How learning stories shape understandings of children's learning identities in one community of practice: A narrative inquiry

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Abstract

Mā te mahi, ka mōhio; mā te mōhio, ka mārama; mā te mārama, ka mātau; mā te mātau, ka ora.
From hard work comes knowledge; from that knowledge comes understanding; from that understanding comes strength; from that strength comes wellbeing and life.

This thesis is a listening, dialogic investigation into ways the community of learners at Greerton Early Learning Centre considers learning stories have affected their children's learning identities—that is, how they view themselves as learners. Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, focuses on responsive, reciprocal relationships wrapped around the uniqueness and mana of each child. Learning stories—a research-based sociocultural narrative assessment approach—have been used in Aotearoa New Zealand early learning settings for over two decades to capture children's learning while honouring the intent of *Te Whāriki* to nurture children's languages, cultures, and identities. In the current climate of privatisation and neoliberalism, however, the value of learning stories is increasingly contested. This study refutes such discourses and instead navigates the value of multiple ways of knowing, meaningfully embedded in the lived experiences of children in relational communities.

This study was embedded in a narrative inquiry paradigm that sees reality as a socially mediated construction contained within stories that are told and retold across times, social contexts, and places. The study aimed to understand and document how storying children's lived experience makes a meaningful difference to ways children view themselves as learners. Six children, their families, and their teachers were invited to reengage with selected learning stories from the children's learning portfolios and then to rethink and retell how these learning stories contributed to their views of children's learning identities.

The study found that learning stories have powerful effects on the ways children see themselves and on the ways those around them see the children as learners. It was clear from the data that children's learning identities are embedded in the complex social and cultural contexts that surround them. The teachers' long-term whanaungatanga relationships with mokopuna and whānau enabled kaiako to write learning stories that connected meaningfully with children's wider historical, social, and cultural contexts. Insights into children's learning

from the learning stories were actively taken up by the parents and shaped the ways they saw and interacted with their children as learners. Likewise, teachers listened to stories shared from home (whether in a written learning story form or simply in the course of conversations), and these contributed to the teachers' understandings of the children as agentic learners within sociocultural contexts. The physical folders of learning stories offered children powerful ways to maintain connections and a sense of pride in their learning achievements, linked to the people and places that surrounded those achievements.

Learning stories also enabled children to review their learning growth over time, including times when they had set goals, been supported in pursuing those goals by those around them, and had their achievements and dispositions honoured through documentation as a learning story. The process of robust engagement with crafting and reviewing their own and their colleagues' learning stories played an important role in teachers' ongoing professional learning. Finally, it was clear that across the whole community of practice—spanning mokopuna, whānau, and kaiako—learning stories played an important role in developing and reinforcing a shared language of learning as well as a shared understanding of the importance of children's dispositions and working theories as the most highly valued forms of learning.

Although centred in one community, this research stands on the shoulders of many and may have resonance and implications for those in broader contexts. At a time when the usefulness and appropriateness of learning stories are increasingly contested, this study provides an important demonstration of the power of thoughtfully written learning stories and the alignment of this assessment approach with the vision and values of *Te Whāriki*. Further, with limited past research looking at the intersection of learning stories and children's learning identities, this study's rich account of this interaction in one community of practice provides a valuable contribution to the literature.

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I am indebted to our Greerton kaiako team. Over the years, I have watched with awe and wonder as you engage with children and families and each other. What extraordinary learners and teachers you all are, and what a gift for me to be part of our team. This study is essentially yours because it could never have been told without you.

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Table of Contents

List of figures and tables

Rārangi kupu - Glossary

Kupu Māori are intentionally used across this thesis because they help to shift meaning away from a purely western-centric focus. While a glossary might typically provide a direct translation for each term, this rārangi cannot offer direct translations, for kupu Māori and English are not synonyms. Rather, they have "their origins in different world views" *(Rameka & Soutar, 2019). The approximate translations and explanations provided here are a guide to help readers who do not speak te reo Māori.*

The definitions and explanations below were informed by my own professional knowledge as well as a number of published Māori dictionaries. It has also been reviewed by a Māori colleague of mine for accuracy and appropriateness.

Āhua—Nature/form/shape/character

Ako—Learning and teaching: These two ideas coupled together have very strong significance for learning and teaching as being reciprocally entwined. Any member of a learning community may be at once a learner and a teacher, including our smallest mokopuna. Within an understanding of ako, there is no hierarchy and we are always learning.

Ako torowhānui—Wholeness/holistic

Aotūroa—Exploration

Aroha—Love, empathy compassion: Kupu Māori for love contains many nuanced intricacies concerning what this looks like in practice.

Hapū—Subnation: A hapū functions as the basic political unit within Māori society.

Hauora—Health/vigour

Hinengaro— Mind, thought, intellect, consciousness, awareness

Iwi—Māori nation

Iwi tikanga—Māori cultural knowledge: There are some commonalities and differences across iwi.

Kaiako—Teacher: Kaiako is the kupu Māori used for teachers in *Te Whāriki,* (MOE, 2017). Kai means sustenance/food; ako means learning and teaching. Kaiako then refers to the kind of sustenance for learning expected in teacher practice in learning settings.

Kaihautū—Leaders

Kapa haka—A group that performs traditional Maori dancing and chanting.

Karakia—Prayer

Kaupapa Māori—Māori philosophy/ purpose: Kaupapa Māori is a discourse of proactive theory and practice that emerged from within the wider revitalization of Māori communities that developed in New Zealand following the rapid Māori urbanization in the 1950s and 1960s. This movement grew further in the 1970s and by the late 1980s had developed as a political consciousness among Māori that promoted the revitalization of Māori cultural aspirations, preferences and practices as a philosophical and productive educational stance and resistance to the hegemony of dominant discourses.

Kete—Basket

Kōrero—Conversations

Kotahitanga—Holistic development: A *Te Whāriki* principle (MOE, 1996, 2017).

Kupu—Word

Mahi—Work

Mana—Power, prestige and authority: Mana enhancing essentially means ensuring the ways mokopuna are treated honours their sense of self.

Manaakitanga—Commitment and care

Mana Aotūroa—Exploration: A strand of *Te Whāriki*, (MOE, 1996, 2017).

Mana atua—Wellbeing: A strand of *Te Whāriki*, (MOE, 1996, 2017).

Mana Motuhake —Strong positive image derived from self-determination

Mana Whenua —Belonging: A strand of *Te Whāriki*, (MOE, 1996, 2017); Status of people as guardians of the land.

Matariki—Māori new year

Maunga—Mountain

Mauri—Life force, spiritual essence

Moana—Ocean

Mokopuna—Children: Mokopuna is the kupu used for children in *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017). This meaning embeds an intergenerational component in terms of the relationships kaiako are expected to develop with mokopuna when implementing *Te Whāriki*, the national early childhood curriculum in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Ngahere—Native bush

Papatūānuku—Earth mother

Pūrākau—Ancient legend/story

Tamaiti—Child

Tāngata whenua—People of the land

Taonga—Precious gift

Tauparapara—Traditional chant

Te Tiriti o Waitangi—The Treaty of Waitangi: Aotearoa New Zealand's founding treaty document. There are two versions, one in te reo and one in English. They are not synonomous (Ritchie & Skerret, 2019). Te Tiriti o Waitangi sets out 3 articles, partnership, protection and full participation (Berryman, Lawrence and Lamont, 2018, p.4), however, there has been extensive controversy concerning what these articles mean. Most Māori chiefs signed te reo Māori version and there is still division around the meaning of these words.

Tikanga-a-iwi—Māori cultural knowledge: There are some commonalities and hapū differences.

Tinana—Physical health

Tino rangatiratanga—Self-determination: "Meaning the right to determine one's own destiny, to define, what that destiny will be, and to define and pursue means of attaining that destiny" (Bishop, 2012, p. 39).

Tohunga—Priest: Expert in a particular field.

Wairua—Spirit/soul

Whakamana—Empowerment: A *Te Whāriki* principle (MOE, 1996, 2017).

Whakamanawa—Self-belief/emotional balance

Whakapapa—Geneological connections

Whakataukī—Māori wisdom

Whānau—Family: In *Te Whāriki* (2017) whānau, brings with it te ao Māori perspectives that whānau means strong, respectful connection.

Whānau kaiako—Family teacher

Whanaungatanga—Family connections

Chapter 1
Introduction

Learning stories—a research-based, sociocultural narrative assessment approach—have been used in Aotearoa New Zealand early learning settings for over two decades to capture children's learning while honouring the intent of the early childhood curriculum to nurture children's languages, cultures, and identities (Carr, 2001; Carr & Lee, 2019a). In the current climate of privatisation and neoliberalism (Arndt & Tesar, 2015; Duhn, 2006; Moss, 2018), however, the value of learning stories is increasingly contested (Gunn & Gasson, 2017). This study refutes such discourses and instead navigates the value of multiple ways of knowing, meaningfully embedded in the lived experiences of children in relational communities.

The research was conducted at Greerton Early Learning Centre (hereafter abbreviated to Greerton), a small early learning setting I established in Tauranga, Aotearoa New Zealand, in 1993. The centre context has been central to my learning throughout my career and, more recently, throughout this research. My colleagues at Greerton influenced all stages of this study, from the conceptualisation of the research topic to reviewing the final document. Therefore, while it might be more usual to describe a specific research site within the methods chapter of a thesis, I deliberately introduce the Greerton context within this introductory chapter as an integral element of the research as a whole.

This chapter introduces the research. First, Section 1.1 locates my learning in the wider national and local context. The research questions are then presented in Section 1.2 followed by a discussion of the study's significance (Section 1.3).

1.1 Locating my learning in its sociocultural context

This section is divided into four parts. Section 1.1.1 introduces the nature and aspirations of Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education 1996, 2017) and acknowledges how macrolevel policy factors have affected the enactment of this curriculum over time. Section 1.1.2 discusses the bicultural imperative of Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum. Section 1.1.3 then outlines the emergence of learning stories as an assessment approach aligned with the early childhood curriculum. Moving to microlevel

contexts, Section 1.1.4 traces my involvement in the Greerton context and acknowledges my positionality as the researcher.

1.1.1 Introducing the nature and aspirations of *Te Whāriki* within a macrolevel policy context

Te Whāriki; He Whāriki Mātauranga Mō Ngā Mokopuna O Aotearoa[1] (MOE, 1996, 2017), by its very nature as a national curriculum, became a unifying force within Aotearoa New Zealand. The development of *Te Whāriki* and teachers' journeys towards implementing its transformative vision have been documented extensively elsewhere (Gunn & Nuttall, 2019; Nuttall, 2003, 2013) and are beyond the scope of this thesis. What is important here is to situate this study in the learning, teaching, and assessment vision of *Te Whāriki,* which focuses on respectful, responsive, and reciprocal relationships. These relationships are embedded in children's lived experiences and wrapped around the uniqueness and mana/power, prestige, and authority of each mokopuna/child (Reedy, 2019).

Te Whāriki was widely heralded as a visionary sociocultural, values-driven curriculum (Moss et al., 2016) focused on learners' strengths, dispositions, and working theories, where learning and development were "entwined, social, and situated" (Gunn & Reeves, 2019, p. 149). Yet, for many, it was embedded with concepts that were new and complex. Traditional psychological/developmental curricula that focussed primarily on knowledge and skills or understood assessment as objective, observable tasks (Davis, 2006) were "more likely to describe outcomes in terms of children's physical, intellectual and social understandings and skills" (Carr, 2001, p. ix). In contrast, sociocultural curricula placed emphasis on learners' languages and cultures as drivers of their learning (Carr, 2001). Sociocultural curricula are therefore more likely to describe learning in complex relational and dispositional ways with people, places, and things that are valued (Carr, 2001) in their communities. The two major learning outcomes of *Te Whāriki*—dispositions and working theories (Hedges & Jones, 2012)—meant kaiako/teachers were not locked into narrow curriculum delivery models proving learning (Arndt & Tesar, 2015). Instead, *Te Whāriki* expected kaiako to engage in learning opportunities that nurtured children's learning identities as competent, confident

[1] Hereafter, this title is abbreviated to *Te Whāriki*. If *Te Whāriki* is used without a citation, it represents the whole history and scope of the curriculum, including both the 1996 and 2017 versions. If a specific version is being referred to, this will be indicated as either *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996) or *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017).

learners, enhancing the mana of mokopuna, and reflecting aspirations and values of children's communities (Reece et al., 2021).

However, a shift to the socioculturally framed ethos of *Te Whāriki* demanded significant learning and change over time. I remember thinking, as I read the first draft copy in 1994, that this was a document that understood exactly what we, kaiako, were trying to implement in our play-focused learning setting. I could not have been more wrong because my connection with *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996) at that time was illusionary. I had no idea what it really meant to honour the principles of *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996). Although, as a teaching team, we were intensely interested in learning more, we floundered. To us at Greerton, the concept of *doing* mana atua/wellbeing (a strand of *Te Whāriki*) for a term seemed reasonable. This idea fitted with previous notions of planning by predetermining learning goals and intentionally teaching children in prescriptive ways (Arndt & Tesar, 2015; Hill, 2001). Now, with the benefit of hindsight and constant struggle, we ask ourselves how such naive notions of sociocultural learning could have ever been considered, let alone diligently worked on. Davis (2006) offers a reason for this: "*Te Whāriki* had presented an alternative theoretical framework for the sector and was intended to present a 'new' way of thinking, yet assessment practises had not yet been designed to reflect this new way of thinking" (p. 18). It became clear that: "Successful work with a curriculum that emphasised relationships and participation was going to require assessment that took the same view" (Carr, 2001, pp. ix–x).

Te Whāriki referenced Bronfenbrenner's description of nested environments (Mutch, 2003), raising teacher awareness of macropolitical determinants that affect learning possibilities within family and community contexts. However, a yawning gap between promise and reality exists (Gunn & Nuttall, 2019), and substantive political will is required to achieve *Te Whāriki* sociocultural aspirations that "value and celebrate the traditions, singularities and knowledges" (Moss, 2017, p. 21) of diverse communities. *Te Whāriki* aspirations, while nonprescriptive, remain complex and, thus, their achievement requires a complex range of actions that include: reducing teacher/child ratio levels and group sizes; increasing space and access to the natural world; paying teachers equitably; and employing degree-level qualified teachers who both understand and enact *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* obligations. In addition, multiple factors underpinning teacher wellbeing require thoughtful adoption because wellbeing is a precursor for teacher continuity in early learning settings, where relational, situated learning

can be nurtured over time. Furthermore, opening space for the dynamism of multiple stories is a movement towards complexity and difference, "uncertainty, unpredictability and wonder" (Moss, 2017, p. 20). It is a journey that refutes quality and high returns discourses, narrowly focused on evidence-based technical assessment of learning outcomes. A visionary curriculum is one thing, but the political will to ensure its enactment is a contentious debate. In this sense, the next section repositions western narratives within a correlational storying of kaupapa Māori research to understand culturally relevant assessment.

1.1.2 The bicultural imperative of *Te Whāriki*

While *Te Whāriki* heralded a shift into a sociocultural perspective of learning environments, it was not the only significant action. The curriculum itself was fundamentally constructed in a way never seen before, as explained by Te One and Ewens (2019):

> The concept of a whāriki, a woven mat, where theory, culture, and practice were interwoven, was located in te ao Māori—the Māori world (Mutch, 2003) … In a ground-breaking, innovative process, the curriculum guidelines were founded on an indigenous conceptual framework, which incorporated Māori and western principles of learning and teaching alongside views of children as rights-holders—citizens in a democratic society. (p. 7)

Te Whāriki is bicultural, embedded in commitment to *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (Rameka & Soutar, 2019) and a marker point for early childhood journeys towards ethically just practices (Rameka, 2017). To achieve this, *Te Whāriki* requires macrolevel policy decisions, both pre-degree and in-service, to implement requirements for kaiako to attain sophisticated levels of "te reo, social justice, and sustainability" (Ritchie & Skerrett, 2019, p. 86). In terms of enacting ethically just practices, Reedy (2019) places mokopuna wellbeing at the heart of explorative learning opportunities and a relational connection to the wider world when speaking of mana aotūroa/exploration:

> This is the development of a desire to explore and understand all aspects of this world and the universe; the development of curiosity, and of seeking answers. The child learns and understands their uniqueness and their similarity with the rest of the universe. They learn that conquering the unknown through the power of the mind is possible; that understanding the physical world is exciting and challenging; that

> developing and practising the universal ideals of peace, compassion and harmony are a responsibility for us all. (p. 38)

I think this zooms in to the essence of what a policy context—one that has the wellbeing of its youngest citizens at heart—must consider when determining the macropolitical milieu. These policies have potential to constrain or enable learners to engage with learning environments. Furthermore, they enable kaiako to know how to implement our bicultural curriculum and be committed to social justice (inclusion/antiracism) and peaceful coexistence with papatūānuku/earth mother, inside a multicultural/ethnic/language society (Gunn & Gasson, 2017; Rameka, 2018).

Te Whāriki principles and strands are legally mandated and kaiako have responsibility to engage with their bicultural ethos biculturally (Rameka & Soutar, 2019; Ritchie, 2014). However, it is an expectation that is difficult to meet unless kaiako are well informed and determined to find ways to ensure mokopuna and whānau recognise themselves in their early learning settings (Bishop, 2012; Ritchie, 2015; Skerrett, & Ritchie, 2021). This is described in *Te Whātu Pōkeka* (MOE, 2009) as mana/power, prestige, and authority enhancing for mokopuna. In a personal communication, Diana Cruse wrote:

> I think that, for me, the real beauty in *Te Whatu Pōkeka* is that it encourages our kaiako to look at the ways of being for our mokopuna. It encourages us to look at our children's wairua. *Te Whāriki* also does this, through mana whenua, where we look at a child's ahua/nature.

Mana is essentially about one's identity. While there is no single viewpoint, for iwi/hapū, tikanga/cultural knowledge are nation and subnation perspectives, mokopuna join an early learning setting already immersed in aroha/love within their whānau setting. Transition processes that embrace mokopuna in the complexity of an aroha-enhanced relationship nurture mana atua/wellbeing and mana whenua/belonging.

The social world is a culturally derived world, and *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017) is clear about kaiako responsibilities to ensure curriculum—the sum total of everything that happens—is wrapped around mokopuna. This includes being: "culturally competent: developing increasing proficiency in the use of te reo and tikanga Māori and able to form responsive and reciprocal relationships with tangata whenua" (MOE, 2017, p. 59). Kaiako, too, have

Tātaiko[2] to guide their understanding of what it means to be culturally competent as they engage in ako/learning and teaching with and alongside mokopuna and their whānau. The competency wānanga—"participating with learners and communities in robust dialogue for the benefit of Māori learners' achievement" (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2011, p. 4)—is specific about the practice required. Allied with this view that culture is essential to understanding learning identities is this from Bishop and Glynn (1999): "… strategies need to be holistic, complex and situationally grounded" (p. 72). As kaiako negotiate and navigate curriculum, there is much to consider (Berryman et al., 2018; Rameka, 2016). *Te Whāriki* has a clear expectation that kaiako work together as *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* partners to ensure all children have their cultures, languages, and identities nurtured. For kaiako, this means respectfully engaging with whānau in a *power with* way to ensure whānau relationships are embedded in a framework of reciprocity and social justice.

The Kotahitanga research (Bishop & Berryman, 2006) described potentiating learning environments as a "culturally responsive pedagogy of relations" (Berryman et al., 2018, p. 4). However, the research showed that potentiating environments require meaningful ako, as well as positive relationships and the kind of pedagogy kaiako engaged in with learners, was critical. The whakataukī used in Te *Whāriki* (MOE, 2017) to cement a cultural way of being with mokopuna is: "Waiho i te toipoto, kaua i te toiroa. Let us keep close together, not far apart" (MOE, 2017, p. 59). In this sense, learning identities are very specifically culturally derived, and culturally sustaining relationships are the nucleus ensuring these relationships are mana enhancing. This is not about skills and knowledge as a cumulative depository. It is about the dispositional framing of skills and knowledge that brings about sustained, multicontextual learning.

The next section looks more deeply at the way teacher practice changed as a result of the "more consensual and holistic approach" (Mutch, 2003, p. 126) of *Te Whāriki* and its view that assessment ought to inform learning in credit-based, dialogic ways.

[2] Tātaiako is the Teaching Council of New Zealand (2011) document outlining teachers' cultural competency responsibilities.

1.1.3 The emergence of learning stories

Learning stories are a research-based response to *Te Whāriki* and, as such, are framed by sociocultural perspectives of learners and learning (Carr, 2001). Learning stories, through their narrative, personalised approach designed to track learning progress over time, have the capacity to recognise and respond to children's learning in ways that strengthen learning during the learning (Cowie, 2000) and beyond. Their theoretical intent aligns with "the key feature of formative assessment as a meaning-making activity" (Cowie, 2000, p. 261), contributing to children's identities as active participants in their own learning journeys. Carr and Lee (2012) conclude that:

> Learning stories can capture the intermingling of expertise and disposition, the connections with the local environment that provide cues for further planning, the positioning of assessment inside a learning journey, and the interdependence of the social cognitive and affective dimensions of learning experiences. Learning stories enable children and students to develop capacities for self-assessment and for reflecting on their learning. (p. 131)

The genesis of the concepts of noticing, recognising, and responding to learning were derived from the research on formative assessment by Cowie (2000), and these ideas have become an inherent part of the learning story framework. Learning stories are divided into three parts that: first, *notice* learning in a social/cultural context; second, *recognise* the learning through analysing its dispositional underpinnings; and third, *respond* in ways designed to strengthen learning further through feedback that enhances learning identities. They, therefore, have the capacity to strengthen children's views of themselves as thoughtful coconstruction occurs with children, families, and colleagues.

Learning stories meant a shift away from highlighting and addressing gaps in children's learning, the norm in previous psychological/developmental approaches (Davis, 2006), and, instead, offered a credit-based model that was disposition enhancing (Carr, 2001) and mana enhancing (Reedy, 2019). Arndt and Tesar (2015) place importance on the way learning stories allow for uncertainty and how they are "positioned as strong underpinnings of culturally and morally open, rich and complex assessment, to be constantly renegotiated with each local context" (p. 71). Gunn and Gasson (2017) add the

dimensions of learning identities, social connection, and trustworthiness to learning stories: "… how the learning-experiences children engage in are contributing towards their identities as competent and confident learners … distributed … fit-for-purpose, credible, and trustworthy" (p. 169). Learning stories written in the ways described above enable kaiako to draw from the past to analyse the present learning context yet with thought for future learning trajectories. The story unfolds in relationship with mokopuna and whānau through a dialogic response to the child's right to have agency over their own learning.

Yet, it took time for kaiako to reconceive their understanding of effective ako within this broad principle and strand-driven curriculum framework, and to engage in assessment practices that were fit for the purpose of tracking progress in a complex view of ako as lived experience in relational communities (Gunn & Gasson, 2017). Beginning to write learning stories was the turning point for our learning and teaching team at Greerton in understanding the sociocultural intent of *Te Whāriki*. As we began to write about learning inside a relational connection with a child and their family, we began to *see* learning differently. We shifted from our perceptions of children as solely learners to instead consider powerful agentic children who were learners, teachers, and researchers (Sands et al., 2012). It also meant seeing ourselves differently. The old taken-for-granted narrative of teachers as those with knowledge and skill to impart was disrupted as learning stories introduced "a kind of awkwardness into the fabric of one's experience, of interrupting the fluency of the narratives that encode that experience and making them stutter" (Rose, 1999, p. 20). We puzzled over these ideas together, and we documented our shifts in practice in an attempt to articulate a shared understanding of our local curriculum. The next section continues to explore the centre context and its influence on my positioning as researcher, learner, and teacher.

1.1.4 My involvement in the early learning community and the research site

Greerton initially was located in two repurposed houses with large gardens—one for infants/toddlers and another for toddlers/young children (McChesney & Clarkin-Phillips, 2020). In 2017, the settings amalgamated to reflect the team's intention to mirror the way we considered learning happens in families and communities (Gray, 2015). In 2019, our setting moved to a purpose-built centre, designed to retain the feel of a family home. I am an insider in this community, with all the partiality that this length of service and emotional investment

suggests. However, longevity also offers me a depth of perspective, helpful for tracking the evolution of learning and teaching here.

It is not simply my own commitment to the Greerton setting that has been longstanding. Length of service is a feature of the Greerton team for there is a commitment from teachers to be in children's and families' lives for the long term. This matters because relationships take time to develop, particularly the sort of trusting ones (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012) that underpin positive learning experiences (Rinaldi, 2006; Sands & Lee, 2019). There is also a shared commitment to the other members of the teaching team, and this has implications for the wellbeing and growth of all members of this learning community—children, families, and teachers. The following whakataukī adds weight to this view that experience within community generates meaningful learning when it is combined with a sense of shared responsibility to one another:

> *Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi engari he toa takitini. I come not with my own strengths but bring with me the gifts, talents and strengths of my family, tribe, and ancestors.*

My research has been driven by curiosity to both understand the potential of learning stories as artefacts crossing times, cultural contexts, and places to nurture learning identities and their potential to deepen understanding of the learning and teaching culture as they are shared across a learning community. In this sense, my roles as learner, teacher, and researcher are deeply connected to learning stories as an assessment strategy. In addition, I have a long-standing position as a learning facilitator with the Educational Leadership Project[3] to support teaching teams to write learning stories in ways that reflect *Te Whāriki* aspirations.

An important part of my positioning as a researcher is my commitment to *Te Whāriki* as an inherently *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*-informed curriculum. As a Pākehā researcher, it was important to me that this study be informed by what Māori, as tangata whenua/people of Aotearoa New Zealand, think about ways of being, doing, and knowing (Rameka, 2012). At the same time, kaupapa Māori research belongs to Māori (Bishop, 2012; Smith, 2012) as an act of tino rangatiratanga/self-determination. It therefore cannot be appropriated by non-

[3] The Educational Leadership Project has offered professional learning support to teachers through the Ministry of Education and private contracts, and is particularly known for its role in promoting learning stories in Aotearoa New Zealand and across the world.

Māori, such as myself (Smith, 2012). My study seeks only to honour te ao Māori tikanga and mātauranga Māori in ways that enable kaiako to think more deeply about their responsibilities to mokopuna and whānau of Māori descent, and, indeed, to all children living in Aotearoa New Zealand. I am therefore guided by Māori academics in terms of seeking out their wisdom in their writing and conversations with me. References to Māori academic thinking, traditional wisdom (in the form of whakataukī), and kupu Māori are spread across this thesis in a normalising practice as I seek a deeper understanding of the research questions in the bicultural context of *Te Whāriki*.

In summary, Section 1.1 has highlighted both the aspirations and macropolitical context of *Te Whāriki*, and the emergence of learning stories as a research response to a new theoretical curriculum paradigm. Finally, in a microcontextual sense, my positioning as a researcher was outlined. The next section discusses the emergence of the research questions (Section 1.2).

1.2 The research questions, located in the pedagogical context of a professional community of learners

This section tracks the shared learning and reflection that preceded and informed the selection of the research questions. It then presents the research questions that framed this study.

This research continues the Greerton team's ongoing journey as teachers/researchers. Many questions lay unanswered after our initial Centre of Innovation research (Meade, 2007) on children's question asking and question exploring as they formulated working theories to understand their world (Sands et al., 2012). As a team, we wondered further about the role of learning stories in contributing to the culture of learning and teaching experienced by our community of learners and how this learning amassed a critical vibrancy as participants interacted and learnt together. We liked the way Wenger (2009) describes the relationship between interactions and artefacts (in our case, learning stories): "Meaningful learning in social contexts requires both participation and reification to be in interplay. Artefacts without participation do not carry their own meaning; and participation without artefacts is fleeting, unanchored, and uncoordinated" (pp. 1–2). We realised that writing learning stories meant we were reifying learning in the form of artefacts that could be revisited, reimagined, and

reinterpreted by our community, allowing us all to see children's current learning in the context of their past experiences. Of great interest to us as a teaching team was how the artefacts—that is, the learning stories—became sites for conversation and what these conversations meant for children's ongoing learning.

The Greerton teaching team was also interested to understand further how dispositional language (Carr & Lee, 2019b; Claxton, 2017) within learning stories could strengthen opportunities for teachers to have impactful conversations with mokopuna, their whānau, and our colleagues. As a result of our Centre of Innovation research (Meade, 2007), Greerton kaiako had consistently been using the language of dispositional learning to intentionally embed powerful notions of learning identity formation into our local curriculum. We wondered how much this way of writing learning stories really did affect children in the longer term. Informed by Bronfenbrenner's notion of the chronosystem (Eriksson et al., 2018), which embeds a dimension of time into learning and development, we were interested to see if dispositional language did indeed travel to other contexts and other times and whether continuity and connection across stories supported this development.

As a result of the shared learning described above and prompted by my decision to complete my master's thesis, Greerton kaiako engaged in a series of collaborative conversations about what I might research. The topic was then refined in conjunction with my supervisor, resulting in the following overarching research question:

> *How have learning stories in one early learning setting affected this community's understanding of their children's learning identities?*

Two subsidiary research questions were also identified:

> *1. How have learning stories affected children's views of themselves, and families' views of their children, as learners?*
>
> *2. How have learning stories shaped the culture of learning and teaching in this community of practice comprising children, families, and teachers?*

In summary, then, the current research was designed to track the impact of learning stories on our children's learning over time, and to think more about the ways learning stories have contributed to nurturing their identities, and the ways their whānau perceive them, as learners.

While the benefits of this study for our own centre setting are clear, this next section considers the significance and potential value of this study for both research and practice in other settings.

1.3 Significance of the study

This study is immersed in *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996, 2017) because, since this curriculum's inception in 1996, it has guided the ways Greerton kaiako have nurtured mokopuna to learn and grow. The whakataukī, *Mā te whāriki e whakatō te kaha ki roto i te mokopuna, ki te ako, kia pakari ai tana tipu. Early childhood curriculum empowers the child to learn and grow* from *Te Whāriki* (2017, p. 18) imbues te ao Māori wisdom to centre this research in its cultural context (Rameka & Soutar, 2019), recognising the intricacies of the bicultural weave required of a curriculum based in *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*. *Te Whāriki* is designed to focus kaiako practice on the uniqueness of the child (Reedy, 2019) and to situate learning within culturally responsive relationships (Bishop, 2019). This study investigates the value of drawing from the contributions of mokopuna, whānau, and colleagues to strengthen ways learning communities understand how to engage in meaningful ako—learning and teaching that makes a difference to mokopuna now and into a future tempered by the past.

How kaiako position themselves to enable relational connection is a foundational imperative of *Te Whāriki* (Rameka & Soutar, 2019) because kaiako are inherently part of the sociocultural nested environment (Gunn, 2016), embedded within the whakapapa/genealogy of harakeke/flax and associated with "notions of kaitiakitanga/custodianship or stewardship" (Rameka & Soutar, 2019, p. 46). Central to *Te Whāriki* is protection of the mana of mokopuna (Reedy, 2019), and Greerton kaiako have understood a teacher's role to be an invested one—a role that goes far beyond transactional skill and knowledge acquisition into a pedagogy of cultural relationships (Bishop, 2019). The ways Greerton kaiako write learning stories to deeply connect to mokopuna, whānau, and kaiako are intentionally examined in this study because relational connections are at the heart of people's responses to the learning stories they read (Carr & Lee 2019a). If the Greerton learning stories do indeed make a difference to children's views of themselves as learners, and families' views of their children as learners, it is important to understand why. Other early learning communities, grappling

with this intention to use learning stories to honour multiple voices, may well be interested in the Greerton community's research journey.

This research contributes to an ongoing practice debate in the early childhood community in Aotearoa New Zealand about the relevance of learning stories to be able to respond to children's learning—in the now and beyond—through offering an insight into how Greerton kaiako weave *Te Whāriki* principles, strands, goals, and learning outcomes into their assessment practices. The research is positioned in the cultural context of ako for it offers an insight into how kaiako, through thoughtful analysis of learning, track children's learning progress and consider ways the entire community might enable this learning to grow. This has implications for kaiako practice elsewhere as it examines structural and process factors that lead to kaiako being both committed to narrative assessment as a means to promote learning and learning identities as well as the organisational factors that enable thoughtful learning stories to be written.

My intention is to respond to the contentious nature of assessment practices in Aotearoa New Zealand, albeit from the perspective of a case study. There is evidence of a difference between narrative assessment theory (Carr, 2001; Carr & Lee, 2019b) and actual practices in settings (Education Review Office, 2013; McLachlan, 2017, 2018, 2019). As kaiako write narrative assessments, many complexities arise, including degrees of professional understanding of formative assessment, allocated time to write effectively, and the varying ways kaiako are enabled or not to share learning stories with colleagues, families, and children and receive their feedback. Gunn and Reeves (2019) point to the increased number of unqualified teachers and the growing wider concern over "graduate teachers' sense of preparedness to teach" (p. 151). People interested in pursuing multiple storied accounts of learning that lead to a sense of self in relation to others may well be interested in Greerton's perspective of working from theory to practice.

In conclusion, this study, from the standpoint of one early learning community, will offer insight into the ways thoughtfully written learning stories can lead to a deepened understanding of learning in the context of relationships with mokopuna, whānau, and colleagues. This study will investigate the effects of learning stories on children's identities of themselves as learners, on families' perspectives of their child's learning, and on the culture of learning and teaching that emerges as the result of teachers' thoughtfully written narrative

accounts of children's learning lives. It will provide whānau perspectives on the ways learning stories impact on their engagement with their children's learning. This research is significant for it will focus on how dispositions and working theories can be sustained and enhanced in early learning settings. The study will add weight to calls for more learning support for kaiako to be able to honour the aspirations of Aotearoa New Zealand's *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*-informed curriculum through writing learning stories that are participatory, culturally situated, and meaningfully focussed on agentic learning for each person. The next chapter searches the literature to draw on conversations that both support the perspective of multiple pathways, multiple voices to be listened to, and literature that contest these views to determine their resonance in early learning settings.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

This literature review orients the study in relation to the research questions. The first part of the review looks to relevant literature to understand: the nature of learning identities (Section 2.1), why an understanding of learning identities is important (Section 2.2), and how learning identities are formed (Section 2.3). The second part of the review turns to learning stories, providing a summation of prior research about the impacts and benefits of learning stories, and debates and critiques tensions surrounding their practice (Section 2.4). Finally, Section 2.5 brings together the two bodies of literature—on learning identities and learning stories—to provide a foundation for my research.

2.1 What are learning identities?

There are many possible ways to think about learning identities. For example, the concept of learning identities has been variously described as storied autobiography (Bruner, 2004); introspective care of self while critiquing the world outside (Ball, 2016); decentring of self in a posthuman rejection of human-centric thinking (Murris, 2016); comparable, performity-oriented view of *other* (Lave, 1996; Moss, 2018); and socioculturally derived understanding of self (Rogoff, 2003).

The definition of learning identities I use in this study is embedded in a sociocultural narrative (Carr & Lee, 2019a; Hedges, 2014). I define learning identities as *growing knowledge of oneself or another as a learner, including in relation to dispositions and enabling factors that help one learn* (Carr et al., 2010; Claxton, 2004; Claxton & Carr, 2004; Gunn & Gasson, 2017; Hedges, 2014). For example, a child might see themselves as a kind friend, brave, clever, or as being interested in pūrākau/creation stories, while an adult might see the child as empathic, leaderful, persistent, resourceful, or curious.

While learning identities are uniquely situated within the individual, research emphasises it is simultaneously encompassed in complex relational, social, and cultural contexts (Carr & Lee, 2019b; Rogoff et al., 2018). Within this definition, learning identities are recognised as

constantly in transition (Claxton & Carr, 2004; Gilbert, 2005), shaped by reflexive, lived experience that results in self-realisation, transformation, and growth (Dewey, 1916).

In my reading of the literature, the terms "learners", "learning", "learner identities", and "learning identities", are often used interchangeably when discussing explanations for how, what, and why children learn and the learning environments that result (Hedges, 2014). My preference is to use the term *learning identities* because it carries an active, shifting view (Gilbert, 2005) that keeps one's learning identities in motion.

The sociocultural definition of learning identities used in this study has parallels in mātauranga Māori. Time is recognised as fluid, and past storying of experience has continuity in the present, which, in turn, informs future learning. Rameka (2016) uses this whakataukī to explain: *Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua—I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past.* This reorients learning identities away from solely western-centric thinking into "a social collective, rather than individual, psychological phenomenon" (Lave 1996, p. 149). Learning identities in this research can be thought of as continuous, reflective views of oneself within a range of social, cultural, and language spaces that each cause learners' perspectives of themselves—and others' perspectives of the learning—to change over time. Consequently, learning identities are complex because people's views of themselves as active learners shift as a response to social and cultural experiences.

2.2 Why is an understanding of learning identities important?

This section considers three aspects underpinning the importance of understanding learning identities. Section 2.2.1 considers the ways learning identity paradigms underpin curriculum, praxis, and assessment enactment. Section 2.2.2 discusses how understanding learning identities assists teachers to orient learners towards learning, and Section 2.2.3 considers the importance of understanding learning identity formation as an active, changing view of oneself as a learner.

2.2.1 Ontological paradigms affect curriculum, praxis, and assessment enactment

An understanding of learning identities is important because ontological paradigms that drive learning identity definitions and discourses lead to decisions affecting how curriculum, praxis, and assessment are enacted, both at policy and practice levels (Dahlberg et al., 1999). What happens in learning spaces is, therefore, contestable for, as Hedges (2021) demonstrates, the design of learning spaces and the ways learning opportunities unfold are determined by the outcomes policymakers, teachers, and families determine as desirable. Curricula are not politically neutral (Mutch, 2003), and paradigms may be formed from political and market-driven ideologies rather than philosophy and education. Consequently, understanding learning identity paradigms is important because of their direct impact on the design of children's learning environments and the curriculum children experience (Hedges, 2021).

2.2.2 Learners' attitudes, values, and habits orient learners towards or away from learning

Learning identity understanding is important too because learners' attitudes, values, and habits orient learners towards or away from learning opportunities (Claxton & Carr, 2004). However, the ways learners think and feel about themselves are affected by "a large number of interwoven factors" (Carr & Claxton, 2002, p. 11) that include culturally meaningful contexts, relational connections, and emotions evoked through engagement in learning. How learners think and feel is important because stronger learning identities have been associated with lifelong learning success (Carr & Lee, 2019b; Claxton, 2018; Claxton & Carr, 2004; Ritchardt & Perkins, 2000). The researchers cited have found learners meaningfully transform their perspectives of their learning-selves when they respond to novel situations with inclinations to be curious, resilient, empathic, creative, resourceful, and determined. Kaiako who understand the importance of learning identities are therefore less likely to focus on curriculum content in isolation. Instead, they are more likely to pay attention to children's inclinations and sensitivities to occasion in their efforts to support learners to stretch their learning in multiple ways (Claxton & Carr, 2004) within a *Te Whāriki* construct of curriculum experience as rich, diverse, and culturally meaningful.

2.2.3 Learning identities formation is active

Learning identities are embedded in action as learners participate with "people, places, ideas and things" (Carr, 2006, p. 2) over time. Costa and Kallick (2000) pick up on the active nature of children's learning identities when they say: *"*Intelligent people are in a continuous learning mode. Their confidence in combination with inquisitiveness allows them to constantly search for new and better ways" (p. 85). The importance of understanding learning identity formation as an active, continual sculpting of one's view of oneself inside socially mediated contexts has implications for the ways learning identities are strengthened. This is complex for there is no one pathway. Developing facilitating environments to strengthen diverse learning identities impacts on ways kaiako both set up learning spaces and engage with learners. As an example, *Te Kotahitanga* (Bishop & Berryman, 2010) found paying attention to learning identities had implications for Māori success and, indeed, success for all, leading to improvements in students' learning as well as teacher practice (Bishop, 2019). A deepened understanding of learning identities, therefore, supports kaiako reflection (Claxton & Carr, 2004; Crooks et al., 2016) and response to the nuances of children's lived experiences (Hedges, 2014).

2.3 How are learning identities formed?

This section is divided into three parts. Section 2.3.1 considers ways learning identities embedded in dispositions and working theories lead to transformational learning. Section 2.3.2 reviews why dispositions are valued for their dynamic capability in learning identity formation, and, finally, the role of sociocultural perspectives in learning identity formation is discussed (Section 2.3.3).

2.3.1 Dispositions and working theories lead to transformational learning

The indicative learning outcomes of *Te Whāriki* are dispositions and working theories (Claxton & Carr, 2004; Hedges & Jones, 2012; Peters & Davis, 2011). As learners intentionally engage in learning contexts, they form a series of concepts, and, as they do, a combination of dispositions and working theories lead to transformational learning as

learners build increasingly sophisticated concepts about the world (Cowie & Carr, 2008; Hedges, 2019).

Dispositions have been described as a propensity to respond to experience in particular ways (Claxton & Carr, 2004) and working theories as "non-linear, contingent, associative, and imaginative" (Hargraves, 2014, p. 319) thinking processes. Working theories essentially describe thinkers who integrate knowledge, skills, and dispositions into a series of mini theories (Claxton, 1990) as children "interpret new information in the light of current experience and understandings" (Hedges, 2011, p. 273). These interpretations are socially and culturally situated, and experiences in early learning settings contribute to their continuing "tacit, implicit and intuitive nature" (Hargraves, 2014, p. 320).

Dispositions and working theories are connected because they are embedded in complex actions tied to times, contexts, and places. A study by Peters and Davis (2011), while focused primarily on working theories, found that teachers came to think of dispositions and working theories "as two sides of the same coin" (p. 8). In practice, dispositions orient learners to the action of building working theories about the world, and both add to a "dictionary of experiences" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 76) that cumulatively build learning identities (Carr et al., 2008), stretched across people, places, and things (Cowie & Carr, 2008). In an Aotearoa New Zealand early learning context, Dewey's (1916) view that education ought to be a transformative experience and that self-realisation and growth are essential elements (Pring, 2007, 2016) has a resonance with *Te Whāriki* dispositions and working theories.

Dewey was interested in the process of growth, and this, he said, arose out of a person's interaction with their environment (Pring, 2007; Shyman, 2011). This experiential transformation was not merely an addition of knowledge, in the sense that Freire (1970/2007) scathingly described as a banking model or an accumulation of information and skill. Dewey (as cited in Perez-Ibanez, 2018) considered transformation as a fundamental ability to see the world differently—a reconceptualisation of the world and a person's place in it through conscious reflection. In this sense, learning identity formations are a combination of both a conscious response as well as a growing propensity to respond to the world in particular ways and, in so doing, have an effect on that world (Duhn et al., 2020). Thus, learning identities are complex and embedded in children's dispositional responses to experiences as well as the working theories derived from thoughtful interplay with those experiences.

Kaiako contribute to the building of learning identities through the play they choose to reify, the ways they describe and analyse children's play through assessment practices, and how they share these storied accounts with the child, family, and colleagues (Gunn & Gasson, 2017). Ritchie and Rau (2006) and Peters and Davis (2011) speak to the importance of ensuring this documentation is meaningful to the children and to their families and communities. It is contingent, then, to ensure teachers both understand how to nurture learning identities and actively do so in ways that enhance the mana of mokopuna, whānau, and kaiako within dialogic communities. This next section integrates dispositions and working theories to understand how learners' views of themselves are strengthened.

2.3.2 Dispositions and working theories are valued for their dynamic capacity in the formation of learning identities

This research is interested in what happens to ako when kaiako are alert to children's dispositions and working theories, and, through praxis, enable an energised culture of inquiry to develop, both in the curriculum experiences provided and through documentation written about those experiences. As kaiako speak in their learning stories to the dynamic nature of dispositional learning and the working theories that emerge as children "attempt to connect, elicit, and extend understandings in creative ways" (Hedges, 2014, p. 36), children and families are able to retrieve children's lived experiences, discuss them together, and reimagine possible learning selves (Carr & Lee, 2019b). Claxton and Carr suggest (2004):

> Suppose that the idea of the 'effective learner' can be unpacked into a number of learning attributes: tendencies towards 'persisting', 'questioning', 'collaborating', and so on …. What is at stake here is how we can take a dynamic approach to such qualities: charting their potential or possible direction of growth, and therefore providing some guidance about what we do that strengthens or weakens them. (p. 88)

They emphasise that children's dispositions to respond in resilient, resourceful, persistent, and empathic ways, for example, are enhanced or constrained by teachers' feedback. Furthermore, the working theories that result as dispositional thinking is applied to learning experiences are socioculturally situated and without an endpoint. The ability to increase the robustness, breadth, and richness of both dispositions and their working theory applications relies on the ways learning communities enable children to keep modifying both their views

of their world and of themselves. Research (for example, Claxton, 2018; Dweck, 2006; Ritchart & Perkins, 2000) supports children's construction and reconstruction of multiple working theories as children's dynamic dispositional orientations to learn in active ways expands their learning identities. Rinaldi's (2006) work is essentially interested in a listening dialogue between teachers and children and the effect this has on children's engagement in "learning how to learn, fostering their natural disposition toward relationships and the consequent co-construction of knowledge" (p.126). Listening means being open to others and what they have to say. Listening creates the space for children to build "provisional theories offering a satisfactory explanation that can be continuously reworked" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 64). Duhn (2020) explains listening slightly differently:

> Waiting and being patient when doing research [or learning and teaching] with children … is also central to decentring because in so doing, we become better attuned to what else is happening around us, and to what matters to children. In other words, children let us into their worlds, but only if we take the time to listen and be with them. (p.145)

For Duhn (2020), it is important that actions make a difference, and her call for listening patience is a call for shifts in power dynamics to enable children's voices to be heard. This call to listen is reiterated by other Aotearoa New Zealand academics. Bishop's (1999, 2019) long-standing research holds high expectations for kaiako who work with and alongside children every day. Bishop's research findings, along with colleagues like Glynn (1999) and Berryman (2006, 2010), call for shifts in the power balance and for teachers to enact ako within a pedagogy of cultural relationships where positive learning dispositions and working theories can flourish because the contexts for learning are socially and culturally meaningful to learners.

Likewise, *Te Whāriki* calls for children to have agency in their learning. This means an ability for them to act on dispositions like being curious, social, and creative within an aspirational view of curriculum design (Gunn & Gasson, 2017) and for children to build working theories they can test out and modify because the curriculum ensures time and opportunity to do so. These dispositions are not focused on compliance and skill-focused learning in isolation. Hedges (2021) contends that an outcome for *success* often "results in programmes and policies emphasising academic outcomes and preparation for school … reflecting narrow academic focus of specialist programmes and assessments and a connection

with subsequent international comparison testing regimes" (p. 180). Dispositions that drive active, focused learners with agency to decide on the working theories, processes, products, engagements with friends, or decisions to learn alone are the kinds of dispositions that flourish when kaiako design learning environments activating children's curiosity to engage in complex theories (Haggerty, 2019; Kay, 2019; Sands & Lee, 2019). These learning environments include rich conversation and uninterrupted play (Gray, 2009, 2013; Gunn & Gasson, 2017) and time to be reflective when theories can be modified and reconstructed.

2.3.3 Sociocultural perspectives in learning identities formation

There is a myriad of literature on learning identity formation, particularly related to sociocultural perspectives. Vygotsky and Bruner are cited in *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017) as influential in the notion of mediated participation inside relationships with people, places, and things" (Cowie & Carr, 2008, p. 5). Mediated participation is cemented further as responsive pedagogies unfold in dialogue. Responsive pedagogies also rely on the children themselves as, with agentic energy, inside the multiple contexts of home, setting, and community, children choose to engage in ways that are meaningful to them (Claxton, 2018). This relational, listening togetherness is an opportunity to reimagine ways we all continue to refine our learning identities through experience one with another. Claxton and Carr (2004) regard narrative documentation that makes a child's growing sense of self visible as a way to grasp and retrieve experience. Learning stories (Carr & Lee, 2019a) make it possible to talk together, explain, widen the context, and better understand the impact of documented learning on mokopuna, whānau, and kaiako.

There is a growing body of research (Duhn, 2012; Murris, 2016; Moss, 2014) on learning identities formation that calls for a decentring of learning identities and thereby "relationally position[ing] humans as co-inhabitants of a shared realm, reflecting an ethic of care and respect for the more-than-human world" (Ritchie, 2012, p. 86). This sociocultural view of learning identities shifts learner focus to a wider posthuman purview that situates learners within the world as custodians. It is a view that calls for kaiako to proactively reclaim indigenous knowledges and thereby offer children provocations for learning imbued in the natural world through the pūrākau that tell the whakapapa of living things (Rameka, 2016).

In conclusion, Section 2.3 and its three subsections have shown that the concept of learning identities is truly complex. It is also shaped by one's epistemological view of how knowledge is formed as the direction of one's gaze determines what one sees. In this study, I align myself and the research with the sociocultural perspective on learning identity formation discussed in this section, and I take the view that storied accounts of dispositions and working theories are the key building blocks of learning identities enacted within language, culture, and socially situated experience. These positionings underpin the research methodology, methods, findings, and conclusions presented in the chapters that follow.

2.4 Learning stories and their influence on kaiako practice

Having completed the review of literature around learning identities, the next section considers learning stories—the second central construct in the present study. Chapter 1 has already introduced what learning stories are. The focus of the review that follows is a summation of prior research on the impacts and benefits of learning stories (Section 2.4.1), and Section 2.4.2 discusses the debates, critiques, and tensions in relation to learning story assessment in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.4.1 Prior research on the impacts and benefits of learning stories

Learning stories first emerged as a response to the sociocultural framework of *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996) and proffered a narrative assessment model designed to articulate dialogic understanding of learners' progress (Carr, 2001). Learning stories became the most widely used form of assessment in early learning centres nationwide; however, wide use does not equate with effectiveness. Gunn (2015) explains:

> The extent to which narrative assessments as learning stories might bring children, parents and teachers together, in interactions over learning and development varies. It depends in part on the expertise of the teacher and her or his capacity to make visible the relations between learning and development of the individual within the communal context of the early childhood or early years setting. (p. 47)

A deepened pedagogical understanding was therefore required to see beneath surface skills and provide feedback that could enhance, for example, learner self-efficacy and learners'

views of how they could keep improving their learning (Cowie et al., 2018; Crooks et al., 2016). It also meant learning how to write learning stories in ways that offered feedback to children and families about a child's learning while voicing the socially situated and cultural complexity that is learning within a *Te Whāriki* perspective. Relevant here is the set of principles of assessment developed by Crooks et al. (2016) to meet social justice and children's rights commitments. The most important describes assessment as a learning journey, monitoring progress over time in ways that strengthen children's learning identities and their ongoing motivation to keep learning. *Te Whāriki* was innovative, and its emphasis on tracking and stretching children's learning in credit-based, dispositional, and working-theory-focused ways within curriculum challenged kaiako to think differently about ako and to think very differently about assessment (Davis, 2006).

Learning stories, by their very nature as narrative, subjective accounts of learning, (Carr & Lee, 2019a; Crooks et al., 2016) reflect kaiako values and their views of children as learners. What teachers write in assessments supports or hinders children's burgeoning learning identities (Carr & Lee, 2019b; Gunn, 2015). Kaiako authorship of learning stories contributes to the narrative inquiry view of puzzling, of valuing story, and of teachers' intent to be authentic, sensitive, and invested (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000). However, teacher intentions are not the only influence in the way these artefacts have come to be. The learning story journey has as much to do with qualifications and ongoing professional development. Kaiako are expected to know what learning to capture and understand how to do this effectively (Gunn & Gilmour, 2014). The journey encapsulates ratios, enabling teachers to be allocated the time to do this assessment analysis justice, and the leadership in settings to support a myriad of attuned relational events to unfold (Gorst, 2021).

Learning stories fulfil the aspirational expectations of *Te Whāriki* when kaiako are enabled to engage within the curriculum to write learning stories in timely, relationally connected ways (Carr & Lee, 2019a). As these narrative assessments track children's learning progress through cultural, dispositional, and working theory lenses (Sands & Lee, 2019), they make a difference to outcomes for mokopuna. This can be seen in ways families talk about their children's learning stories and comment on the changes they see through conversations with kaiako, or in children's folders or online portals. Children's active engagement with their learning story folders as they share their learning with whānau, kaiako, and friends shows how children view learning stories. However, when this intricate support network is absent or

depleted (few qualified kaiako, minimal time allocation, little or poor professional learning opportunities) and workloads are overwhelming or focussed on isolated skill acquisition, a teacher's ability to intentionally engage in cultural, relational pedagogy is compromised (Carr et al., 2016). Children's agentic abilities to engage with the stories in their learning folders is also compromised.

I think Perkins (2010) sets the scene for the vitality required of learning stories to elicit the kind of emotional connection that draws learning communities into what valued learning can look, sound, and feel like, and consequently make a positive difference for children's learning outcomes:

> It's never just routine. It's about thinking about what you know and pushing further. It involves open ended or ill-structured problems and novel, puzzling situations. It's never just problem solving, it involves problem finding. It's not just about right answers. It involves explanation and justification. It's not emotionally flat. It involves curiosity, discovery, creativity, camaraderie. (p. 29)

Perkin's description of learning is inspiring for teachers because making certain the learning he describes happens in early learning settings consistently requires a great deal of energy and commitment to *Te Whāriki* aspirations as well as an understanding of a sociocultural view of the learner described by Perkins (1993) as "person-plus" (p. 88). It also requires a deep understanding of the pedagogy underpinning rich, diverse learning environments (Crooks et al., 2016).

2.4.2 Debates, critiques, and tensions in relation to learning story assessment in Aotearoa New Zealand

A very real issue, however, is who decides what is rich learning to capture. Ritchie and Rau (2006), in their Teaching and Learning Research Initiative: *Te Puawaitanga: Partnerships with tamariki and whānau in bicultural early childhood care and education*, have this to say:

> There is an inherent tension in our current early childhood practice of pedagogical documentation, in that we as educators enacting our professional obligations often assume the responsibility for making judgements as to what to notice, what to include, and how these focuses are then interpreted. (p. 3)

Judgements about what to notice, what to include, and how to interpret learning can only be fully realised when a listening pedagogy is enacted—a pedagogy that includes each member of a community. Māori assessment strategies, too, have looked to te ao Māori ways of being to formulate culturally responsive assessment and *Te Whatu Pōkeka* (2009) details this kaupapa.

Despite a revised *Te Whāriki* (2017), tensions are still apparent (Gunn & Nuttall, 2019) with respect to its implementation. In addition, in the view of Arndt and Tesar (2015), "concerns with the implementation of *Te Whāriki*, directly implicate assessment, as a key pedagogical application of the curriculum framework" (p. 74). Learning stories have been caught up in this debate because the way they are written is variable (Education Review Office, 2013); however, the gap between the learning story theoretical framework (Carr, 2001) and learning story implementation in practice is also contestable. There is much debate in the literature, yet how to strengthen the implementation of *Te Whāriki* and, by implication, learning stories is not a simple process. *Te Whāriki* is aspirational, not prescriptive (Gunn & Gasson, 2017) and requires assessment strategies to be sociocultural, socially just, and child-rights-centred. In the view of Gunn and Gasson (2017): "Simplistic, fixed, and standardised measures cannot adequately account for the close connections between children's learning and the kinds of responsive and reciprocal relationships that contribute to that learning" (p. 169). These views are supported by Carr et al. (2016) in a response to a proposed Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) international assessment framework: "We need to acknowledge and study the way in which assessment offers learners identities and positions" (p. 452).

Te Whāriki requires mokopuna and whānau involvement—meaningful, ongoing involvement that makes a difference to the ways curriculum is designed and enacted. The following whakataukī elaborates: *He whāriki hei whakamana i te mokopuna, hei kawe i ngā wawata. A whāriki that empowers the child and carries our aspirations.* However, the journey towards a realisation of *Te Whāriki* aspirations is still in progress, and Ritchie and Skerrett (2019) voice the sentiment of many in their chapter called, *Frayed and fragmented: Te Whāriki unwoven*. Currently, few kaiako are able to enact the bicultural nature of *Te Whāriki* because they do not have proficiency in te reo or tikanga Māori. Thus, a vacuum exists—one that needs addressing. One way to keep moving towards *Te Whāriki* aspirations and Teaching Council

Standards—mandatory for teacher certification in Aotearoa New Zealand—is for assessment to listen deeply to whānau and mokopuna: *Mā te ahurei o te tamaiti e ārahi i ā tātou mahi. Let the uniqueness of the child guide our work.* The extent this happens is dependent on macrolevel factors (see Section 1.1.1) as well as expectation and support in the microlevel context to help kaiako to do so effectively (Arndt & Tesar, 2015).

If *Te Whāriki* aspirations for assessment are to be realised, issues related to cultural knowledge, power, and control need to be addressed, and this call to realise *Te Whāriki* aspirations is very evident across *Weaving Te Whāriki,* edited by Gunn and Nuttall (2019). In the first edition, published in 2003, each chapter was forward-focused, picking up on the dynamic nature of *Te Whāriki* as an aspirational curriculum. The third edition, published in 2019, brought together most of the same authors; however, it seemed to me, the optimism had tarnished, and very real calls for system changes at macro and microlevel practice were evident. In my reading, this had nothing to do with the intent of *Te Whāriki* but all to do with the state of neoliberal, commodity-driven, task-oriented shifts in the ecological framing of early childhood in Aotearoa New Zealand and, indeed, across the world (Moss, 2018).

However, despite the contested nature of learning stories (Carr, 2001), they are fit for this wider view of learner outcomes as proposed by Hedges (2021) and supported in Gunn and colleagues' (2014, 2016, 2017, 2019) work because they are designed to assess children's rich learning in the context of language, culture, and identity (Carr et al., 2010; Carr & Lee, 2019; Guerin, 2015). However, learning stories are not without their distractors, and some academics (for example, Blaiklock, 2008; Buchanan, 2013; McLachlan, 2017) have misgivings about their implementation. Other academics, such as Gunn and Glasson (2017), find it difficult to conceive how measurement-focused assessment is an alternative in the context of a *Te Whāriki* view of rich, distributed learning experiences and assessment processes able to respond with similar complexity. Gunn and Glasson (2017), with reference to measurement-focused standards' abilities to contribute to children's identities as competent and confident learners, respond to criticism of learning stories by saying they:

> Can't imagine … why or even how fixed and simplistic early learning standards might be imposed or even introduced … In spite of this however, questions about child learning outcomes and the standards of such are regularly raised by Government officials and some academics, and commentators. (p. 169)

Learning stories have also been criticised for the time they take to write, and early childhood management has sought to reduce this time, finding other ways to assess children's learning (Blaiklock, 2008). There have also been significant and successful attempts to reduce the myriad of creative ways kaiako have presented learning stories to children and families. Online platforms with templated proformas have reduced both the accessibility to children as well as the creative flair that draws a reader into a story of learning.

The Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (2015) uses the standards, *Learning Focused Culture* and *Design for Learning*. These standards place the onus on kaihautū/leaders and kaiako to ensure learning and assessments are meaningful and that children have agency to choose the way they engage in learning. The emphasis, too, must be to ensure assessment is in place to improve learning, not prove it (Gunn & Gasson, 2017). This contentiously brings learning stories face to face with a positivistic paradigm that views learning as measurable, repeatable, and transactional (Moss, 2018). Yet outcomes-oriented curricula are also contestable because narrow-subject-focussed, school-readiness foci may not reflect children's learning experiences (Gee, 2007). Hedges (2021), along with other researchers (for example, Haggerty, 2019; Kay, 2019), call for a wider purview of curriculum outcomes "to capture children's rich learning capabilities as they occur in the present alongside considerations of the future" (Hedges, 2021, p. 180).

Learning communities that embed *Te Whāriki* principles and strands into the environment design nurture curious, resilient, resourceful, empathically focused children. These mokopuna know who they are and care deeply about their impact on others and, indeed, on the world around them. These kinds of learning environments, described by Moss (2017) as resistant movements to the dominant neoliberal discourse, immerse children in communities of learning that value their identities as learners embedded in socially and culturally derived lived experiences.

In conclusion, Section 2.4 and its two subsections have shown that learning stories have the capacity to respond to *Te Whāriki* aspirations because they are grounded in sociocultural theory. Learning stories—as a narrative assessment strategy—are designed to recognise the uniqueness of mokopuna, and, at their best, they stretch across people, places, and things (Cowie & Carr, 2008) to situate learning stories in the learning context and the social/cultural milieu that mokopuna and whānau

bring to learning settings. However, many other influences impact kaiako abilities to write learning stories in ways that make a difference to children's identities of themselves as active, dispositional learners. These factors encapsulate my positioning and contribute to the paradigms underlying the research methodology, methods, findings, and conclusions presented in the chapters that follow.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter reviews two bodies of literature—learning identities and learning stories—to provide a foundation for my research. The literature review brings these two conversations together to make the point that understanding learning identities is important because learning identity paradigms drive both curriculum design and the kinds of experiences children have within the curriculum.

This review reinforces that learning identities are socially and culturally situated. Therefore, a pedagogical reorientation away from solely western-centric thinking enables multiple voices to be heard and made visible (Moss, 2017, 2018). Consequently, the literature recognises that assessment must respond to learner-nuanced situatedness. The review emphasises that credit-based, relational, and culturally meaningful processes keeping learning and the learner situated in participatory pedagogies are able to meet the sociocultural assessment aspirations of *Te Whāriki*.

There is a focus in the literature on learners' feelings about themselves and how dispositional learning characteristics orient learners towards or away from learning opportunities, making the case that kaiako who pay attention to learner inclinations, sensitivities to occasion, and abilities develop facilitating environments to strengthen diverse learning identities (Carr & Lee, 2012). The literature recognises that learning stories, as an assessment response to *Te Whāriki* values and its socioculturally informed curriculum, have the capacity to embrace the uniqueness of each child while listening to the multiple diverse, social, and cultural stories that surround children's lives.

The review supports teacher practice that nurtures meaningful cultures of ako through engaging in partnership with children in responsive, coconstruction of learning. It emphasises the need for continued conversations around whānau aspirations, learning dispositions, and

children's working theories to ensure these concepts are well understood by early learning communities. The literature highlights that learning identities are always in transition and, consequently, are complex because learners' views of themselves are constantly in flux.

However, the literature also discusses the contested nature of learning stories. In current global political climates where neoliberal stories often define success, learning stories, as complex relational responses to children's learning, are under threat. The literature contributes to disrupting positivist, measurement-focussed practices and points towards the value of learning communities engaging with *Te Whāriki* principles and utilising learning stories to inform learning and teaching.

The research conversations also highlight the complexities of attaining *Te Whāriki* aspirations. The literature review indicates a need for willingness at macropolitical levels to provide the surrounding contextual frameworks that would enable kaiako to fulfil these aspirations and to meet their commitment to *Te Tiriti O Waitangi* obligations.

There is a large body of literature on learning identities, learning dispositions, and, increasingly, working theories. However, joining these concepts together, understanding the role that learning stories have in nurturing learning identities, learning dispositions, and working theories could benefit from further research. In particular, continued research would clarify ways learning stories, as artefacts, promote and continue learner and community conversations about learning and learning progress, and, as a consequence, lead to transformational learning for individuals and their learning communities across times, contexts, and places.

My study responds to the findings of the literature reviewed in this chapter by specifically exploring ways learning stories affect both an individual's and a learning community's perspectives of children's learning identities. In reflecting on this review, it seems that the epistemological paradigms evident in learning stories have the potential to affect children's development of learning identities. It is timely, then, to consider how learning stories, positioned by the literature as a sociocultural assessment response to *Te Whāriki,* are capable of both listening to and shaping children's, families', and teachers' perceptions of children as learners. The next chapter considers the methodology to make this possible.

Chapter 3
Methodology

This chapter commences with a visual overview of the research design situating the study in context (Section 3.1). Section 3.2 looks at the ontological and epistemological positioning, and Section 3.3 justifies narrative inquiry as the overarching methodology for the study. Section 3.4 considers the narrative research methodology underpinning this research, and Section 3.5 outlines ethical and quality considerations.

3.1 Visual overview of research

Figure 3.1 provides a visual overview of the research landscape to show interconnectivity in every aspect of the study. This connectivity points to lived experience unfolding over time, in a variety of social settings and places (Caine et al., 2013). In addition, the visibility of the Greerton social connections signals a commitment to relational meaning-making. This narrative research paradigm was reflexively formed in relationship with myself as the author of the research trajectory, yet composed too, in relationship with my coinquirers and participants. Narrative inquiry permeated every aspect of the study as a way to generate an iterative process that valued the storied lives of this particular community of learners (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; McAllum et al., 2019).

Figure 3.1 is layered in the form of concentric rings to create a sense of "narrative unity" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 3). The rings have movement, they are relational, and meaning is generated through the weight of the component parts working together (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). The first ring shows how each element of the research is grounded in an ontological view that reality is socially constructed. The second concentric ring reflects an epistemological perspective that storied views of people's lives is a legitimate way to seek knowledge, while the third ring shows the situated way an iterative narrative thread connects all aspects of the research together (Butler-Kisber, 2019). The three intersecting circles are indicative of the dialogic relationship between the Greerton learning community, the iterative process, and the findings and discussion (Chapter 4). The arrows provide a sense of movement in tune with a narrative inquiry perspective of lived experience as ever unfolding, composed in relation to temporality, sociality, and place. The shadowed effect on each ring

creates a sense of thick description—of breadth and depth in reflexive thought and empathic integrity. The diagram, considered as a whole, gives a sense of my positionality as a researcher and makes the underlying paradigm explicit so it can be recognised and debated (Claxton & Carr, 2004; Moss, 2018).

In summary, this diagram presents an overview of the research showing how every aspect of the study was embedded within a narrative inquiry research paradigm. The diagram visually articulates the way narrative inquiry was woven into a cohesive process that sought to keep the integrity of people's stories aligned to temporality, sociality, and place. The next section considers the ontological and epistemological paradigms underpinning this study, for it is here that decision-making about how this study would unfold occurs and the meaning-making that would eventuate (Moss, 2018).

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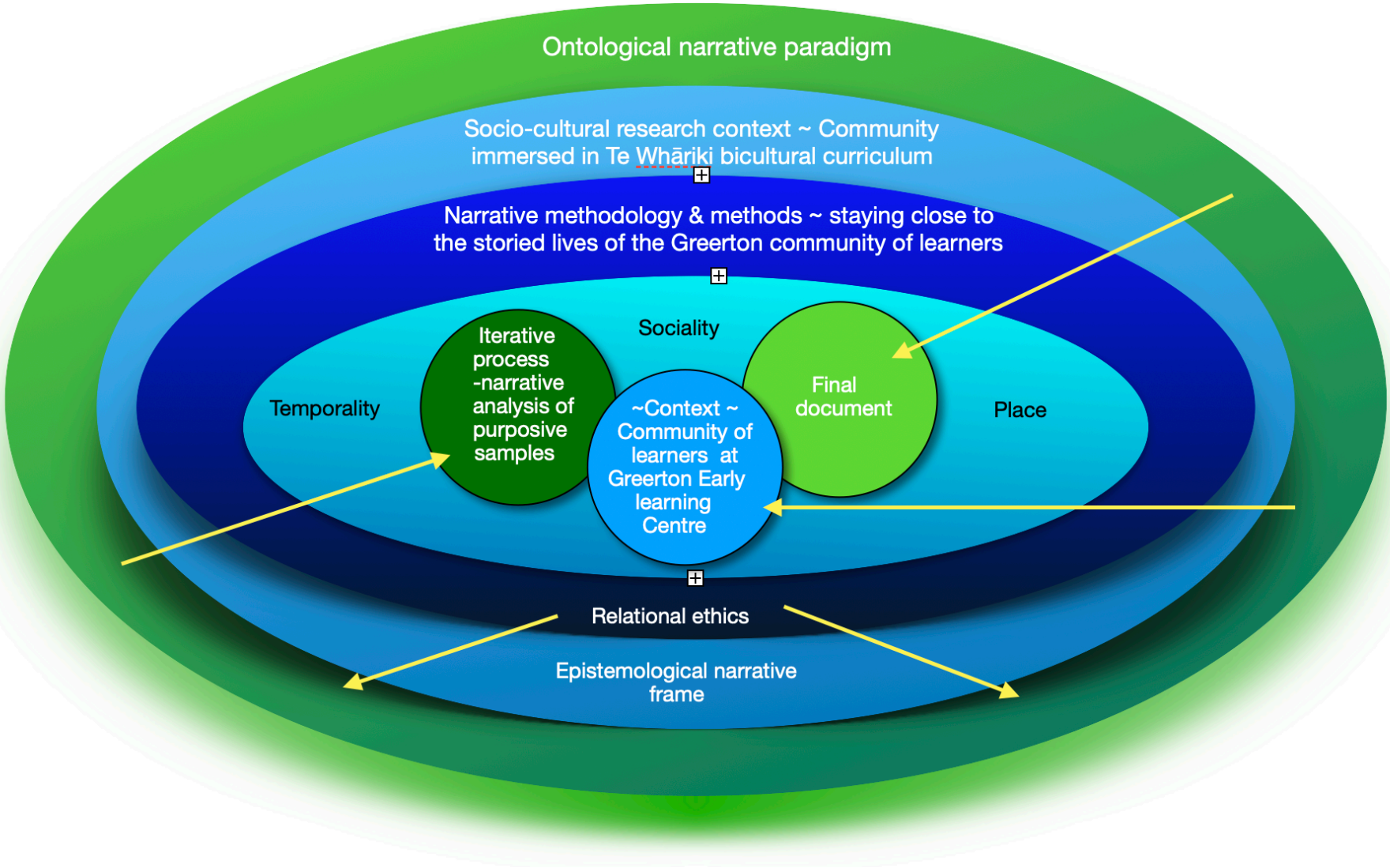
Figure 3.1: *Narrative connections layered as concentric circles*



3.2 Ontological and epistemological positioning

Ontological and epistemological perspectives give rise to ways people conceive reality and the nature of knowledge (Holmes, 2020). As a narrative inquirer, I have aligned myself with the perspective that there is no single truth and no single way to understand the world. However, as Moss (2018) points out:

> There are many different knowledges and claims to truths, for example about the child and early childhood education, each vying for influence and power, each bidding to be taken up as the truth, leading to questions such as whose knowledge counts and gains power and whose knowledge is marginalised and suppressed. (p. 39)

These knowledges and claims to truth(s) generate paradigmatic positions (Moss, 2018) that affect the stories people tell and therefore the way people continue to interpret, respond to, and make sense of the world. In a reflexive sense (May & Perry, 2017), it is important to understand the make-up of the paradigm used in this study and to do so through a social dialogue that shifts potentially taken-for-granted ontological and epistemological assumptions into view where they can be examined, critiqued, and debated.

This section discusses first, the way ontological perspectives shape views of reality and how my perspective of ontology has influenced the way this research has unfolded, thereby making my paradigmatic position visible (Section 3.2.1). Second, the resulting epistemological frame, encompassing this study, is set out to clarify the axioms that have configured my chosen research pathway (Section 3.2.2).

3.2.1 Ontology

Ontological perspectives interpreting the nature of reality vary widely (Berryman, 2019). A multitude of narratives exist, and these shape our human understanding of the world. What matters is that perspectives are chosen in the knowledge that alternatives exist (Moss, 2018). Positions can then be debated, people with alternative views can be listened to, the search for truth can be shifted to meaning-making in the context of language, culture, and identity, and

difference and diversity can flourish (Moss, 2018). These are all possible when a conscious choice is made to be open to and accepting of multiple perspectives (Ritchie, 2015). However, openness as Moss (2018) says, does not preclude selecting a particular storyline that resonates. Indeed, this is the premise for choosing a narrative inquiry, puzzling view of the world that enables personal/social/contextual stories to be shared.

In narrative ontological positioning, thinking narratively within research inquiries, means being committed to relational perspectives of reality (Caine et al., 2013, Ntinda, 2019) that lead to learning and personal change. Narrative inquirers see knowledge as active experiential processes embedded in stories. Stories ae shaped and re-shaped over time in contextual, coconstructed social spaces. This has such relevance to this Greerton study that it is worth reifying Clandinin and Connelly's (2006) definition in their quote below:

> People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. (p. 477)

This research actively engaged an experiential, coconstructed way of thinking about reality by using children's learning stories to enable children, families, and teachers to reengage with the original stories and then rethink and retell their perspectives about how these contributed to their views of learning identities. Utilising learning stories as meaning-making ways to enable lived experience to be considered, reconsidered, and reimagined was a paradigmatic positioning that made sense to the notion of seeking relational and ethical integrity across this research landscape.

In summary, this study sees reality as a socially mediated construction (Bruner, 1996, Rogoff, 2018), contained within stories that are told and retold (McCain & Matkin, 2019). Identity and meaning, therefore, are always undergoing change (Bruner, 2004) and looking back, over time, was a way to view the effect of these stories in a temporal, social, contextual, situated continuum. The iterative process for this study rested on the language of the particular stories, chosen by the teachers, for they were mediated within the Greerton learning community, and

the “people, places, and things” (Cowie & Carr, 2008, p. 105) inherent in the stories were individually and socially meaningful to the people involved (Moss, 2018).

3.2.2 Epistemology

In terms of epistemology (how we know something), narrative methodology deliberately steps beyond the margins of positivist research into relational subjectivity—a site for the dynamism of personal, social, and contextual change through dialogue (Berryman, 2018). In this cultural, social, and language-infused dialogic space, meaning is not tied to quantitative numerical data but to perspectives generated in sociocultural contexts (Rogoff et al., 2018). This view of epistemology requires an owning of perspective for what is privileged is personal interpretation (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016; Scotland, 2012). Positioning epistemology inside a narrative inquirer’s concept of research, as a coconstructed unravelling of story—is a relational journey. Pinnegar’s (2007) words resonate with the ethos of this study: “Relationship is the heart of living alongside in narrative inquiry—indeed, relationships form the nexus of this kind of inquiry space” (p. 249). This view of relationship speaks to the epistemological framing of this research at Greerton. In effect, how we come to know the world is through our experience of it and, more explicitly, our interpretation of those experiences (Moss, 2018).

Listening to the multiple perspectives of children, families, and teachers, in terms of their views of lived experience through the medium of learning stories offered an opportunity for reflexive insight into the Greerton local curriculum. The challenge was to engage with stories in ways that enabled us all, as a community, to think about their impact on the learning identities of mokopuna. This is a reason to ensure those involved sensed a resonance that their opinions were responsively engaged with, thus enabling a new relational story to be told.

However, the way knowledge is constantly expanded in Bruner’s view (Fioretti & Smorti, 2019) is through stepping beyond the ordinary, usual storied, sense-making interpretations that feel personally and socially comfortable, into the extraordinary. Essentially, it is moving into surprise, awe, and wonder, opening up other possible worlds as a result. The outcomes derived from the shared nature of storytelling and the responsive, dialogic feedback lead to

the unravelling of possibilities. This puzzling aspect of narrative epistemological paradigms was alluring to us as narrative inquirers (Fioretti & Smorti, 2019; Lindsay & Schwind, 2016) because coherent threads across stories could be named but so too could anomalies. These cause disruption and stretch conventional thinking beyond surface views of knowledge acquisition. Rose (1999) epitomises this kind of thinking when he discusses the notion of "introducing a critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present experience as if they are timeless, natural, unquestionable…" (p. 20). Disrupting our conventional thinking was important in this study. Essentially, this narrative epistemological view of knowledge acquisition is immersed in multiple interpretations of the storied data, (Cresswell & Poth, 2018), and the socially discursive nature of this research process (Pring, 2017), adds the captivating possibility of interrupting uninterpreted practice in early learning settings.

In summary, narrative ontological and epistemological research paradigms underpinned the ways this research process ultimately unfolded and informed the resulting findings and discussion. The next section considers the methodology chosen for its congruence with the ontological and epistemological positioning of this study.

3.3 Overarching methodology—narrative inquiry

The methodology section of this research is a detailed expansion of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings. The three subsections that follow justify the selection of narrative inquiry as the overarching methodology of the study.

3.3.1 Story is the fundamental way people construct and understand learning identities

This research uses narrative inquiry methodology because at the heart of this study is the intent to learn more about the storied experiences of participants. It is therefore sociocultural in nature (see Section 2.3.3). McAlpine (2016) succinctly locates narrative and sociocultural methodology together in asking these questions:

> What stories do people tell and use to participate in local practices? How are such stories cultural resources, that is, based in common narratives that individuals can call on and modify to better represent their own experiences? (p. 35)

Story has been described as the way human beings make meaning of their lives (Brown, 2009; McCain & Matkin, 2019; Szilas, 2015). Telling and retelling stories as a series of narratives then, are how individuals and communities understand themselves within social and cultural contexts (Bruner, 2004; Moen, 2006; Ntinda, 2019; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Meaning-making is therefore always in flux as these narratives build upon one another to shape and reshape the ways individuals construct their learning identities over time (Pring, 2017). Narrative researchers typically "embrace the assumption that story is one if not the fundamental unit that accounts for human experience" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 3). Thus, using narrative inquiry in the present study allows stories about children's learning identities to be privileged in order to better understand how learning identities are developed.

3.3.2 Learning for individuals happens in relationship with community

Narrative inquiry aligns with Dewey's contention (Pring, 2007) that learning occurs in relationship with community as *lived experience*, within oneself and with others (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). Lived experience can be thought of as a series of narratives, shaped and reshaped over time, creating an ever-changing landscape of meaning (Butler-Kisber, 2018).

Three dynamic elements—*temporality, sociality, and place*—interact together to generate meaning that is both personal and social (Ntinda, 2019; Pring, 2007). These three elements were integral to the analysis of the narratives in this study (see Section 3.4). *Temporality* is seen as a sliding continuum of experience creating narrative continuity that draws experiential learning from the past into the present and future (Caine et al. 2013; Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). *Sociality* situates experience through a sociocultural lens of lived experience where culture, and social and language narratives frame how people come to understand the world around them (Rogoff et al., 2018). *Place* locates experiences in context and anchors them in relational milieux that are "deeply contextual, always embedded one with the other" (Clandinin et al., 2018, p. 20). Thus narrative inquiry is a deeply relational undertaking that sees each of these elements nested together to generate a lived experiential view of learning identities that are at once personal yet informed and formed through community.

Story, connected to time and embedded in relational milieux, has been a constant in kaupapa Māori. The tauparapara/traditional chant in *Te Whātu Pōkeka* (MOE, 2009, p. 3) connects the

notion of looking backwards and forwards in terms of time to current learning and future possibilities. Rameka (2016) makes this visible by referring to wisdom of the past in this whakataukī: "Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua: I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past" (p. 387). Time is therefore intertwined, and the past, present and future are linked together with the people who matter, in terms of whakapapa/genealogical connections, as well as the context of learning, and the place in which learning occurs. *Te Whāriki*—as a *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*-informed curriculum—expectantly requires all kaiako to understand its principles and strands through te ao Māori cultural lenses. Therefore, as this study is directly focused on learning, imbued with a *Te Whāriki* ethos, the methodology utilised to understand the impact of assessment on learning identities must have coherence with te ao Māori perspectives. Narrative inquiry's perspective of temporality, sociality, and place and its intent to listen to multiple storied accounts of lived experiences inside social and cultural contexts has synergy with kaupapa Māori perspectives (Cruse, 2017).

This notion of social *milieux* described above in a sociocultural relational sense is picked up by Carr (2001) when she discusses dispositions as descriptors of learning progress. Places, environments, and communities are contexts where positive learning dispositions are enhanced or diminished (Claxton & Carr, 2004). Dispositions in this sense are qualifying adverbs (for example, being curious, being playful, showing manaakitanga/commitment and care or being anxious or bored) that are affected by the relational experiences of learners with the "people, places, and things" (Cowie & Carr, 2008, p. 95) they engage with over time. Dispositions are not idle. Hedges and Jones (2012) describe them as "combinations of knowledge, skills and attitudes that integrate as dispositions and working theories" (p. 36). The integration of dispositions and working theories within social milieux is useful to learners. Shifts in thinking and action occur as learners anchor new experiences to existing, tentative theories and consequently deepen their understanding of the world. Children's learning identities are continuously changing inside these social milieux (Carr et al., 2004).

The coinquirers and participants in this research have constructed their personal reflections on learning identity formation within this view of social milieux as a mediating context for learning (see Chapter 4). This understanding of early childhood learning environments, as dispositional milieux aligns with the sociocultural approach embedded in *Te Whāriki*. Furthermore, this view is central to narrative research, which "allows for the intimate study of individuals' experiences over time and in context ... [where] each story told and lived is

situated and understood within larger cultural, social, and institutional narratives" (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 1). This study uses stories as a way to interpret and understand the learning lives of the participants within relational communities.

3.3.3 The appropriateness of a story-informed research frame

The present study centres on how specific narratives (children's written learning stories) impact on coinquirers' and participants' perceptions of learning identities through the stories they tell about their views of these learning stories on learning identity formation. It is therefore appropriate to utilise a story-informed research frame to analyse the data (Bishop, 2019).

It is also appropriate because the written learning stories themselves are narrated by teachers who have long-term relational connections with the children and families (Ntinda, 2019). These relationships are embedded in temporality, sociality, and place. Relationships influence teachers' perspectives of children's learning in ways that carry experiential meaning because these perspectives have been reified in the writing process (Leon, 2016). They are able to be revisited, retold, and reinterpreted and, in so doing, follow narrative theoretical views that story is a fundamental way to generate meaning (McAlpine, 2016).

The responses to the purposive sample of learning stories used in this study (see Chapter 4) from teachers, families and children are uniquely situated in a socially constructed dialogic space that invites dynamic interaction (Berryman et al., 2018). These stories belong to each of the participants and the narrative research methodology used in this study recognises and values the multiplicity of the stories told throughout the study.

In summary, narrative inquiry methodology is the study of lived experience as story. It is more than an applied methodology for it embodies a view that story is also the phenomena under study (Clandinin et al., 2018). Continuity of story is a defining factor in narrative inquiry, from the lived experience as individuals within cultural communities to the data collection and forward into the iterative analysis (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The next section considers the methods used to encapsulate the stories in a contextual sense so that

continuity of story is indeed “embodied and embedded” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 3) to repeat a phrase of paramount importance.

3.4 Narrative research methodology

This section considers the methods underpinning this research. Narrative as a method is explained (Section 3.4.1). Section 3.4.2 describes the research setting, and the study timeline is set out and a description of coinquirers and participants is provided in Section 3.4.3. The data method of analysis used to understand the research questions is detailed in Section 3.4.4.

3.4.1 Narrative as a method

Complexity arises as narrative inquiry can be used as research methodology and method (Clandinin et al. 2018). There is tension between the big picture construct of narrative as a methodology and narrative utilised to construct a detailed analysis of lived experience. The choice of method is grounded in paradigmatic thinking that emerges from both ontology and epistemology for, without a clear understanding of these commitments, Caine et al. (2013) contend:

> Much is blurred and much becomes tension filled … What is apparent … is how interwoven narrative ways of thinking about phenomena are with narrative inquiry as research methodology. In these moments we return to our understandings of narrative inquiry and see the importance of making our ontological and epistemological commitments visible. We understand narrative inquiry as both phenomenon and methodology and this forms the basis for how we know how to be, and live, as researchers and as people in relations. (p. 575)

It is my concern to ensure methodology—as phenomena under study—and method—how data are gathered—are understood within this research process because there is no definitive procedure or consensus about what narrative research encompasses (Andrews, 2021). However, Clandinin and Connelly (1990) state: “Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the pattern of inquiry for its study” (p. 2). Therefore, using narrative as a method enables researchers to document multiple perspectives. For this research project, it provides a way to grasp the potential for adding to the body of knowledge

surrounding learning identity formation through understanding multiple ways of knowing (O'Grady et al., 2018; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

3.4.2 The research setting

This study is based in the Greerton community of practice, introduced in Chapter 1. A motivating influence for this study was the Greerton team's continuing interest in pedagogy that contributes to children's views of themselves as lifelong learners. Kaiako wanted to pursue meaning-making processes that would lead to a deepened appreciation of the nuances involved.

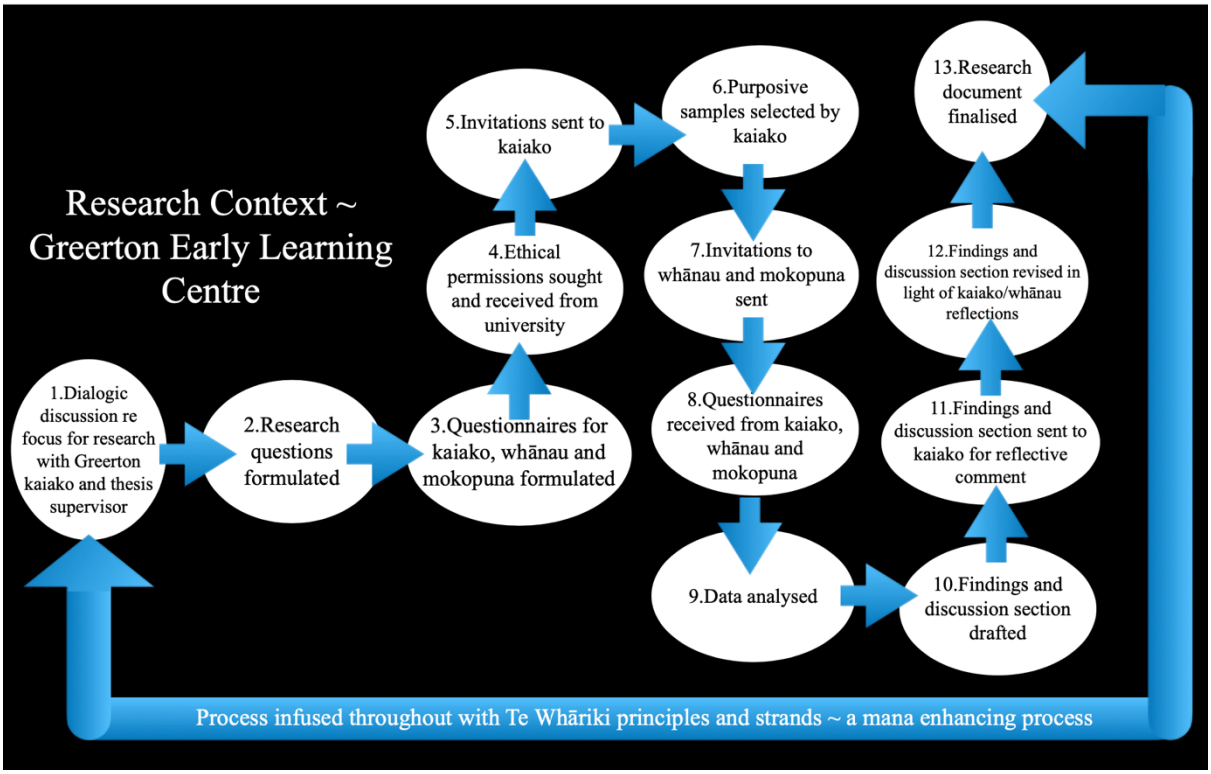
The selection of a narrative inquiry paradigm felt natural because Greerton kaiako have used narratives—in the form of learning stories—to track children's learning progress since 2000. Children and families have been reading and writing these back to us for just as long. So, an inherent focus on the stories people tell and a commitment to relate those stories in ways that keep the integrity of the voices so generously offered (Ntinda, 2019) is something this community has long understood (Hatherly & Sands, 2001; Sands et al., 2012).

It seemed to us too that teachers' roles have always been active ones. A narrative notion of lived experience (Clandinin, 2016) causing change to the individuals and the community was one we pursued (Sands & Lee, 2019). The Greerton learning and teaching community has changed dramatically from the community many of us remember over the span of nearly thirty years. This has been iterative change as the local curriculum here is one that invites both independent and interdependent reflection. The purpose of the research design was to build a coherence between ontology, epistemology, and methodology to create a synergy that positioned dialogic relationships at the forefront. Teachers talk about the Greerton community as a whānau-centred cultural space. This meant the study would need to be inclusive of children, whānau and kaiako to visibly acknowledge each group's right to contribute. Listening deeply to the interests, intentions, and interpretations of the group is an important part of the culture of learning and teaching at Greerton.

3.4.3 Timeline, co-inquirers, and participants

Data for this study came from mokopuna, whānau, and kaiako within the Greerton learning community. This section: sets out the research timeline of events (Figure 3.3), describes coinquirers (Section 3.4.3.1), and explains who the participants are (Section 3.4.3.2).

Figure 3.2 *Research Process*



The timeline in Figure 3.2 shows the steps taken to engage in this research from the development of the research questions through to the final document. Each step sits within the context of the Greerton learning community. The smaller blue arrows show the research journey pathway. The blue arrowed line linking one and thirteen sits within the principles of *Te Whāriki* and affirms that each step was a mana-enhancing process.

3.4.3.1 Kaiako—working alongside coinquirers

An invitation to participate in this study was offered to the six longest serving teachers at Greerton. Each kaiako agreed to be involved in the research. Their combined collegial experience at Greerton was seventy-five years. The continuity engendered through this long

service speaks to the connectedness of time, context, and place that generates shared, storied experience. It calls to mind a whakataukī in *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017) that values the whakapapa of shared endeavour:

> *He whāriki hei whakamana i te mokopuna, hei kawe i ngā wawata. A whāriki that empowers the child and carries our aspirations.* (p.10)

The teachers at Greerton consider this learning setting to be steeped in shared leadership practice (Sands et al., 2012). However, the external parameters of this master's thesis research meant that only this smaller group would be directly responsible for contributing and responding dialogically to the interpreted data. This engendered some dismay as it was a break from our usual ways of being, ways that we have long cherished in terms of how our local curriculum unfolds. Shared leadership is a concept that for us, stretches across our entire community. We view ourselves as a kaupapa whānau community with many familial features that connect us. For example, our new building was designed as a home with shared learning spaces to ensure we mirrored the way learning happens across ages and spaces in families and communities. The whānau culture elicits a responsibility from each of us for the wellbeing of our whole community. Threads of meaning generated in this study are therefore not only relevant to the people directly involved; they have meaning for the *many* across our community. We understood that this kaupapa meant kaiako—directly involved— would also be listening and responding in ways that encompassed the values and perspectives of our entire community.

Hence my concern was to find ways to involve kaiako as a research community, working as coinquirers, in the "midst" (Caine et al, 2013, p. 576), puzzling with and alongside the people who matter to each of us. Positioning teachers as coinquirers is an agentic act for decision making within the fabric of the study that enables teachers' voices to be heard as data must be "put to work in particular contexts, sunk into narratives that give them shape and meaning, and mobilised as part of broader processes of interpretation and meaning-making" (Dourish et al., 2018, p. 1). While it was my responsibility to complete the iterative analysis, I have done so with the aid of responsive feedback from my colleagues (for example see Appendix 15). Hence, with a coinquirer relationship in mind, it was kaiako who selected from the hundreds of learning stories written for the Greerton community. Coinquirers were asked to choose three of these learning stories, narrated for one child, that would forefront the three-dimensional context for narrative inquiry—temporality, sociality, and place (Section 3.3.2).

These were learning stories that tracked learning progress in the context of personal and social experiences and, in the teachers' opinions, would contribute to unravelling the puzzle of learning identities.

Narrative inquirers very often choose semi structured interviews as these conversation formats generate possibilities for responsive listening (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). However, in this study, kaiako were asked to reply to a questionnaire. The intention here was for teachers to review the learning stories they had chosen and then respond in considered ways. Teachers are well practised in writing learning stories and reflecting on both children's learning and indeed their own learning. Sharing these with colleagues is the way the Greerton community builds a shared understanding of our local curriculum. The challenge was to ensure a questionnaire format did not detract from the essential ethos of narrative inquiry that values responsive construction of meaning-making. This data collection was therefore designed with open-ended questions, without word constraint and in the event kaiako used it as a thinking guide rather than a rigid question/answer response (see Appendix 5).

There were ethical concerns, in terms of my insider researcher positioning. By the time this study commenced, I had sold the Centre to my daughter. Nevertheless, a questionnaire was a way to mitigate the potential power dynamics in my roles as a previous owner and colleague participating in a shared leadership culture and shared construction of practice. In addition, a questionnaire provided the opportunity for teachers to think as narrative inquirers and puzzle through the complexities of understanding learning identity formation. In a pragmatic sense, the data collected from questionnaires was far less than the amount semi-structured interviews would generate. Questionnaires meant I could widen the cohort group to hear as many voices as possible within the scope of a master's thesis.

In summary, the six longest serving Greerton kaiako were asked to choose three learning stories written for one child, and, once permission had been granted from the child's family, kaiako completed a questionnaire. This was constructed in ways that positioned kaiako as coinquirers, puzzling through the notion of learning identities as they reviewed the selected learning stories in the context of their relationship with whānau and mokopuna. Kaiako then read the findings and discussion section of the research. They wrote their thoughts in the margins by way of responsive feedback (see Appendix 15) and in so doing created a sense that my iterative interpretations had included the authentic voices of all the people involved.

3.4.3.2 Participants

An invitation to participate in this study was offered to six families and children whose learning stories kaiako had selected. Each family and child invited agreed to do so. The importance of asking for children's and families' perspectives was to ensure all community members had a voice that was listened to. Whānau and mokopuna responses were essential dialogically and their perspectives mattered, particularly in relation to a storied continuum of experience affecting learning identities over time and place.

Families and children are very used to reading and responding to the learning stories kaiako write to them. These learning stories intentionally seek to position children's learning within the sociocultural contexts of each child's lived experience. Each learning story is unique to each child and carries a continuity thread that has connecting links across time, context, and place. They are interpreted accounts of a child's learning, informed and formed in relationship with the child, their family, and the culture of ako, actively and intentionally designed to ensure agentic learning (Murris, 2016). These learning stories, while not directly analysed, created a narrative frame that families and children related to and were excited to review.

A questionnaire was used to gather whānau and mokopuna perspectives (see Appendices 8 & 11). The questionnaires were prompts for families and children to share their thoughts with me. They were open-ended, without word limit. They were focused on the very essence of their children's wellbeing as they grow into a world that demands much of each of us. The questions needed to reflect this wairua/spirit and to be treated with great care in the analysis. Some children were still very young at the time the data was gathered and a video recording was used for children whose whānau thought this more appropriate.

In summary, all six whānau and their mokopuna, selected by kaiako, agreed to participate. The youngest children's responses were videoed. Very often, people participate in research and once the data is gathered, this ends their active role (Gunn, 2016). In this research, because we are part of a whānau-focussed community of learners, it seemed to me, that more was required. Therefore, families were offered an opportunity to read the findings and discussion section of the study and offer feedback. It was recognised that this was a significant time commitment and may or may not be of interest.

Table 3.1: Summary of data

Child's name	**Age at time of data collection**	**Child questionnaire /video completed**	**Teacher's name**	**Teacher questionnaire completed**	**Parent's name**	**Parent Question-naire completed**	**Learning Story title**
Reece	11	✓	Karen	✓	Sharon	✓	1.The observer 2.On a mission 3.Sharon's Learning Story
Brielle	7	✓	Melissa	✓	Aimee & Simon	✓	1.Brielle's persistence pays off 2.Brielle's riding 3."Look, it's my first time"
Maia	5	✓	Amanda	✓	Danielle	✓	1.What does learing success look like? 2.Aroha: mā te ngākau aroha koe e ārahi 3.Maia's taonga
Tessa	5	✓	Catalina	✓	Kate	✓	1.Welcome to the farm, Tessa /Tessa takes a calculated risk 2.When mana is strong challenges are sought 3."I can't talk, I'm concentrating
Sambridhi	5	✓	Tanya	✓	Laxman	✓	1.Sambridhi puzzles it out 2."I did it" 3.Rainbow hands and seven feet. Sambridhi has so many fabulous ideas to express
Blake	3	✓	Bridget	✓	Rachel	✓	1.A curious mind 2.The right tool for the job 3.An ingenious elevator
Totals		**6 children's question-naires /videos**		**6 teacher Question-naires**		**6 family question-naires**	**18 Learning Stories (supporting data only)**

Table 3.1 provides a summary of the data collected for the study. It shows the corresponding child, parent, and teacher names as well as the learning stories selected for each child. It also shows that in total, the study collected six child questionnaires, six parent questionnaires, and six teacher questionnaires as the core data sources, and eighteen learning stories as supporting data. The next section details how the data were analysed.

3.4.4 The data method of analysis used to understand the research questions

The selection of a data method of analysis eluded me for a long time. I had originally planned to use reflexive thematic analysis to generate codes and then consider emerging themes. Indeed, it took wide reading across qualitative methodology and methods to understand the problem. Thematic analysis breaks data into coded blocks before synthesising these into meaningful interpretations (McAllum et al., 2019). While this approach provides rigour for identifying, interpreting, and discussing patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), all my reading on narrative inquiry paradigms kept *story* as the essential unit of meaning (Leon, 2016; Moen, 2006). Decontextualising data did not fit with this narrative concept of temporality, sociality, and place (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). Neither did it fit with the Greerton experiences of assigning meaning through the learning stories told, written, retold, rewritten, shared, and shared more widely. I had concern, too, for ethical integrity and relational connection. A narrative inquiry paradigm calls for the researcher to take care of and be careful with the stories people tell them because these sustain meaning in their lives (Clandinin et al., 2018). Again, the idea of breaking up these stories (as would be necessary for thematic analysis) seemed inappropriate in this context.

A narrative analysis method was ultimately selected for the study (McAllum et al., 2019). Narrative analysis meant the data could be divided into storied units of meaning. Unlike the smaller chunks used in thematic analysis, these storied units retained the three-dimensional space, narrative researchers require to ensure lived experiences, time, context, and place are wrapped around sense-making components (Ntinda, 2019). The analysis process is based on the guidance of McAllum et al. (2019). The process involved familiarising myself with the data, gathering initial meaning-making narrative excerpts from the data, searching for narrative coherence across the six data subsets, and seeking responsive feedback from inquirers and participants.

I began by reading and rereading the data from each of the questionnaires to gain an overall sense of what these responses might be telling me. I understood that my interpretation would be perceived through my own "dictionary of experiences" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 76). I, therefore, considered the data, seeking to understand participants' perspectives and avoid possible short-sightedness through the blurred lens of my own perspective. I also read and reread each

of the learning stories to gain a sense of context behind the comments. It was not my intention to analyse the learning stories as these were contextual examples. The questionnaires presented the coinquirers' and participants' interpreted understandings of learning identities. Nonetheless, the learning stories were very important in framing the ideas and my intent was to use these as examples when reporting the findings. I grouped the data into six child-based subsets, each comprising the three component stories for one child and the associated interpretations by the teacher, the family, and the child. I looked across each of these data subsets to analyse any seemingly connected smaller narratives. Although focused on the same experiences, the stories that emerged from mokopuna, whānau, and kaiako within a single data set were perspectival, showing that each person's understanding of the child's learning identities was uniquely situated.

In reviewing the data, I shifted narratives into meaningful storied texts. In this way, connected and repeated ideas could be sifted to weight their significance. However, because stories are always interpreted, we *see* them from our own cultural contexts (Wenger, 2007). I found that annotating the physical script made it easier to see the emerging coherence of the smaller narratives for, in Dewey's view, experiences are "continuous and interactive, and if intentionally reflected upon, may be educative" (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p. 15). The purpose of this phase, then, was to think about the ways coinquirers and participants understood how the experiences, narrated in the learning stories, influenced the child's learning identities.

As I attempted to find answers for the questions I had framed, I used the Deweyan concept of the three-dimensional research space and looked for the way time, sociality, and place created meaning across each of the child-based data subsets (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). Wherever threads of meaning seemed to sit apart, I parked them for the moment, continually reconsidering the shape and tenor of the links. I did not want to lose individual perspectives simply because they did not fit other threads that emerged across the data subsets. At the same time, I wanted to refrain from ignoring disconfirming evidence and keep faithfully focused on meaning-making.

As I emerged from this phase, I could see groupings that generated a flow of ideas linked across data sets. This enabled me to build a research text around the common narratives as well as to comment on outlying narratives if apparent, and then to collate these together to

create a draft research document. Samples of this process are collated in Appendix 13 which was an initial iteration of Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Once I had produced the draft document, I was ready to ask for responsive feedback from coinquirers and participants where possible. Initially, I had intended this to be a member checking process; however, it became clear that member checking would not provide the degree of fidelity entitled to the coinquirers, the other participants, or, indeed, to the wider research interest from the Greerton community of learners. Narrative inquiry methodology does not seek agreement that the research findings are an accurate rendition of the raw data at the time it was collected—as is the intent of member checking. Rather, meaning making in narrative inquiry is much more active than this for, in narrative research, "it is perhaps an impossible (and misguided) goal to produce a faithful representation of what participants meant…" (McAllum et al., 2019, p. 370).

Teachers and families often asked me how the study was going and intimated their interest in the outcome. As a result of this continued interest, I sent the findings and discussion chapter to each of the kaiako and whānau and invited them to make comment if they so wished, and several examples are provided in Appendix 14. Wherever appropriate and willing, parents discussed aspects with their children and recorded their comments. This process reflected the Greerton well-established sociocultural practice of stretching learning through dialogic conversation and collective meaning-making.

3.5 Ethical and quality considerations

A research proposal was presented to the University of Waikato Ethics' Committee. The approval letter can be viewed in Appendix 12. This section outlines how I upheld relevant ethical guidelines throughout this study by: firstly, seeking informed consent from the centre owner, coinquirers, and participants (Section 3.5.1); secondly, ensuring confidentiality (Section 3.5.2); thirdly, taking care to ensure power relations were transparent and understood by all members (Section 3.5.3); and fourthly, treating all of the stories, so generously offered, with care and respect (Section 3.5.4). Section 3.5 is concerned with generating an interpretive resonance.

3.5.1 Seeking informed consent

The Centre owner was sent a letter of invitation asking permission to use Greerton as the site for the research, for the Centre to be named, and teachers, families and children to be asked to be participants in the study (Appendix 1). A consent form detailing involvement was attached (Appendix 2). Teachers, families, and children were sent letters of invitation explaining the research project and expectations for their involvement (Appendices 3, 6, and 9 respectively). Expectations for each group differed, and invitation letters were tailored to reflect this. The consent forms detailing potential involvement were sent to teachers (Appendix 4), families (Appendix 7) and children (Appendix10). Teachers were asked to consent to the use of three learning stories they had written for a particular child and two examples are attached (Appendix 13). Teachers were also asked to respond to a questionnaire (Appendix 5). Families were asked to consider the learning stories in their child's folder, in particular the three learning stories selected by the teacher, and respond to a questionnaire (Appendix 8). Children were asked their thoughts about their learning story folders and respond to a questionnaire if this was possible (Appendix 11).

Researching with children carries considerable ethical concerns (Moor, 2014; Woodgate et al., 2017), and opportunities for meaningful engagement are problematic (Gunn, 2016). As a reflexive response to the context for this study, I decided to write a learning story for each child to serve both as an introduction to them in their family context and to offer feedback about how their contributions had informed the study. The children's learning stories are in the introduction section of Chapter 4. The photos from the exemplar learning stories were used in the creation of these new learning stories because permissions had already been granted for their use. Participants all had the right to decline to participate and the right to withdraw data at any point in the research process up to completion of the questionnaires.

3.5.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality for participants is an ethical concern in research. However, because of my long involvement in the early childhood community in Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond, it was impossible to guarantee anonymity for Greerton. When seeking permission from the

owner to use Greerton as my research setting, I clearly explained this potential and permission was granted to use the Greerton Early Learning Centre name (Appendix 1).

The letters seeking approval from coinquirers and participants offered anonymity (Appendices 3, 6 & 9). This community of learning has a long record of credit-based learning practices. There was never an intention to look through a deficit lens to find gaps, only an honest attempt to understand practices and perspectives. This was understood by each person asked to be involved and no one declined, either to participate or to be referred to by a pseudonym.

3.5.3 Power relations were transparent and understood by all members

I have been an integral part of the Greerton community since its inception in 1993. A shared leadership model has meant that teachers have always spoken their minds without reserve generated by potential issues of power and real or perceived retribution. However, to an outsider, this may well be contentious due to my long-standing ownership of this centre. In September 2017, I sold the centre to our daughter who is also a teacher at Greerton. To alleviate any of these concerns, the involvement in this research was completely voluntary and it was clearly stated that no employment repercussions would result from teacher involvement.

Other than teachers knowing the three phenomena I wished to explore, the selection of the learning stories was completely teacher driven. This continued the Greerton practice of coinquiry into research puzzles that have intrigued and fascinated us over time. Teachers selected three exemplar stories for one child. The selection of children and family participants was the teachers. This parameter definitively positioned teachers in an agentic role that had synergy with narrative ontology, epistemology, and methodology, valuing coconstructed, reflectively lived experiences (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). This social involvement is a transactional view of learning narrated through coconstructed experience (Bishop, 2019; Jacoby & Ochs, 1995). When situated in a research setting, social involvement requires an ethical, relational view of the engagements, one with another (Woodgate et al., 2017).

3.5.4 Treating all of the stories, so generously offered, with care and respect.

It is this sense of ethical relationships that has continued to concern me my entire professional life and speaks to the temporality aspect of narrative research (Ntinda, 2019). When a researcher decides to study their own community, an autobiographical component is an inherent part of the process because they bring their ethical intent and practice with them (Clandinin et al., 2018). The years spent being part of the lived experience and thought for the time after the research is complete are very relevant to the way the study is designed and carried out, and how the final thesis is written. There is no intent to stand back and try for objectivity. From a narrative inquirer's perspective, this is an impossibility because a narrative construct of ontological reality is a socially constructed reality (Clandinin et al., 2018). From this viewpoint, we all have a positioning that offers at once insight as well as veiled discernment. The way I have tried to ensure this study has meaning has been to involve the research members as much as is reasonably fair. I wanted to engage with member perspectives in ways that generated a palpable *resonance* for the people involved (McAllum et al., 2019). This is a shift from the usual qualitative reliance on pragmatic choices about authenticity and truthfulness to build a case for the acceptability and usefulness of research (Nowell et al., 2017). This is no more apparent than in the requirement to take care of the storied lives of the people whose generosity has made the study possible.

3.5.5 Interpretive resonance

Resonance is a construct that allows people a sense that a particular study is meaningful to them. Although this research is a small project, developing a sense of resonance with a wider audience is achieved when readers feel aspects of the study might have a usefulness in another community setting too (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). Ultimately, the reader decides. In narrative inquiry, resonance is supported when a reader gains a sense of the efficacy of the study. This happens more effectively when researcher ontological and epistemological positioning is coherently infused within the study (Butler-Kisber, 2019). As issues of power and voice are addressed and ethical relationships embedded in every aspect of personal and social context have primacy, then readers may well feel a sense of overlap in their own contexts and be drawn to thinking about "whom does this matter to and how?" (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p. 15).

Figure 3.2 was designed to visually show how this resonance would be achieved in an embedded way across this study. In the first instance, it was important that this mahi/work ensured the Greerton community had a sense that stories in the study were retold with a congruence that mirrored values that can be felt, seen, and heard in the Greerton local curriculum. Congruity between Greerton values and the stories told was important to me as I thought resonance here would reflect my fidelity to the community. Oral storying of learning experiences has long been a part of the Greerton community ethos. However, learning stories as a formative assessment process intentionally infused the story-telling learning culture with the principles of *Te Whāriki*. Stories could now be retrieved, reviewed, and reinterpreted as ways to live and learn alongside children, families, and each other. I knew this because of my long insider status at Greerton, and I also knew that incongruities would instantly be recognised by this community. Overreached claims and understated effects had to be avoided. This study sits alongside many other research projects involving Greerton kaiako and in this tradition, community agentic involvement (Sands et al., 2012) is a real and present kaiako expectation. A sense of resonance, then, was an essential component generating authenticity and truth. Figure 3.2 shows how resonance was achieved through layering research processes and connecting each phase to the culture of ako at Greerton. The diagram was a concrete way to explain the dialogic nature of resonance in narrative inquiry research, both in general and, essentially, in the particularity of this study.

Figure 3.3 *Research Paradigm*

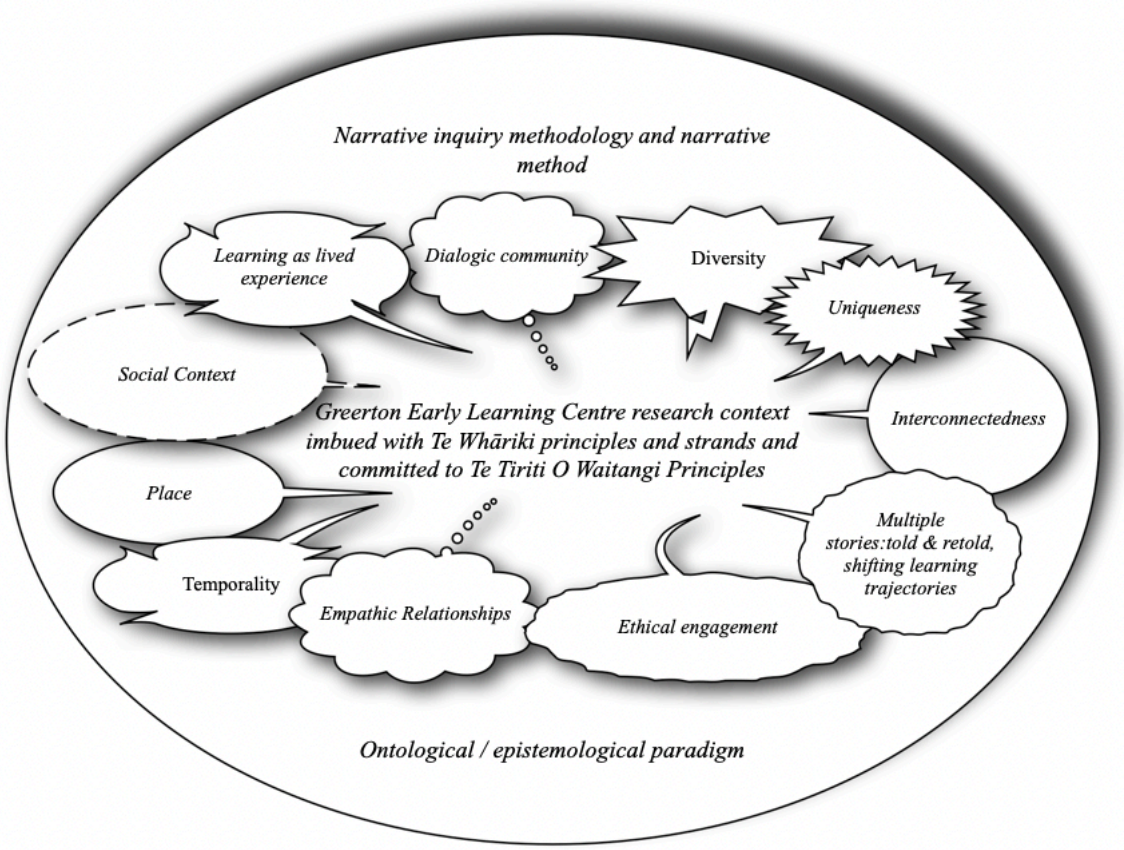


Figure 3.2 shows that narrative inquiry research is a cohesive way to think about a research puzzle. The component aspects, within the circumference, are situated because of my ontological and epistemological positioning as the researcher, interested in finding out more about learning identity formation from a storied perspective. The various speech bubbles are arrayed in a circular fashion without hierarchy. This denotes a listening, reflective vibrancy in the dialogic interactions. Each bubble has a focus that, taken together, describes the contextual elements that constitute my narrative inquirer's discourse. There are many possible stories and, in research, choices are made. This means that the pathway chosen here is contestable and is "a choice made in the full knowledge that other narratives exist, that there are alternatives" (Moss, 2018, p. 3). This research intentionally seeks to add to the debate about learning identity formation through listening to a community who have a vested interest in ensuring children's potential *to be all they can possibly be* is nurtured.

Chapter 4
Findings and Discussion

Findings and discussion are intentionally situated together in this chapter because thinking narratively in the midst of research puzzles (Cain et. al, 2013, Nitinda, 2019) requires ongoing commitment to relational perspectives of meaning. Bruner (1996) asks: "What does it mean to say that the comprehension of narrative is hermeneutic? For one thing it implies that no story has a single, unique construal. Its putative meanings are multiple" (p. 137). So, when interpreting the findings from this research, to avoid separating storied parts from the meaningful *ako torowhānui /wholeness* of the contextual story, my intent is to ensure—in Bruner's words (1996)—they are "made to live together" (p. 137). Combining findings and discussion enables readers to construe meaning with the aid of multiple, connected threads to the *whole* story. The logical progression for this view of epistemology is therefore to keep findings centred in a socially informed discussion that illustrates ways lived experience is perspectival and how temporality, sociality/context, and place—as dynamic components—interact together to generate meaning that is both personal and social.

The findings interpreted from each contribution within and across the purposive samples were a series of narrative threads that contributed to meaningful understanding of the research questions. Just as *Te Whāriki* principles and strands are inextricably enmeshed metaphorically as a woven mat, the narrative threads embedded in this research were impossible to quantify and detangle simplistically. Notwithstanding this view of holistic, storied concepts of learning identity formation, narrative analysis enables a process to draw out smaller storied experiences. These create focal points for conversation. In this study, these braided river narratives show how learning stories contributed to children's learning identities through visibly tracking their lived experiences now and into their future—a future always in motion.

A narrative epistemological stance informs this research (Section 3.2.2); consequently, each point is viewed within the wholeness of the sociocultural context of the community of learning at Greerton. These findings and discussion build on previous research identified in the literature review and are a reaffirmation that children's learning identities are embedded in the complex social and cultural contexts that surround children (Berryman 2013; Bishop, 2019; Bruner, 1996). Within this chapter, the children participating in this study are

introduced in Section 4.1. Following this, learning stories enabled valued learning to become a visible, tangible way to share children's experiences and are noted in Section 4.2, after which Section 4.3 shows how learning stories created a shared dispositional language that strengthened the growing identities of learners. The final section, Section 4.4, draws these ideas together and considers the implications for ako within the Greerton learning community.

4.1 Children participating in this study are introduced

It is timely at this point to introduce the children who participated in this study by way of a learning story that speaks to each child's learning identities across times, contexts, and places. These learning stories are an ethical response to providing meaningful feedback to children and have been shared with the children in the spirit of reciprocity and ako. These learning stories position children at the centre of this study, valuing their mana, mauri, and wairua/spirit. These are not learning stories taken from the 18 collected for this study; rather, I have written these as a reflexive response to the experience of working with each child's and family's contributions to the study.

Whāia te iti kahurangi, ki te tuohu koe, me he maunga teitei ~ Seek the treasure that you value most dearly, if you bow your head, let it be to a lofty mountain.

Kia ora koutou, Tessa, Elysie, Kate and Brian,

I wanted to thank you all for your willingness to be part of our study. Tessa, it was such a treat to reread the learning stories Cat had chosen, and the whakataukī above, seems to me, to capture the way you approach learning that matters to you. Attempting little by little to climb the big old pine on the farm was a goal you set for yourself, and returned to time and again to keep stretching your skills. Cat called it a new, bold challenge! The very wonderful thing about your adventures into nature with us and the kinds of adventures you have with your family, are ones that don't have any straight edges. They take a great deal of thought and problem solving, resilience and resourcefulness; care for others and for nature. **Where do these kinds of challenges take you?** As I look back over your learning stories, I see you finding problems that capture your interest. While at first there might be uncertainty, you move through these feelings into an exuberance for learning.

Where might this learning lead?

These are great characteristics to have as you explore the wider world of school and beyond and we know from your Mum's comments that your family appreciated being able to revisit your learning adventures together at your home.

Tessa takes a calculated risk at Puketoki Reserve is a wonderful learning story to recall, because it hints towards the future. You had two ways to cross that stream. The man-made bridge or the fallen logs and you chose the more difficult, less known path. These are the kinds of decisions that keep you thinking, challenging yourself and pushing further as a result. We will all want to know how your learning continues and look forward to a revisit as time goes on. Thanks once again for agreeing to be part of our Greerton study.

Arohanui Lorraine ~ March 2022

Kia ora, Reece, Sharon, Olivier and Rick, March 2022

Reece, thank you for your comments in the questionnaire (and your Mum too of course). I thought you might be interested to hear about what happened. Mum has the discussion and findings chapter and I thought it would be well within your reach to look at it and no doubt you will have some thoughts. Here's a personal view about what I thought for you. Your comments took me straight back to my memories of you as an infant here at Greerton, and your investigations. You so adroitly commented in your response on your interests and two you mentioned were: "I could fix the car with Dad, and I could paint pictures". That fascinated me because while these interests sound so different, underneath them is your growing character as a learner. The Greerton research was interested in thinking about these *underneath the surface* characteristics that move across experiences. So I wonder what you think painting and fixing the car might have in common. You told me that you threw away the paint brushes and this gives me a clue. Could it be that you're fascinated to see how things might work beyond the usual? That's being creative. Or you want to push the limits of what's possible? Fixing the car though, means at the end of the day the car needs to work, so there's a practical element to your investigations too. That doesn't mean to say a car has to be fixed in a particular way, and you may need to repurpose a part to solve a problem. Inside all of this is a resourceful attitude, a resilient persistence to get a job done and a willingness to make mistakes along the way, learn from these and keep moving your learning forward in ways that make you feel satisfied with your progress, not necessarily someone else.

Learning, before, now and into your future...

I wonder about you're learning now. Only you can tell me and that's another whole conversation. I do know though that to win the school talent quest, with a parkour act bringing your friend's into the limelight with you, is about a leaderful attitude, the potential to make mistakes in front of an audience, and yet a desire to push past the ordinary into what becomes extraordinary. That happened for you as an infant and is happening for you now. **Learning for the future:** Our research was interested to see how these characteristics, that drive a range of learning experiences to become, more robust, (although difficult you don't give up easily), more breadth (the attitudes that helped you do exceptionally well, for example, with your school parkour event, you realise can be useful elsewhere, perhaps as you try out cooking, or racing) and growing the richness of your responses (the goals you set yourself this year, compared to the past which could perhaps have more people involved, more difficult tricks, or be something you have not done, yet need all those things that made you successful previously). Our research looked at the learning stories that recalled those experiences and unpacked your dispositional learning and your responses helped us to realise how important writing learning stories to reinforce these characteristics were to you and your family. Now, the stories you tell yourself and the thoughtful way you look at what you do and plan to stretch further, will be the important ones. We all wish you every success and based on what you have done in the past, it will be so interesting for us to see what you choose into the future. Arohanui Lorraine

Brielle, I wonder if you remember these photos. You were a pepe at the time, and so the photos are taken, possibly earlier than your first memories, however, these are from one of the learning stories Melissa chose, to remind her about what kind of learner she thinks you are. It was called *Persistence pays off* and it seems to me, to be just one of the many stories she might have selected for you from your folder, that have these kinds of learning characteristics inside them. A whole lot of your experiences were full of hard work, curiosity and energy to stretch your learning further. Actually, pretty much anything worth doing takes a whole lot of mahi to get the job done and you have shown us, many times, that you deeply understand this aspect of learning. It's part of you. One of the learning stories, from Karen, that I remember really well, was when you decided to teach your kaiako and friends sign language. Karen remarked that you did this with such a great deal of empathy, for she was having trouble remembering what you had taught her the day before. So what does this short history tell us about your ways of being and doing? From just these two stories and my understanding of your learning identities from the years, we spent together, it seems to me that you understand when other people have struggles. You are then prepared to help them further - what a great tuakana you are! And you do this with a kindness that reminds me of the whakataukī: ***Aroha mai, aroha atu: Love given, love received.***

I want to thank you for your help with my study. I loved hearing what you had to say about yourself as a learner now that you are at school. You told me: **"I think I am a good learner and I always try my hardest"**. This is just what all your learning stories said about you. Melissa once wrote: "With this approach to learning new things, the sky is the limit for our friend Brielle!"And I think she's right. I know that's what your whānau think too from their comments in the study. The photo to the right is from another of your learning stories written when you were a little older and shows you speeding along our bike track. I think it links with the first story because it shows you continuing your hard effort to reach a goal you set for yourself. These were reinforced from your family's responses and reminded us just how important writing learning stories about your learning characteristics are to your whānau. **What might this mean for your learning in time to come?** Brielle, you have shown that you are in charge of the way you learn and with your whānau support many things are possible. You told us: **"I love to learn about art, writing, animals and nature"'** and I can only imagine how much you will keep stretching these interests when you put the same efforts into whatever else you choose, as you did to keep stretching your swinging, bike riding and sign language abilities.

Arohanui Lorraine March 2022

Kei te mihi Maia, Danielle, Kuia Cherie, Peyton and Aunty Te Awhina

The last time I saw you Maia, you were lining up ready to catch the school bus home. We had such a lovely chat and it reminded me of the very social, friendly person you were when you were at Greerton and how those characteristics had become so much part of the way you respond to new situations. Your Mama's comments in our study made us realise just how much your learning stories gave her an insight into the wonderful range of learning you chose to be engaged in while your were with us.

My thoughts on your learning…

Bubbly, chatty, full of interest in what's going on around you are just the kind of characteristics that draw you into learning, and that deepened ability you have to then become focused and work through any nukarau bits is the perseverance that gets you to the edge of learning and beyond. Cat's story about you dressing your baby comes to mind and although it was tricky you came back and told her you had done it, with what Cat described as a "burst of happy energy". But independence is only part of your story. I once wrote a story that showed you as a good friend to a sad child and the ways you drew her into your play with horses. I figured that kindness might be modelled for you at home too because Amanda's story about your Mum offering her taonga to you for the day, so you wouldn't be sad saying goodbye to her, was just the sort of manaakitanga I would see you do often.

Where do these kinds of learning characteristics lead?

It was a chance meeting at the bus stop that day, yet what I was reminded of were all those opportunities you had as 'your younger self' to practice being a friend, being kind, and being in charge of your learning, that it was no surprise to see you at school being confident and competent with the experiences that happened in your new learning space. This mirrored what your Mama said in her reply to our Greerton study, telling us all about the ways you focus on learning at home and at your marae. It's about all those loving arms that surround you. Arohanui Lorraine

Mā te ngākau aroha koe e ārahi embodies your wairua as you share your aroha with those around you.

Namaste Laxman, Kamala, Kiran, Sambridhi and Sampada,

I wanted to thank you for joining our Greerton study. When you came back to talk to us about your learning story folder, you were almost swamped by your friends. They were so keen to look at your book with you and pointed and chatted about the things you all loved doing. I was so pleased that Tanya chose your stories for our study, as I don't think I have ever seen anyone love your book as much as you. Your Dad's comments in our study made us all think about how much your learning stories contributed to your sense of belonging here. The moment you got it you realised that these stories were yours, and you literally didn't let it out of your sight. You wore your backpack with your folder inside and took it home every night. I think it was a comfort to you in a place that was so strange, with a language that wasn't your own. Yet, within a short time, you learnt English and made friends, yet still, your folder and bag remained precious, and it was a long time before it left your side. **As I think about your learning journey**, I can see that your stories track your progress from your first days in Aotearoa New Zealand in the midst of difference, to confidence and competence in such a wide range of learning situations. Our study has looked at how your sense of self becomes more resilient (meaning there is a lot of bounce in the way you get up from disappointment or cope with a tricky learning goal, like riding a two-wheel bike), and broadening these learning attributes (using the characteristics that caused you to keep trying to ride that bike to finishing a very tricky puzzle with your friends).

We said goodbye to you with a heavy heart because we had so loved you being with us, yet your future learning seemed in no doubt because of the way you approach learning. This is about your learning identities. **Sambridhi, you look for learning opportunities** and you're curious about everything! When you set a goal for yourself you don't give up and one of the things we loved was your kindness to others. Tanya wrote about your leadership and teamwork in the story *Sambridhi puzzles it out*: " Your ability to lead the play as you noticed a pattern within the puzzle and to accept your friends' ideas too, as they had ideas about where pieces might go together". One of the fascinating ideas inside your stories was the way you had started expressing your thoughts, ideas and feelings into your art which reflected your joy and your imagination. Your drawing above is just such an example of your creative learning identity. The first one, a portrait of Tanya sadly got ripped but you put that piece in the re-cycling and started again. This shows your robustness to pick yourself back up after disappointment. This time the drawing had rainbow hands and feet and took a long time. We could see how you broaden your abilities across many experiences and then enrich them. This is why drawing and riding a bike have so much in common.

We look forward to hearing about your ongoing progress Sambridhi. Thanks once again. Arohanui Lorraine: March 2022

Curiosity, ingenuity and practicality

Kei te mihi, Blake, Rachel, Peter and Annabel,

Blake, thank you so much for agreeing to be part of our study into the link between learning stories and what you think of yourself as a learner. As a baby and now as a competent three year old learner-in-action, your love of your stories is legendary here at Greerton because we so often see you pouring over the pictures and excitedly chatting with your friends about what you see there. I've seen you with your book by the swings lying on the bark concentrating as you turned each page. Your Mum tells us too that your feelings from the original experiences are relived as you look back through your folder at home. What fun to share your learning like this.

One of the things we learnt in this study was the way you re-enacted the stories. The emotions you felt at the time the learning was happening are then acted out as you look at the photos in your book and retell the story. All these emotions come through in your voice and your actions as the stories in your book help you to remember what it all felt like.

The three words in the title for this story are the keywords from each of the learning stories Bridget chose to look at for this research. What fabulous words and they describe your learning identities, reflecting what your Mum said: Blake is an "independent, curious and determined learner. He rarely gives up if it's something he really wants to achieve and he goes about it with a calm and quiet demeanour".

These are all learning characteristics that take you far into complex learning. Mum says that you are a bit like your Grandad, in the way that you like to spend time figuring things out. At home you get to work with real tools now that the stories from Greerton have shown how competent you are. Bridget wrote in one story: "Blake, as your working theories grow you are discovering more and more things that invoke your curiosity and encourage you to persevere". The story called A*n ingenious elevator* is just one of the ways you explore how things work. It seems you enjoy riding in elevators and do this every chance you get. What was really interesting in our research was to find out how you take these real life experiences and remake them yourself. It seems you have a whole host of mini-theories that you keep experimenting with. Cat explained what happens: "Seeing your magnetic shape elevator I realise that, not only are you a passionate learner, a researcher investigating in detail your ideas but you also have the disposition to make links between experiences by exploring with your own mind things that intrigue you in the wider world". **These learning dispositions** will always be very valuable 'tools' to have in your learning toolbox! Tools are not just the practical things you use to build with; they are a range of ways you respond to particular experiences and Blake you do indeed have a great many tools, including resourcefulness, perseverance and bountiful curiosity to keep you searching for interesting things to explore! March 2022 Arohanui Lorraine

4.2 Valued learning shared across times, contexts and places

The first contributing narrative thread is the way thoughtfully written learning stories enabled valued learning to be a visible, tangible way to share children's experiences with their families and teachers at the time and beyond to the child's older self, across contexts and places. Five threads of inquiry emerged from the data. The first thread addresses the way learning stories forefront a credit-based perspective of learning as an intentional act, affirming learner agency (Section 4.1.1). The second thread shows that emotion and learning are entwined, and, when children, families, and teachers reaccess experiences through learning stories, learning identities can be strengthened (Section 4.1.2). The third thread notes that learning stories are subjective, relational accounts of learning written by invested kaiako and whānau, and this relational connection generates a sense of resonance within the community (Section 4.1.3). The fourth thread looks at the way learning stories track the continuity of learning, beginning in relationship, and then address the pedagogy underpinning learning experiences supporting positive outcomes for learners' identities (Section 4.1.4). Fifth is the notion of making valued learning visible as learning stories speak of ako torowhānui, agency, and social and relational connections (Section 4.1.5).

4.2.1 Learning stories forefront a credit-based perspective of learning

This study found that learning stories can foreground credit-based perspectives of learning as intentional acts affirming learner agency (Carr & Lee, 2012) when they generate conversations about the agentic child in relation to learning experiences. Agency is "about authoring and responsibility, and includes taking the initiative and asking questions" (Carr, 2009, p 37). Agency is also evident in Gunn and Gasson's (2017) research. They reiterate the aspirational approach of *Te Whāriki* to curriculum design rather than "the development of a prescriptive, subject-oriented and measurement-based curriculum" (p. 167). Learning is an active, *doing* practice for young children (Claxton & Carr, 2004), and mokopuna bring past experiences and relational perspectives to times, contexts, and places as they use their wealth of familial and cultural understanding to act. Reece's mother Sharon, in her storied response to the research questionnaire, confirms her view that Reece is an active learner, that he is in charge, and how the learning stories written for him by his teachers made this visible:

> *Initially, the learning stories provided our whānau with information and stories about what Reece was getting up to, as an addition to our daily conversations. However, we realised quickly that the stories were more than that. They were created from careful and compassionate observation and supported by research. As a result, I felt they offered powerful insights into his personality and documented his ongoing dispositional and physical development. I also realised that Reece was creating his own place to stand in the world… Personally, I cannot overstate the value of the learning stories. I saw how the teachers valued the children in their care as independent, curious learners who were in charge of their learning.*

Reece, now aged eleven, agrees:

> *I like fun learning. Fun learning is building, and like, being able to interact. I like interactive learning. I like learning for any reason. It doesn't have to have a goal.*

Reece's whānau kaiako, Karen, added to these sentiments:

> *Reece's mana spoke to me about an empowered learner who knew the dispositions that made him a successful learner along with the knowledge around what learning entails.*

Learning stories written from credit perspectives of learning and learner are not soft options that disregard challenge or skills and knowledge acquisition (Claxton, 2018). Karen, in comments about Reece as an active, scientific learner, writes:

> *As Reece explores his world, he is the scientist who looks to find answers to questions he has about the world.*

The important focus here is that it is Reece who sets those questions within an environment designed to elicit curious investigations. Reece's learning stories reflected an action-oriented learner.

This whakataukī: *Mā te whāriki e whakatō te kaha ki roto i te mokopuna, ki te ako, kia pakari ai tana tipu; the early childhood curriculum empowers the child to learn and grow,* elevates the credit-based, agentic view of the child so clearly envisioned in *Te Whāriki* as mana enhancing. Indeed, children set goals far in excess of what teachers might conceive when they are trusted to engage in play-focussed, challenging environments, mindfully designed for the innate, immense curiosity mokopuna bring to their learning (Carr, 2009; Gray, 2009).

As teachers track this learning, they are able to reimagine, as more experienced *players/learners/researchers/teachers,* ways to enrich the learning environment further. Then kaiako wisely step back and are attentive and responsive to what happens. Rather than "hijack" (Peters & Davis, 2011, p. 9) children's struggles, their imaginative solutions and creative theorising, kaiako provide the time, space and social connection for learning to happen. Melissa, (kaiako) addresses this view of the child as competent and confident in terms of widening the context for Brielle between home and setting:

> *In writing to Brielle's parents and introducing rich, theoretical language, we leave room for Brielle's whānau to grow their understanding about learning identity too. In* **Look it's my first time**, [learning story], *I write to explain Brielle's learning identity in a way that unpacks what is valued in our space: "Amee and Simon, your Brielle continues to show us just how strong, resilient, and powerful she is! As a learning community, we have done a lot of research about children as they build their learning identity. Effectively, it's about a child's self-driven urge to learn how to learn".*

Learning stories generate conversations about agentic children in relation to learning experiences, both within the setting and with whānau, when written with a credit-based view of learners in active engagement with their world and deeply desirous to find out more.

4.2.2 The synergy of emotion and learning

This study found that emotion and learning are entwined and when children, families, and teachers reaccess experiences through learning stories, learning identities can be strengthened across times, social contexts, and places. Carr and Lee (2012) realised this essential connection when they added to their *Dimension of strength for key competencies* (Carr, 2006) and included "e" for elan, an energy, style, and enthusiasm for learning (Guerin, 2015). The Greerton research showed how learning stories encompass elan into learning experiences that generate working theories as they travel across dimensions of strength as defined by Carr (2006):

> Mindfulness (as learners begin to 'make these practices part of their own identity and expertise'), breadth (more wide-ranging contexts, as connections are made beyond any one setting or community), frequency (over time), and complexity (across mediating resources—including people). (p. 2)

As effective pedagogy—composed in empathy—is added, the mana of the child is nurtured because ako then speaks to their mauri. Maia's mother, Danielle, reiterated this idea of children as active learners and added the component of emotion when speaking to the learning stories in Maia's folder:

> *The learning stories seemed to spark a memory and a feeling. She would tell me the story of what was happening at the time and shone with the emotions she felt at the time as if she were there all over again.*

These emotions were reactivated through reengaging with the experience as the learning story was shared with her family. The narrative notion of temporality—of learning shifting along a time continuum—was clearly in force (Pring, 2007). Kate, Tessa's mother, confirms emotional connection and learning, with her comments about Tessa:

> *As we read through them over and over again, the photos grab her attention, but then we read the story and the learning is refreshed in her mind, or she picks up something new.*

This research has shown that strong emotions are evoked when experiential learning is made tangibly visible, and new learning built upon past experiences is made possible as learning stories are shared across contexts. This makes sense when the learning stories retain their complex connection to relationships and feelings over time.

4.2.3 Valuing the subjectivity of the invested writer

Learning stories are subjective, interpreted accounts of experience that at their best, make significant differences to the way communities feel about the learner, learning environment, and ongoing potential to strengthen valued learning further. It is therefore exponentially important for kaiako to understand the child's and family's values/aspirations. When learning stories get it *right* children and families feel they have been listened to. This does not mean there is a right way to write learning stories; however, there are theoretical underpinnings that encompass narrative. These are conducive to Dewey's (1916) vision of temporality, context, and place and concepts of noticing, recognising, and responding (Cowie et al., 2018).

Malaguzzi (as cited in Gibbs et al., 2005) too, solidifies ako as a connected construct, for in his view:

> Learning and teaching should not stand on opposite banks and just watch the river flow by; instead, they should embark together on a journey down the water. Through an active, reciprocal exchange, teaching can strengthen learning how to learn. (p. 5)

Neither should families' views of valued learning sit on opposite sides of the bank from teachers' views. Valued learning is both emotionally connected and transformative when the communication between families and teachers is an ongoing shared dialogue. A listening dialogue is possible as kaiako and whānau informally meet with each other and in formal assessment processes, which for this study at Greerton are the writing of learning stories.

A coconstructed view of valued learning, imbued with an emotional connection, therefore acts as a conduit for transformative learning. Transformation is possible because the learning stories enable the experiences of the past to be drawn into the present where they can be connected to other contexts. Tanya's comments about the ways kaiako at Greerton write learning stories testifies to the transformative power of learning stories to strengthen learning identities when kaiako write from their personal perspective about mokopuna they know and respect:

> *At Greerton we like to refer back to previous learning if a child is feeling 'stuck'. We remind them of a time that doing a previous task, like riding a bike, felt like it was too hard, but that it was their persistence and practice that helped them to learn, and these are the skills that will help them now with the current problem. I think that it helps to grow learners that know that great accomplishments don't come easily, but there will be friends and teachers to support you through your struggle, and definitely there to celebrate with you when you achieve your goal.*

Learning stories, written by kaiako who care deeply that mokopuna make the progress they have set their hearts on, enable children to revisit strategies, dispositions, and working theories they used to achieve these goals. This happens when kaiako truly believe the aspiration statement in *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017) to be true. Children *are* competent and confident. They are not *becomings* in a passive sense (Huang, 2019), although a *being and becoming* dichotomy is not helpful for it posits very different views of the child and childhood and therefore very different views of learning, teaching, and assessment. Being and

becoming is, however, often presented as a binary. Indeed, one of the reasons for the contestability of learning stories is a view that learning stories do not measure learning required to become "a rational, functioning adult in a specific society or culture" (Huang, 2019, p. 102). However, this research has shown when time, context, and place form a framework for learning, the *being and becoming* child is an agentic participant in deciding what to learn.

The way teachers write learning stories is an invested reflective account of the learner and the learning event, analysed in ways that help the community to understand what lies beneath learning. Tanya's comments above reinforce the Greerton community's emphasis on socially supported learning. Freire (1970/2007) clarifies the positioning of the invested teacher alongside the agentic child: "The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn, while being taught also teach" (p. 80). Thus, teachers' learning stories, written within the construct of invested, dialogic relationships with children, families, and their colleagues, can nurture children's identities as learners who grow in complexity over time. An important narrative thread in this research is to ensure the learning milieu for subjectively written learning stories is formed within a rich learning environment that speaks to the child's inborn desire to learn.

4.2.4 Relationship and the connection to pedagogy

Te Whāriki principles call for all engagements with mokopuna, whānau, and kaiako, including assessment, to honour respectful, responsive relationships. Learning stories written by kaiako are therefore expected to be mana enhancing (Reedy, 2019); however, relationships are insufficient on their own to meet *Te Whāriki* aspirations. Affording environments are ones that support both dispositions and working theories to thrive because kaiako pedagogy enables the construct of a strong learner. In *Te Whāriki* terms, this means enabling mokopuna to be curious and courageous as they take an interest, to be determined and persistent as they involve themselves in a setting and to share ideas as they communicate. Strong learners explore with creative intent and are alert to social justice issues.

Bishop (2019), in his book, *Teaching to the North East,* explains that positive relationships open the door to learning opportunities because if children do not have a sense of mana atua

and mana whenua, being sensitive to occasion, and inclined and able to learn (Richardt & Perkins, 2000) may instead create feelings of anxiety and unhappiness. Dewey (1938/1997) too was very clear about the need for relational connectedness between child, home, and school, and Dewey's theoretical constructs are clearly understood on an experiential level when Tessa's mother, Kate, says:

> *The learning stories have always provided valuable information about Tessa's time at day care. Rather than just photos with a short commentary about the activity, they are very well written with links back to her learning at the time. They show a different side to Tessa as she is often more confident in her learning at day care with her teachers, and they help us understand her everyday learning.*

Kate is very aware that interpreted experiences lead to learning growth. She has seen how Tessa was able to interpret her feelings, despite some anxiety, and act in ways that kept her stretching towards the goals she set for herself. This insight was as a result of the deliberate way kaiako intentionally wrote learning stories that tracked Tessa's learning progress over time. The view of her learning was holistic mirroring the *Te Whāriki* principle of kotahitanga/holistic development. The learning stories continually reaffirmed the many dimensions of her learning identity as Tessa engaged in the learning process. Catalina (kaiako), comments on the three learning stories she selected to reflect on for this study:

> *These three learning stories depict a journey of robust, empowering learning, with Tessa at the steering wheel.*

These exemplars build on the continuity of Tessa's learning and the growing robust nature of her engagement with challenges. Catalina continues:

> *Quite often, starting our forest farm adventures is great cause for celebration and excitement is hard to contain. But not for Tessa! She was rather worried about embarking on such a journey, hence her wish to hold my hand at all times and seeking reassurance and emotional comfort.*

In Catalina's following comments she speaks to the underpinning pedagogy occurring at the same time as the relational connection:

> *We have always known that in order for mokopuna to thrive, trusting relationships and a deep sense of belonging to a place of significance are key. "*We're going to

> give it a go and see what happens”*, Kate’s words, Tessa’s mum, still echo in my mind. This was our conversation before stepping into the van for the first time. Tessa was wrapped tightly around her mum’s body, face buried in her neck.*

However, the pedagogy surfacing from Catalina’s comments are about a listening pedagogy that gives Tessa time and support to work through the feelings of learning. Catalina continues:

> *Progressively, Tessa took on board our way of approaching learning in the wild, making a transition toward embracing opportunities at her own pace, reflecting, thinking, being cautious.*

Throughout, Catalina has a trajectory of high expectation for Tessa that is conveyed to her family and to Tessa through her learning stories. The point is that learning stories were not disconnected examples of activities. The continuity thread connecting these narrative assessments continues and gives a fulsomeness to the learning journey experienced by Tessa. This is a learning journey that has transferability to other times and other places. Catalina says:

> *By the third learning story,* **When mana is strong**, challenges are sought, *we witness a strong, independent, competent, and confident learner eager to set her own goals and work hard to achieve them. From the time she found her sense of belonging to the type of experiences the forest farm adventures provided, she has gone from strength to strength. It seems that for Tessa, it is not enough to meet a challenge and work through it, but actively create edgy opportunities where she gets to experience again surprise and uncertainty but, this time from a place of mana motuhake (strong positive image derived from self-determination).*

Learning stories at Greerton are thoughtful narrative assessments that track learning continuity. They are forged in relationship with mokopuna and whānau. Kaiako, from this relational perspective, weave the pedagogy underpinning the learning experiences, into learning stories that support positive outcomes for learners’ views of themselves.

4.2.5 Valued learning made visible

Making valued learning visible happens as learning stories speak of wholeness, agency, and social and relational connection. Amanda (kaiako) makes this comment about Maia in relation to kotahitanga:

> *Her past and present experience connected her ideas and grew her mana, where she was ready, willing, and able to give anything a go. Just like in my learning story* **Aroha** *I shared my perspective on Maia's learning. I said that:* "I believe this connection, she shared with us all every day, was woven around her mana, her whakapapa. This is an innate part of who she is, a precious taonga [precious gift]. I could see Maia flourish when she felt aroha from those around her and in turn, she shared aroha with us all. This connection was expressed in her learning in ways that gave her meaning and a purpose".

Danielle, Maia's mother, supported this view of her daughter through her comments:

> *One example of this that stands out the most for me is the pride she felt as she wore my taonga for the day. She was so happy to be able to wear such a precious family treasure and share the experience with all her friends.*

Danielle shifts the context for Maia's response to wearing her taonga when she speaks about Maia learning with her whānau:

> *At the marae, Maia clings to her elders and listens intently. She sings everything she hears and attempts to speak in te reo. Having an uncle who is* Tohunga [priest; expert in a particular field] *helps her feel more a part of what is going on around her. She loves karakia* [prayer] *and lights up when there is kapa haka* [cultural group].

Danielle is appreciative of the way learning stories offered insight into her daughter's learning journey:

> *I am so proud of her and grateful I got the opportunity to peer through the window of Maia's learning journey while attending Greerton.*

Never far away are the emotions that learning stories elicit and the way they connectedly speak to the aspirations families have for their children. This can only happen when the relationship between mokopuna, whānau, and kaiako is strong. However, the essentiality of

pedagogical insight into what kinds of practice stretch learning for each child is also of paramount importance. This is one reason why the Greerton community values the early childhood qualification. All permanently employed kaiako are qualified. However, the Greerton community also values the ongoing, lifelong learning attitude of kaiako. In this sense Karen offers her response to the impact of professional conversations:

> *Learning stories are shared and read within the team. This sharing brings new insights into the child; it enables us to ensure continuity of learning can happen and is the basis for further planning to take place.*

Karen links relationships and pedagogy together when she comments further:

> *The key teacher* [whānau kaiako] *strategy was something, that was very important to the culture that we were growing at Greerton. Our entire team with the help of Wendy Lee and Margaret Carr had focused over a three-year period* [Karen refers here to the Centre of Innovation research] *on identifying the elements that underpinned our culture of inquiry learning and the strands that supported this. Whanaungatanga, developing meaningful relationships were at the heart of this. Key teaching linked closely with the neuroscience of attachment theory.*

Relationships then are key for they open the door, and, from this valued standpoint, mokopuna, whānau, and kaiako listen intently to the messages of ako and ways these unfold within a responsive curriculum.

4.3 The creation of a shared language of learning

The analysis of the narratives in this study revealed a cohesive use of a shared language of learning that gave impetus for children to develop working theories, thus strengthening learners' growing views of themselves. Five enabling components emerged in the study. These can be described as elemental features of the pedagogical landscape. They contributed to kaiako understanding of each child's unique learning identities, whānau perspective of their child's identities and the growing understanding for children about the way they routinely approached learning situations. First, this shared language was a kaiako construct that became embedded in the culture of ako at Greerton (Section 4.3.1). Second, language used by kaiako centred on the attributes of learners that made them more inclined towards

being ready, willing, and able to respond to uncertainty with resilience (Section 4.3.2). Third, language was composed, both conversationally and in written learning stories, in ways that enabled children to be agentic, resourceful learners (Section 4.3.3). Fourth, language encouraged children to be reflective learners (Section 4.3.4), and fifth, there was a consistent effort from kaiako to generate language that enabled socially responsive learning to occur (Section 4.3.5).

4.3.1 Language generating a learning culture

Across all the data, a language of learning (a phrase that emerged from the Centre of Innovation research) had a pervasive intensity. A dispositionally focused language of learning is a narrative thread that is entwined in the culture of ako at Greerton. Dispositions are active and caused children to engage in possibility thinking (Craft et al., 2008), generating working theories. Children use this language, too, in spoken responses and unspoken actions to their learning experiences as they figure out how their world works. Sambridhi (mokopuna) confirms this:

> *I did it!*

She says this with an emotion that reflects the determination, persistence, and practice it took for her to learn to ride a two-wheeler bike. Furthermore, it is written down in learning stories and therefore retrievable across times contexts and places. Tanya (kaiako) confirms Sambridhi's exclamation:

> *Persistence is needed in huge quantities to learn to ride a two-wheeler bike. Resilience features strongly too as it takes determination to overcome the many bumps and setbacks that come with learning like this.*

This dispositionally focused language is a construct of the pedagogical philosophy of kaiako, and, because of its dynamic relationship to learning and its frequent use by kaiako, mokopuna and whānau utilise this language of learning to describe and interpret learning experiences too. Sambridhi's father, Laxman, picks up this intentional learning thread as he describes his daughter's learning:

> *As a learner, she has built a confidence about how to deal with strange surroundings. Having English as a secondary language, and recently moved in from offshore, she*

had built a strong perception about dealing with strange[4]. She observes and quickly tries to do it herself when she is at a new place and with new tools to play with. She approaches new people and is very open to communicate with surrounding context. She wants to try any sports even if she does not have any clue how to play it. After a few failure attempts, once she succeeds, she says "I did it" *with a loud voice.*

This kind of language is growth mindset language (Dweck, 2006), and it permeates across experiences with systemic continuity. It generates conversations that have become established ways to talk with each other at Greerton. Kaiako learning stories are immersed in dispositional language because they are grounded in children's experiences and reflect children's intent, voices, actions, and their working theories. Whānau are introduced to dispositions too through the way kaiako talk about their child's learning day and as they read the learning stories. Tanya's (kaiako) comments when interpreting the learning story called, **Sambridhi puzzles it out** reflect this korero/conversation:

This learning story celebrates Sambridhi's perseverance, determination, and social competence through completing a large floor puzzle. It was Sambridhi who persisted from the beginning to the very end, and her social competence that allowed other children to be involved and contribute to the puzzle. Even though Sambridhi had initiated starting the puzzle, she was generous with letting other children be involved, and slowly figure out where a piece may go for themselves.

This way of speaking about learning has been drawn from Claxton and Carr's (2004) focus on the "dynamics of disposition" (p. 87) The Greerton kaiako have taken these ideas and built a consistency of language that the kaiako team use often and the community as a whole become very familiar with overtime. This study shows how important intentionality is and how language offers a scaffolding element toward a dynamic dispositional view of what it means to be a lifelong learner (Sands & Lee, 2019). This practice becomes a proactive local curriculum especially because language is continually laid down in practice and embedded in the working theories children create and recreate.

[4] Strange in this context is a reference to the differences between Sambridi's home language, culture, and environment and the languages, cultures and environment experienced as an immigrant to Aotearoa New Zealand.

However, dispositions are extraordinarily important because these can generate affording or inhibiting ways learners respond (often by way of working theories) to learning opportunities (Claxton & Carr, 2004). Dispositions gain an added significance because defining what these dispositions are is a value-laden exercise. They lead to what knowledge, skills, and attitudes are encouraged and how these are reinforced in learning communities (Bishop, 2019). Learning stories that make these dispositional values explicit, enable them to be debated and analysed (Claxton & Carr, 2004). This is why *Te Whāriki* directly asks kaiako to build a shared community understanding of their local curriculum (MOE, 2017). Learning stories offer a cohesive body of knowledge about the learning experiences of children in settings as well as teachers' professional competence. Learning stories utilised as evidence across internal evaluation processes and the New Zealand Teachers Council recertification professional growth cycle requirements, generate a shared kaupapa. The Greerton kaiako reiterated this, and Bridget's comments are reflective of kaiako views on this need to have a shared kaupapa:

> *Through giving feedback on each other's stories, we get the chance to empower our colleagues and build on our confidence in our identities as both teachers and learners.*

Learning stories keep children's lived social and cultural experiences meaningfully connected to an unfolding curriculum. They also provide a framework to understand a setting's local curriculum.

4.3.2 Resilience as a dispositional construct of ako

Resilience—as a valued disposition—was a significant narrative thread in this study. One of the ways kaiako direct attention to aspects of children's learning is by commenting on both the outcome and the characteristic (Claxton & Carr, 2004). As discussed in the literature review, the outcome is set in the context of assessment that "captures children's rich learning capabilities as they occur in the present alongside considerations of the future" (Hedges, 2021, p. 180). In terms of characteristics, learners do not acquire dispositions as quantifiable learning characteristics (Hedges & Jones, 2012). Instead, they become more or less disposed towards a particular response when confronted by the uncertainty of learning. This is important because the way children respond to learning opportunities enables them to learn or

constrains their learning opportunities. Resilience is also about emotional and physical courage. Catalina (kaiako) makes this comment:

> *Surprise and uncertainty quite often characterise our learning and it is in moments like this that mokopuna really get to practise their resilience, be that physical or emotional.*

Melissa (kaiako) strengthens this view of ako as an individual learning trajectory inside a social community that cares for the outcomes:

> *Understanding this whakapapa helps us to understand the role that Brielle's learning stories might have had on the whole of our learning community. When the image of a learner is upheld across spaces, there are exponential opportunities for these stories that celebrate learner identity to permeate the growing brain. Brielle is celebrated as a driver of her own learning, a persistent and resilient learner who doesn't give up in the face of challenge, and a learner who has the ability to* speak *a language of learning.*

Resilient learners are able to face life's challenges with courage and tenacity and these dispositions are valued by the Greerton learning community. The kaiako thought the act of reifying these dispositions, both in conversations with mokopuna and whānau and in writing learning stories about resilience, courage, and tenacity in the context of lived experience (and the working theories children immerse themselves in), has important consequences for the ways learners think about themselves. Rachel, Blake's mother, talks about how learning stories reframed their view of Blake as a learner—from needy to competent—and how this shift in thinking changed the ways they responded to his learning, enabling his agency as a learner to flourish. This learning is open ended, connected to people, places, and things and speaks to the most important finding of all in this study—that is, the essential importance of keeping this learning in a contextualised view that upholds Blake's mana. This is a *Te Whāriki* imperative. Rachel makes these pertinent comments:

> *Our go-to as parents was to automatically help when we see struggle or difficulty. We knew Blake, from a young age seemed to enjoy how things fit together, but we would often still interrupt and* show him *or* help him*. While this was well meaning, the learning stories really helped us understand the value of this trait in him, his quite rare ability to stick with the problem until he'd got it and how this was building his*

resilience. This has really stopped us from interfering now when Blake's in his flow, working hard on a problem.

This view holds empathy for Blake's agency to strategise for himself, experiment, stay curious and keep an open-minded persistence to work through difficulty. This is the essence of a resilient learner's reaction to uncertainty and challenge. The language of resilience as a narrative thread drawn from the data is evident across the contributions to this study. Bridget (kaiako) reiterates the importance of the continuity of learning. She emphasises how dispositions are continually embedded in the narrative of learning, within and across learning stories in children's portfolios, and the way these stories gain momentum through the continuity of dispositional language:

The stories in Blake's portfolio celebrate Blake's ability to be a resilient, resourceful, and reflective learner and the ways in which he builds on these habits over time. The continuity resides in both the thread of learning and in the pattern of learning.

These responses across times, contexts and places enabled multiple opportunities for learners to move past the feelings of frustration and to enjoy these feelings. A challenge becomes something to be considered and overcome. As a result, deep satisfaction with the learning process occurs. Over time, many researchers have stated the importance of intrinsically feeling a sense of satisfaction in tackling and overcoming challenges (Claxton, 2018; Dweck, 2006, Robinson & Aronica, 2014). Melissa (kaiako) explains the role of learning stories in this learning identity formation further:

As Brielle's understanding of her [learning] *identity, grows she begins to identify and analyse her own learning verbally.* "Look Lissa, it's my first time doing this one!" *Brielle is self-assessing herself by using this language and celebrating her own achievements. She knows that in saying these words out loud that she will be respected and valued, and that her community is interested in her growing intelligence. Now, as she comes close to a transition to school, Brielle not only practises her learning with persistence and resilience, but she speaks this language to herself. "*I can do it, I can do it", *she chants as she sets herself a goal (to ride a two-wheeler bike) and begins to practice. This* language of learning *has become second nature to her, and it is clear that Brielle drives her own learning and succeeds because of her own efforts.*

Over time, the whole community comes to understand that these are the ways we learn here; these are the ways challenges are responded to here. While the language of learning becomes embedded in a learning culture encompassing the whole community and is intentional, it is not prescriptive. Melissa reiterates the ways this kind of ako unfolds at Greerton:

> *Teachers make no assumptions about what might be learnt next, but they set the tone for her* (Brielle's) *future learning by leaving the door open to "*notice, recognise, respond, and revisit" *in the moment, when progressions become evident. In this way, Brielle's learning is given unscripted autonomy and room is left for her to continue learning in her own unique way.*

This unscripted autonomy sits within an environment tipped towards flight or what Csikszentmihalyi (1996) calls flow, the space where challenge is slightly ahead of skill and the opportunity to move into a flow state is activated. At Greerton, physical challenge is set up as an inherent part of the environment and in the ways kaiako respond to emotional and social experiences. These responses are wrapped in the uniqueness of each child's journey and hence, are designed to stretch the learning of mokopuna within a mana-enhancing, relational connection to learning progressions.

4.3.3 Agentic, resourceful learners

An explicit narrative thread from this study is the determination of the Greerton community to ensure children have agency over their learning. There is time, space, and conversation for learners to hone their resourcefulness and experiment with evolving working theories. This is embedded in a play-focussed environment that actively invites exploration and forays into awe and wonder, attuned to children's mana aotūroa/explorative drive. There is an essential complexity surrounding play and the links to lifelong learning can be obscured if we are not aware of these connections (Brown, 2009). Families will have a vast array of perspectives on play's value. The question arises, in terms of participatory pedagogies where the whole community is supportive of agentic, resourceful learners, as to just how we draw everyone into a deeper understanding of play and the open-ended, action-working theory-oriented learning that results. Karen, Reece's infant whānau teacher, is deeply thoughtful about the connection of learning stories, both to Reece, as he revisits his experiences and to the way they connect with his whānau. Karen reflects:

Having been Reece's infant whānau teacher, I found reading the written whānau voices powerful for when Reece and his Mum arrived on that very first visit, the view of how Reece would learn looked different to Mum. It was framed around the idea of planned structured learning moments, set by teachers. The whānau voice I was reading over this period highlights the learning they saw happening for Reece, and how this learning was transported and impacted on family life and Reece's identity, all this embedded within his dispositions for learning.

The learning stories opened a window of insight into the kind of learning that is being valued here at Greerton and in particular, for Reece. Sharon (Reece's mother) says:

It also gave us words to describe Reece. He was an explorer, a friend, a reader, a performer, but he was also compassionate, thoughtful, curious, observant, playful… After reading a learning story I found I noticed similar things at home and felt empowered to support Reece to develop further.

The family's view of Reece as a learner shifted as a result of these learning-focused conversations. A portfolio full of stories connected images, words, and actions together to build a sense of Reece as a learner, ever in charge of his learning and ever building complexity in deeply meaningful ways. These were connected to the people, places, and things that mattered to him. Most importantly, Reece can recall these images, and he links them to his present view of himself as a resourceful learner:

The learning stories reflect what I'm interested in now.

While Reece has grown a realisation of what it means to be an agentic, resourceful learner over time, he was always a learner that kaiako learnt about through his actions. Karen recalls Reece's comments on a return visit to Greerton:

I remember him excitedly relating how his parkour group had won the school's talent quest. He discussed their close mishaps when a team member nearly fell off the stage, but he also spoke about the practice, effort and risk-taking that had been involved for this group to achieve their success.

Sharon (Reece's mother) adds this comment about Reece's tenacity and resourceful attitude to getting better at something he deems important:

> *Over the holidays Reece has been teaching himself tricks on his scooter and skateboard. With a friend, he has been going to the skate park at 6.30 a.m. in order to get a couple of hours of practice in before it gets busy. This is classic Reece.*

Resourcefulness is a cumulative characteristic adding to the complexity of learning and the learner. Amanda (kaiako) brings the focus to hauora/health/vigour when she writes these thoughts:

> *My collection of learning stories highlights one aspect of Maia's learning journey, one that is vital to growing her learning identity but not separate from all other parts of her identity as a learner. In te ao Māori[5], the whāriki includes four dimensions of human development: tinana/physical health, hinengaro/mental health, wairua/spiritual health, and whatumanawa/emotional balance. However, for this purpose to show the continuity of learning, I have chosen one aspect to highlight Maia's perseverance and determination as a learner. Each learning story weaves a narrative about Maia as an empowered learner.*

Amanda then comments on a particular learning story that imbues the notion of a resourceful agentic learner in action:

> *In the story* **Whakamana/[empowerment]: what does learning success look like? Maia knows ...,** *was a moment when Catalina empowered Maia to take ownership of her learning and push beyond her comfort zone to give herself a chance to dress her pepe/baby doll by herself. The connection for Maia between past experiences in our learning community empowers her to risk failure and try again. Catalina also said: "Maia today experienced a moment of Māramatanga[6], as she came to understand that through effort, focus, and a growth mindset, new learning is acquired".*

Again, this kind of writing finds its way into whānau consciousness and Danielle, Maia's mother responds to the research questionnaire with these comments about her resourceful

[5] This references Sir Mason Durie's *Te Whāre Tapa Whā*. This is a complex interweaving of a Māori health model and for a further reference to this see https://mentalhealth.org.nz/te-whare-tapa-wha. It is not possible to discuss this here in the fullness it deserves.

[6] Māramatanga is a concept explored in Te Whatu Pōkeka: Kaupapa Maori Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars. This is when a child comes to understand new knowledge: a phase of enlightenment, realisation, and clarification (MOE, 2009, p.49).

daughter as she overcomes difficulty and talks about her experiences with her whānau with excitement and joy:

> *Another is how overjoyed she was to experience visiting the farm and how she overcame so many obstacles that day, especially how funny it was that she had to trudge through the mud or how exciting it was to reach the top of the gate after battling through the slippery conditions.*

These narrative threads have consistency that takes them beyond the time of the first experience into a time continuum that has power to influence learning identities long after the experience. Learning stories of experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand ngahere/bush, maunga/mountains, and moana/ocean—as referred to by Danielle—reposition a child in a posthuman sense as Murris (2016) and Moss (2018) explain as encounters with relational others. At Greerton, intentional decisions in terms of repeated experiences enable children's relationship with the environment to be nourished. Maia sees herself in relationship with papatūānuku/earth mother and has many experiences that give her an appreciation of decentering self to be in relationship with the natural world and Tane's (atua/god) creatures (Ritchie, 2017). In a narrative perspective of epistemology, these experiences are relived in other times, contexts, and spaces to reinvigorate and imbue the experience alongside a cumulation of experiences (Brown, 2009; McCain & Matkin, 2019; Szilas, 2015). Learning stories over time provide the linking access to memory and contexts written in the past yet able to influence a new present.

4.3.4 Reflective learners

Reflective learners were referred to across all the narrative threads in this study. Three features were evident in the data. First, learning stories affected the Greerton pedagogical landscape and the community's responsiveness to children's dispositional learning initiatives. Second, a distributed notion of reflective learners was pervasive across the learning community, and third, reflective subjectivity was a feature of both children's and teachers' responses to learning.

First, once the Greerton kaiako realised that a dispositional framework was one of the key learning outcomes from *Te Whāriki*, along with working theories (Hedges, 2019; Sands et al.,

2012), they intentionally set about researching how these learning outcomes could be vibrantly realised in practice. Consequently, Greerton kaiako actively went about the process of drawing children into possibility thinking—creating working theories—and thoughtfully supported the ongoing refinement of children's ideas. This notion of dispositionally framed learning as an action rather than a destination became embedded in learning stories and further into environment design and evaluation. Melissa picked up this reflective learning thread when she contributed her ideas about the ako at Greerton in her comments for this study:

> *Whenever I think about the culture of teaching and learning that Greerton Early Learning Centre has created, for tamariki/children and kaiako alike, I feel nothing but blessed. This is a learning community who seek out and embrace new knowledge, who welcome reflection and change for the better of everyone, and who thrive on edgy challenges that stretch and grow their intelligence.*

Thoughtfully written learning stories, because they spoke directly to the growing learner, their whānau, and colleagues, became enmeshed in the local curriculum at Greerton. They were considered by kaiako to be a meaningful way to write about mokopuna in the context of their active, experiential learning and to do this in very reflective ways. Consequently, learning stories are always divided into sections (noticing, recognising, and responding) to make the learning explicitly clear to everyone.

Second, the notion of reflective learners across our community is an important part of the Greerton culture of ako. Amanda (kaiako) emphasises this perspective for teachers:

> *A shared kaupapa around nurturing the whole child and sharing our thoughts as a team, has been strengthened and empowered through our shared leadership, where in ako we enhance everyone's mana by sharing our learning stories with each other. It solidifies our culture of learning and adds new perspectives to our own kete* [basket].

Laxman speaks about the way his daughter, Sambridhi, is able to grow her learning confidence as she relooks at her stories and responds:

> *When she sees the story(s) with pictures written about herself, she feels confident, how she has done it and who was with her at that time—mostly the encouragement from her teacher(s). For example, when crossing a small bridge while they were on*

farm visit, she had done after few attempts. She still remembers how much her teachers had helped her to do it.

A reflective learner can be seen in the persistence children utilise as they try something new and difficult, or their endeavours to put working theories into action. These actions reflect children's unspoken thoughtfulness about what to do next to achieve a goal they set for themselves. Tanya (kaiako) explains this when speaking of Sambridhi's efforts:

Completing the puzzle and learning to ride the bike are both very different actions, but without Sambridhi's ability to persist with something that is difficult, she would not have been successful in her task.

Furthermore she offers insight into the way Sambridhi overcomes disappointment:

The drawing in **Rainbow hands and seven feet**, [learning story] *needed persistence as Sambridhi worked through the disappointment of the first drawing getting damaged, and then created another. The disposition of persisting and putting significant amounts of effort into her drawing was a key aspect of this learning story.*

Tanya next outlines how Sambridhi acts reflectively to reach a chosen goal:

She then practices and practices until this new knowledge is cemented in her brain, is a line in **Sambridhi puzzles it out** [learning story].

Practice is a huge component of the reflective learner. Phrases around the feelings felt in the process of doing *practice* were ones all the children used to verbalise their thoughtful responses to challenging learning. Kaiako include children's perspectives in the learning stories they write because their authentic voices provide insight into children's self-assessment of their learning. Below are quotes from the children themselves or drawn from the contextual learning stories provided as background for this study:

Brielle: "I always try my hardest".

*Blake: "*YES! I did it"*, with a big proud smile on his face as he recalls the event, reminding him that trying hard is worth the effort.*

*Maia: "*I did it, Cat!" *I looked at Maia's face to see a mix of exuberance and surprise as she understood just how capable she really is.*

> *Tessa:* "I can't talk, I'm concentrating". *She couldn't talk because she was concentrating to make it to the top. And then, the turning point happened as she gained full control of the situation, I [Tanya/kaiako] even heard Tessa say:* "This is not too hard for me".
>
> *Sambridhi: "*I DID IT!" *She bursts out while biking at speed.*
>
> *Reece:* "I'm really good at some things, I'm okay at most things, and I can get better at them".

These comments paint a dynamic montage of children excited about the challenges they set for themselves and the action-oriented way they reflect on their learning.

Third, reflective subjectivity was a recurring narrative thread. Subjectivity requires an opening of perspective; otherwise, a restricted perception of a child's learning occurs. This is why kaiako write for all mokopuna in the Centre (Lee et al., 2013). All children have many learning stories in their portfolios written by all kaiako over time. This is not scheduled. Learning stories are written because they capture kaiako attention, either because this is a new learning trajectory and calls to be written down, or it is part of the tracking process that excites kaiako. However, as Ritchie and Rau (2006) point out, decisions about what to privilege in terms of valued learning is inherently power-laden and potentially hegemonic. The Greerton research showed that dialogic, relational connections were critical if dominant discourses were to be disrupted. Teachers know children very well because they have been in the Greerton team for many years, and they recognise long-standing interests or struggles to reach self-determined goals.

Learning stories are written because a decision is made that important learning is happening. This decision will be conceived in ongoing dialogue with children, their families, and colleagues. Learning stories are not written for accountability, task-driven exercises. There is, however, a requirement for equity. Fairness is paramount and the number of learning stories written for each child is tracked. This means no one misses out, and whānau teachers advocate for their children to ensure fairness is maintained. Importantly, kaiako have a sound knowledge of the learning stories in children's portfolios because they are intentionally shared with colleagues. Bridget (kaiako) shares her view on this:

> *I am always positively influenced and inspired by the stories my colleagues write, and, through them I learn so much more about our children, valuable stuff I might not have noticed or known before.*

Kaiako understand, too, that multiple perspectives add resonance to developing community perspectives of children. Melissa (kaiako) explains in relation to Brielle (this idea can be extrapolated out for each mokopuna):

> *When we write about Brielle it comes from a place of thoughtful understanding about who she is as a learner and how future learning might be provoked.*

In this way, children gain a view of themselves as learners as they read the stories of experiences that are important to them. Whānau hear from kaiako and gain more than one view of their child's interests and multiple possible trajectories to stretch this learning further over times, contexts, and places. For example, in the portion of the learning story that seeks to stretch learning (responding), Cat (kaiako) writes for Tessa:

> *How can we stretch this learning further? Tessa knows how much we trust and value her contributions at the farm. This knowledge is quickly becoming a launching platform to taking on future challenges with positive energy and strong self-belief. This is how I'm able to explain our latest chat, when Tessa told me: "*You know Cat, now I can go up the Mount [local maunga known as Mauao] without being carried". *Wonderful, because we are going to put this to the test very soon, Tess.*

Another kaiako, Tanya, continues the process of tracking Tessa's learning:

> *It is 3.30 in the afternoon…The conversation ebbs and flows as different things bubble to the surface of our minds. We cover the important things, like face painting techniques; [Tessa's comments]* "I needed to look in the mirror, so paint doesn't go in my eyes. It would pretty hurt. Cause you see with them; you don't touch them". *Tessa was then inspired to start writing in the air.* "I can do a 3 and a 2 cause I'm just too good at my books. I can even do it in the air and then you can't see it!" *We enjoyed guessing letters while Tessa explored capitals and lowercase letters. There were so many that I wondered how she remembers all the letters?* "I'm good at it though". *I asked if Tessa knew how she got good at this. There was a little pause while she thought over her answer, and then said,* "I just practice". *Words of a wise learner.*

Learning stories encourage mokopuna to reflect on their learning as well as providing a process for kaiako reflexivity. Reflection happens when the whole community is connected in ways that value the role of learning stories in learning identity formation as well as their ability to influence pedagogy and pedagogical culture. Shifts in practice occur when learning stories are cohesively shared across the team, with mokopuna and whānau.

4.3.5 Socially responsive learners

These narratives encompassed the sociality of learning and the contextual destination of learning identities—as a learner shifting over time, dependent on place for the ways learning and teaching are bound together, and the ways social connections are valued. These two threads are discussed in more detail below.

First, learning is eminently social, and there are many and varied storylines in this study that speak to the sociability of learning. The whakataukī below is one positioned in *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017), and, in this context, it speaks to the diversity of children attending early learning settings in Aotearoa New Zealand: "Kotahi te kākano, he nui ngā hua o te rākau. A tree comes from one seed but bears many fruit" (p. 8). This whakataukī utilising the wisdom of te ao Māori, emphasises that in our commonality we are all different. In early learning we celebrate those differences while maintaining our relationship with each other. This enables opportunities to make a difference in young children's lives and it comes with immense responsibility to make sure we do just this. We wrote about these ideas (Sands & Lee, 2019) when describing the shared leadership ethos of the Greerton ako community:

> When children are in a community that feeds their appetites for curiosity, as well as companionship, rhythm and ritual, ideas flow, and action results. Children lead, and because we live and learn inside a sociocultural context, teachers and families also lead, but they do so in a spirit of respect for children's burgeoning capabilities. The most salient point to make is that leadership is a shifting possibility and no one person or group have the prerogative to make all the decisions. This makes for a viscerally appealing environment as well as an intellectually exciting and socially inclusive one. (p.37)

This current research has shown the importance of camaraderie, generated through being, playing, leading, and learning together, particularly from children's perspectives. It is not surprising that children were much more likely to want to point to photos in their portfolios and talk about what they did and who they did it with. Learning as an active, doing experience has previously been discussed (Section 4.2.2), and it was immensely difficult to ask very young children to respond to their learning story folders on cue. Conversations with children around the research questions were abandoned because capturing words out of context had little value anyway and neither did it feel ethical. However, watching children gather their friends together to pour over their folders and emit excited exclamations was telling. Exclamation is the right word to use because it implies emotion and excitement—elan—for these kinds of feelings were what generated the repeated tapping of the photo on the page the gathering of the book into their arms and the holding of it tightly to their chests, the flipping of the pages to find the exact photo they were looking for, and the excited squeals of remembered joy or gruelling commentary about how tricky it was, followed by a deep sense of tonal satisfaction in their voice for a goal achieved. This is discussed from a plural perspective because each of the children still attending at the time of gathering the research narratives treated their folders in this way. They were important to them, so important that imagining access only online to learning stories for children—as happens in some settings—feels like social injustice.

Second, learning stories created conversations around the ways children, families and teachers could work in partnership to create vibrant learning spaces that nurtured children's learning identities across times, contexts, and places. Early childhood settings are positioned so powerfully to enable partnership to be an embedded process, but only if this is actively sought. While qualified, experienced teachers know more about pedagogy, families are experts about their children. When both kinds of expertise are shared over time, everyone benefits. Amanda's (kaiako) contribution to this research included a comment from a colleague's learning story for Maia. Amanda writes:

> *Catalina beautifully portrayed this notion:* "When we empower our children to learn and view them as already capable and competent learners, we genuinely fulfil their potential ... they [Maia's whānau] know their beloved mokopuna came into this world full of potential and complete, "adorned with her own mana, mauri and wairua" (Te Whatu Pōkeka). *The Greerton kaupapa whānau are so very privileged to carry out*

these aspirations and te ao Māori view for Maia, working in close partnership to enhance and nurture Maia's sense of being, learning and doing.

Families have picked up this view of learning over time and shifted their previous assumptions. In their response to the questionnaire, they commented that the stories made a huge difference in the way they now participated in what they would previously have considered tricky or hard things with their children at home or in the community. Families changed the way they responded as well, seeing their children as competent and confident rather than needy. Reece's mother, Sharon says:

Reece decided to cook a snack. He decided what the ingredients were, and how much should go in. He directed me to deal with the hot oven, and then he shared them with our whānau. He had seen enough learning stories of cooking—Matariki [Māori new year]*, tea parties, cooking fish, etc. to have an understanding of the rules of cooking, but also was able to lead and share as a result of the many learning experiences that he revisited in his books.*

The learning stories often talked about learning goals the children set for themselves as difficult ones, indicating that learning does not happen easily when children take the lead in stretching their learning. The stories reiterated that it is inside the feelings generated in the process of learning that children build an understanding of themselves as "learners who don't give up; as learners who like to trial innovative ideas; as learners who enjoy the stimulation of tricky, challenging goals and the camaraderie generated through playing together" (excerpt from Greerton's philosophy). This impacted the way children talked about themselves and the way families talked about their children. It also took learning experiences far beyond one particular setting. Learning travelled across times, contexts, and places because the contextual experiences were written down and could be shared. In terms of shifting attitudes and practice, Rachel (Blake's mother) said:

From a wider whānau perspective, it has also impacted the way our family have purchased gifts for Blake, knowing the types of things he enjoys.

In terms of a time continuum, she adds:

Blake loves to look back on his stories of him as a baby, particularly the ones with his friends with them also as much younger children. He loves to point out different

friends in the stories and remark on what each of them is doing, or feeling, based on their expressions.

Melissa (kaiako) speaks of how Brielle influenced her ako:

> *Brielle's natural curiosity about her environment and her willingness to take on challenging goals led to a story that framed Brielle as the learner who was stretching her learning in exponential ways. It was also a story that challenged my understanding of how Brielle learnt, so it was a reflective moment of learning for me too. Brielle taught me to slow down and not make assumptions about what our tamariki goals were so that there was time: for her to research for herself, time to work through struggle, time to make mistakes, and time to solve her puzzles.*

Responsive learners are open to wonder and surprise, negotiation and compromise, and to working alongside others and finding imaginative, resourceful, resilient working theories to unpack learning. These contribute to potentiating experiences. As kaiako talk about these with and alongside mokopuna, whānau, and kaiako, the uncertainty of learning, and the working theories children build about that learning are valued. The learning stories build on dispositional responses to learning and cumulatively set these up as valued default responses that children practice time and again. Claxton and Carr (2004) remind us that when these dispositions are visible, they can be debated and, discussed, and pedagogical practice can change as a result.

4.4 The key finding and discussion of this study

This section considers, firstly, how important the notion of protecting the mana of the whole child is from the standpoint of *Te Whāriki* and the way learning stories can have an impact on children's identities in mana-enhancing ways (Section 4.4.1). Secondly, culturally responsive pedagogy is discussed in relation to nurturing lifelong learners. Learning stories have a role here too as they examine children's learning and share lived experience across times, contexts, and places (Section 4.4.2). Thirdly, a *Te Whāriki* perspective on partnership with whānau and mokopuna is examined (Section 4.4.3), and, fourthly, the importance of the view of the child from both a *Te Whāriki* perspective and a te ao Māori view is examined (Section 4.4.4). The summary section of Chapter 4 brings each of these aspects together to reinforce the complexity of the learner and the corresponding requirement to utilise an assessment

strategy that reflects the learner's lived experience across temporality, context, and place (Section 4.4.5).

4.4.1 Learning stories: capacity to generate a mana-enhancing impact on learning identities

If our intention is to truly strengthen children's concepts of themselves as lifelong learners, it is not possible to decontextualise the child from their identities as active, experiential learners who bring their language, culture, and whānau connections with them into learning settings. Bridget (kaiako), in her thoughts on Blake's learning, said this:

> *Over the years, Blake is gaining a deeper understanding of his strengths and capabilities and who he is as a learner in this place, and all of these stories combined, paint a picture of Blake continuing to be an active explorer.*

Bridget adds a quote from her reading of Rinaldi (2013). This epitomises her view of Blake as an active, determined learner, inherently respected for his huge capacity to drive his own learning:

> We see a child who is driven by the enormous energy potential of a hundred billion neurons, and by the incredible curiosity that makes the child search for reasons for everything, and who has all the strength and potential that comes from the ability to wonder and to be amazed. A child who is powerful from the moment of birth because of being open to the world, and capable of constructing his or her own knowledge. (p.15)

This idea of the powerful child is reiterated in the aspiration statement of *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017) embodying the notion of children as "competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society" (p. 5). The findings from this study show that this aspiration statement is also a vision for the future—a future enacted in the present because whānau and kaiako must work together in partnership with mokopuna, to realise this vision. High hopes are the essential prerequisite, and each of the storied accounts in this research spoke to a realisation of the hopes and dreams whānau and kaiako have for mokopuna and mokopuna have for themselves. *Whāia te iti kahurangi, ki te tuohu koe, me he*

maunga teitei: seek the treasure that you value most dearly, if you bow your head, let it be to a lofty mountain. This whakataukī is about perseverance and endurance, refusing to let obstacles get in your way while striving to reach your goals. It is about the wholeness of the child and the importance of keeping the continuity of the learner and their environment firmly embedded in lived experience. As contextual evidence, a short excerpt from one of the learning stories Catalina (kaiako) included in her narrative response to the research questions, puts continuity of learning into context. Tessa's view of herself as a learner is reified through Catalina's iterative thoughtfulness:

> **I can't talk, I'm concentrating.** *Tessa's words, spoken between puffs of breath came in a crucial moment of our climb up the 'cow's track'. Prior to this, Tessa slipped a few times, getting muddy and a little bit worried. As I wiped her very few tears, we spoke about the challenge we set ourselves, its high degree of difficulty, how slippery and wet it really was. We also talked about how much trust I have in her and how, holding on to the boundary fence might be a good idea. And then, the turning point happened, with Tessa telling me she couldn't talk because she was concentrating to make it to the top. As she gained full control of the situation, I even heard Tessa say: "*This is not too hard for me". *What an accomplished mission!*

This exemplar speaks to the competent and confident learner who can go beyond the struggle of learning in the moment and work their way through, often in coconstruction with a supportive kaiako, friend, or whānau member, to completing a goal they have set for themselves. This is essentially what *Te Whāriki* expects from kaiako because teachers set the climate for the culture of ako in their settings. What this research has found is that sound pedagogy is explicitly important to enable children to traverse their learning journeys inside a supportive social space but so, too, is the ongoing opportunity to revisit these experiences in other times, other contexts, and other places. Nowhere in the data were there attempts to separate skills and abilities from the context of learning to measure or quantify that learning. This would be a decontextualization and a simplification, and kaiako were wary of measuring learning in this way. There is something to be lost, and that loss can be a loss of agency, both for the child reviewing their learning experiences and for the teacher invested in assessing learning in ways that has an impact now and into a child's future. Bridget (kaiako) reiterates this view in her further comments on Blake as a learner:

> *Blake knows that he is in control of his own success, and the obvious feeling of satisfaction that Blake gains through his experimentation creates a passion in him to continue to stretch his learning by seeking out similar challenges or problems to solve.*

Learning stories enable this kind of journeying when they are written in ways that keep the child close to their family, their culture, and their social context. This is a feature of the way Bridget thinks about connection with Blake's whānau:

> *Blake applies this learning in his wider world too. For example, Blake's whānau often share their stories of his eagerness to stretch his learning during swimming lessons. I know Blake's family see their children as very capable learners and encourage them to take risks. They share and celebrate their own stories with us during our daily conversations and their online responses to Blake's learning stories.*

This view is strongly evident in the way Blake's mother, Rachel, thinks of Blake as a learner:

> *I also think the learning stories have helped us have more trust in Blake and his ability to navigate more risky things. His ability to use REAL tools that we learnt from reading Bridget's story, rather than the plastic ones that we purchased for him really showed us that Blake is far more capable than we gave him credit for. Blake is an independent, curious, and determined learner. He rarely gives up if it's something he really wants to achieve. And he goes about it with a calm and quiet demeanour.*

As we think about the importance of this finding that learning stories can impact children's views of themselves in mana-enhancing ways and the importance of this sense of pride in oneself in the learning process, Rachel's comments put this in perspective. She talks about Blake's view of himself as he revisits his portfolio of learning stories with his family:

> *He recalls the activities and will often remark about what is happening. "*I'm wearing my shoes in the water getting them all wet!" *or he'll talk about how he fell down over and over trying to climb the skateboard ramp. He'll tell this story sounding quite sorry for himself, and we will reiterate how he tried so hard and finally did it, and we turn the page in his folder to the picture of his great big smile, which will make him exclaim: "*YES! I did it"*, with a big proud smile on his face as he recalls the event, reminding him that trying hard is worth the effort.*

These comments reveal the way story has a sense of temporality as Blake, with the aid of a paper portfolio that he can access at will, looks back over his learning and talks about his experiences with his friends, his parents, and his teachers and, in this restorying, the experience gains momentum in terms of cementing his view of himself as a learner. He particularly connects the emotions that surrounded these experiences and acts them out again.

4.4.2 The synergy required between relationship and pedagogy

Each journey is a unique one; therefore, a realisation of *the* aspirational vision of *Te Whāriki*, now and into the future, means nurturing children who are able to face life's challenges with a resilience, a resourcefulness, and a socially informed, empathic perspective that enables them to be successful learners, however they choose to define this. Bishop (2019) explains the kind of learning setting that can achieve a vision for success clearly when calling for a culturally responsive pedagogy: "New ideas are incorporated by being linked to prior knowledges, hence the importance of creating learning contexts where students' prior knowledge is welcome and indeed essential to allow their world views to be accepted and acceptable" (p. 79). Bishop is referring to older students; however, the principle is just as relevant for young children with the caveat for early childhood that whānau must be included in this dialogic, learning-focused community. In early childhood, *dialogic* includes the written narratives about children's learning that enable this narrative assessment to be a retrievable artefact that adds another storyline into a child's lived experience. As these stories are shared, they contribute to each learner's identities. Ako that nurtures lifelong learning identities ought, therefore, to be culturally responsive, credit based, and begin with what the learner knows, enabling a cross-connection between home, community, and setting.

Learning stories have powerful pedagogical impacts on children's learner identities when they speak to ako torowhānui. They reify what is valued and enable learning communities to revisit, reinterpret and reimagine possible selves. Tessa's mother, Kate, after reading the learning story about Tessa's forest/farm experiences linked that narrative to Tessa's other experiences:

> *She is still proud to tell us that she was brave, especially as she was nervous to begin with. This is a great example we use with Tessa to remind her that sometimes new*

things make us feel scared and unsure, but they can turn out to be the best things ever and we should always try.

This study showed just how important learning stories were in creating learning identities through ako that could be retrieved by the learner in the context of the early learning setting and in the context of home and community. Learning stories are particularly powerful in cementing children's and families' perspectives when they traverse the dimension of authentic lived experience across contexts because they inspire a resonance that speaks to the child's feelings about learning. They look beneath the surface to uncover the strategies learners used to overcome their fears and struggles and then achieve a self-set goal, just as Tessa's experience shows.

4.4.3 Partnership with mokopuna and whānau

Te Whāriki (2017) is very explicit about partnership and participation with whānau, and the following whakataukī draws a relational time continuum: "He taonga te mokopuna, kia whāngaia, kia tipu, kia rea. A child is a treasure, to be nurtured, to grow, to flourish" (p. 2). In a *power with* empowering way, kaiako and whānau who position themselves alongside children, so that experiential learning can occur, enable children to stretch from what they know and grow their learning. Decontextualising learning into goal-oriented outcomes in a schoolified (Bennett, 2010) didactic way that differs from the child's desire to learn what is meaningful to them is the antithesis of partnership and culturally responsive pedagogy (Bishop, 2019). Learning stories, therefore, that speak to the wholeness of the child and, layer upon layer, build a whakapapa of the child's learning identities (Rameka, 2012) powerfully contribute to the child's sense of self, recognising that this learning journey is anchored in relationship.

As teachers notice, recognise, and respond to children's mana, mauri, and wairua inside the learning stories they write, they set up ongoing conversations that reinforce the *Dimensions of the Learner* (Reedy, 2019): "The child is nurtured in the knowledge that they are loved and respected; that their physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional strength will build mana, influence, and control; that having mana is the enabling and empowering tool to controlling their own destiny" (p. 37). These dimensions are brought together in a comment from Kate, Tessa's mother:

> *Tessa loves to look back through her learning stories and discuss what was happening and what she was learning. Often at the end of the day, it is hard for Tessa to recall all the fun adventures she has had, so when a learning story comes through, they remind her to tell us about an important experience she had and what she learnt.*

Kate's comments position her daughter as a learner, well able to recognise what is important to her and, further, a learner able to reflect on her learning. The learning stories, because they storied important learning experiences as defined by Tessa, were the artefacts that enabled Tessa to remember, retell, and reflect on this learning, so adding to the cumulative storying capacity of learning stories. Dewey's (1916) three narrative elements—*temporality, sociality, and place*—were enacted as Tessa and her family shared her learning. These dynamic components interacted together to generate meaning that was both personal and social (Ntinda, 2019; Pring, 2007), bringing Tessa's learning alive once again and building practical ways for further conversations with whānau and ongoing partnership as a result.

4.4.4 The view of the child.

The view of the child in this study, is a perception of children viewed both from a *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017) concept of the child and a te ao Māori perspective of mana (Reedy, 2019). Teachers working within the bicultural curriculum imperative of *Te Whāriki* in Aotearoa New Zealand are required to intentionally ensure that children "experience a curriculum that empowers them for their journey" (MOE, 2017, p. 7). *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017) entrenches this further:

> They need to *learn how to learn* so that they can engage with new contexts, opportunities and challenges with optimism and resourcefulness. For these reasons, *Te Whāriki* emphasises the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions that support lifelong learning. (p. 7)

These four aspects are expected to be woven together, not isolated into a fragmented curriculum delivery, characterised by a goal setting/evaluative genre, unconnected to a child's agency to learn (Berryman et al., 2018; Hill, 2001). This idea of the importance of complex, connected storying as a way to view mokopuna, is reinforced by Greerton whānau in this study. Brielle's parents, Amee and Simon, had this to say about their daughter:

> *So enriched is Brielle's mana, that she sees intelligence as something that can grow, and this leads her to actively seek new challenges within her learning environment.*

Melissa, her whānau teacher, connects with these comments about her learning identities in relation to one of Brielle's learning story exemplars for this study. Melissa commented:

> **Look, it's my first time*!*** *This story is a celebration of Brielle's learning as a four-year-old. The words that caught my eye upon rereading this story are these: "*When Brielle sets herself a goal, there is no stopping her, and she works with grit and determination no matter what the challenge".

Brielle's' family reinforce Melissa's thoughts:

> *We knew she was a determined learner at home, but this definitely showed through as a common theme throughout her learning stories.*

Brielle says this of herself:

> *I think I am a good learner, and I always try my hardest.*

Conversations with whānau kaiako occur regularly; however, the learning stories enable whānau to revisit, reinterpret, and to consider ways to stretch their children's learning further in timely ways unique to them. Brielle is now at school and her family sees their determined learner still in action:

> *She still is a very determined learner. She has been determined to move up in her levels in her reading and as one of the stories said—when she sets a goal—she works towards it. She is very proud of herself that she has managed to move up levels in her reading even though it has been difficult, and she has struggled. This determination is so important for her, for all the obstacles she has had to face and is yet to face.*

Nowhere in the learning stories are there comments that reference Brielle as needy, only as a learner-in-action who sets her own goals and with determination, works to achieve these. Brielle's family are proud of their courageous daughter, and they deeply understand in an embodied way the importance of nurturing the kind of courageous learner who sets her own goals:

> *Even learning to tie her shoelaces—she was determined to get it right. She had a goal in mind as she had to learn to tie her shoelaces before she could get a pair of shoes*

she wanted. She practised and practised with us helping her when she got stuck. We all researched on YouTube*, finding an easier way for her to learn as she was finding the way we did it a bit confusing. She found a way she thought would be good for her to try, and she managed to do it all by herself without us helping. She faces all her specialists' appointments as a very strong young lady and seems to take everything in her stride. She is a very proud hearing aid user and wearer. Brielle is constantly trying to push the boundaries and go the extra mile in what she sets her mind to achieve.*

These stories are complex. They are meaningful to the child at the centre of this learning and to those who care deeply about her and seek to stretch her learning further in a *power with*, empowering way.

In keeping with the close interrelationship between myself as the researcher and the wider Greerton team as coinquirers, I leave the last words of this findings and discussions chapter to one of the teachers, Karen, whose thoughts on the impact of learning stories on one child (Reece, who was three at the time this learning story was written) speak more broadly about the connections between learning stories and learning identities that have been uncovered within this thesis. This extract paints a provocative image of Reece and is included here for it pulls the narrative threads together. Preceding this learning story are comments from Sharon, Reece's mother:

We reconnect and remember the teachers, the children, the activities, and increasingly, as we read and discuss the dispositions and learning observed, Reece and Olivia (Reece's sister who also attended Greerton) talk about their understanding of what was going on and what they remember.

On a mission…*We arrived at Greerton on a brisk Monday morning to find a huge pile of freshly trimmed branches, just waiting for curious investigators to find them. Reece, who is always brimming with curiosity, was one of the first to be enticed by their possibilities. He instantly set out on a path of discovery. His first mission was to clamber all over them. Back and forward he went, sometimes getting stuck and losing a gumboot, sometimes tumbling over, but always with a smile and a laugh. Having explored climbing, Reece's intention shifted to moving and manipulating the branches. He tugged and pulled with all his might to release a branch from the*

tangled pile and balanced it on the seat, then went back for another and another. After he had successfully shifted several branches, he shifted them all back again…then moved them off again…then put them back again. It seemed that his mission was to practise his perseverance and strength.

Reece, now eleven, says this of himself:

I'm a good learner, I think. A good learner is someone who picks things up quickly, once I get the hang of it. I like to look at new things first before I try them. I'm really good at some things; I'm okay at most things, and I can get better at them. The learning stories reflect what I'm interested in now.

Karen's (Reece's whānau kaiako) comments about the narrative temporality of learning stories:

As he rereads his stories, he rediscovers what a powerful learner he is and how we valued him as an important member of our community. His playfulness, creative thoughtful ideas, and reflective nature shaped his identity and the lives of the people who were fortunate enough to have shared his learning journey with them.

The point is that Reece's learning is not only described but also analysed and this analysis is the key to a *stuttering* of ideas that Rose (1999) has said shifts taken-for-granted perspectives. It is within this *stuttering* that a space is created to be responsive to a child's ideas. The learning story progresses:

What learning is happening here for Reece? [recognising] *Sharon and Rick, Reece loves to work independently and shows huge amounts of focus, perseverance, and resilience when he has the ability to see out his ideas. Guy Claxton is a theorist who inspires us daily and his research is helping us to unpack learning and social competence in our community. To me it all seems like a bit of a puzzle when it comes to growing competent learners. Everyone develops different strengths at different times in their lives and we believe very strongly in fostering these strengths to their fullest. This is an important view to have because these strengths shift and change over time and learnt dispositions, like perseverance and resilience, will support new learning, no matter what the context. In other words, Reece will take his strength of independence, and in time shift to work interdependently (reciprocity) with others. His independence will also help him with planning new learning adventures*

(reflectiveness), questioning new knowledge (resourcefulness) and managing distractions (resilience) when learning. Once again, it's like a big learning puzzle with each of the pieces having equal importance …it's just that sometimes one piece is bigger and easier to fit into place but once it's there, all the other pieces are more easily found. I think this view might help us all to support Reece—as he follows his own learning pathway the puzzle will complete itself.

This high trust model for learning is not prescribed, yet it is a pedagogy of ako wrapped in relational connection that is carefully orchestrated through language and action, as can be seen in the learning story exemplar for Reece. Teachers write learning stories about the children's dispositional learning-in-action and the working theories that Hargraves (2014) describes as being contingently shaped and reshaped through lived experience. These learning stories open wider conversations as children and their whānau reinterpret and reframe their working theories in wider social contexts to build continuing stories about themselves as learners over time, context, and place.

Chapter 5
Conclusion

This study was a narrative inquiry, relying on the dialogical community at Greerton to contribute multiple voices to a puzzle that had long intrigued us. This study investigated the impact of learning stories on our community's understanding of their children's learning identities and considered how these understandings led to decisions affecting children's curriculum experiences (Moss, 2018). The research question framing this study was:

> *How have learning stories, in one early learning setting, affected this community's understanding of their children's learning identities?*

The two subsidiary questions were:

> *1. How have learning stories affected children's views of themselves, and families' views of their children, as learners?*
>
> *2. How have learning stories shaped the culture of learning and teaching in this community of practice comprising children, families, and teachers?*

Data was collected from mokopuna, whānau, and kaiako at Greerton Early Learning Centre in Tauranga, Aotearoa New Zealand. Six subsets were formed and, in each of these, a teacher, child, and family commented on three learning stories chosen from a child's folder. In total, eighteen learning stories provided the contextual framework. Research members shared their views on how these learning stories affected their perceptions of the child's learning identities, and I analysed their responses through a narrative lens. Kaiako were considered coinquirers because they were instrumental in determining the research question and selecting children and family participants. In addition, the six kaiako provided feedback on findings and discussion to substantiate a sense of authenticity and resonance that the study reflected the culture of ako at Greerton.

This chapter provides a summary of the findings (Section 5.1) and reflects on the quality and limitations of the research process (Section 5.2). Section 5.3 examines the significance and contributions made by this study in relation to knowledge and research, while Section 5.4

proposes directions for further research. Section 5.5 considers implications for policy and practice, and Section 5.6 concludes with final remarks on my learning journey.

5.1 Summary of the findings

The key finding from this research situated learning identities in a complex, experiential interplay that was impossible to detangle into curriculum fragments. Learning stories, written by Greerton kaiako, built a layered whakapapa of connection to the people, places, and things that mattered to mokopuna and whānau and contributed to ongoing shifts in the Greerton community's perceptions of children's learning identities. Over time, these learning stories accentuated children's views of themselves as confident and competent learners who build on what they know. This was possible because what children know was accepted and valued in the culture of ako (Bishop, 2019), generated by the Greerton teachers in dialogue with children and families. From this credit-based perception of learners and their learning, children's mana was continually nurtured. Mokopuna were, therefore, able to move confidently between experiences and, layer upon layer, grow their learning with a robustness, breadth, and richness (Claxton & Carr, 2004) that was observable in their language and actions. The study revealed four rich narrative threads contributing to the complex nature of children's learning identities.

First, relationships cannot stand alone if learning possibilities are to be stretched to realise children's potential. A thoughtful, culturally, and socially responsive pedagogy is also required. As the community shared the storied accounts of learners-in-active-engagement with Greerton's thoughtfully planned environment, they enabled all partners in the learning process to understand both learning and learners. This generated a whānau-focused community of learners with responsibilities to one another. Bennett (2010) champions this kind of community ethos, describing it as a connected lifeforce where learning communities are "learning to be, learning to do, learning to learn, and learning to live together" (p. 18). There is much to ponder in this, for it is a powerful premise for thinking about how kaiako continually engage with children, families, and colleagues. This study has shown that when kaiako wrap learning around mokopuna and consider all contexts, lived experiences, relational connections, cultures, and communities surrounding each child, thoughtful pedagogy results because teachers do not then "deliver" curriculum.

Second, the study demonstrated that the ongoing opportunity for children to revisit their experiences in other times, contexts, and places supported children's ability to stretch their learning and their views of themselves. This meant finding ways to ensure learning stories would be shared widely within and across the community to reinforce the continuity of learning experiences. The Greerton learning stories were narrative threads that connected meaningful experiences and feelings about those experiences to strengthen learning identities. They were artefacts that tracked learning progress and considered ways to strengthen progress further. This was written into learning stories as in-the-moment progress, occurring during learning events, or as pondered opportunities for agentic children to puzzle over further and pursue their interests over time. As children shared their stories, they were reminded of the times they were brave, kind, or solved tricky goals they had set for themselves. This *remembering* reinforced the feelings of learning as well as the strategies children used to overcome their fears and struggles to achieve their self-set goals.

Third, the study showed that learning stories focused on dispositional learning created a culture of dispositional language and working-theory-focused narratives. Thus, language enabled children to reflect on their views of themselves. The ways learning stories were written mattered because they travelled to other times, contexts, and social/cultural spaces and impacted on learning identities at the time they were written and into the future—a future embodied in lived experience from the past. Further, learning stories written in this way and shared widely within the Greerton community also created pedagogic practice that continually sought space to deepen dispositional habits of learning and working theories rather than the teaching of isolated skills and knowledge. As a result, children's working theories had momentum and an ever-increasing tilt towards deepening learning complexity. These working theories were situated in social/cultural contexts that contributed to a deepened sense of children's identities as learners-in-action.

Fourth, sociocultural learning communities are participatory, and, because the Greerton teachers wrote learning stories composed in dialogue with mokopuna, whānau and kaiako colleagues, the learning stories generated a sense of resonance that language, culture, and identity were valued. As kaiako wrote learning stories in response to children's mana, mauri and wairua, they were intentionally building a whānau-focused community that valued a listening pedagogy. Whānau and children picked up on this responsiveness and contributed

their own perspectives for learning with agency that continued the dialogue. The study reinforced that ensuring partnership in early learning settings means situating pedagogy as responsive acts to the aspirations of all participants. Consequently, particular cultural positionings are less likely to dominate because many voices are heard.

In conclusion, the key finding is a reaffirmation that children's learning identities are embedded in the complex social and cultural contexts that surround children (Berryman, 2013; Bishop, 2019; Bruner, 2004; Gee, 2007). As teachers shared learning stories with each other, a deepened pedagogical understanding was generated. This led to a culture of ako that permeated each teacher's practice. The questionnaires affirm that the contextual learning story exemplars in this study—indeed all stories in children's portfolios—had an impact on our community's understanding of learning identity formation because they offered holistic, storied accounts of children's learning. Learning stories gained resonance because they were emotionally connected to learning valued by mokopuna, whānau, and kaiako. Learning stories also engendered a resonance with teaching colleagues because their contextual nature supported a shared understanding of local curriculum. The significance of learning stories to this finding is the way their narrative theoretical and practical construction keeps this social and cultural complexity alive.

5.2 Reflections on the quality and limitations of the research process

This was a small study conducted in one early learning setting with teachers who have been part of the Greerton learning community for many years. There is no expectation that this is generalisable to other contexts because learning communities are "entwined, social, and situated" (Gunn & Reeves, 2019, p. 149). However, just as kaiako might look at a pedagogical approach like Reggio Emilia and see resonance with, for example, a listening pedagogy (Rinaldi, 2006) or consider Bishop's (2019) thinking about a pedagogy of cultural relationships and find aspects of practice that fit with their own epistemological paradigms, readers may well find resonance with aspects of Greerton's pedagogical practice and experiment in their own settings.

My positionality as an insider researcher was potentially problematic. A coconstructed resonance embedded in relational ethics (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016) was a way I tried to

ensure this positionality would not impact unfairly on the research design, process, and outcomes. I explicitly sought to engage participants in agentic ways to ensure features of narrative inquiry, positioning of the researcher, focus on issues of power and voice, and the observance of ethical practice, were consistently considered throughout the entire study (Butler-Kisber, 2019). Hence, my colleagues acted as coinquirers who framed the research focus, selected the learning stories (which both provided contextual framing for the data analysis and also identified the children who, along with their whānau, would be invited to participate in the study), and gave feedback on the findings and discussion chapter. Checking for resonance with all participants was another way to reduce my researcher bias and deepen my reflexivity.

The selection of a narrative approach meant this thesis did not result in quantifiable "measures" of learning story impacts. However, measurable results would be inconsistent with a *Te Whāriki* sociocultural concept of complex learning. Complex learning requires complex assessment strategies to support learner self-efficacy and learners' views of how they could keep improving their learning (Cowie et al., 2018). This study is limited because it is small. However, the study has endeavoured to keep complex views of learning identities embedded in children's lived experiences over time, context, and place. Thus, the analysis of the data showed that learning stories written to track children's learning progress are capable of improving learning rather than "proving" learning and thereby capable of contributing to positive learning identities.

5.3 The significance and contributions made by this study in relation to knowledge and research

The study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of the dynamism of personal, social, and contextual change through dialogue. Overall, the study strengthens a perspective that learning identities are uniquely situated within the individual, yet simultaneously encompassed in complex relational, social, and cultural contexts. This research reinforces the notion that learning identities are active, experiential processes embedded in stories shaped and reshaped over time in situated, coconstructed social spaces. The research adds to the growing body of knowledge that views learning identities as

complex, embedded in children's dispositional responses to lived experiences as well as the working theories derived from thoughtful interplay with those experiences.

The explicit link between learning dispositions and working theory exploration is a lesser explored research focus in the wider literature. This study foregrounds these indicative learning outcomes from *Te Whāriki* (Hedges & Jones, 2012) with a sense of their connectivity and blurs the edges of both dispositions and working theories, thereby making it more difficult to speak of one without the other. Kaiako in this Greerton research designed learning environments with a congruence they thought matched the compatibility of dispositional learning and working theory exploration. For example, teachers wrote learning stories that talked about children's resilience and resourcefulness. They linked these dispositions to children's working theories as mokopuna, despite challenges, tinkered with their ideas to complete self-set goals. This study contributes to the notion of viewing dispositions and working theories as contingent on each other. The study reinforced learning dispositions as active, discursive verbs (Claxton & Carr, 2004) that kept building momentum. This momentum nudged learners to rework their tentative, existing working theories and to keep striving to make sense of their experiences.

In this study, I drew on narrative inquiry paradigms to make my argument that learning stories have a significant impact on children's learning identities because they are storied accounts of learners in complex, dialogic sociocultural settings. Narrative inquiry's emphasis on multiple storylines was especially useful to my analysis. It allowed me to think through the ways in which learning stories make individual stories of learning identities visible within the context of lived experiences that shift over time, context and place. To this end, the narrative notion of telling and retelling stories was of value for generating direct links to learning stories written with continuity in mind and designed to look to the past to guide a future developed in the present. Thus, this research contributes to a narrative perspective that individuals construct learning identities over time through accumulating stories. Learners come to understand themselves and others within social and cultural milieux through a reflective engagement with their stories.

This study reinforced the literature that values learning stories as formative assessments (Cowie & Carr, 2008; Crooks et al., 2016; Gunn, 2016) that enable learners and their families to grasp lived experiences across times, contexts, and places and generate milieux for

ongoing learning. Narrative inquiry's attention to temporality, context and place helped me to make sense of the roles of learning stories here as artefacts that enabled learners to retrieve experiences and reflect on these in the future.

This research also raises questions about early learning environments that constrain agentic learners actively deciding what to learn. Throughout this study, there was a strong sense that the early learning culture of ako at Greerton ought to be one that enables each child to thrive as learners-in-action in a connected, community-oriented way, not as an institution, structured and excessively rule-bound. Prescriptive learning environments have little resonance therefore with a *Te Whāriki* view of the agentic child nurtured in community.

The strength-based nature of learning stories illustrated in this study offers an alternative to problematic discourses that continue to see certain groups of learners marginalised. In Aotearoa New Zealand there continues to be debate as to whether we should use reductive developmental assessments to track children's learning and identify children "at risk". *Te Whāriki* was considered *transformative* because it signalled credit-based learning through its mana-positioned principles and strands. This research illustrated that learning stories as a narrative assessment response to *Te Whāriki* can speak to learner struggles but in ways that discuss how the learner overcomes these, not as a pathologised deficit. Learning stories are especially able to gather family and community into a complex storied view of learners moving from what they know and what they can do into more complex learning. Learning stories that illustrate the complexity, uniqueness, and contextual situatedness of children's learning journeys thus may have a role in disrupting neoliberal dominant discourses.

In terms of knowledge and research, while it was not a direct focus, the study also demonstrates what is possible when educators consistently work (as the Greerton team have) to embed structural and process factors underpinning *Te Whāriki* aspirations into practice. This intent is instilled with high expectations that make a difference to the wellbeing of a learning community. Shared leadership, high ratios and employment of fully qualified teachers are some of those factors that contribute to learner progress and learner wellbeing. The study is indicative of what happens for mokopuna, whānau, and kaiako when these factors are embedded in settings. It is a reminder that underlying structural and process factors enable or constrain kaiako from enacting *Te Whāriki* aspirations.

5.4 Directions for future research

Much has already been written about the role of learning stories that track learning progress and support the design of responsive learning environments (Carr, 2001; Carr & Lee, 2012, 2019a; Geurin, 2015; Gunn & Gasson, 2017). As a result, this research was always about learning from others who have researched this area as I utilised previous research and practice to inform this study. This current Greerton research sought to deepen understanding of the role of learning stories at a time when the connection between learning story theory and practice is under considerable threat. The study looked for ways learning story theory, immersed in *Te Whāriki* aspirations, could unfold in practice to understand the impact of learning stories on children's, families', and teachers' perspectives of learning identity formation. Future research can ask further questions, and the narratives in this study offer a platform for widening exploration. Below I offer some suggestions for this future work.

One possible line of inquiry is further investigation of children's experiences in nature and the ways these might be shared across time, context, and place to understand the effects of the natural world on learning identity formation. There were several references from research members in this study to the farm/forest adventures Greerton kaiako and mokopuna experience weekly. Research members commented on the effects of these adventures on children's dispositions and working theories through storying children's lived experiences across ngahere, maunga, awa/rivers, and moana in learning stories. However, these practices have not yet been fully explored, and additional research could raise questions about the value, for example, of experiencing pūrākau in place-based contexts with very young children.

Further questions arise about how these lived experiences in the natural world are shared across contexts, and in families and communities. If dialogic, listening communities are valued, then times, contexts, and places outside the immediacy of a setting's fences and gates are also sites for conversations that ought to include the whole community. This could be a rich opportunity to tap into communities' funds of knowledge, engage in culturally responsive practice, and strengthen partnerships with whānau and communities.

Further research could contribute to more discussion about the enactment of *Te Whāriki* aspirations through resistant movements (Moss, 2018) interested in exploring wider interpretations of our connection with the natural world. The Greerton community have been growing sustainable practices in the wild for over a decade and sharing these experiences with our community through learning stories. In recent years, a wave of interest in learning in nature in Aotearoa New Zealand has occurred (see, for example, Alcock & Ritchie, 2018; Beatson, 2019). A wider study with collaboration across early learning settings could give further insight into, for example, a posthuman focus on humans as custodians of our world particularly as this relates to very young children's growing identities as custodians in a world that sorely needs such advocates.

Furthermore, one of the research questions in this study focused on understanding how learning stories shaped the culture of ako in the Greerton community of practice. The findings recognised the importance of developing a shared understanding of local curriculum immersed in *Te Whāriki* principles, strands, and learning outcomes to ensure practice supported children's learning identities. Further research could investigate how learning stories could, for example, contribute to internal evaluation and professional growth cycle evaluative processes to understand their potential impact on the culture of ako in settings.

Finally, there is currently much debate in early childhood on kaiako wellbeing (for example, social media, Ministry-of-Education-supported early learning opportunities). How do settings ensure kaiako are supported to stay in children's lives where deep-seated, long-term relational connections become possible? Greerton uses learning stories as the basis for all professional requirements, which helps mitigate paperwork and related pressures for teachers, supporting their wellbeing and allowing the focus to remain on teaching and learning. Research delving more deeply into the detailed ways learning stories contribute to a meaningful understanding of professional practice components, underpinning local curricular and driving pedagogy, could resonate with others. Research inquiry into ways internal evaluations, professional growth cycles, planning, and assessment drive a pedagogy of cultural relationships constructively or in constrained ways could be a useful contribution to issues of wellbeing.

5.5 Implications for policy and practice

This was a small, albeit intense, study in one setting; therefore, it cannot offer definitive recommendations about education policy or professional development programmes, for this would overreach the research findings. However, based on the findings on this study and their alignment with wider research, below I offer suggested implications for policy and practice.

Policymakers could:

- Continue to protect and promote learning stories within early childhood education;
- Resist pressure to implement developmental assessment models that decontextualise learning and pathologise children with "normal" developmental variation; and
- Ensure both preservice and practising kaiako are well supported with professional learning opportunities that support them to use learning stories in ways that have powerful impacts on learning and learning identities.

Early childhood teachers and leaders could:

- Prioritise dispositions and working theories as valued learning, capturing these intentionally in learning story assessments;
- Use learning stories and other forums to increasingly build children's and families' understandings of the nature and importance of dispositions and working theories;
- Seek to understand what children and families value, including specific dispositions, and incorporate these into learning story assessment;
- Seek a shared language of learning that reflects what is valued in their learning community;
- Look for connections in children's learning across times, contexts and places and capture these in learning stories;
- Be attentive to emotion, subjectivity, and relationality as elements that cannot be separated from learning or assessment;
- Engage in conversations and reflections on learning stories allowing these to inform ongoing practice;
- Maintain a strength-based orientation that allows learners to have agency over directing their own learning; and

- Review ways of working together as a team to ensure kaiako have time to notice, recognise, and respond to learning in powerful ways.

5.6 Final remarks on my learning journey

The emphasis in this research was on children's perceptions of themselves as learners and their families' and teachers' views of their learning identities. The particular emphasis is that this reflexive research endeavour has been centred on *our* mokopuna, whānau, kaiako team. This study had many benefits for us as a community of learners as it was an opportunity for experienced colleagues to think deeply about our practice as individuals and as a team, and to reflect on what this practice means for mokopuna and whānau and each other. The implications of this research for our team widens to the borders of our setting and our families' homes as we consider ways whānau value learning and share their aspirations for their children and family with us. This means we are continually searching to engage in ways that honour the uniqueness of each mokopuna and their whānau.

The Greerton journey to enact *Te Whāriki* aspirations, although a situated one, is one we have in common with early childhood settings across Aotearoa New Zealand. My hope is that others find some resonance with the intent and practice at Greerton and the study acts as a reference point to kaiako on similar pathways. The study reiterates that language matters, for it shapes the way communities think and, consequently, the way they navigate the social world across times and places, and the way that the language used in rich, connected, contextually situated narrative assessments can bring awakening, light, and ongoing growth to individuals and communities. The whakataukī below epitomises just how much language matters:

> *Tōku reo, tōku ohooho tōku reo, tōku ohooho, tōku reo, tōku māpihi maurea*, *tōku reo, tōku whakakai marihi! My language is my awakening, my language is the window to my soul.*

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter of Invitation form for owner of Greerton Early Learning

Kia ora …

Thank you for your interest in this research. I am seeking your permission to learn more about the way learning stories affect children's learning identities here in the Greerton Early Learning Centre community of practice. This would mean asking teachers who have worked here for five years or more to participate and inviting a corresponding group of families and children, based directly on the learning stories teachers select.

My main research question is: **How do learning stories, in one early learning setting, affect their children's learning identities?**

My three sub-questions are:

What impact do the learning stories have on children's views of themselves as learners?

What impact do the learning stories have on the families' views of their children as learners?

What impact do the learning stories have on the culture of learning and teaching in this community of practice comprising children, families and teachers?

I intend to explore these questions using the centre as a case study that combines the perspectives of teachers, families, and children (where appropriate).

Teachers' and Families' participation

Over time teachers have written many learning stories for children. If they choose to participate in this research, with these above research questions in mind, I would ask them to: Select three learning stories about a single child they consider will give an insight into learning more about the effect these learning stories have had on this child's learning identity and on the culture of learning and teaching at Greerton Early Learning Centre. Once they have decided on a particular child, their family will be contacted to ask if they are willing to fill out a questionnaire. The children will also fill out a questionnaire if appropriate, and the teacher will fill out a questionnaire. In this way it is anticipated that multiple perspectives will provide a deeper insight into the impact of learning stories in learning identity formation and on the culture of learning and teaching at GELC. I have included a copy, of each of the invitation letters and permission forms for the teachers, families and children for you to understand the scope of this research project.

As multiple perspective is essential for a qualitative study using narrative theory, should the family decide not to participate, it may be necessary to select another child. Teachers would only be asked to fill out the teacher's questionnaire once permission has been received from the parent and potentially the child, to avoid unnecessary work.

This Centre has had a high profile in research and professional development for many years. It would not be possible then to keep the Centre from being identified in any research I am associated with.

It is my intention to make the potential power issues and the voluntary nature of participation very clear. In order to mitigate issues of power because of my leadership and ownership positions at Greerton Early Learning Centre, teachers have the right to anonymity. The learning stories they select may be written by them and/or colleagues and if they choose to be anonymous they would need to use pseudonyms and redact photos to ensure they are not recognisable in the research outputs

However, valuing participant voice is an embedded feature of narrative research and learning story narrative assessment and I would like to offer participants the right to choose to use their own names if they so wish. Over the years, because all learning stories, written by this community, have celebrated the credit based nature of the early childhood national curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, teachers, families and children have been willing to share their experiences using their names, including their photos for publication and research purposes. This study is focused in one early learning setting and relies on the work of the teachers at Greerton Early Learning Centre and the perspectives of parents and children. Teachers are very familiar with the way learning stories are analysed through a credit perspective, celebrating children's learning progress and valuing teachers, families and children's voice. Should teachers, the family and the child choose to use their own names and identifying photographs, I want to assure them and you, that all the data will be treated with utmost care to ensure there is no harm to participants. I want to reiterate that teachers' responses will not be used in any employment related matters should they choose to use their names.

I will also need to keep a list of all participants to be able to provide contact information in event of a Covid 19 outbreak. This would only be shared with the relevant authorities.

If any disputes or concerns arise, I will invite participants to discuss these with me directly, and if things are not able to be resolved between us, I invite them to contact my supervisor on the email address at the end of this letter.

I have included both letters, questionnaires and permission forms for you to peruse to ensure you have all the information needed to decide whether or not to give permission for this research to happen inside the Greerton Early Learning Community.

Sincerely

Lorraine Sands

Ethics approval number: FEDU086/20

Thesis Supervisor:
Katrina McChesney

Appendix 2: Consent form from owner of Greerton Early Learning Centre

I seek permission to include three Learning Stories teachers have chosen from children's portfolios at Greerton Early Learning Centre and their completed questionnaire.

- **I understand that participation in this thesis research for participants is completely voluntary.**
- **I understand that participants may withdraw up until the questionnaire is submitted.**
- **I understand this thesis research will be published.**
- **I understand that teachers will complete the attached questionnaire once the child's family and the child (where appropriate) has given permission for 3 learning stories from the child's portfolio to be included in this research.**
- **I understand teachers will complete the questionnaire with reference to the Learning Stories they choose.**
- **I understand that Greerton Early Learning Centre will be identified in the research and participants may choose to be anonymous or to use their own names.**

I understand that the learning stories may be reproduced in their current form or as extracts, including photos and names, dependant on children and families' consent.

I give permission for:

- **Lorraine Sands to conduct the research at Greerton Early Learning Centre.**
- **Lorraine Sands to invite teachers to participate**
- **Teachers' work (learning stories) and reflections (responses to a questionnaire) to be used for the purpose of this research, including in the thesis and any related publications or presentations**
- **Three learning stories teachers choose for one child to be included for the purpose of this research, including in the thesis and any related publications or presentations**
- **Lorraine Sands to contact parents and to access relevant families' contact details for the purpose of inviting them to participate in the research.**
- **The Greerton Early Learning Centre name to be used in the research and associated publications.**

Centre owner Signature: ..... Date: .....

Email Address: .....

University ethics approval number: FEDU086/20

Appendix 3: Letter of Invitation to Teachers at Greerton Early Learning Centre

Dear
Thank you for your interest in this research. It is designed to learn more about the way learning stories affect children's learning identities here in the Greerton Early Learning Centre community of practice.

My main research question is:

How do learning stories, in one early learning setting, affect their children's learning identities?

My three sub-questions are:

- **What impact do the learning stories have on children's views of themselves as learners?**
- **What impact do the learning stories have on the families' views of their children as learners?**
- **What impact do the learning stories have on the culture of learning and teaching in this community of practice comprising children, families and teachers?**

I intend to explore these questions in a case study that combines the perspectives of teachers, family members, and (where appropriate) children.

Your participation

Over time teachers in the Greerton Early Learning community of practice have written many learning stories for children. If you choose to participate in this research, with these above research questions in mind, I would ask you to:

Select three learning stories written by teachers at Greerton Early Learning Centre, about a single child you consider will give an insight into learning more about the effect these learning stories have had on this child's learning identity.
Once you have decided on a particular child, I will contact their family to ask if they are willing to have their child's stories used in the research, and to fill out a similar questionnaire themselves. The child will also be invited to consent to participate and to fill out a questionnaire, if this is possible.

If your nominated child and their parent/caregiver consents to participate in the research, I would ask you to fill out a questionnaire based on the learning stories you selected for this child. In this way it is anticipated that multiple perspectives will provide a deeper insight into the impact of learning stories in learning identity formation.

As multiple perspective is essential for a qualitative study using narrative theory, should the parent and/or the child decide not to participate, it may be necessary to select another child. You would only be asked to fill out the teacher's questionnaire once permission has been received from the parent and the child, to avoid unnecessary work.

I have been a teacher/owner at Greerton Early Learning Centre since 1993 and therefore your colleague for many years. In addition, my daughter is now the centre owner. However, this ought to have no bearing on your decision to participate in this study. I want to assure you that it is completely voluntary. It is your choice to participate (or not) and the data you provide and your decision to participate (or not) will not be used in any way for performance management or related employment matters.

If the centre owner provides consent, I intend to name the centre in my research and any related publications. However, you have the right to individual anonymity. On the consent form attached, you are invited to indicate whether you would like to be named or referred to using a pseudonym.

Over the years, because all learning stories written by this community have celebrated the credit based nature of the early childhood national curriculum, Te Whāriki, teachers, families and children have been willing to share their experiences using their names, including their photos for research purposes. This study is focused in one early learning setting and relies on the work of the teachers at Greerton Early Learning Centre and the perspectives of parents and children. You are very familiar with the way learning stories are analysed through a credit perspective, celebrating children's learning progress and valuing teachers, families and children's voice. Should you decline the offer of anonymity, I want to assure you that all the data will be treated with utmost care to ensure there is no harm to participants. I want to reiterate that your responses will not be used in any employment related matters should you choose to use your name.

I will also need to keep a list of all participants to be able to provide contact information in event of a Covid 19 outbreak, however, I would only share this information with the appropriate authorities.

If any disputes or concerns arise, I invite you to discuss these with me directly, and if things are not able to be resolved between us, I invite you to contact my supervisor on the email address at the end of this letter.

Once again thank you for agreeing to be part of this research study. I deeply value your professional knowledge, experience and commitment over a long period to making a difference to children's learning outcomes. This has formed the emotional heart of this community. I understand the depth of thought that will go into answering these questions and I appreciate and value, both your professional commitment to be involved, and the time and effort required to provide an in-depth response to the following questions.

Sincerely

Lorraine Sands

University ethics approval number: FEDU086/20

Thesis Supervisor:
Katrina McChesney

Appendix 4: TEACHER'S Consent Form

I seek permission to include three Learning Stories selected for one child who has/had attended Greerton Early Learning Centre and your completed questionnaire in this research project.

Teacher's Name: .....

- **I understand that participation in this thesis research is completely voluntary.**
- **I understand that no data will be used in any employment related matters and I am not under surveillance in any way.**
- **I understand that I may withdraw up until the questionnaire is submitted.**
- **I understand this thesis research will be published.**
- **I agree to complete the attached questionnaire once the child's family has given permission for their child's learning stories to be included in this research.**
- **I agree to complete the questionnaire with reference to the Learning Stories I choose.**
- **I understand that Greerton Early Learning Centre will be identified in the research but participants, including myself, may choose to be anonymous or use their real names.**
- **I understand that the learning stories may be reproduced in their current form including photos and names. Should participants choose to be anonymous, all names would be altered and photos blanked out if learning stories are reproduced in full or as extracts.**

I give permission for:

- **My responses to the questionnaire to be used for the purpose of this research, including in the thesis and any related publications or presentations.**
- **Three learning stories I have chosen for one child to be included for the purpose of this research, including in the thesis and any related publications or presentations.**

I would like (Please cross out one):

1. **For my name and/or photos to be used in the research**
2. **OR for my name to be anonymous and photos redacted**

Please use this pseudonym instead of my name: _____

Teacher Name:
Signature: ..... Date: .....

Email Address: .....

University ethics approval number: FEDU086/20

Appendix 5: Electronic Questionnaire for teacher co-inquirers at the Greerton Early Learning Centre community of practice.

Please attach a copy of the learning stories you have chosen and use the title of the learning story to differentiate each when answering the subsequent questions. These may be learning stories you have written or those written by your colleagues.

Child's name or pseudonym:
Please provide some background information about this child, including the length of time he/ she attended Greerton Early Learning Centre and your role? For example: Were you the child's key teacher?

For each of the 3 learning stories you have selected:

1. Please comment on the dispositions, knowledge and skills focussed on in each learning story.

Considering the three learning stories together:

3. Please comment on the way you think these learning stories track and stretch this child's learning.

4. Please comment on the way these learning stories reveal continuity of learning over time.

5. What do you think the effect of writing learning stories had for this child's identity formation? Please share examples of the impact on this child's learning identity.

6. What do you think the sharing of these learning stories with your colleagues had on the culture of learning and teaching at Greerton Early Learning Centre?

University ethics approval number: FEDU086/20

Appendix 6: Letter of invitation for Families

Dear

I am interested to understand more about the impact of learning stories on families' views about what valued learning looks like for their child and the impact on children's views of themselves as learners. I am currently gathering information for a thesis towards my Masters of Education at Waikato University. This study uses teachers', families' and children's perspectives on the impact of learning stories in learning identity formation. This is about the way we see ourselves as learners.

For example: Do we generally respond to new situations with curiosity? Do we keep persevering when we are working on something difficult? Do we find creative ways to solve our problems? A teacher at Greerton Early Learning Centre has chosen three learning stories written for your child over time, and I am interested to understand your perspective and your child's views too. These stories talked about:

- how children responded to the people, places and things around them
- the things they loved to do,
- the ways they stretched their learning,
- their struggles and strategies to reach the goals they set themselves,
- their feelings about accomplishing goals they set for themselves.

The stories are attached to enable you to re-familiarise yourself after this extended time.

I have included the research questions below to offer the wider context for my study.

How do learning stories, in one early learning setting, affect their children's learning identities?

Sub-questions:

- **What impact do the learning stories have on children's views of themselves as learners?**
- **What impact do the learning stories have on the families' views of their children as learners?**
- **What impact do the learning stories have on the culture of learning and teaching in this community of practice comprising children, families and teachers?**

I am asking you to:

- Consent to me using your child's learning stories in my research
- Consent to your child (if they are old enough and consent to participate themselves)
- Completing a questionnaire about how they feel about their learning stories
- Complete a questionnaire yourself about the learning stories and their impact on your child

Participation in this study is completely voluntary.

You may choose to be anonymous and if so, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym. If you choose anonymity, all reference in the research findings to you or your child, will only use the pseudonym and all photos will be blanked out. If you choose to use your name and/or your child's name and photos, I want to assure you that these will be treated with the utmost respect and described in positive ways, just as the learning stories written for your child have focused on what your child could do and their plans to stretch this learning further.

If any disputes or concerns arise, I invite you to discuss these with me directly, and if things are not able to be resolved between us, I invite you to contact my supervisor on the email address at the end of this letter.

The questionnaires are attached. Depending on your child's age/literacy you might write down their words or if you think it is easier to do an audio/video recording and send this, please feel free to do so. Whatever way you choose to complete your child's questionnaire, the important aspect is to capture their words as I am very interested to hear what they think.

I am happy to assist in any way I can.

Sincerely,

Lorraine Sands

Thesis Supervisor:
Katrina McChesney

University ethics approval number: FEDU086/20

Appendix 7: FAMILY Consent Form

I seek permission to include three learning stories from your child's learning portfolio and your completed questionnaire.

Parent Name: .....

Child's Name: .....

- **I understand that participation in this thesis research is completely voluntary**
- **I understand that I may withdraw up until the questionnaire is received**
- **I understand this thesis research will be published**
- **I agree to complete the attached questionnaire**
- **I understand that Greerton Early Learning Centre will be identified in the research**
- **I understand that I may choose my name and my child's name to be anonymous in the research findings**
- **I understand that the learning stories written for my child may be reproduced in their current form including photos and names. However, if I choose to be anonymous, only the pseudonym would be used and photos would be blanked out**

I give permission for:

- **The 3 Learning Stories to be used for the purpose of this research, including in the thesis and any related publications or presentations**
- **My comments in the family questionnaire to be used for the purpose of this research, including in the thesis and any related publications or presentations.**
- **My child's comments in the child questionnaire to be used for the purpose of this research, including in the thesis and any related publications or presentations**

Cross out one of the following

For my name/child's name to be used in the research

For my name and my child's name to be anonymous. Please use this pseudonym for my child..... And this pseudonym for myself.....

Parent Signature: ..... Date: .....

Email Address: .....

University ethics approval number: FEDU086/20

Appendix 8: Electronic Questionnaire for Families

A teacher at Greerton Early Learning Centre has selected three learning stories from your child's learning portfolio. These are attached to give you an opportunity to re-read them.

1. **Looking back, what impact do you think these learning stories had on your view of your child as a learner?**
2. **Looking back, what impact do you think these learning stories had on your child's view of themselves as a learner at the time they were written? Can you recall some examples?**
3. **Can you please offer some context about your child as a learner beyond his/her time at Greerton Early Learning Centre? For example: How did your child experience school, sports, the arts?**
4. **In your view how would you describe the impact of learning stories on your child's perspective of her/himself as a learner since leaving Greerton Early Learning Centre?**
5. **What was the role of your child's learning portfolio while they were at Greerton? Have they engaged with their portfolio since leaving Greerton Early Learning Centre?**

University ethics approval number: FEDU086/20

Appendix 9: Letter of invitation from children (please note, depending on the age and literacy ability this may need to be read and explained to the child)

Dear
When you were at Greerton Early Learning Centre, the teachers wrote stories about your learning. I am a learner too and I am gathering ideas about what children think of their stories. I want to write a larger story about this and I would like to know what you think. I hope you will answer some questions. You can do this by talking about them into a phone that will record your voice and/or writing down your thoughts. I have sent you three of your stories for you to look at again.

I'm wondering about things like: What did you love to play when you were at Greerton Early Learning Centre? How did you feel about your folder? Did you take it home when you were at the centre? Have you looked at it since? What kinds of things do you like to do now? What do you think of yourself as a learner?

I want to thank you very much for your willingness to answer these questions. Lorraine

University ethics approval number: FEDU086/20

Appendix 10: CHILD Consent Form

I ask to use three learning stories from your learning portfolio and your thoughts using a voice recording and/or your writing about your play and learning.

Parent Name: .....

Child's Name: .....

- **I know that joining this learning is my choice.**
- **I know that I may decide to change my mind up until I send you my voice recording or my written answers.**
- **I know other people will be able to read the stories about me.**
- **I agree to tell you my thoughts about my learning.**
- **I know that other people will know that these stories are from Greerton Early Learning Centre.**
- **I know that I may choose to use my name or a different one so people won't know who I am.**

I will let you use:

- **The 3 Learning Stories from my portfolio to tell a bigger story about the learning and play at Greerton Early Learning Centre**
- **My ideas about my learning to tell a bigger story about the play and learning at Greerton Early Learning Centre**

Please cross out one of the following

Use my name in the stories.

Do not use my name in the stories. Use this name .....

Child Signature: ..... Date: .....

University ethics approval number: FEDU086/20

Appendix 11: Questionnaire for Children child to complete if appropriate.

Depending on your child's age/literacy you might write down their words or if you think it is easier to do an audio/video recording and send this, please feel free to do so.

1. When you were at Greerton Early Learning Centre your teachers wrote stories about your learning.

- **Looking back, what did you think of the stories in your folder?**
- **How did you feel about the ways these stories described your learning?**
- **How would you describe yourself as a learner now?**

University ethics approval number: FEDU086/20

Appendix 12: Ethical Approval

Te Wānanga Toi Tangata
Division of Education
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton,
New Zealand, 3240

Division of Education Research
Ethics Committee (DEREC)
fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz
www.waikato.ac.nz

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

17/12/2020

Dear Lorraine Sands

Division of Education Research Ethics Committee Application Approved
FEDU086/20

I am pleased to advise you that your ethics application for the project entitled "Learning stories and their relationship to learner identities" was approved by Te Wānanga Toi Tangata Division of Education Research Ethics Committee on December 17th, 2020.

Please be aware that the Te Wānanga Toi Tangata Division of Education Research Ethics Committee must be advised (by memo) of any changes to the details recorded in your ethics application. Please send any such advice to fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz. You will receive a memo of approval once the change(s) has been considered.

Kind regards

Co-chairs
Te Wānanga Toi Tangata Division of Education Research Ethics Committee (DEREC)

Appendix 13: 2 Examples of the contextual learning stories

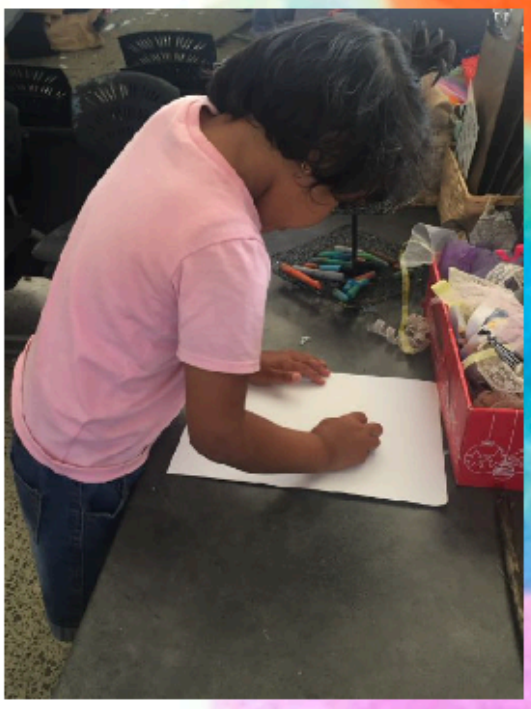
Rainbow hands and seven feet.

Sambridhi has so many fabulous ideas to express.

Sambridhi, the artist. So many times I have watched Sambridhi work and been in awe of her creativity and imagination. Lately, I have been enjoying the stories that are growing from these artworks, showing us what fun Sambridhi is having with expressing her ideas.

One quiet afternoon, Sambridhi declared, "I am going to draw you, Tanya!" This is always an honour, and as I admired her drawing, Sambridhi laughed and pointed at the drawing. "Seven feet! You have seven feet!" We laughed as I imagined trying to walk with seven feet! The precious drawing was then decorated with letters, and tucked into her bag to keep safe. Sadly it got ripped, and feeling disappointed, Sambridhi screwed it up for the recycling. How to deal with such disappointment? Make another one of course!

As Sambridhi drew, I asked her who she was drawing this time? "I don't know, maybe me!", she replied with a huge smile. What she did know for certain though was the important details. "I'm going to make a rainbow hand." This drawing took a long time to make as each part of the person was carefully coloured in, and then rainbow feet were added too. How wonderful to be endowed with such beautiful ideas that can be shared to make the joy in them spread to others.



My thoughts on Sambridhi's learning.

Sambridhi's days here are filled with joy and laughter as she plays and plays with friends. These games are always full of stories as the rituals of being babies, horses and doctors are acted out. Now some of the stories are coming out through Sambridhi's artworks. Art is a way of expressing thoughts, ideas and feelings and can tell a story through the emotions it evokes. Sambridhi's drawings are full of joy and reflect her imagination. Of course she knows that people don't actually have seven feet, but what a great story this person would have to tell about their life, or life with rainbow hands.

How could this learning continue to grow for Sambridhi?
I know that Sambridhi loves to create beautiful works of art, and so I am certain that there will be more fabulous drawings to come. I would love to hear more about the stories in her drawings, and write them down for Sambridhi to read again. I will make sure that I ask her next time she is drawing if there is a story about her picture.
Arohanui, Tanya
January 2021

Tessa takes a calculated risk

Puketoke Reserve is one of our favourite places to explore in the community. The river running through the heart of the bush, the birds and native trees are constantly providing us with opportunities to discover something new about ourselves and our connection with nature. Today, while walking the long loop we discovered an old rimu tree crashed across a bank to resemble a bridge. Interestingly, a few meters up, an actual man made bridge connects each side of the bank as part of the loop track. So I invited my friends to choose the bridge they wished to cross. So, who should line up ready to give this a go? None other than Tessa. Check out these photos dear whānau. They are the proof that Tessa is really learning how to control her feelings of uncertainty and conquer her fear when coming across new and unpredictable provocations.

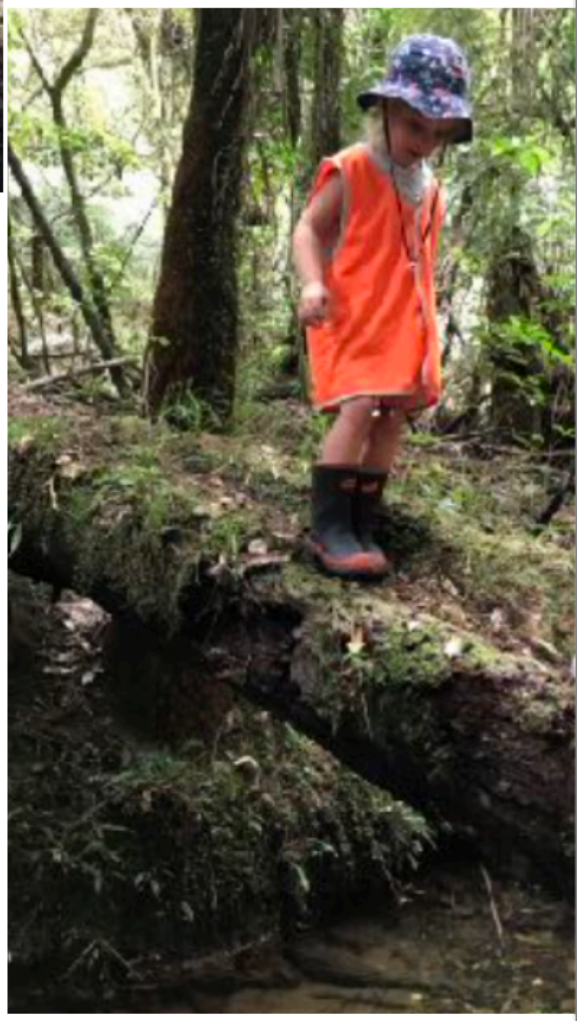
Unpacking the learning for Tessa

Since becoming a farm girl, Tessa has been on an incredible journey of learning about herself, her physiscal, spiritual and emotional abilities. She has worked so hard to build her

One of the most wonderful things about our farm group is its fabulous ability to inspire each other to strive for more, to encourage and nurture, to push boundaries, empower and give each other emotional comfort and support. This is how we are able to exercise courage and dare for unconceivable things. However, we do this with safety in mind, assessing hazards and risks together. Tessa knows this and I am sure it won't be long before another challenge presents itself. When that happens, we will invite Tessa to continue building herself up, documenting her journey to highlight her emotional, physical growth for there is no finishing line to learning.

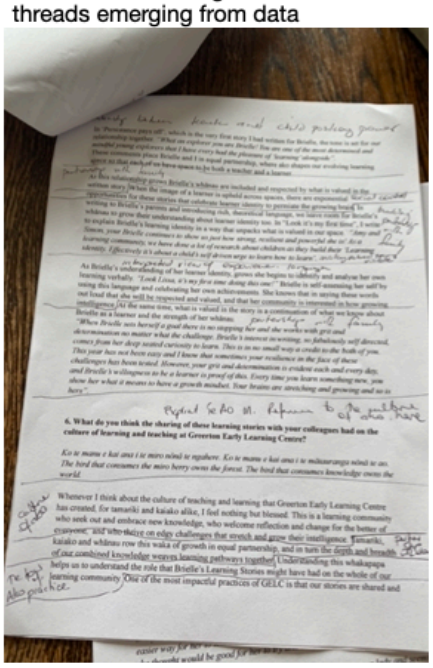
Cu afectiune/Arohanui, Cat

resilience and strength, to embrace different opportunities found in nature, to give things a go and grow her bravery. This is nothing short of extraordinary to see Tessa attempting something tricky, risky and requiring a great deal of composure and self control. In the past, she has been comfortable watching others in such situations, content to celebrate their achievements from the sidelines. But today marked a completely different approach with Tessa in full concentration mode, eager and willing to experience something new and engage her courage more than ever before. Wow, wow, wow!

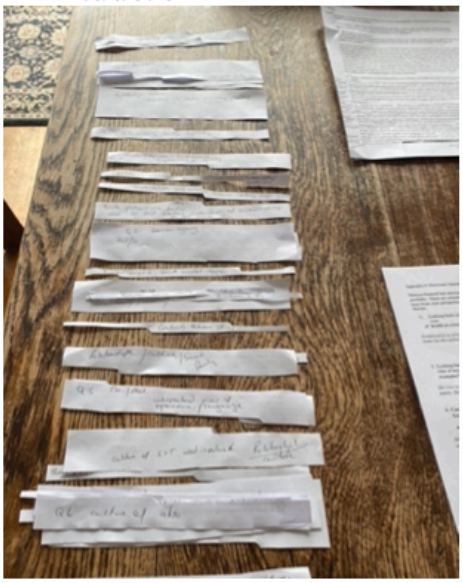


Appendix 14: Examples of narrative analysis: Searching for narrative threads

Initial reflexive thoughts on narrative threads emerging from data



Physical gathering of narrative threads within data sets



Examples of linking narrative threads across data sets

Narrative thread

Culture of ako sociability

So it became vital for me, to learn more about Reece, his family, their culture and how I could help connect these two worlds for him.

Reece's learning stories created a bridge between home and the centre.

Through stories such as this, the view that is reflected back to Reece, is that his his ideas are valued as they have been recognised by the larger community.

For me, these responses were learning stories. "What we've been shown is that once again , children take the world around them and shape it in different ways to what we would expect. More than mud Reece has valued who he shared jumping in it with. As well as the rough and tumble, he conveys repect for the quieter times in the"onion tent." Over and over again he shows us all that he has reflected and internalized from te ngahere."

He went to primary school already having made friends with some of the children who would be attending with him.

They reflect how we connect to the world and others.

I have taken learning stories out of early child hood education and written a story for my son's high school teacher. I remember him ringing me to say how powerful it was, for him to see this written down.

Social context/identity

When Reece visits he stands back for a while, slightly off balance, still the observer but our shared stories reconnect into this moment and space, and when he feels comfortable his fun personality sparkles through his conversations.

This place of pondering stretches his brain muscle as he makes inferences and connections.

His learning has grown out of being an active member within the social context of Greerton, and these are the things that enhance his ability to understand who he is as a learner, and a citizen of the world, and how he participates within his social world.

Interpreted view of experience

This enhanced and enriched your learning in so many ways. I watched her emotional intelligence flourishing as she stretched her learning physically and creatively in her time with us. In these Learning stories I have chosen they show how her whakamanawa/self belief was fluidly flourishing as she pushed boundaries and broadened her thinking about what she could achieve if she truly set her mind to it.

My collection of learning stories highlight one aspect of Maia's learning journey, one that is vital to growing her learner identity but not seperate from all other parts of her identity as a learner. In Te Ao Māori, the whāriki includes four dimensions of human development: tinana, hinengaro, wairua and whatumanawa. However, for this purpose to show the continuity of learning I have chosen one aspect to highlight Maia's perseverance and determination as a learner. Each learning story weaves a narrative about Maia as an empowered learner.

In her last story I wrote I said "*Making these connections allows your written and people literacy evolve at a pace that is relevant to your own ideas and experiences. A person I love to read, Brené Brown, has said: "Connection is why we're here; it gives purpose and meaning to our lives".*

Learning stretched / Continuity over time and across stories

These learning stories capture moments, that weave a story that Maia can reflect on now and in the future as she can reference her time with us at Greerton in the future and see how her Kaiako captured these in a way that celebrated her immense potential as she grew her learner identity further.

In conclusion, I think the effect of writing learning stories had for Maia's identity formation strengthened her sense of belonging where many learning stories capture who she was as a cherished mokopuna grounded in the blueprint of her ancestors.

Bi-Cultural Te Whāriki

Her older sister Peyton and cousin Hakeke also featured strongly in Maia's identity of who she is as a mokopuna, grounded in the wisdom of her tipuna and nurtured through her whakapapa.

Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi engarria he toa takitini. I come not with my own strengths but bring with me the gifts, talents and strengths of my family, tribe, ancestors (2) *This whakatauki embodies just how empowered Maia was today as she shared her most precious gift with us all.*

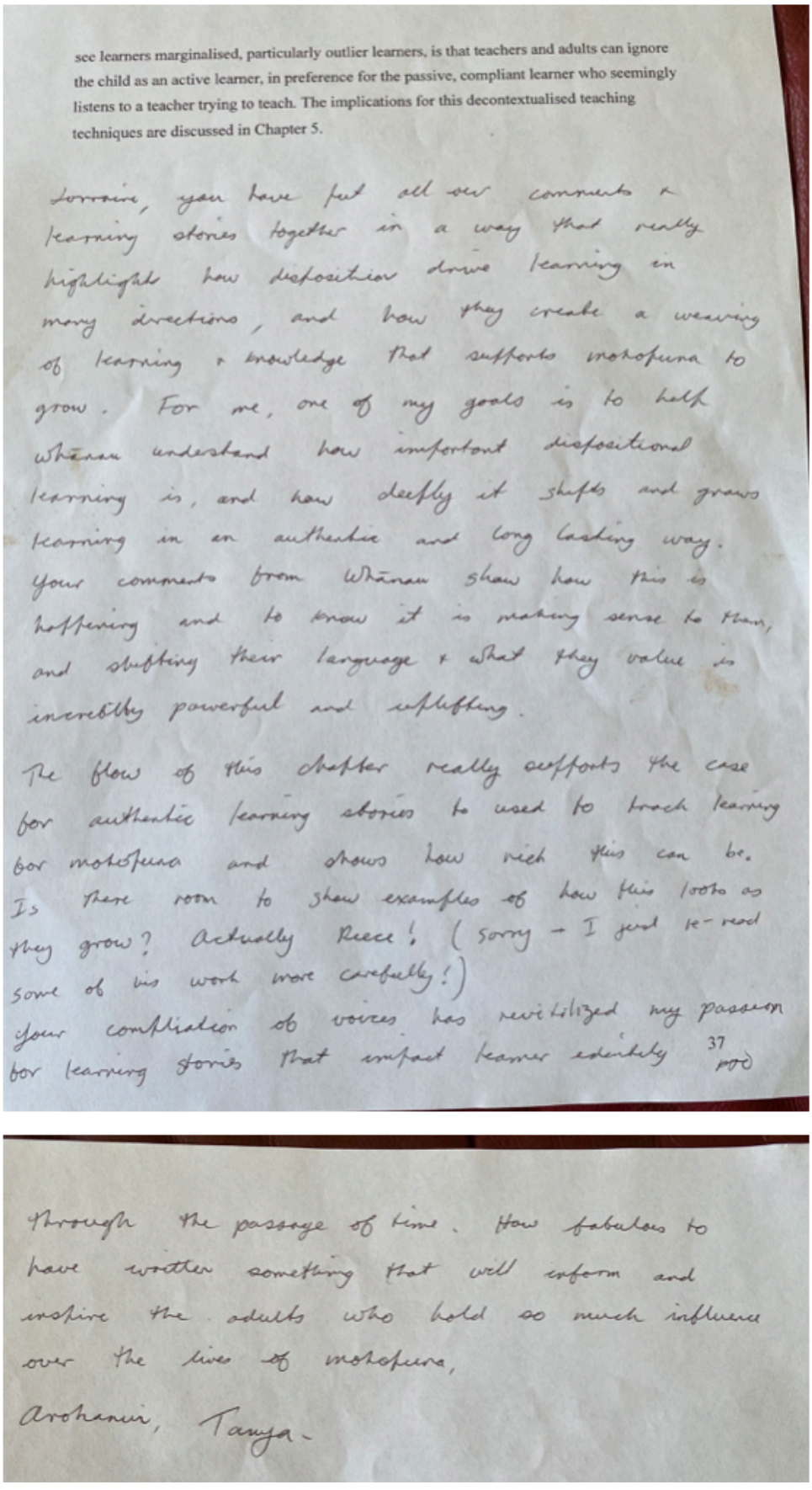
Lesley Rameka reminds us that ensuring spiritual harmony or balance is a critical aspect of the child's holistic wellbeing and development. My own thoughts on the learning in this moment

Her past and present experience connected her ideas and grew her mana, where she was ready, willing and able to give anything a go. Just like in my Learning story ***Aroha*** I shared my perspective on Maia's learning. I said that *I believe this connection she shared with us all everyday, was woven around her mana, her whakapapa. This is an innate part of who she is, a precious taonga. I could see Maia flourish when she felt aroha from those around you and in turn she shared aroha with us all. This connection was expressed in her learning in ways that gave her meaning and a purpose.*

In my LS I write to Maia *I believe this connection you share with us all everyday, is woven around your mana, your whakapapa. This is an innate part of who you are, a precious taonga. I can see you flourish when you feel aroha from those around you and in turn you share aroha. This highlights your learning in ways that give you meaning and a purpose that enhances and enriches your learning...as you follow your creative urges and risk taking adventures, we all see your whakamanawa/self belief growing.*

As Catalina beautifully portrayed this notion in her story "*When we empower our children to learn and view them as already capable and competent learners, we genuinely fulfil their potential.....they (Maia's Whanau) know their beloved mokopuna came into this world full of potential and complete, "adorned with her own mana, mauri and wairua." (Te Whatu Pōkeka). The Greerton Kaupapa Whānau is so very privileged to carry out these aspirations and Te Ao Māori view for Maia, working in close partnership to enhance and nurture Maia's sense of being, learning and doing.*

Appendix 15: Example of kaiako feedback contributing to a sense of resonance



see learners marginalised, particularly outlier learners, is that teachers and adults can ignore the child as an active learner, in preference for the passive, compliant learner who seemingly listens to a teacher trying to teach. The implications for this decontextualised teaching techniques are discussed in Chapter 5.

Lorraine, you have put all our comments + learning stories together in a way that really highlight how dispositions drive learning in many directions, and how they create a weaving of learning + knowledge that supports mokopuna to grow. For me, one of my goals is to help whānau understand how important dispositional learning is, and how deeply it shifts and grows learning in an authentic and long lasting way. Your comments from Whānau show how this is happening and to know it is making sense to them, and shifting their language + what they value is incredibly powerful and uplifting.

The flow of this chapter really supports the case for authentic learning stories to used to track learning for mokopuna and shows how rich this can be. Is there room to show examples of how this looks as they grow? Actually Reece! (sorry - I just re-read some of his work more carefully!)

Your compilation of voices has revitalized my passion for learning stories that impact learner identity 37 pod

through the passage of time. How fabulous to have written something that will inform and inspire the adults who hold so much influence over the lives of mokopuna,

Arohanui, Tanya.