Investigating children's participation in decision-making in New Zealand primary schools:

Participation, pathways and potential.

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Te Kura Toi Tangata
Faculty of Education

at

The University of Waikato

by

ALISON ANN SMITH

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2020

ABSTRACT

The notion of children and young people participating in a school's decision-making processes has been the topic of much research and writing throughout the Western world since the 1980s. Existing research has included work that spans the continuum from individual students having input into decisions that affect them specifically, to a focus on student councils or other student groups where a small number of students contribute to decision-making that affect the student body as a whole. However, only a very small body of research or literature focuses on primary school children's participation in decision-making and there appears to be little published in the New Zealand context. This thesis addresses this knowledge gap by examining children's participation in decision-making in two New Zealand primary schools.

By investigating the perspectives of principals, teachers and children, this study sought to critically examine the ways in which children participated in decision-making in two New Zealand primary schools, and explore the outcomes for children through their involvement in various decision-making mechanisms, including that of student leadership or representational roles.
The related research questions (RQ) were:

RQ1: In what ways do children participate in decision-making mechanisms, including formal student leadership roles; and

RQ2: What are the lived experiences, perceptions and understandings of the children in regard to this participation?

This thesis takes a qualitative, case study approach to examining teachers', principals' and children's beliefs and practices in two primary schools. The research used semi-structured interviews to generate data from two principals and ten teachers about children's participation in decision-making. Four focus groups were also conducted with a total of 29 children. Participative activities were completed by the children to gain insights into their perspectives about their experiences of participating in decision-making in their schools.

The research found that the schools offered a variety of opportunities for children to participate in decision-making, including formal student leadership roles. Where authentic participation existed, adults facilitated and organised for children

to be active and agentic decision-makers. Conversely, where adults offered contrived or very narrow opportunities, children had little voice or agency and authentic participation did not occur. The research raised issues about schools practices and pathways related to children's participation in decision-making and found that the nature of these practices depended on adults' knowledge about children and children's rights, their views about children's competency and agency, and the extent to which democratic practices within a social justice worldview were implemented. These findings enabled the creation of the pikotoru *Mahi Ngātahi* model of children's participation in decision-making in primary schools.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ehara taku toa, he takitahi, he toa takitini.
My success should not be bestowed onto me alone, as it was not individual success but success of a collective.

To my supervisors, Associate Professor Rachel McNae and Dr Noeline Wright, who stuck with me throughout what was a lengthy and often tumultuous candidacy. Thank you so much for everything you have done to support and assist me - and may your future students be less troublesome…

To all my very many wonderful colleagues and friends – you have inspired me, believed in me, stood by me and, best of all, made me laugh through the 'thick and thin' of everything that life has brought over the last several years.

So "Thanks whanau" – Dr. Howard Youngs, Dr. Andres Santamaria, Professor Tanya Fitzgerald, Professor Eileen Piggot-Irvine, Dr. Ross Bernay, Dr. Lynette Reid, Norah Parsonage, Diana Ayling, John McGowan, Steve King, Iain Taylor, Mary Rahiti, Fiona Cavanagh, Lynda Stuart, Rakesh Govind, Phonderly Siohane, LeeAnne Turton, Dr. Jo Howse, Professor Carol Cardno, Yo Heta-Lensen, Mary Wilson, Jamie Hawke, and so many more. You know who you are…

To my daughter Sarah-Ann, who has put up with my various academic studies throughout much of her 24 years, hoping that one day she would get to call me "Doctor Smith". Sez - you are a delight and my best thing…

And, finally, to my beloved mother Ann, who kept on believing in me even when I didn't believe in myself anymore and, as always, knew that I would get there in the end. This thesis would not exist were it not for your complete faith in me throughout my life.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all the educators and teachers in my family
– both present and past, both Pākehā and Māori –
and the thousands of tamariki whom they have taught in their
communities, schools and classrooms, for almost 150 years.

[A photograph of Mary-Ann Horsley (nee Stephenson) of Nga Puhi, Te Kapotai descent (centre), with her sisters Minnie and Carrie, photographed around 1875 (Source: Simon & Smith, 2001, p. 87). Mary-Ann was a teacher at Waikare School, Northland, during the 1880s, and is my Great-Great-Aunt].

Ko Kapowai te maunga.
Ko Waikare te awa.
Ko Ngapuhi te iwi.
Ko Kapotai te hapu.
Ko Waikare te marae.
No Kororareka ahau.
Ko Alison taku ingoa.

No reira, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with examining the extent of and the ways in which children in primary schools participate in decision-making in their schools. It reports on data gathered in two New Zealand primary schools over the space of six months, from educational leaders, teachers, and the children themselves. This chapter comprises three sections. In the first instance I describe the professional and personal experiences that have shaped my interest in this area of research. Secondly, the current context within which the research is situated is described. Finally the aims and research questions that shape this research are presented.

Professional and personal experiences

My interest in children's participation in their education has its roots in my teacher training experiences. I trained as a primary school teacher in the early 1980s at the University of Waikato and Hamilton Teachers' College. The lecturer who had overall responsibility for the 1981 cohort of students was Ron Rashbrooke, a man who struck me immediately as a wise and people-focused person, and with whom I struck up a strong friendship. As my training continued, I discovered that Ron was an educator ahead of his time. He had spent a year at Summerhill in England, the school founded by A. S. Neill in the early part of the twentieth century. Ron had set up his own school back in New Zealand in the 1950s based on Neill's principles of progressive, democratic education. Amidst a mainly conservative teacher education programme that centred on behaviourism, Piaget, learning objectives, mastery and children as compliant beings, I clearly recall finding Ron's stories of his school leadership experiences and educational philosophies both fascinating and shocking. Over the three years of my training, many an hour was spent in Ron's office and at his home, along with his wife Molly, talking about what education should be about, how children should be treated as equal participants in this process alongside teachers, and how current models of schooling were reducing children's ability to think, to act independently, and to grow into fully participating citizens of tomorrow's democracies.

Years later, when I spent five years teaching at Auckland's Epsom Normal School, Ron's stories were still with me as I encountered more professional freedom, along with the collegiality of several teachers who showed genuine

respect and warmth for children and, in their teaching, were experimenting with children having freedom of choice in designing their own school day. Although this extended only to children making up their own timetable within the existing constraints of current subjects and content, it was innovative in the early 1990s. I carried these ideas forward into my teaching, and continued to question not only curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices, but also deeply engrained practices such as children being organised into separate lines of girls and boys and 'marching' around the school in order to move from place to place, discipline systems heavily focused on punishment and loss of dignity, and relationships with children based on power and fear. I recall my stifled efforts to involve children authentically in a 'student council'-type group that I was responsible for in the mid-1990s in a Deputy Principal's role. The expectation of the school was that children should not be allowed to complain or 'be negative' in this group, or ask for the school to provide things that were clearly not possible and not within the children's remit to even suggest. The children's role was largely that of expressing their thanks to the school for what was provided for them, and to suggest only fairly benign changes or ideas, such as being allowed to have a mufti day or to organise a lunchtime sporting activity. As a young teacher, the mismatch between the existing modus operandi of the student council and my own interest in more democratic and empowering practices was starkly evident.

When my own daughter began intermediate school at a conservative high-decile[1] school some ten years later, I recall being surprised at the very hierarchical systems of student leadership, largely based on children's popularity with their peers, which still existed. My daughter came home one afternoon extremely pleased that her class had voted her to be Deputy Games Captain. When I enquired as to what the role entailed, she replied that being the Deputy meant that she would be the Captain when that child was away. Upon asking what the Captain's role involved, my daughter cheerfully replied "I don't have a clue actually". I remember being struck with the absurdity of a system that gave titles and roles to children elected because of their popularity that, it seemed, had little meaning for them. I mark this point as the time that I became concerned with

[1] Deciles are a measure of the socio-economic position of a school's student community relative to other schools. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities; Decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students (Ministry of Education, 2017a).

children's participation in decision-making in primary schools, a concern that found its expression in the research reported in this thesis.

Children's participation in decision-making in schools: Background and context

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The notion of children being able to participate in decision-making in their schools is situated within the broader context of research and literature that is concerned with the ways in which children and young people participate in and have a voice in matters to do with their lives, whether it is in education, health, family settings, or in the wider community. Formal attention to children's contribution in matters to do with their lives in a contemporary sense can be traced back to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) to which New Zealand became a signatory in 1993. The Convention arose from the growing interest in the concept of children's rights in the 1980s (Henaghan, 2018), with the UNCRC viewed by many writers as an influential milestone in the history of children's participation (for example, Henaghan, 2018; Leitch, 2012; Mager & Nowak, 2012; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). Article 12 of the UNCRC states that:

> 1. Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
> 2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative of an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law (United Nations, 1989, p. Article 12).

There are no limits to what might be a 'matter' that affects a child – it may be something in the everyday life of children, such as being consulted about changes to their school uniform or, on the other hand, broader matters such as climate change (Henaghan, 2018). Article 12.1 underpins many projects and contexts throughout the world as varied as community and neighbourhood improvement initiatives (Hart, 1997), improvements in child health in developing countries (Vanner, 2014), and addressing homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools (Cornu, 2016). It is particularly relevant to discussion of children's participation in decision-making in the school context.

In regard to the Aotearoa New Zealand school sector, however, the New Zealand Education Review Office (ERO), in a national report titled *Student participation in school decision-making* (2003), found much to critique about schools' practices related to students' participation. Although the ERO concluded that New Zealand schools are good at involving children and young people in decision-making at an organisational level through student representative mechanisms (such as student councils) and also at the classroom level, they also found that "schools need to review the extent to which current formal mechanisms for student participation in decision-making promotes the participation of all students" (Education Review Office, 2003, p. 1). This is a strong recommendation, yet in the 16 years since this evaluation was carried out, little progress appears to have been made in the implementation of measures that might facilitate students' participation in decision-making to a greater extent, particularly in primary schools.

The right for children to contribute to society in meaningful ways as described in Article 12 is certainly conveyed prominently in New Zealand national curriculum documents. For example, in *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa; Early childhood curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2017b), this right is evident in the Principles, Strands and Goals that underpin the curriculum. *The New Zealand curriculum for children and young people in Years 1-13* (Ministry of Education, 2015) and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa for Māori-medium education* (Ministry of Education, 2008) also embodies themes of children's participation, 'voice' and contribution in relation to school learning and its outcomes. Furthermore, my own experience as a teacher, senior leader, tertiary teacher and education consultant over 35 years has been that teachers and school leaders commonly espouse that children *are* participating in decision making in their schools in various ways.

I am familiar with some current vehicles for this contribution such as student councils and student leadership roles. Other examples of avenues for children's contribution include such organisations as *EnviroSchools,* where students are actively involved in education and practices aligned with environmental sustainability (The Enviroschools Foundation, 2018), and *Garden to Table,* where students develop and maintain fruit and vegetable plantings and learn how to cook using the produce they have grown (Garden to Table, 2018). At individual school sites, children may be involved in 'committee'-type groups such as the 'Student Health Team' and the 'Liturgy Team' which operate at an Auckland

Catholic school with which I am familiar. However, despite these examples and the intent of our curricula, I still question the extent to which children in Years 1-6 *actually* participate in decision-making in schools and, furthermore, have these decisions acted upon in a manner that is *not* predetermined, shaped or manipulated by the adults involved, but which nevertheless still enables children to, at the very least, express their views and have these taken into account.

Current research and literature

The research and literature in the specific area of children's participation in decision-making have emerged since around 1990, principally from the United States and the United Kingdom, but also from Australia and Scandinavia. However, the literature is sparse on three fronts. In the first instance, while there is some relevant literature in secondary/high school contexts spanning at least the last 30 years, (see, for example: Andersson, 2018; Cook-Sather, 2017; Manca & Grion, 2017; Mansfield, 2014; Mansfield, Welton, & Halx, 2012; Mitra, 2003; Mitra & Gross, 2009; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006), there is little by comparison written about primary/elementary schools. Secondly, it appears that there is very little literature written by New Zealanders nor from a New Zealand perspective, apart from some relatively recent work situated in the secondary school context (see, for example, Bolstad, 2011b; Bourke, 2008; Bourke & Loveridge, 2014; Bourke & MacDonald, 2016; Hipkins, 2010; McNae, 2011; Saunders, 2005), and a very recent study carried out with primary school principals (Charteris & Smardon, 2019b). Third, literature that adds to our knowledge about how children from different ethnic and cultural groups can best be involved in decision-making processes is sparse (Hart, 2008). This is an important omission in the context of the bicultural nature of Aotearoa New Zealand and the very multicultural nature of most New Zealand primary schools. Notably, the work of Russell Bishop in the *Te Kotahitangi* project offers a particular look at 'culturally responsive pedagogy' (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009), while Alton-Lee's *Best evidence synthesis* (2003) addresses the many challenges associated with the difference and diversity present in all New Zealand classrooms. Despite this, when these three bodies of literature are overlaid, the need for further research specifically in the area of children's participation in decision-making in New Zealand primary schools becomes apparent.

This lack of research is surprising given the many perceived benefits, albeit sometimes of a moderate nature, of children participating in decision-making that are conveyed throughout the current international literature (Andersson, 2018; Griebler, Rojatz, Simovska, & Forster, 2017; Mager & Nowak, 2012). These benefits can be grouped into three main types. The first type comes from the children themselves being positively affected at a personal and individual level – they can develop valuable life skills such as teamwork and respect for diverse views, their self-esteem may improve, and their ideas about democracy and citizenship may be better developed (Leitch, 2012; Quinn & Owen, 2016; Serriere & Mitra, 2011). The second type arises from the development of better quality relationships between children and their teachers, and amongst the children themselves (Lac & Mansfield, 2018). The third type of benefit comes from the positive effects that the school as an organisation may experience, such as an improvement in the school 'climate' and an increase in the extent to which children are having an influence on change and improvement (Flynn, 2015; Harber, 2010; Mitra, Serriere, & Soicovy, 2012). Given all these potential benefits, it is important that the nature and scope of children's participation in decision-making in New Zealand primary schools is investigated. By examining the ways in which children participate in and perceive their role in decision-making in their schools (as well as investigating the views of school principals, school leaders and teachers) this study aimed to provide new knowledge related to children and decision-making that is specific to the New Zealand primary schooling context - a field about which very little is known.

Research aim and questions

By gathering the perspectives of principals, teachers and children, this study aimed to:

- critically examine the ways in which children participated in decision-making in two New Zealand primary schools, and explore the outcomes for children through their involvement in various decision-making mechanisms, including that of student leadership or representational roles.

The related research questions (RQ) were:

RQ1: In what ways do children participate in decision-making mechanisms, including formal student leadership roles; and

RQ2: What are the lived experiences, perceptions and understandings of the children in regard to this participation?

The organisation of this thesis

Chapter One has described the development of my interest in this research area and provided the background and context for this research. An overview of current research and literature is also provided, along with the research aims and questions.

Chapter Two reviews the key literature that is relevant to this study. This review serves to contextualise the research and is drawn from many sources. The chapter is organised into four main sections. It begins by overviewing the various concepts that are associated with notions of 'participation' as these relate to children in the primary school context – consultation, voice, agency and participation. Models of participation are then described, including the seminal work of Hart (1992). Literature pertaining to children's competencies and rights, children's agency, and children's participation in their schools' decision-making processes is then considered. Finally, concepts of social justice framework are drawn from the literature in order to position children's decision-making and its component concepts of voice, children's rights under the UNCRC, agency, participation, democracy and representation as social justice issues.

Chapter Three, *Research methodology and design*, provides a description of the underpinning philosophy and methodology of the research. It begins with a declaration of my positioning as the researcher, before describing the social justice orientation taken in conducting research with children in this project. My ontological and epistemological positions are also identified, and the links to an interpretive paradigm described. The chapter concludes with a justification for the use of a case study methodology.

Chapter Four, *Research methods and ethical considerations,* overviews the research participants before examining the data-gathering methods used in the research – semi-structured interviews, focus groups and co-operative, participatory activities. The data analysis processes are then described, including how the data themes emerged. The chapter concludes with a consideration of research rigour and the characteristics of ethical research.

Chapter Five, *Research findings,* is organised into two main parts that report the findings from the adult participants' interviews in both schools, followed by the

findings from the focus groups and the co-operative, participatory activities carried out with the child participants.

Chapter Six, *Discussion,* discusses the findings of the study in three main parts in the light of relevant literature and concludes with the introduction of *Te Pikotoru* model of children's participation in decision-making in primary schools.

Chapter Seven, *Conclusion,* completes the thesis by summarising the research, drawing conclusions from the findings and discussion, and presenting the *Te Pikotoru* model in greater depth. The chapter also acknowledges the limitations of the research, and suggests areas in which future research might be carried out.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chapter 1, I noted that, whilst literature concerned with student participation in decision-making is prolific in regard to some contexts, there is little existing research and writing concerned with students in primary schools, particularly in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. However, as this study aimed to critically examine the ways in which children participated in decision-making in two New Zealand primary schools, it was important to review the literature that is available that links to this aim. In particular, I needed to understand how concepts such as 'participation' have emerged in the literature and how these are currently conceptualised and understood. Furthermore, given the international significance of the *United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), I needed to also review literature concerned with children's rights and abilities, and the more recent popularisation of the idea of 'agency', with a view to linking these notions to that of children's participation in decision-making in primary schools.

The literature reviewed in this chapter was obtained from many sources and, given the relatively small literature base concerned with primary school contexts in general, and New Zealand primary schools in particular, I also included literature situated in secondary school and early childhood contexts. I began with locating academic journal articles and other literature such as books, by searching library catalogues and electronic databases in a number of fields including student voice, agency and participation, childhood, democracy in schools, student leadership, and social justice. Several academic journals with a clear focus on student participation were identified, as were prolific authors in the field. Finally, publications from governments and international agencies, such as the United Nations, were also used to provide important historical and contextual material.

This chapter comprises four parts. It begins by exploring the historical discourses of childhood and children's competencies, and identifies the current state of children's rights in a wider societal sense. The second part of the chapter examines a selection of concepts, definitions and models of 'participation', and identifies the considerable overlaps of definition and understanding that characterise these concepts. A preferred definition of 'participation' is drawn from

this literature that underpins my research. Part Three reviews literature specifically concerned with children's participation in their schools' decision-making processes, with decision-making being defined as the process of children directly and actively taking part in highly collaborative practices that create opportunities for children to have an authentic influence over matters that are important to them. Concepts of democracy, citizenship and agency in the school context and the particular mechanism of student councils are explored. Part Four concludes the chapter by examining social justice as the overarching ideal within which participation, children's rights and competencies, agency and democracy are bound. Current gaps in research and literature in the context of New Zealand primary schools are identified, and the choice of research questions affirmed.

Part One: The nature of childhood: How historical discourse shapes perceptions of participation

This first section reviews literature in regard to 'children' – that is, the nature, history and study of 'childhood', views of children's competencies and, finally, the current state of children's rights. These themes are presented together here, as they portray a current view of where and how children are positioned in society today in regard to their competencies and abilities, and provide a useful backdrop to this study's consideration of the ways in which children in New Zealand primary schools contribute to decision-making.

Children and childhood

To fully understand current ideas about children's participation and perceived competency concerning decision-making in schools, it is useful to briefly trace the history of society's views of children and childhood in general (McNamee, 2016). In countries that are similar to Aotearoa New Zealand, the word 'child' is defined by age in the literature as, for example, a young person between birth and puberty, a child from the time of birth until he or she is an adult, and so on (see, for example: Alderson, 2003; Morrow, 2013; Penn, 2008; Thorne, 2009). Wyness (2012a) notes that whilst 'age' and age range are still contested areas, "thinking about those up to and around the age of 14" (p. 5) is appropriate.

'Childhood', however, is not a modern term but a very old one (Wyness, 2012b). Thorne (2009) writes that it dates back to the tenth century and that the suffix 'hood' denotes that childhood is more of a state/condition rather than a type of person. The children of medieval times were treated in much the same ways as

adults with little special attention given to their particular needs (Marten, 2018; McNamee, 2016). The positioning of children as a separate social grouping emerged in the 16th century (Wyness, 2012b) in west European countries. By the 17th century, children had a social and legal status that differed from that of adults, although children older than seven were generally sent out to work (Thorne, 2009) and had a clear economic value to the family. By the late 19th century, children – at least those in the middle and upper classes - were "predominantly perceived as fragile and in need of protection, in a context of industrialisation and urbanisation, poverty, child mortality and the abolition of child labour" (Vandenbroeck & Bouverne-De Bie, 2006, p. 130). Laws concerned with children began to change to reflect their being viewed as requiring protection so that their particular needs could be met (Sidoti, 2005).

The twentieth century has been described as the 'century of the child' with an unprecedented focus on endeavouring to understand children and children's interests by those working in law, welfare, medicine and education (James & Prout, 2015a). As Hendrick (2015) notes, "By 1928, childhood was well on its way to being conceptually 'modern' … it was increasingly defined in relation to educational, medical, welfarist and psychological jurisdictions, and was clearly separate from adulthood" (p. 43). The early years of the 20th century brought compulsory attendance at school in most Western societies such as New Zealand, marking children as separate from adults but also, by default, as a group viewed as less capable, less rational and less influential than adults. At the same time, the notion of 'childhood' was gradually further divided into the sub-groups of babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers (Alderson, 2003). Childhood was viewed as being not a state in and of itself, but rather as preparation for becoming mature and rational adults and citizens. The mid-century emergence of the welfare state positioned children as needing 'care' both by the family and, in the absence of this, by the State (Hendrick, 2015). This was underscored by renewed concern in the 1960s about child physical and sexual abuse, whilst the 1980s signalled the development of various children's rights interest groups that sought to listen to children and advocate on their behalf, with the notion of the 'ideal' childhood becoming increasingly contested (James & Prout, 2015a).

At the same time, the *sociology* of childhood approach began to develop, emerging in the 1980s (Wyness, 2015), despite the long-held dominance of psychology, developmental psychology and the 'child study' movement, where

childhood was characterised by a series of observable and measurable stages or 'milestones', explained and attributed to various influences (McNamee, 2016). This psychological approach, largely underpinned by Piaget's *Theory of cognitive development* (Piaget, 1952), and Vygotsky's *Zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky, 1978), had shaped arguments about how children differed from adults in regard to their competence, agency, independence, and so on. Now, however, academics in various fields, and even psychologists, began to see children in a more holistic way, rather than as the amalgamation of the "bits and pieces of children's lives studied by psychologists [that] were seen to constitute the whole child" (Mayall, 2013, p. 8).

By the 1990s, a new focus on children as social beings interacting and learning in their particular contexts was apparent, with renewed interest in the idea that children's learning and development were shaped by the society and people around them (Mayall, 2013). Such thinking echoed the ecological theory of development developed by Bronfenbrenner (1977) who, in contrast to Piaget and Vygotsky, viewed child development as emerging from an individual's interplay with their environment. This idea of children interacting within the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-systems of their social environments is certainly suggestive of the notion of agency and the ways in which this is influenced by their surroundings. It is these systems are of particular interest in this thesis.

Positioning of children

In the 21st century, the 'new' social study of childhood has become embedded (McNamee, 2016; Wyness, 2010, 2012a, 2015). Children are recognised as active, social beings in the worlds of children and adults, rather than as products of society and biology (James & Prout, 2015b). This view is influenced by social construction theory which "moves away from seeing society as acting *on* the individual, and instead takes account of how individuals construct society through *interaction*" (McNamee, 2016, p. 32). These two 'strands' – social constructionism and children as social actors – continue to underpin socio-cultural notions of childhood, with research now focused on children's views and experiences within their own contexts as active participants with particular abilities and competencies (Marten, 2018; Mayall, 2013).

However, despite views of children as having limited capacity and competency being largely considered as outdated (Wall et al., 2019), thinking about children

as competent beings has not occurred at the pace and to the extent that we might think (Wyness, 2012a), and views of children as somehow 'lesser' than adults have persisted. While Wyness (2012a) acknowledges the progress made in many societies' thinking about children as social actors and social agents taking a full part in society and making a difference, he also cautions that such recognition is by no means widespread or generally accepted, with children still "ambiguously placed as structurally marginal and situationally competent" (p. 280). Similarly, Giesinger (2019) notes that children – or young children, at least – are "often conceived as incompetent choosers" (pp. 251-252). This positioning may be further exacerbated by over-protective parents who, in their efforts to keep their children safe, hover continuously above and within their children's lives (Cevher-Kalburan & Ivrendi, 2016). Alderson (2012) notes this ongoing juxtapositioning of children and adults, stating that "only adults count" (p. 179) particularly in regard to matters of law and human rights, and that children are so confined that they are being separated from their communities and seen as increasingly helpless, endangered, and in need of adult care and supervision This contrasting of the adult and the child has led to the perpetuation of a number of specially-constructed, 'adult-centric' dichotomies (Bacon & Frankel, 2014), as summarised for the purpose of this research in Table 2.1.

Table 2. 1: Dichotomies of childhood and adulthood: A literature summary

The child; childhood	**The adult; adulthood**
vulnerable, dependent	competent, autonomous
needy	cares for needs
subordinate, objects	superordinate, subjects
passive, powerless	agentic, powerful
emotional, unreliable	rational, reliable
ignorant, foolish	wise, informed
incomplete, not-yet-fully-formed	fully functioning, fully formed
future beings	persons *now*

(Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2018; Hanson, 2017; James & Prout, 2015a; Mayall, 2013; McNamee, 2016; Wyness, 2012a, 2015)

In education contexts, Bolstad (2011a) cautions that while children are seen as competent social actors in some schools and classrooms,, it is more likely that they will be seen as needing protection and provision. Similarly, James and James (2012) argue that ideas about age and capability have been

institutionalised by schools where classes, curricula, assessment and reporting on achievement are all age-related. Adults in schools may even actively resist the idea of younger children having a voice and participating in decision-making on the grounds that only older children are capable of doing so. Such views may also be related to beliefs about the 'correct' age to do certain things, with any notions of ages, stages and child development norms inevitably influencing views of children as competent beings (Morrow, 2013).

In regard to the UNCRC, which is examined further in the next section of this chapter, it is very clear that the provision of *every* child's right to 'be heard' is emphasised. The UNCRC states that "the child who is capable of forming her or his own views [has] the right to express those views" (United Nations, 1989, Article 12). In addition, *General Comment No. 5* (United Nations General Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003) cautions that the phrase "capable of expressing his or her own views" does not provide the option to prematurely assume at the outset that a child is incapable but, rather, that adults are obligated to presume a child *is capable*: "States parties shall presume that a child has the capacity to form his or her own views and recognize that she or he has the right to express them; it is not up to the child to first prove her or his capacity" (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009, p. 9).

Primary schools are contexts potentially capable of recognising these rights and the competency of students of all ages to express their views if particular attitudes and beliefs exist amongst adults. One claim made in the literature is that adults must ensure that children have the space, time and opportunities to demonstrate their ability to 'have a voice' (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014; Charteris & Smardon, 2019a). Furthermore, these opportunities must be offered to *all* children, not just those whom adults judge to be old enough or mature enough (Mager & Nowak, 2012). Adults must pay constant attention to maximising children's chances to 'be heard' by continually questioning the ways in which they view children and, in particular, the judgements they make about children's abilities (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2018; Wyness, 2013a).

The aim here, as noted by writers as early as 1997 (see, for example: Prout & James, 1997; Ruddock, Day, & Wallace, 1997), is to see *all* children "as active social beings, constructing and creating social relationships, rather than the cultural dupes of socialization theory" (Prout & James, 1997, p. 23). What adults

must not do, in the final analysis, is underestimate children, whatever their age and background (Morrow, 2013). Adults should assume that children have sufficient knowledge and understanding to be able to express their views, and particular measures should be taken to support children no matter their mode of communication, ethnicity or mother tongue (Lundy, 2007; United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). As Mansfield, Welton and Halx (2012) explain, listening to and valuing the voice of children because we believe them to be highly competent beings will lead to more student-focused and social justice-oriented practices. As such, an environment that champions the rights of children is important.

Children's rights in New Zealand: The enactment (or not) of policy

Human rights are enshrined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). This document set out the universal protection of all human rights in response, largely, to the atrocities of World War Two, and included wide-ranging provisions such as the right to be free, the right to be treated equally with other people, the right to a fair and public trial, the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the right to education. The UDHR has expanded its reach since its inception to include a variety of Conventions, some of which are particularly relevant to schools. These include the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (United Nations, 1965), the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (United Nations, 1979), the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989), and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2008).

As part of the body of international law, the provisions within these various conventions all describe various human rights that are universal, inalienable, interdependent, indivisible, equal and non-discriminatory. This means that:

- all rights must exist for everyone (universal);
- they cannot be transferred, bought or sold, taken away from or denied to anyone (inalienable);
- all rights are related all other rights, meaning that the advancement of one right advances other rights and, equally, the deprivation of one right affects others (interdependent);

- all rights are equally important and no right is more or less important than others (indivisible); and
- all people are equal and may not be discriminated against (United Nations Population Fund, 2005).

Thus, all of the rights included in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989) are also subject to these principles above, and each 'right' is interdependent with all other rights (Lundy, 2007). That is, all UNCRC provisions relate to *all* children everywhere, cannot be taken away or denied, and must be provided in relation to and alongside all other rights.

As a result, the signing of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989) has impacted thinking about children and childhood with its move away from a focus on children's needs and deficits to a rights-based approach (Alderson, 2018; Gillett-Swan, Tancredi, & Graham, 2020; Wyness, 2018). The UNCRC is the most widely endorsed treaty ever, signed by all member states of the United Nations with the exception of the United States of America (Simon, Luetzow, & Conte, in press), and is "widely regarded as the most important advocacy tool for children's rights globally" (Coppock & Gillett-Swan, 2016, p. 7). Aotearoa New Zealand became a signatory in 1993. The UNCRC gives 'personhood' to all people, and recognises that every person - regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, or any other element of identity – has rights (Federle, 2018). It is framed around four core principles: "non-discrimination of children; support for the best interests of the child; the right of every child to life, survival and development; and the right of all children to express their views" (Vanner, 2014, p. 340). Collectively, Articles 12 – 17 describe the rights of all children to freedom of expression, freedom of belief, freedom of association, and the protection of privacy and access to appropriate information (Vanner, 2014). Other articles are also linked to Article 12, including Article 3 (respecting the best interests of the child), Article 6 (the right to non-discrimination), and Article 5 (the right to direction and guidance). The recent 30th anniversary of the UNCRC may give pause to reconsider the principles underlying its creation – for example, many societies have developed a different view of children in that "No longer are children to be seen as becomings only. Now they are beings. They have a present and a future – and also a past" (Freeman, 2018, p. 4).

In its current form, the UNCRC recognises children as "citizens of the world with rights – the rights to protection, provision and participation" (Penn, 2008, p. 133). Article 12 of the UNCRC is commonly identified as creating the context for children to participate in decision-making in a variety of aspects of their lives: Article 12 states that:

> 1. Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
> 2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative of an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law (United Nations, 1989, Article 12).

The United Nations notes that the UNCRC underpins all of its work (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2016). However, as Freeman (1998) cautions, the UNCRC was written by adults using their particular views about creating a better world for children and, ironically, without consultation with any children. Furthermore, as Lundy (2007) argues, Article 12 can only be fully implemented if the other articles of the UNCRC are also applied, such as Article 2 – Non-discrimination, and Article 19 – Protection from abuse.

When a State ratifies the UNCRC, it is obligated to implement all its provisions, as the Convention is part of international law (United Nations General Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003). Thus, signatory nations to the UNCRC have committed themselves to not only care for and protect children, but also to actually listening to their opinions and allowing them to influence and participate in decision-making processes (Henaghan, 2018). However, the ways and extent to which children's rights are reflected in a society will always depend on that society's social, cultural and political contexts. For example, the economic resources of a nation may limit the extent to which the Convention can be implemented, but nations still need to demonstrate that they are striving to "undertake all possible measures towards the realization of the rights of the child, paying special attention to the most disadvantage groups" (United Nations General Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003, p. 3).

Shier's (2001) seminal work noted that Article 12 of the UNCRC, wherein provisions are made to ensure children are given the right to participate in decision-making in a variety of aspects of their lives, was one of the "most widely violated and disregarded in almost every sphere of children's lives" (p. 108). Despite the widespread enthusiasm for and adoption of the UNCRC since that time, uncertainty remains regarding the extent to which children's rights are being "embraced fully within societal institutions as adults, researchers, policy-makers and professionals continue to grapple with actualising the rights enshrined within the CRC" (Coppock & Gillett-Swan, 2016, p. 8). Wyness describes the growing critique of the UNCRC despite its international influence, and there continue to be calls for government agencies to address certain issues, such as how to determine the 'competence' of children (van Rooyen, Water, & Rasmussen, 2015),

In her early work, Lundy (2007) noted that the provision of the rights of Article 12 depended on the cooperation of adults who may have concerns about children's capacity and fears that children will gain control over adults, and that the effort exerted in implementing Article 12 would be better spent on other things. She went so far as to say that "Article 12 is one of the most widely cited yet commonly misunderstood of all the provisions of the UNCRC" (p. 930). More recently, Lundy (2018) also noted that the provision of opportunities for children and youth to participate in decision-making in schools is still not widely evident, or comprise merely tokenistic measures, or where "adults' protectionist agendas" are dominant (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2018, p. 121).

One of the tensions within the Convention arises from the notion of not only ensuring the right of children to express their views about matters that affect them, but also that these view are "given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (United Nations, 1989). Clearly, the 'due weight' that is given will depend on how adults perceive age and maturity – there is potential for this to vary significantly from context to context, and for children to be judged as not 'of an age' to express their views on particular topics – in other words, as incompetent with views that do not have an influence because they are not accorded due weight (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2018). *General Comment No. 12*, however, states that all children should be 'heard' and that their views may "add relevant perspectives and experience and should be considered in decision-making, policymaking and preparation of laws" (United Nations Committee on the

Rights of the Child, 2009, p. 7). Lundy (2007) summarised this well in her early work, stating that a child's right to express their own views is dependent only on "their ability to form a view, mature or not" (p. 935). Guidance on ways in which to assess children's level of understanding and capability of forming their own views, however, is not explicitly given by the Committee, leaving open the possibility that children's voices may still not be sought out or heard, despite the provisions of the UNCRC.

This *General Comment* also emphasises that merely listening to children is not sufficient – serious consideration must be afforded to what children say. Furthermore, children should be assumed to be capable of expressing their own views – children do not have to prove their capacity to do so (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). Another area that potentially threatens the provision of rights to children is that nations must ensure that the provisions of the Convention are "widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike" (United Nations, 1989, Article 42). As *General Comment No. 5* of the Committee on the Rights of the Child notes, children need to know about the UNCRC and know what their rights are (United Nations General Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003). Again, adults in schools play a crucial role here, and their opinions and perceptions, as well as their own training and curriculum implementation, will again influence the extent to which the Convention is enacted (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2018). The UNCRC is clearly not without its challenges to nations and all adults who live or work with or for children.

The record of Aotearoa New Zealand in enacting the UNCRC is disappointing. The Committee on the Rights of the Child first reported in 1997 that, although New Zealand was committed to the UNCRC, the government's implementation appeared to be fragmented (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1997). In 2003, the United Nations noted its concern that children, the public and all groups of professionals working with children in New Zealand were not sufficiently aware of the UNCRC (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003). The United Nations further recommended that the government carry out public awareness campaigns on children's rights and education and training for all people working with children, including teachers. These findings and recommendations were again expressed in 2011 (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2011), along with the recommendation that the

principle of respect for the views of the child needs to be better promoted and implanted. The most recent report of 2016 shows further lack of progress, noting that New Zealand still needed to strengthen its limited awareness-raising programmes as well as the systematic training for professional groups, including teachers (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016). These reports, issued over nearly 20 years, indicate a lack of progress on the part of New Zealand in effectively implementing the provisions of a UNCRC to which they became a signatory in 1993.

Having scoped historical and current views and understandings about children, childhood and children's rights, it is now appropriate to review literature concerned with the concepts and models that examine children's 'participation' in order to position the discourses identified in this section within the particular context of participation in decision-making.

Part Two: Children's participation in decision-making: Concepts and models

It is essential to first examine the notion of children's participation in decision-making in its broadest sense. This will allow me to locate further literature related to decision-making in schools and the ways children are involved (or not) in the dominant discourses that shape the field. Therefore it is important to critically examine the literature that defines and describes notions of children's participation in decision-making in communities, schools and other contexts. Scoping of the literature highlights that children's participation in decision-making in educational contexts involves the use of multiple terms including 'consultation', 'voice', 'agency' and 'participation' itself. These terms are sometimes used in combination or interchangeably and, as a result, explaining exactly what is meant by these terms in the wider literature available is no easy task, with each concept having multiple meanings.

Several writers comment on the difficulty in defining these terms. Thomas and Percy-Smith (2010) describe 'children's participation' as "a field, to use a resonant phrase, 'in search of definition'" (p. 1). This lack of clarity is also noted in Mager and Novak's (2012) review of empirical research in the area of children's participation, which concludes with a call for further research to focus on clearly defining this term, as well as gaining further understanding about "successful ways to implement student participation in order to have beneficial effects" (p.

51). What is evident in the literature reviewed here, however, is that the concept of children's participation in decision-making in educational contexts has been developed and re-developed over time, as the focus has moved away from adults' perspectives to a greater interest in children as being central (Wyness, 2018).

The following section of this chapter draws on the literature to explore the various concepts which contribute to the field of children's participation - consultation, voice and agency. The section concludes with a definition of 'participation' within which this thesis is positioned.

Concepts of participation

Consultation

Perhaps the oldest of the concepts in relation to children's participation in decision-making is that of 'consultation', which appears infrequently in literature since 2010. This concept first commonly appeared in the literature in the 1970s in relation to student consultation in university settings (see, for example: Claydon & Lovegrove, 1972; King, 1976). It was consequently defined by Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) in relation to school settings as "talking with pupils about things that matter to them in the classroom and school and that affect their learning" (p. 7). In summary, consultation was viewed as the process of asking children about their views by talking to them, and describes a very simple, one-dimensional mechanism for inviting student participation in the school context. What is important to note is that this process is invariably adult-centric – adults make the decisions whether they will consult with children and about what and also when, how, and to what extent children's views will be taken into account.

A stern critique of student consultation is offered in the work of Holdsworth (2004, 2005) who suggests that consultation is implemented by adults only to "ease pressures for real changes in decision-making processes and structures. It may simply be a way of making decision makers feel as if they are 'doing the right thing'" (p. 143). Bolstad (2011a) similarly critiques student consultation as limiting their input to just offering opinions without assurance that these will be listened to or acted on by adults. In fact, adults control both the decisions about consultation and also the mechanisms by which it is carried out. Consultation is often constructed as one-way – adults consult with children – and hence the process is not collaborative. Although children are given the opportunity to express their

views, this is frequently expressed as a restricted and uni-directional form of participation that positions children as the 'receivers' or 'objects' of consultation, rather than actively making decisions in an autonomous, authentic partnership.

Voice

'Student voice', a now common term, emerges from the late twentieth century literature. 'Voice' heralded a somewhat more child-centric view of participation, suggesting that children could have a say and actively express their views, and be supported by adults to do so. Greater collaboration than 'consultation' was implied, with children participating in decision-making and problem solving alongside more facilitative and enabling adults. Rudduck, Day and Wallace (1997) noted this move away from 'consultation' as early as 1997, but lamented teachers' reluctance to acknowledge the value of children's views. They also noted that children were still being positioned as inferior beings lacking in experience and knowledge, a view shared by Roche (1999) at that time. Some years later, Bourke (2008) described 'voice' as "more complex than merely listening to the student as it requires a shift in role for both teachers and students" (p. 155). Most recently, Wyness (2018) has positioned 'voice' as a "critical feature of children's participation … [encompassing] all forms of communication, allowing children of all ages to participate", while Charteris and Smardon (2019a) have defined 'student voice' as involving "leaders, teachers and other stakeholders asking students about their views on a range of topics from pedagogical approaches to schooling redesign" (p. 305).

However it is defined, 'voice' is still subject to the same constraints as 'consultation' – children may talk, but adults can still take little notice. In this way, 'voice' can be reduced to the physical act of producing speech in contexts where adults limit opportunities to speak and to act – "their 'voice' is diluted as it is channelled into 'safe' places and managed by more powerful 'voices'" (Hadfield & Haw, 2001, p. 497). The potential of 'voice' may also be undermined by teachers viewing this as yet another thing to be done – an obligation that "can lead to compliance rather than to thought" (Rudduck, 2006, p. 133). Indeed, 'voice' is the current nomenclature used by New Zealand's Ministry of Education (2011), albeit only in reference to student views about learning, assessment and so on, rather than students' participation in decision-making in schools from a broader perspective. Furthermore, recent student voice research has identified a progression in practice from concerns that particular voices are sometimes

silenced, such as particular ethnic and socioeconomic groups (Thomas, 2007); new research evidence suggests that historically marginalised students are increasingly able to exercise their voice on important matters in schools (Gonzalez, Hernandez-Saca, & Artiles, 2017).

Agency

While Wyness (2015) reports that 'agency' was once viewed as a "status assumed by children once they leave childhood" (p. 7) it is now an almost taken-for-granted component of children's various participation opportunities and mechanisms. The literature defines 'agency' as children not only knowing that they have the skills, abilities and experiences to have a say in matters that are important to them, but also knowing that they *can* have a say and will be listened to - their input will have an influence on outcomes. An emphasis on choice is evident here in that children can initiate action "in an intentional and self-aware sense" (Frost & Roberts, 2011, p. 70). This requires adults to view children as skilled social actors who are capable of making a difference in their own lives and whose agency should be facilitated (Mayall, 2002). Furthermore, children and adults can undertake partnerships characterised by shared decision-making and joint action (Holdsworth, 2005). Bragg and Fielding (2005) also suggest that previous ideas about "the boundaries between teacher and student are starting to change" (p. 106). Wyness (2017) positions such notions of 'agency' as being embedded in a movement away from the modernist form of childhood that persisted until the end of the 20th century, to a version of childhood in the 21st century where agency is a critical component.

While the literature presents, on the whole, an optimistic view of student agency, there are areas of critique stemming principally from concerns about the authenticity of this agency. In a study of children's participation in Bangkok, Mumbai, Sydney and Beijing, Mason and Bolzan (2009) concluded that notions of children's agency vary across cultures. In the often very multicultural schools that exist today in New Zealand, this is an important finding that may well resonate in the local context. Whilst schools may strive to promote children's agency, this may be influenced by cultural differences in regard to deference to adults, the extent to which a culture is collectivist or individualist, and the ways in which different people construct childhood (Mason & Bolzan, 2009; Wyness, 2017). Therefore, children may experience agency in different ways at home than they do at school. A related critique is that certain children may more easily

identify and demonstrate their agency. Those children that are more confident, have a higher sense of self-worth, and believe that they are agentic and can make a difference, may more readily demonstrate agency (Mitra, 2009). Furthermore, socio-economic advantage may impact on agency, with children from working-class families likely to have more social capital that enables them to more readily demonstrate agency that their more affluent counterparts (Wyness, 2017). In either socio-economic context, there is also a danger that, in their embracing of student agency, children inevitably "become the project of adults, to be shaped and moulded" (Wyness, 2005), rather than being seen as capable social actors.

Participation

The final concept that I wish to focus on from my review of the literature is that of 'participation', the most widely used of the four terms highlighted in this section over the last 30 years. 'Participation' was first notably used by Hart (1992) in his seminal work that produced the much-cited *Ladder of participation*. Hart defined 'participation' as "the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured" (p. 5). Other literature similarly defines this term as the process of children directly and actively taking part in highly collaborative practices that create opportunities for them to have an authentic influence over matters that are important to them (Alderson, 2000b; Holdsworth, 2005; Yamashita, Davies, & Williams, 2011). However, understandings of 'participation' in the literature vary. More moderate views focus on the complexity of participation and the difficulties faced by teachers from an adult-centric perspective (Sinclair, 2004). Other writers address issues of power and equity, such as Bragg and Fielding's (2005) wide-ranging notion of a 'radical collegiality' between students and teachers, where traditional relationships and power structures are more negotiable. Similarly, Thomson and Gunter (2009) note that "the most fundamental reason for student participation is to redress a power inequity" (p. 418) in describing the benefits of the 'students-as-researchers' approach.

Holdsworth (2018) grapples with the meanings and inter-relationships between voice, agency and participation, using a Venn-type diagram to 'nest' participation within agency, and agency within voice in order to illustrate their inter-

relationships. However, my review of the literature suggests a different, almost opposite, view of these concepts, as shown in Figure 2.1.

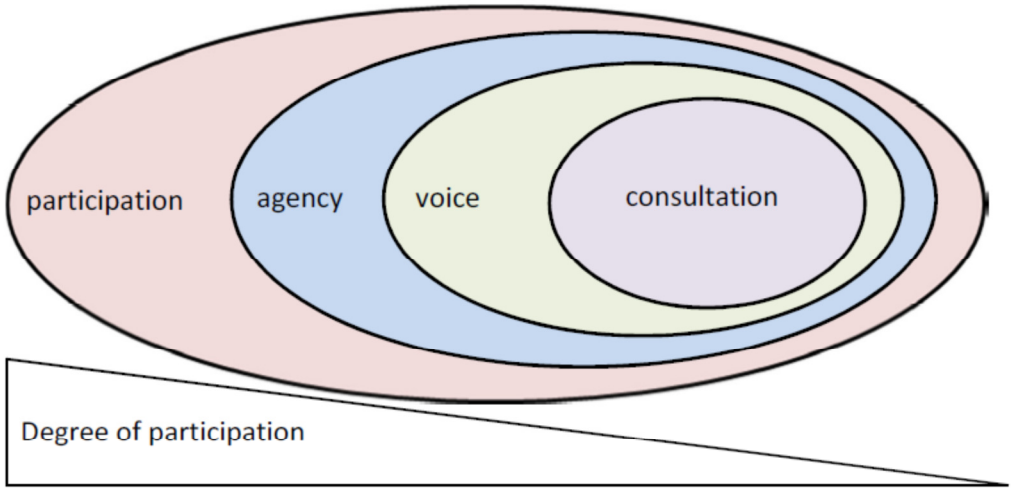

Figure 2. 1: Participation concepts and degree of participation (adapted from Holdsworth, 2018, p. 23)

Figure 2.1 reflects my positioning of 'participation' as a result of the literature reviewed here. 'Participation' is the all-encompassing concept that subsumes notions of consultation, voice and agency within it. This indicates where the highest levels of involvement, collaboration, autonomy and influence may be experienced by students and children. Participation is the most wide-ranging, all-encompassing notion in the literature that I have reviewed, and is the term that I will use throughout this thesis. I define 'participation' as children initiating, talking, thinking, deciding and acting in democratic contexts where they share power and ownership with adults. Through participation, children are taken seriously by adults and have reason to believe that their participation will make a difference. The following section of this chapter describes several models of participation, with particular attention to Hart's *Ladder of participation* (1992).

Models of participation

Over time, a wide range of typologies and models of participation have emerged in the literature (see, for example: Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2006; Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2019; Shier, 2001; Simovska & Jensen, 2009). The most commonly cited model throughout the literature is certainly that of Hart's *Ladder of participation* (1992), based on the work of Arnstein (1969). I focus in detail only on this model in this section as this seminal work has significantly influenced most other more recently developed typologies.

Hart's 'Ladder of participation'

Hart's work is widely regarded as seminal in the field of children's and young people's participation in matters affecting their lives and the *Ladder of participation* (Hart, 1997) underpins much of the conceptual and theoretical work that has been carried out in the ensuing 20 years. It builds on the very early work of Arnstein (1969) who was the Director of Community Development Studies for *The Commons*, a non-profit institute in Washington DC and Chicago. Her recognition of the importance of 'citizen participation' brings a social justice perspective to her work that is echoed in much of the ensuing and contemporary literature concerned with student participation. Hence, I will examine this model first before returning to the work of Hart.

Arnstein's work is regarded as one of the first reports to be published in the field of the participation of adults in their own communities, and takes a view shaped by the United States of America's espoused notions of democracy, liberty and citizenship (Alderson, 2000b, p. 167). Arnstein had a particular interest in the ways in which people could actively participate in their local environs, and described several important aspects in her writing that are echoed throughout the literature in the field of participation to the present day. For example, she recognised the importance of the participation "of the governed in their government" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216) as a crucial part of lived democracy, and the need to redistribute power not only with the various strata of society but also to the "have-not blacks, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Indians, Eskimos, and whites" (p. 216).

Arnstein's treatment of concepts of power is the hallmark of her work as she positions 'citizen participation' as a "categorical term for citizen power" (p. 217); it is the redistribution of power – or the exercising of social justice - that enables people to be included in political, civic and economic processes. As Arnstein describes:

> There is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process … participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. It allows the powerholders to claim that all sides were considered, but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit. It maintains the status quo. (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216)

Arnstein's words here can be easily transported from their original citizenship context to that of a primary school. Notions of tokenism and instrumentalism are implied, along with the implication that participation is often 'seen to be done' and power relationships remain unchanged. These same ideas are reflected in the work of Charteris and Smardon (2019b) almost 40 years after Arnstein, in their study of student voice in relation to learning in New Zealand primary and secondary schools, indicating the work yet to be done in the use of so-called democratic, participatory structures. Similarly, Bourke (2014) notes that the 'stance' of teachers needs to change, from "merely consulting with students, to one of creating opportunities to actively engage with decision-making" (p. 141), a change requiring different relationships between teachers and students.

Arnstein's model, shown in Figure 2.2, depicts this power (re)distribution. This is very clear in rungs 1 and 2 – Manipulation and Therapy - where, more than just failing to redistribute power to any extent at all, participation also becomes a process by which powerful people and groups "'educate' or 'cure' the participants" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217). Rungs 3, 4 and 5 – Informing, Consultation and Placation - accord enough power to citizens that they may "indeed hear and be heard … [but] lack the power to ensure that their views will be *heeded* by the powerful" (p. 217). Those with power continue to make the actual decisions. It is not until rungs 6, 7 and 8 – Partnership, Delegated Power and Citizen Control – that citizens are distributed increasing degrees of power, and can take on influential and authentic decision-making roles.

It is not difficult to see the influence of Arnstein's work on that of Hart's (1992) *Ladder of participation*, which was designed as a tool for thinking about children's participation in community projects, as well as in school, family and neighbourhood settings. Hart's (1992) definition of 'participation' reflects Arnstein's concern with notions of social justice:

> The term 'participation' is used … to refer generally to the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured. Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship. (Hart, 1992, p. 5)

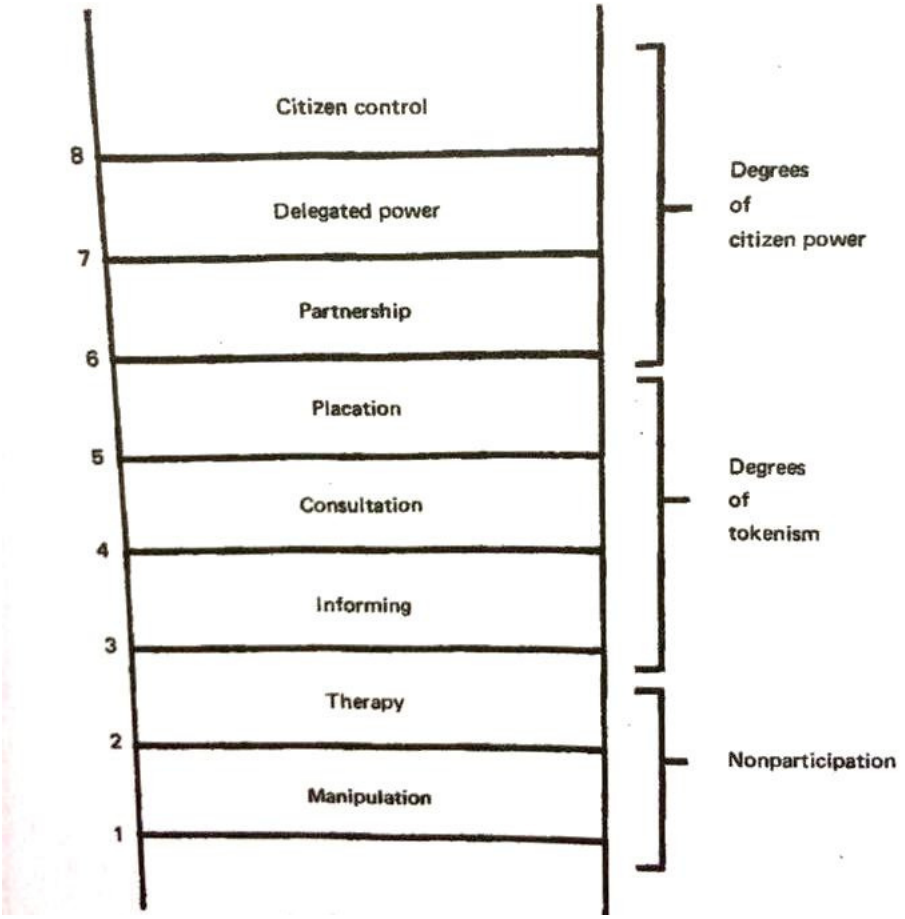

Figure 2. 2: Arnstein's 'Eight rungs on a ladder of citizen participation' (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217)

Borrowing Arnstein's ladder metaphor, Hart's model (see Figure 2.3) is organised into two 'levels' - Non-participation and Degrees of participation – comprised of eight rungs. The lowest three rungs – Manipulation, Decoration and Tokenism - are grouped together and described as Non-participation, and "do not allow young people to assume important roles and indeed may actively exploit them for adults' agendas" (Bragg, 2007, p. 23). The five higher rungs comprise the Degrees of participation, and involve information-giving, consultation and shared decision-making, with various degrees of adult or child-initiation. The third rung, Tokenism, is positioned at the 'tipping point' from Non-participation to Degrees of participation, where the involvement of children is limited to fulfilling only a symbolic function. As Hart (1992) states, this level is where "children are apparently given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions" (p. 9).

Hart's work in 1992 does not clearly discuss issues of power and social justice, although these are implied in his description of children's participation in community projects in developing countries – often as part of participatory action research projects, children's participation in work, and children's participation in schools and other governmental arenas. Hart's particular concern was to bring a critical perspective to children's participation roles by examining these in relation to the roles adults play, and to encourage adults to further reflect on the true participatory nature of opportunities that are offered to children in the name of democracy and empowerment. However, Hart's later work in 2009 begins to more specifically address the importance of schools as democratic places where children should actively participate in decision-making, rather than just learning about democracy and empowerment in citizenship education programmes. As Hart (2009) notes:

> Schools are central settings in children's lives for learning about political power, participation and justice. Even five-year-olds after entering school can quickly develop a fairly accurate understanding of the roles of different people in the schools. By the end of their elementary school years they have a very complete understanding of political authority and power. (p. 17)

This seems particularly relevant to children's participation in decision-making in primary schools. Children become exposed to practices that serve to foster their participation in decision-making to varying degrees, and where adults (and even other children) exert authority and power over them in certain ways.

Taken in its entirety, the ladder provides a useful framework through which adults can analyse and reflect on their current efforts to involve children as participants and also examine what further work might be possible. Hart (2008) cautioned his readers to use the Ladder "with care and with a great readiness to critique and invent anew" (2008, p. 28). Despite this, Hart's Ladder has certainly stood the test of time – as Fielding (2009) notes, many have found it useful "in helping to distinguish salient power relations and energising dynamics that range from manipulation, through consultation, and participation to co-construction" (p. 102). Indeed, Hart's Ladder still features in even very recent publications where authors trace the development of student voice and participation models, being recognised as the most important model of participation in regard to children and youth (see, for example: Andersson, 2017; Botchwey, Johnson, O'Connell, & Kim, 2019; Lundy, 2018; Mayne, Howitt, & Rennie, 2018; Morris, 2018).

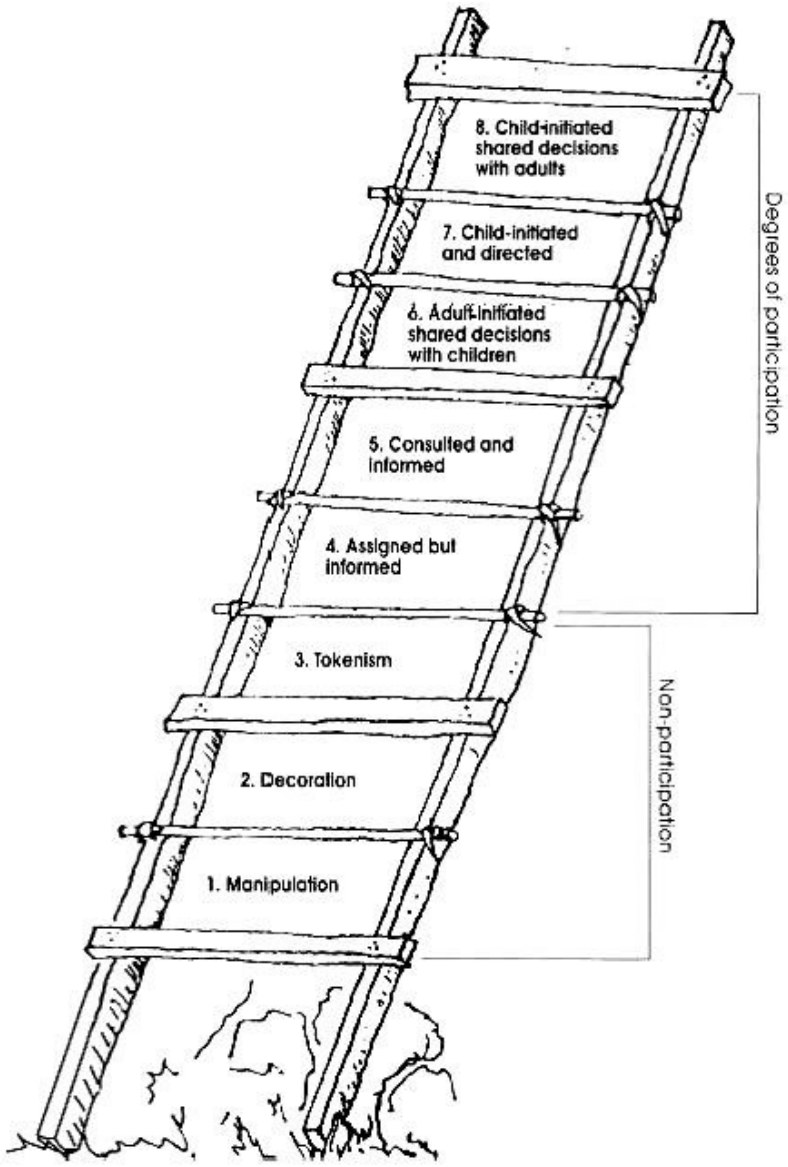

Figure 2. 3: Hart's 'Ladder of participation' (Hart, 1992, p. 8)

There are many other models of children's and young people's participation that echo the main themes of Hart's (1992) *Ladder*, including the work of Alderson and Montgomery (1996), Lee and Zimmerman (1999), Fielding (2001), (Shier, 2001), Jensen and Simovska (2005), Mitra (2006) and again Fielding (2011). There are three main common features of these models. In the first instance, these are all models with 'progressive' designs – that is, with a beginning level positioned as being the least desirable and a further set of levels that 'lead up' to the most desirable types of participation. I argue that this is the case whether the

'levels' are presented as a list or as a model, and whatever the shape or design of the model. A case in point here is that of Simovska's model (2005, cited in Simovska & Jensen, 2009), *Non-hierarchical forms of participation*. This is presented in a pie-graph format that is described as "non-hierarchical […] to avoid uncritical, normative use of the 'levels' description" (p. 15), and presents five forms of participation as "five different but equally valid forms of participation that allow choice of the option that is most helpful" (p. 15). Despite this description, it is possible to move around the segments of the graph in a 'progressive' manner and to identify some segments as 'better' than others in regard to children's participation. Consequently, these models appear to suggest that only one level can be in operation at any one time, and that the goal of adults must be to move children on to the next or better stage. Even Hart (2008) critiqued this about his own model:

> In some ways the ladder metaphor is unfortunate for it seems to imply a necessary sequence to children's developing competence in participation … This was not the intention but given the metaphor … it is not at all surprising that the model has been interpreted as stepwise climbing. (p. 23)

A second feature relates to the ways in which power is distributed. Within these models, it is adults who shape the decision-making process and who regulate the extent to which children may be involved from the onset – that is, adults exert various form of power 'over' children. The first stages of these models are characterised by the dominance of adults (or teachers) who decide what happens and when and why, and where children are positioned as the 'receivers', the 'observers' and the passive 'actors' within their world. That is, adults not only tend to control decision-making processes by being the dominant party (albeit perhaps unintentionally), but they also control who may participate, in what ways and to what extent. Furthermore, in order to 'empower' children, adults appear to have to give up their power in some way. However, as Mitra (2008) explains, power is not a "zero-sum game" (p. 229) where adults' power must diminish in order for students' power to increase. Furthermore, issues of power have persisted in practices associated with children's participation, with the "dominant culture of superiority already present within the schools" (Ladkin, 2017, p. 38) as teachers find it difficult to recognise the influence of their power in regard to children, let alone address power imbalances.

Finally, the third feature of the various models is that they are founded on the assumption of homogeneous groups and make little concession for the diversity that is invariably present within groups of children. Considerations of ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, school context and other factors that may shape the nature and types of participation are largely absent, with the only common difference described being that of the age of the children. As Fielding (2013) argues, the idea that there is one singular voice that can represent young people and, as a result, other voices are silenced, is a notion that persists. This is particularly important when considering primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand where diversity is the norm with schools and their populations varying across a variety of demographic factors. Such contextual considerations are recognised by Bourke and Loveridge (2018) who noted how "the issue of the need for a plurality of voices remains in contemporary critiques" (p. 4). Hart (2008) also recognised this about his own model, and argued for a debate about the cultural aspects of children's participation and the risk of a "cultural form of imperialism" (p. 28) when Western constructions of collaboration and agency are imposed upon other groups. The nature of children's participation in decision-making that is described in much of the literature fails to consider the "chasm in opportunity for differing children" (Leitch, 2012, p. 216) even within one nation or organisational context. Mager and Nowak (2012) extend this argument into the field of student councils, and conclude that these groups are institutionalised with their benefits only accruing to those few students involved.

It is also possible that any model or typology of children's participation may be used or misused as adults see fit. It may not be sufficient for an adult to merely select a model and then implement it to the best (or not) of their ability, without having a broad knowledge of other areas of literature that underpin the productive implementation of children's participation strategies and contexts. Regardless of adults' intentions, however, their 'power' may still overshadow children's positioning, especially in contexts such as schools where power relationships are very difficult to dismantle. Furthermore, the conditioning embedded in society as a result of hundreds of years of schools' traditions and hierarchical structures provides a significant challenge to both adults and children. Nevertheless, the agency that children have and are able to demonstrate is fundamental to the effective provision of children's participation in decision-making in schools. It is towards the school context that I now turn in Part Three of this chapter, by reviewing elements of the school context that impact on

the ways in which children may participate in decision-making in their schools – democracy, citizenship and agency. A review of the meanings of several fundamental concepts in children's participation is presented in the next section.

Part Three: Tokenism, authenticity and power in children's participation

At this point in the literature review, it is important to traverse a number of concepts that emerge repeatedly in research publications concerned with children's voice, agency and participation, and which I also use in this thesis. These concepts are 'tokenism' (including the concept 'tokenistic'), 'authentic' (including the concept 'authenticity), and 'power'. In this section I will overview these concepts as they are presented in relevant literature and define each as I use it in this thesis.

Token(ism)istic

The words 'token' and 'tokenism' are used throughout the literature concerned with children and young people's voice and participation (see, for example: Charteris & Smardon, 2019b; Hart, 1992; Lundy, 2007, 2018; Thomson, 2011; Wisby, 2011). In general, the term 'tokenism' arises when describing participation activities that result from adults' perceptions that children have limited capacity to contribute to decision-making. The original work of Hart (1992) in his *Ladder of participation*, labelled the third lowest and 'least preferred' rung of the ladder as 'tokenism', defining it as "those instances in which children are apparently given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, and little or no opportunity to formulate their opinions" (Hart, 1992, p. 19). A further definition is provided by Wisby (2011), who notes that tokenism characterised student voice implemented in schools as a response to the "passing fashion" (p. 35) of student participation. Similarly, Herriot (2013) notes the danger of tokenistic approaches to student voice in producing quite the opposite of what might have been intended, resulting in students being disengaged or, as other authors note, merely passively engaged (Baroutsis, McGregor, & Mills, 2016; Ng, Bartlett, & Elliot, 2018). Morris (2018) goes so far as to say that research in the field largely positions 'tokenism' as "the Achilles heel of student voice" (p. 30) linked to lip-service being paid to children's voice or voice only being sought on unimportant, mundane topics.

In fact, 'tokenism' is played out in three main ways. In the first instance, the nature of the 'activity' that children are involved in can be tokenistic. Alderson (2000a) noted an example of this in her early work related to school councils, where the adult involved with one school council she examined in the research gave children no time to discuss matters of importance to them or express their views. Eighteen years later, 'tokenism' still emerges in the literature as an issue in the implementation of student voice. To avoid tokenism, the literature suggests that voice and participation work must be enjoyable for children, be relevant and 'real life', at the children's level of capability while not being patronising, give all children equitable opportunities to participate, and facilitate children speaking freely (Charteris & Smardon, 2019a, 2019b; Groundwater-Smith, 2011; Keddie, 2015).

Secondly, even if the activity in which children are engaged appears to be non-tokenistic, adults' actions, attitudes and values still shape the very nature and scope of the activity. In relation to school councils for example, Wyness (2018) notes that adults' beliefs and values lead to actions that "mirror or imitate adult models of participation, particularly the emphasis on electoral processes, making it more ritualised and less likely to engage with children's interests" (p. 55). To exacerbate this tokenism, adults may not value children's views or only let children engage in "event-based rather than processual forms of participation" (Wyness, 2018, p. 58). This serves to sustain the existing power relationships between adults and children merely because of age and relative status within a school environment – this may be the case even when adults strive to involve children in non-tokenistic ways. As Ground-Water-Smith (2011) notes, "at worst this contributes to existing technologies of power, at best to paternalism and tokenism (p. 55).

Finally, student voice work will be tokenistic if children's contributions are not overtly valued by adults, not used to influence change or, at worst, completely ignored. Voice becomes merely a token if it is not listened to and taken into account, and particularly so if children's views are only sought on topics of no great importance to them, or if the views of children are not the same as adults' views (Herriot, 2013). Thus, even when a children's voice initiative may reflect notions of inclusion and agency, the use to which this voice is put by adults may render it tokenistic (Charteris & Smardon, 2019b). In fact, children are often themselves aware that the participation opportunities in which they are involved

are tokenistic. In Lundy's (2018) later work, she reports on findings that suggest that "while it is rare for a child to describe his or her experience or the adults' behaviour or process using the adjective 'tokenistic', children often give accounts of having experienced adult attitudes and actions that would be classified by many as 'tokenism'" (p. 341). Similarly, Keddie (2015) describes student councils as being seen as tokenistic if the topics in which students are permitted to have a voice are unlikely to influence the core concerns of schools, or if "schools superficially engage with students' views without, for example, thinking through why they want to engage with students" (p. 228). To avoid this type of tokenism, adults must constantly challenge their own expectations of children, check their assumptions about children's competence and capability, recognise that children's input and ideas are valid, and support them to participate in voice initiatives. Children must know what the purpose of any voice activity is and what the information they provide will be used for, as well as receiving feedback from adults about their participation and contribution, and being able to see that their 'voice' has influence. Children then become true partners in school decision-making (Keddie, 2015).

Given the influence of Hart's *Ladder of participation* (1992), practitioners appear to have avoided some participation initiatives, fearing that these are tokenistic (and therefore very undesirable), and erring on the side of caution that doing nothing, rather than doing the wrong thing, is a safer option (Lundy, 2018). In reference to Article 12 of the UNCRC, Lundy (2007) warned that "Tokenistic or decorative participation is not only in breach of Article 12 but can be counter-productive" in that tokenistic participation may be just as, or more, damaging than no participation at all. However, by 2018 Lundy argued that this is not a clear rationale for avoiding participation as "the effect on children is not inevitably, exclusively or permanently negative " (Lundy, 2018, p. 346). There may also be benefits for the adults involved. While Lundy notes that tokenistic participation mechanisms are at least a step in the right direction and preferable to doing nothing at all, I would argue that there is a danger in such approaches. If tokenism is all that is ever achieved, this can become acceptable to both adults and children because the rhetoric assures us that at least adults are doing something. In the same way as the integration of te reo Māori, tikanga Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi into primary schools in New Zealand is often tokenistic and pays only lip service to te ao Māori, tokenism is not enough.

In summary, the meanings I ascribe in this thesis to the terms 'tokenism' and 'tokenistic' are that tokenism is apparent when children are involved in settings where the activity or process used does not match their capability, is not enjoyable or meaningful to the children, 'uses' children for a purpose that is inappropriate and/or is adult-centric in design. Furthermore, tokenism is also evident where adults do not support children to contribute and/or where participation opportunities are not equitably provided to children. Finally, tokenism is present where children's voice is sought on matters that are not of concern to them, where their voice does not have an influence or lead to change, and/or where children do not receive any feedback about the difference that their voice has made.

Authenticity

Conversely, student participation practices may be described as 'authentic' where processes and activities are designed to accurately and truthfully seek out children's ideas and feedback. 'Authentic' practices are seen as 'genuine', situated within the 'real world' of those involved, personally interesting to children, actually carried out by those children and perhaps generated and designed by children. Such initiatives should also reflect adults' genuine efforts, care and thoughtfulness in constructing and intentionally carrying out the activities (Cook-Sather, 2015). Finally, the influence of children's views should be reflected in full and appropriate use of the results in ways that are visible to those children, rather than students voicing their opinions and no subsequent action being taken (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018).

However, efforts that focus solely on authenticity can also limit student voice. Nelson (2019), for example, describes that adults can become so concerned with student voice being 'authentic', that the importance of the context in which the voice is gathered and the power relations at play within that context become unnoticed. Such is adults' fervour to 'do the right thing' in regard to voice, that the overarching belief is that "authentic student voice will emerge if we get student positioning 'right' or if we get our methods 'right', freeing the voicing process from restraints to facilitate an unfettered and ideal expression of student experience and perception" (Nelson, 2019, p. 2). The very fact that adults have initiated and designed the opportunities for student voice renders these opportunities as normal, expected and accepted over time, and results in both adults and children recognising "student voice when we see it because of what we are told student

voice looks like" (p. 5). Furthermore, the persistence of the power imbalance between adults and children can influence even the most authentic voice mechanisms (Nelson, 2019). No matter the efforts made by adults, students may still say what they think teachers want to hear, or by exercising voice about only very minor issues in order not to show disrespect for adults (Ladkin, 2017). As a result, children's voices are muted in the face of long-standing educational practices and regimes (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2019). Keddie (2015) also expresses reservations in regard to authentic voice processes and their success in being inclusive of all voices. Despite describing authentic consultation as being characterised by students choosing the focus, feeling listened to, having their voice responded to in 'genuine' ways and their ideas being taken seriously, questions still remain about "who is authorised to speak and who is silenced, who speaks for whom and for what purposes must be asked" (Keddie, 2015, p. 230).

The *Voice-Inclusive-Practice* (VIP) approach advocated by Sargeant and Gillet-Swan (2015) seeks to address these issues. Such practice seeks to redress power imbalances by consulting directly with children on matters that they care about, and reduce the "hierarchical, power laden systems that assure their distance from the decision-making processes" (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2019, p. 125). Cook-Sather (2015) echoes this idea, stating that adults must move away from "speaking *about* and *for* students toward a more dialogic alternative of speaking *with* them" (p. 2). Sargeant and Gillett-Swan (2019) further note that by making voice mechanisms part of the 'everydayness' of what occurs in classrooms through embedding consultation into the usual teaching and learning programmes, voice becomes more authentic and inclusive.

Building on this work, this thesis uses the following definitions of 'authentic' voice processes and initiatives developed by Sargeant and Gillett-Swan (2015, 2019): Authentic voice processes are "activities and practices that incorporate and actively engage with children and their perspectives on matters that affect them" (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2015, p. 181), and where adults' practice is "internally motivated, free of pressure to conform and informed by a confidence in the participatory capacity of children" (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2019, p. 129).

The relationship between 'tokenism' and 'authenticity'

It is perhaps convenient to juxtapose 'tokenism', or 'contrived' as Nelson (2019) terms it, and 'authentic' and 'authenticity' at opposite ends of a continuum of what

is ‘worst’ and ‘best’ in regard to children’s voice activities and initiatives. Indeed, ‘authentic’ is commonly used by authors in the field to describe a ‘good’ example of children’s voice processes and outcomes in the same sorts of ways that the words ‘tokenism’ and ‘tokenistic’ are used to describe ‘bad’ student voice. Where the word ‘authentic’ is used, it means a variety of things including ‘effective’, ‘successful’, ‘real-world’, ‘relevant’, ‘valuable’, ‘true’ and so on. Whilst these descriptions may seem to be polar opposites, the extent to which this is true hinges almost entirely on adults’ attitudes and actions in relation to the use of power (Cook-Sather, 2015; Ladkin, 2017) and the recognition of the many voices that have the right to be heard (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018; Groundwater-Smith, 2011). I have endeavoured to depict this ‘messy’ relationship in Figure 2.4.

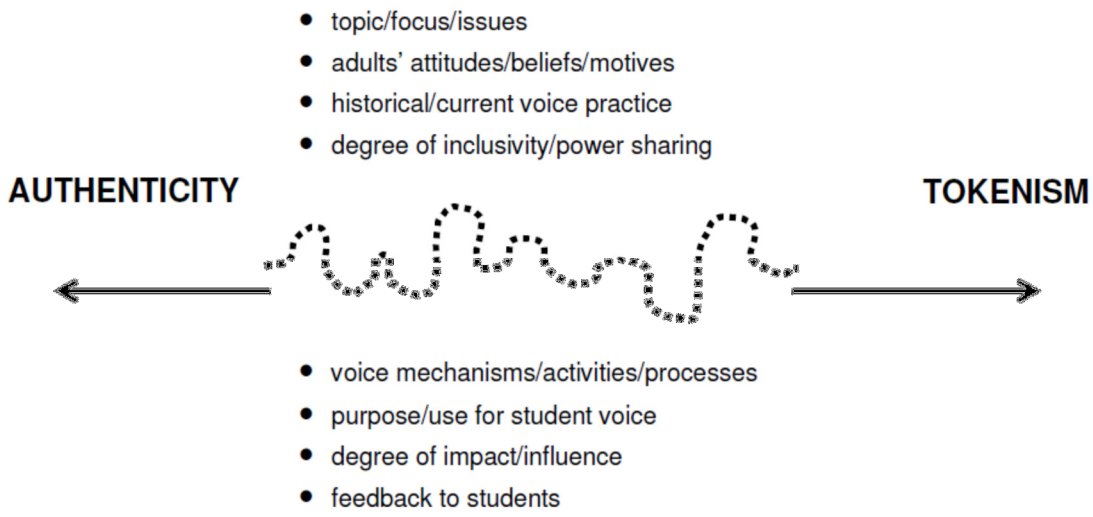

Figure 2. 4: The relationship between ‘tokenism’ and ‘authenticity’

This diagram synthesises the definitions of ‘tokenism’ and ‘authentic(ity)’ as explained in the previous sections and illustrates their relationship. Although I have positioned these at opposite ends of a continuum, these concepts are not complete opposites – rather, I have depicted this continuum as significantly ‘blurry’, unpredictable and potentially chaotic. This is intended to show that the positioning of children’s voice activity anywhere along this continuum is influenced by many factors (shown in the bullet-pointed list). It also implies that something that appears to be authentic may well be at least partly tokenistic – for example, if there is no feedback to students about what difference their feedback and ideas made, this voice is still tokenistic. Conversely, something that appears to be tokenistic may well be at least partly authentic – for example, if a voice

process uses poorly designed techniques and activities, it may still be partly authentic if the focus is chosen by the children and is important to them.

Power

Alongside ideas of tokenism and authenticity lies the concept of 'power'. In its simplest conceptualisation, 'power' is about influence. Literature in the field of children's rights, participation, voice and agency, has been concerned with the presence, impact and allocation of power since the earliest scholarship (see, for example: Alderson, 1993; Freeman & Van Bueren, 1993; Hart, 1992), an emphasis that has persisted even in the most recent publications (see, for example: Cook-Sather, 2020; Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2019; Shier, 2019b). Schools themselves are replete with 'powerful' people, structures, relationships and practices both within and outside of the classroom. Thus, power is a "complex phenomenon that manifests differently dependent on individual characteristics, attributes and social position" (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2019, p. 406).

'Power', then, is an underpinning and inherent concept in ideas about 'voice' and participation as it is variously shared, exchanged, given away, increased or removed in participation models, mechanisms and initiatives. Indeed, the ways in which adults exert, share or let go with power are one factor that can render efforts to involve children in decision-making as tokenistic. Relationships between adults and children in schools remain fundamentally power-based (Robinson, 2016), with the extent to which adults view children as capable remaining influential in how power is allocated (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2019). Literature concerned with power frequently positions it as a repressive rather than productive force (Nelson, 2018), with an underpinning assumption that power exchange is indeed a 'zero-sum game' – that is, "more powerful social actors need to relinquish or lose power in order for less powerful actors to become more powerful" (Nelson, 2017, p. 182). Even where teacher-student relationships are reconceptualised into more equal forms of partnership, the norms of schools and classrooms can never be completely removed (Nelson, 2018). Children will inevitably perceive adults to have more power, even when considerable effort is expended in recognising power imbalances and minimising these (Robinson, 2016). Fielding's (2004) notion of transformation requiring a "rupture of the ordinary [and] a radical collegiality" (p. 296) remains an important, but often unachievable goal.

Where 'power' is shared or 'given away', those on the receiving end are sometimes thought of as 'empowered'. Shier (2019a) drawing from his work with CESESMA in Nicaragua - the *Centre for Educational Services in Health and Environment* – notes that there is no agreed definition of the term and it has become somewhat of a 'buzzword' that requires further examination. Shier (2019a) uses the definition of the CESESMA who comprehensively define 'empowerment' as "a process which three essential factors: capability, conditions/opportunities, and attitude" (p. 2). In his research, adolescents depicted in words and pictures how they would describe their peers who have the power to make decisions as well as those who do not. From his findings, Shier (2019a) concluded that although gaining knowledge and skills can be easily facilitated by adults, as can establishing the appropriate conditions and creating opportunities, adults can only support the development of the required personal qualities, not direct it: "Thus, adults can do much of what is required in order for empowerment to occur in children and adolescents, but not all of it. Essentially, we cannot empower them" (p. 8). However, as Shier (2019b) also describes, what adults *can* do, is "facilitate the kinds of processes that will most likely lead young people towards such transformation" (p. 5). The extent to which such participation structures as student councils, that are set up by adults and where students' power exists only at those adults' behest, can be viewed as empowerment remains unclear. The particular mechanism of student councils is critically examined in this next section.

Part Four: Children's participation in their schools' decision-making processes

This section traverses literature related to children's 'participation', given that I have already defined it as the process of children directly and actively taking part in highly collaborative practices that create opportunities for children to have an authentic influence over matters that are important to them. The first section reviews democracy, citizenship and agency in the school context. This is followed by a consideration of one popular mechanism that primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand commonly use in their efforts to promote the involvement of children in the wider life of the school – the 'student council'. This group is usually comprised of children in representative roles who are expected to demonstrate 'leadership' in some form.

Democracy in the school context

There is a long history of argument over the meaning of 'democracy' (Apple, 2018), and its relevance to schools, though not new, is similarly contested (Apple, 2018; Apple & Beane, 1999; Fielding, 2012; MacBeath, 2004; Mager & Nowak, 2012). Nevertheless, the term is widely used in relation to schools' visions, mission statements and values, and is inextricably linked to other notions such as power, voice and participation (Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011; Morris, 2018; Wyness, 2018). Dewey (1916) is widely regarded as the most influential and prolific writer of modern times to engage with the notion of democracy as it applies to schools (Beane & Apple, 1999). Dewey's work positions schools as integral elements of a democratic society, as it is here that individuals are educated as 'citizens', and where the ideals and morals of democracy are taught and perpetuated. He conceived of democracy as being a collective of citizens working together to recognise social interdependency and safeguard social responsibility – a "mode of associated living, a conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey, 1916, p. 85).

In fact, schools are seen to fulfil two positions in a democracy – in the first instance, education is the mechanism by which people can be educated – and, arguably, educated *about* democracy - and, secondly, a school is a microcosm of society, and should be underpinned by the tenets of democracy in and of itself. Schools may, in fact, lay the foundation for a democratic society, with parents, teachers, leaders and policymakers sharing an emphasis on students learning to be "good people" and engaging respectfully with others and their communities (Westheimer, 2020). Education and democracy, then, have long been seen as having a symbiotic relationship: what happens in schools should reflect "critical thinking, reflection, dialogue, individual freedoms, and social interaction with an aim toward equity" (Hyde & LaPrad, 2015, p. 7), the very characteristics of democracy that Dewey (1916) identified. These two positions are reflected in the early work of McBeath (2004) who identified these two aspects as "learning about democracy" (p. 30) and "learning in a democracy" (p. 36), with the latter's connection to "learning democratically" (p. 41). Thus, democracy in schools has the opportunity to shape democracy in wider society in the same way that fights for gender and ethnicity equality have also been played out in the past in schools and universities (Apple, 2011). Such arguments place a considerable responsibility on schools to not only structure themselves in particular ways, but also to teach and relate to students from a democratic stance. Fielding (2012) cautions, however, that schools must take care to not simply replicate the

inequities in current democratic societies, but to work within "alternative, participatory traditions of democracy" (p. 25) that allow individual identity and new ways of working and living together.

The importance of a participative democratic approach is noted by Bolstad (2011b) who argues that students in New Zealand schools, as part of the wider democratic context, should share in decision-making, exercise voice and participate widely in the life of the school, a view shared in Fielding's (2016) tribute to the work and writing of John Dewey. These practices also utilise students as 'social actors' who can "form and express opinions, participate in decision-making processes and influence solutions" (Bolstad, 2011b, p. 4), an approach known as 'participatory democracy'. While expounding similar aspirations, Fielding (2016) describes school systems as demonstrating a "complacent, even lazy, espousal of democracy as an orienting dynamic, invariably shying away from overtly acknowledging its fundamental significance and relying instead on the remnants of a threadbare, highly stratified civic inheritance" (p. 116). Most recent literature, particular in the United States, argues, either directly or indirectly, for a renewed emphasis on authentic democratic structures and practices in schools in the context of the Trump presidency (Apple, 2018; Rebell, 2018; Westheimer, 2020; Zembylas, 2020).

Citizenship in the school context

A further participation construct is that of 'citizenship', a concept with its origins in ancient times. It is linked to notions of participation, democracy and the holding and exertion of individual and collective 'rights'. Like democracy, it is an actively contested concept (Bacon & Frankel, 2014; Geboers, Geijsel, Admiraal, & ten Dam, 2013). As I have already described, Hart's (1992) seminal work stemmed from that of Arnstein's (1969) original ladder of citizen participation, and concerns the very notion of citizenship as being at the other end of the participation continuum from 'tokenism'. Hart (1992) defined citizenship for children as the opportunity to be involved in the "process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives" (p. 5). In regard to citizenship in the school context, three main mechanisms exist.

In the first instance, schools have engaged in an intentional, though somewhat indirect, focus on citizenship as being the 'doing of good deeds' (Serriere, Mitra, & Reed, 2011). One conceptualisation of this is 'service learning' where students

are “active participants in service projects that aim to respond to the needs of the community while furthering the academic goals of students” (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, p. 593). These projects may be critiqued as resulting in outcomes that are more about charity than community change - service learning often falls short of its potential to develop students as active citizens if students merely, for example, give a concert at a local retirement village or collect cans for a food bank. However, Fox and LaChenaye (2016) report research findings where students were found to have learned citizenship skills while engaging with their community, gained enhanced self-efficacy and appreciation of differences, and improved their peer relationships. As Kahne and Westheimer (2003) state: “While programmes that emphasise service and character may be valuable for supporting the development of good community members, they are inadequate for the challenges of educating a democratic citizenry” (p. 36). Whilst students no doubt gain some knowledge about being a citizen and even though the learning is often based in *real-world* projects, it is frequently, by its very nature, neither student-centred nor empowering (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003).

Secondly, schools have developed programmes that comprise of the deliberate ‘teaching’ of citizenship using set curricula and resources (Mager & Nowak, 2012). Indeed, unlike the New Zealand school context, citizenship education has been compulsory in the United Kingdom since 2002 (The Citizenship Foundation, 2016) with the topics studied including the political systems of the United Kingdom, the role of law and the justice system, human rights and international law, diverse identities and governmental systems, and the ways in which citizens can contribute to their communities (United Kingdom Department for Education, 2013). Wyness (2015) further positions citizenship education as somewhat of a paradox. Despite the citizenship curriculum’s intention to develop children as citizens with particular values and beliefs, this is generally understood by adults as shaping and educating children for their future as citizens, rather than children being viewed as “present day citizens” (Wyness, 2015, p. 76). Students may, as a result, be learning about citizenship in demonstrably anti-democratic schools where students’ lives are dominated by ideas and practices that position them in the future as citizens and workers (Serriere & Mitra, 2011). A similar view is expressed by Bacon and Frankel (2014) who argue that children cannot be citizens as they do not have the full range of rights that adults have and that the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989) provides no assurance that the voices of children will be heard and acted upon.

Finally, schools have most recently reframed the 'teaching' of citizenship to, in contrast, immersing students in the 'democracy' of the school itself - education is held to be a democratic process and schools are viewed as democracies. As I have already described above, this idea was first articulated by John Dewey as early as 1916 when he wrote about education not just as a means to provide skills and knowledge to students, but also as a process wherein children and young people would learn about democracy by actively participating in the school as a democratic institution (Dewey, 1916). This framing of citizenship has resulted in children being allowed opportunities to participate *authentically* in democratic processes and activities such as student councils (Taylor, 2002), school governing bodies as is the case in New Zealand secondary schools' Boards of Trustees (New Zealand School Trustees' Association, 2020b), and the recent prominence of 'student voice' initiatives in relation to learning, curriculum and decision-making processes (Hall, 2017). These elements, and others like them, do not so much 'teach' citizenship, as expose students to a climate, context and culture that ensures they experience and participate in a democratic school as 'citizens', an element that Westheimer (2019) identifies as particularly important in the current era of populist politics in the Trump administration in particular . This notion was encapsulated in the seminal work of Bruner (1973, cited in Jorgensen, 2004) when he asked the question: "What is the most important subject in the school?' and gives the answer: "The school itself" - in other words, "the social dimension is not an annexe to teaching, it is the very precondition" (p. 121).

Furthermore, the deliberate teaching of citizenship using a set curriculum may, as Kahne and Westheimer (2003) note, emphasise service and character too much, and neglect the "challenges of educating a democratic citizenry" (p. 36). The school must *be* the democracy - places where children not only learn to read and write, but also where they can "think about the society in which we live and imagine the kind of society that they can help create" (Westheimer, 2020, p. 7). In this way, the "ambivalent reality" that Jans (2004) identified may also be addressed – that of children being cared for by parents and other adults while, on the other hand, also being "stimulated to present themselves as individuals with their own rights" (p. 27). This view of the school and of children's participation is most commonly evident in the mechanism of the 'student council' as I have already argued. I return to this in a later section of this chapter.

Agency in the school context

Children must have agency in the school context if democratic and citizenship constructs are to be authentically and effectively utilised. Ideas that children could independently exercise agency emerged in the 1970s (James & James, 2012), strengthening during through the 1980s and 1990s as part of the socio-cultural paradigm that began to focus attention on children's actions as "socially meaningful" with children being "deeply implicated in the social world as active agents" (p. 354). Notions of agency continue to be uppermost in the study of childhood in the 21st century with James and James (2012) describing it as possibly the key concept in current studies of childhood.

'Agency' has been earlier defined in Part 2 of this chapter as a person knowing that they have the skills, abilities and experiences to have a say in matters that are important to them, and also knowing that they *can* have a say, that they will be listened to, and that their input will have an influence on outcomes (Holdsworth, 2018; Kirby, 2019; Kumpulainen, Lipponen, Hilppo, & Mikkola, 2014; Wyness, 2018). When this idea is applied to children, the necessity of adults also understanding and valuing these competencies, agentic knowledge and behaviours becomes clear if children are to be viewed as agents and partners. In short, children believe themselves to have the capacity and willingness to have an influence; adults ensure that children are 'taken seriously' and facilitate children's contributions.

Notions of children's rights, competencies and agency are inextricably bound together in the literature that explores these topics. Indeed, Frost and Roberts (2011) identified agency as "the linking concept" (p. 70). No matter how competent adults believe children to be, this potential cannot be enacted without agency – this is the element that differentiates 'agency' from 'voice'. Holdsworth (Holdsworth, 2018) notes that 'voice' refers to children expressing their views – that is, articulating and sharing information, advice and feedback. On the other hand, 'agency' involves a greater degree of autonomy, independence and motivation on the part of students, involving "students making decisions, and taking action (by themselves and with other students) to make changes in their education" (Holdsworth, 2018, p. 22) and having a valuable role within institutions and communities. Agency, then, is a fundamental component of children participating in decision-making in schools if this participation is to be authentic and autonomous. In the school context, Busher (2016) notes that students have

agency to "shape the processes and culture of a school, exerting influence (informal power) through their interactions among themselves and with teachers and through their parents acting as proxies for them (p. 99). Furthermore, in the case of older students and youth, agency can contribute to social capital and lead to educational and employment opportunities (Mitra & Serriere, 2012).

However, agency is only enacted when children can make choices *and* "impose these choices on the world" (McNamee, 2016, p. 33). To some extent, then, agency can only be exerted by children in authentic and meaningful ways if adults make the 'space' for this to occur (Holdsworth, 2018; McNamee, 2016; Wyness, 2013b). In the primary school context, this may refer to teachers actively enabling children as agentic beings. However, other adults such as government officials also impose control over children through policy and increasing assessment and achievement demands. Wyness (2005) notes the tension evident here:

> Given that education is part of a broader public context of intense control of children, how do we reconcile this trend with initiatives that are trying to incorporate children and young people within the public realm as full members of communities with access to decision-making processes? … whilst schools are quintessentially children's places, there is little sense in which children own these places or have any control over how they are organised, run or structured. (pp. 10-11)

Parents may also have a part to play here with 'over-parenting' (Wyness, 2012a). It is clearly not only teachers who need to embrace the notion of children's agency.

Valentine (2011) argues that in order to reduce constraints on children's agency, adults have to take into account differences between children, either within or across social contexts. Privileged children will have different ideas about schools. Their particular cultural capital – including, for example, having space at home to do their schoolwork, parents with higher levels of education, access to the internet, and so on - may allow them to more actively participate in decision-making and demonstrate agency. Disadvantaged children, on the other hand, may be less likely to do so (Valentine, 2011). Furthermore,, Wyness (2015) found that "children who struggle with the rules and norms of schools are not only likely to be socially excluded from the school system, they may openly reject the social

and moral structures that underpin schools" (p. 52). In such contexts, social justice – or the lack thereof, appears to actively constrain agency.

Contextual influences on agency also interested Klocker (2007), who argues that children can still exert agency even when they cannot influence decisions about their lives – thus, agency can be 'thinned' by various factors such as age and ethnicity. Put another way, this 'thinning' of agency reduces children's ability to make choices or limits the range of choices that are available. Conversely, 'thick' agency is seen in contexts where children are able to choose from a variety of options. Although Klocker's (2007) work emerges from her study of child domestic workers in Tanzania, these concepts remain most worthy of consideration because of the implication that social justice impacts not only on the types of options from which children can choose, but also their ability and freedom to exercise this choice. In her later work constructed through a postcolonial lens, Klocker (2014) acknowledged that, even when children were employed as domestic servants in Tanzania, they did not see themselves as innocent victims of exploitation as we might consider them to be. Indeed, Klocker notes that these children still had agency – agency to make their employers' lives difficult, agency to leave their employment because of poor pay and conditions, and even their decision to become a domestic worker as a way to escape poverty Clearly, 'agency' is shaped by context.

Similarly, Holland, Scourfield, O'Neill and Pithouse's (2005) study of family group conferences in Wales found links between agency and social justice. These researchers found that, while social workers strived to increase the engagement of both children and their parents in family-group conferences, the workers still controlled, to a greater or lesser degree, the agenda and outcomes of these meetings. For example, staff were, in their enthusiasm for success, imposing empowerment on families, controlling decision-making, and 'professionalising' meetings through the use of written agendas and other documents, a practice that Wyness (2015) later described as 'imposed agency'. Holland et al. (2005) concluded that, despite the many positive findings of their research, "participative strategies can be simply devices to encourage, or even to manipulate, if those with control are not prepared to share their power" (S. Holland et al., 2005, p. 65). In other words, where children and their families are perceived by others to not have agency, a kind of agency is 'given' to them that, ironically, serves not to empower but to further disempower. In continued reference to the impact of

socioeconomic status on children's agency, Wyness (2015) concluded that agency is not equitably distributed across population of children: "While there is a degree of recognition of children's agency at a general political level, the diversity of childhood, the distinctive economic, social and political contexts within which children grow up, generate distinctive modes of agency" (p. 59). This conclusion may have implications for this thesis research given that the two participating schools are situated at opposite of the decile rating continuum used in Aotearoa New Zealand, suggesting that children from Beacon Point school (Decile 8-10 range) might potentially demonstrate more demonstrate more agentic behaviours than Morton Hill children (Decile 1-3 range). It is such notions that my study will examine.

Student councils

I use the term 'student councils' here to describe groups that are made up of students, rather than the term 'school councils' which can refer to student groups, but also to governance-type groups in schools, largely comprised of adults but with some student representation. In New Zealand, such governance bodies are known as the 'Board of Trustees' (BoT). The BoT governs the school (as distinct from involving itself in day-to-day management) and is comprised of the school Principal, one staff representative, and a number of parent representatives. In secondary schools (Years 9-13) a BoT also has one student representative (New Zealand School Trustees' Association, 2020a). As my thesis focuses on primary schools and to avoid a confusion of terms, I will use 'student councils' throughout.

The body of literature concerned with 'student councils' is considerable, with student councils being noted as one of the most researched examples of student voice and participation (Griebler & Nowak, 2012; Mager & Nowak, 2012). In many school contexts, the student council is the most 'popular' and longstanding forum for students to express their views (Frost & Roberts, 2011; Mager & Nowak, 2012; Wyness, 2013b), resulting from a long tradition in Western education for such groups to be formed. Black (2011) goes so far as to say that student councils are so popular because their form is familiar to adults and, furthermore, adults are drawn to a form of participation and voice that still allows adults to control or influence them. Student councils are defined similarly throughout the literature as a body comprised of students ('councillors') who come together to talk about what is happening in their school and express their views on what might be changed or improved (Forde, Horgan, Martin, & Parkes, 2018; Griebler

& Nowak, 2012; Halfon & Romi, 2019). These students are usually elected by their peers and are often tasked with collecting the views or 'voices' of other students in order to provide responses to adults or raise matters with which the council is concerned (Mager & Nowak, 2012). As such, they are intended to be representative of wider groups of students (Andersson, 2018; Burnitt & Gunter, 2013). In this way, the students' work on councils, the schools' "organised and institutionalized forms of political participation" (Andersson, 2018, p. 2) somewhat mimics the practices of formal democratic adult politics in the Western world (Wyness, 2013b).

Student councils can take on various forms and have various roles and responsibilities. However, this is an under-researched aspect of student councils (Halfon & Romi, 2019). In response to this gap, Halfon and Romi (2019) studied 93 schools in Israel and developed a typology of student councils comprising four types:

- advancing students' rights and enhancing school/community volunteering (24 councils);
- enhancing school/community volunteering (35 councils);
- advancing students' rights (19 councils); and
- neither students' rights nor school/community volunteering focused (10 councils).

The main finding from the study was there was wide heterogeneity in regard to council aims and activities across the schools, probably because there are no guidelines or 'curricula' for such councils. This lack of mandated direction for student councils is also the case in New Zealand – in fact, primary schools are not required to have student representation of any type at all. In regard to children's rights as set out in the UNCRC, the finding that fewer student councils were solely focused on advancing students' rights than the other three types is surprising.

Despite student councils being viewed by some as the embodiment of democratic and citizenship ideals in schools, they are also viewed in the literature as an 'easy fix' for the problem of providing some form of student voice and participation in decision-making, and may be characterised as tokenistic as a result (Wyness, 2018; Yamashita et al., 2011). Establishing a student council in order to satisfy internal or external demands for such a body may mean that councils are not just ineffective, but are undermining the same democratic values

and processes that they were set up to foster (Burnitt & Gunter, 2013). Similarly, Fleming (2015) found that the guidelines established for student councils by the Department of Education and Science in Ireland "suggest very limited and vague involvements for student in consultation, dialogue and participation in the running of schools and in school decision-making" (p. 232). More recently, in examining the extent to which Article 12 of the UNCRC has been enacted in English schools, Jones (2017) found that children had little or no influence on 'important matters' in their education, and goes so far as to say that "there is quite a bit of evidence that indicates strong limitations of school councils as an effective measure for empowering children's voice and participation" (p. 72). Thus, the authenticity of student councils as student participation vehicles remains unclear.

The selection of student council members via election by their peers – usually fellow classmates – is widely critiqued in the literature (T. Jones, 2017). The first aspect of this critique is the tendency for a homogeneous group of students who are perceived to be more articulate, more outgoing and confident, have higher academic achievement, and are from higher socio-economic backgrounds, to be elected (Struthers, 2016; Wyness, 2015). In short, it tends to be those "who find it easiest to speak more coherently and those whom it may be easiest to hear" (McGregor, 2007, p. 97). In fact, Thomson (2010) found that many school staff thought that children whose behaviour or attitude was not acceptable would not make good councillors - "being less compliant or academically successful means that those students will have nothing sensible to say" (pp. 811-812). Such positioning of some students can lead to the creation of, or affirm existing, student 'elites', where councillors are accorded particular status and privileges not available to all students (Mager & Nowak, 2012; Wyness, 2013b; Yamashita & Davies, 2010). Furthermore, the roles, responsibilities and learning that may emerge from council membership will extend only to the members, rather than to all children whom the council represents (Andersson, 2018; Frost & Roberts, 2011; T. Jones, 2017).

The second area of critique is that of the *actual* influence that student councils have. Thomson (2011) notes that student representation is often tokenistic with "students being *seen* to be involved in school processes, rather than being active partners in change" (p. 25). Furthermore, what student councils may discuss is sometimes dictated by teachers and leaders, and there is often little follow-up, with the council's recommendations not necessarily being implemented. In

addition, student councillors may be allocated tasks that, whilst being worthwhile in some respects, are for the most part trivial and unimportant, or "'soft' and uncontroversial" (Yamashita & Davies, 2010, p. 234), such as fundraising, organising mufti days and dances and carrying out tasks for teachers (Holdsworth, 2005; McMahon, 2012; Thomson, 2010). Thomson (2010) described this as the 'hijacking syndrome' – "selecting students who say what [teachers] want to hear, about topics we have decided, in ways that we want to hear and responding in ways that are congruent with what we already want to do" (pp. 819-820). Struthers (2016) also noted this adult influence in her study – the activities of some school councils was limited to "defined, adult-imposed boundaries" (p. 455).

As a result, the presence of a student council as a mechanism for representative or participatory democracy does not necessarily create a site for student participation (Gunter & Thomson, 2007; McMahon, 2012; Yamashita & Davies, 2010) nor guarantee enhanced rights (T. Jones, 2017). Even where students have important things to say and have the capacity to voice these, the important question is whether or not adults are listening and if they act in ways that allow students' ideas to be seriously considering with students' further input. As Thomson (2010) suggests: "Being able to say what you think, in the ways that you want, is highly dependent on what you are asked, by whom, about what and what is expected of you" (p. 813). Student councils, in fact, are regularly characterised in the literature by students as tokenistic and limited mechanisms for democratic participation (Fleming, 2015), with Fleming noting that "the reality of the students' experiences reflected tokenistic activity, contrived involvement in decision-making, and a significant focus on school event organisation or charity fundraising" (2015, p. 235).

The third area of critique is that of the ways in which children are viewed and positioned as student council members, and harks back to a developmental view of childhood as a time of 'becoming', rather than of 'being'; a time spent preparing to be something that will 'come next', as I have described earlier in this chapter. In this view, "the skills developed by councillors will not be employed in the here and now of their school life but rather once they have left school (when they become adults)" (Veitch, 2009, p. 3). As such, student councils are often viewed as restrictive and weak and serve only as a site where children may practice and rehearse for their future life as adults (Wyness, 2013b). While Mager and Nowak

(2012) found some evidence of school councils providing a context for the improvement in life skills, democratic skills and citizenship, this was only moderate. Teachers and leaders may even believe that children do not have the capacity or competence to participate in decision-making about significant matters, leading children to be viewed increasingly as "lesser and less 'expert' partners" (Thomson, 2010, p. 821). As Mannion, Sowerby and l'Anson (2020) found in their research, the issue in practice was not so much children's lack of expertise, but rather the disillusionment resulting from feelings that adults were not taking students' views seriously, resulting in adults still having the most 'say' and influence on the decisions made.

The literature does provide, however, evidence underpinning the effective functioning of student councils, suggesting that councils can contribute to good discipline, promote social inclusion, provide a facility to uphold children's participation, and provide learning and activity concerned with democratic skills in a democratic context (Inman & Burke, 2002; Mager & Nowak, 2012; Struthers, 2016). The most frequently mentioned factor is that of ensuring that councils *do* represent all children by having class councils or other structures that ensure that all voices are heard at some level, and not just those who are council members (D. Anderson & Graham, 2016; Yamashita & Davies, 2010). Similarly, student expertise needs to be recognised and facilitated, and feedback in continuous cycles implemented, so that students hear back about their ideas and actions from teachers and leaders, and have the opportunity to research and implement the changes or improvements that the student body thinks are important. In addition to representational structures such as student councils, all children should have a range of daily opportunities in which they can listen and be listened to, make decisions, and take shared responsibility (Fielding, 2012). Yamashita and Davies (2010) argue for a simple and yet comprehensive approach:

> There are three basics, like the legs of a stool, each of which is crucial for school council impact and indeed for other student participation activities: that *all students* are involved, in *serious issues*, as *professionals.* One thing to stress is that a token, partial, fragmented or indeed one-legged school council is worse than useless, leading to frustrated and alienated students who quickly see through hypocrisy around the issue of 'voice' … it needs investment. (p. 238)

Even when student councils are reported to have several benefits for all students, however, the benefits of student participation student councils are likely to be highest for the students on the council, rather than all the students whom they represent (Black, 2011).

Finally, the literature makes a strong case for the existence of a particular school context and culture if student councils are to be effective – even in schools that take pride in their democratic ethos and activities, councils may not be sufficiently effective and democratic depending on the types of issues with which the students are 'permitted' to engage (Solhaug, 2018), and on the culture of the school. In short, democratic schools are very likely to have student councils as a formal option for influence, but schools vary greatly according to how effective and democratic these councils are. This relates particularly to the issues in which student councils may get involved, the balance of power between students and adults and the extent to which the rules and practices of the school align with each other and with an overall school culture that embraces democratic ideals (Mager & Nowak, 2012; Solhaug, 2018).

Part Five: A social justice perspective

I have alluded to notions of social justice throughout this literature review, and now return to this in the final section of this review to position social justice as the over-arching idea within which this literature review sits - concepts of voice, rights, agency, participation, democracy and representation are bound up in a social justice perspective. This section begins by defining 'social justice' in general terms and as it applies to educational settings, drawing latterly on the work of Nancy Fraser (2009), a contemporary female philosopher whose ideas have much to contribute to thinking about social justice.

The idea of social justice is imbued with values "such as equality, solidarity, human rights and dignity" (Rönnlund, 2014, p. 105). 'Social justice' is, simply put, the social or socially-focused perspective of justice. It exists where institutionalised domination and oppression are eliminated (Young, 2011) and is concerned with the 'social whole' (Capeheart & Milovanovic, 2007). Social justice attends to the voices and concerns of everyone, not just particular individuals, and reflects the context in which it is played out. As Gewirtz (2006) argues in relation to social justice in education, "it is not possible to resolve the question of what counts as justice in education at a purely abstract level, and that what

counts as justice can only be understood within specific contexts of interpretation and enactment" (Gewirtz, 2006, pp. 69-70). It involves examining the underlying structures, hierarchies and processes of society and organisations in order to understand the ways in which rights, opportunities, goods, status and participation are distributed. As Adams (2012) notes, "social structures rarely accord with principles of justice … people occupy unequal social positions and experience political, economic and social advantages and obstacles" (p. 250). To achieve social justice is to ensure that all people are treated equally well by "achieving a fair distribution of societal goods – tangible and intangible" (Reisch, 2002, p. 345). Fraser (2009) further notes that social justice can be achieved through 'parity of participation' for the oppressed, and further describes societies who fail to address the institutionalised norms that work against participation parity as "morally indefensible" (p. 32).

These definitions all suggest a 're-organisation' of the status quo in order to ensure that all people receive just treatment – this reorganisation is generally viewed in the literature as having two main strands – redistribution and recognition. Social justice may be theorised, then, as a mechanism for the 'redistribution' of "material goods such as things, resources, income and wealth" (Young, 1990, p. 15). Conversely, a 'recognition' approach may be taken, involving "the wholesale transformation of societal patterns of representation, interpretation and communication in ways that would change everybody's sense of self" (Fraser, 2009, p. 38). Gewirtz (1998) adds a further dimension of 'relational' justice that refers to "the nature of the relationships which structure society" (pp. 470-471) and focusing on power and how people treat each other, and "the *nature* and *ordering* of social relations" (p. 471). She further argues that both redistribution and recognition theories of social justice must be theorised against this relational backdrop, and that these dimensions are strongly connected to the extent that separating them only more clearly points to their interdependency.

In short, as Young (1990) summarises, the difference between the two broad approaches of redistribution and recognition is that one "gives primacy to having and [the other] gives primacy to doing" (p. 8), and that the 'redistribution' approach must be extended beyond mere physical goods to the redistribution of "decision-making structures and procedures, division of labour and culture" (p. 22). In this way, not only decisions come under close examination, but also

decision-making processes and who has the authority and freedom to make them. Young (1990) further argues that such rights must also be redistributed:

> Rights are not fruitfully conceived as possessions. Rights are relationships, not things: they are institutionally defined rules specifying what people can do in relation to one another. Rights refer to doing more than having, to social relationships that enable or constrain action. (p. 25)

Similarly, opportunities can also be redistributed if the constraints on doing things are removed and people are enabled to take advantage of opportunities as they present themselves. Young (1990) notes education as an example of a process that takes place in a complex environment of myriad social relations. Educational opportunity, then, is not only enhanced by the redistribution of goods such as computers, resources, funding and staff, but also by the transformation of the structure and processes that limit the opportunities of particular social, ethnic and socio-economic groups.

The 'recognition' approach to social justice is viewed by Fraser (2009) as supporting the redistribution paradigm and that "only by integrating recognition and redistribution can we arrive at a framework that is adequate to the demands of our age" (p. 33). Non-recognition, Fraser asserts, includes cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect that can only be remedied by a cultural or symbolic change: "This would involve upwardly revaluing disrespected identities and the cultural products of maligned groups" (p. 35). Fraser talks mainly of cultural groups here, and also of the links between cultural and socio-economic injustice that need to recognised and removed in the pursuit of social justice. She proposes two approaches here – affirmation and transformation. Affirmation attempts to reduce inequitable outcomes without changing the underlying beliefs and structures. Transformation, on the other hand, seeks to directly impact on this underlying framework in order to effect "apocalyptic change" (N. Fraser, 2009, p. 51). Blackmore (2010) describes this type of change as "cultural or symbolic transformation such as valorising diversity in organisations, changing patterns of representation, interpretation and communication to impart a strong sense of self and of others" (p. 20). She concludes that social justice is not just about recognising the shared characteristics of all people, but also seeing and using the distinctiveness of various peoples as a precondition for equitable participation.

Nancy Fraser's work has more recently developed from considering only redistribution and recognition into the consideration of participation and representation, concepts particularly relevant to this thesis. She notes that "the grammar of argument has altered ... Not just the 'what' but also the 'who' is up for grabs" (N. Fraser, 2005b, p. 73), and argues that 'representation' must be incorporated into a three-dimensional frame of social justice. Social justice claims, then, must reflect a critical examination of who is included and who is excluded in particular communities and settings and whether the 'rules' by which decisions are made give equal voice to all participants (N. Fraser, 2005b). The socially unjust concept, it follows, is misrepresentation where decision-making boundaries and rules mean that some people are not as well represented as others or where some groups are excluded from any chance to participate.

These ideas of redistribution, recognition and representation can be applied, in my view, to children's participation in decision-making in schools. In regard to the notion of redistribution, a socially just approach to such decision-making does not stop with the provision of roles, responsibilities and authority – it gives particular consideration to "those who find themselves being socially stratified into layers of advantage and disadvantage, with the inevitable consequences of privilege and exclusion" (Wang, 2016, p. 326). Redistribution also extends to the ways in which the rights to participate in decision-making are bounded and distributed, to whom and by whom. It may also include consideration of those who benefit from the decisions made, how power and agency are shared out, and how readily all stakeholders can access the decision-making structures and gatekeepers. Therefore, participation in decision-making is not just about the inclusion of those who should have access to decision-making processes, but also ensuring that the processes themselves are shaped to meet the needs of those involved (Rönnlund, 2014). Applying this to the school context, a socially just environment will ensure that structures and processes allow the benefits of participating in decision-making to be distributed equitably and, furthermore, that students are equitably positioned to take up these benefits (Keddie, 2012). This must involve challenging the "social structures and institutional contexts, in which the taken-for-granted norms and rules regulating the distribution process frequently remain unchallenged" (Wang, 2016, p. 327). This could extend to examining the extent to which children are involved in decision-making, how they are involved and what agency they actually possess within the set structures of a school's day-to-day life.

As with the consideration of distribution in social justice, a 'recognition' approach is also highly valid when thinking about children participating in decision-making in schools if children are acknowledged as a particular cultural or social group that is made invisible in schools. Using such an approach, children would be valued as "differently equal" (Moosa-Mitha, 2005, p. 369) to adults in decision-making that affects them, and the differences attributed to children would be seen as a valued strength, a view shared by Wang (2016). Gorard and Smith (2009) note that many children's experiences of school shape their views about the world and their own sense of social justice. This idea provides a clear rationale for including children in decision-making both in their experiences of school in the present, but also for their experiences of society in the future, a view shared by Adams (2012).

Conclusion

The literature review presented here has identified the importance and interconnectedness of a range of concepts, models, beliefs, practices and theories that are relevant in a consideration of students' participation in decision-making in school contexts. However, it has also highlighted gaps in the literature in relation to primary school contexts in particular. These gaps highlight the need for further research in this specific area, and support the selection of the following aim and research questions in relation to this study.

By gathering the perspectives of principals, teachers and children, this study aimed to:

- critically examine the ways in which children participate in decision-making in two New Zealand primary schools, and explore the outcomes for children through their involvement in various decision-making mechanisms, including that of student leadership or representational roles.

The related research questions (RQ) were:

RQ1: In what ways do children participate in decision-making mechanisms, including formal student leadership roles; and

RQ2: What are the lived experiences, perceptions and understandings of the children in regard to this participation?

The next chapter describes the research methodology used in this study. Elements of the research design are described, including the selection and use of

the case study approach, and the sampling method. An overview of the research sites and participants is also provided.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This chapter outlines the underlying philosophical and methodological bases of this study. The chapter begins by overviewing my positioning as 'researcher' in the context of research with children. This is followed by a description of the research design with particular attention to ontological and epistemological positionings and my reasoning for selecting a case study approach. The sampling approach of the study is described, and a brief overview of the participants is provided.

In the case of this research, a full application for ethical consideration from the University of Waikato was sought and granted by the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee on March 11 2013 (see Appendix A).

Research with children - My positioning as 'researcher'

This chapter begins with a declaration about my positioning as a researcher in this project about children's participation in decision-making in primary schools. It has a social justice orientation to examining students' 'voice', agency and participation.

Children are frequently the focus of research but, in the past, research has tended to be done *to* children, *for* them and *about* them, rather than *with* them as active participants, contributors and even partners (P. Christensen & James, 2017; S. Fraser, Flewitt, & Hammersley, 2014; Harcourt & Conroy, 2011). As Christensen and Prout (2002) summarise: "Four ways of seeing children and childhood have been identified in research on children: the child as object, the child as subject and the child as social actor … and a nascent approach seeing children as participants and co-researchers" (p. 480). Researchers should, then, have a more respectful view of children's competencies and their rights, and demonstrate particular care when researching 'with' children (P. M. Christensen & James, 2008; Smith, 2011). This view has to balance agency with children's need to be dependent on adults in some contexts, remembering that agency and dependency may co-exist (Alderson, 2008; P. Christensen & Prout, 2002; Todd, 2012).

Beazley, Bessell, Ennew and Waterson (2009) express a similar rights-based view, emphasising that the "real questions for fulfilling children's rights in research concern how you ask questions (and whose questions), how well you do the analysis" (p. 376). Farrell (2005b) further argues that a balance must also be struck between our desire to protect children from harm and exploitation while at the same time ensuring that children have the opportunity to participate in research activities in active and productive ways – that is, that children's "right to participate in research [is] synonymized with their right to protection in research" (p. 167). However, there are 'unknowns' that still persist, even in the current times of researchers' espoused new respect for the role of children in research projects with Alderson (2009) highlighting:

> We do not know how many children feel misunderstood or misreported by researchers, embarrassed and intruded upon, or disappointed and angry that promised benefits never appeared, just as we do not know how many children wanted to take part in research but have been prevented by gatekeepers or by lack of opportunity. (p. 235)

The adoption of a rights-respecting view in research with children is a matter of ontology and epistemology. The views and beliefs that are held by the researcher will influence the choice of both methodology and methods in regard to the participation of children (Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2011). Alderson (2005) terms this as "a notion of childhood" (p. 29). In other words, what researchers believe about children and childhood will affect their choice of research design and methods, as well as the relationships with the children we are researching. Alderson (2005) goes on to list the following examples of these beliefs:

- the *innocent child* needing protection;
- the *deprived disadvantaged child* needing resources and services;
- the *criminal child* requiring control
- the *ignorant child* needing education;
- the *excluded child* who may need special opportunities;
- the *disabled child* who is the victim of personal tragedy or of a rejecting society; and
- the *strong, resourceful child* who can work with adults towards solving problems and creating new opportunities (p. 29).

If the last notion of childhood is adopted, then a view of children as competent and capable beings will guide research (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011). In this view,

children will be valued as 'beings' rather than 'becomings' – that is, as individuals who are knowledgeable, have agency, can share their ideas, make decisions and participate actively (Clark, 2017; Dockett et al., 2011). As Wyness (2012a) states, "viewing children as research subjects rather than research objects captures a new epistemological interest in children's knowledge and understanding, prioritising the idea that children have subjective worlds worth researching" (p. 203). I understand childhood as being a socially constructed notion and, like Gallagher (2009), I perceive children as "competent agents who actively contribute to shaping the social world through their everyday activities" (p. 67). Furthermore, my research is based on the premise that involving children in research and listening to their views and opinions will help me to know and understand more about them, echoing Gallagher's (2009) view that "this kind of work begins from the view of children as social agents, beings in their own right and experts in their own lives" (p. 70).

My research posed particular questions for me as the researcher, in light of a greater emphasis in the last 15 years on research methods and ethical practices that allow researchers to work *with* and *for* children at all stages of a study (Mayall, 2013). Because I wanted to examine children's participation in decision-making, I designed the research to maximise children sharing understandings and experiences of their participation in school decision-making, while also positioning "the child as a person … [and] as agent" (O'Neill, 2018, p. 40). The research aims and questions, the methodology and methods, the selection and involvement of the research participants, and my interactions with them were shaped to highlight children's voices. Uppermost in my mind was engaging participants in the research process and, primarily, conducting research *with* the children I designed my research to reflect McNamee's (2016) list of ways in which children should be characterised in research – as active, competent, social actors. This orientation contrasts with scientific views characterising children as passive, incompetent objects of research whose capabilities and knowledge are not always valued (Alderson, 2009; Harcourt & Conroy, 2011). To avoid 'looking down' on the children involved in my research, I utilised data-gathering tools that assumed children to be competent and having relevant knowledge. My focus was interacting with them as "participating subjects, knowers and social actors, rather than objects of the researcher's gaze" (Smith, 2011, p. 14).

In order to examine children's participation in decision-making, my ontological and epistemological positions required supporting and interacting with my participants with a 'rights-respecting' approach (Alderson, 2001; P. Christensen & Prout, 2002; Todd, 2012). This was an especially important factor in positioning the children as participants – they were supported to contribute their ideas in relation to 'contribution', to participate in describing and defining 'participation', and to have a voice in the type of 'voice' that they thought children should have in our primary schools. In positioning myself as a researcher, I ensured that my research aim was clearly linked with the methodology, methods of data collection and methods of data analysis. These links both addressed the criteria of suitability and appropriateness in terms of research design, and reflected my values, beliefs and worldview in a much wider sense. To that end, I took care to link an interpretive, qualitative, subjectivist approach with contemporary socio-cultural views of the child, children and childhood explored in Chapter 2. I thus adopted Alderson's "notion of childhood" (2005, p. 29) which mirrors my beliefs about children as strong and resourceful beings who can work with adults towards solving problems and creating new opportunities

I also carefully reflected on the positioning of the children in my research in regard to the seminal, well-known models of children's participation in decision-making (see, for example: Hart, 1992; Mitra, 2006; Shier, 2001; Simovska & Jensen, 2009), in order to maximise opportunities for children's participation in my research. In reference to Hart's *Ladder of participation* (1992). Level 6 best matches the degree of involvement of children in my research – "adult-initiated shared decisions with children" (Hart, 1992, p. 8). As an 'outsider' to the children's contexts, I initiated the research and the children were selected by adults to take part in it. However, I shared some of my research design decisions with the children in order to maximise their sense of involvement and to "engage in research *with* children as competent social actors" (O'Neill, 2018, p. 50). For example, as I explain in Chapter 4, I thoroughly described the consent processes to the children and designed a 'consent' form for them to sign (Appendix J), explaining that they also needed to agree to participate in my research even though their parents/caregivers had already given their written consent. This idea of making their own decision seemed to appeal to the children, many of whom spent quite some time deciding what their signature should look like.

In regard to Mitra's 'Pyramid of student voice' (2006), children's participation in my research was positioned between "Being heard" and "Collaborating with adults" (p. 8), being particularly evident in the institutional diagramming activity described in full in Chapter 4. In this activity, children were not only expressing their ideas and views to each other and to me while they arranged the circles but, in both schools, they generated unique results that demonstrated their perceptions of involvement in decision-making of various people and groups which proved crucial in the development of the research findings as noted in Chapter 5. Such a 'degree' of participation also aligns with Shier's (2001) Level 3 "Children's views are taken into account" and Level 4 "Children are involved in decision-making processes", demonstrated most clearly in the children's autonomy in the photo elicitation activity.

The next section provides a justification of the research design as a combination of ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations.

The research design

The research design emerged from my need to link the research aims and questions to my chosen research methodology and methods. As Scott (2012) explains, a research design "refers to the schema or plan that constitutes the research study. It is the means by which the objectives or aims of the study are fulfilled" (p. 107). I therefore chose methods that would achieve my aims and be true to my views of children and their agency. This design process began with exploring my ontological and epistemological positionings.

Ontology, epistemology and paradigm

Being aware of different approaches and theories of research helps researchers to reflect on types of research and types of data generation methods. Ontological and epistemological positions underpin a researcher's work, supporting critical thinking about reality and how it is understood by all involved (Morrison, 2012).

Ontology is a branch of philosophy (Hartas, 2010a) that draws attention to "the nature of the phenomena being studied" (Hammersley, 2014, p. 169). It is "a theory about the nature of being, of what is" (Gallagher, 2009, p. 66). Ontology poses the following questions: "What kind of being is the human being? What is the nature of reality?" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 12). Ontological issues include the consideration of whether the social world is external to human beings, or

whether the world is shaped by those beings or 'social actors' (Bryman, 2008). Thus, the first research design consideration I faced was that of ontology – simply put, how do I perceive 'reality'? Because I wanted to identify and examine the views and perceptions of my participants, I adopted the view that there are multiple realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I sought to identify and examine people's individual ways of shaping, experiencing and understanding their reality. This view aligned with my 'notion of childhood' and also my intention to involve children as active participants in the research process.

The second research design consideration is that of epistemology, which Gallagher (2009) describes as "a theory about the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired" (p. 66). Epistemology poses this question: "What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 12). Epistemological issues include consideration of what comprises knowledge about the social world and how that social world should be studied (Bryman, 2016). In facing this question of epistemology, I needed to decide if I viewed research knowledge as having a fixed and objective nature or, conversely, as personal, unique and created by my research participants. Thus, the second research design question asked: How do I perceive 'knowledge'? Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) note that epistemological assumptions emerge from our beliefs about what knowledge is and how it is acquired and communicated. These beliefs shape how we perceive our participants and their realities, and how we will go about gathering these perceptions. My own beliefs in this regard meant that my research was positioned within a subjectivist view – that is, I viewed knowledge as being produced by my research participants from within their versions of reality formed from their life experiences. My role as a researcher, then, was to identify and understand my participants' individual social worlds as far as possible. In particular, this aligned with my view of children as competent social beings who are continually creating their own unique knowledge within the childhood context, and my desire to conduct research *with,* rather than *on*, them.

Identifying my ontological and epistemological positions enabled me to consider the world view, or paradigm, through which I view knowledge and its nature. A paradigm is similar to a 'lens' (Hartas, 2010a) or a 'frame' (Hughes, 2010), acting as a conceptual framework for researchers. This reduces the "complexity of social reality" (Hartas, 2010a, p. 16). Morrison (2012) describes it similarly as a set of beliefs or epistemological assumptions. I have outlined that my research

aimed to closely examine the experiences, perceptions and interpretations of my research participants. I did not want to conduct experiments or test a hypothesis. Because of my ontological and epistemological stance, my research was qualitative and positioned in the interpretive paradigm.

The interpretive paradigm suited my intentions because I could, as an educational researcher, "operate within a set of distinctive principles regarding what it means to conduct educational research *with* people" (Morrison, 2012, p. 20). Interpretivists focus on the diversity of human actions and behaviours in different social and cultural contexts. Individuals' actions and behaviours may also vary within single contexts (Hammersley, 2014). Interpretivism requires, Bryman (2008) argues, researchers to "grasp the social subjective meaning of social action" (p. 16). This view assumes that, in Merriam's (2009) words, "reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality. Rather there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event" (p. 8). For example, a group of people at the scene of a car crash may experience this differently, and this may depend on each person's level of involvement, whether as a victim, witness, perpetrator, paramedic or police officer. It is only when these multiple views are put together that a bigger picture may emerge. As I would be working with groups of children as well as adults in schools, this framing through an interpretive lens suited my project. This lens enabled me to value my participants' knowledge, and to try to understand the world from their point of view. As Bryman (2008) notes, there is a "double interpretation going on; the researcher is providing an interpretation of others' interpretations" (p. 17) as perspectives and shared meanings are explored and insights into situations developed (Wellington, 2015). My research valued identifying and understanding the perspectives and knowledge that children, teachers and school leaders held in regard to children's participation in decision-making, and how these perspectives combined to form a "multi-layered and complex reality" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 22).

Within an interpretive stance, I additionally positioned my research within the social constructivist paradigm, a view which focuses on the interactive processes that take place between people (Burr, 1995). This paradigm aligned with the social settings of schools where people are constantly engaged in social practices and interacting with each other, and where research is focused on these interactions. These research settings also aligned with Hartas' view (2010b) of social constructivism as seeking to obtain rich data and provide rich

descriptions of social settings and interactions, as well as to "empower participants' perspectives and ideas" (p. 44). I was particularly drawn to Guba and Lincoln's (2005) description of the constructivist researcher's 'voice' as being one of "passionate participant" (p. 196) who acts as a facilitator of multi-voice reconstructions. Also influential was Bryman's (2016) contention that reality is constructed by the individuals within a particular social world with constantly evolving meanings, phenomena and categories.

Social constructivism also enables researchers to re-examine social constructs - like 'sexuality', 'gender', 'child development', 'childhood' and 'youth' - in particular ways that recognise their instability and fluidity (S. Fraser & Robinson, 2004). This confirmed to me that social constructivism was the appropriate paradigm within which my research was positioned, because the practice of children participating in school decision-making is inherently a social practice where people constantly interact with others in particular ways. A social constructivist perspective also enabled me to see children as social actors in terms of participating in the research. A social constructivist view logically connected with contemporary socio-cultural understandings of such concepts as the 'child', 'children' and 'childhood', which underpinned my research focus.

In summary, my research design was influenced by the ways in which I view and understand my world, as well as my perceptions about children's knowledge and capabilities. Since I wanted to establish a relationship of reciprocity with any schools in which I worked as a researcher, my intention was that the schools would benefit from my research. Case study is, as Stake (1978) notes, "epistemologically in harmony" (p. 5), and this is the next focus of this chapter.

Case study

Case study – definitions

Understandings, definitions and processes of case study research have been the focus of debate and writing for at least the last 50 years (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Furthermore, there is no firm agreement about whether 'case study' is a method, a methodology, a research design, an approach to research, a 'genre', or a research strategy (Brown, 2008; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). For example, Stake (2005) argues that 'case study' is "not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied" (p. 443). Meanwhile, other writers view case study as a legitimate research approach in its own right (for example: Bassey,

2012; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Cohen et al., 2018; Flyvbjerg, 2011). From the mid-1970s, 'case study' has been defined, in research practice terms, as an approach that allows the researcher to focus, for example, on a particular site, group of participants, phenomenon or "an instance of action" (Adelman, Jenkins, & Kemmis, 1976, p. 141) in order to gain a deep understanding of that instance in all its complexity. This emphasis on the 'case' distinguishes the case study approach from other research strategies because:

> We choose to study *the case.* We could study it analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures or hermeneutically, organically or culturally, and by mixed methods – but we concentrate, at least for the time being, on the case. (Stake, 2005, p. 443)

Current conceptions of case study take into account more overtly the notions of space and time as also 'bounding' the case. Bassey (2012) defines case study as an "empirical enquiry which is conducted within a localised boundary of space and time" (p. 156) that examines the case in its natural context. I selected this definition for my research, as it takes an almost four dimensional view of the 'case', taking into account the site, the people, the time and the context. The case is not only a practice or a group of participants or a particular phenomenon, but it is also a study that is carried out at a particular time and in a particular 'space'. Space, in this definition, can refer to a tangible physical place, such as a school, but also to an intangible 'space', such as a school's organisational culture. Thus, in my study, the 'space' is not just the particular schools or the practice of children's participation in decision-making, but also the traditions and history of the schools, the school communities and whanau, and so on. I was also drawn to Merriam's (1998) emphasis on a "way to gain understanding of the situation" (p. 19) as this is the aim of case study research in my view, rather than a merely descriptive approach.

Types of case studies

Emerging from the wide range of case study definitions, the literature also identifies various types of case studies. Yin (2009) identifies four basic designs: single-case holistic or embedded designs; and multiple-case holistic or embedded designs. Holistic designs are those where "only the global nature of an organisation or of a program" is the focus (Yin, 2009, p. 50), whereas an embedded design also pays attention to one or more subunits. A single-case design obviously focuses on only one case, while a multiple-case design uses

more than one case to provide a better understanding of a phenomena by studying how it exists across a variety of cases (Stake, 2006; Wyness, 2010).

I selected the *embedded* case study approach as this allowed the collection and analysis of data from three perspectives:

- the beliefs, values and perceptions of each school's principal;
- the beliefs, values and perceptions of 'key adults' at each school who had a particular role to play in regard to children's participation in decision-making; and
- the experiences, perceptions and ideas of children involved in decision-making, and also from those not involved.

However, the selection of the number of either the single-case or multiple-case option was more complex. In light of the dearth of literature available in regard to children's participation in decision-making in New Zealand primary schools, more than one case was needed in order to contribute to existing knowledge by looking a little more widely at the phenomenon by identifying "continuities and differences" (Wyness, 2010, p. 159). However, the selection of a large number of cases would have made the research unwieldy. As a result, two cases were selected in order to provide a sufficient pool of rich data to gain detailed insights. This multi-case, embedded research design supported the investigation of children's participation in decision-making primarily through participants' responses, as well as providing me with an opportunity to look more broadly than a single case study would allow (Wyness, 2010). The idea of 'children's participation in decision-making' was the 'phenomenon' which, as Stake (2006) describes, can "take on different lives or forms, depending on the particular hosts or local conditions" (p. ix). The common characteristics of this phenomenon were studied across the two cases (primary schools) as well as identifying aspects of "situational uniqueness" (Stake, 2006, p. x).

Case study – the selection of cases and participants

Given the importance of the *case*, or in this project, *cases*, it was critical for the case selection to be a robust and valid process. In fact, some researchers argue that nothing is more important as the selection of the case/s (for example: Eisenhardt, 1989; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005), as this determines not only what *will* be studied but also, by implication, what *will not* be studied. The two schools involved in this research were selected using a multiple purposive sampling or selection approach in order to 'hand pick' the cases according to their "typicality

or possession of the particular characteristics being sought" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 156), their potential to be "information rich" in regard to the research questions (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 173), and also with the intention of including "deliberately contrasting cases" (Yin, 2012, p. 8).

The *Schools Directory* (Government of New Zealand, 2013b), a list of all 2543 New Zealand schools, was obtained from the website of *Education Counts* (Government of New Zealand, 2013a) and used as the basis for the sampling process. The sampling approach comprised a combination of:

- Sample 1: state and/or integrated schools with children in Years 1-6 (including 'full primary schools' spanning Years 1-8, and 'composite' schools spanning either Years 1-10 or Years 1-13). This was the identified research context – 1953 schools in New Zealand matched this criteria;
- Sample 2: schools in Sample 1 with a geographical location in the general Auckland area. This would minimise my travel time and therefore maximise the opportunities for multiple visits to each school – 356 schools matched this criteria; and
- Sample 3: schools in Sample 2 where adults and/or children had existing relationships with me due to past professional, academic or collegial contacts – 45 schools matched these criteria.

The area marked 'P' (Sample 3) indicated the resulting *possible* cases. Issues of potential bias and subjectivity based on my existing knowledge of the schools were potentially problematic. It was possible that the data collection and analysis could be influenced by this. While the pre-existing relationships helped 'pave the way' for me in the participant schools, this was not without risk in regard to researcher objectivity and validity of findings. Therefore, considerable thought was put into this sample selection in regard to the suitability of this 'familiarity' criterion, rather than merely selecting schools randomly. Selecting schools with which I already had an existing or prior relationship afforded the following three advantages in my view:

In the first instance, I 'knew' these schools to a greater or lesser degree, and the principals and some teachers had already worked with me in some capacity, and some children recalled seeing me in their classrooms as well. This meant that I could more easily establish rapport with my research participants. With adult participants, I hoped that they would be at greater ease during a one-to-one

interview as they had likely spoken to me before and I was not a 'complete stranger'. Secondly, my previous knowledge of the school enabled me to more readily understand and contextualise their comments within a wider knowledge of the people and practices at the school. I was able to ask probing questions in more useful ways, and to link various participants' stories together. Finally, it was possible that adult participants shared more private information about their perspectives and opinions about children' s participation in decision-making; that is, they may have felt more able to trust me with, for example, their criticisms of school practice. However, prior knowledge of the participants and the schools was also potentially problematic particularly in regard to data analysis as all data needed to be considered without bias or the influence of my own opinions. This required continual reflexive 'noticing' of any emotional or judgemental responses to data, and ongoing reading and re-reading of transcripts and notes to ensure participants' words were analysed without bias.

From Sample 3, a *sub-sample* of cases was selected in order to include schools of differing school size, decile rating (the Ministry of Education's rating according to the socio-economic profile of the local community) and ethnicity demographics. This would further enrich the data set through the use of a variety of contexts - 15 schools made up this sample, shown as 'S' in Figure 3.1. Two schools were then randomly selected from 'S', with a view to further random selections if either school did not agree to participate. This final case selection is shown as 'F' in Figure 3.1.

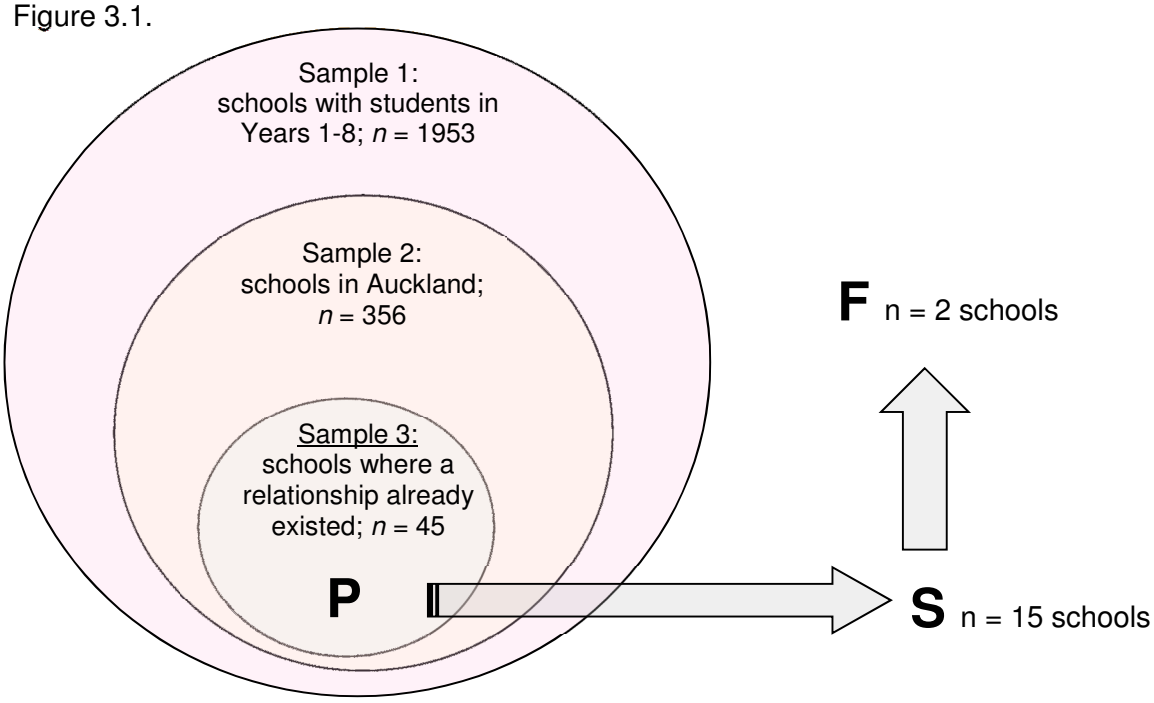

Figure 3. 1: Multiple purposive sampling approach

An introductory email, with the *Invitation to participate – Boards of Trustees* letter attached (Appendix B), was sent to the principals of the first two randomly selected schools, seeking their initial interest in participating in the project. The first principal replied by email that the school were very interested in the project. First, he wanted to discuss the matter with the Board of Trustee's Chairperson to gain the Board's consent, so I emailed him the *Participation consent form – Boards of Trustees* (Appendix C). The signed form was emailed back to me about one week later. The other principal invited me to speak to the Board of Trustees at their next meeting, at which I provided a copy of the *Invitation to participate – Boards of Trustees* letter (Appendix B) and the *Participation consent form – Boards of Trustees* (Appendix C). The Board agreed to participate in the project, and the signed form was handed to me directly. Thus it was not necessary to select any further schools as case study sites. The pseudonyms ascribed to the schools in this thesis are 'Beacon Point School' and 'Morton Hill School'.

Once the schools had given their written consent to participate in the research, I visited the schools again and met with the principals to gain their assistance in identifying staff members and children who might participate in my research – these 'key informants' were adults who had roles related to decision-making opportunities for children. In both schools, the principals supplied the names of probable 'key informants' and, including each principal, six key informants were identified at Beacon Point School and six at Morton Hill School. When approached, all of these teachers and leaders gave their consent to participate in the research. The process of principals selecting adult participants was potentially problematic as they may have only selected those adults who they felt would talk about children's participation in decision-making in a positive 'light'. However, my previous knowledge of the school meant that I knew who was likely to be selected and if any suitable adult was being excluded by the principals. I was satisfied that both principals identified every adult in the school who met the criteria for selection. At no time did I have cause to suspect that the adults had been coerced or pressured by the principal to speak only positively about the school.

The principals also supplied the names of children who they felt had particular roles and responsibilities in this participation – in both schools, these children were members of the schools' Student Leaders' groups. At Beacon Point School

16 children aged ten or eleven years were identified and consent from both the children and their parents/caregivers was obtained. All 16 children subsequently participated in the research. At Morton Hill School 14 children aged five to eleven years were identified. Parent/caregiver consent for one child was not received so 13 children participated in the research. Asking the principals to identify these children was an important step, as their selection also reflected their own views about who was involved in decision-making. Given my prior knowledge of the schools and my awareness that particular structures for student 'leadership' already existed in both cases, I was satisfied that appropriate children had been identified as potential participants. It seemed to me that these children would be well-placed to contribute to the planned focus groups. Random selection would have risked having children participate who did not have much knowledge of the school's practice in regard to children's participation in decision-making, and this may have caused them to feel uneasy in a focus group and perhaps embarrassed that they could not answer my questions.

At both schools, the principal was present for my first meeting with the children where I explained the consent procedures and handed out the forms for children to take home. They introduced me to the children and explained very briefly why I was visiting the school. I took this as a sign of their support for my research and a way of communicating this to the students. Comments about children needing to portray the school in a positive light were not made by either principal at these meetings, and no child mentioned that such comments had taken place at another time. The principals' presence was also helpful in that children could report to their parents that this had occurred, and this may have encouraged some parents/caregivers to give consent for their child's participation. Neither principal asked to be present at the focus group with the children or asked me in any detail what was said. Both seemed keen that my research was a 'success', but only in regard to me being able to collect the data that I needed. Although the children could potentially have been coerced or pressured into saying certain things to me about the school, there was no evidence of this having occurred.

The case study contexts

An overview of each case study context is shown below. A brief description of each school context is given, followed by broad demographic information and an overview of the participants. The ethnic composition information presented in Tables 3.1 and 3.4 has been aggregated to protect each school's identity. The

adult research participants, their schools and their pseudonyms are listed in Tables 3.2 and 3.5. Tables 3.3 and 3.6 list the child participants by age and pseudonym. It is particularly important to list children individually, rather than describing them by year group or ethnicity categories, as this reflects my intention to give each student a 'voice' as an individual with her/his own identity, opinions and experiences.

Beacon Point School

The school context

Beacon Point School is a high decile, mid-size school in the Auckland metropolitan area. The school is well established within its local community, having opened in the early 20th century, and prides itself on the status it accords to ceremonies, celebrations and traditions. It maintains considerable links with past pupils and teachers, and this led to significant interest and involvement by a wide range of people in the school's recent centenary celebrations. The school is a popular choice for local parents, and is also sought after by those living outside the school's enrolment zone. Its student population is largely Pākehā-New Zealand European (approximately 70%), in addition to small numbers of Māori, Pasifika and Asian students. It positions itself as a multi-cultural school and celebrates its diverse student population. There are also opportunities for children to experience te reo Māori and tikanga Māori, and to join the kapahaka group.

There is low staff turnover and strong leadership, as noted by the Education Review Office (ERO) in their latest review of the school (the reference details for this report are not included here in the interests of confidentiality for the school and the research participants). The school espouses several values including learning, effort, responsibility and manākitanga. The school's website emphasises excellence in academic achievement and high levels of involvement and success in extra-curricular activities. Its current Education Review Office (ERO) report notes that student achievement is high at this school, with nearly all children achieving at, or above, the National Standards. The school currently has a 4-5 year ERO review cycle, a status that is aspired to in the current school evaluation environment in New Zealand.

Table 3. 1: Broad demographic information – Beacon Point School

School pseudonym	**Beacon Point School**
Decile	10
School type	Years 1-6
Ethnic composition	
NZ European/Pākehā	62%
Māori	12%
Pacific peoples	4%
Asian (including Indian)	6%
Other	16%

Table 3. 2: Adult research participants – Beacon Point School

School	**Participant group**	**Pseudonym**	**Details**
Beacon Point	**Principal**	Brett	Established principal - 10+ years' service
	Teachers/leaders	Amy	TIC - PE equipment and Road Patrol
		Mary	TIC - 'Student Leaders'*
		Paul	TIC - Sport
		Lucy	TIC - Library
		Michelle	TIC - Kapahaka

Table 3. 3: Child research participants – Beacon Point School

School	**Participant Group**	**Pseudonym**	**Gender**	**Ethnicity**	**Age**
Beacon Point School	**Students involved in formal decision-making roles**	Layne	boy	Pākehā	10
		Katherine	girl	Pākehā	10
		Charlotte	girl	Pākehā	11
		Hettie	girl	Pākehā	10
		Jason	boy	Indian	10
		Terrence	boy	Pākehā	11
		Gia	girl	Pākehā	11
		Tim	boy	Pākehā	10
		Lana	girl	Pākehā	11
		Connor	boy	Pākehā	11
		Zara	girl	Pākehā	11
		Kyle	boy	Pākehā	11
		Anna	girl	Pākehā	11
		Ryan	boy	Pākehā	10
		Paige	girl	Pākehā	11
		Scott	boy	Pākehā	11

Morton Hill School

The school context

Morton Hill School is a small, highly multicultural low-decile school in the Auckland metropolitan area. The school is established within its local community,

having been opened in the early years of the 20th century. Its student population is predominantly Pasifika, with Samoan and Tongan students making up over 60% of the student population, in addition to small numbers of around ten other ethnic groups. The school prizes and celebrates the multi-cultural richness of its students, whanau and community. Approximately half of the school is made up of bilingual and digital classrooms, including bilingual-digital education in one class. There is low staff turnover and strong leadership, as noted by the Education Review Office (ERO) in their most recent review of the school.

The school espouses several values that are centred on their 'Human Rights in Education' focus which began in 2011, and reflect children and staff 'valuing' – valuing people, learning and themselves. The school places emphasis on participation, involvement, trying one's best, and fulfilling one's potential. Its approach is based on every child having rights and responsibilities, as does every adult, and staff place particular importance on community and whanau involvement. High parental engagement and involvement with the school is a feature of its ethos and practice. The school vision also espouses its concerns to address the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on students and families, and to ensure that students enrolled at the school have access to every possible resource, in the belief that all children in New Zealand should experience an excellent education, and achieve highly.

Table 3. 4: Broad demographic information – Morton Hill School

School pseudonym	**Morton Hill School**
Decile	2
School type	Years 1-6
Ethnic composition	
NZ European/Pākehā	3%
Māori	7%
Pacific peoples	68%
Asian (including Indian)	12%
Other	10%

Table 3. 5: Adult research participants – Morton Hill School

School	Participant group	Pseudonym	Details
Beacon Point	**Principal**	Lana	Established principal - 5+ years' service
	Teachers/leaders	Maria	TIC - Travelwise
		Annie	TIC – Health Promoting Schools/School Garden
		Barbara	TIC - Kapahaka
		Louise	TIC – Road Patrols
		Rosa	TIC – Technologies (ICT)

Table 3. 6: Child research participants – Morton Hill School

School	Participant Group	Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Age
Morton Hill School	**Students involved in formal decision-making roles)**	Kent	Boy	Pākehā	5
		Anna	Girl	Chinese	7
		Ben	Boy	Samoan	7
		Deanna	Girl	Samoan	8
		Hannah	Girl	Samoan	8
		Adam	Boy	Samoan	9
		Tane	Boy	Samoan	9
		Tilly	Girl	Indian	9
		Susan	Girl	Pākehā	9
		James	Boy	Indian	9
		Rashid	Boy	Indian	10
		Sahil	Boy	African	11
		Lila	Girl	Samoan	11

Conclusion

A case study approach in this research enabled the in-depth examination of two schools in regard to children's participation in decision-making. In particular, the phenomenon of participation was able to be examined from the perspective of the principals and teachers and, most importantly, the children themselves. My own positioning as the researcher has been highlighted, given the significance placed on researching 'with' children in order to gather data from their perspectives, rather than research 'on' them. The next chapter provides a description of the research methods utilised in this study and addresses the ethical considerations relevant to this project.

CHAPTER 4: METHODS AND ETHICS

This chapter begins by overviewing the research methods of semi-structured interviews and focus groups that are used in this case study. This is followed by a description of the participatory methods used as part of the focus groups with the children who participated in this research. The chapter then details data analysis processes and concludes with a discussion of the ethical matters relevant to this research.

Data collection methods

As Yin (2012) notes, case study research is not limited to one data collection method and, in fact, benefits "from having multiple sources of evidence" (p. 10) Furthermore, the use of multiple sources allows broader coverage of the cases, as well as supporting triangulation and the "development of converging lines of inquiry" (Yin, 2009, p. 115). Qualitative methods tend to be selected by case study researchers, as the data gathered lend themselves more effectively to the in-depth analysis that is required to describe and illustrate the cases and phenomena being studied (Wyness, 2010). Choosing the right research methods for a case study is a critical part of decision-making for any researcher (Adelman et al., 1976).

My ontological and epistemological positionings were important in selecting appropriate research methods. I was mindful of Brinkmann and Kvale's (2015) assertion that: "If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them?" (p. 1). I needed to choose methods that would allow me to talk with my participants in this way and that would also be respectful of children, teachers and principals, and link to the aims of the project as a whole – giving voice to how children participate in decision-making in their schools. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were my choices for the six months of data generation. These methods resulted in thick descriptions and a rich array of data for analysis.

Semi-structured interviews

Individual interviews are considered to be the most commonly used method in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016; Hobson & Townsend, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and one of the most important sources of data in a case study

(Yin, 2009). This is due in large part to its flexibility as a method in its various forms, and also its ability to produce "conversations, discourses and narratives [that] are regarded as essential for obtaining knowledge of the social world" (Kvale, 2007, p. 7). Anderson and Arsenault (1998) define an interview as "a specialised form of communication between people for a specific purpose associated with some agreed subject matter. Thus, the interview is a highly purposeful task which goes beyond mere conversation" (p. 202). Bryman (2008) notes similar characteristics, stating that all interviews share some common features, "such as the eliciting of information by the interviewer from the interviewee and the operation of varying degrees of formality or explicitness concerning the conduct of the interview" (p. 192). As such, an 'interview' is exactly as it sounds – an 'inter-view' – "where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 4). To meet the aim of my research, it was imperative to talk to people and gather a range of 'rich' data from the adult participants. This approach would give me access to their knowledge, perceptions, beliefs and experiences – "to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 409). Furthermore, interviews would allow me to construct knowledge with participants through conversation and interaction.

There are several types of interviews, with the degree of 'structure' being the underpinning descriptor. Thus, interviews are generally regarded as being situated somewhere on a continuum from 'structured' at one end, to 'unstructured' at the other, and 'semi-structured' falling somewhere in between (Cohen et al., 2011; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Hobson & Townsend, 2010). 'Semi-structured' interviews are generally considered to have greater informality, to be more free-flowing, have more 'open-ended' rather than closed questions, be more conversational rather than interrogative and, finally, generate considerable 'rich' data (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Bryman, 2016; Coleman, 2012; Hobson & Townsend, 2010; Wellington, 2015). Furthermore, the researcher can gather data about a wider range of matters than what might be easily achieved using observation methods. Another advantage is that participants in semi-structured interviews may provide valuable information that the interviewer had not anticipated or included in the interview schedule. The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews allows the interviewer to probe and prompt the participants' responses with further questions and conversations

(Coleman, 2012). In this way, interviews can examine participants' "thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, views, feelings and perspectives. We can also elicit their version or their account of situations" (Wellington, 2015, p. 137). Because of these advantages, semi-structured interviews were a logical choice for my project as I needed to talk with principals and other key adults. This interview style allowed me to adapt or add questions if needed, for the different adults in my research, depending on their position and role in their school. I was also able to probe further if their responses include ideas and concepts that I had not previously considered or wanted further information.

Interviews, like all research methods, are not without limitations. These include the risk of omitting important topics, the use of constraining or poorly-designed questions, the interviewer 'leading' the interviewee, interviewer bias, and the potential for a lack of rapport between interviewer and interviewee (Cohen et al., 2018; Hobson & Townsend, 2010; Wellington, 2015). I endeavoured to address these potential limitations using three main techniques. In the first instance, the interview questions were drafted in response to the overarching themes of the literature review, and were crafted with the explicit intention of providing an 'openness' that I hoped would enable participants to talk freely and range over other related topics that I may not have considered. During each interview, I was constantly aware of the need to prompt and probe with additional questions. After each interview, I read over my interview notes and noted subtle changes to the interview schedule in order to enhance the quality of the interview questions. Secondly, I remained vigilant regarding my own responses in each interview, checking that I was not making comments or using body language, such as nodding, that would suggest to the interviewee that their responses were 'correct' or what they thought I wanted or expected to hear. Finally, I spent time throughout the interview to establish and maintain a friendly and reasonably informal rapport with each participant so that they would feel relaxed and confident about their participation. I had already met most of the participants during other contacts with the school and this seemed to allow an appropriate rapport to be quickly established. Where I had not previously met a participant, I asked questions about their work at the school in order to create some familiarity between us.

Focus groups

Focus groups are small groups where participants respond to questions or prompts posed by the researcher, and where interactions amongst participants contribute to the quality of the data collected (G. Anderson & Arsenault, 1998). Krueger and Casey (2015) similarly defined this method as "a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (p. 2). Because a focus group is a kind of "collective conversation" (Liamputtong, 2011, p. 3), it can be more comfortable and enjoyable for participants as they share their ideas and perceptions. Participants are usually selected because of their interest in or knowledge about a defined topic or because they share common characteristics (Gillham, 2005) With skillful facilitation by the researcher, this conversation gives rise to a synergy amongst participants that can produce contributions that individuals may not have thought of without the influence of the other focus group members (Gillham, 2005). The interactions of the group can also be observed. Focus groups may also provide a supportive environment for marginalised people, those who have "little or no societal voice" (Liamputtong, 2011, p. 4) or who lack social power (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996), thus lending itself to research with child participants in education settings (Gibson, 2012). Focus groups can also provide the context or stimulation for the use of creative and participatory methods (Flewitt, 2014).

These strengths underpinned my decision to use the focus group method with the children in this research, as I anticipated that the interaction between the children would not only help to ensure they felt comfortable in this setting, but that data would be easily generated. I was also mindful of the ethical challenges of conducting one-to-one interviews with children and their possible discomfort in an interview situation with an adult unknown to them. In fact, I considered individual interviews for children only very briefly as, with my background as a primary school teacher, I instinctively felt that the children might feel uncomfortable or even anxious on an individual interview with an adult they did not know. I did not want a child to be embarrassed if they felt that they could not answer a question, or awkward if long silences occurred. My priority was to make the children feel comfortable and confident in a "safe peer environment" (Adler, Salantera, & Zumstein-Shaha, 2019, p. 2). I was also aware that the ethical considerations of conducting individual interviews with the children were concerning – in fact, being alone in a room with an adult the child did not know meant that harm could have

been caused to the child through discomfort and anxiety. Therefore, my selection of the focus group method was made in order to offer the most comfortable and enjoyable experience for the children, and that it would be "less intimidating to speak in a group than in a one-to-one interview with a stranger" (Kellett & Ding, 2004, p. 167). In summary, I felt that individual interviews would offer no significant advantages to either the children or to my research focus. Folque (2010) makes the point that "the researcher who wants to interview children effectively will structure those interviews to provide multiple opportunities for children to say what they know and what they think" (p. 246). In this case, those interviews needed to take place in the form of focus groups.

In regard to the size of the children's focus groups, I thought carefully about how to 'organise' the 16 children at Beacon Point School and the 13 at Morton Hill School. In the former case, this group of 16 children aged ten or eleven years fell 'naturally' into two groups of eight – that is, the Student Leaders and the Deputy Student Leaders – with four girls and four boys comprising each of these groups. These focus groups are somewhat large, but within the range normally indicated for focus groups of adults, as noted by Carey and Asbury (2016) who summarise recommendations for group size in focus groups of children from a variety of literature as being in the range from 4 to 8 children. Other possible groupings would have been to have four groups of four, groups of five and three, or groups of six and two. However, as Gallagher (2009) states in relation to children's focus groups:

> … too few and there may not be enough participants willing to speak out … Further, with too few children, it is difficult for them not to view the facilitator as an authority figure in charge of the group. Including children who already know one another and are comfortable discussing the subject matter of the focus group might ameliorate this effect. (p. 71)

Given the priority that I placed on children's sense of safety, security and confidence, I decided the groups of eight would best meet both the 'natural groupings' aspect as well as being within the recommended range for children's focus groups. Also, two groups of eight meant that the natural groupings of Leaders and Deputy Leaders, each having a mix of boys and girls, could be preserved. Furthermore, as a result of the existing group dynamics, described by Gallagher (2009) as "critical" (p. 77), I hoped that the children's knowledge and familiarity with each other would alter the power relationship by providing a

situation where the children would feel comfortable with each other and 'outnumber' me as the researcher. In these focus groups, there was certainly lively discussion about individual contributions to the discussion but, again, this was good-natured and I did not see evidence of peer pressure or criticism. Where children disagreed, they did so respectfully and sometimes with humour. The only action I took at times was to remind them to talk one at a time and to make sure everyone had a chance to say what they thought.

Similarly, at Morton Hill School the membership of each group supported the natural groupings that already existed for these children in relation to the student leadership roles played in their schools, coupled with the age range of five to eleven years' of age. Owing to the age range, I decided to create two groups – five to eight years, and nine to eleven years. This decision was made not out of a sense that the younger children were less 'competent' to participate in a focus group, but rather to enable their voices to be 'heard' better than they might be in a group with older children, as described by Adler, Salantera and Zumstein-Shaha (2019). I also wanted to conduct an initial activity (the "Would You Rather…?" game) with the younger children to facilitate them in thinking about the nature of a 'decision'. This activity also provided a way to orient and prepare the younger children for the later focus group discussion and other activities. Although my decision to use this activity with the younger children may be perceived as a presumption of their capacity (or otherwise) to participate, I wanted to check their understanding and encourage their ideas. The activity also served as an opportunity for these younger children to get to know me a little, thereby building their sense of safety in the focus group setting and their ideas about what to expect.

In the later focus group comprising all of the Morton Hill children, the older children were able to support and work alongside the younger children. The way in which this occurred echoed the ethos of the school to some extent, in that the older children were calm, helpful and respectful to the younger children and, furthermore, did not exert any power over them that I was able to discern. The children appeared to be at ease amongst their peers, enabling them to be open, honest and relaxed. My hunch was that children's voices and views were all 'heard' – I encouraged all children to participate, made 'space' for those who were naturally more quiet or hesitant, showed that I was taking every response

seriously by taking notes throughout the discussion, and did not indicate to children that their responses were 'correct' or what I wanted/expected to hear.

In short, focus groups were selected as a suitable method for children because:

- children might be more comfortable to participate in a group rather than individually in an interview;
- being in a group of their peers would provide a sense of security and familiarity;
- they could respond to each other's ideas;
- they might feel more safe offering their ideas;
- the issue of the 'one right answer' children might think is needed is reduced in a group;
- I felt it was inappropriate for me ethically to interview children individually;
- a focus group approach facilitated the completion of the activities that I had designed; and
- the inclusion of the younger children would have been more difficult to achieve in individual interviews.

It was not my intention to prioritise adults' voices by interviewing them individually – rather, the choice of methods reflected what I believed would be comfortable for participants and that would generate valid data. If anything, it could be said that children's voices were prioritised as they had considerably more time with me over two separate meetings, and I gave a great deal of attention to the design of the focus group questions and activities in order that children would feel fully involved and comfortable. Most importantly, however, I wanted to seek the views as adults *as individuals*, as the politics of school settings for adults may have influenced the extent to which they felt able to speak freely in the presence of their colleagues in a focus group. Furthermore, privacy could not be guaranteed to adult participants in focus group settings, and the possibility existed that what was said in the group may have been inappropriately raised or referred to later in other settings. Although these cautions could also apply to child participants, I judged it more likely that adults would not want their views to be heard by their colleagues and would be more likely to be honest and open in an individual interview. In the case of the children, I judged it more likely that they would be open and honest in a group setting.

The limitations of focus groups must also be considered and, in particular, how these might apply to conducting research with children using this method. These limitations are generally held to be inappropriate composition of groups in regard to size and participant selection, difficulties associated with dominant participants or participants talking at the same time, participants influencing and being influenced by the responses of others, the power relationship between facilitator and participants, and the difficulty of transcribing focus group recordings (Bryman, 2016; Coleman, 2012; Hobson & Townsend, 2010). In order to address these limitations, I took care to ensure that the composition of each focus achieved a balance of size and participant 'type' by grouping together children who already knew each other and had something in common, while keeping the number of participants to a maximum of eight children. These criteria matched with the approximate numbers of children in each of the Student Leader groups.

As the researcher, managing the dynamics of the focus groups proved more challenging as some children were naturally more dominant and some said very little. I realised that I would need to 'manage' the groups more proactively by reminding them to talk one at a time and providing particular opportunities for children who were less talkative to have their say. The issue of participants being influenced by and influencing others was an advantage in the groups at Beacon Point School, as this facilitated conversations wherein children started to articulate their frustrations at their participation opportunities – had not this been raised by a couple of the children, this emerging view would not have been apparent in my view. As the facilitator, I aimed to achieve an informal atmosphere in the group and carefully explained my role to the children with particular attention on my hope that they would talk freely and that their views were confidential. My 'power over' them as an adult could not be completely mitigated, but I took care to conduct myself in ways that might reduce this by, for example, letting children use my first name, showing that I valued their responses and focusing on a facilitation style of interaction. Finally, the difficulty of transcribing the focus group recordings was significant as, despite asking children to speak one at a time, this was still a common occurrence. The detailed notes I had taken during the groups proved very important, and I also repeatedly listened to the recordings to ensure that the findings were supported by the data and that direct quotes were accurately transcribed.

Despite these limitations, I deemed focus groups to be the most suitable method to use with the child participants. As Farrell (2005b) notes, research methods should be selected with a view to children benefiting from their participation by being "*seen and heard* in the research" (p. 168), rather than experiencing research as being 'done to' them in a top-down manner (J. Holland et al., 2001) or feeling they are being 'put on the spot'. The focus group method aligned with these aspirations. Focus groups allowed me to facilitate conversations with groups of children in order to best understand their ideas, beliefs and perceptions about their own participation in decision-making at their schools. I also wanted to engage children in the research in ways that were likely to be interesting and enjoyable for them (Dockett et al., 2011), and where they could demonstrate their competency and agency (Adams & Swain, 2001). Because I was the 'facilitator' of the focus group discussions, I was able to guide children using semi-structured questions or discussion prompts and encouraged them to talk and discuss with each other rather than with just me. Although a wide range of focus group sizes are mentioned in the literature, I ensured that the focus groups contained no more than eight children in order for each child to have opportunities to speak and for the discussion to be as focused and productive as possible. I also wanted to reduce the likelihood of the discussion "[drifting] off topic easily" (Gallagher, 2009, p. 77), and to maximise the synergy that Hennessy and Heary (2005) identify as being a particular advantage of focus groups of children. Focus groups also allowed me to use cooperative, participatory activities with the children, as noted by Gallagher (2009) . These activities are described in the next section.

Cooperative activities with child participants

One way to more fully involve children in the research process is through the use of creative, visual, cooperative activities (Dempster, Stevens, & Keeffe, 2011; Dockett et al., 2011; Veale, 2005). This can include the use of games, drawing, photography and other techniques through which research might become more 'child-friendly' while still retaining its rigour and validity (Alderson, 2008). Such group activities, if skillfully used, are purported to help ensure that children are active participants in the research and that research is conducted *with them*, rather than merely *on them* as 'subjects' or 'objects' (Farrell, 2005a; Lewis, 2004). However, as Dockett, Einarsdottir and Perry (2011) caution, there must be clear methodological underpinnings for the choice of these methods – an activity that children find relevant and enjoyable will not in itself guarantee to produce valid

data. Therefore, a method must serve a clear purpose that would not be well met with a different method.

I identified three main cooperative activities to use with children within the general focus group framework with the intention of encouraging them to participate and to make decisions within the research activity itself (Davis, 2009). These methods were: a game (which was used with younger children); a labelling and sorting activity; and taking photographs around the school. Using these techniques, I hoped to assume the role of a 'facilitator' with the children, rather than solely a 'researcher' (Alderson, 2009; Davis, 2009). Also, the children were actively producing the research data themselves and, in this way, had greater control over the research process (Dempster et al., 2011).

In the first instance, I used a game to check that the younger child participants (5-8 years of age) understood what a "decision" is, could articulate their own definitions of this term, and explain what a person does when they are making a decision (see Figure 4.1). The activity also served as a way to 'orient' the younger children to the focus group setting. Cox et al. (2007) used the book "Would you rather?" (Burningham, 1994) to introduce the concept of decision-making to children. I purchased a copy of this book but it was largely unsuitable for use with children from a variety of cultural groups in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, using the book's main theme, I developed a game called "Would you rather…?" where each child had an envelope with two cards in it showing two choices that they could select from, and then explain why they had made that choice. For example: "Would you rather…climb a tree? Or ride a bike? Why?"; "Would you rather…do some Maths? Or write a story? Why?" Each child's decision and reasoning was discussed by the group and other children were able to comment on whether they would have made the same decision.

Figure 4. 1: The 'Would you rather...?' game

As Cox et al. describe: “This exercise enabled the children to think about choices they make and to help them to put their reasons for making them into words … The priority was for the children to understand what decision-making is” (pp. 10-11). In other words, it was intended as a ‘priming’ activity to ensure that the children had some understanding of what their focus group was about. This activity was also used for another purpose and that was to allow the children and I to get to know each other a little, and for the children to hopefully feel comfortable both with me as a former stranger, and also with what we would be talking about. I wanted them to feel at ease and to enjoy the experience of participating in the research, to feel safe in the focus group setting and to quickly know what to expect in such a setting. This mitigated against the risk of the younger children feeling inadequate or uncomfortable, a risk that seemed less likely with the older children had greater familiarity with the Student Leaders system because of their exposure to it, or “stock of experience” (S. Fraser, 2004, p. 24) over two-three years and also as Student Leaders at the time the focus groups took place.

Although the children began by choosing one of the choices in the “Would you rather…?” game, and this was what I had explained that they should do in the game, this was meant as a supporting and scaffolding activity, rather than to suggest to children that decision-making always requires a choice between two competing options. Despite the game starting with the presentation of ‘either-or’ choices, the children quickly decided that they could make up their own “Would you rather…?” questions. During this lively interaction, the children began to offer

three or more choices. A couple of children said that they would not choose any of the given choices because they wanted to choose something else, and some discussion ensued about this, mainly describing how a person could choose what they want and this can be different from what someone else might choose. The children did not criticise the contributions of others, and seemed to enjoy the game. They took turns and listened to each other, and there was no evidence of peer pressure or 'put downs' of responses. One child (aged seven years) looked at me towards the end of the game and said "I see what you're trying to do. You're trying to find out if we know what a decision is!" This was greeted with laughter by the other children as they began to discuss that they did know what a decision was, and then checked that I knew that they knew.

My view is that the activity successfully engaged the children and 'set them up' to participate in the rest of the focus group with confidence and interest. By starting the game with only two options to choose from, I tried to scaffold them into talking about decisions and decision-making. There was a possibility that children would become preoccupied with the idea of decisions involving a choice between only two options, but as the discussion progressed, the children began to talk about the notion of a decision more widely, and ideas moved away from focusing on an 'either/or' choice. As these younger children were from Morton Hill School and had been selected as Student Leaders, they were already participating in collaborative decision-making as part of that Year 1-6 group.

Secondly, I adapted an 'institutional diagramming' participatory research method similar to that utilised by Cox et al. (2007). This method is described by Chambers (1994) as being one where "all who are present can see, point to, discuss, manipulate and alter physical objects and representation … The learning is progressive. The information is visible, semi-permanent, and public, and is checked, verified, amended, added to, and owned, by the participants" (p. 1257). In my adaptation of this approach, the children were given circles of three different sizes and asked to identify the people at the school who they felt had the most 'say' in decision-making, and then choose the size of circle that appropriately represented this person's or group's influence over decisions. The children were then asked to arrange the circles in whatever arrangement or pattern they wish in order to show how these people or groups were connected, and then explain what they have done.

Finally, I used photovoice, also known as 'participant photography' (Call-Cummings, Hauber-Ozer, Byers, & Peden Mancuso, 2019), as the third cooperative data-gathering activity. As Darbyshire, MacDougall and Schiller (2005) state, researchers who involve children in their research projects must consider ways in which research participants can truly 'participate', so that research becomes a process in which children can engage in active and meaningful ways. Using 'visual' methods, of which photography is one example, is a way of achieving this involvement. Dockett et al. (2011) further note:

> Having cameras in the research with children invites them to use a mode of communication beyond written or oral language. Integral to this method has been opportunities for children to make choices about what to photograph, direct conversations about the photos and/or choose what photos and/or comments are contributed as data. (p. 74)

The children were asked to take photos around the school (using an iPad) to show places, objects or scenes that depicted things where they had participated in a decision-making process. They then explained to me why they had selected those particular images to photograph. This allowed the children to utilise a data-gathering approach that did not depend so much on their written or oral language skills, and in which all children could equally participate, thus utilising the main features of 'photo elicitation'. Harper (2002) describes photo elicitation as the use of photograph in an interview process to "evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words" (p. 13). In this case, the technique was more aligned with Sampson-Cordle's (2001, as cited in Harper, 2002) notion of 'photo self-elicitation' as I hoped that the children would discuss what they were photographing and why as we walked around the playground. I intended that this 'walk and talk' approach would further involve the children in the research process as they became active data collectors rather than just participants who were "researched on" rather than "researched with" (Prosser & Loxley, 2010, p. 206).

In summary, as a researcher working with children aged between five and eleven years of age, I sought to strike a good balance between the tensions of guarding against assumptions about ability and capacity on the one hand and, on the other hand, the 'ethical' need for children to feel safe and capable in a focus group situation with an adult they did not know. The research methods and my manner as the researcher needed to be appropriate but also not patronising or 'talking-down' to the younger children (Kellett & Ding, 2004). In the end, the goal was to

use “participant-friendly” methods (S. Fraser et al., 2014, p. 48) that suited children as ‘participants’, as well as accessing their knowledge, perspectives and ideas in ways that made sense to them, and utilised a “research *with* children” approach (S. Fraser, 2004, p. 23). I am also drawn to Biggeri et al.’s (2019) notion of children needing the “right space for dialogue” (p. 207) that takes into consideration a range of factors including age, gender, research subject matter and purpose, and familiarity of children with one another and with the researcher. Tensions are evident between these considerations which must be balanced when selecting research methods and partnering with children in research.

Data gathering activity

Phase One: Semi-structured interviews with ‘key adults’

I undertook twelve semi-structured interviews in total, comprising the two school principals, and with other “key informants who were expected to be knowledgeable” (Meyer, 2001, p. 338). The other ‘key informants’ were teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders, with a total of six adults participating at each school. Each of the principals identified these people for me to approach. The most important criterion for recruiting my participants was that they had roles relating to children’s decision-making opportunities. From this diverse group of participants, I gathered a wide range of perspectives about the philosophical underpinnings held by their schools in relation to children’s participation in decision-making, the nature of the mechanisms that were used and their perspectives of the benefits that accrued to children. Although it was possible that the families and the wider community could also be influential in regard children’s participation in decision-making, only the adults within the schools were interviewed as they fell within what Stake (2005) describes as the ‘boundaries’ of the case. The next section explains the inclusion of focus groups in the data gathering in my research project.

The interviews with the principals and ‘key adults’ took place at their respective schools, and the participants were aware of the general aim and research questions, having been provided with the *Invitation to participate – principals and key adults* (Appendix D) and signing the *Participant consent form – principals and key adults* (Appendix E). The principals’ interviews were around 90 minutes and reasonably informal, given that each principal was already known to me. The interviews with the ‘key adults’ ranged in duration between 30-60 minutes. Nearly all of these people appeared relaxed in the interview setting, although two were

very concerned to answer the questions 'correctly', checking after their interview with questions including: "Oh I hope I said the right things. I don't think I did that very well (Maria), and "Did I get those questions right? Is there something I need to change?" (Lucy).

The interviews began with asking the principals to describe the culture of their school in general terms and to give their understanding of the idea of children participating in decision-making in their school. After these initial questions, I used the *Interview schedule – principals and key adults* (Appendix F) to conduct each interview. It was not uncommon for a participant to talk about a topic that more closely related to another question on the schedule that I had yet to ask. I had to be flexible in re-ordering the questions as needed as the interview progressed and checking at the end that I had covered all of the questions initially planned. Prompting and probing questions were used as appropriate in most interviews. Conducting a number of interviews in one day at times, meant that I could not review the audio recording directly after every interview, but I did this periodically to further familiarise myself with the data, and check if the interview questions needed revising. The interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber.

Phase Two: Focus groups with children

The principals selected children for these focus groups who they identified as participating in decision-making. I initially met informally with the children to tell them about the research and how they could participate. I also explained the necessity of giving the *Invitation to participate – parents/caregivers* letter (Appendix G) to their parents, and ensuring that they returned the signed *Participant consent form – parents/caregivers* (Appendix H) to their principal. The children also received their own *Invitation to Participate – children* letter (Appendix I). Both principals attended these initial meetings, and thereafter collected the consent forms for me as the children returned them to school.

At Beacon Point School, 16 children aged 10-11 years were selected being the eight Leaders and eight Deputy Leaders of each House, and the children were divided into two focus groups accordingly. All children had parental/caregiver consent to participate in the research. Four focus groups were conducted, two for each group of children. The first set of focus group followed the process of the children signing their own *Participant consent form – children* (Appendix J),

followed by the discussion and institutional diagramming activities as described in Appendix K. The photovoice activity, also described in Appendix K, was carried out in the second set. This broke the focus group tasks into manageable parts, and helped to ensure that the children approached the photovoice activity refreshed. I also noted that, in the second set of focus groups, the children referred back to things that had been said or done in the first set, indicating to me that they had been thinking about this in the interim.

At Morton Hill School, 14 children aged 5-11 years were selected, being the two Student Leaders from each class at the school. One child did not have parental/caregiver consent to participate, so 13 children were involved in the data-gathering activity. Two focus groups were established on the basis of the children's ages (5-8 years and 9-11 years) so that I could more successfully tailor the activities and questions to each group. The first focus group of children aged 5-8 years at Morton Hill first played the "Would you rather…?" game. I then combined the two groups for the discussion session and the photovoice activities, and carried out the institutional diagramming activity with the group of older children. These children, like those at Beacon Point School, arrived at their second focus group with things they wanted to say that they had thought of in the time since the first focus group, and also reported that they had talked with their parents about what they had done. Having collected all of the data, the data analysis process began.

Data analysis

Dey (1993) describes qualitative data analysis as a "process of resolving data into its constituent components, to reveal its characteristic elements and structure" (p. 31) that allows researchers to logically and rigorously organise their data in order to manage and understand it. A characteristic of much qualitative research, including case studies, is the large quantity of narrative data. Although this volume of data may be seen as problematic, it can also be viewed as a "sign that the study has uncovered a particularly rich problematic" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 237). As all of the data collected in these case studies were 'rich', descriptive and non-numeric in nature, the main focus of the data analysis was the identification of common codes and categories. The processes described below aligned with the interpretive, social constructivist approach of the research by achieving the purposes of generating, describing, and exploring themes, along with discovering, describing and explaining differences and similarities (Cohen et al.,

2018). This approach also allowed data gained from one method and one case to be considered in parallel with other data collected in the other case.

Semi-structured interview data analysis

Interview data were first transcribed directly from the digital recordings by a transcriber in order to ensure that nothing was excluded from data analysis. I reviewed the transcriptions for errors such as the transcriber's incorrect interpretation of abbreviations that the participants used, for example: 'PB4L' (Positive Behaviour for Learning). Adult participants were emailed their transcript and invited to check it and reply to me within 14 days with no participant requiring any changes. I then printed the transcripts and read them closely, making notes in the margins of codes and commonalities that these suggested to me.

Inductive coding then formally proceeded with a view to reducing the amount of data and organising it into more abstract categories that could then be applied throughout the data set (Schreier, 2014). Each interview transcript was read and re-read, and the data coded and sorted into emerging categories as these arose, endeavouring to use codes that clearly captured the meaning of each piece of datum (Cohen et al., 2018) These codes, which I called 'Level #1' codes, were then entered onto a Word table according to the school concerned, including exact duplicates – once duplicates were removed, a total of 172 codes were entered for Beacon Point School, and shaded in pink; and 251 codes for Morton Hill School, shaded in blue. In the next stage of coding, these tables were cut into individual cells that were then re-sorted and synthesised into 'Level #2' categories – which resulted in 15 categories for each school. This process required further reading and re-reading of the transcripts, elimination of duplicate codes, grouping of others under a new code, removing redundant codes and further modification. The number of Level #1 codes that had been summarised into each Level #2 category was also checked to ensure that all Level #1 codes had been considered. Level #2 categories are shown in Table 4.1 (overleaf).

Table 4. 1: Level #2 categories - the first stage of coding

Beacon Point #2 categories	**Freq**	**Morton Hill #2 categories**	**Freq**
Child-initiated fundraising	7	Role of principal	12
Benefits/perks - extrinsic	6	Barriers to D-M	10
Scope of chn.'s D-M	14	Chn.'s involvement	44
Attitudes about chn.	11	Rewards/perks for chn.	15
Role of parents	5	Chn.'s D-M in classrooms	15
Future of chn.'s D-M	4	School culture	15
Opportunities for risk-taking	3	Influence of teachers	10
Criteria for HCs selection	10	Attitudes about chn.'s D-M	13
Benefits for chn - intrinsic	13	Beliefs about chn.'s D-M	19
Selection process for HCs	10	Teachers as barriers	12
Beliefs about chn.'s capability	11	Barriers to chn. as D-Ms	9
Importance of tradition	18	Attributes of chn.'s D-M	45
School culture	21	Criteria for 'Advocates' selection	10
Roles of HCs	16	Impact of culture and whanau	14
Chn.'s D-M opps./jobs	23	Role of teachers	8
Check tally Level #1 codes	**172**	**Check tally Level #1 codes**	**251**

Level #2 categories were further aggregated into Level #3 categories – eleven codes for each school which were matched wherever appropriate (Table 4.2). These were then further examined and modified into a common set of 14 categories that could be applied to both schools – 'Level #4' categories (Table 4.3, overleaf). These categories were used in the further data analysis using MAXQDA (VERBI Software GmbH, 2016).

Table 4. 2: Level #3 categories

Beacon Point #3 categories	**Freq.**	**Morton Hill #3 categories**	**Freq.**
Role of parents	5	Impact of culture and whanau	14
Attitudes about chn.'s involvement	22	Chn.'s involvement	44
		Attitudes about chn.'s D-M	32
Benefits/perks - extrinsic	13	Benefits/perks for chn.	15
Outcomes of D-M for chn	13	Outcomes of D-M for children	45
Importance of school tradition	18	School culture	15
School culture	21		
Selection of Student Leaders	20	Selection of Student Leaders	10
		Chn.'s D-M in classrooms	15
		Influence/role of teachers	30
		Role of principal	12
		Barriers to chn. As d-m s	19
Roles of Student Leaders	16		
Chn.'s D-M opportunities/jobs	23		
Child-initiated fundraising	7		

Table 4. 3: Level #4 categories

Role/impact/importance of school tradition
Role/impact/importance of culture (ethnic)
Role/impact/importance of school culture
Role/impact/importance of the principal
Role/impact/importance of teachers
Role/impact/importance of whanau
Criteria for selection into D-M roles
Attitudes about children
Attitudes about children's participation
Nature of children's participation
Extrinsic rewards for children
Intrinsic rewards for children
Outcomes for children of their participation
Barriers/limitations to children's participation

Following this manual coding, I then returned to the full transcripts and applied the Level #4 codes to re-code all of the text. I used MAXQDA (VERBI Software GmbH, 2016) for this process. MAXQDA is a software program for data analysis which is available for purchase via the internet. It enables the importing of data and a variety of functions related to analysis such as coding, grouping, matching and so on. Using MAXQDA ensured that all of the interview data was coded using the Level #4 codes. This also meant that I could see how many data were grouped under each code and also search for participants' quotes according to code. This process confirmed the selection of the Level #4 codes as being valid, as the re-coding of text on MAXQDA showed that no further codes were required. An example of the MAXQDA coding is shown in Figure 4.2 (overleaf).

The use of both manual inductive coding processes and MAXQDA enabled me to ensure that coding was carried out thoroughly and accurately because of the cross-checking that the combined approaches allowed.

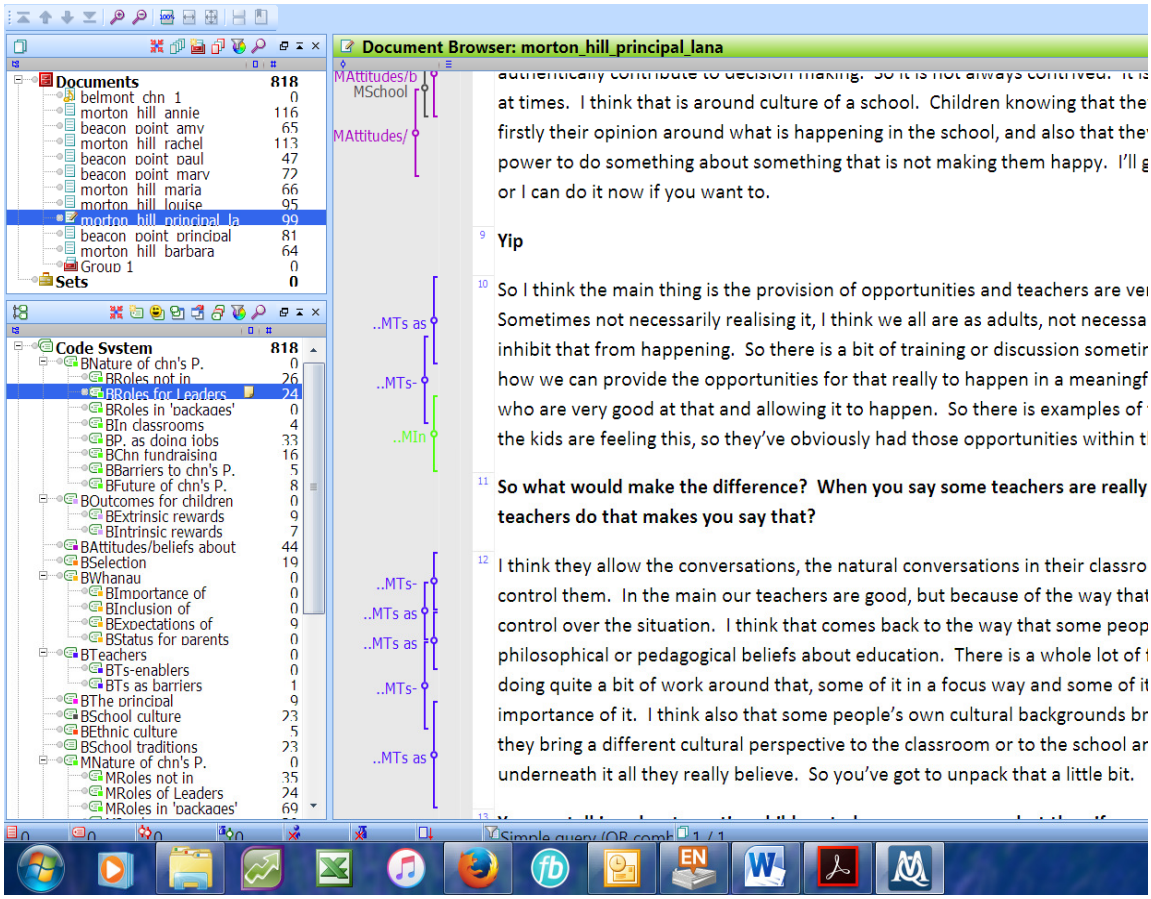

Figure 4. 2: A sample of interview transcription with MAXQDA coding

Focus group data analysis

Conversations with the children during the focus groups were also transcribed. However, because the children tended to talk over one another or at the same time, and some voices were difficult to hear, these transcriptions were incomplete. It was also difficult to know what child was talking. Fortunately I had taken extensive notes as the children talked so I returned to these as the data source, and listened carefully to each recording two or three times in order to add further content and detail to these notes. I also carefully noted direct quotes and identified the speaker as accurately as possible. To analyse these data, I used my notes to create a series of memos describing the findings that emerged from the notes as I revisited these and listened to the recordings again. As the focus groups occurred after the interviews with adults, I was able to note both contrasting and affirming data and views that emerged from the children's focus groups. For example, the children's focus groups at Morton Hill School affirmed the data collected from the principal in regard to the responsibilities that children had to represent and advocate for their peers. In the case of Beacon Point School, the children's focus groups revealed that the children really had very little

participation in decision-making, a reality that contrasted sharply with the rhetoric of participation expounded by the adults.

In addition, photographs were taken of the institutional diagramming task in order to keep a record of this material, and children also took photographs during our walk around the school. I visited each school to review the main points I had noted about the focus group content, and the photographs of the institutional diagramming with the children, to check that these matched with their perceptions of what had taken place during the focus groups. The photographs taken outside by the children in the photo elicitation task were also shown to them again, and I checked my understanding about the reason that each photograph was taken was correct. In regard to the institutional diagramming, the photos served as an accurate record of what had occurred and these, along with the notes I had taken and the recordings of this activity, were continually examined and memos noted in order to relate these data to the adults' interviews and the general focus group content. The photographs taken outside similarly served as a pictorial form of data that both matched with and contrasted with adults' views.

Ethical considerations

Attention to ethical matters is a fundamental aspect of research design and research activity, and should underpin planning, decision-making and action throughout the project (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2010), helping researchers to always strive for high ethical standards, rather than merely avoiding low ones (Alderson, 2009). This consideration of how the researcher will 'care' for their participants assists in the processes of building relationships between the researcher and participants that establish trust and engender interest and commitment in the project (Busher & James, 2012). In regard to research ethics when children are participants, Phelan and Kinsella (2013) usefully differentiate between 'procedural ethics' and 'ethics in practice' – that is, while formal research ethics approvals must be gained and correct preparations made for carrying out research with children, researchers must also be reflexive and "must decide how to respond or act in the moment" (p. 82), an element of researcher practice that I have already described in the previous section.

Ethical considerations may be of even greater importance for qualitative researchers (Stake, 2005), who need to be aware of ethical concerns from the outset of the project and throughout its passage (Alderson, 2004; Janesick,

2000), but particularly during data collection in the field. Qualitative researchers are usually more closely involved with their participants because of their common use of interviews, focus groups, observations, and other research methods which require them to have what Busher (2002) terms an "engaged role" (p. 82), and may result in greater "intrusiveness" into the lives of the participants (Lindsay, 2010). Whilst anonymous questionnaires might allow a researcher some isolation from the research participants, there is no such distance between the researcher and the 'researched' in most qualitative inquiry. Moreover, in case study research, attention to ethics is of utmost concern because of the importance of establishing relationships and maintaining trust, of striving to research *with* people rather than doing research *to* them (Simons, 2009). Stake (2005) goes so far as to describe case study researchers as "guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict" (p. 459). Clearly, the researcher must exert particular ethical caution when undertaking a case study – the researcher, the participants and the associated ethical considerations are all situated within the "precise socio-political context of a specific case" (Simons, 2009, p. 96).

The commonly accepted principles of ethical research are: (i) minimisation of harm; (ii) voluntary and informed consent; (iii) respect for confidentiality, privacy and preservation of anonymity; (iv) limitation of deception; (v) faithful and full analysis and reporting of data; and (vi) cultural and social sensitivity (Snook, 2003; Tolich & Davidson, 1999). Each of these principles was considered and addressed in this research project. Formal institutional ethics approval was gained from the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee on March 11 2013 (Appendix A), and further advice from the committee was sought on September 28 2013 in regard to engaging the services of a professional transcriber. The next section will explain each of these principles in more detail with regard to their application in this research.

Minimisation of harm

This principle requires the researcher to eliminate or, at the very least, minimise the harm that might be experienced by the research participants. 'Harm' might be physical, psychological, emotional or developmental and may have a range of outcomes such as stress and a loss of self-esteem (Cohen et al., 2018). Furthermore, the researcher cannot always predict when harm might occur. As Simons (2009) describes, harm is "interpreted differently by different people and

may be perceived differently by them at different times" (p. 97). Nevertheless, the onus lies firmly with the researcher to act in ways that minimise risk.

In regard to my research project, the minimisation of harm lay primarily with the gaining of informed consent from all research participants and the protection of their identities in the final thesis, which I will describe in more depth in the next sections. Potential participants were also reassured that there was no potential for harm to them if they chose not to participate in the research. Of importance also, however, was "relational ethics" (Simons, 2009) - that is, the shifting of attention to some extent *away* from avoiding doing harm to participants, *to* a focus on doing good. In this research project, I endeavoured to take this approach by finding ways, particularly with child participants, to 'give back' to participants and to each school. I ensured that I thanked the children at the end of the focus groups and showed appreciation of all the information that they had shared with me. The same consideration was also extended to adult participants, particularly by making every effort to not take up more of their time than what had been originally requested.

Voluntary and informed consent

This principle requires the researcher to ensure that the research participants deliberately and voluntarily consent to taking part in the research project and, furthermore, that they do so having received and understood the aims and scope of the research, their role within it, the possible benefits and risks, and the purposes to which the data that they supply will be put (Stake, 2005). Gaining this consent occurred at four levels at each school in this research project – the Board of Trustees, the principal and other 'key adults', the parents/caregivers of the children and, finally, the children themselves.

An introductory email, with the *Invitation to participate – Boards of Trustees* letter attached (Appendix B), was sent to the principals of the two schools, seeking their initial interest in participating in the project. The first principal replied by email that he wanted to discuss the matter with the Board of Trustee's Chairperson to gain the Board's consent, so I emailed him the *Participation consent form – Boards of Trustees* (Appendix C). The signed form was emailed back to me about one week later. The other principal invited me to speak to the Board of Trustees at their next meeting, at which I provided a copy of the *Invitation to participate – Boards of Trustees* letter (Appendix B) and the

Participation consent form – Boards of Trustees (Appendix C). The Board agreed to participate in the project, and the signed form was handed to me directly. The principals and teachers also received a separate *Invitation to participate – Principals and key adults* (Appendix D) and a *Participation consent form – Principals and key adults* (Appendix E), the consent forms being signed by the principals and teachers at the beginning of my interviews with them.

Informed consent was perhaps most important when considering the involvement of children as research participants. Children are already in a "coercive situation" (Snook, 2003, p. 75) given that they are compulsorily required to be at school in the first place (Todd, 2012), and therefore consent from child participants - as well as from the Board, the principal and the parents/caregivers - were all required, a practice favoured by Coady (2010) In this way, I endeavoured to implement processes of "ethical symmetry'" as described by Christensen and Prout (2002, p. 477), where the same ethical processes that were engaged in with regard to the adult participants were also engaged in with the children. Therefore, although the parents/caregivers of each child received gave their written consent in this research project (Appendices F and G), consent was also gained from the children themselves (Appendices H and I). In this way, I hoped that the children felt that they could choose whether or not they wanted to participate in the research (Farrell, 2005b; Phelan & Kinsella, 2013), rather than feeling that they had to *assent* because their parents/caregivers had given their consent (Farrell, 2005a; Smith, 2011).

When I initially met with the children, I was careful to explain very clearly that they could choose not to take part even if their parents said they could and, equally, that they could not take part if their parents did not give their consent. In this regard, families and children *opted in* to the research in a deliberate and informed manner. As described by Busher (2002) and Simons (2009), it was important to gain consent directly from families and children, rather than the schools giving consent *in loco parentis*. I was also careful to be alert for and act on any verbal or non-verbal cues that indicated that a child was uncomfortable in the research setting or may wish to not participate any further, keeping in mind that the child may not wish to withdraw from the project entirely, but might just not want to participate on a particular day or in a particular activity (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011; Phelan & Kinsella, 2013).

Preservation of the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of participants

This principle requires the researcher to protect participants from harm, as far as is possible, by preserving their privacy, anonymity and confidentiality (Busher & James, 2012). Often grouped together, these three terms have different meanings in the context of research. In this research project with its utilisation of interviews and focus groups, the identities of the schools and the individual research participants were obviously known to me, so anonymity could not be guaranteed (Lindsay, 2010). However, the privacy of each site and participant was protected to the extent that confidentiality could be assured as, although I could identify the responses of individual participants, I could provide an assurance that such identification would not be made publicly (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). This was achieved through the use of pseudonyms for both individual participants and for their schools as well. I was also careful to not provide too much detail about the schools as, if the organisation can be identified, then participants might also be identifiable (Wiles, 2012). Tolich and Davidson (1999) pay particular attention to the identifiability of schools in New Zealand, suggesting that "a consideration of this smallness needs to become the overriding rule, and acknowledging this means that ethical issues have to be thought through carefully […] These are questions of enormous ethical significance for all New Zealand social scientists" (p. 78)

The principals knew the identities of the other 'key adults' interviewed as they had assisted me in selecting these people. The identity of the child participants was also known by the principals and/or other key adults as, once again, the selection of the children was directed largely by these adult participants. In the case of the children, they obviously knew the others in the same focus group. However, there were no questions or comments about privacy, anonymity or confidentiality. No participant asked about the data that other participants had provided or expressed any concern that their identity as a participant was obviously known by the principal and possibly by other participants in their school as well.

Limitation of deception

As Bryman (2008) explains, deception may be defined as "when researchers represent their work as something other than what it is" (p. 124). Cohen et al. (2011) list several ways in which deception may occur, including people being unaware that they are being researched, researchers telling lies or compromising

the truth, researchers engaging participants in research in ways that are degrading or dehumanising, or knowingly concealing the "true purpose and conditions of the research" (p. 95). In this research project, I considered that there was very little possibility that participants would be subject to any degree of deception. Informed consent was gained from all participants and the interview and focus group questions and protocols were carefully designed to meet the aims of the research in ways that did not mislead or misinform participants. Any questions from participants were answered openly and honestly.

Faithful and full analysis and reporting of data

Related to the limitation of deception is the faithful and full analysis and reporting of data; that is, subjecting all data to appropriate analysis processes, identifying valid themes from this analysis, and reporting all data and themes (either explicitly or as aggregations) in the final thesis and any other publications and presentations resulting from it. Busher (2002) emphasises that research participants have the right to know the outcomes of the study. Similarly, Smith (2011), in referring specifically to research involving child participants, describes this part of the research process as an 'obligation' on the researcher and that children, like adults, have the "right to access and ownership of research outputs to which they have contributed, such as drawings, writings, photographs or interview material" (p. 22). In regard to this ethical principle, I ensured that all data was actually utilised. The employment of a professional transcriber meant that I was able to access every word of all interviews and focus groups in the written form, as well as reviewing the digital voice recordings. All data were included in the analysis processes.

Cultural and social sensitivity

As Snook (2003) identifies, researchers must act appropriately not only within the principles already described here, but also by attending to "the evolving understanding of these principles in a particular society in a particular time" (p. 78). In the New Zealand context, this means that researchers must demonstrate an awareness of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi), and also a recognition of "the power component of their work, particularly where there are age, race, cultural, religious, class or gender disparities between researchers and their subjects" (Snook, 2003, p. 78). In this research project, this sensitivity was shown in the offer to provide research information to the parents/caregivers of the child participants in their first language, although this was not requested by any

participants or parents/caregivers. I also consulted with appropriate people in each school in order to seek advice relating to the cultural considerations I should demonstrate for particular ethnic groups. As far as I could ascertain from consulting with the school principals, no participants identified as Māori.

Two further ethical concerns are relevant here and these relate to the involvement of children as participants – in the first instance, the overall approach that I took with the children to establish rapport and, secondly, an acknowledgement of the power relationships that the research inevitably entailed in regard to the children - by the mere fact of my presence as an adult, as someone who may have appeared to be more knowledgeable and more proficient, and as someone asking questions and taking notes. If nothing else, I had 'power' by default because of the ways in which children invariably regard adults as authority figures. Being an experienced primary school teacher, I used my skills to form a positive rapport with the children, with my previous experience in relating appropriately and productively to children being utilised in all of my interactions with them. This helped to establish an appropriate 'research relationship' with the children (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011; Phelan & Kinsella, 2013). At the very least, I hoped that the children felt respected and safe; at the most, I hope they enjoyed the research process and felt that they were active participants. Appendix L summarises the ethical concerns associated with this research, using the basic ethical principles identified by Tolich and Davidson (1999), and the further principle of cultural and social sensitivity (Snook, 2003).

Case study rigour and the transferability of findings

If research is to make any contribution to practice or theory, it must "be rigorously conducted [and] present insights and conclusions that ring true to readers, practitioners and other researchers" (Merriam, 2009, p. 210). In relation to the quality of case study methodology in particular, either quantitative or qualitative, Bryman (2008) notes that this hinges on those aspects of reliability, validity and generalisability that are judged appropriate by the researcher. A qualitative case study approach should adopt, Merriam (2009) suggests, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) notions of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, a position also taken by Bassey (2012) and Meyer (2001). It was not my intention to generalise findings as a result of my research project, so particular attention was paid to internal validity or credibility, and to external validity, or transferability. These two aspects were selected as being most appropriate for attention in a

qualitative case study as these enable the 'trustworthiness' of a research study and its data to be established (Merriam, 2009). Whether or not the same data would be obtained by another researcher is not at issue – it is the data gathered by a particular researcher with particular participants in particular contexts that are valued as this allows the researcher to identify how people understand the world.

Internal validity has been defined as "the extent that research findings accurately represent the phenomenon under investigation" (Bush, 2012, p. 82) or, in the case of qualitative, case study research: "Are the findings *credible* given the data presented?" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 213). This was achieved using four main strategies in this research project. In the first instance, multiple sources of evidence were used. Across the semi-structured interviews and focus groups in two research sites, a total of 41 participants were involved in the study – 12 adults and 29 children. These multiple sources provided a breadth and depth of data, and allowed for triangulation of findings within each research site, as well as the "different realities" both within and across sites (Stake, 2005, p. 454). Furthermore, "member checks" or "respondent validation" (Merriam, 2009, p. 217) was carried out by checking the interview transcripts with the adult participants, and informally sharing the focus group initial findings and notes with the children concerned. Secondly, as the data analysis progressed, emerging themes were checked and re-checked by linking these to the data. The use of MAXQDA here to 're-code' the data was a particularly robust way of achieving this, and confirmed the relevance of the generated themes and their applicability to both research sites. Thirdly, I engaged in data collection over an extended period of time and through a number of visits to each site in order to ensure that I had collected sufficient data (Bassey, 2012) and, as far as possible, the data collection and initial analysis approached 'saturation' point (Wellington, 2015). That is, that the more data I collected, the less I noted new findings emerging. This was particularly so with the interviews of the adult participants in each school where the data collected began to be repetitive with the later interview data having a broad similarity to the data collected earlier.

The fourth strategy that was used to enhance internal validity was that of constantly and consciously being reflexive about my position as a researcher. Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher (2009) define reflexivity as "the thoughtful reflection or a researcher upon the impact of her or his research on the participants, their

social world, on the researcher her-or-himself and on the knowledge produced" (2009, p. 229). Similarly, Fraser, Flewitt and Hammersley (2014) highlight the necessity of researchers being aware of how they are influencing the data collection and analysis, as well as the ways in which the findings are reported. Being reflexive requires a researcher to question every aspect of the research process and to acknowledge the influence that their own beliefs, values and experiences have – to "stand back and take stock from time to time" (Lewis, 2004). As the researcher, I endeavoured to think and re-think my actions and approaches and to engage in "analysis of 'adult'-self as researcher" (A. Jones, 2004, p. 115). I found myself constantly modifying what I was doing both in the fieldwork and in the data analysis and findings production.

This reflection mostly concerned my work with the children participating in the research and had two foci - the 'power over' relationship that I inevitably had with the child participants by virtue of my age and positioning as a 'teacher' in their eyes and, secondly, my own bias regarding the lack of participation opportunities that I believed children to have in primary schools. To ignore these two foci would have threatened the internal validity of the research. The actions I took to continually address the power relationships with the children included ensuring that they understood that they did not have to participate in the research and asking them to formally consent in writing themselves, as well as seeking their parents/caregivers' consent. I also encouraged the children to use my first name, and told them a little about myself and my daughter as a way to make my position as the researcher less threatening. I found myself constantly monitoring my own 'talk' in an effort to be less of a 'teacher' and more of a facilitator of their activities and discussions. I centred the discussions on the children, demonstrated active listening behaviour and expressed openly that I valued what they had to say, approaches also noted by Pattman and Kehily (2004).

In an effort to acknowledge my own bias regarding the lack of participation opportunities for children, I was continually alert for data that disconfirmed these assumptions or presented findings contrary to these assumptions, as suggested by Merriam (2009) and Yin (2009). I initially considered this in the research design by ensuring multiple informants were included across more than one context, as achieved in the work of Hayes (2010). One action here was to use the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews to probe adults' responses more deeply to ensure as far as possible that I understood their answers and that I had

gained as much further relevant information as possible. In the focus groups with child participants, I asked questions in a variety of ways in an effort to give as many opportunities for the children to respond. I also noted children that had not responded and encouraged them to participate in the discussion, while also gently ensuring that the more confident children did not unduly dominate the group. I was also aware that not all of the children might be used to "expressing their views freely or being taken seriously by adults because of their position in adult-dominated society" (Punch, 2002, p. 325) so the inclusion of participatory, 'hands-on' research methods was essential to maximise the children's ability to participate in the research.

Finally, the use of both a manual data analysis system as well as a computerised version (MAXQDA) in the data analysis phase meant that many passes were made over the data transcripts and that data were categorised and re-categorised until no new codes or themes could be identified. I hoped that this thoroughness would ensure that all data were included with this being particularly important in the case of data gathered from the child participants.

In regard to transferability, I adopted Vasconelos' (2010) view that a case study approach is concerned with 'particularisation' rather than generalisation. In regard to notions of external validity or generalisability, I endeavoured to 'build in' what Lincoln and Guba (2000) describe as 'transferability' and 'fittingness'. Indeed, their chapter is entitled *The only generalization is: There is no generalization.* Rather, Lincoln and Guba (2000) note that it is the responsibility of the researcher to provide sufficient 'thick description' so that anyone interested in the research may judge for themselves the degree to which the research findings might be transferable to their own contexts, a view also expressed by Wellington (2015):

> Whatever stance we take on the issues of generalizability, there seems to be one important general point. In examining case studies, a large part of the onus rests upon the *reader.* The validity of a case study needs to be assessed by the reader, given his or her experience, knowledge and wisdom, i.e. the value, or 'truth', of case study research is a function of the reader as much as the researcher. (p. 177)

In order to enhance the transferability of my study, I included descriptions of the research sites and participants in as much detail as possible without endangering the confidentiality that was an integral part of the ethical considerations of the research. Another factor that contributed to transferability was the variation that

merged between the two research sites as the study progressed. Although this was a fortunate accident rather than a direct result of the purposive sampling process, the diversity of findings in regard to children's participation in decision-making across the two schools may be valuable to those who read the research findings.

Conclusion

This chapter has overviewed the two main methods used in this research – semi-structured interviews and focus groups. It then focused on the participatory methods that were included in the focus groups with the children in order to research 'with' these participants in ways that, I hoped, honoured their competencies and agency, and gave them all a voice in the research findings. I have also described the approach and processes used for data analysis. Attention has been given to ethical considerations in this chapter and, in particular, the decisions and practices that support ethical research with children aged five to eleven.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the research. It is organised into two main parts that address the research questions (RQ) below:

RQ1: In what ways do children participate in decision-making mechanisms, including formal student leadership roles; and

RQ2: What are the lived experiences, perceptions and understandings of the children in regard to this participation?

In this research, I refer to children's 'participation' in decision-making as being any site or structure where either adults or children believed that children 'had a say', could influence decisions and outcomes and/or exercised independence and initiative in decision-making in their schools.

Part One addresses the first research question and describes the sites for children's decision-making opportunities at both schools. Part Two of the chapter addresses the second research question and describes children's perspectives of participation in decision-making. Quotes from participants are used throughout the chapter to illustrate the findings, and photographs are provided to illustrate the cooperative activities carried out in the focus groups with children, including the photovoice activity. In the case of direct quotes from children, each child's age is added at the end of the quote; for adults, their position in the school is added.

In choosing to report findings from the adults' interviews first, my intention was to set the scene from the adults' perspective to show the existing kaupapa in each school in regard to children's participation. Comments passed in the organisation stages of the research by adults at each school alerted me to the possibility that two very different landscapes would emerge in regard to adults' beliefs, perceptions and practices in the area of children's participation. From a reader's perspective, I believed this would provide background to then read the findings arising from the children's focus groups. That is, I wished to position the data gathered from the focus groups in the contexts as described by the adults. As this chapter demonstrates, this structure served to clearly identify the similarities and differences between adults' and children's accounts

Finally, the order of the presentation of findings does, in my view, give the children the last word. There was no deliberate intention to present the adults' interview findings in greater depth or at greater length than the children's' focus group findings – this occurred as a logical outcome of there being more interviews than focus groups. Furthermore, I wanted each participant's data to be evident in the findings and discussion in order to honour their contribution to my research.

Part One: Children's participation in decision-making: Sites and opportunities

The findings indicated various occurrences where students had opportunities to make decisions. Four key themes emerged from these sites and opportunities to include: task-related decision-making carried out by student Monitors, project-based decision-making (linked to groups such as Schoolgen and Enviroschools), entrepreneurial opportunities and, finally, student leadership roles.

Task-related opportunities for participation in decision-making: Monitors' roles.

This category included roles where children had traditional 'Monitor'-type tasks and responsibilities in relation to various aspects of the school's activities, such as Library Monitors and Staffroom Monitors. Adults at both schools identified such roles: 14 roles at Beacon Point School and five at Morton Hill. These roles were carried out by only Year 5 and 6 students with many children having more than one role, and generally supervised by the adults who selected the children. Although adults believed these roles provided decision-making opportunities for children, the findings suggested that this decision-making 'space' existed only where adults recognised, valued and organised for children's participation.

At Beacon Point School, Monitors' roles directly linked to the completion of tasks set by adults. For example, Staffroom Monitors were children in the class of the Teacher-in-Charge (TIC) of the staffroom who wanted to take on a 'monitor' role. Staffroom Monitors filled and emptied the dishwasher in the staffroom after staff breaks, wiped down tables and went to the local dairy, unaccompanied, to buy milk during school time. Further examples included the Office Monitors who answered the phone during breaks, Bell Monitors who rang the bell at set times throughout the day, and Sports Equipment Monitors who set up and packed

away specialist equipment such as gymnastics gear, and any equipment that junior school teachers required.

None of these Monitors' duties seemed to involve students in making decisions, yet Beacon Point teachers identified these roles as evidence of decision-making opportunities. Because most Monitor roles linked to particular teachers and the responsibilities they held in areas of the school, their own students were often called upon and the children had little choice about the role/s they might undertake. It appeared that the Monitor roles at Beacon Point were defined by adults as sets of prescribed tasks, with little student input. The students appeared to perform repetitive, observable tasks for teachers that did not seem to materially affect the school lives of students, or offer them opportunities for decision-making. This suggests a lack of 'space' for children's participation. Teachers, however, saw these Monitors' roles as decision-making opportunities, although 'decision-making' appeared to consist mainly of children selecting from options already set by adults. It seemed that teachers orchestrated and defined what children could do. One example of this orchestration was the Assembly Monitors' use of a set script for assembly announcements – this meant that assembly ran well, children were 'seen' to be leading it, while the adults' influence in providing the script in the first place went unnoticed:

> *I think because staff aren't seen to run assembly, I think that is good. So kids in classes do all the announcing, they get a script. Every week kids stand up and do sports awards at assembly.* [Amy – TIC PE]

Of further significance were adults' conceptualisations of this work as involving children in decision-making and allowing them to learn responsibility and earn trust, through completing tasks to the standards required. Adults articulated that children needed to take care not to disappoint teachers or let others down, and children also voiced this view in their focus groups, as shown in the following extracts from Paul, a teacher, and Connor, a student:

> *[Being a Monitor] does teach them responsibility and it is doing things for us too. Things like road patrol … That is a responsibility thing. They know they can't let teachers down* [Paul – TIC Sport]

> *You get to do things and take responsibility, instead of the teachers we have to take the responsibility … once you're committed, you can't back out, you can't get out* [Connor – 11 years of age]

In addition, Monitor roles required children to take part in work needed for the school to run smoothly. The interview data suggest that 'responsibility' has two dimensions. The first dimension is that of students being allowed to, and trusted to, legitimately enter areas of the school where only adults would normally be in New Zealand primary schools, such as the staffroom, the physical education (PE) equipment shed, and the office/school reception area. Children were then trusted to complete their allotted jobs out of adults' sight and supervision. Examples of this were children setting-up audio-visual equipment for assembly in the Hall, or organising equipment for fitness or PE lessons in the playground. Children who went to the dairy to purchase milk did so without adult supervision, and this too was seen by adults as children exercising responsibility.

The second dimension of 'responsibility' is the importance of children remembering to complete a task, do it in a certain way, and not let teachers down. Furthermore, risk-taking and using initiative on the part of children seemed to be not encouraged or expected. Children successfully completed their assigned roles and this meant that teachers had fewer of these jobs to do themselves. Furthermore, the school could save money by, for example, children loading the staffroom dishwasher and generally tidying up after the morning tea break, rather than employing an adult to carry out this work. Mary and Paul (teachers at Beacon Point) described these roles as engendering responsibility:

> *Year 6s do office jobs, looking after the office over morning tea, and staffroom cleaning, the dishes, those kind of traditional jobs – going to get the milk, and that kind of thing. So they have all kinds of jobs in and around the school. A lot of responsibility* [Mary – TIC Student Leaders]

> *There are a few things, responsibilities to do things for adults around here. Kids come in and clean the staff room and put the cups in the dishwasher and stuff like that.* [Paul – TIC - Sport]

However, the findings suggest that children's compliance and subservience was at the forefront of this 'responsibility'. Monitors appeared to have very little authentic responsibility to exercise their own voice or agency in their roles. Amy's description of one of the PE Shed Monitors' roles also illustrated this lack of decision-making opportunities. Doing 'jobs' so that teachers did not need to, was seen by adults as children taking responsibility, and children welcomed the opportunity to earn the praise of adults:

> *Without me asking now they will rummage around and get all the flat balls and I just leave the pump outside my room plugged in all the time. It means I go through 100 inflation needles because they snap really easily. But I'd much rather the kids are doing it and not me. What do the rest of my class do? Some of them will be trained for the sound monitors at assembly, so they sit up the front at assembly – you would have seen that. They always set it up, they operate everything which is great.* [Amy – TIC PE]

While teachers viewed Monitors' roles as being examples of children participating in decision-making, there was little evidence of students actually making decisions that influenced practice or benefitted people other than the staff. Because most Monitor roles were linked to particular teachers and their own students, children appeared to have little choice over what role/s they might undertake. That students got to exercise very little agency over the type of role they could take on, or what was performed in it, seems to typify all the Monitor roles at Beacon Point School – Monitor roles were characterised by a list of observable tasks that were undertaken on a regular basis. While teachers suggested that these roles were teaching responsibility, the same roles could also be understood as being only about jobs to do that made the school life of teachers easier. Students were merely performing tasks.

The contrast with Beacon Point in how these similar roles were carried out and facilitated at Morton Hill School is quite marked. At Morton Hill, children also carried out Monitor's roles – for example, Library Monitor or Road Patrol Monitor - although there were far fewer roles to choose from and therefore far fewer children involved. An example of this was Information Technology (IT) Monitors. These Monitors were co-ordinated by Rosa, a teacher who described herself as having a wide interest and enthusiasm for digital learning. Just as in Beacon Point School, IT monitors were selected from children in Rosa's class so that it was easier for her to manage this group. These Monitors had a wide variety of responsibilities assisting teachers with a large number of tasks including: device and equipment movement, management and recharging; software and app testing and evaluation; trouble-shooting minor IT problems; and training teachers in the use of devices, software, apps and printing. In this sense, they took on roles beyond what might be expected of a Monitor at Beacon Point.

Rosa described the role in the following ways that indicated her perception of the children's involvement as being partly linked to responsibility to complete tasks, but also using their initiative, solving problems and sharing their expertise by helping teachers and other children with IT problems:

> *The teacher will often say to the kids when they go to pick IT stuff up or deliver stuff, I need this or need that or this isn't working or that is not working, and then the kids will either report that back to me or problem solve it themselves. It works quite well ... I think for a lot of teachers as well, it is a lot more powerful when a kid comes in to show them something than if I was to come in and show them something. But also for the kids to go in and help other kids, that is more meaningful than the teacher standing up the front telling you what to do.* [Rosa – TIC ICT]

This illustrates a different kind of 'responsibility' and decision-making than that of Monitors at Beacon Point. Children making decisions independently was an expected part of the IT Monitors' Role. Rosa wanted the children to show initiative and to be 'the teacher' to teachers if they had the expertise to assist and solve problems. Although some tasks were prescribed and routine, there were also opportunities for children to demonstrate agency outside of these tasks as the situation required. In this respect, Rosa appeared to be treating the children not only as being capable of doing a wide range of tasks as part of the Monitors' role, but also as having the capacity and capability to move outside the set tasks and make decisions and solve problems using their initiative and support from her when needed.

Rosa also involved the IT Monitors in her own decision-making processes in regard to IT. She described the children as 'problem solvers' and welcomed their involvement in decision-making at a very high level of participation. For example, Rosa used the children's abilities and interests to give her feedback on the apps that would be useful on iPads for junior children:

> *What I did was I had a whole lot of apps on the iPads, all sorts of apps, rubbish ones, junky ones ... they did some work around what is this app, how is it going to help with my learning. We did some stuff around the age that it would be appropriate for – so is this an app that is going to be for the junior classes, the middle or the senior? … I would like to involve them more ... The lease on a lot of our stuff is coming up at the end of the year, so I would like some feedback from the kids in terms of what they would*

> *like in their classrooms that is going to help them. Whether they want more iPads and why, or would they rather be using laptops and why. I think I'd like to involve the kids in that decision making … I suppose when I think about the ICT job, it is a job … to get the deliveries from A to B, but I try to make it as authentic as possible in terms of "you can make some decisions around ICT and you can go and help other people".* [Rosa – TIC ICT]

This quote illustrates Rosa's intent for the children to 'have a say' in the leasing and purchasing decisions around devices and hardware that could not only inform Rosa, but would also provide opportunities for deeply authentic decision-making opportunities for the children. She recognised and valued children's latent knowledge, skills and abilities, and set up opportunities for the children to draw on these.

Whilst IT monitors no doubt saved time for teachers and perhaps even reduced teacher stress at times, the Monitors needed to be pro-active with teachers and make decisions about what needed to be done, how and when. Rosa also described the need to gently teach and facilitate the monitors in being respectful to teachers and the children in the classes in which they worked. The emphasis was on being humble in their work and serving people and the school, rather than thinking that they had more status or importance than other children did. As a result, while Rosa facilitated agency and recognised capability, she also encouraged the monitors to respect the capabilities of others, both teachers and children. This suggests sensitivity on Rosa's part in knowing when and how to provide opportunities for children to participate in decision-making, but also when and how to support and assist the children to acknowledge and build capabilities in others.

The kinds of roles children were able to carry out as Monitors were very differently conceptualised and enacted in each school. This depended largely on the adults who were 'in charge' of the Monitors and the ways in which they expected the roles to be carried out. Both schools valued children demonstrating responsibility. However, at Beacon Point School this lay in completing set tasks in particular ways, doing 'jobs' so that teachers did not have to, and not letting teachers down. The children were almost more accountable than responsible in roles that involved completing routine jobs, and appeared to have very little agency. At Morton Hill School, children still needed to complete certain set tasks

but they were also strongly encouraged to make their own decisions and solving problems as these arose. They were accountable for the set tasks, but also for exercised their own initiative, voice and agency to carry out their roles in emergent ways as problems, decisions and challenges arose for them. These findings suggest that the key values underpinning each school's positioning of children are quite distinct, and considerably impact on children's participation in decision-making.

Project-based opportunities for participation in decision-making: 'Package' groups

This second category of decision-making opportunities, 'Package' groups, existed only at Morton Hill School. These groups worked on particular projects and initiatives coordinated by teachers and linked to external organisations such as Travelwise, Health-Promoting Schools, Enviroschools, Schoolgen and Cool Schools. Travelwise, for example, is an Auckland Transport that promotes children either walking to school safely or using public transport rather than travelling in their parents' cars; Schoolgen, provided by Genesis Energy, promotes solar energy and energy efficiency in schools. In a small, low-decile school where funding and resourcing were ongoing challenges, these packages provided resources, expertise and sometimes personnel to the school at no cost. Packages the school chose to use tended to promote 'worthwhile' causes, behaviours and activities. This emphasis aligned with the school's human rights and social justice agendas, in that the selected packages offered children experiences they might not otherwise have, given the financial challenges that the school and community faced.

At least 100 children were involved in one or more of these packages. The children worked collaboratively with a teacher and each other to complete tasks that were 'whole school' in focus, and where all students benefited. Various teachers had the responsibility for coordinating the packages, and these teachers often had personal interests and skills that they brought to these groups. The descriptions that follow illustrate ways that teachers encouraged, facilitated and provided 'space' for children to participate in decision-making in these 'package' roles. The work of the groups was collaborative, child-focused and inclusive. Although this may be seen as another form of orchestrated decision-making opportunities, the data indicated that the decision-making here built on children's agency and provided for democratic and socially just activity.

Decision-making opportunities for children were particularly evident in activities associated with the school garden, inspired by involvement in the *Health Promoting Schools* package (Ministry of Health, 2015). Any child could take part at any time in activities such as weeding, planting, harvesting and cooking. Certain children preferred certain aspects of the programme and 'turned up' on days when they knew these tasks would be available, while others were highly involved year after year. One teacher, Annie, reported that she strived to involve children as much as possible and build the activity of the group around children's ideas and interests, providing an environment where children's participation in decision-making was the norm. In her interview, Annie consistently talked about "we" when describing the work of the group. She identified her own role as one of gentle advising and 'steering', and spoke passionately and positively about the children. She described her focus on actively involving them in planning for the term ahead and letting them shape and significantly influence decisions about, for example, what would be planted, what they might cook, and so on. The group's activity always had its origins in children's suggestions, and children participated fully in the decision-making activity as illustrated in the following quotes. At times, Annie needed to 'steer' children in particular ways, whilst still retaining the essence of their ideas:

> *[The children] wanted to do some cooking. It was quite hard to agree on what to do, because the things that they came up with were making pavlova or making dessert, chocolate cakes and cookies ... I had to steer it into some healthier options. So we made things like fried rice and corn fritters and beetroot salad, and using things from our garden as well.* [Annie – TIC School Garden]

At other times, children's agentic participation in decision-making was utilised to the full, with student's ideas often being carried through to completion:

> *The garden out there needed a bit of rejuvenation so we tackled that and weeded it ... we brainstormed what they wanted to do with the garden. One of them came up with the idea for a rainbow garden and as soon as she said it everyone else jumped on it and they were like "we could have different coloured vegetables and fruit and flowers". When we had the working bee last year, the building of the Rainbow Garden was one of the things that got done.* [Annie – TIC School Garden]

On another occasion, an idea to promote healthy eating through a children's disco was also actioned. The disco was organised by the children, involving more

decision-making about, for example, what the disco would entail, how they could raise some money for refreshments and prizes at the disco, and how they would encourage children to dress up and come to the disco. As a result, the children took on a type of service role with other children:

> *We are always talking about what they want to do and they always come with a million ideas ... they wanted to make food, not just them, but for everyone in the school to have an opportunity to make food … They also wanted to run some discos. We talked about how we could do a 5+ programme ... to try and promote children eating 5 fruit and veggies a day. They were like "Let's have a disco and call it a 5+ disco".* [Annie – TIC School Garden]

In contrast with the orchestrated Monitors' decision-making opportunities at Beacon Point School, at Morton Hill School there was little status or special attention attributed to the school garden children in regard to public recognition as individuals. Rather, Annie facilitated them in planning activities, making decisions and figuring out how they could extend the school garden's work to involve all children at the school.

The school garden also gave rise to actions that supported the human rights and social justice emphasis of Morton Hill School. Because the 'Parents' Room' at the school was directly adjacent to the school garden, connections formed between parents and the school garden group. Once children had cooked using ingredients from the garden, they were keen to take their food and recipes home to share with their parents. Any extra food left after cooking sessions was given to the Parents' Room or packaged up for children from families facing particular poverty challenges to take home. Such actions led to some parents from the Parents' Room helping children with weeding and planting. Eventually, Annie initiated after-school cooking classes for parents in the Parents' Room. She also managed to source some donated ingredients to supplement the garden produce. School garden children saw that their participation in this extension to the community of their activities was making a positive difference.

The nature of the school garden group's work was similar to that of the IT Monitors. In both contexts, children contributed to the school by completing tasks to ensure that 'things run smoothly'. These tasks were sometimes prescribed by adults but there were also many aspects that enabled children's participation in decision-making opportunities. Children's interests, abilities and capacity *as*

children were recognised and fostered. Children were encouraged to identify and develop their own ideas, and to work out how to bring these ideas to fruition. Adults supported children in overcoming any barriers they might face, and let them find out for themselves about what was possible to achieve and what was not. Adults asked children for their opinions and used this 'voice' to inform their own decision-making. Work was collaborative and collective, with an emphasis on creating benefits for all children at the school.

Other 'package' roles at Morton Hill School included these same aspects of participative decision-making, 'space' for agency and voice, working to include other children in the school, and a democratic, social justice ethos. Children involved in *Schoolgen* (Schoolgen, 2015), for example, organised several activities related to the programme including publicising energy conservation, writing items for the school newsletter, monitoring energy use in classrooms, and training younger 'buddies' in junior classes. Like the school garden group, these children were guided and facilitated by a teacher, Barbara, to achieve both their collectively constructed plans and involve other children. There was still task-completion activity but, as with the school garden roles, this was largely not controlled by adults and did not accord special privileges to children. Rather, the children at Morton Hill School figured out their own ways to carry out their plans and shared their work with the wider school community and involved others, as illustrated in the following quote:

> *We always start with a plan … they have some immediate goals and some global goals. We brainstormed the things in classrooms that would use energy and decided where to put thermometers … Now they're planning our big solar thing. Last year we had this really cool quiz day … they had a solar disco. That is their organisation … The kids do all of that. I don't do any of that … They make decisions, what is going to be included and how they are going to do it and who is going to do it … they have to make their own decisions … I don't tell them to do this.* [Barbara – TIC SchoolGen]

Morton Hill teachers consistently spoke similarly about the 'package' groups. While teachers sometimes gently 'steered' the children in a particular way, the children's voice and agency still set the prime direction. Each teacher spoke about their efforts to involve as many children as possible, and there were very few criteria that children needed to meet in order to participate. These teachers' views reflected an appreciation of the children's capacity and capability.

Teachers' use of brainstorming as a technique for children to generate ideas, then supporting them to select the most realistic options, was also evident in the interview data. Teachers facilitated opportunities for children to actively plan what they wanted to achieve within the various groups or projects in which they were participating. On the rare occasion that adults knew that children's ideas were unlikely to be successful, teachers supported the children to trial ideas to see what would work and what might not. These findings suggest that children's agency was consistently fostered – teachers did not have the leading role or the most status. Rather, teachers saw themselves as enablers and helpers so children could realise their ideas with as much independence and 'voice' as possible, as evidenced by Barbara's comment above. In this way, adults and children took complementary roles and worked together.

Informal opportunities for participation in decision-making: 'Entrepreneurship' roles.

The third data category that provided informal opportunities for children to participate in decision making was 'Entrepreneurship' roles. In most cases, these played out in child-initiated fundraising activities for charity or personal financial gain, and existed only at Beacon Point School. This role did not formally exist as a regular opportunity for students, but operated more on a case-by-case basis. For example, children were able to meet with the school's principal if they had ideas about raising money within the school by organising a special event or selling something. Teachers gave two main examples here - in one case, a child had returned from a holiday resort overseas with the desire to raise money for a local village that had incurred considerable damage from a tropical cyclone. With the principal's permission, this child and her family hosted regular cake stalls and the money was forwarded to the village. In practice, this involved the child's mother doing most of the baking for the stall, and the child and her friends selling these items at morning tea break to other students. As Mary shared:

> *There is a bake sale going on at the moment. Some girls who said that they wanted to raise money for a village in Fiji.* [Mary – TIC Student Leaders]

In general, participants appeared to accept these 'entrepreneurship roles' as being a valid component of the school's activity in regard to children's participation in decision-making. They viewed this as a worthwhile initiative, and teachers were accustomed to sending children with such ideas to the principal for

permission for the initiative to go ahead. In this way, such fund-raising was seen as an accepted part of the culture of the school and another way in which children could become 'responsible'. One participant, however, seemed discomforted by the cake stall, and expressed the irony of children holidaying in luxurious accommodation on a Pacific island and then wanting to raise money for disadvantaged families they had seen:

> *I think that has come up because they went for a holiday to Fiji and were swanning off in the sun for a while but then they've come back and there are some needy people over there … But the hearts are there, the hearts are in the right place. It is quite funny. One of the girls is in my class and they do, they come back with their hair braided and these are my photos, this is our beachfront spa we stayed at.* [Paul – TIC Sport]

This quote perhaps reflects notions of privilege and 'being special' in relation to these children. Having been accorded particular status and responsibility at school as Monitors, gaining permission to hold a cake stall to raise money for less privileged people may have underscored the children's general sense of themselves as being positioned 'above' others, a notion that is reported on later in this chapter.

This positioning was evident also in a similar child-facilitated initiative of a boy who wanted to sell food items in the school playground. In this case, the boy concerned gained permission from the principal and sourced the food items from the wholesaler, enabling him to sell these at a profit to other children. The child donated $200 to the school and kept the remainder of the money (approximately $400) for himself. As such, the school provided the 'site' for this child to generate a profit for himself. The principal praised this entrepreneurship, while other participants took the stance that he deserved the profits if he was prepared to put the time and effort into his project. Mary and Paul described this:

> *We have had children selling [food items] from [company]. He, and his parents admittedly, put together a proposal to [company] and they said Yep. And so he sold [food items] at Friday morning tea for the summer terms, and he made money and he also donated some back to the school.* [Mary – TIC Student Leaders]

> *His choice at the end, he gave a percentage back to the school, I think. But that was his initiative. He totally set that up and he approached [company] and sent them in his business plan … It goes in phases too. Often the kids*

> *will see other kids and think I can do something. When they do, often they'll get recognised … Other kids will see it and say I want to do something like that. Then Brett (the Principal) will get 15 knocks on the door saying I want to raise money for my Aunty's goat.* [Paul – TIC Sport]

Although Paul's comments suggested that he perceived this fund-raising as somewhat of a 'trend' amongst the children, other data suggested that the teachers and principal were very supportive of these endeavours, and saw this as an opportunity for children to have a 'voice' and to make decisions by managing an independent money-raising venture. The interview transcripts suggest a pride in these children taking the initiative in this way and in being 'successful' in generating money. Adults viewed this as children making and acting on decisions. However, rather than demonstrating independence, these roles suggest another form of children's compliance with perceived adults' expectations of what children should do and be. For example, the children in the Student Leaders' focus group remarked on the recognition given to these entrepreneurial activities at school assembly in ways that suggested these activities were in some way 'prized' by the school and worthy of particular acknowledgement and positive attention from adults. The very 'public' nature of these roles, the high degree of adult approval and admiration, and the status accorded to the children aligns with many aspects of the Monitors' roles. Again, a difference between the two schools is suggested, with different values underpinning children's participation in decision-making.

Formal 'student leadership' roles

The final data category indicated that 'Student Leadership' roles carried out by (s)elected children, assumed that those involved has particular decision-making and leadership roles and responsibilities in the school. These roles tended to be representational in nature – that is, children voted their peers into the role. These roles were played out very differently at the two schools. At Beacon Point School, traditional school rituals and school structures shaped student leadership opportunities. Children had defined roles that largely involved exerting control over other children. At Morton Hill School, on the other hand, having a student leadership role was regarded as a privilege wherein leaders served other children and advocated on their behalf.

At Beacon Point School, Student Leader and Deputy Leader roles linked to the school's four 'Houses' that have existed for over 100 years. Adults at Beacon Point very fondly described the House structure and Student Leaders' traditions as integral to both the history and current practices of the school in relation to student leadership. Children in Year 6 nominated their peers or themselves to be Student Leaders. After nomination, each student presented a short speech to his or her peers explaining their suitability to be a Leader and their aspirations for the role. The children then voted for who they believed would be the most suitable.

The interview data revealed a commitment of sorts by the teachers to the Student Leader selection process and its apparently democratic practices of nominations, speech-making, voting and majority rule. However, two participants described how teachers 'influenced' voting processes when teachers deemed potential leaders were unsuitable. According to two participants, it appeared that teachers imposed their own selection criteria by altering voting results in order to ensure that the 'right' students got elected. Hence, teachers were able to disrupt the election process depending on their own views and beliefs about potential Student Leaders. Teachers, they said, had even altered the voting results to prevent a relatively new student becoming a Student Leader in order to show loyalty to a child who had been at the school for a longer time:

> *Student Leaders ... are voted in by their peers, but also the teachers have a say to try to keep it reasonably balanced. But we hardly ever have to step in. Usually it is just a confirmation ... We had a girl arrive at our school this year, first time ... She came third ... In fact, she was actually second equal ... We didn't give her the Deputy Leader because the girl she came second equal with, she's been here 5-6 years ... we should show a bit of loyalty.* [Brett – Principal]

Once elected, Student Leaders' roles at Beacon Point School closely mirrored that of the Monitors – they carried out 'jobs', primarily by assisting teachers to organise children for House sports events. Findings from teacher interviews suggest that the teachers perceived the Student Leader role as being about leadership and decision-making. However, the interview data also suggested that teachers told the Leaders exactly what to do, how it was to be done, and when it was to be done. What teachers perceived as 'leadership' appeared to be comprised of event management and controlling younger children, along with compliance to certain instructions set by the teachers. The Leaders were

responsible for organising other children in particular ways. Brett, the school's principal, espoused that children are being 'leaders', while also describing the role as one of getting equipment and looking after younger children:

> *Student Leaders organise events ... they organise lunch time sports for little kids. So [House name] might play [House name] in a game ... But they do it, it is not organised by the teachers, the kids are being the leaders. They have to go and get the gear and monitor the kids and we just leave them to it. There is no supervision from staff.* [Brett - Principal]

Amy's description suggested a similarly narrow role of 'organisation' alongside surprise that the Leaders could carry out this role successfully:

> *We met with the eight Student Leaders and we gave them a brief and it was basically rules of the game and what we needed them to organise. I wouldn't have thought they could do it, but they did. It was amazing. They had to get there and get the teams organised and practice and then we ran a tournament ... It was great.* [Amy – TIC PE]

Paul's listing of the various components of the Leaders' role gives further insight into the organisational aspect of the Leaders' role, and the extent to which adults are providing the parameters of what needs to be done and how it must be done:

> *A lot of their responsibilities do come back to sport ... they're in charge of looking after their House and motivate them and get them involved and encourage them and things like that. They've enjoyed it. So basically for the softball which I ran, I just put together a set of rules, these are the rules that you're going to play by, you need to have this many people on your team, this many boys or this many girls minimum. And then just had a quick meeting with the Student Leaders and said these are the rules ... You need to put together a team. There is the schedule, you'll be playing this house on this day, go and organise it.* [Paul – TIC Sport]

At Morton Hill School, student leadership roles also existed, although the processes and underpinning values and beliefs contrast with Beacon Point School. At Morton Hill, Student Leaders mostly nominated themselves for the role. It was not uncommon for every child in a class to stand for election, suggesting that all children believed they could take up a leadership role along with a perception of leadership as a collective and cooperative activity. All classes were involved from Year 1 to Year 6, although junior school teachers played a more active role than senior school teachers in facilitating the election

process and encouraging children to put themselves forward, in order to support these younger children. At all levels, the children gave a short talk to the class and then children and teachers voted. Whoever was elected took up the role. Teachers were keen to preserve the democratic process. Most teachers ensured that one boy and one girl were selected, but no other criterion was consistently applied by staff, and no manipulation of voting was reported by the participants:

> *So for my class [Year 3-4] we talked about the Student Leaders' group and the kind of people that we were looking for. Then we had everyone who wanted to be a Student Leader, which was three-quarters of the class, stand up and say why they wanted to do it. Then at the end people voted. It was a secret vote ... I thought the ones who are doing it, I think they're the right people for the job. There are responsibilities, they do have to report back and there is an expectation that they talk to their class mates and take ideas to [the meetings] as well. I think it is probably achievable for a lot of children to be able to do. The ones who have been selected I would say are reasonably popular, but I don't think that is why they were selected.* [Annie – TIC School Garden]

> *My kids who are Leaders, one is a Year 5 and one is a Year 6, and that was purely a democratic process at the beginning of the year to choose them. Not the two kids I would have thought they chose, they're not the most vocal kids.* [Rosa – TIC ICT]

These quotes also reflected a quite different ethos held by Morton Hill teachers when compared to Beacon Point teachers. Rather than manipulating the process to ensure their preferred children are elected, Morton Hill teachers let the process take its course, and showed support for those elected as the leadership role unfolded over time.

Student Leaders had particular decision-making, leadership and advocacy roles and responsibilities at Morton Hill School. Although the role of Student Leader was recognised as important, being a Student Leader was understood as a privilege and a responsibility – Leaders knew that they must serve those who voted for them. The main task of these Leaders was representing their classmates as spokespeople and advocating for their interests. They did this by collecting children's views and ideas about what they would like the school to be or have in order to improve it for children. They then presented these ideas to the Student Leaders' meetings facilitated by the principal, Lana. The school's human

rights ethos was clearly reflected in Lana's description of the participative decision-making environment she was creating, of which the Student Leaders were an integral part. Her belief in children as capable, agentic beings within the school 'community' was also reflected here. The following quote illustrates these attitudes and also indicates Lana's clear understanding of participation, voice and agency:

> *I think there is a real emphasis on students' belonging, owning and being able to have their input into the school too … My idea of children contributing to decision making is around allowing the opportunities first of all, for them to be able to authentically contribute to decision making … It is not contrived. It is not necessarily planned at times. I think that is around the culture of a school. Children knowing that they actually have the right to be able to express firstly their opinion around what is happening in the school, and also that they can do something about it. They've got the power to do something about something that is not making them happy.* [Lana - Principal]

An example of this voice and agency in action follows. A small group of children wanted the school to have 'pets'. This idea was brought to Lana, the principal, at the Student Leaders' meeting, where she facilitated the development of the idea through skilful questioning. This was designed to get the children thinking about what planning and actions they needed to implement, what they needed to find out, what some of the barriers might be along the way, brainstorming solutions, and deciding what sort of animals might make the best school pets. Eventually, the school built a temporary shelter for the newly purchased rabbits. The children then had to work out how to ensure that the rabbits were cared for and kept secure. They also had to plan for their care during weekends and school holidays, raise funds for their food, organise feeding and cleaning rosters for the rabbits during the day, and so on. Once the rabbits were permanently housed, they became a long-standing feature of the school. This example illustrates how Lana and other adults supported the children in bringing their ideas to fruition, despite knowing from an adult perspective that the children would encounter challenges along the way. Even though it would perhaps have been easier for adults to discourage the notion of school pets in order to avoid several logistical issues that they could foresee, the children's ideas were taken seriously. Furthermore, the children not only solved many of the problems they faced along the way but were encouraged and supported to do so in ways that were child-

generated, rather than adults taking a dominant role. When children proposed ideas, rather than alert them to all the difficulties, challenges and problems inherent in their ideas, the principal instead used open questions so that they would end up with a more complete and realistic understanding of the practical implications of their ideas:

> *Rather than telling children that 'You can't do that because…' we need to take the stance of: 'I wonder if you could do that. What do you need to find out? Who do you think could help you? What should we do next to get this idea going?'* [Lana - Principal]

Lana shared the written Minutes of one meeting where the possibility of building a tree-house was discussed. A student had written the Minutes, showing various ideas brought to the meeting by class representatives, questions that the group needed to consider, and agreed actions that they would take with help from their classmates and teachers. These minutes provided further evidence that the children were active decision-makers. The minutes showed they engaged in discussions leading to independent, action-based group activities, with the support of Lana. Furthermore, these decision-making opportunities enabled children to act, think and decide *as children,* rather than undertaking tasks and controlling other children's behaviour the way teachers might.

Lana facilitated children's voice and agency by supporting them to pursue their ideas, rather than stopping them from pursuing projects that she knew to be impossible to accomplish for various reasons. In the case of the treehouse which the children wanted to a build in a large pohutukawa tree, Lana already knew that this could not be done because of the height restrictions placed on playground structure by the Ministry of Education. These restrictions vary depending on the surface below the equipment onto which children could fall – in the case of the treehouse, such a fall would be several metres onto a concrete netball court surface below. Lana supported the children to write an email to the Ministry of Education to check the feasibility of their idea and the children received a reply email that described the relevant rules and regulations, enabling the children to realise that their idea was not feasible and why. Therefore, by Lana asking: "That sounds like a really fun thing to have at our school. I wonder who could tell us about whether we could do that or not?", she facilitated the children to explore the feasibility of their idea rather than merely telling them that it would not be allowed.

This was not so much a process of 'negotiation' or the exertion adult power, but a suggestion of a 'real-life' way that children could find out for themselves if they could build a treehouse through an authentic action – writing an email to the Ministry of Education. This process allowed adults to support children's voice, agency and participation. In some instances children learnt that their ideas were not going to be 'do-able' and the reasons for this, just as adults cannot always carry out every idea they have for change. The children learnt that, at times, there are rules and laws that constrain what we can do. This does not limit their voice or agency however – rather, it adds to their understanding that voice sometimes has limits that are externally imposed by society and our legal/government structures. Children's voice could still be nurtured in this example by encouraging the children to adapt their idea to something that could be built within the height restrictions that children would still enjoy, such as a seat going around the tree for children to sit on when they ate lunch.

The findings suggest that the Student Leaders' system offered Morton Hill children opportunities to experience and exercise democratic principles, participation and agency. All children were able to participate in decision-making through, for example, voting for their preferred Leader, letting the Student Leaders know of their ideas for making school a better place, having their ideas presented directly to the principal at the Leaders' meetings, and seeing at least some of their ideas coming to fruition. These practices also aligned with the work of the teachers and children in the 'package' roles and in Monitors' roles. Children's capabilities and interests *as children* appeared to be honoured and valued, and children were encouraged to strike a balance between, on the one hand, the excitement of their own activity and participation and, on the other hand, to be humble and respectful of others at all times. Children's ideas and interests were taken seriously, and children also experienced the decision-making, negotiation, planning processes and hard work that was needed to make their ideas a reality. Beacon Point School did not offer such examples of voice and agency. Rather, the imposition of various 'rules,' such as the use of a set script for leading assembly, served to reduce voice opportunities substantially.

Part 2: Children's participation in decision-making: Children's perspectives

This part shares findings related to the children's perspectives of their participation in decision-making in their schools, the ways that they positioned

people and groups within the school as decision-makers, and how they positioned themselves. Where participant quotes are used, the abbreviations BP or MH readily indicate whether the quote is from a child at Beacon Point School or at Morton Hill School. For example:

> *You have to take responsibility for what you choose 'cos it's your choice.* [Hettie, BP, 10 years]

Children's understandings of 'decision-making'

The children at both schools demonstrated an understanding of the concepts of 'decisions' and 'decision-making'. The quotes below illustrate that the older children in particular were easily able to articulate these understandings:

> *A choice, you choose No or Yes.* [Scott, BP]
>
> *You have to take responsibility for what you decide 'cos it's your choice.* [Hettie, BP, 10 years]
>
> *It's like there's two paths, and you choose which way to go.* [Ryan, BP]
>
> *Doing something without anyone telling you – you make the decision.* [Tim, BP, 10 years]
>
> *You just talk about stuff and then you make a decision.* [Sahil, MH, 11 years]
>
> *You have to choose something, and you have to say what you want.* [Tilly, MH, 9 years]
>
> *When you choose something, it's your ideas, you choose from the options.* [Susan, MH, 9 years]
>
> *You get to say what you want, but you can talk to other people about it.* [Rashid, MH, 10 years]

In general, children appeared to understand about choosing between alternatives, expressing what they thought and making decisions based on their own ideas and opinions. These data also suggested that the children viewed themselves as capable of making good decisions, even if they knew someone else had a different view. However, there was a difference here between the schools, with Beacon Point children emphasising making a choice between alternatives, while the Morton Hill children's responses indicated a more agentic element to decision-making where potential choices were numerous and 'what you want' was important. This finding reflects those from the previous section concerned with participation sites and opportunities. Children from Beacon Point School articulated an understanding of decision-making that suggested the same

sort of constrained, pre-set process that the Student Leaders carried out at that school. Morton Hill children, on the other hand, described decision-making as a shared activity where everyone could participate and where everyone's ideas and contributions were valued.

A distinction was also evident in the ways that the children described their opportunities for participating in decision-making at their schools, as these reflected their experiences as Student Leaders. Beacon Point children commonly portrayed themselves as being given a small number of options or choices, with these being decided in advance by teachers. For example, the children talked about being able to choose what Mathematics activity they wanted to do, whether or not they wanted to participate in an inter-school sports event and what colour T-shirt they wanted to wear to a choir performance. These examples also related to decision-making as a limited and solitary activity, with few examples emerging from their roles as Student Leaders:

> *We got to vote about the colours of the tops for singing, out of purple or aqua.* [Tim, BP, 10 years]
>
> *We had to learn a poem but it could be any poem we wanted as long as it had a certain rhythm.* [Jason, BP, 10 years]
>
> *Sometimes we choose who we want to work with in a group, like, who we want to sit with for that thing we are doing.* [Ryan, BP, 10 years]

When asked about the decisions at Beacon Point School in which they had participated, the children seemed to understand the question. However, they were not able to give any specific examples of this, even though they had several ideas about why children might participate in decision-making:

> *So they can help the teachers.* [Tim, BP, 10 years]
>
> *So we learn how to take responsibility.* [Chloe, BP, 11 years]
>
> *So we can step up for yourself.* [Lana, BP, 11 years]
>
> *To help us get ready for intermediate school.* [Zara, BP, 11 years]
>
> *So we can take on commitments and develop our independence.* [Tim, BP, 10 years]
>
> *To make us not rely on others to make decisions.* [Charlotte, BP, 11 years]

These responses suggest a view of decision-making as something that children do to prepare them for the 'next stage' of their lives and for adulthood - a notion of children that positions them as 'becoming' rather than 'being'. Decision-making was also positioned here as an independent and solitary activity that served

oneself – there was a sense of individualism and the importance of 'self'. Some of the children's comments, furthermore, indicated a sense of apology about their own shortcomings as decision-makers, because teachers needed to 'improve' or 'confirm' their decisions. The limited nature of their participation in decision-making at Beacon Point was again evident here – children could make only 'small' decisions about things that they understood, and adults needed to step in and correct or improve these decisions:

> *Teachers have the final say.* [Tim, BP, 10 years]
>
> *We get a say in small matters that we understand.* [Terrence, BP, 11 years]
>
> *We get to make small decisions. Like in our class our teachers says who wants to go swimming? She gets to have the main vote, but she lets us have a small vote so that we feel like we're actually doing something.* [Layne, 10 years]
>
> *Sometimes we make bad decisions but the teachers corrects them a little bit so they are good decisions, so we make OK decisions but they make them into better decisions.* [Jason, BP, 10 years]
>
> *We do have a say but not much.* [Kyle, BP, 11 years]

Overall, the Beacon Point Student Leaders communicated a view of children's participation in decision-making as a passive, adult-initiated and adult-controlled activity. All of the children believed that they *did* participate, but the examples given were of task-completion, decision-making from a limited set of options, and a lack of authentic opportunities for agency. Even when three children began to articulate that adults were only paying lip-service to children's participation, other children responded by reasserting their status as Student Leaders, responding with such statements as "Yes we do make decisions!" and "We do so get a chance to say what we want!". A particularly interesting comment showed how one child thought that the Student Leaders were "the mini 2ICs of the school" [Scott – 11 years] and could "learn what it feels like to be a teacher" [Hettie – 10 years]. Student Leaders were believed to "manage the House" [Gia – 11 years], "teach their House" [Jason – 10 years] and "put the kids in line [in sport] and keep them in line" [Scott – 11 years]. Despite Tim's protestations that Student Leaders did not make any decisions, the other children continued to quote very simplistic examples of choice and decision-making. These examples suggested limited agentic decision-making opportunities for these children.

The findings revealed that the children at Morton Hill School had a depth of understanding about decision making - not just in their ability to define it, but to also articulate their actions as examples of decision making in action. Their responses closely aligned with examples that the adults had talked about, and reflected decision-making as an agentic, active and collaborative pursuit. Furthermore, in this context, the findings revealed examples of how children's interests and ideas were welcomed, valued and viewed as important. In this way, children were able to act and interact *as children*, and appeared to see participation in decision-making more broadly than just themselves. These responses reflected a collectivist stance in relation to the Student Leader role at Morton Hill, rather than an individualist positioning where status, privilege and power characterised the activity. All of the Morton Hill children shared examples which showed that they were aware they represented their classmates and that their role was to collect ideas from their class and then to feed back to them after the Student Leaders' meetings with the principal. This structure appeared to enable all children in the school to participate in decision-making, with the Student Leaders being the conduit as representatives, but also responsible for bringing ideas to fruition. Thus, the Leaders had responsibilities towards others, being expected to diligently and appropriately carry out their roles. In many ways, this arrangement reflected democratic principles of representation, redistribution and recognition, as well as facilitating children in participating in decision-making. The following conversation extract describes their participation in decision-making about getting rabbits for the school:

> *We have ideas to improve the school. We tell [the principal]. We get ideas from our class about stuff like rubbish, Tech Day, the tree house, pets – we've got rabbits now.* [Tane, MH – 9 years]
>
> *We voted on the rabbits. The whole school voted on their names.* [Deanna, MH – 8 years]
>
> *Then we had to fund-raise for the food and the cage.* [Ben, MH, 7 years]
>
> *We try to do the things that we can do. Sometimes we can't do the ideas*. [Sahil, MH – 11 years]
>
> *We are thinking about whether we can swap playgrounds but [the principal] says there is a reason why the juniors can't go on the big playground. It's too high or something.* [Ben, MH, 7 years]

The role of Student Leaders at Morton Hill School and the principal's reasons for having a student leadership group are further illustrated in the following conversation. The children viewed their role as participating not just in the act of

decision-making, but in the collective activity of improving the school and helping the principal to achieve this:

> *It's to help her make decisions.* [Sahil, MH – 11 years]
>
> *Yeah, she wants help with her decision-making.* [Rashid, MH – 10 years]
>
> *And she wants leaders of different ages.* [Adam, MH - 9 years]
>
> *So we get to decide more.* [Susan, M – 5 years]
>
> *And to make changes to the school.* [Ben, MH – 7 years]
>
> *She wants to know the kids' ideas, not just the grown-ups.* [Hannah, MH – 8 years]
>
> *Cos it's actually the children who want the stuff.* [Sahil, MH – 11 years]

Decision-making was perceived as a co-operative and collaborative activity. This was evidenced in the Morton Hill children's completion of the institutional diagramming activity. They took some time and effort to ensure that everyone at the school (including relievers, teacher aides, the caretaker and the principal's partner) as well as their own parents, were recognised as participating in decision-making and accorded a circle. The children positioned the various circles as they undertook the task, and then discussed how the overall arrangement of the circles should look. After trying several different ideas for this, the conclusion was reached that "Everyone's involved!", whereupon all of the circles, apart from that of the Board of Trustees and those depicting all students in the school, were swept into a pile together (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5. 1: Student Leaders' positioning of people and groups

In the photovoice activity, Morton Hill children were mindful of photographing only those things where they felt that *every* child in the school had participated, either in a decision-making process or actually physically making a component, or had

equal access to. Thus, the 'Food Garden' was included (Figure 5.2) as all children had access to it as part of the school site. As Deanna (8 years) said, "This is for everybody". The children also decided to photograph a mural depicting children and a human rights-related message (Figure 5.3), commenting that "All children have rights at school" [Ben – 7 years] and "They are all equal" [Adam – 9 years]. Similarly, a painted figure of a girl fixed to the school fence was photographed (Figure 5.4), with the children noting that this was important because "That's about all of us 'cos that's about everyone being safe and happy at school" [James – 9 years]. In contrast to Beacon Point School, children were not concerned to take pictures of themselves. Instead they focused on locating sites where *children* had taken a role in decision-making, rather than where *they* had taken as role as Student Leaders. This echoed their collectivist view of the people within the school that was portrayed in the institutional diagramming exercise.

Figure 5. 2: Food Garden entry

Figure 5. 3: Human rights mural, painted by students

Figure 5. 4: Figures on the school fence

Student views of participation in decision-making at Morton Hill were very different from those at Beacon Point, where Student Leaders undertook the same data generation activities as at Morton Hill, including the institutional diagramming activity described earlier in this thesis. The findings related to this context revealed that decision making was related to power and status. In both the Student Leaders' and the Deputy Leaders' groups, the children accorded various circles to adults and children. For example, in the Deputy Leaders' group the Board of Trustees was allocated the largest circle because "They can expel people" [Zara – 11 years]. The principal and one of the deputy principals were accorded middle-sized circles, as the children knew that these two staff were Board members. The Parent-Teachers Association (PTA) was also placed on a middle-sized circle because "They raise the money" [Anna – 11 years], as were

the teachers who the children felt had “A medium amount” [Lana – 11 years] of participation. Parents and office staff were accorded the smallest circles, along with Student Leaders, Deputy Leaders, children and Teacher Aides (see Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5 shows that there was a perceived hierarchy with regard to decision making and participation within the school context. Despite not being directed to create a hierarchy, the children arranged the circles to position these in relation to each other. They used words like “above”, “higher”, “below” and “about the same” while sorting the circles. They identified some adults as having more decision-making opportunities than others, and this also held true for children. I was particularly interested in the positioning of Office Monitors as being ‘above’ the general population of children as this suggested an element of status afforded to these Monitors. Teacher aides were clearly positioned ‘below’ everyone, and placed at the ‘bottom’ of the hierarchy. The children viewed themselves as more important and with power and status exceeding that of all other children.

Figure 5. 5: Participation in decision-making: Deputy Student Leaders' identification and positioning of people and groups

The Student Leaders’ group at Beacon Point School identified similar people and groups as Deputy Leaders, with the addition of the ‘Government’, and the caretaker (name blurred) with the staff and parents/adults. They also listed the principal, the Board of Trustees, the PTA, “some parents” [Terrence – 11 years],

teachers, and “maybe the kids” [Tim – 10 years]. ‘Children’ were divided into Year 5 and 6 students, and Year 1-4 students. Again, the children arranged the circles into a hierarchy, but extended the hierarchy by also folding the smallest circles in half and then into quarters when they realised there were only three sizes of circles. This clearly showed the Leaders’ perceptions of degrees of decision-making participation, as well as the hierarchical relationships between individuals and groups. In particular, this indicated a clear delineation in the positioning of Leaders, Year 5 and 6 children, and all other children. They appeared to be positioning themselves as being more involved in decision-making than other children when, as the data suggest, this was probably not the case. ‘Leadership’ was equated with decision-making in a way that suggested that power and status were also important factors. The children seemed to view themselves as more important and with power and status exceeding that of all other children. Figure 5.6 shows the institutional diagramming completed by the Student Leaders at Beacon Point School.

Figure 5. 6: Participation in decision-making: Student Leaders’ identification and positioning of people and groups

Beacon Point Leaders and Deputy Leaders worked together on the photo-voice activity. Their artefacts and contributions focused on two main subjects – evidencing collaborative artworks where each child had their work included, and places and objects in the school about which they were aggrieved. Their discussion of these places and objects indicated a sense of unease about their

roles and responsibilities that had started to emerge in the focus group discussions – the children began to articulate some different notions about their participation in decision-making. They used the photo-voice activity to express where they had *not* participated in decision-making, rather than where they had. For example, the children photographed the school field to show the location of new temporary classrooms built here rather than in the area where several trees were cut down (Figure 5.7). The children were of the opinion that the trees had been destroyed for no reason and seemed angry about the new classrooms taking up field space. They took a photo of themselves playing on the junior playground to show that the playground was not 'too small' for them, that they should be allowed to play on it, and that some components were too high or difficult for the junior children to be able to use at any rate in their view (Figure 5.8). They also expressed their feelings of frustration that a petition signed by every Year 6 child in support of being allowed on the junior playground had been ignored by the principal and teachers. They had demonstrated agency in raising the petition, only to find that their perceived status and privilege as Student Leaders had not worked in their favour.

Figure 5. 7: The empty site created by tree felling (left), and the eventual location of new classrooms (right).

Figure 5. 8: Children demonstrating their use of the junior school playground.

In summary, the photos taken by the children at both schools illustrated the clear distinction between the schools in relation to the children's perceptions with regard to participation in decision-making. At Morton Hill School, the Student Leaders were quick to identify what they wanted to photograph and, overall, a collectivist viewpoint was evident – these children knew that they 'worked' for all the children in their own classes, and that what had come to fruition from their work – for example, the school's rabbits being purchased and looked after - was accessible to and of benefit to all of the children at the school. At Beacon Point School, on the other hand, the Leaders were aggrieved that when they voiced their ideas about things that mattered to them, they felt they had not been listened to. For example, they had organised a petition in the hope of being allowed to play on the new junior school playground. They felt their point of view had not been taken into account even though every Year 6 child has signed the petition. Although they were able to identify sites around the school where a number of children's individual contributions made up the finished product, such as a mural, they did not identify any sites where they believed children had participated in decision-making.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings from the interviews carried out with the 'key informant' adults, and the focus group discussions and related activities conducted with the children who participated in this research. The findings indicated that a wide variety of formal and informal roles and opportunities existed across the two schools in regard to children's participation in decision-making. However, important differences were evident between the two schools in regard to the degree of agency, voice and authentic decision-making 'power' that was available to the children. This depended on adults' understanding of children's rights, their values and beliefs in regard to children's competency and capacity to participate in decision-making, and the existence of agentic and democratic structures and practices that supported and championed children's participation. The next chapter discusses these findings in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the research findings and considers them alongside the themes noted in the literature review and in relation to the research questions. The chapter is organised into four parts. Part One discusses conceptualisations of children's competencies and rights as these exist in the two schools. Part Two examines the ways in which children's participation in decision-making is understood by the adults in each school along with the ways in which children are positioned. Part Three examines notions of democracy, citizenship and agency as portrayed in the research findings. Finally, Part Four considers the findings in relation to the social justice concepts of recognition, redistribution and representation, and presents a model of children's participation in decision-making.

Part One: Children, childhood and children's rights

Children and childhood

The findings of this research suggest that children and childhood were seen in very different ways by the adults in the two participating schools. These very diverse perceptions of children in the two schools, along with particular attitudes towards children's right to participate in decisions that affected them, created environments and ways of behaving for both adults and children.

'Adults-in-becoming' or 'children-as-beings'

The literature review highlights two opposing views of children, that of children as 'adults-in-becoming' and 'children-as-beings' (Mayall, 2013; McNamee, 2016; Wyness, 2012a). This research identified these two views in the schools studied. In contexts where children were perceived as needing close direction and control, their participation in decision-making was considerably constrained in their role of carrying out adults' instructions and doing 'jobs' for adults. A particular incongruity was evident here as, even though adults certainly saw children as being in the 'stage' of childhood, children were not recognised as having valuable traits, capabilities and strengths *as children*. Rather, the emphasis on biological age and perceived immaturity underpinned the notion of children as 'adults-in-becoming'. The ways in which children were also encouraged to exert a particular kind of authority over other children allowed then to 'play' at being adults, in roles that gave them considerable status.

Children were positioned as 'adults-in-becoming' at Beacon Point School, but also as existing in the "separate haven of childhood … stranded in a kind of time warp" as described by James and Prout (2015b). This position was not that of a child, as their role was replete with instructions, jobs and responsibilities. However, this position was also not that of an adult, as children were not permitted to participate in decision-making in ways that recognised their interests and capabilities. Instead, they occupied a space between these two groups, where they served adults' needs as the 'doers of jobs', almost as 'mini-adults'. This notion of 'mini-adults' is not the same as 'adults-in-becoming' however. I argue that the term 'pseudo-adults' may be a better description here, a notion appearing only in education-focused literature concerned with child-centred pedagogy as far as I have been able to ascertain.

This idea of 'pseudo-adults' is somewhat similar to Read's (2008) concept of 'pseudo-adultification' where "the differential power relation between teachers and pupil is emphasised as little as possible" (p. 613) in order for the pupil to have a higher degree of agency in the classroom through the teacher's "construction of the pupil" (p. 613). Read (2008) found, however, that the teacher's authority over students remained as high as that of teachers who did not espouse this more liberal approach in the classroom. In Read's (2008) work, as at Beacon Point School, 'pseudo' invokes ideas of something being fake, pretend, artificial or phony, even when teachers believe that they are increasing student agency through practices intended to be liberal and democratic. These are notions that accurately account for the ways in which children at Beacon Point School were carrying out particular roles in particular places that, to some extent, echoed the work of the adults in the school. I would suggest that this is a much more problematic conceptualisation of 'childhood' than the dichotomies of childhood and adulthood described in the literature (see, for example: Alderson, 2003; Mayall, 2013; McNamee, 2016; Wyness, 2015). These children were effectively given roles as 'adults' and they performed work for teachers. In the contexts where they were put 'in charge' of younger children, they exerted power in order to assume a superordinate role over these younger peers, a role that was expected of them by teachers and other adults.

A view of children as pseudo-adults is in considerable contrast to modern sociological thinking regarding the status of children. Rather than being recognised for their own particular capabilities *as children* at Beacon Point

School, they were positioned by adults as workers with pseudo-power and pseudo-status who garnered the obedience of younger children. Ironically, these children, despite their elevated social positioning, almost completely lacked any real authentic decision-making opportunities related to their own interests. While carrying out 'work' for teachers and other adults in the school, the only decisions they needed to make were to choose between options already decided by the adults. As pseudo-adults they were neither wholly adults nor children.

'Pseudo-adulthood' is also echoed in Wyness' (2015) description of children being positioned in *interstitial* ways – between public and private spaces within their family lives and also in institutions and contexts that are external to the family. Occupying an 'interstitial' space, or interstice, means to be in a small space between two things that are positioned very closely together. Thus, the children at Beacon Point School existed in interstitial ways, not only in the way that Wyness (2015) describes, but also within the school context as Student Leaders. In fact, these Student Leaders were little more than figureheads. Rather than the student leadership system being based on children's interests and abilities, it acted to perpetuate children's subservience to adults. Furthermore, the problematic control that was exercised by Leaders over other children suggests that power had been bestowed by teachers onto these 'special' students that allowed them to control their peers and, more particularly, much younger children. The Leaders' 'space', then, existed between the adult space on one side where teachers exhibited power and authority over them and, on the other side, the space that other children occupied. In a space of being neither adults nor children in a school context, pseudo-adulthood emerged.

Adults' thinking about children and childhood may also, in contrast, be underpinned by an appreciation of children's strengths, interests and abilities. At Morton Hill School, adults' thinking about children and childhood was not overtly expressed, but was implied in the ways in which children were involved in decision-making by encouraging their strengths, interests and capabilities. In this low decile, multicultural school it would be easier, perhaps, for teachers and leaders to focus solely on the basic needs of children, such as whether they had sufficient food and clothing and therefore view children as "vulnerable, dependent, naïve and innocent" (Te One, 2011, p. 42). Although these socioeconomic needs were catered for by the school, this did not define the ways in which staff thought about and involved children. The children were seen as

'children', and adults spoke of and interacted with children as active participants with particular abilities, views and experiences (Mayall, 2013). They also demonstrated that they believed students had the ability to be social actors (Wyness, 2012a) in an agentic sense, and were capable of making a difference to the school for other children. In this way, Morton Hill School appeared to understand that "realising participation rights in a compulsory space requires various preconditions and careful thought how to alleviate existing structures of power" (Perry-Hazan, 2019, p. 3).

Wyness' (2013a) idea of 'spaces' for children rather than just 'places' is reflected in the positioning of children at Morton Hill School. In such spaces, Wyness (2013a) believes that children can work comfortably alongside adults with the latter acting as collaborators and protagonists, providing "a more relational approach to children's participation, recognising the respective roles and positions of children and adults" (p. 435). This 'space' is largely a children's space, characterised by interdependent relationships between children and adults. Adults 'step in' and 'step out' as they are required by children *as well as* when adults see that their support, encouragement or expertise might be helpful. The locus of control, however, remains largely with the children. As a result, the school becomes not just a 'place' for children, but also a 'space' where children's participation in decision-making is child-centric. Such 'space' is identified by Hart (1992) in Levels 4-8 of his *Ladder of participation* where children's participation is taken beyond just fulfilling a symbolic function. Importance is placed on children having a choice about the focus and manner of their participation, as well as opportunities to voice their own opinions in a context of decreased adult control and influence. They are acknowledged as both children-as-beings who are also 'future-adults' rather than pseudo-adults, As Mansfield, Welton and Halx (2012) note, it is important that students' ideas and voices are valued and listened to, not only because of the immediate benefits that this brings, but also because children can begin to develop skills for adulthood that will enable them to be contributing members of society in the future.

Children and childhood – a tale of two schools

Although this research did not set out to draw comparisons, marked differences between the two schools were apparent in relation to the positioning of children and the impact on children's participation in decision-making. The contrast in the ways in which children and childhood were understood and positioned by adults

at the two schools is summarised in Table 6.1. Table 6.1 combines notions from a number of authors (Alderson, 2012; Bragg, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2015; Fielding, 2009; Thomson, 2010; Wyness, 2012b) in relation to children and childhood.

Table 6. 1: Positionings of children: Participation in decision-making

Beacon Point School	**Morton Hill School**
traditional/conventional	contemporary/innovative
cognisant of privilege	cognisant of responsibilities and service
evocative of status/individualism	evocative of contribution/collectivism
'power over' other children	'power with' other children
adult-initiated	child and/or adult-initiated
adult-controlled	adult-supported
symbolic	authentic
related to 'jobs' and 'work'	related to 'participation'

The ways in which children were positioned created socially-produced 'spaces' that were "organised to produce and reproduce practices [and] used to create and maintain particular forms of relationships" (McGregor, 2004, p. 13). As I have already noted, Wyness (2013a) speaks of schools as providing a 'place' for children's participation in decision-making, but not a 'space'. Rather than this space being "a material or geographical dimension" (Wyness, 2013a, p. 436), Wyness describes the "ethical and social dimensions of space, where adult-child relations are interdependent, where this interdependence allows for children to be heard and where children work alongside adults" (p. 437). Although both schools set out to provide opportunities for children's participation, it was the more intangible components that characterised the 'space' for this.

These intangible components of children's 'space' include the values and attitudes that adults hold about children, the ways in which children are positioned in relation to adults, the intent for inclusion expressed by teachers in relation to children's participation, and the extent to which a participation ethos permeates school processes and activities on the whole. I argue, then, that adults' positioning of children is a power mechanism, as adults exert authority and control over children. This use of power persists because, as Wyness (2012a) notes, "adults are the key agents [and] childhood is fundamentally a product of the way adults think about and talk about children" (p. 30). Therefore,

the use of 'space' described above ensures the persistence of certain ways of utilising power, both where power is misused by adults to exert control over children, as well as where power is redistributed by adults in order to facilitate democratic notions of social justice and participation. Adults' relationships with children, the design of student leadership mechanisms and the nature of decision-making opportunities all served to fashion these 'spaces' for children. In one setting, power was distributed and redistributed in ways that allowed participation in decision-making, along with the benefits to be derived from this, to be available and accessible to all in a socially-just environment. In the other setting, power was used to distribute status and authority to 'selected' others, thereby limiting both decision-making opportunities and the privilege to access these. Again, adults are key in shaping and maintaining particular views of children in the ways that Wyness (2012a) describes.

These uses of 'power' by adults contributed significantly to the extent to which children's 'spaces' at school reflected a socially just, democratic approach to participation in decision-making, a notion also reflected in Wyness' description of children's 'space' (2013a). However, despite notions of power, powerlessness, empowerment, sharing power and (re)distributing power resonating throughout the literature concerned with children's participation in decision-making, I argue that it is the link between power and participation that allows for the creation of this 'space' or not. As I have previously noted, the act of 'giving' power to children is often seen as a 'zero-sum' game (Federle, 2018; Nelson, 2017); if adults give power away or empower children, then children will have more power and adults will have less. Instead, I contend that if adults think more about building participation opportunities for children, rather than 'giving them power', then a more socially just context can be ensured as participation subsumes consultation, voice and agency within it, as depicted in Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2. If children's participation is facilitated and prioritised, then children will be engaging with others in democratic and socially just contexts where they have opportunities to share power and ownership of decision-making with adults.

Children's rights

The findings of this study support the argument that adults' positioning of children is both underpinned by, and illustrative of, those adults' beliefs about the rights of children to participate in decisions made about them. As highlighted in the Literature Review chapter, the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the*

Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989), to which New Zealand is a signatory, describes those rights that should be accorded to all children. Of particular relevance to this study is Article 12 of the UNCRC which outlines children's rights in regards to participation – in short, their rights to have a say in matters that pertain directly to them. As Freeman (1996) noted, this Article is important "not only for what it says, but because it recognises the child as a full human being with integrity and personality and the ability to participate freely in society" (p. 37). With regard to this research, the relationships between the location and distribution of power and how this influenced and impacted opportunities for children to participate in decision making was noteworthy.

Rights – the power to withhold or to distribute?

The research findings suggest that the degree to which children participate in decision-making is at least partly a function of the degree to which they are afforded rights by adults along with the opportunity to exercise these. The absence of agency and power was easily recognised within contexts. In this research the limited degree to which children *participated* in decision-making was immediately obvious when considering the perceptions that children from Beacon Point School shared. Their contributions suggest that the school may not have been cognisant of the requirements of Article 12 of the *UNCRC* (United Nations, 1989), which states that "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" (p. 4).

Adults' positioning of children as 'adults-in-becoming' impacted on the extent to which children's rights were recognised in regard to the UNCRC. It could be argued that if adults do not view 'children-as-beings' with their own particular status and capacities, it may be unlikely that their rights *as children* would be considered, let alone provided for. Lundy (2007) notes that the implementation of Article 12 is "Dependent on the cooperation of adults, who may or may not be committed to it or who may have a vested interest in not complying with it" (p. 929). Lundy (2007) goes on to list three types of concerns that adults might have, all of which seem applicable here: a belief that children lack the capacity to participate in decision-making; that giving children more control reduces adults' power; and that ensuring that children's rights are met is just too difficult. Instead, adults mediated children's voices and participation through adults' "positions of

power and responsibility in relation to children" (Wyness, 2013b, p. 343). In this way, some adult practices at the school appeared to not fulfil the UNCRC's provision for children's rights as described in the literature (Fielding, 2013; Shier, 2001; Thomson & Gunter, 2009).

Power was not only exerted over children, but children's power was actively taken away, reflecting a view of power as a 'zero sum game', where according rights to participate to children must result in adults' power and privilege being much reduced (Federle, 2018). Furthermore, where children were able to exert power over other, mostly younger children, another 'layer' was created where children's views were not taken into consideration. Such enabling of children to exert power over other children is unusual as Laupa, Turiel and Cowan (1995) note, as the differences in knowledge, experience and status that normally exist in adult-child relationships are not present. This use of children as 'mini-adults' served as an additional mechanism that effectively took away not only their opportunities to participate but those of other children as well. Rather than representing other children, or advocating for their ideas and issues, these 'mini-adults' became another link in the chain of hierarchy, power and control over children. Positioning these children as mini-adults paradoxically positioned them 'above' other children because of their pseudo-adult status, including permission to enter particular spaces and to organise and manage other children. Shaw and Wainryb (2006) note that it is not generally until the teenage years that children "seem capable of appreciating more fully the dynamics of power" (p. 1060). Yet, the findings suggest that these children did exert power over other children, even if they did not understand the ramifications. In any case, neither group of children appeared to have any authentic participation opportunities and could not contribute to decision-making in areas affecting them. This finding echoes the conclusions of an Irish study that sought to "identify areas where children's rights were 'ignored or underplayed'" (Lundy, 2007, p. 928) across a number of areas of children's participation, including education. Lundy's study found "that children's views were not sought out or listened to or, worse, that they were afforded only minimalist, tokenistic opportunities to participate and engage with adults" (p. 929). This description could well be applied to the aspects that the children shared about Beacon Point School.

Conversely, where a school accords particular voice and agency opportunities to children, considerable endorsement of the UNCRC in both visible and implied

ways is likely to be evident. This was further demonstrated at Morton Hill School where Student Leaders were expected to represent their classmates by fostering the, voice and agency of other children. Adults' distribution of participation opportunities to children, and also the redistribution of these opportunities by children to other children, contributed to children's positioning as 'children-as-beings' with the right to express their views about things important to them. This recognition of the rights of children under the provisions of the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989) to contribute to the decisions that affect them, reflects the work of Wyness (2012b) in regard to children's needs versus their interests. Wyness (2012b) notes that children, *as children*, have their own individual and collective interests that are 'of the moment' in childhood. These interests are likely to be different from those needs that adults perceive them to have, but not less important or less authentic:

> The needs discourse dominates our thinking about how to relate to children and young people. It assumes that childhood is a deficit model of personhood and that children's needs have to be met by adults in order for them to attain personhood. (Wyness, 2012a, p. 51)

Taking Wyness' (2012a) point further here, it is important that children's needs and interests, and how or who meets these needs, are considered together in order that children may hold and also exercise their rights. In the case of Beacon Point School, adults presumed children needed structure and hierarchy, and to learn responsibility by assuming the status of pseudo-adults in relation to other children. However, the children's needs and interests lay elsewhere with their concerns about playground matters. Putting children's interests at the forefront, however, presupposes that children are seen as active and agentic beings who have something valuable to say (Cook-Sather, 2020), and can express their views and interests through authentic means where they are listened to by adults (Wyness, 2012a). I therefore argue that children hold a latent political voice and the distribution of rights allows them to exercise their right to participate in decision-making in ways that are relevant and appropriate to them.

Linking participation and children's rights

Children's participation in decision-making is not only linked to ways adults' position them in relation to notions of childhood or adulthood described in the previous section, but also to adults' beliefs and knowledge about the rights that ought to be accorded to children. In other words, children's participation

opportunities (or lack thereof) are strongly linked to the provision or withholding of rights as described in the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989), to the extent that these two elements – participation and rights – co-exist and are interdependent. On one hand, providing opportunities for children to participate in decision-making depends on adults' belief that children have the right to do so; opportunities for children's participation, on the other hand, enable these rights to be exercised in meaningful ways. It is useful therefore to connect the findings of this research to the models presented in the literature review. The connection between children's rights and participation can be identified in Shier's (2001) *Pathways to participation* model. The model marks a minimum point that must be achieved in order to endorse the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989). As described in Chapter 2 of this thesis, Shier's model (2001) includes five levels of participation extending from children being listened to, to children sharing power and responsibility for decision-making. At each level, "openings, opportunities and obligations" (Shier, 2001, p. 110) enable three levels of commitment to participation, with the model not including any levels of 'non-participation'. In regard to the UNCRC, Shier identifies that organisations that are poised to enter Level Four are minimally satisfying the requirements of the Convention. This clearly identifies children's involvement in decision-making as the critical point where children's rights under the UNCRC are enacted.

This link, or lack thereof, between participation and rights that Shier (2001) describes, can also be identified in Hart's *Ladder of participation* (Hart, 1992). In relation to the provision of rights to children, the beginning stage of Shier's Level 4 where "children are involved in decision-making processes" (Shier, 2001, p. 110), could equate to Hart's Level 6 – "adult-initiated and directed" (Hart, 1992, p. 8). In Figure 6.2, these minimum points are shown by a bold red line, identifying various ways in which children at both schools participate in decision-making. In the case of Morton Hill Student Leaders, their opportunities for participating in decision-making can be variously located across nearly all of Hart's and Shier's types of participation. The only exception to this was when they were expected to show visitors around the school for special events. Every other Student Leader activity which the children identified involved them in, at the very least, engaging in decision-making processes and/or sharing power and responsibility for decision-making (Shier, 2001), while also including the 'lower' but contributory levels of children being listened to, supported in expressing their views and having these views taken into account.

However, despite the UNCRC being the most widely endorsed treaty ever with ratification by 192 governments (Alderson, 2003), Article 12 has also been noted as “one of the provisions most widely violated and disregarded in almost every sphere of children’s lives (Shier, 2001, p. 108). In the case of Student Leaders at Beacon Point, their participation in decision-making resided entirely within Hart’s ‘non-participation’ categories (Hart, 1992), an area that Shier does not even include in his model. Such participation can be characterised by manipulation, decoration and tokenism, to use Hart’s (1992) terms. In turn, this positioning of children’s participation did not meet Shier’s minimum point at which a school’s practice endorses the UNCRC. This ‘tokenistic’ participation was not only characterised by a sense of ‘decoration’, but also by particular power relationships in that adults denied participation rights to children. Furthermore, Student Leaders, through the modelling by their teachers, denied this participation in decision-making to younger children as well. This disregard, arising most likely from a lack of knowledge of the UNCRC in general and Article 12 in particular, reflects the consistent findings of the United Nations since 1997. These findings identified the New Zealand government’s implementation of the UNCRC as fragmented, with a lack of progress in awareness raising and training (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1997, 2003, 2011, 2016).

Hart (1992)			Beacon Point	Morton Hill	Shier (2001)	
8	Degrees of 'participation'	Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults			Children share power and responsibility for decision-making	**5**
7		Child-initiated and directed		Investigating and organising rabbits as school pets		
6		Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children		IT Monitors School Garden participants TravelWise Monitors SchoolGen Monitors	Children are involved in decision-making processes	**4**
5		Consulted and informed			Children's views are taken into account	**3**
4		Assigned but informed			Children supported in expressing their views	**2**
					Children are listened to	**1**
3	Degrees of 'non-participation'	Tokenism	Assisting with House sports Giving feedback on playground equipment			
2		Decoration	Hosting school visitors Assembly Monitors	Hosting school visitors		
1		Manipulation	Staffroom/office Monitors			

Figure 6. 1: **Positionings of Student Leaders according to Hart's Ladder of participation (1992) and Shier's Pathways to participation (2001)**

denotes the minimum point that must be achieved in order to endorse the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989)

Part Two: Children's competency and children's agency

Children's competency – in the eye of the beholder

Part One raises Penn's (2008) question: "When does a child stop being a child?" (p. 13). In short, when children's competency is considered, adults' perceptions about the 'right' age, and the 'wrong' age for children to do and to be able to do certain things become important (Morrow, 2013). If children are regarded as 'competent' beings in regard to participating in decision-making, they will be viewed as those best placed to have views and ideas about matters that concern them, reflecting the provisions of Article 12 of the UNCRC mentioned earlier. As Hadfield and Haw (2001) describe, "Young people are in the best position to talk about being young" (p. 492). In fact, the lack of competency children are sometimes seen to have as capable decision-makers, lies less in their expertise in expressing their views and ideas, and more in adults' willingness to listen to them. Where children are viewed as "'kids who do not and cannot know what is good for them" (McGregor, 2007, p. 91), little change is likely to emerge in regard to valuing children's competencies and, furthermore, school participation structures are likely to remain the same.

However, viewing children as lacking competency because they are positioned as 'adults-in-becoming' is only part of the perceptions revealed in this research. This perception was also present where children were positioned as 'mini-adults' or 'pseudo-adults'. These children were arguably well able to carry out sophisticated representational and leadership roles had these been made available to them, but this potential was not fully realised at Beacon Point School. Instead, their role was almost 'dumbed down' to a curious coupling of status and subservience. This coupling is aptly described by Fielding and Bragg (2003) as "simply ventriloquizing predictable teacher-approved ideas" (p. 31), rather than children being able to voice their own views. While children's social and cultural capital may have provided a foundation for meaningful participation in decision-making, this potential went largely unrecognised and underutilised. Their competencies were also *misused* in that the children's confidence and verbal abilities were employed to exert power over other children. As a result, their roles failed to develop them as 'adults-in-becoming', let alone as 'children-as-beings'.

Decision-making opportunities for children were considerably constrained by teachers' views of them. Although the Student Leaders system illustrated an attempt to allow students to have a voice, the system existed within a context of

children's competencies being not just underestimated, but unrecognised. 'Spaces' for children's participation in decision-making were located "within the more conventionally defined structures of children's places" (Wyness, 2009, p. 396). The ways in which teachers viewed children, and the prominence of these views in the school culture, appeared to be, as Bolstad (2011a) describes, "tightly framed" and "deeply embedded" (p. 32). As a result, there were few opportunities for children to develop and utilise their competency to contribute to decision-making in ways that were appropriate and relevant for them. Penn (2008) describes this mindset thus: "Young children's autonomy, competence, independence and resistance have been continually underestimated or disregarded […] children are mostly regarded as immature adults, many steps and stages away from the meaningful, decision-making maturity of adulthood" (p. 19).

In addition to Penn's (2008) description of adults' mindsets, contextual factors were also important to consider as these created a further set of constraints for some children. While their capacity and competency to contribute to decision-making can be profoundly limited by teachers' views of them as inexperienced and lacking requisite skills and knowledge, organisational structures and traditions can also have an impact. This may be particularly so when teachers believe that these structures and traditions are still relevant and effective. In giving examples of such structures, NcNeish and Newman (2002) identify the adult-focused nature of most organisations where children are present, such as schools and hospitals, and the persistence of certain processes, values and values even in the face of an espoused commitment to children's participation. Such factors were evident at Beacon Point School where most teachers communicated a strong connection and desire to uphold past beliefs and practices. This may be problematic in a policy environment in New Zealand that reflects global trends for primary school education to build independence, agency and self-management in '21st century' teaching and learning as set down in various Ministry of Education documents such as *Innovative learning environments* (Ministry of Education, 2016b) and *Digital technologies for teaching and learning* (Ministry of Education, 2016a). Until these contextual factors are recognised and 'unpicked', the prevalent adult beliefs and the hierarchical structures and processes that fail to encourage children's participation in decision-making (McNeish & Newman, 2002) will continue to control systems and values.

Contextual factors can also be significant enablers of opportunities to participate in decision-making either directly as part of a student leadership system, or more indirectly as part of everyday activities and interactions for children in the school environment. Furthermore, participation in such contexts may promote and develop children's competency as well as merely recognising and utilising it. In the Morton Hill School context, the majority of children were involved in decision-making that not only linked with their interests and needs, but appeared to be very ably facilitated by adults. This participation was believed to play an important part in valuing and using the cultural and social capital of children from a largely low socio-economic community where most people have English as a second language, and where there is a diversity of ethnic groups including recent immigrants and refugees. Morton Hill School's considerable network of participation structures for children aligns with Hart's (1997) conclusion that community participation by children appears to be "developing more in some of the emerging democracies than in the self-proclaimed well established democracies" (p. x) or, as Wyness (2001) summarises "children's participative structures are more developed in developing than developed countries" (p. 193).

Despite socio-economic considerations that some might view as limiting children's agency and participation potential, the Morton Hill students were viewed by teachers as having considerable social and cultural capital and, as a result, were seen as considerably competent. Far from being children who lacked participatory 'power' and competency, many of these children demonstrated active and enduring decision-making prowess, because the school valued their capital, believed in children's rights to participate, and provided a wide range of authentic opportunities for participation. As Rudduck, Day and Wallace (1997) noted just over 20 years ago, where schools and teachers have "ventured down the route of consulting students", they have found young people to be "capable of analytical and constructive comment" (pp. 75-76). In short, many children have the competency to participate meaningfully in decision-making as they possess "unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate without this partnership" (Mitra, 2009, p. 822). The challenge for educators is to provide contexts where ethnicities, cultural values and family backgrounds of children are positioned as strengths, in order to scaffold decision-making opportunities that are meaningful and constructive.

Children's agency

No matter how competent adults believe children to be, this competency cannot be utilised in children's participation in decision-making without children having agency. Competency and agency are linked, as agency is the medium through which children can demonstrate their competencies, exercise their voice and have influence (Holdsworth, 2018; Kumpulainen et al., 2014). As James and James (2012) note, agency is "the capacity of individuals to act independently … It underscores children's and young people's capacities to make choices about the things they do and to express their own ideas" (pp. 3-4).

Agency can also be conceptualised sociologically as a phenomenon that exists only in relation to the social interactions and contextual factors that constrain or facilitate it, particularly in the case of groups such as children who hold little power. In the school context, Mayall (2002) notes that children see adults as "having authority over them, and as requiring children's compliance with the social order of the school" (p. 29). At both schools studied in this project, children's agency was shaped by the beliefs, actions and assumptions of teachers and leaders. Adults' power and how they exercised this shaped the extent to which children were positioned as a minority group with the attendant lack of power, voice and agency.

'Thick' and 'thin' agency in action

The findings of this research suggest that teachers' and leaders' practices in regard to children's participation in decision-making reflected their particular beliefs about children's competency and, as a result, shaped the extent to which children were agentic. Klocker's (2007) notions of 'thick' and 'thin' democracy are very relevant here, with 'thick' agency meaning that a person has "the latitude to act within a broad range of options" (p. 85), while thin agency refers to "decisions and everyday actions that are carried out within highly restrictive contexts, characterized by few viable alternatives" (p. 85). Klocker also noted that agency can be 'thickened' or 'thinned' by relationships, structures and contexts. In the contexts explored in this research these thickening and thinning forces were evident.

For example, Klocker's work supports the notion that in schools where adults have considerable power over children's participation in decision-making, student agency is likely to be thinned. At Beacon Point School, agency appeared to be

very ‘thin’ because adults significantly shaped and controlled these decision-making practices. They were the ‘gatekeepers’ to children’s opportunities to have a say about matters that concerned them. Adults also decided whether or not they would listen to children’s views and to what extent, if any, these views would be taken into account. The views and actions of adults appeared to rule the day in a manner that Wyness (2013b) clearly describes: “The normative modes of participation gravitate towards pre-existing institutional arrangements where adults have critical roles in structuring the form and direction that participation takes” (p. 343). In addition, the Student Leaders’ role as ‘controllers’ of young children served to also thin the agency of those children as Leaders actively participated in perpetuating their own non-agentic positioning. Wyness (2013b) notes this as a possible outcome for student council-like groups if students “align themselves with school structures. It also gives them latitude to rehearse dominant Western modes of political practice that are taken up in adulthood” (p. 344).

Conversely, agency is thickened by certain practices, beliefs and structures, and this ‘thick’ agency was much more evident at Morton Hill School, both in the way that adults spoke about children, and also in the authentic opportunities that were available for all children to exercise agency. Children participated in a wide variety of authentic tasks and responsibilities characterised by opportunities to exert agency in making these roles ‘their own’. It is this element of choice that created what Klocker (2007) describes as ‘thick’ agency at Morton Hill. Here, the children were able to choose from a range of options because of the ways in which adults positioned them as competent, not only in acting but in deciding that they would act. That is, children knew they could have a say and that their views would be listened to. These findings also suggest that where adult control is minimised, children appeared to increasingly ‘thicken’ their own agency so that they were deciding what they would have a say about, what the outcomes might be and how adults could support them in their activity. Children had recognised their considerable agency here, not only in responding to the opportunities provided by adults, but in identifying and creating their own opportunities to participate in decision-making.

A fundamental component of the provision and promotion of ‘thick’ agency seems also to be the extent to which adults take children and their participation ‘seriously’. This idea of “taking students seriously” (Holdsworth, 2005, p. 150) by

giving them 'serious' things to do, requires that teachers and leaders are inventive, bold and "serious about the approach" (p. 150). In fact, Holdsworth (2005) found that activities espoused as providing participation opportunities for children often lacked these characteristics. Bragg and Fielding (2005) also found that schools provided "disappointingly few opportunities" (p. 106) for students to participate in decision-making in school settings. However, taking children seriously aptly summarises the approach taken to involve students in decision-making at Morton Hill School. This attitude of taking children seriously thickened agency. Adults at Morton Hill also appeared to have "more nuanced understandings of children's lives … and powerful understandings of children's participation" (Wyness, 2013b, p. 341). This is another way in which adults developed 'thick' agency – by mirroring the cultural patterns from children's own homes in the student leadership structures and other participation opportunities for children. At Morton Hill School this meant that not only were children able to choose from a variety of options generated both by adults and by themselves, but that they could do so within structures that honoured their own cultural contexts and in which the emphasis was on serving others in an altruistic manner. Klocker (2007) identifies such contexts as 'thickeners'

Agency may also be thickened through relationships. At Morton Hill School, the relationships between teachers and children, and amongst children themselves, seemed to be respectful, reciprocal and enabling. The tenets of leadership, service and familial ties already present in the Tongan, Samoan and Māori cultures of the majority of children were reflected in the many opportunities for children to participate in decision-making and particularly in the student leadership structure. Children's agency was shared, both by adults and between children, and a strong sense of working for or serving others was also apparent. This appears to reflect the nature of the children's cultures in regard to a collectivist viewpoint, where the needs of the individual are not as urgent as the needs of the group or collective. As Mason and Bolzan et al. (2009) note, the notion of *obligation* may be important in collectivist worldviews – participation may be seen as contributing, 'doing your share' and 'taking part in'. It follows that where an organisation aligns its practice in regard to children's participation in decision-making with the dominant cultures of its school community, this 'nesting' of participation practice within existing cultural values may extend Klocker's (2007) idea of 'thick' agency.

Part 3: Democracy in schools and democratic structures

Democracy in schools

Schools' control of children – 'thick' and 'thin' democracy

Apple (2018) argues that:

> The democratic nature of a school's structure and process relates to who participates in the school's decision-making processes and how [they participate] … This participation, especially on the part of students, cannot be relegated to mere tokenism and must ensure full and equal voice for all. (p. 24)

The findings from this research suggest that the ways in which teachers and leaders think about children's competency and agency in particular, impacts on the decision-making opportunities that are provided and, as a result, the extent to which the school is a democratic 'space' for children. This support of democratic values is one way in which adults can 'thicken' children's agency. On the one hand, adults may view student participation as a way of preparing children for the future by giving them 'practice' in being part of a democracy, allowing them to try out democratic roles, and readying them to play their part as citizens once they are part of the adult world. McBeath (2004) describes this as "learning about democracy" (p. 30). This view characterises children as 'adults-in-becoming' in a schooling paradigm where education prepares people for their future roles as citizens in a democratic society. On the other hand, adults may view student participation in decision-making as being in and of schooling itself – as part of "learning democratically" (MacBeath, 2004, p. 41), which MacBeath views as being closer to what schools should be as significant institutions in a society. My findings suggest that adults at each school considered their school to be a democracy as both teachers and principals believed that they were providing opportunities for children to participate in decision-making.

The election of Student Leaders and how they carried out their roles provides an example of each school's interpretation of democracy. In a similar manner to Klocker's (2007) description of 'thick' and 'thin' agency, Apple (2011) identifies "'thick' collective forms to 'thin' consumer driven and overly individualistic forms" of democracy (p. 22). 'Thick' democracy, like 'thick' agency, relies on relationships between people, along with a concern to provide agency to others through structures and practices that enable people to shape their own contexts. It aims to enable "full collective participation in the search for the common good" (Apple, 2018, p. 4), a characteristic that aligns with the tenets of 'thick' agency.

'Thin' democracy, on the other hand, promotes individualistic practices and values where dominant groups can potentially exert power over others and full participation is minimised, as it is with 'thin' agency.

Student leadership practices at Beacon Point School suggest a 'thin' version of democracy where the school, by enabling a type of market force economy to prevail, ensured that existing practices, with their underpinning values and beliefs, continued unchallenged. In a very socio-economically advantaged community, the individualistic nature of the student leadership system was reinforced by the hopes held by parents for their own child to be elected, followed by the subsequent prestige and status attached to the role. The school's practice in allowing students to pursue entrepreneurial money-making activities also reflects this individualistic view. 'Thick' democracy was more evident at Morton Hill School, where the rights-based ethos of the school played out in adults sharing decision-making with children who were supported in 'making things happen' in ways that aligned with a democratic environment. While teachers and leaders provided the opportunities for a kind of 'democracy-in-action', this was carried out within a collectivist culture that emphasised the roles that everyone had to play in the successful existence of the school as a community of children, whanau and staff.

As Alderson (2000a) affirms, there is no 'middle ground' for schools: "Schools cannot simply ignore democracy; they either promote democratic practices or actively contravene them, there is no mutual middle ground" (p. 132). When applied to Beacon Point School, however, it is possible to argue that adults in the school promoted democratic principles *as they perceived them to be.* By resisting a re-examination of "old habits, structures and strategies", as suggested by Ekholm (2004, p. 108), the school will continue to face challenges in achieving a participative democracy – instead, it is most likely to continue to reflect 'democracy' as conceptualised by adults and then imposed on students. The ways in which adults exerted control over children, and the ways in which children were given roles that the school believed to be democratic, speaks of the "anti-democratic tiers of power" that exist in the wider educational sphere in the view of Alderson (1999, p. 188).

The findings suggest that, if a school is to be a 'democracy', then democracy must be at least played out "in the sense that students have genuine

opportunities and spaces in which to air their views and to have ownership" (Smyth, 2007, p. 640). This democracy appeared to be of a holistic nature at Morton Hill School, as described by Woods and Woods (2012) – children were enabled to develop as children *as well as* participate in decisions that affected them by working together in highly productive ways. This meant that students had opportunities to act as *citizens* in the school in the ways which Hart (1992) described - "sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives" (p. 5). They were already immersed in the 'democracy' of the school itself. This aligns with Dewey's (1916) original vision of education being not just a means to provide skills and knowledge to students, but also as a process wherein young children and young people would learn about democracy by actively participating in the school as a democratic institution. As Kahne and Westheimer (2003) conclude, the school must *be* the democracy.

Democratic structures

In order to be the democracy, schools must promote democratic practices that enable children to have opportunities to participate in decision-making. Such practices are commonly manifested in various democratic structures such as the 'student council' (Yamashita & Davies, 2010). A student council is widely understood to be a body comprised of students, usually elected by their peers and being representative of wider groups of students, who come together to talk about what is happening in the school and express their views on what might be changed or improved (Burnitt & Gunter, 2013; Veitch, 2009; Whitty & Wisby, 2007a). As a democratic structure, student councils are viewed by some as the embodiment of democratic and citizenship ideals in schools.

However, how such groups are understood and implemented in different school contexts depends on schools' enacting of the ideals of 'thick' agency and 'thick' democracy. Where student councils operate in meaningful ways, Yamashita and Davies (2010) argue that they demonstrate the key elements of all students being included, matters that are important to both adults and children being dealt with, and students' expertise and capabilities being recognised. However, where student council-type groups are put in place as an antidote to a lack of student voice and participation, they provide "tokenistic compliance to consultation but ultimately not responding to nor acting upon children's views" (Leitch, 2012, p. 217). Such differences were evident in the contexts studied in this research.

Adults' perceptions and expectations of children similarly appeared to strongly influence the nature of the democratic structures in the schools studied in this research, resulting in two quite different types of participation emerging for the children in the two contexts. This participation hinged on Apple's (2018) two 'conditions' of democracy - that is, who is allowed to participate and how they are allowed to participate. Both schools held elections for Student Leaders but, following this, how participation in decision-making played out was markedly different. Where children could represent their classmates by advocating for their interests and needs, change occurred that was facilitated by adults but which still strongly reflected children's initial ideas. Where children had no meaningful opportunities for participation, their role appeared to have no impact on representing other children or their concerns and ideas. In this latter case, the children were victim to what Thomson (2010) calls the "hijacking syndrome" (p. 819), where the structures and practices with which they were involved had no outcomes in regard to participation in decision-making. Their voice was, as Thomson (2010) describes, a result of adults "selecting students who say what we want to hear, about topics we have decided, in ways we want to hear and responding in ways that are congruent with what we already do" (p. 820). Charteris and Smardon (2019b) similarly describe this as the "'ventriloquism' of voice" (p. 318) where students' ideas are used only selectively, if at all, to serve adults' purposes.

The impact of contextual nuances in schools in regard to democratic structures appears to be considerable with, I argue, adults views about children's participation being particularly influential. Where adults' championing of agency and participation exists, democratic structures most likely operate in ways that empower, value and respect children's views and "provide them with an opportunity to experience their views being taken seriously" (Baginsky & Hannam, 1999, p. 4). Where such an environment does not exist, it may be very difficult for adults to adjust their practice to relate to children in these new ways. If adults view themselves as being the most capable and knowledgeable decision-makers, it will take considerable personal and organisational change to move towards "a more inclusive approach to pupil voice whereby all pupils have the opportunity to participate in decision-making, and on a more equal footing to other stakeholders" (Whitty & Wisby, 2007b, pp. 312-313).

Part 4: Mahi Ngātahi: Children's participation in decision-making through a social justice lens

This chapter has discussed the findings presented in Chapter Five. This research set out to investigate the ways in which children participate in decision-making in two New Zealand primary schools, and explore the benefits to be gained for children through their involvement in various decision making mechanisms, including that of school 'councils'. What emerged in this research was a series of clear differences between the two participating schools that I had not expected to find. These differences may be grouped into three common ideas that emerged from the findings in both schools, albeit in very different ways: (i) knowledge about children; (ii) views about children's positioning; and (iii) practices regarding children's participation. When viewed through a social justice lens, a critical opportunity emerges to illuminate these three broad ideas in a form which can inform, and perhaps in some cases, reform the ways in which schools involve children in decision-making about things that matter to them. As such I propose the following model (see Figure 6.2) to represent these ideas.

This model takes the form of the 'pikotoru', a shape used particularly in Māori carving to show the joining of two peoples or cultures rather than individuals. 'Pikotoru' translates to 'three curves' and encompasses such concepts as combining, meeting, balancing, bending, flexing and adapting. Thus, the pikotoru enables joining in a fluid way where the nature of each nexus can be ever-changing. The triple twist also reflects the intertwining of three kete (baskets) of knowledge, originally obtained for mankind by the god Tāne, the Māori god of the forests. Māori often refer to 'kete', a traditional Maori basket typically woven from flax and still in common use today, in more symbolic terms as a holder of knowledge. In the model proposed here, the three kete are 'holders' for each of the three broad ideas listed above. I have used the pikotoru here to show not only the combining of the three kete of knowledge in regard to children's participation in decision-making in schools, but also as a means to show the relationships *between* these kete in the pikotoru's triple twist. The model thus exists within and is fundamentally influenced by not only the bicultural underpinnings of society and education in Aotearoa New Zealand, but also by ideas about social justice and, in particular, Fraser's (2005b) three principles of social justice as these relate to the findings of this study.

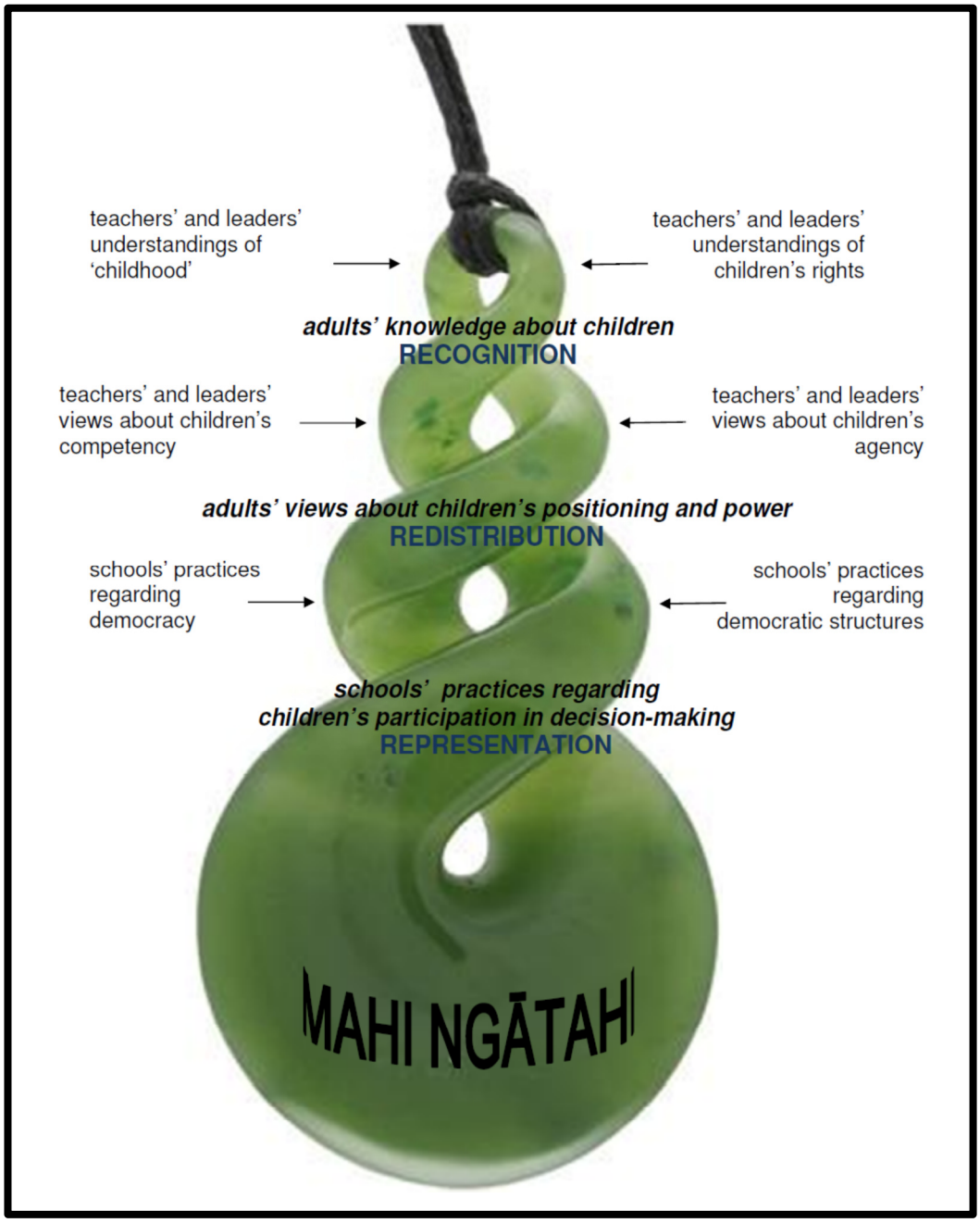

Figure 6. 2: **Mahi Ngātahi - children's participation in decision-making**

The first kete (the holder of knowledge, beliefs and attitudes) – *adults' knowledge about children* - emerges from and is a combining of the first two strands of the pikotoru: (i) *childhood* as both a historical and a contemporary construct; and (ii) *children's rights*. This basket of knowledge is the foundational kete upon which all practices relating to children's participation are eventually built. This kete contains the understandings that teachers and leaders in schools have about childhood and of children's rights, including how they view children individually and collectively, how they understand children in relation to adults, and what they

know about the passage of childhood – it is the temporal starting point for conceptualisation of children's participation in decision-making. I have borrowed here the notion of 'recognition' as identified by Fraser (2009). She conceptualises this term as the change needed in the way society views certain groups and normalises the dominance of some groups over others through cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect. I believe this can be applied to considerations of children's participation in decision-making. I argue that adults working in schools must first gain knowledge and understanding about 'childhood' and 'children's rights' before they can recognise 'children' as a group whose particular distinctiveness marks out their need for equitable participation (Blackmore, 2010).

The second kete – *adults' views about children's positioning and power* - builds on the first by combining two strands of the pikotoru: (iii) *children's competency*; and (iv) *children's agency*. This kete contains the ways in which adults in schools view children's strengths, talents and abilities *as children*, alongside the extent to which children are able to express their own ideas, preferences and decisions in an agentic manner. The kete builds upon the first as adults' knowledge about children, and their recognition of them as a distinct group, provides the foundation for a deeper understanding of their competency and agency. Borrowing again from Fraser (2009), I have identified this kete further as being one of 'redistribution'. Fraser uses this term to refer to the redistribution of goods but also of rights, opportunities and participation, the latter echoing the concerns of the second kete, while Young (2011) speaks specifically about decision-making structures in her conceptualisation of redistribution.

The third and final kete in the pikotoru model – *schools' practices regarding children's participation in decision-making* - builds on the kete already described, and combines perhaps the two most complex and sophisticated strands: (v) *schools' practices regarding democracy*; and (vi) *schools' practices regarding democratic structures.* I argue that teachers and leaders cannot design and implement practices related to democracy until they have moved through the previous two kete, where they deeply recognise children as 'beings' with particular rights as described in the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989), as well as the redistribution of power, opportunities and status, leading to new positionings. Fraser's (2005a) concept of 'representation' has been used here in its widest sense of not just ensuring that marginalised groups have a voice, but that

recognition and redistribution are balanced with representation; that is, representation does not just mean that children vote for representatives such as the Student Leaders described in this thesis, but that processes, structures, values and beliefs in the school all support children's participation in decision-making in whatever form this might take. As Fraser (2005b) argues "representation is a matter of social belonging" (p. 75). If children are to 'belong' to the group who are able to participate and influence decision-making, adults must constantly check that rules and boundaries consistently *include* children, rather than exclude all or some, and that all have a voice.

These three kete are used in this chapter to frame the conclusion of the research.

Adults' knowledge about children

In examining children's contribution to decision-making in the two schools in this case study, I did not originally consider that these practices would be influenced by adults' knowledge about children, children's rights and historical and contemporary views of 'childhood'. However, this finding emerged early in the data analysis phase. I now conclude that adults' practice is deeply affected by this knowledge. It would be easy to say, perhaps, that adults at Beacon Point School lacked this knowledge and that adults at Morton Hill School possessed this knowledge. However, this is not the case in my view. Adults at Beacon Point School *did* have knowledge in these areas, but it was a particular type of knowledge which characterised children as 'becoming' rather than 'being', and appeared not to be cognisant of the rights of children to have a say in matters that affect them. Adults at Morton Hill School did have knowledge about human rights and the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989), and this was reflected in the ways in which children were spoken about and implicit in the decision-making opportunities that existed for all children, not just those in particular leadership roles.

Meaningful opportunities for children's participation in decision-making cannot be developed or implemented without this underpinning knowledge. At the very least, a working knowledge of the UNCRC is needed in order to provide a context within which authentic opportunities can emerge. At best, adults should understand both historical and contemporary views and theories of children and childhood, and the ways in which these views have developed over time. This idea is expressed also by Hanson (2017), who argues that in order to understand

children and childhood, we should give "due consideration not only to how present and future are balanced but also to more explicitly embrace children's and childhood's past" (p. 281). Hansen also identifies a third component to the accepted 'being' versus 'becoming' argument – that of the 'been' child. He contends that these historical understandings enable us to better take into account children's own cultural, political and linguistic backgrounds.

This thinking resonates with Fraser's (2008) principle of recognition that involves calling attention to and affirming the value of a particular group. Recognition underpins a socially just approach in regard to children's participation as the act of adults 'recognising' children is fundamental to the provision of authentic participation opportunities. If children are not recognised as competent people with inherent rights to participate in decision-making, then participation is unlikely to extend beyond the simple 'tokenism' and 'informing' types identified by Hart (1992) at best. At worst, children's involvement will be limited to only 'manipulation' and 'decoration' (Hart, 1992).

Adults' views about children's positioning and power

This research suggests that this second kete is strongly underpinned by the first; that is, teachers' and leaders' views about positioning and power in relation to children emerge from the understandings they have of childhood and children's rights. Where adults believe children to be not only highly capable and competent as children, but also as entirely able and aware 'beings' who can utilise these abilities to have their own voice, children are more likely to be positioned by adults, and perhaps also by themselves, as agentic and powerful. Where adults view children as lacking competency and agency, children are likely to be positioned as having very little agency and power. This is brought into sharp relief where children are positioned in a way that I have describe as 'pseudo-adults'. This positioning identifies a new way of viewing children in regard to competency and agency that does not appear within the relevant literature as far as I am aware. Furthermore, this positioning, although suggestive of the benefits of the adult world's rights and responsibilities, actually confers little or no agency on children. On the other hand, where children and adults are positioned in ways that I argue are complementary; there is a balance of power in the ways that participation occurs because adults facilitate children to participate widely in decision-making. In such a context, adults view participation as a child's right, not something that adults bestow on children.

Thus, I argue that adults' knowledge of children shapes the ways that adults position children and redistribute power in two ways – whether adults believe that children are competent and agentic in the first place and, second, whether or not opportunities are provided for this competency and agency to be enacted in meaningful ways. An important aspect of this is in children having *children's agency*. Wyness (2015) describes this as 'purposeful' agency which does not eliminate adults from the context entirely but, instead, allows children to "have a voice and the respect from adults that goes with voice but not necessarily all the concomitant responsibilities that go with having a say" (pp. 31-32) That is, children can participate *as children*, not as pseudo-adults with positioning and power that is incongruous with authentic and purposeful participation in decision-making. This view falls within Fraser's (2008) notion of redistribution, where 'goods' that are unequally divided – in this case agency and power – are shared in such a way that they are more equally distributed. Where adults recognise that children are already competent and agentic, and constantly organise opportunities for children's positioning and power to be strengthened, children are likely to become increasingly independent and proactive, both because adults believe them to be so and also because children believe this about themselves.

Our practices regarding children's participation

The three kete in the pikotoru model are interdependent. I argue that this final kete emerges from the previous two. That is, the ways in which schools operate as democracies where children can participate in decision-making emerge from the first kete - adults' knowledge about children, and the second kete - adults' views about children's power and positioning. The development and implementation of 'spaces' designed to support children's participation in decision-making, then, will reflect the mindsets of the adults in schools, whether these be democratic and participatory or not.

The model is also designed to emphasise that the consideration of actual practices regarding children's participation should not occur until after the first two kete are navigated. This is intentional to avoid 'starting' here, with adults engaging *only* this third kete in their haste to allow children's participation, agency and voice - to 'have it' and to 'do it'. My argument is that this third kete is not, and should not, be the 'beginning' of this process. Indeed, adults cannot decide about the practices around children's participation in decision-making until they first think deeply and critically about the other elements of the pikotoru. The danger in

not doing so is to risk the haphazard implementation of structures and processes that may lack authenticity and deep understanding of the issues at hand – children's participation may be 'seen to be done', but may fall well short of Holdsworth's (2005) assertion that "taking children seriously means giving them serious things to do" (p. 139)

The progression of the kete towards this last component of schools' practices emphasises notions of democracy in particular as these apply to participation. Where schools' practices are inherently democratic, children's participation is likely to flourish (Mannion, 2010). This democratic component is particularly important in structures such as student leadership roles and groups, including the common 'student council' mechanism. The research reported on here suggests that these mechanisms of participation are particularly meaningful and effective when they emerge from adults' genuine desire to promote opportunities for student participation in decision-making. Truly democratic groups are underpinned by this ethos, rather than children merely being elected to fulfil roles that offer no genuine participation opportunities and are, in fact, not designed with democratic values in mind.

Where democracy and participation are clearly in mind, Fraser's (2005a) third principle of representation emerges in practice. Fraser (2005a) discusses this concept in relation to feminist politics and as a hybrid type of combining and moving beyond recognition and redistribution. I am using it here in a more localised 'micro-sense' meaning to suggest that where democracy and democratic structures are in place, children are likely to be effectively 'represented' by themselves or by other children in groups such as student councils. In addition, however, they are able to 'represent' their own views, ideas, needs and concerns in an environment where adults will listen and respond. Finally, this part of the pikotoru model supports the 're-presentation' of children as more agentic, participative and capable beings than they may have been viewed in the past in primary schools.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This chapter summarises the research findings, indicates the contribution that this research makes and outlines the possible implications for those working in the area of children's participation in decision-making in primary schools. Finally, the chapter examines the limitations of the study and possible areas for further future research.

Summary of the research

This research critically examined the ways in which children participated in decision-making in two New Zealand primary schools, and explore the outcomes for children through their involvement in various decision-making mechanisms, including that of student leadership or representational roles.

When embarking on this research, I found that there was very little literature published in the primary school context in regard to children's participation in decision-making. As a result, this research was carried out in two primary schools that both had a 'student council'-type group, as well as a variety of other groups, activities and roles that were espoused by the staff in the schools to provide children with opportunities to participate in decision-making.

The related research questions (RQ) were:

RQ1: In what ways do children participate in decision-making mechanisms, including formal student leadership roles; and

RQ2: What are the lived experiences, perceptions and understandings of the children in regard to this participation?

A case study methodology was used across two schools, with data gathering carried out in a series of interviews with 12 adult participants. Focus groups were also carried out with a total of 29 children, including the use of institutional diagramming and photo elicitation methods.

The main findings of the research were that the schools offered a variety of opportunities for children to participate in decision-making, including formal student leadership roles. However, some of these opportunities offered children very little agency and voice, meaning that actual participation was limited. Where authentic participation existed, adults facilitated and organised for children to be

active and proactive decision-makers, particularly about matters that particularly interested them, and children knew that they 'had a say'. Where authentic participation did not occur, adults offered contrived or very narrow opportunities and children mainly performed 'jobs' for teachers, including exerting control over other younger children. The main findings of the research were that the schools offered a variety of opportunities for children to participate in decision-making, including formal student leadership roles. However, some of these opportunities offered children very little agency and voice, meaning that actual participation was limited. Where authentic participation existed, adults facilitated and organised for children to be active and proactive decision-makers, particularly about matters that particularly interested them, and children knew that they 'had a say'. Where authentic participation did not occur, adults offered contrived or very narrow opportunities and children mainly performed 'jobs' for teachers, including exerting control over other younger children. These 'student leaders' had very limited voice and agency, and were largely unaware of this. The research raised issues around schools' practices related to children's participation in decision-making and found that the extent, authenticity and democratic nature of these practices depended on adults' knowledge about children and children's rights and their views about children's competency and agency. These findings enabled the creation of the pikotoru *Mahi Ngātahi* model of children's participation in decision-making in primary schools.

Mahi Ngātahi – the contribution of this research

This study contributes to the sparse body of literature currently available in regard to children's participation in decision-making in primary schools, and especially in the New Zealand context. Its prime contribution is that of the pikotoru model as a way of conceptualizing, implementing and evaluating children's participation in decision-making in primary schools. The three-kete structure introduces new ways of thinking about the phenomenon of children's participation in decision-making by:

- acknowledging the diversity of practice that may exist in schools across New Zealand;
- demonstrating that children may experience vastly different participation structures; and
- identifying the powerful influence that the knowledge, views and practices of adults have on student voice, agency and participation.

The pikotoru model contributes to the body of existing models and frameworks that are concerned with notions of participation, including the work of Hart (1992) and Shier (2001). Whilst other models are often concerned with issues such as 'levels' of participation, the 'right way' for children to participate, and how participation should be actioned in practice, the pikotoru model focuses on the knowledge, beliefs and values of the adults in the context. In particular, the model asks adults to step back from the immediacy of the imperative to enact children's participation structures in order to examine the worldviews, assumptions and experiences that inform leaders' and teachers' practice. It also contextualises this knowledge within the cultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, illuminating the importance of contextual cognisance and the underpinning tenets of social justice which frame the education landscape in New Zealand.

In traversing the literature concerned with the focus of this thesis, it has become increasingly clear that what academics and practitioners alike choose to 'name' this body of knowledge, views, beliefs and practices is a critical factor. As I have discussed in the Literature Review chapter, several words have been used since the mid-1990s with notions of 'consultation' and 'participation' being the most commonly employed. Other words such as 'collaboration' and 'voice' have also been utilised since around the beginning of this 21st century. All of these words, however, imply the granting of permission, by adults, to children – the giving or sharing of power is intrinsic here, as is the control that adults have over these processes. Even the notion of 'voice' must be examined carefully – it is all very well to have a voice, but talking means nothing if nobody is hearing with a goal of truly listening and understanding, and then taking action.

A new word or concept, then, is needed if we wish to 'name' the processual that is depicted in the pikotoru model. In my writing of this thesis I have continually been challenged to identify this new word, and have discarded several options along the way. 'Engagement' is one such word that I have considered. It suggests a mutually-agreed meeting point where two or more parties may meet and interact, but it still harbours an adult-centric flavour in my view. This relates to the current use of this term to describe the rate or amount of students' involvement with or participation in their education. Arguably, a student or child may be thought of as engaging in education by merely attending school and being present in the classroom, or by participating in learning in a quiet and compliant way. At the other end of the continuum, student 'engagement' is

defined more as a deep and steadfast commitment to learning, where participation is active, energetic and positive. 'Engagement', however, is also a military term, describing an encounter, battle or conflict between opposing forces.

'Mahi tahi', on the other hand, may be translated most literally as 'one work'. In *Te Pikotoru* I have used this term to indicate the nature of both children's participation *activity*, and also its *outcomes* as Mahi Ngātahi – working together. This phrase has connotations also of consultation, collaboration, involvement and participation. While the models of Hart (1992) and Shier (2001) imply movement from less desirable forms of participation to more desirable, 'better' forms, the use of Mahi Ngātahi in this model is intended to include all types of participation that are built on the three kete which comprise the model.

The use of the word *mahi* (work) also indicates that participation is about work. There are plans to be forged, activities to be undertaken and outcomes to be accomplished. It does not include notions of status, power over or elitism. In fact, no single person expects or accepts any credit or recognition for what results from the work. Finally, everyone plays their appropriate part according to their strengths, knowledge and skills. The participation of everyone is valued and people help one another to complete the work. This notion of Mahi Ngātahi is best expressed through the following proverb:

Ehara taku toa, he takitahi, he toa takitini.
My success should not be bestowed onto me alone, as it was not individual success but success of a collective.

Implications for school leaders and teachers

This research has identified that the use of student council-type structures and student leadership roles and mechanisms does and should vary from school to school, but cannot be implemented as a 'catch-all' for addressing the imperative to involve children in decision-making schools. It has also highlighted that adults have considerable and sometimes intangible influence over participation practices in schools because of their existing knowledge and beliefs that inevitably shape their practice. The major implications here are that:

- structures and processes to enhance children's participation in decision-making should be designed and implemented only after careful and

extensive consideration of contemporary knowledge and practices in this regard;

- any development of children's participation practice must be undertaken only with authentic involvement of children at the very least or, at best, children's initiation, leadership and stewardship;
- the government's current emphasis in areas such as student voice, personalised learning and modern/innovative learning environments must be continually scrutinised and critiqued with children's participation and agency at the centre of decision-making; and
- leaders and teachers must critically reflect on and review children's participation in decision-making, and include their students in such reflection. The list below is drawn from the findings of this research and the literature encountered over the course of this research, and provides a framework for adults to inquire into the extent to which:
    - children initiate decisions and actions;
    - all children have an equal chance to be involved;
    - students' cultures and ethnicities are integrated into all aspects of school life;
    - children work together in groups and teams;
    - children gather data, ideas and opinions from other children;
    - children report back to other children and adults; and
    - the school is improved through children's ideas and actions.

Finally, where student council-type bodies are established, adults must be very cognisant that it is not the structures in which children are involved that shape the 'participatory value' of such groups, but the adults' views, values and practices that that underpin these structures. Councils can be sued to give elevated status to some student, to limit voice opportunities to a very small group, to minimise the scope of children's participation in decision-making, and even to just preserve traditional structures and make teachers'' lives easier. On the other hand, such groups can be authentic mechanisms for children's voice and agency if the 'kete' in the *Mahi Ngatahi Pikotoru* model are in place. Such groups could be (depending on the Children's priorities and interests, and the school context):

- school council-type groups who advocate for the students they represent to improve the school from children's perspective;
- groups that 'serve' others by selecting and leading activities that support the school's contribution to the local community, e.g. fund-raising for local

charities, support of/involvement with local retirement facilities through school visits, etc.;

- groups that work to support particular special projects in the school such as, for example - Enviroschools, special character activities (such as family mass in a Catholic school), peer mediation schemes and the school garden; and/or
- groups that 'help' the school by managing resources and also have input into their purchase, use and distribution such as, for example - PE equipment, IT equipment, and library space and materials.

Limitations of the research

There are a number of potential limitations that may have affected this research study.

- In the first instance, the study gathered data in only two schools in one city in New Zealand. Furthermore, these schools were positioned at each of the extreme ends of the socio-economic spectrum. This may limit the transferability of the findings across a broader range of schools or in other regional and national contexts;
- In both schools, the principal played a significant role in selecting the children who participated in the research. At Beacon Point School, these children were largely those in formal leadership roles in the 'student council'-type group and/or school monitors. Whilst these children were perceived by the principal to be the 'leaders', there was not an opportunity for me to more deeply canvas other decision-making sites at the school in order to include children who were involved in decision-making in less formal, recognised ways;
- Although 4-5 visits were made to each school in order to carry out the data gathering, a 'snap-shot' approach is still dominant to some extent. It is possible that a more comprehensive, longitudinal approach to data-gathering may have yielded further insights across a broader range of participants and decision-making contexts. It may also have been beneficial to study the decision-making opportunities of a small group of children over time and in greater depth by conducting the research over a full school year;
- I collected data from principals and teachers who had recognised roles and responsibilities in their schools that involved working with children as leaders, monitors and so on. I did not conduct interviews with allied staff or

with teachers without formal involvement with children in espoused decision-making roles. These other adults may have brought different perspectives to the data and findings; and

- I was already familiar with the schools prior to the research commencing, and had reasonably long-standing professional relationships as a leadership consultant with the principals and many of the teachers. This may have influenced the ways in which the adult research participants interacted with me in that they may have been hesitant to talk about aspects of their school's practice that they perceived to be problematic. On the other hand, however, this familiarity may also have encouraged these participants to share their experiences with me honestly and extensively. Another aspect of these relationships with participants was that they may have perceived me to have a power relationship over them – this was in fact evident in two of the interviews where teachers seemed very concerned to give the 'right' answers.

Areas for further research

This study has identified other areas for future research, namely:

- this study focused on children's contribution to decision-making in matters largely outside of the realm of teaching and learning. It is timely to examine this decision-making in relation to the current high interest in children's agency in relation to their lived experiences of achievement and success as learners;
- research that explores the espoused high levels of children's participation in decision-making in modern/innovative learning environments may usefully examine the extent to which these environments are facilitative or constraining on children's agency;
- a broader scoping study of student council-type groups and student leadership roles in New Zealand primary schools in order to gain a comprehensive picture of current practice;
- the pikotoru model offers a framework for schools to deeply examine their knowledge, beliefs and practice in relation to children's participation in decision-making. This model could be used as the foundation for an action research study of a relevant change process at a particular research site or group of sites;
- the findings of this research suggested a link between the socio-economic and cultural makeup of the school and its community with the ways in which

children participated in decision-making. Further research could be carried out in a wider range of schools beyond the two very different socio-economic and cultural contexts of the schools who participated in this study;

- the participative methods used with children in this study may prove useful for other researchers in their current form or with further development; and
- further research into children's participation in decision-making that is organised and carried out by children themselves may provide an opportunity for a school or researcher to further mobilise notions of voice and agency within a school setting.

This study sought to contribute to and extend the very small body of research and literature that currently exists in regard to children's participation in decision-making in New Zealand primary schools. I believe this overall intention has been achieved and this research has contributed something towards the field that will be considered both scholarly and also potentially practical for teachers and leaders to consider. There are perhaps still more questions than answers, and this imperative to question and wonder may help adults that work in schools to resist that urge to '*do* student voice' because it is now expected of schools. There is much to consider first, important thinking to do, dozens of questions to ask and exciting planning to undergo, before actions are developed, tested and refined. I encourage leaders and teachers to take a deep breath, start at the beginning of the *Mahi Ngātahi* pikotoru, and wind their way carefully through each twist and turn of the journey, perhaps even back-tracking now and then, so that their practice is based on the knowledge, attitudes and values that the pikotoru suggests. Whatever you do, take the hand of a child and let them lead the way…

REFERENCES

Adams, J., & Swain, J. (2001). Towards participatory research with disabled students. In L. Catan (Ed.), *Young people as researchers: Possibilities, problems and politics* (pp. 29-36). Leicester, England: National Youth Agency.

Adelman, C., Jenkins, D., & Kemmis, S. (1976). Re-thinking case study: Notes from the second Cambridge Conference. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 6*(3), 139-150.

Adler, K., Salantera, S., & Zumstein-Shaha, M. (2019). Focus group interviews in child, youth, and parent research: An integrative literature review. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 18*, 1-15.

Alderson, P. (1993). *Children's consent to surgery*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.

Alderson, P. (1999). Human rights and democracy in schools: Do they mean more than "picking up litter and not killing whales"? *The International Journal of Children's Rights, 7*(2), 185-205.

Alderson, P. (2000a). School students' views on school councils and daily life at school. *Children and Society, 14*(2), 121-134.

Alderson, P. (2000b). *Young children's rights: Exploring beliefs, principles and practice*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Alderson, P. (2001). Life and death: Agency and dependency in young children's health care. *Children's Issues, 5*(1), 23-27.

Alderson, P. (2003). *Institutional rights and rites: A century of childhood*. Paper presented at the Institute of Education, London, England.

Alderson, P. (2004). Ethics. In S. Fraser, V. Lewis, S. Ding, M. Kellett, & C. Robinson (Eds.), *Doing research with children and young people* (pp. 97-112). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Alderson, P. (2005). Designing ethical research with children. In A. Farrell (Ed.), *Ethical research with children* (pp. 27-36). Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Alderson, P. (2008). Children as researchers: Participation rights and research methods. In P. Christensen & A. James (Eds.), *Research with children: Perspectives and practices* (2nd ed., pp. 276-290). Oxon, England: RoutledgeFalmer.

Alderson, P. (2009). Rights-respecting research: A commentary on 'The right to be properly researched: Research with children in a messy, real world'. *Children's Geographies, 10*(2), 233-239.

Alderson, P. (2012). Young children's human rights: A sociological analysis. *International Journal of Children's Rights, 20*(2), 177-198.

Alderson, P. (2018). Common criticisms of children's rights and 25 years of the IJCR. In M. Freeman (Ed.), *Children's rights: new issues, new themes, new perspectives* (pp. 39-50). Boston, MA: Bril Nijhoff.

Alderson, P., & Montgomery, J. (1996). *Health care choices: Making decisions with children.* London, England: Institute for Public Policy Research.

Alton-Lee, A. (2003). *Quality teaching of diverse students in schooling: Best evidence synthesis*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

Anderson, D., & Graham, A. (2016). Improving student well-being: Having a say at school. *School Effectiveness and Improvement, 27*, 348-366.

Anderson, G., & Arsenault, N. (1998). *Fundamentals of educational research* (2nd ed.). London, England: Falmer Press.

Andersson, E. (2017). The pedagogical political participation model (the 3P-M) for exploring, explaining and affecting young people's political participation. *Journal of Youth Studies, 20*(10), 1346-1361.

Andersson, E. (2018). The school as a public space for democratic experiences: Formal student participation and its political characteristics. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, 14*(2), 149-164.

Apple, M. (2011). Democratic education in neoliberal and neoconservative times. *International Studies in Sociology of Education, 21*(1), 21-31.

Apple, M. (2018). *The struggle for democracy in education: Lessons from social realities*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Apple, M., & Beane, J. (1999). Lessons from democratic schools. In J. Beane & M. Apple (Eds.), *Democratic schools: lessons from the chalkface* (pp. 118-123). Buckingham, England: Open University Press.

Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 35*(4), 216-224.

Bacon, K., & Frankel, S. (2014). Rethinking children's citizenship. *International Journal of Children's Rights, 22*(1), 21-42.

Baginsky, M., & Hannam, D. (1999). *School councils: The views of students and teachers*. London, England: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

Baroutsis, A., McGregor, G., & Mills, M. (2016). Pedagogic voice: Student voice in teaching and engagement pedagogies. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 24*(123-140).

Bassey, M. (2012). Case studies. In A. Briggs, M. Coleman, & M. Morrison (Eds.), *Research methods in educational leadership and management* (pp. 155-169). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Beane, J., & Apple, M. (1999). The case for democratic schools. In M. Apple & J. Beane (Eds.), *Democratic schools: Lessons from the chalk face* (pp. 1-29). Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Beazley, H., Bessell, S., Ennew, J., & Waterson, R. (2009). The right to be properly researched: Research with children in a messy, real world. *Children's Geographies, 7*(4), 365-378.

Biggeri, M., Arciprete, C., & Karkara, R. (2019). Children and youth participation in decision-making and research processes. In D. Clark, M. Biggeri, & A. Frediani (Eds.), *The capability approach, empowerment and participation* (pp. 193-221). London, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Cavanagh, T., & Teddy, L. (2009). Te Kotahitanga: Addressing educational disparities facing Maori students in New Zealand. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 25*(2), 734-742.

Black, R. (2011). Student participation and disadvantage: Limitations in policy and practice. *Journal of Youth Studies, 14*(463-474).

Blackmore, J. (2010). *Educational leadership and Nancy Fraser*. Oxon, England: Routledge.

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., & Tight, M. (2010). *How to research* (4th ed.). Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Bolstad, R. (2011a). From "student voice" to "youth-adult partnership". *set Research Information for Teachers, 1*, 31-33.

Bolstad, R. (2011b). *From "student voice" to "youth-adult partnerships": Lessons from working with young people as partners for educational change*. Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Botchwey, N., Johnson, N., O'Connell, L., & Kim, A. (2019). Including youth in the ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Planning Association, 85*(3), 255-270.

Bourke, R. (2008). What students can teach us about learning. In A. St. George, S. Brown, & J. O'Neill (Eds.), *Facing the big questions in teaching: Purpose, power and learning* (pp. 115-164). Melbourne, Australia: Cebgage Learning.

Bourke, R., & Loveridge, J. (2014). Student voice(s) as a pedagogical tool. In A. St. George, S. Brown, & J. O'Neill (Eds.), *Facing the big questions in teaching: Purpose, power and learning* (2nd ed., pp. 137-145). Auckland, New Zealand: Cengage Learning.

Bourke, R., & Loveridge, J. (2018). Using student voice to challenge understandings of educational research, policy and practice. In R. Bourke & J. Loveridge (Eds.), *Radical collegiality through student voice: Educational experience, policy and practice* (pp. 1-16). Singapore: Springer.

Bourke, R., & MacDonald, J. (2016). Creating a space for student voice in educational evaluation. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education, 41*(2), 156-168.

Bragg, S. (2007). *Consulting young people: A review of the literature*. London, England: Arts Council England

Bragg, S., & Fielding, M. (2005). It's an equal thing ... It's about achieving together: Student voices and the possibility of a radical collegiality. In H. Street & J. Timperley (Eds.), *Improving schools through collaborative enquiry* (pp. 105-135). London, England: Continuum.

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Brofenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist, 32*(7), 513-531.

Brown, P. (2008). A review of the literature on case study research. *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education, 1*(1), 1-13.

Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods* (3rd ed.). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Burningham, J. (1994). *Would you rather?* London, England: Red Fox.

Burnitt, M., & Gunter, H. (2013). Primary school councils: Organization, composition and head teacher perceptions and values. *Management in Education, 27*(2), 56-62.

Burr, V. (1995). *An introduction to social constructionism*. London, England: Routledge.

Bush, T. (2012). Authenticity in research: Reliability, validity and triangulation. In A. Briggs, M. Coleman, & M. Morrison (Eds.), *Research methods in educational leadership and management* (3rd ed., pp. 75-89). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Busher, H. (2002). Ethics of research in education. In M. Coleman & A. Briggs (Eds.), *Research methods in educational leadership and management* (pp. 73-89). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Busher, H. (2016). Student voice: A site for developing citizenship, a vehicle for improving learning. In A. Montgomery & I. Kehoe (Eds.), *Reimagining the purpose of schools and educational organisations: Developing critical thinking, agency, beliefs in schools and educational organisations* (pp. 93-109). London, England: Springer International Publishing.

Busher, H., & James, N. (2012). The ethical framework of research practice. In A. Briggs, M. Coleman, & M. Morrison (Eds.), *Research methods in educational leadership and management* (pp. 90-104). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Call-Cummings, M., Hauber-Ozer, M., Byers, C., & Peden Mancuso, G. (2019). The power of/in Photovoice. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education, 42*(4), 399-413.

Capeheart, L., & Milovanovic, D. (2007). *Social justice: Theories, issues, and movements*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Carey, M., & Asbury, J. (2016). *Focus group research*. London, England: Routledge.

Cevher-Kalburan, N., & Ivrendi, A. (2016). Risky play and parenting styles. *Journal ofhild and Family Studies, 25*(2), 355-366.

Chambers, R. (1994). Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA): Analysis of experience. *World Development, 22*(9), 1253-1268.

Charteris, J., & Smardon, D. (2019a). The politics of student voice: Unravelling the multiple discourses articulated in schools. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 49*(1), 93-110.

Charteris, J., & Smardon, D. (2019b). Student voice in learning: instrumentalism and tokenism or opportunity for altering the status and positioning of students? *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 27*(2), 305-323. doi:10.1080/14681366.2018.1489887

Christensen, P., & James, A. (2017). Introduction: Researching children and childhood: Cultures of communication. In P. Christensen & A. James (Eds.), *Research with children: Perspectives and practices* (3rd ed., pp. 12-20). London, England: Routledge.

Christensen, P., & Prout, A. (2002). Working with ethical symmetry in social research with children. *Childhood: A journal of global child research, 9*(4), 477-497.

Christensen, P. M., & James, A. (2008). *Research with children : perspectives and practices* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Clark, A. (2017). *Listening to young children: A guide to understanding and using the mosaic approach* (3rd ed.). London, England: Jessica Kingsley.

Claydon, L., & Lovegrove, M. (1972). Course construction and student participation. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 4*(1), 60-70.

Coady, M. (2010). Ethics in early childhood research. In G. MacNaughton, S. Rolfe, & I. Siraj-Blatchford (Eds.), *Doing early childhood research: International perspectives on theory and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 73-84). Crow's Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwin.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). London, England: RoutledgeFalmer.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). London, England: Routledge.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). London, England: Routledge.

Coleman, M. (2012). Interviews. In A. Briggs, M. Coleman, & M. Morrison (Eds.), *Research methods in educational leadership and management* (3rd ed., pp. 250-265). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Cook-Sather, A. (2015). Addressing the question of authenticity in middle grades student voice work: Wrestling with politics, power, and purpose in education. *Middle Grades Review, 1*(2), Article 2.

Cook-Sather, A. (2017). Virtual forms: How amplifying student voice through digital media promotes reflective practice and positions students as pedagogical partners to prospective high school and practicing college teachers. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 48*(5), 1143-1152.

Cook-Sather, A. (2020). Student voice across contexts: Fostering student agency in today's schools. *Theory Into Practice, 59*(2), 182-191.

Coppock, V., & Gillett-Swan, J. (2016). Children's rights, educational research and the UNCRC. In J. Gillett-Swan & V. Coppock (Eds.), *Children's rights, educational research and the UNCRC: Past, present and future* (pp. 7-16). Southampton, England: Symposium Books.

Cornu, C. (2016). Preventing and adressing homophobic and transphobic bullying in education: A human rights-based approach using the United

Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 13*(1-2), 6-17.

Cox, S., Currie, D., Frederick, K., Jarvis, D., Lawes, S., Millner, E., . . . White, D. (2007). *Children decide: Power, participation and purpose in the primary classroom*. Norwich, England: University of East Anglia.

Czerniawski, G., & Kidd, W. (2011). Introduction: Outside looking in and inside looking out - attempts at bridging the academic/practitioner divide. In G. Czerniawski & W. Kidd (Eds.), *The student voice handbook: Bridging the academic/practitioner divide* (pp. xxxv-xxxvii). Bingley, England: Emerald.

Darbyshire, P., & MacDougall, C. (2005). Multiple methods in qualitative research with children: More insight or just more? *Qualitative Research, 5*(4), 417-436.

Davis, J. (2009). Involving children. In E. Tisdall, J. Davis, & M. Gallagher (Eds.), *Researching with children and young people: Research design, methods and analysis* (pp. 154-167). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Dempster, N., Stevens, E., & Keeffe, M. (2011). Student and youth leadership: A focused literature review. *Leading and Managing, 17*(2), 1-20.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2005). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 1-32). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2011). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 1-19). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Dey, I. (1993). *Qualitative data analysis: A user friendly guide for social scientists.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Dockett, S., Einarsdottir, J., & Perry, B. (2011). Balancing methodologies and methods in researching with young children. In D. Harcourt, B. Perry, & T. Waller (Eds.), *Researching young children's perspectives: Debating the ethics and dilemmas of educational research with children* (pp. 68-81). London, England: Routledge.

Education Review Office. (2003). *Student participation in school decision-making*. Wellington: Education Review Office

Eisenhardt, K. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review, 14*(4), 532-550.

Ekholm, M. (2004). Learning democracy by sharing power: The student role in effectiveness and improvement. In J. MacBeath & L. Moos (Eds.), *Democratic learning: The challenge to school effectiveness* (pp. 95-112). London, England: RoutledgeFalmer.

Farrell, A. (2005a). New possibilities for ethical research with children. In A. Farrell (Ed.), *Ethical research with children* (pp. 176-178). Maidenhead, England: Open University Press.

Farrell, A. (2005b). New times in ethical research with children. In A. Farrell (Ed.), *Ethical research with children* (pp. 166-175). Maidenhead, England: Open University Press.

Federle, K. (2018). Do rights still flow downhill? In M. Freeman (Ed.), *Children's rights: New issues, new themes, new perspectives.* (pp. 6-16). Boston, MA: Brill Nijhoff.

Fielding, M. (2001). Students as radical agents of change. *Journal of Educational Change, 2*(2), 123-141.

Fielding, M. (2004). Transformative approaches to student voice: Theoretical underpinnings, recalcitrant realities. *British Educational Research Journal, 30*(2), 295-311.

Fielding, M. (2009). Interrogating student voice: Preoccupations, purposes and possibilities. In H. Daniels, H. Lauder, & J. Porter (Eds.), *Education theories, culture and learning: A critical perspective* (pp. 101-116). London, England: Routledge.

Fielding, M. (2011). Student voice and the possibility of radical democratic education: Re-narrating forgotten histories, developing alternative futures. In G. Czerniawski & W. Kidd (Eds.), *The student voice handbook: Bridging the academic/practitioner divide* (pp. 3-17). Bingley, England: Emerald.

Fielding, M. (2012). From student voice to democratic community: New beginnings, radical continuities. In B. McMahon & J. Portelli (Eds.), *Student engagement in urban schools: Beyond neoliberal discourses* (pp. 11-27). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Fielding, M. (2013). Whole school meetings and the development of radical democratic community. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 32*(2), 123-140.

Fielding, M. (2016). Why and how schools might live democracy 'as an inclusive human order'. In S. Higgins & F. Coffield (Eds.), *John Dewey's Democracy and education: A British tribute.* (pp. 114-130). London, England: UCL Institute of Education Press.

Fielding, M., & Bragg, S. (2003). *Students as researchers: Making a difference*. Cambridge, England: Pearson.

Fleming, D. (2015). Student voice: An emerging discourse in Irish education policy. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 8*(8), 223-242.

Flewitt, R. (2014). Interviews. In A. Clark, R. Flewitt, M. Hammersley, & M. Robb (Eds.), *Understanding research with children and young people* (pp. 136-153). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Flynn, P. (2015). Empowerment and transformation for young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties engaged with student voice research. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 49*(2), 162-175.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 12*(2), 219-245.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2011). Case study. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 301-316). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Folque, M. (2010). Interviewing young children. In G. MacNaughton, S. Rolfe, & I. Siraj-Blatchford (Eds.), *Doing early childhood research: International perspectives on theory and practice* (pp. 239-259). Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Forde, C., Horgan, D., Martin, S., & Parkes, A. (2018). Learning from children's voices in schools: Experiences from Ireland. *Journal of Educational Change, 19*(4), 489-509.

Fox, J., & LaChenaye, J. (2016). A contextual examination of high-quality K-12 service-learning projects. *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community, 4*(1), 17-28.

Fraser, N. (2004). Social justice in the age in identity politics: Redistribution, recognition and participation. In N. Fraser & A. Honneth (Eds.), *Redistribution or recognition? A political-philosophical exchange* (pp. 7-109). London, England: Verso.

Fraser, N. (2005a). Mapping the feminist imagination: From redistribution to recognition to representation. *Constellations, 12*(3), 295-307.

Fraser, N. (2005b). Reframing justice in a globalizing world. *New Left Review, 36*(Nov/Dec), 69-88.

Fraser, N. (2008). From redistribution to recognition? Dilemmas of justice in a "postsocialist" age. In K. Olson (Ed.), *Adding insult to injury: Nancy Fraser debates her critics* (pp. 11-41). London, England: Verso.

Fraser, N. (2009). *Justice interruptus: Critical reflections of the "postsocialist" condition*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Fraser, S. (2004). Situating empirical research. In S. Fraser, V. Lewis, S. Ding, M. Kellett, & C. Robinson (Eds.), *Doing research with children and young people* (pp. 15-26). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Fraser, S., Flewitt, R., & Hammersley, M. (2014). What is research with children and young people? In A. Clark, R. Flewitt, M. Hammersley, & M. Robb (Eds.), *Understanding research with children and young people* (pp. 34-50). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Fraser, S., & Robinson, C. (2004). Paradigms and philosophy. In S. Fraser, V. Lewis, S. Ding, M. Kellett, & C. Robinson (Eds.), *Doing research with children and young people* (pp. 59-77). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Freeman, M. (1996). Children's education: A test case for best interests and autonomy. In R. Davie & D. Galloway (Eds.), *Listening to children in education* (pp. 29-48). London, UK: David Fulton.

Freeman, M. (1998). The sociology of childhood and children's rights. *The International Journal of Children's Rights, 6*(4), 433-444.

Freeman, M. (2018). Introduction. In P. Freeman (Ed.), *Children's rights: New issues, new themes, new perspectives.* (pp. 1-5). Boston, MA: Bril Nijhoff.

Freeman, M., & Van Bueren, G. (1993). Editorial introduction. *The International Journal of Children's Rights, 1*(1), vii-viii.

Frost, D., & Roberts, A. (2011). Student leadership, participation and democracy. *Leading and Managing, 17*(2), 66-84.

Gallagher, M. (2009). Data collection and analysis. In E. Tisdall, J. Davis, & M. Gallagher (Eds.), *Researching with children and young people: Research design, methods and analysis* (pp. 65-88). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Garden to Table. (2018). Home page. Retrieved from http://www.gardentotable.org.nz/

Geboers, E., Geijsel, F., Admiraal, W., & ten Dam, G. (2013). Review of the effects of citizenship education. *Educational Research Review, 9*(June), 158-173.

Gewirtz, S. (1998). Conceptualising social justice in education: Mapping the territory. *Education Policy, 13*(4), 469-484.

Gewirtz, S. (2006). Towards a contextualised analysis of social justice in education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 38*(1), 69-81.

Gibson, J. (2012). Interviews and focus groups with children: Methods that match children's developing competencies. *Journal of Family Theory and Review, 4*(2), 148-159.

Giesinger, J. (2019). Children, rights and powers. *International Journal of Children's Rights, 27*(2), 251-265.

Gillett-Swan, J., & Sargeant, J. (2018). Assuring children's human right to freedom of opinion and expression in education. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 20*(1), 120-127.

Gillett-Swan, J., & Sargeant, J. (2019). Perils of perspective: Identifying adult confidence in the child's capacity, autonomy, power and agency (CAPA) in readiness for voice-inclusive practice. *Journal of Educational Change, 20*(3), 399-421.

Gillett-Swan, J., Tancredi, H., & Graham, L. (2020). Putting students at the centre. In L. Graham (Ed.), *Inclusive education for the 21st century* (pp. 266-295). Crows Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwin.

Gillham, B. (2005). *Research interviewing: The range of techniques*. Maidenhead, England: Open University Press.

Gonzalez, T., Hernandez-Saca, D., & Artiles, A. (2017). In search of voice: Theory and methods in K-12 student voice research in the US, 1990-2010. *Educational Review, 69*(4), 451-473.

Government of New Zealand. (2013a). Directories. Retrieved from http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/directories/list-of-nz-schools

Government of New Zealand. (2013b). Schools directory. Retrieved from http://educationcounts.govt.nz/directories/list-of-nz-schools

Griebler, U., & Nowak, P. (2012). Student councils: A tool for health promoting schools? Characteristics and effects. *Health Education, 112*(2), 105-132.

Griebler, U., Rojatz, D., Simovska, V., & Forster, R. (2017). Effects of student participation in school health promotion: A systematic review. *Health Promotion International, 32*(2), 195-206.

Groundwater-Smith, S. (2011). Concerning equity: The voice of young people. *Leading and Managing, 17*(52-65).

Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. Denzin & P. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 191-215). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Gunter, H., & Thomson, P. (2007). Learning about student voice. *Support for Learning, 22*(4), 181-188.

Hadfield, M., & Haw, K. (2001). 'Voice', young people and action research. *Educational Action Research, 9*(3), 485-502.

Halfon, E., & Romi, S. (2019). High-school student councils: A typological approach. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, December*, 1-21. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/1746197919886880

Hall, V. (2017). A tale of two narratives: Student voice - what lies before us? *Oxford Review of Education, 43*(2), 180-193.

Hamilton, L., & Corbett-Whittier, C. (2013). *Using case study in education research*. London, England: SAGE Publications.

Hammersley, M. (2014). Methodological ideas. In A. Clark, R. Flewitt, M. Hammersley, & M. Robb (Eds.), *Understanding research with children and young people* (pp. 469-185). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Hanson, K. (2017). Embracing the past: 'Been', 'being' and 'becoming' children. *Childhood: A journal of global child research, 24*(3), 281-285.

Harber, C. (2010). Long time coming: Children as only occasional decision makers. In S. Cox, C. Dyer, A. Robinson-Pant, & M. Schweisfurth (Eds.), *Children as decision makers in education* (pp. 35-44). New York, NY: Continuum.

Harcourt, D., & Conroy, H. (2011). Informed consent: Processes and procedures in seeking research partnerships with young children. In D. Harcourt, B. Perry, & T. Waller (Eds.), *Researching young children's perspectives: Debating the ethics and dilemmas of educational research with children* (pp. 38-51). London, England: Routledge.

Harper, D. (2002). Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies, 17*(1), 13-26.

Hart, R. (1992). *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship. UNICEF Innocenti Essays, No. 4*. Florence, Italy: International Child Development Centre of UNICEF.

Hart, R. (1997). *Children's participation: The theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hart, R. (2008). Stepping back from "The ladder': Reflections on a model of participatory work with children. In A. Reid, B. B. Jensen, J. Nikel, & V.

Simorska (Eds.), *Participation and learning: Perspective on education and the environment, health and sustainability* (pp. 19-31). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Hart, R. (2009). Charting change in the participatory settings of childhood. In N. Thomas (Ed.), *Children, politics and communication: Participation at the margins* (pp. 7-29). Bristol, England: Policy Press.

Hartas, D. (2010a). Educational research and inquiry: Key issues and debates. In D. Hartas (Ed.), *Education research and inquiry: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (pp. 13-32). London, England: Continuum.

Hartas, D. (2010b). The epistemological context of quantitative and qualitative research. In D. Hart (Ed.), *Educational research and inquiry: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (pp. 33-53). London, England: Continuum.

Hayes, A. (2010). Design issues. In G. MacNaughton, S. Rolfe, & I. Siraj-Blatchford (Eds.), *Doing early childhood research: International perspectives on theory and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 103-125). Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Henaghan, M. (2018). Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Children: Where have we come from, where are we now and where to from here? In M. Freeman (Ed.), *Children's rights: New issues, new themes, new perspectives* (pp. 260-274). Boston, MA: Brill Nijhoff.

Hendrick, H. (2015). Constructions and reconstructions of British childhood: An interpretive survey, 1800 to the present. In A. James & A. Prout (Eds.), *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood* (pp. 29-53). Oxon, England: Routledge.

Hennessy, E., & Heary, C. (2005). Exploring children's views through focus groups. In S. Greene & D. Hogan (Eds.), *Researching children's experience: Methods and approaches* (pp. 236-252). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Herriot, L. (2013). The presence of an absence: Youth participation in macro-level educational reform. *Citizenship Teaching & Learning, 9*(1), 35-52.

Hipkins, R. (2010). *Reshaping the secondary school curriculum: Building the plane while flying it?* Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Hobson, A., & Townsend, A. (2010). Interviewing as educational research method(s). In D. Hartas (Ed.), *Educational research and inquiry: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (pp. 223-238). London, England: Continuum.

Holdsworth, R. (2004). *Taking young people seriously means giving them serious things to do*. Melbourne, Australia: University of Melbourne.

Holdsworth, R. (2005). Taking young people seriously means giving them serious things to do. In J. Mason & T. Fattore (Eds.), *Children taken seriously in theory, policy and practice* (pp. 139-150). London, England: Jessica Kingsley.

Holdsworth, R. (2018). Student voice, agency, participation. *Connect: Supporting student participation, 2018*(229), 22-25.

Holland, J., Bell, R., Henderson, S., McGrellis, S., Sharpe, S., & Thomson, R. (2001). Youth values and transitions: Young people's participation in the research process. In L. Catan (Ed.), *Young people as researchers: Possibilities, problems and politics.* (pp. 37-42). Leicester, England: National Youth Agency.

Holland, S., Scourfield, J., O'Neill, S., & Pithouse, A. (2005). Democratising the family and the state: The case of family group conferences in child welfare. *Journal of Social Policy, 34*(1), 59-77.

Hughes, P. (2010). Paradigms, methods and knowledge. In G. MacNaughton, S. Rolfe, & I. Siraj-Blatchford (Eds.), *Doing early childhood research:*

International perspectives on theory and practice (2nd ed., pp. 35-61). Crows Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwin.

Hyde, A., & LaPrad, J. (2015). Mindfulness, democracy, and education. *Democracy and Education, 23*(2), 1-12.

Inman, S., & Burke, H. (2002). *School councils: An apprenticeship in democracy?* London, England: Association of Teachers and Lecturers.

James, A., & James, A. (2012). *Key concepts in childhood studies*. London, England: SAGE Publications.

James, A., & Prout, A. (2015a). Introduction. In A. James & A. Prout (Eds.), *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contenporary issues in the sociological study of childhood* (pp. 1-5). Oxon, England: Routledge.

James, A., & Prout, A. (2015b). Re-presenting childhood: Time and transition in the study of childhood. In A. James & A. Prout (Eds.), *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood* (pp. 202-219). Oxon, England: Routledge.

Janesick, V. (2000). The choreography of qualitative research design. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 379-399). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Jans, M. (2004). Children as citizens: Towards a contemporary notion of child participation. *Childhood: A journal of global child research, 11*(1), 27-44.

Jensen, B., & Simovska, V. (2005). Involving students in learning and health promotion processes - clarifying why? what? and How? *Promotion and Education, 7*(3-4), 150-156.

Jones, A. (2004). Involving children and young people as researchers. In S. Fraser, V. Lewis, S. Ding, M. Kellett, & C. Robinson (Eds.), *Doing research with children and young people* (pp. 111-130). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Jones, T. (2017). Unsatisfactory progress: Article 12 and pupil participation in English schools. *International Journal of Children's Rights, 25*(1), 68-84.

Jorgensen, P. (2004). Children's participation in a democratic learning environment. In J. MacBeath & L. Moos (Eds.), *Democratic learning: The challenge to school effectiveness* (pp. 111-131). London, England: RoutledgeFalmer.

Kahne, J., & Westheimer, J. (1996). In the service of what? The politics of service learning. *Phi Delta Kappan, 77*(9), 592-599.

Kahne, J., & Westheimer, J. (2003). Teaching democracy: What schools need to do. *Phi Delta Kappan, 85*(1), 34-66.

Keddie, A. (2015). Student voice and teacher accountability: Possibilities and problematics. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society, 23*(23), 225-244.

Kellett, M., & Ding, S. (2004). Middle childhood. In S. Fraser, V. Lewis, S. Ding, M. Kellett, & C. Robinson (Eds.), *Doing research with children and young people* (pp. 161-174). London, England: SAGE Publications.

King, R. (1976). Student views on assessment in Geography. *Assessment in Higher Education, 1*(2), 4-15.

Kirby, P. (2019). Children's agency in the modern primary classroom. *Children and Society, 34*(1), 17-30.

Klocker, N. (2007). An example of 'thin' agency: Child domestic workers in Tanzania. In R. Panelli, S. Punch, & E. Robson (Eds.), *Global perspectives on rural childhood and youth: Young rural lives* (pp. 81-94). New York, NY: Routledge.

Klocker, N. (2014). Struggling with domestic work: What can a post-colonial perspective offer? *Children's Geographies, 12*(4), 464-478.

Krueger, R., & Casey, M. (2015). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Kumpulainen, K., Lipponen, L., Hilppo, J., & Mikkola, A. (2014). Building on the positive in children's lives: A co-participatory study on the social construction of children's sense of agency. *Early Childhood Development and Care, 184*(2), 211-229.

Kvale, S. (2007). *Doing interviews* (2nd ed.). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Lac, V., & Mansfield, K. (2018). What do students have to do with educational leadership? Making a case for centering student voice. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education, 13*(1), 38-58.

Ladkin, S. (2017). Exploring unequal power relations within schools: The authenticity of the student voice. *Journal of Initial Teacher Inquiry, 3*, 37-40.

Laupa, M., Turiel, E., & Cowan, P. (1995). Obedience to authority in children and adults. In L. McMaster, J. Connolly, D. Pepler, & W. Craig (Eds.), *Morality in everyday life: Developmental perspectives* (pp. 131-165). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Lee, L., & Zimmerman, M. (1999). A new vision for student voice. *Education Canada, 39*(2), 34-35.

Leitch, R. (2012). Student voice in a global context: Rights, benefits and limitations. In C. Day (Ed.), *The Routledge international handbook of teacher and school development* (pp. 215-221). New York, NY: Routledge.

Lewis, V. (2004). Doing research with children and young people: An introduction. In S. Fraser, V. Lewis, S. Ding, M. Kellett, & C. Robinson (Eds.), *Doing research with children and young people* (pp. 1-11). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Liamputtong, P. (2011). *Focus group methodology: Principles and practice*. Los Angeles, LA: SAGE Publications.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (2000). The only generalization is: There is no generalization. In R. Gomm, M. Hammersley, & P. Foster (Eds.), *Case study method* (pp. 27-44). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Lindsay, G. (2010). Ethical considerations and legal issues in educational research. In D. Hartas (Ed.), *Educational research and inquiry: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (pp. 110-127). London, England: Continuum.

Lundy, L. (2007). 'Voice' is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the RIghts of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal, 33*(6), 927-942.

Lundy, L. (2018). In defence of tokenism? Implementing children's right to participate in collective decision-making. *Childhood, 25*(3), 340-354.

MacBeath, J. (2004). Democratic learning and school effectiveness: Are they by any chance related? In J. MacBeath & L. Moos (Eds.), *Democratic learning: The challenge to school effectiveness* (pp. 19-51). London, England: RoutledgeFalmer.

Mager, U., & Nowak, P. (2012). Effects of student participation in decision making at school. A systematic review and synthesis of empirical research. *Educational Research Review, 7*(1), 38-61.

Manca, S., & Grion, V. (2017). Engaging students in school participatory practice through Facebook: The story of a failure. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 48*(5), 1153-1163.

Mannion, G. (2010). After participation: The socio-spatial performance of intergenerational becoming. In B. Percy-Smith & N. Thomas (Eds.), *A handbook of children and young people's participation: Perspectives from theory and practice* (pp. 330-342). Oxon, England: Routledge.

Mannion, G., Sowerby, M., & L'Anson, J. (2020). Four arenas of school-based participation: Towards a heuristic for children's rights-informed educational practice. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, 1-18.

Mansfield, K. (2014). How listening to student voices informs and strengthens social justice research and practices. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 50*(3), 392-430.

Mansfield, K., Welton, A., & Halx, M. (2012). Listening to student voice: Toward a more inclusive theory for research and practice. In C. Boske & S. Diem (Eds.), *Global leadership for social justice: Taking it from the field to practice* (pp. 21-41). Bradford, England: Emerald.

Marten, J. (2018). *The history of childhood: A very short introduction*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Mason, J., & Bolzan, N. (2009). Questioning understandings of children's participation: Applying a cross-cultural lens. In B. Percy-Smith (Ed.), *Handbook of children and young people's participation: Perspectives from theory and practice* (pp. 125-132). Florence, KY: Routledge.

Mayall, B. (2002). *Towards a sociology for childhood: Thinking from children's lives*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.

Mayall, B. (2013). *A history of the sociology of childhood*. London, England: Institute of Education Press.

Mayne, F., Howitt, C., & Rennie, L. (2018). A hierarchical model of children's research participation rights based on information, understanding, voice, and influence. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 26*(5), 644-656.

McGregor, J. (2004). Space, power and the classroom. *FORUM, 46*(1), 13-18.

McGregor, J. (2007). Recognizing student leadership: Schools and networks as sites of opportunity. *Improving Schools, 10*(1), 86-101.

McMahon, B. (2012). Education in and for democracy: Conceptions of schooling and student voice. In B. McMahon & J. Portelli (Eds.), *Student engagement in urban schools: Beyond neoliberal discourses* (pp. 29-48). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

McNae, R. (2011). Student leadership in secondary schools: The influence of school context on young women's leadership perceptions. *Leading and Managing, 17*(2), 36-51.

McNamee, S. (2016). *The social study of childhood*. London, England: Palgrave.

McNeish, D., & Newman, T. (2002). Involving children and young people in decision making. In D. McNeish, T. Newman, & H. Roberts (Eds.), *What works for children?* (pp. 186-204). Buckingham, England: Open University Press.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S., & Tisdell, T. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Meyer, C. (2001). A case in case study methodology. *Field Methods, 13*(4), 329-352.

Ministry of Education. (2008). *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa for Māori-medium education*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

Ministry of Education. (2011). Student views. Retrieved from http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Archives/Student-views

Ministry of Education. (2015). *The New Zealand curriculum for English-medium teaching and learning in years 1-13*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

Ministry of Education. (2016a). Digital technologies for teaching and learning. Retrieved from http://www.education.govt.nz/ministry-of-education/specific-initiatives/digital-technologies-for-teaching-and-learning/

Ministry of Education. (2016b). Innovative learning environments. Retrieved from www.ile.education.govt.nz

Ministry of Education. (2017a). School deciles. Retrieved from http://www.education.govt.nz/school/running-a-school/resourcing/operational-funding/school-decile-ratings/

Ministry of Education. (2017b). *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

Ministry of Health. (2015). Health Promoting Schools. Retrieved from http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/life-stages/child-health/health-promoting-schools

Mitra, D. (2003). Student voice in school reform: Reframing student-teacher relationships. *McGill Journal of Education, 38*(2), 289-304.

Mitra, D. (2006). Increasing student voice and moving toward youth leadership. *The Prevention Researcher, 13*(1), 7-10.

Mitra, D. (2008). Balancing power in communities of practice: An examination of increasing student voice through school-based youth-adult partnerships. *Journal of Educational Change, 9*(3), 221-242.

Mitra, D. (2009). Student voice and student roles in education policy and policy reform. In G. Sykes, B. Schneider, D. Plank, & T. Ford (Eds.), *Handbook of education policy research* (pp. 819-830). New York, NY: Routledge.

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

Mitra, D., & Serriere, S. (2012). Student voice in elementary school reform: Examining youth development in fifth graders. *American Educational Research Journal, 49*(4), 743-774.

Mitra, D., Serriere, S., & Soicovy, D. (2012). The role of leaders in enabling student voice. *Management in Education, 26*(3), 104-112.

Moosa-Mitha, M. (2005). A difference-centred alternative to theorization of children's citizenship rights. *Citizenship Studies, 9*(4), 369-388.

Morris, D. (2018). *Student voice and teacher professional development: Knowledge exchange and transformational learning*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Morrison, M. (2012). Understanding methodology. In A. Briggs, M. Coleman, & M. Morrison (Eds.), *Research methods in educational leadership and management* (pp. 14-28). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Morrow, V. (2013). What's in a number? Unsettling the boundaries of age. *Childhood: A journal of global child research, 20*(2), 1551-1155.

Nelson, E. (2017). Re-thinking power in student voice as games of truth: Dealing/playing your hand. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 25*(2), 181-194.

Nelson, E. (2018). Teachers and power in student voice: 'Finger on the pulse, not children under the thumb'. In R. Bourke & J. Loveridge (Eds.), *Radical collegilality through student voice: Educational experiences, policy and practice.* (pp. 197-216). Singapore: Springer.

Nelson, E. (2019). Student voice as regimes of truth: Troubling authenticity. *Middle Grades Review, 1*(2), Article 3.

New Zealand School Trustees' Association. (2020a). *Board of Trustees; Poari Whakahaere*.

New Zealand School Trustees' Association. (2020b). Student elections media release. Retrieved from https://www.nzsta.org.nz/latest-news/student-elections-media-release-2020/

Ng, C., Bartlett, B., & Elliot, S. (2018). *Empowering engagement: Creating learning opportunities for students from challenging backgrounds*. Singapore: Springer.

O'Neill, J. (2018). Voice and the ethics of children's agency in educational research. In R. Bourke & J. Loveridge (Eds.), *Radical collegiality through student voice: Educational experience, policy and practice* (pp. 39-54). Singapore: Springer.

Pattman, R., & Kehily, M. (2004). Gender. In S. Fraser, V. Lewis, S. Ding, M. Kellett, & C. Robinson (Eds.), *Doing research with children and young people* (pp. 131-144). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Penn, H. (2008). *Understanding early childhood: Issues and controversies* (2nd ed.). Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Perry-Hazan, L. (2019). Conceptualising conflicts between student participation and other rights and interests. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, 1-16. doi:10.1080/01596306.2019.1599324

Phelan, S., & Kinsella, E. (2013). Picture this ... Safety, dignity and voice - Ethical research with children: Practical considerations for the reflexive researcher. *Qualitative Inquiry, 19*(2), 81-90.

Piaget, J. (1952). *The origins of intelligence in children* (M. Cook, Trans.). New York, NY: International Universities Press.

Prosser, J., & Loxley, A. (2010). The application of visual methodology in the exploration of the visual culture of schools. In D. Hartas (Ed.), *Educational research and inquiry: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (pp. 199-222). London, England: Continuum.

Prout, A., & James, A. (1997). A new paradigm for the sociology of childhood? Provenance, promise and problems. In A. James & A. Prout (Eds.), *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood* (pp. 7-33). London, England: RoutledgeFalmer.

Punch, S. (2002). Research with children: The same or different from research with adults? *Childhood: A journal of global child research, 9*(3), 321-341.

Quinn, S., & Owen, S. (2016). Digging deeper: Understanding the power of 'student voice'. *Australian Journal of Education, 60*(1), 60-72.

Read, B. (2008). 'The world must stop when I'm talking': Gender and power relations in primary teachers' classroom talk. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 29*(6), 609-621.

Rebell, M. (2018). *Flunking democracy: Schools, courts, and civic participation*. Chicago: University of Chicago, IL.

Reisch, M. (2002). Defining social justice in a socially unjust world. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services, 83*(4), 343-354.

Robinson, C. (2016). Listening to the voices of young people: Working towards the genuine participating young people in discussions about school transformation. In A. Montgomery & I. Kehoe (Eds.), *Reimagining the purpose of schools and educational organisations* (pp. 79-91). Switzerland: Springer International.

Roche, J. (1999). Children: Rights, participation and citizenship. *Childhood: A journal of global child research, 6*(4), 475-493.

Rönnlund, M. (2014). Justice in and through education? Students' participation in decision-making. *Journal of Social Science Education, 13*(2), 104-113.

Ruddock, J., Day, J., & Wallace, G. (1997). Students' perspectives on school improvement. In A. Hargreaves (Ed.), *Rethinking educational change with heart and mind* (pp. 73-91). Alexandria, Virginia: ASCD.

Rudduck, J. (2006). Editorial: The past, the papers and the project. *Educational Review, 58*(2), 131-143.

Rudduck, J., & Fielding, M. (2006). Student voice and the perils of popularity. *Educational Review, 58*(2), 219-231.

Rudduck, J., & McIntyre, D. (2007). *Improving learning through consulting pupils*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Sargeant, J., & Gillett-Swan, J. (2015). Empowering the disempowered through voice-inclusive practice: Children's views on adult-centric educational provision. *European Educational Research Journal, 14*(2), 177-191.

Sargeant, J., & Gillett-Swan, J. (2019). Voice-Inclusive Practice (VIP): A charter for authentic student engagement. *International Journal of Children's Rights, 27*(1), 122-139.

Saunders, R. (2005). Creating meaningful leadership programmes for young women through the process of co-construction. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Leadership, 20*(2), 15-30.

Schoolgen. (2015). About Schoolgen. Retrieved from http://www.schoolgen.co.nz/about-schoolgen

Schreier, M. (2014). Qualitative content analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 170-183). London, England: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Scott, D. (2012). Research design: Frameworks, strategies, methods and technologies. In A. Briggs, M. Coleman, & M. Morrison (Eds.), *Research methods in educational leadership and management* (pp. 106-121). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Serriere, S., & Mitra, D. (2011). Critical issues and contexts of students voice in the United States. In C. Day (Ed.), *Routledge International Handbook of Teacher and School Development* (pp. 223-242). New York, NY: Routledge.

Serriere, S., Mitra, D., & Reed, K. (2011). Student voice in the elementary years: Fostering youth-adult partnerships in elementary service learning. *Theory and Research in Social Education, 39*(4), 541-575.

Shaw, L., & Wainryb, C. (2006). When victims don't cry: Children's understandings of victimization, compliance and subversion. *Child Development, 77*(4), 1050-1062.

Shier, H. (2001). Pathways to participation: Openings, opportunities and obligations. *Children and Society, 15*(2), 107-117.

Shier, H. (2019a). "Empowerment" of children and adolescents: What is it, how does it occur, and what is the adult supporter's role? Finding answers in the experience of young people organising with CESESMA in Nicaragua. Retrieved from https://childrensresearchnetwork.org/knowledge/resources/empowerment-of-children-and-adolescents-cesesma-nicaragua

Shier, H. (2019b). Student voice and children's rights: Power, empowerment, and "protagonismo". In M. Peters (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Teacher Education* (pp. 1-6). Singapore: Springer.

Sidoti, C. (2005). The law and taking children seriously: In theory, policy and practice. In J. Mason & T. Fattore (Eds.), *Children taken seriously* (pp. 17-21). London, England: Jessica Kingsley.

Simon, J., Luetzow, A., & Conte, J. (in press). Thirty years of the convention on the rights of the child: Developments in child sexual abuse and exploitation. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 1-8.

Simon, J., & Smith, L. (Eds.). (2001). *A civilising mission? Perceptions and representations of the New Zealand Native Schools system*. Auckland, New Zealand: Auckland University Press.

Simons, H. (2009). *Case study research in practice*. London, England: SAGE Publications.

Simovska, V., & Jensen, B. B. (2009). *Conceptualizing participation - the health of children and young people*. Copenhagen, Denmark: World Health Organisation.

Sinclair, R. (2004). Participation in practice: Making it meaningful, effective and sustainable. *Children and Society, 18*(2), 106-118.

Smith, A. (2011). Respecting children's rights and agency: Theoretical insights into ethical research procedures. In D. Harcourt, B. Perry, & T. Waller (Eds.), *Researching young children's perspectives: Debating the ethics and dilemmas of educational research with children* (pp. 11-25). London, England: Routledge.

Smyth, J. (2007). Toward the pedagogically engaged school: Listening to student voice as a positive response to disengagement and "dropping out". In D. Thiessen & A. Cook-Sather (Eds.), *International handbook of student experience in elementary and secondary school* (pp. 635-658). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Snook, I. (2003). The ethics and politics of social research. In C. Davidson & M. Tolich (Eds.), *Social science research in New Zealand: Many paths to understanding* (2nd ed., pp. 69-87). Auckland, New Zealand: Pearson.

Solhaug, T. (2018). Democratic schools - annalytical perspectives. *Journal of Social Science Education, 17*(1), 2-12.

Stake, R. (1978). The case study method in social inquiry. *Educational Researcher, 7*(5), 5-8.

Stake, R. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 443-466). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Stake, R. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Struthers, A. (2016). Breaking down boundaries: Voice and participation in English primary education. *International Journal of Children's Rights, 24*(2), 434-468.

Taylor, M. (2002). School councils: Their role in citizenship and personal and social education. *Topic*(28), 1-6.

Te One, S. (2011). Defining rights: Children's rights in theory and in practice. *He Kupu, 2*(4), 41-57.

Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of mixed methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioural sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

The Citizenship Foundation. (2016). What is citizenship education? Retrieved from http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/main/page.php?286

The Enviroschools Foundation. (2018). The Enviroschools Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.enviroschools.org.nz/

Thomas, N. (2007). Towards a theory of children's participation. *International Journal of Children's Rights, 15*(2), 199-218.

Thomas, N., & Percy-Smith, B. (2010). Introduction. In B. Percy-Smith & N. Thomas (Eds.), *A handbook of children and young people's participation: Perspectives from theory and practice* (pp. 1-7). Oxon, England: Routledge.

Thomson, P. (2010). Involving children and young people in educational change: Possibilities and challenges. In A. Hargreaves (Ed.), *Second international handbook of educational change* (pp. 809-824). London, England: Springer.

Thomson, P. (2011). Coming to terms with 'voice'. In G. Czerniawski & W. Kidd (Eds.), *The student voice handbook: Bridging the academic/practitioner divide* (pp. 19-30). Bingley, England: Emerald.

Thomson, P., & Gunter, H. (2009). Students' participation in school change: Action research on the ground. In S. Noffke & B. Somekh (Eds.), *The*

SAGE handbook of educational action research (pp. 407-419). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Thorne, B. (2009). "Childhood": Changing and dissonant meanings. *International Journal of Learning and Media, 1*(1), 19-27.

Tisdall, E., Davis, J., & Gallagher, M. (2009). *Researching with children and young people: Research design, methods and analysis*. London, England: SAGE Publications.

Todd, L. (2012). Critical dialogue, critical methodology: Bridging the research gap to young people's participation in evaluating children's services. *Children's Geographies, 10*(2), 187-200.

Tolich, M., & Davidson, C. (1999). *Starting fieldwork: An introduction to qualitative research in New Zealand*. Auckland, New Zealand: Oxford University Press.

United Kingdom Department for Education. (2013). Citizenship programmes of study: National curriculum in England. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-citizenship-programmes-of-study

United Nations. (1965). *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations.

United Nations. (1979). *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations,.

United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations.

United Nations. (2008). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations.

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (1997). *Concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: New Zealand*. Geneva, Switzerland: The United Nations.

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2003). *Concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: New Zealand*. Geneva, Switzerland: The United Nations.

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2009). General Comment No. 12: The right of the child to be heard. Retrieved from https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/671444?ln=en

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2011). *Concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: New Zealand*. Geneva, Switzerland: The United Nations.

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2016). *Concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: New Zealand*. Geneva, Switzerland: The United Nations.

United Nations General Assembly. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/

United Nations General Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2003). *General Comment No. 5: General measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Retrieved from New York, NY: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/513415?ln=en

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. (2016). Children's rights: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/

United Nations Population Fund. (2005). *Human rights principles*. New York, NY: United Nations Population Fund.

Valentine, K. (2011). Accounting for agency. *Children and Society, 25*(5), 347-358.

van Rooyen, A., Water, T., & Rasmussen, K. (2015). What makes a child a 'competent' child? *New Zealand Medical Journal, 128*(1426), 88-95.

Vandenbroeck, M., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2006). Children's agency and educational norms: A tensed negotiation. *Childhood: A journal of global child research, 13*(1), 127-143.

Vanner, C. (2014). 'We are the assets of the school': Children's participation rights in a school health and nutrition project in El Salvador. *International Journal of Children's Rights, 22*(2), 339-360.

Vasconelos, T. (2010). Case study. In G. MacNaughton, S. Rolfe, & I. Siraj-Blatchford (Eds.), *Doing early childhood research: International perspectives on theory and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 327-343). Crow's Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwim.

Vaughn, S., Schumm, J., & Sinagub, J. (1996). *Focus group interviews in education and psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Veale, A. (2005). Creative methodologies in participatory research with children. In S. Greene & D. Hogan (Eds.), *Researching children's experience: Methods and approaches* (pp. 253-272). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Veitch, H. (2009). Participation in practice: An evaluation of the primary school council as a participatory tool. *Childhoods Today, June*(Special Issue), 1-24.

VERBI Software GmbH. (2016). MAXQDA: The art of data analysis. Retrieved from http://www.maxqda.com/

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wall, K., Cassidy, C., Robinson, C., Hall, E., Beaton, M., Kanyal, M., & Mitra, D. (2019). Look who's talking: Factors for considering the facilitation of very young children's voices. *Journal of Early Childhood Research, 17*(4), 263-278.

Wang, F. (2016). From redistribution to recognition: How school principals perceive social justice. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 15*(3), 323-342.

Wellington, J. (2015). *Educational research: Contemporary issues and practical approaches* (2nd ed.). London, England: Bloomsbury Academic.

Westheimer, J. (2019). Civic education and the rise of populist nationalism. *Peabody Journal of Education, 94*(1), 4-16.

Westheimer, J. (2020). Can education transform the world? *Kappa Delta Pi Record, 56*(1), 6-12.

Whitty, G., & Wisby, E. (2007a). *Real decision making? School councils in action: Research Report.* London, England: Department for Children, Schools and Families,.

Whitty, G., & Wisby, E. (2007b). Whose voice? An exploration of the current policy interest in pupil involvement in school decision-making. *International Studies in Sociology of Education, 17*(3), 303-319.

Wiles, R. (2012). *What are qualitative research ethics?* London, England: Bloomsbury.

Wisby, E. (2011). Student voice and new models of teacher professionalism. In G. Czerniawski & W. Kidd (Eds.), *The student voice handbook: Bridging the academic/practitioner divide* (pp. 31-44). Bingley, England: Emerald.

Woods, P., & Woods, G. (2012). Degrees of school democracy: A holistic framework. *Journal of School Leadership, 22*(4), 707-732.

Wyness, M. (1999). Childhood, agency and education reform. *Childhood: A journal of global child research, 6*(3), 353-368.

Wyness, M. (2001). Children, childhood and political participation: Case studies of young people's councils. *International Journal of Children's Rights, 9*(3), 193-212.

Wyness, M. (2005). Regulating participation: The possibilities and limits of children and young people's councils. *Journal of Social Sciences, 9*, 7-18.

Wyness, M. (2009). Adults' involvement in children's participation: Juggling children's places and spaces. *Children and Society, 23*(6), 395-406.

Wyness, M. (2010). Children's and young people's participation within educational and civic settings: A comparative case study approach to research. In D. Hartas (Ed.), *Educational research and inquiry: Qualitative and quantitative approaches.* (pp. 159-169). London, England: Continuum

Wyness, M. (2012a). *Childhood and society* (2nd ed.). London, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wyness, M. (2012b). The social construction of childhood: Sociological approaches to the study of children and childhood. In R. Adams (Ed.), *Working with children and families: Knowledge and contexts for practice* (pp. 45-52). Hampshire, England: Palgrave McMillan.

Wyness, M. (2013a). Children's participation and intergenerational dialogue: Bringing adults back into the analysis. *Childhood: A journal of global child research, 20*(4), 429-442.

Wyness, M. (2013b). Global standards and deficit childhoods: The contested meaning of children's participation. *Children's Geographies, 11*(3), 340-353.

Wyness, M. (2015). *Childhood*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.

Wyness, M. (2017). The recognition and distribution of children's agency in the UK. In S. Dinter & R. Schneider (Eds.), *Transdisciplinary perspectives on childhood in contemporary Britain* (pp. 230-245). London, England: Taylor & Francis.

Wyness, M. (2018). Children's participation: Definitions, narratives and disputes. In C. Baraldi & T. Cockburn (Eds.), *Theorising childhood: Citizenship, rights and participation* (pp. 53-72). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Yamashita, H., & Davies, L. (2010). Students as professionals: The London secondary school councils action research report. In B. Percy-Smith & N. Thomas (Eds.), *A handbook of children and young people's participation: Perspectives from theory and practice* (pp. 230-239). Oxon, England: Routledge.

Yamashita, H., Davies, L., & Williams, C. (2011). Assessing the benefits of students' participation. In S. Cox, C. Dyer, A. Robinson-Pant, & M. Schweisfurth (Eds.), *Children as decision makers in education: Sharing experiences across cultures.* (pp. 99-106). New York, NY: Continuum.

Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Yin, R. (2012). *Applications of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Young, I. (2011). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Zembylas, M. (2020). The affective modes of right-wing populism: Trump pedagogy and lessons for democratic education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 39*(2), 151-166.

Appendix A: Ethical approval letter from the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee

Dean's Office
Faculty of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4500

www.waikato.ac.nz

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

MEMORANDUM

To: Alison Ann Smith

cc: Professor Christopher Branson
Associate Professor Linda Mitchell

From: Associate Professor Garry Falloon
Chairperson (Acting), Research Ethics Committee

Date: 11 March 2013

Subject: Supervised Postgraduate Research – Application for Ethical Approval (EDU003/13)

Thank you for submitting the amendments to your application for ethical approval for the research project:

Investigating children's contribution to decision-making in New Zealand primary schools – participation, pathways and potential

I am pleased to advise that your application has received ethical approval.

Please note that researchers are asked to consult with the Faculty's Research Ethics Committee in the first instance if any changes to the approved research design are proposed.

The Committee wishes you all the best with your research.

Associate Professor Garry Falloon
Chairperson (Acting)
Research Ethics Committee

Appendix B: Invitation to participate – Boards of Trustees

Department of Professional Studies
School of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4466 ext 7904
www.waikato.ac.nz

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Investigating children's contribution to decision-making in New Zealand primary schools – participation, pathways and potential

53 Belfast Street
Hillsborough
Auckland 1042.

[Date]

Dear [School Name] Board of Trustees' members

I am currently enrolled in the Doctor of Education programme at the University of Waikato and am writing to invite your school to participate in the research that I will be undertaking during [date] and [date] in order to complete my thesis.

The aim of my research is: To investigate the ways in which Years 1-8 children contribute to decision-making in New Zealand primary schools.

The details of the proposed research project are included below.

Title of project

Investigating children's contribution to decision-making in New Zealand primary schools – participation, pathways and potential.

Why is this research important?
Through my professional experiences in the education sector, I have formed a strong interest in the issue of how students perceive their educational experiences generally. In particular, my experience is that although many primary schools have various mechanisms that are designed to allow children to contribute to decision-making (e.g. school councils, running school assembly), there are opportunities for this to be further investigated as there has been very little research carried out in New Zealand in this area, and none that I am aware of in primary schools.

What are my research questions?
(i) In what ways do children in New Zealand primary schools participate in decision-making in their schools?
(ii) What types of pathways are provided for children to contribute to decision-making?

(iii) What potential exists for the enhancement of children's contribution to decision-making and its outcomes?

Who will be involved in the research and what will they be asked to do?
There will be two Auckland schools involved in this project. At each school, I wish to carry out one interview (of approximately one hour) with the principal and one interview each with up to 6 "key adults" (other school leaders or teachers who are involved in what the school does to enable children to contribute to decisions - e.g. the teacher that runs the school council).

I would also like to hold focus groups (a kind of group interview that will take about one hour) with 4 groups of 6 children who the principal and staff identify as being either *involved in* existing formal decision-making processes (2 groups of 6 children) or *not involved in* existing formal decision-making processes (2 groups of 6 children). The children will also be asked to take photographs around the school that show how they *have* been involved in decision-making and/or where they would *like* to be involved, and these photos will be discussed in the focus groups.

What are the ethical issues?
Informed consent will underpin every aspect of this research project. It will be obtained from all school Boards, leaders, teachers, parents/caregivers and children, and the research project will not proceed without these consents. Furthermore, the identities of the schools, adults and children that participate will be kept confidential. The information gathered in this research project will be used by me to complete my doctoral thesis and in future presentations (including conference papers) and publications. This project has received ethics approval from the University of Waikato (Ethics Approval Number EDU003/13).

When will the research take place?
I hope to begin my research in your school during (date). I will ensure that the timings of all interviews and focus groups are negotiated with the principal and staff.

What are the benefits for the school?
There are two potential benefits for your school. In the first instance, I will be able to share the results of my research with you and this may assist you in further enhancing the ways in which students can contribute to decision-making. Secondly, I believe that the children that are involved in the focus groups will learn from the experience of being involved in a formal research project and that they will value the opportunity to make a contribution to play an important role in their school.

I hope that you will consent to your school's participation in this research. If you have further questions, or would like me to attend a Board of Trustees meeting, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely
Alison Smith
alisonsmith@clear.net.nz
09 624 1577
027 271 4764

Appendix C: Participant consent form – Boards of Trustees

Department of Professional Studies
School of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4466 ext. 7904
www.waikato.ac.nz

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Investigating children's contribution to decision-making in New Zealand primary schools – participation, pathways and potential

The Board have read the *Invitation to Participate (Boards of Trustees)*, and have also been given and have understood an oral explanation of this study.

We have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to our satisfaction. We understand that we may ask further questions at any time and can ask to see the thesis when it is finished.

We also understand that we are free to withdraw [Name of school] School from the study at any time up until [date].

We understand that neither the school's name nor the names of any staff or children will be used in the thesis or any presentations or publications that may arise from the thesis. We understand that the information that the school, staff and children provide will be confidential to the researcher (Alison Smith), her supervisor (Professor Chris Branson), and her co-supervisor (Dr. Rachel McNae).

We give our permission for [Name of school] School to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the *Invitation to Participate (Boards of Trustees)*.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Position: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Invitation to participate – principals and key adults

Department of Professional Studies
School of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4466 ext. 7904
www.waikato.ac.nz

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Investigating children's contribution to decision-making in New Zealand primary schools – participation, pathways and potential

My name is Alison Smith. I am currently enrolled in the *Doctor of Education* degree in the School of Education at the University of Waikato, and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for my thesis which forms a substantial part of this degree.

What is the research about?
The aim of my research is: To investigate the ways in which Years 1-8 children contribute to decision-making in New Zealand primary schools. Specifically, I want to answer the following main research questions:

(i) How do children in New Zealand primary schools participate in decision-making in their schools?
(ii) What types of pathways are provided for children to contribute to decision-making?
(iii) What potential exists for the enhancement of children's contribution to decision-making and its outcomes?

What will you be involved in and how long will it take?
I would like to interview you. This will take no longer than one hour and I would like to digitally record the interview. You will be asked to give your written consent prior to the interview, and I may want to interview you again later in my study.

What will happen to the information collected?
Only myself, my supervisor (Professor Christopher Branson), and my co-supervisor (Dr. Rachel McNae) will be privy to the recordings, notes and transcriptions from your interview, and these will be stored securely at my home office and used in the strictest confidence in the writing of my thesis, and possibly in presentations and articles in the future. Neither you nor your organisation will be identified or identifiable. After the thesis is completed, I will destroy any notes and recordings after a period of five years.

If you decide to participate in this research, you have the right to:

- ask questions of me or my supervisor at any time;
- refuse to answer any particular question;
- to withdraw from the study before May 1 2014;
- to withdraw the information you have provided by May 1 2014; and/or
- to read the completed thesis.

I hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find your involvement worthwhile. If you have any queries about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Alison Smith
09 624 1577
027 271 4764
alisonsmith@clear.net.nz

Professor Chris Branson
07 838 4466 ext. 7904
cbranson@waikato.ac.nz

Appendix E: Participant consent form – principals and key adults

Department of Professional Studies
School of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4466 ext. 7904
www.waikato.ac.nz

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Investigating children's contribution to decision-making in New Zealand primary schools – participation, pathways and potential

I have read the Participant Information Form (adults) sheet, and have also been given and have understood an oral explanation of this study.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study or withdraw the information that I have provided up until May 1 2014, or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study. I understand that I can ask to see the thesis when it is finished.

I understand that neither my name nor the name of my organisation will be used in the thesis or any presentations or publications that may arise from the thesis. I understand that the information that I provide will be confidential to the researcher (Alison Smith), her supervisor (Professor Chris Branson), and her co-supervisor (Dr. Rachel McNae).

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Participant Information Sheet.

I agree to my responses being digitally recorded.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F: Interview schedule - principals and key adults

1. How would you describe the culture of your school? Vision and values?

2. What do you understand by the idea of children contributing to decision-making at their schools?

3. What would you say are the main beliefs at this school about the role of children in their own education? How/why have these beliefs emerged do you think? How important is this to the school overall?

4. What are the main ways that children can contribute to decision-making at this school? How has the school developed and decided on these? How successful are these?

5. Do all children have the opportunity to contribute to decision-making? Why/why not? Who decides on/selects the children who will be involved?

6. What roles do teachers have in helping children to make a contribution? Are there any teachers or adults who are particularly involved? In what ways do you have a particular role to play?

7. What factors do you think encourage the contribution of children at this school? What factors hinder it?

8. How do you think children at this school would rate their opportunities to contribute to decision-making?

9. What examples are there at this school of where children's contributions have made a difference/had an influence on outcomes?

10. What would you like to further develop at this school in terms of opportunities for children to contribute? What are other schools doing that you would like to try?

Appendix G: Invitation to participate – parents/caregivers

Department of Professional Studies
School of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4466 ext. 7904
www.waikato.ac.nz

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Investigating children's contribution to decision-making in New Zealand primary schools – participation, pathways and potential

Kia ora. My name is Alison Smith. I am currently enrolled in the *Doctor of Education* degree in the School of Education at the University of Waikato, and seek your help in giving (child's name) permission to take part in my research project as one of a group of Year 6 children. This research will allow me to complete the thesis for my degree. I have selected (school name) School to be involved in my research project as I have worked in the school as a consultant over the last two years or so, and am interested in the ways in which (school name) School involves children in contributing to decision-making. The Board of Trustees and (principal name) have given permission for the school to participate.

I would like to invite your child _____ to participate in my research at (school name) School.

What is the research about?
The aim of my research is: To investigate the ways in which Years 1-8 children contribute to decision-making in New Zealand primary schools.

What will your child be involved in and how long will it take?
I would like _____ to participate in a focus group discussion – this is a group discussion with a small group of other children. The children will be asked about ways in which they have the chance to contribute to decisions that are made at their school, and they will also have the opportunity to take and discuss photos taken around the school showing where children *have* contributed to decision-making at the school or where children *could* contribute.

The focus group will take no longer than one hour and I would like to digitally record the conversations of the children.

What will happen to the information collected?
Only myself, my supervisor (Professor Christopher Branson), and my co-supervisor (Dr. Rachel McNae) will be able to listen to the recordings and read my notes from your child's focus group, and these will be stored securely at my home and used in the strictest confidence in the writing of my thesis, and possibly in presentations and publications in the future.

Neither (child's name) nor (school name) School will be named in my thesis work. After the thesis is completed, I will destroy any notes and recordings after a period of five years.

If you decide that you want your child to participate in this research, _____ will have the right to:

- ask questions of me or my supervisor at any time;
- refuse to answer any particular question;
- to withdraw from the study before May 1 2015; and
- to withdraw the information s/he has provided before May 1 2015.

As (child name)'s parent(s)/caregiver(s) you have the right to:

- ask questions of me or my supervisor at any time;
- to withdraw your child from the study before May 1 2015;
- to withdraw the information your child has provided before May 1 2015; and/or
- to read the completed thesis.

I hope that you will agree to _____ taking part and that your child will enjoy the focus group and find it interesting. If you have any queries about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Please return the next sheet to (principal name) at (school name) School by Monday 1 December (with your signature/s added) if you are happy for your child to participate in this research.

Alison Smith
027 271 4764

alisonsmith@clear.net.nz

Professor Chris Branson
07 838 4466 ext. 7904

cbranson@waikato.ac.nz

Appendix H: Participant consent form – parents/caregivers

Department of Professional Studies
School of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4466 ext. 7904
www.waikato.ac.nz

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Investigating children's contribution to decision-making in New Zealand primary schools – participation, pathways and potential

Please return this sheet to (principal name) at (school name) School by Monday 1 December with your signature/s added if you are happy for your child to participate in this research.

Permission for (child's name)

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and I understand what the research is about.

I know that I can ask questions of Alison Smith or her supervisors at any time.

I also understand that I am free to withdraw my child, or any information that s/he has provided, from the study before May 1 2015, and that my child can decline to answer any particular questions in the study. I understand that I can ask to see the thesis when it is finished.

I understand that neither my child's name nor the name of their school will be used in the thesis or any presentations or publications that may arise from the thesis. I understand that the information that my child provides will be confidential to the researcher (Alison Smith), her supervisor (Professor Chris Branson), and her co-supervisor (Dr. Rachel McNae).

_____

I consent to my child participating in this study under the conditions set out in the Participant Information Sheet.

I agree to my child's responses being digitally recorded.

I agree to my child participating in taking photos of the school as part of this study.

Signed: _____

Name/s: _____

Date: _____

Appendix I: Invitation to participate – children

Department of Professional Studies
School of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4466 ext. 7904
www.waikato.ac.nz

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Investigating children's contribution to decision-making in New Zealand primary schools – participation, pathways and potential

My name is Alison Smith and I am about to start a very big research project. I would like you to take part if you and your parents think that it would be an interesting and enjoyable thing to do.

What is the research about?
The aim of my research is: To find out about how primary school children contribute to decision-making in their schools.

What will you be involved in and how long will it take?
I would like you to be part of a focus group discussion – this is a group discussion with a small group of other children. You will be asked about the ways in which you have the chance to contribute to decisions that are made at your school. You will also have a chance to take photographs of things at your school that you *have* helped to make decisions about or where you think children *could* help to make decisions, and we will talk about these in the focus group.

The focus group will take about one hour and I would like to digitally record you so that I can listen to your ideas and thoughts again, and type out what you have said for my thesis (a kind of report). Before the focus group starts, you and your parents will sign special forms so that I know that you all agree that you can be in the focus group.

What will happen to the information collected?
Only myself, my supervisor (Professor Christopher Branson), and my co-supervisor (Dr. Rachel McNae) will be allowed to listen to the recordings and read the information that you give me in the focus group. I will keep all this in a very safe place so that no-one else can see it. I will use it to write my thesis and perhaps to do presentations and write articles.

You and your school will be anonymous in my thesis – that means that I won't use your real name or your school's real name. After the thesis is completed, I will keep my notes and recordings in a safe place in case I need them later.

If you decide that you want to take part in this research, you are allowed to:
- ask me questions at any time;
- tell me that you don't want to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable about;

- tell me that you don't want to be in the study anymore (by May 1 2014), and/or
- tell me that you don't want me to use the ideas and thoughts that you told me in the focus group (by May 1 2015).

Your parent(s) are allowed to:

- ask questions of me or my supervisor at any time;
- tell me that they don't want you to be in the study anymore (by May 1 2015), and/or
- tell me that they don't want me to use the ideas and thoughts that you told me in the focus group (by May 1 2015).

I hope that you will want to help me with my research. If you or your parents have any questions about the research, please get in touch with me – email is best.

Alison Smith
09 624 1577
027 271 4764
alisonsmith@clear.net.nz

Professor Chris Branson
07 838 4466 ext. 7904
cbranson@waikato.ac.nz

Appendix J: Participant consent form – children

Department of Professional Studies
School of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4466 ext. 7904
www.waikato.ac.nz

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Investigating children's contribution to decision-making in New Zealand primary schools – participation, pathways and potential

Consent of (child name) at May Road School

Alison Smith has explained her study to me and the activities that she would like me to participate in.

I have had the chance to ask questions about the activities that I will be doing with Alison. I understand that I can ask Alison any questions about her study and the activities I am doing at any time.

I understand that I don't have to answer any questions or do any activities that I don't want to do. I also understand that I don't have to be part of the research at all if I don't want to and that I can decide at any time that I don't want to continue.

I understand that the information that I give to Alison won't be shown to other people except her teachers (Professor Chris Branson and Dr. Rachel McNae) and that Alison will use a different name when she writes about me so that no-one knows it is me or my school.

I understand that Alison will keep all of the research materials in a safe place in her home office and that these will all be destroyed after five years.

I agree to participate in Alison's study.

I agree to my voice and ideas being digitally recorded.

I agree to doing activities with Alison like taking photographs of the school.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix K: Focus groups with children - framework and questions

1. The "Would you rather?" game

This game will be used first with any focus group members below nine years of age to check that they have an age-appropriate understanding of what a 'decision' is, and can give examples of decisions that they or others make.

2. Focus group discussion prompts

- Tell me a bit about what your school is like? What do you really like about your school? What do you think could be improved?
- Your principal and teachers tell me that you are involved in helping to make decisions at this school. What do you actually do? What kinds of things do you get to help decide about? How does this happen?
- Why do you think your school wants you to help make decisions?
- Do your ideas and opinions actually make a difference at this school? How do you know? What about the ideas and opinions of other children?
- What other things would you like to help make decisions about that to you don't at the moment? Why? What other ways do you think children could participate in decision-making at this school?
- How would you rate how good adults at this school are at listening to children's opinions and ideas? Why do you say this?
- What else would you like to tell me about how children participate in decision-making at this school?

3. The institutional diagramming exercise (adapted from Cox et al., 2007)

The children will be given circles of three different sizes and then asked to respond to the following questions/prompts:

- Who are the people who make decisions at this school? Who has the most 'say'? Think about adults and children.
- Who have you chosen? What decision-making does each person/group participate in?
- Now choose the size of circle that best matches how much these different people participate in decision-making and write on the circle to identify each person.

- Now arrange all of your circles in some way that shows me how all these people and groups fit alongside each other. Tell me about what you have done. Why have you arranged the circles in this way?

4. Photovoice exercise

This will take place while walking around the school and talking photographs as the children identify specific sites where children have participated in decision-making in some way. The following questions/prompts will be used.

- Show me some things around the school where children have had to participate in some decision-making.
- What decision/s needed to be made here? How did children participate in this? What did they do/say? Did everyone have a chance to contribute to decisions? Who did? Who didn't? Who decided about that?

Appendix L: Summary of ethical considerations and actions

Minimisation of harm	• ethics approval was obtained from the University of Waikato (Ethical Approval No. EDU003/13); • informed consent (in writing) was obtained from all participants and from the parents/caregivers of child participants; • interview and focus group protocols and schedules were designed to meet the aims of the research ; • focus group protocols were designed to be appropriate for the ages of the children involved; • interview and focus group records and reports protected the confidentiality and identity of schools and participants; and • the final thesis protects the confidentiality and identity of schools and participants
Voluntary and informed consent	• no inducements were offered to schools or research participants; • all participants were given time to consider the invitation for their participation before consenting in writing; • informed consent (in writing) was obtained from the Principals and Board of Trustees of each school; • informed consent (in writing) was obtained from all adults involved in semi-structured interviews in each school; • informed consent (in writing) was obtained from parents/caregivers of all children involved in focus group interviews, as well as from the children themselves; and • all participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the research at any time before May 1 2014.
Preservation of the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of participants	• participants were made aware that their participation was not anonymous as I knew the identity of all participants; • pseudonyms were ascribed to each school and participant during data analysis and report writing; • photographs taken by children were used in the final thesis only if neither the school nor any child could be identified; • the data provided was kept confidential to me and my supervisors; • electronic data were stored on a password-protected computer and/or external hard-drive; and • hard copy data has been stored in a locked cabinet at my home office.
Limitation of deception	• informed consent (in writing) was obtained from all participants and from the parents/caregivers of child participants; and • interview and focus group protocols and schedules were designed to meet the aims of the research.
Faithful and full analysis and reporting of data	• all data were included in the analysis process and reported in the final thesis; • the limitations of the research were identified and explained in the final thesis; • all adult research participants were provided with a summary of the research findings at the conclusion of the thesis writing; and • the thesis itself was available to the principal, adult participants and the Board of Trustees at each school.
Cultural and social sensitivity	• provisions were made for research information to be provided to research participants in their first language - this was not required; • provisions were made for consultation with appropriate Māori in the event that any research participants were Māori. This consultation was designed to be appropriate in each school (e.g. school kaumatua or other key person), and/or with Māori colleagues and personal kaumatua) – this was not required; and • provisions were made for consultation with appropriate persons to be undertaken in each school and with my own colleagues, where participants belonged to particular ethnic groups (e.g. Samoan).