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Students' Experience of Decision-making at School

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Abstract: Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (*UNCRC*) sets out children's right to be heard and have their views given due consideration in matters that affect them. This article reports on a qualitative research study undertaken in Aotearoa New Zealand to explore the experiences

of ten Year 9 and 10 students (13 and 14-year-olds) from two New Zealand secondary schools. The research explored how these young people perceive and experience their ability to have a say in their everyday school life. Semistructured interviews focused on the students' lived experiences of being able to influence their learning and lives within their school environments. The results of this research show that these students recognised and appreciated the opportunities they were offered by teachers and schools to direct their learning in terms of optional subjects, activities within class, and extra-curricular activities. In addition, when issues relating to privacy and having sufficient information to reach an informed opinion were overcome, the students' positive relationships with their teachers enabled a safe responsive environment where opinions could be expressed. However, the results also indicated that the students perceived barriers to their ability to express their opinion at school. Those barriers included a lack of knowledge of how to access decision-making processes and a limited ability to determine the matters about which student voices are sought. These findings are analysed through Lundy's (2007) framework to present students' perceptions of the effectiveness of spaces created by the schools to facilitate student voice and influence. This research concludes that teachers could more intentionally and effectively create space to enable students to exercise their rights under Article 12 of the UNCRC.

Keywords: children's rights, decision-making, choice, UNCRC

Introduction

Aotearoa New Zealand ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (*UNCRC*, 1989) in 1993 and recognises the rights of all children. The convention defines a 'child' to be a person up to the age of 18. The aims for children's education under *UNCRC* include developing their potential skills and abilities, and developing respect for human rights (Articles 28 and 29 *UNCRC*, 1989). New Zealand provides for these education-linked rights through the provision of free compulsory education until the age of 16 and as a result, most adolescents spend approximately 30 hours per week on the New Zealand curriculum, and largely at New Zealand secondary schools (Education Act, 1989; Education and Training Act, 2020). Therefore, how schools and teachers enable or hinder students' ability to learn the skills needed to function and contribute to society may have a significant influence on them and on New Zealand's compliance with *UNCRC*.

While schools can initiate structures and curriculums that provide information about children's rights, there may be barriers to those rights being exercised. In New Zealand the Office of the Children's Commissioner (*OCC*) is required to raise public awareness about children's rights, and it accomplishes this in part through raising the awareness and accountability of government agencies in respect of *UNCRC* (Article 42 of *UNCRC*, 1989; Children's Commissioner Act, 2003). In particular, in order to educate children about their rights, teachers must know about those rights and should demonstrate respect

for them by enabling their exercise (Lundy, 2007). Where those rights are not respected, the children are left learning about matters that will only affect their future lives and may become disillusioned with an educational system that provides contradictory information due to the conflict between the messages given and the actions taken (Cook-Sather, 2020; Lundy, 2007). Such disillusionment can lead to children disengaging from learning at school (Mitra, 2018). Supporting the expression of children's voices at school is also good pedagogical practice, if the UNCRC rights are to be effectively implemented (Lundy, 2007). However, creating spaces that support the expression of children's voices may require changes to school policies and practices that restrict those rights, and could entail a change in staff attitudes and a school's culture (Cook-Sather, 2020). For these reasons it is appropriate to consider how young people experience the way in which schools and teachers enable their rights under Article 12.

Background to the study

When children are afforded their rights, a range of associated benefits are identified including levels of respect, gaining a sense of belonging in a place, increasing self-esteem and self-efficacy, refining communication and metacognitive skills, and experiencing autonomy in one's life (Holdsworth, 2000; Percy-Smith, 2010). Further, Lansdown (2011) identified that taking into account children's views can make decision-making processes more robust, improve outcomes due to the additional data, and increase decision-makers'

accountability. Consequently, giving children an opportunity to express their voice can be transformative for them and those living within their environments, if those views are given due weight. Conversely, children experience a number of disadvantages where their participation rights are denied, including that the child's self-belief and wellbeing can diminish (Bishop et al., 2009).

Lundy (2007) proposed a framework for conceptualising Article 12 through the four elements of voice, space, audience and influence (*Lundy's Framework*). For children to meaningfully participate in a matter all four elements of Lundy's Framework need to be satisfied: to have a voice, children need information about the topic and help developing the research and analysis skills needed to form a view; to have space, a space must be created in terms of time, location and subject matter, so children can share their ideas with others in an emotionally and physically safe, and supportive environment; to have an audience is where someone listens and responds to that child's voice; and to have influence requires meaningful participation through the power to potentially change one's own life or environment, whether directly or indirectly.

However participation through exercising the right to be heard is a complex and multifaceted concept (Anderson, Graham & Thomas, 2019). Contextual factors affect how a child's rights are enabled and constrained. For example, a young child's ability to express themselves is limited if only written views are heard. Participation must also be meaningful through the topic being important to the child or the child's role being valuable to the community

(Holdsworth, 2000; Percy-Smith, 2010). In Ireland, Horgan et al. (2017) interviewed 94 children, between 7 and 17 years old, and 34 adults to discover how children participated in their homes, schools and communities. The authors found that both space and audience for children's views were created through trusting relationships. Further, in terms of everyday matters, that study identified that children felt they had more ability to participate at home than at school or within their communities. So, children understand from prior experience that certain environments support or inhibit their participation.

While New Zealand schools are expected to teach within a curriculum framework, Holdsworth (2000) queried to what extent a school's environment teaches beyond that curriculum. Each school's hierarchical structure is supported by rules and practices, so that adults have power over students and students' ability to direct their own learning is limited (Bourke & Loveridge, 2016; Kidman, 2014; Mayes et al., 2019). Similarly, school assessment processes attribute value to some forms of learning over others, and may not recognise some strengths and prior knowledge, which can limit a child's perception of learning and their identity as a learner (Bourke, 2017; Charteris & Smardon, 2019).

Therefore, despite educational theories acknowledging that a child's active engagement and involvement is necessary for learning to occur, the school environment restricts how and when a child has the opportunity to participate in school-based learning, and what is perceived to be valuable to learn.

Despite such restrictions, when students experience some degree of control at school, the influence they have is appreciated (Graham et al., 2018; Horgan et al., 2017). For example, Graham et al. (2018) interviewed 177 students and 32 staff across secondary schools in New South Wales, and their results identified how important students found it to be given choices about their classwork.

Enabling Students' Voices

Research has recently turned from formal initiatives in schools and the community to how children experience their participation rights in their everyday lives (Horgan et al., 2017; Percy-Smith, 2010). Percy-Smith (2010) found that it is through everyday experiences that children are included and participate in groups and communities. Further, Horgan et al. (2017) found that children felt their home environment, rather than school or community environments, provided more opportunities to practice forming and expressing views, and to participate in everyday decisions. Supportive familial relationships were found to provide a context that mirrors the reasons why participatory research projects were found to effectively enable student voice. Consequently, Horgan et al. (2017) provide an example of how supportive relationships can provide an informal way to facilitate participation.

This shift in focus from formal to informal mechanisms mirrors the increased recognition of learning outside the school environment, where that

informal learning (as with informal participation) is often unrecognised beyond the setting in which it occurs, and is unmonitored by external reference points (Bourke et al., 2018a, 2018b; O'Neill et al., 2017). For both informal learning and informal participation mechanisms the relationship between the child and adult provides the space for the learning to occur or the voice to be heard (Horgan et al., 2017). In both instances, it is the ongoing relationship that enables the adult to recognise the child's ability to act autonomously in a particular context, and allows the adult to act so as to respect that child's capability (Berryman et al., 2017; Horgan et al., 2017). Specifically, as a consequence of a child being heard, the child feels included, the child's rights are respected, and the relationship is strengthened (Bishop et al., 2009; Cook-Sather, 2020). These consequences highlight the importance of the adult's perception of the child's capability to act or express a view, as their attitude is determinative of whether the child is respected. Despite research having identified ways student voice could be enabled within the classroom, New Zealand children have indicated they would like more input into their education (Office of the Children's Commissioner, OCC, 2018). Given the importance of affording children a voice in their own education and their desire to have a greater say, this research explores the everyday lived experiences of a selection of Year 9 and 10 students in New Zealand.

Method

The purpose of this research was to explore how ten Year 9 and 10 students at two New Zealand secondary schools experience having their views heard at school.

- i. What does it mean to Year 9 and 10 students to 'have a say' in matters affecting their lives at school?
- ii. How do Year 9 and 10 students consider that they can influence their school life?

Those research questions enable this research to report on how Article 12 rights are experienced by ten Year 9 and 10 students in their everyday school lives based on data gathered through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The research adopted a case study design involving one-on-one semi-structured interviews as the method for data collection. In addition, for Māori and Pasifika cultures, face-to-face interviews are more consistent with their cultural traditions relating to interactions, oral communication preferences, and are reflective of the importance of relationships (Macfarlane et al., 2014).

The semi-structured interview schedule was created to ensure that the research topic would be adequately addressed during a single interview with each student. The questions were designed to gain the students' understanding of the topic in the form of qualitative information, thereby enabling a thick and rich description of the phenomenon to be uncovered. The questions were openended, and enabled the students to use their own words to describe their experiences. A

draft interview schedule was piloted with two other Year 9 students. Following that pilot, the interview schedule was modified to provide additional prompts, and the language was altered to make the questions more understandable for Year 9 and 10 students (i.e., young people around 13–14 years old).

By obtaining informed consent, the students indicated that they willingly provided their data and knew they could stop participating at any time. That knowledge enabled the students to control the information that they were disclosing during the research process. The research was assessed as being of low risk and complied with Massey University's Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants (Massey University, 2017).

The research involved 13–14-year-old young people in Years 9 and 10, and this means both schools' agreement was obtained to access each school and to invite students from their respective schools into the research. The research was explained to a Year 9 class at one school and a Year 10 class at the other school. The students were provided with consent forms and the information sheet. The participating students self-identified as Māori (n=2), Sri Lankan/New Zealand (n=1), Indian (n=1), and New Zealand European (n=6). These Year 9 and 10 students have transitioned from primary to secondary school, and have had their life disrupted during the New Zealand 2020 COVID-19 lockdown (when all schools were closed). In this regard the students could be seen as typical pupils who are establishing relationships with peers and teachers

at their school within an educational environment affected by the pandemic risks that existed in 2020.

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were audio-recorded with the participating students over 4 days and ranged from 20 minutes to an hour in length. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were read through repeatedly to identify the major themes. That iterative, inductive process was undertaken to code and thematically analyse the interview data, with those codes being derived from the data. The iterative process was important as the students used different terms to describe similar concepts, and some students answered questions in different orders and supplemented their initial thoughts later in their interviews. The iterative process allowed similarities to be identified, codes to be simplified, and themes to be streamlined.

Results

Two major themes emerged from the interview data that focused on how students participated in decision-making and their own perceptions of genuine opportunities to do so. Every student identified some opportunities to participate in decisions affecting their school life. For example, the schools' use of optional subjects allowed the students to select some of their areas of learning. However, the findings were less clear about whether these students experienced a genuine ability to identify and address their learning needs and interests in an authentic way within the school environment. For instance, some students chose not to express views as they thought they could not influence the situation, or did not

know with whom or how to discuss the matter. Some students were also fearful of what other people might think of them, and felt the issues raised by the school were not relevant to them. Together the two themes addressed how, why and about what students may want to influence in respect of their school life.

Participating in decision-making

The theme of participating in decision-making included the context of the decision, the ability to influence, and the processes supporting participation. For these students the subject matter or context of the decision affected whether they would take up an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process.

Where a decision affected the student personally and they were provided with a genuine choice, these ten students indicated that they were more likely to engage in the process. For instance, alternatives provided for optional subjects or choices connected to assignments were contexts these students appreciated as opportunities to influence their learning. Sophie, a Year 9 student, decided her optional classes were important enough to her to send her Dean a letter requesting her subjects be changed. Similarly, Bella recognised that choices within classes allowed her to adopt her preferred learning approach, and to deepen her understanding as she wished.

It's that you can choose to work by yourself if you want to. Because I know I have worked with people who weren't really that enthusiastic about it, and I was getting right into it because I really enjoyed learning about whatever it was. But they didn't want to do as much. So, it is cool that you

can choose to work by yourself about something you want to learn about and not be held back I guess. (Bella, Year 10)

Likewise, while recognising he had no ability to influence the curriculum content, Carter, a Year 10 student, thought he could alter how that content was delivered by choosing between the alternative teaching formats offered by the school administration. However, where the student is uninterested in the context a chance to influence what happens will not be meaningful to the student, and may result in them not expressing their views. For example, offering a student uninterested in sport a chance to select the game is irrelevant, even though a sport-loving classmate may find that choice engaging and motivating. Ben, a Year 10 student, highlighted his appreciation of the genuine choices provided by teachers or the school as they gave him some control over his school experiences, rather than his school life being regulated by school rules and the curriculum.

The likelihood of altering the outcome is another factor that six students identified as influencing whether to participate in the decision-making process. For instance, although feeling disgruntled about hair rules, one student chose not to send the email he had drafted to his principal. His decision in part related to his assessment that “it was kind of a pointless topic 'cause he [the principal] would tell me to cut my hair or something” (Parker, Year 9). Whereas two other students felt more confident participating when the context affected the school environment as experienced by students, rather than contexts that had a

potentially significant impact on the whole school community. These two students identified that such significant topics were matters they did not want to get involved with as the likelihood of their views altering the outcome was minimal:

I wouldn't say how it's run, because it is not exactly kind of our say.

There's a lot more politics in how the school is run. Just small things like someone wants a table here or whatever, things that make the school more enjoyable for a student. (Carter, Year 10)

Students expressed disappointment that their opinions were not given due weight or due regard when their selection of subjects were overridden by school operational constraints; surveys were undertaken, but no changes resulted nor feedback given; or their opinions appeared to be brushed aside when no reasons are given for a decision.

My group class is right behind that building, it is just going to be a new learning centre. Well it is going to be a little inconvenient. To be honest like no [we cannot change the situation], there's like 1100 kids in the school and it's like the campus is as small as it can be. And it is like tough luck, they did try to keep like each class in one group, English classrooms there, social studies in another corridor, but you like do end up having classes in other places - like I have a social studies class in a science room. (Ben, Year 10)

These students did not identify any ways they could influence the timetable and physical space constraints imposed by the school, rather these constraints had to

be worked within, as demonstrated by Sophie changing her optional subjects. Similarly, these students expressed a limited desire to change what was being taught, other than one student wanting more language options and another student wanting less direct instruction style teaching. From this research it is difficult to say whether this apparent acceptance of the school environment comes from not having considered the matter before, a perception of having no ability to influence it, or a lack of interest on the part of these students.

This limited ability to influence how, when and what is learnt at school can be contrasted with the students' experience of online learning during the COVID19 Lockdown. These students recognised that during the COVID-19 Lockdown they had controlled their learning through choosing what, how and when to study. For example, one student chose to engage with school work in the morning, forgot to attend some classes, and learnt photography from his father.

It was very nice I got to wake up 2 hours later, which was very helpful. So I would wake up and just make breakfast and get like a hot chocolate. After I had finished that I would just like come into my room and get ready, and then do the classes, and if we had a meeting well I tried to write to when my meeting was and then I just forgot about it. I tried photography, it was really cool. I learnt a whole lot of things about the camera and how it works. I finished in like 3 hours, 'cause with the home learning you weren't blocked by anything, you could do whatever you want, whenever you want, how fast you want it. So like it's the exact same as like walking into class finishing all your work and then leaving 30 minutes earlier. (Parker,

Year 9)

Being unable to identify to whom and how to communicate about a matter was identified by six students as inhibiting their ability to participate in decisionmaking processes. Using a petition is an example of how some students attempted to participate without knowing specifically who they want to hear their opinions, how to gain access to that person, or being able to address the concerns that underpin the proposed change due to a lack of background information. In contrast, two other students outlined how not knowing the identity of the relevant audience and the appropriate manner in which to communicate to that audience results in students being unable to access the decision-making process. Where that decision-making process is perceived to be inaccessible, the student is rendered unable to participate in that process.

I feel like they [the student councillors] do kind of make themselves known. But you are still not sure how to approach them - would you do it during lunchtime and interval, where you find them, what can you say to them, how can you give them the full aspect of your ideas. 'Cause some people are just too shy to talk to like the big cheese prefects and stuff, and the student committee, they don't want to talk to them but they want their ideas heard. It's something about not knowing the teachers like if you know the teachers - you know they will probably listen to you. Like yeah [the more you know them] the easier it is to talk to them absolutely. (Bella, Year 10)

Students' Perception of a Genuine Opportunity

A student's perception of whether an opportunity or choice is genuine influences that student's assessment of their ability to effectively influence the decision. To perceive a genuine opportunity the student must identify that opportunity and decide to act upon it. Further, that perception is affected by the student's prior experiences and environmental factors.

The first step to participating is identifying that an opportunity to participate exists. From the interviews a student's perception of opportunities arising in the school environment appear to be proportional to their level of involvement in school life. For instance, one student, Carter, was a Year 10 Junior Leader, member of the student council, band member, and played in school sports teams. He recognised these roles afforded him opportunities to have a say simply through being involved in many groups at school. Similarly, Max, another Year 10 student, was a Class Ambassador representing his class in a schoolwide group and had participated in a student-organised anti-bullying forum. He wished other students would take up the opportunities provided to influence how the school operates and the school environment.

As [Class Ambassador] you say the idea, bring it to your tutor class - they think it is terrible or something like that, or its just your class doesn't listen they want to talk about the next game of Fortnite. [It would] just be nice if people listen for like two minutes 'cause it is on our school - it is important to our school, you can worry about home stuff at home, this is school.

(Max, Year 10)

The students recognised that choices offered in class by teachers enabled them to partially control their own learning. These choices included how the teaching was delivered, such as digital classes; and how projects are undertaken, such as group or individual work, or selecting the topic for speeches or assignments. Such choices were appreciated by the students as they could adapt their learning to topics that drew on their strengths, skills and interests. In addition, the school system offered optional subjects providing a way for students to connect their school-based learning with their personal interests and future career aspirations. The importance of such system level choices was identified by two students whose selection had not been honoured by their schools. For David, this affected his impression of the school's genuineness in giving the students' choices and lowered his expectation of doing his chosen optional subjects the following year. Conversely, Sophie described how she changed her optional subjects to something that interested her within the options available according to the timetable. Similarly, extracurricular activities provided the students with opportunities to connect their school life with their interests. Many extracurricular activities were offered to students through their school's clubs and

other groups, including sports, shows, chess, debating, choirs, kapa haka, and representatives on the School Board or Home and School Committee. Students reported a greater degree of control and influence over their school lives when talking about their optional subjects, within class choices and extra-curricular activities that are allowed within the parameters established by the school.

Even where an opportunity exists, a young person must still choose to take up that opportunity. To be able to take up the opportunity these students recognised that they needed to be able to communicate their opinions effectively, be aware of who the audience is at a particular point in time, and have the skills to deliver their opinion in an appropriate way. Five students were reluctant to express opinions to teachers in front of other students. They preferred using emails or one-to-one informal conversations outside of class time. Further, they preferred to speak to teachers with whom they had an established relationship, as they knew those teachers would listen. In addition, one student noted that being polite and respectful increased the likelihood of being heard.

Two students recognised that their lack of knowledge about how and to whom opinions could be given prevented their participation in decision-making processes. Knowing the appropriate process can therefore enable participation in terms of making the decision-making process more transparent and by enabling students to take up the opportunity to communicate their views. The relevance and importance of the particular subject matter to that student also affects whether a student will choose to take up an opportunity. For example, one

student spoke out about the unfairness of a proposed rule change at a meeting. In doing so that student had identified and chosen to act upon an opportunity to communicate his views about a matter significant to him. Consequently, the context of the decision helps to motivate students to choose to take up an opportunity.

Further, factors within and unique to each student affect their ability to take up opportunities to participate in decision-making processes and influence their school lives. Along with being sufficiently interested in the subject matter, these factors included shyness, confidence, and a fear of being judged for holding certain views. One student described how she held many opinions, but would not speak out when she knew others in the class held strong views, or where she supported the school's current rule, as she feared that others would think less of her. For this student the fear of being judged was sufficient to prevent her from expressing her opinions, unless they could be expressed anonymously. This notion of controlling who hears your opinion was raised by five students.

Exploring the ability to create space and choice for student voice

With the interconnections of Lundy's framework (voice, space, audience and influence), the idea of space to enable student voice is now discussed in light of the themes arising from this research. Consistent with studies undertaken by Horgan et al. (2017) and Graham et al. (2018), this current research shows that spaces to enable student voice can be created in many ways. Those spaces may

be created by schools or students. A variety of such spaces are considered below in terms of their effectiveness for enabling Article 12 rights.

Seeking input from children is one way to enable children's voices (Mitra, 2006). This research identified that schools use a variety of ways to seek student input in connection with school life. The ways these students identified included having student representative bodies, teachers informally seeking comments on issues from students individually or in class, optional subjects, and extracurricular activities. Each of these ways is a space created by the school or teachers that allow students to modify how they experience the school environment and direct their own learning. Within those spaces the audience needs to listen to students and afford the students the influence intended by those spaces to avoid students disengaging from their learning and diminishing their trust in school systems and teachers.

Further, the themes from this research identified that factors specific to each student helped students identify what matters are meaningful to them and if they are motivated sufficiently to express a view. In considering whether to express a view, students think about where they can make a difference by expressing their views or how their responses will be perceived by others. In addition, the participating students identified only limited spaces for expressing views about the school's operational practices, teaching pedagogy, specific curriculum content or assessment practices, if they wanted to be involved. These spaces included spaces created by students, such as strikes or petitions, or by

questions asked by teachers or the school through surveys or ad hoc questioning. In this way students had limited avenues for expression about such matters, if they wanted to be involved. Consequently, and consistent with the OCC (2018) finding that students had limited input into their learning, this research found that these ten students could only identify a limited range of opportunities for Year 9 and 10 students to 'have a say' about their learning.

In contrast, this research identified many opportunities for students to alter what they did outside of class time through the wide variety of available extracurricular activities. However, even those activities are constrained by the school rules and timetable, including the COVID-19 health-related restrictions. This research highlights how secondary schools can create spaces that enable students to alter their school environment to align with their personal interests, career aspirations and learning preferences. Those spaces may be created through offering optional subjects, choices within classes, or extra-curricular activities. Consistent with the findings of Horgan et al. (2017) and Graham et al. (2018), this research found that students appreciated choices that allowed them to direct their school life and learning.

However, like agendas being established by teachers for student councils, these school-created spaces identify matters that *adults* think interest students (Cook-Sather, 2020; Graham et al., 2018; Holdsworth, 2000). Further, it is not clear from this current research the extent to which such spaces reflect matters that students identify as important. For instance, how are the extra-curricular

activities offered selected, and can students start new activities within the school that address their interests? It is appropriate to consider such questions when creating spaces for student voice within the school environment to increase the likelihood of a space being used by students.

In addition, this research demonstrated how students are affected when teachers or school leaders do not honour their commitment to let students influence their learning. In that situation the student must choose between holding the school accountable for its promises by speaking out, or accepting the school's rejection of that student's preferences. If students do not speak out, this research identified that students' expectations of being treated respectfully in the future are lowered and their trust in the school systems diminish. Thus, this research reflected some of the disadvantages that arise when rights are not respected (Cook-Sather, 2020; Quinn & Owen, 2016). Based on this current research, the choice to speak up is affected by the importance of the matter to the student, and the student's perception that the space offers a genuine opportunity for the student's view to be given due consideration. This demonstrates how the elements of Lundy's Framework must work together to effectively enable Article 12 rights.

Opportunities arising from the COVID-19 lockdown

The COVID-19 Lockdown enabled these students to experience the flexibility offered by online learning. That flexibility gave them an opportunity to develop and refine organisational and time management skills, and accept more

responsibility for their learning. These students recognised they had lost this flexibility and control since returning to school. By being able to contrast their two school-related experiences, these students gained new insights into how they learn and how to influence their school lives. For instance, students identified spaces they had not chosen to use or did not appreciate previously, such as seeking help through emails or being able to communicate immediately when confused in class. In addition, some limitations arising from school systems and practices or teaching practices previously unnoticed were identified as barriers to 'having a say', particularly concerning identifying the relevant audience, and how classroom practices can limit opportunities to direct one's own learning. These insights varied between students depending on their personal experiences during the COVID-19 Lockdown, including their home situation, the responsiveness of teachers within the online learning environment, and the student's level of selfmotivation.

The development of self organisation and time management capabilities are examples of students' informal learning during the COVID-19 Lockdown. Such capabilities, similar to those identified by Bourke et al. (2018a, 2018b), need to be taken into account by teachers when determining the knowledge and skills a child brings to the school's learning environment. Such recognition would demonstrate respect for the students and raise teachers' expectations of their students' abilities consistent with the concepts of manaakitanga (compassion) and mana motuhake (self-determination) under the effective teacher profile (Berryman et al., 2017; Bishop et al., 2009). It would also be consistent with

implementing an approach aligned with the principles of ako (interconnectedness of teaching and learning), where the teaching and learning roles are modified to take into account the learner's prior knowledge and skills. Consequently, the informal learning that occurred for these students during the COVID-19 Lockdown illustrates why it is important for teachers and schools to regularly reassess their beliefs and assumptions about students' capabilities. Such a reassessment would ensure that they are appropriately giving due weight to students' views and have appropriately taken account of their existing abilities in connection with their learning. Consistent with the findings of Horgan et al. (2017) and Graham et al. (2018), such a reassessment is consistent with removing barriers to student participation created by adults' attitudes and beliefs about those students' maturity and abilities.

Enabling student voice

The students in this research identified few opportunities to direct their own learning, as teachers were perceived to control learning in the classroom. At the same time, consistent with Graham et al.'s (2018) findings, these students did appreciate the limited choices provided by teachers and the school administration as they had some ability to align their learning with their own interests and career aspirations.

However, this research showed how New Zealand secondary schools could enable students' voices to be heard more effectively. To effectively enable Article 12 rights, students must be provided with opportunities to express their

opinions, perceive the opportunities as safe spaces in which to express their views, and find the matters on which opinions are sought relevant and meaningful. For example, a caring, responsive teacher-student relationship may be a safe space for students to share their opinions. This finding expands on the value and importance of the teacher-student relationship highlighted by the effective teaching profile (Berryman et al., 2017; Bishop et al., 2009; Macfarlane et al., 2014). In addition, schools could use surveys or a suggestions box to create a safe space for the expression of opinions to address students' need for privacy and fear of being judged by those listening. Further, this research highlighted that there were reasons (sometimes subtle) why students do not identify, or use, spaces created for student voice within the school environment. Those reasons included the students finding the matter raised within a particular space to be irrelevant to them, or thinking they cannot influence the outcome through expressing their opinion. As a result, such spaces may not effectively support the exercise of children's rights due to the absence of one or more of the elements of Lundy's Framework. Consequently, this research illustrated how Lundy's Framework can be used as an analytical tool to provide insights into how to create genuine spaces for students to effectively have their voices heard, in accordance with Article 12 of UNCRC.

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