

We All Ascend Together:
**A teacher-oriented exploration into
the affordances and limitations to
developing learner agency in years 4-8
Aotearoa/New Zealand classrooms.**

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Abstract

Educators and researchers agree that developing learner agency is necessary to ensure learners are prepared for a changing future. However, learner agency is not widely embedded across schools. This qualitative study identifies the key affordances and challenges of embedding learner agency from the perspective of six Aotearoa/New Zealand primary school teachers. Through semi-structured interviews and thematising of data, teachers identified what impacted their development of learner agency within their schools. Results revealed that learner agency is both afforded and challenged when stakeholders' (leaders, teachers, learners and whānau) beliefs in learner agency are established and when there is a shared understanding of the practices required to ensure learner agency development. From there, active, powerful and reciprocal partnerships must be established between all stakeholders. Finally, all stakeholders' roles must be positioned where power is shared. The role of leadership was especially highlighted as a key affordance and challenge to developing learner agency. It is through leadership focus and prioritising of time, resources and professional learning that practices supporting learner agency are advanced.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In 2010, education expert, Ken Robinson (2010) published *Changing Educational Paradigms*. Robinson pondered many questions including how do we educate our children to take their place in economies we can't anticipate? Even more relevantly for Aotearoa/New Zealand, how do we educate our children to maintain their cultural identity whilst being part of globalisation? Robinson stated we cannot meet the future by doing what we did in the past. By doing so we are alienating and marginalising millions of children who no longer see a purpose in school. This ignited my personal hope and vision that Aotearoa/New Zealand's education system, specifically primary school education, could evolve to a place where learners participated actively in the design and evaluation of their work, were led by their passions and in which success was more than a grade. Robinson reinforced my belief that a successful education system required a revisioning that shifted its focus from traditional, narrow-focused teacher-led models towards one that is not only successful, but effective. This prospect was exciting and, consequently, my ongoing passion for and belief in learner agency (LA) was established.

Having years of personal experience of teaching at schools in which many learners were identified as priority learners (Education Review Office, 2012), it is clear that, by definition, these learners were failing at school. I believe it is more likely school was failing the learners. My experience is that all learners succeed when they have input over the content of their learning, opportunities to reflect on themselves as learners and the support to plan personal goals and learning pathways. Through this learner input, learning becomes meaningful, motivating and relevant. Learners talk confidently about what they have learned at school with their whānau.¹ Learners help and learn from each other. Learning contexts become areas of ongoing passion explored years beyond primary school.

¹ Those identified as family including immediate and extended members

Unfortunately, twenty years on from Robinson's TED talk, the education system appears to have transformed very little. As social climates evolve, and unacceptable statistics regarding non-succeeding learners rise, the time has come for the education system to adapt to actively foster and prioritise LA as "education has to be about learning to thrive in a transforming world" (Hannon, 2017, p. 12) and LA enables this. To further assist this, Sahlberg (Fidler, 2009-present) stated in a podcast it is necessary to probe the role of education:

More and more people are beginning to understand now that education should be much more than just giving children in school knowledge and skills that they need to get into university and get a good job. Thinking about what education is for is so important.

1.2 Defining learner agency

For a number of reasons, LA is a complex concept. Therefore it is essential to have a clear definition on how it will be used throughout this study.

1.2.1 What is in a name?

A range of descriptors were used to refer to what is termed learner agency (LA). These varied depending on which country and era the literature was written. Examples included personalised learning (Bevan-Brown et al., 2011), future-orientated learning (Bolstad et al., 2012), learner autonomy (Al Asmari, 2013) and new pedagogies for deep learning (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). La Ganza (2008) believed the term LA was problematic because it suggested that LA is only about student self-governance occurring in isolation from external factors. However, LA was selected for the purposes of this study because the OECD (2018) recognised there are a range of people involved in any learning environment, and everyone involved in the learning environment is deemed a learner. As such, the term 'student agency' does not best reflect the learning interconnections that occur within the school setting. Although this research focuses on the affordances and challenges of amplifying the learner role, it recognises everyone will be in the position of being a learner.

1.2.2 Defining learner agency (LA)

Defining LA was complex because it is a concept that has evolved over time and across countries. Although the term is used commonly, its definition varied; “Agency is one of the most ubiquitous constructs in the educational sciences, yet surprisingly ill-defined” (Clarke et al., 2016, p. 3). There are several reasons for this. Agency is connected to different disciplines, including sociological and psychological (Annan, 2016; Clarke et al., 2016), therefore, the lens through which agency is perceived, changes. Additionally, LA was described as existing on a continuum (Annan & Wootton, 2016a; Spencer & Juliani, 2017) with learning portrayed as teacher-directed at one end, learner-directed at the other and co-construction occurring in the middle. This may prompt us to see teacher/learner roles in binaries, such as learners as active or passive; two potentially dysfunctional ends of the teaching continuum. This could be troublesome because it portrays all passivity as negative to learning and being active as always positive (van Lier, 2008), which is not true. However, despite the complexities impacting how LA can be defined, there were four commonalities relevant to this research.

First, a prevalent theme involved the repositioning of learners whereby they exercised greater choice, power, and control over their learning (OECD, 2018; Hill & Thrupp, 2019). Through exerting this control learners helped decide on learning content, their goal focus, who they learned with, where they learned, the purpose of and how they used learning (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Spencer and Juliani (2017) added that LA enhanced the ability of learners to make independent decisions about their learning; LA required shared power and this supported its development.

Secondly, learning is interactive, and relationships influenced learning (Hill & Thrupp, 2019; Klemenčič, 2015; La Ganza, 2008). van Lier (2008) noted that LA does not take place in a void, it is always a social event. Furthermore, these interactions supported connections that enabled others to “collaborate, access, create and share information with others, help others learn and transfer learning skills across environments” (Annan, 2018, p. 3). LA not only enhanced one’s own learning but supported and contributed to the learning of others (Klemenčič, 2015). Partnerships were an integral aspect of LA.

A third theme noted LA changed across time and contexts (such as political, learning, cultural and institutional), was impacted by a learner's prior knowledge (Annan, 2016, 2018; Klemenčič, 2015; van Lier, 2008) and was enacted in different ways depending on the situation (Annan, 2016; Mercer, 2012). LA changed in strength depending on the context and was actively negotiated and enabled under certain conditions; it is dynamic, not a fixed, attribute.

Fourthly, LA was defined as having the will to enact one's agency; agency was something a learner does, rather than being something a learner possesses (van Lier, 2008). It was not enough to have a sense of agency, learners must act on the opportunity to be agentic (Annan, 2016; Clarke et al, 2016). Learners must "make real choices and take action *intentionally and knowingly* [emphasis added]" (Hill & Thrupp, 2019, p. 49). This required learners to develop a range of skills, such as self-efficacy and self-regulation (Chuter, 2019; Klemenčič, 2015), which varied across cultures and contexts and required the support of friends and mentors (Klemencic, 2015), including teachers. Barriers to enacting one's agency must be considered when developing LA, especially because teacher practices can constrain a learner's willingness to act (Prain et al., 2013).

To summarise, LA is underpinned by four key features:

1. Learners are repositioned to have power over their learning, thereby moving from a teacher-directed environment to one with shared, negotiated partnerships;
2. Agency is socially constructed;
3. Agency changes over time, place and context; and
4. Learners must be willing to enact their agency, and this depended on the context and prior knowledge of the learner. Consequently, LA varied under different conditions.

1.3 Research objectives

A teacher, as an ‘agent of change’ (Annan, 2016), has a key role in affording LA. The first steps in redeveloping education is asking the teachers themselves (Niemi et al., 2010), because it is they who determine the extent learners are passive or active in the learning environment (Al Asmari, 2013; Harmandaoglu Baz et al., 2018). Therefore, it is the teachers’ perspectives and actions which are the focus of this study. Despite this, few studies examined the development of LA from teachers’ perspectives (Biesta et al., 2015; Yen Dwee & Anthony, 2017), particularly in the primary context. Furthermore, to date, no studies have been found that examine this from the perspective of Aotearoa/New Zealand primary school teachers. What has been identified, however, is that designing learning, such as programmes supporting LA, will be challenging for educators (Hannon, 2017) owing to a range of ambiguities and because teachers’ understandings of LA are limited (Bevan-Brown et al., 2011; Campbell et al., 2007; Swan, 2017). What is encouraging is that environments are being created by several outstanding educators around the world, reinforcing the realisation that teachers, when supported, develop LA (Hannon, 2017). Additionally, examples from other educators make developing LA easier (Hannon, 2017). What is unclear, however, are the factors supporting and inhibiting this from occurring.

This study is a step towards filling this gap, by identifying the affordances and challenges to developing LA from Aotearoa/New Zealand teachers’ experiences in classrooms in which LA is prioritised. As Vaughn (2014) suggested “examining classrooms where students easily enact a sense of agency may provide additional insight” (p. 13). Once these factors are identified, schools could use them to consider how they could spread and embed, with depth and understanding, LA across their schools and communities.

The research question guiding this study is:

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, what are the affordances and challenges to primary school teachers of learners in years 5-8 in developing learner agency?

The sub-questions are:

1. Why do teachers believe it is important for them to develop LA?
2. What affords/helps teachers to develop LA in their classroom and school?
3. What challenges/hinders teachers from developing LA in their classroom/school?

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature examining LA to explore the emerging themes that support the aim of this study. Themes include: the co-constructed repositioning of stakeholders in LA, bespoke partnerships and understanding stakeholder beliefs, experiences and efficacy about LA. Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical framework and methodology for the research project, including the rationale for interviewing teachers, participant selection, data collection and ethical considerations. The research findings: co-constructed repositioning; bespoke partnerships: moving from relationships to active partnerships; and beliefs, practices and efficacy, are discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents the thematised findings: belief, purpose and benefit; powerful partnerships; and repositioning roles. Finally, Chapter 6 draws key conclusions from the research, identifies the implications and limitations of this study and potential areas for further research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Literature examining LA is extensive and associated with most aspects of teaching and learning across all tiers of education. These include curriculum (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018), feedback (van den Bergh et al., 2013), reflection (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018), assessment (Braund & DeLuca, 2018), instructional approaches (Mayer, 2004) learning environments (Imms et al., 2017), technology (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014), and professional development (Timperley et al., 2007). The diversity of research noted here highlights that developing LA is a complex undertaking. However, what is evident and agreed to, is that for LA to be developed, sustained in-depth and with integrity, three key foundational factors are required: the co-constructed repositioning of stakeholders in LA; bespoke partnerships and understanding beliefs; experiences and efficacy of LA.

Participants in the literature reviewed included learners (Al Asmari, 2013; Campbell et al., 2007), teachers (Husbands & Pearce 2012; OECD, 2013), leadership, (Robinson, 2007), and curriculum (Annan, 2018; Education Review Office, 2015;), whānau (Ayers, 2010; Education Review Office, 2015, 2018), the Ministry of Education (Biesta et al., 2015), pre-service teacher training (Biesta et al., 2015; Harmandaoglu Baz et al., 2018) and collaboration with community experts and businesses (Bolstad et al., 2012).

The inclusion criteria for literature focused on the themes of changing roles, partnerships and beliefs. Moreover, owing to the scope of this research, the frame through which literature has been reviewed was narrowed to ensure it fell within the scope of the research questions (the factors that afforded and challenged the developing of LA in Aotearoa/New Zealand primary schools). Literature was identified applying specific keywords systematically in varied databases (e.g., ERIC, ProQuest, Sage, JYX, Researchgate). The main search terms used were “learner AND agency,” “students AND agency,” “personalisation,” “future-focused learning”, “students AND autonomy”, “learners AND autonomy”, and “student-led learning”.

Also included is literature focusing on currently practicing teachers. Furthermore, literature focusing specifically on teacher voice and perspective was included primarily, and studies conducted in Aotearoa/New Zealand were prioritised. Where this was not possible, a wider scope of perspectives, such as research including leaders or students, were included. Empirical studies from the Middle East (Oman, Saudi Arabia), Europe (Sweden, Austria, Switzerland, Scotland) and North America with participants that included teachers, leaders and primary, secondary and tertiary students were also included.

Excluded from this literature review, although acknowledged to impact LA, are practices associated with learning and stakeholders at the macro level of education (Ministry of Education, pre-service teacher training, community experts and businesses). Additionally, keywords, such as those related to “teacher networks” or “communities”, were not applied in this study because such searches resulted in literature focused on collaboration between school and out-of-school organisations and third sector participation in schools - none of which are the main focus of this study. Searches across the databases were conducted to locate any studies that challenged the effectiveness of LA. However, none were found. It is important to note that, to date, no studies that focus solely on teachers’ perspectives on the affordances and challenges of developing LA in Aotearoa/New Zealand primary schools were found.

2.2 Why learner agency?

2.2.1 *The global context*

Although thought leaders like Dewey (1915) have advocated for schools to be democratic in their approaches for many years, few significant changes have occurred in this time. The reality of a rapidly changing and uncertain global environment has meant LA must now be an essential aspect of education (OECD, 2018). Furthermore, according to Lichtman:

Today, most thoughtful educators agree the industrial age model of content-driven education no longer serves our students... The goal of education has changed from the transfer of knowledge to the inculcation of wisdom, born of

experience, which will help students succeed in an increasingly ambiguous future. Schools must either radically change what they do or very quickly become utterly irrelevant. (2014, p. xv)

As seen in Lichtman's (2014) quote, education needs to evolve so that our learners can thrive in an unpredictable future. Schools need to evolve in order to prepare and support learners for change (Fadel et al., 2015). Knowledge will continue to be important but what additional skills will learners need so that they can adapt and apply their skill set in novel situations? (Hannon, 2017). With all these considerations, literature recognised that approaches, such as LA, will support learners to develop the ability to navigate the disruptions that are likely to occur across many facets of their lives.

2.3.2 The Aotearoa/New Zealand context

Through its Vision and Principles, the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) aims to develop learners who are “confident, connected, actively involved, and lifelong learners who, in their school years, will continue to develop the values, knowledge, and competencies that will enable them to live full and satisfying lives” (p. 10). Additionally, LA is reinforced through its principles, such as learning to learn and community engagement (p. 11). Also, LA practices are embedded within the professional standards (Teaching Council NZ, n.d., Standards Resources section). Furthermore, New Zealand research supports a learner-centred approach (e.g. Bolstad et al., 2012; Education Review Office, 2017), and there were recent consultations with the educational sector and its stakeholders, including teachers, whānau and learners, that supported the development of LA (Ministry of Education, 2019). Consultations identified a number of outcomes that included “Learners at the centre of education – Learners/ākonga² with their whānau are at the centre of education; barrier-free access - great education opportunities and outcomes are within reach for every learner/ākonga.” (p. 8).

However, despite these affordances, concerns have been raised about the extent LA is occurring in our schools. Bolstad et al. (2012) stated:

² Learner/student

The challenge is to develop a view of how the emergent cluster of principles that underpin future-orientated teaching and learning can be embedded at the whole-system level, enabling local and systemic development to support all New Zealand learners to successfully participate in, and contribute to, our national and global future as well as their own personal futures. (p1).

They added that being a spectator does not support learning, and active engagement was required. Our education system is not set up currently to support these principles to occur in practice; if we want a system that prepares our learners for future societies, there must be a change in how we do this (Bolstad et al., 2012). Other concerns included whether LA was being put into practice across schools (Benson & Gould, 2020; Bevan-Brown et al., 2011) and whether learners and whānau were being engaged authentically to ensure success for all (Benson & Gould, 2020). LA is supported by evidence - and the Ministry of Education - yet it is not occurring as systematically or with the depth it needs to be. This study examines why this might be the case by asking teachers about the factors that specifically afforded and challenged the development of LA within their classrooms and schools.

A final consideration for the Aotearoa/New Zealand context is the importance of culturally responsive practices. As a nation underpinned by a treaty with tangata whenua³, *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (New Zealand Curriculum Online, 2020) and one that continues to grow its cultural diversity, it is recognised clearly that our schooling system “is inadequately serving some of our learners, in particular Māori, Pacific children and young people with disabilities and learning support needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds” (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 3). There are many positive intersections between culturally responsive pedagogies and LA. Across a range of New Zealand literature, examples of these included: creating an environment in which every learner thrives (particularly those who identify as Māori); creating learning contexts and processes that are familiar to learners; supporting learner participation in classroom programmes, such as engaging students in the planning and evaluation of their own learning; making time to legitimise learners’ prior knowledge, and empowering students to understand and transform their current realities (Berryman et al., 2018; Bishop, 2019; Savage et al., 2011).

³ People indigenous to New Zealand

Although culturally responsive practices are not examined explicitly in this study, it is noted that LA does provide an opportunity to support the success, without minimising the cultural diversity and richness, of all Aotearoa/New Zealand's children.

2.3 What are some necessary educational outcomes and how can LA support these?

2.3.1 A personalised approach

To support learners to gain the most from their education, learning needs to move away from a standardised approach, to one in which increasingly personalised goals are at the core of classroom work where learners were more active in their role (OECD, 2015). LA supports a personalised approach through its practice of actively seeking out and ensuring learners were key participants in designing their learning pathways.

2.3.2 Personal success

LA supports learners to achieve the success that facilitates them to become all they are capable of, regardless of any challenges, within and beyond school (Benson & Gould, 2020; Chuter, 2019). Campbell et al. (2007) posited that, “personalisation is about developing social practices that enable people to become all they are capable of becoming” (p. 141). Furthermore, LA is both an enabler of success at school and also an outcome of school; learners who understand their values are more likely to pursue their goals (Chuter, 2019). Literature suggested that because agency has the goal of promoting equity and opportunities (Rajala et al., 2016), developing LA might support learners to achieve at school and in life.

2.3.3 Academic success

In addition to providing learners with the tools to adapt to uncertain futures and achieve personal success, LA supports academic success, which continues to be an essential aspect of education.

Agency predicts highly valued academic outcomes. Students who actively seek clarification or request assistance from their teachers have been found to score higher on standardised exams, students who connect to the deeper meaning of an assignment will...experience higher achievement. Finally, students who evaluate how they best focus and act on their findings have higher learning outcomes. (Chuter, 2019, p. 2).

LA increases engagement, supports learners to take the lead in their learning and develops the dispositions of active learners, and consequently learners explicitly position themselves as active (Vaughn, 2014), all of which enhances academic achievement. LA is an evidence-based approach which could support learners to develop the skills required for an unknown future, encourages individual successes and personalised progress. It must be pondered why is LA not gaining traction and becoming a common and embedded approach in our education system?

2.4 The co-constructed repositioning of stakeholders in LA

A key theme emerging from this literature review was the changing roles of stakeholders in teaching and learning. However, it was the repositioning of roles between teachers and learners and their power-sharing that had the greatest amount of discussion across the literature.

2.4.1 The repositioning of the teacher role in developing LA

In schools, the extent to which LA was developed was influenced strongly by teacher willingness to adapt their role and support learners to be active partners in the learning process. This repositioning of roles was identified by Bolstad et al. (2012) as not just a tweak to schooling but rather a “paradigm shift in practice” (p. 14). To develop LA, a redefinition of the teacher role was required. Rather than being the font of all knowledge, teachers must become increasingly flexible as they facilitate learning, organise differentiated resources, provide personalised feedback and encouragement, guide, support and motivate learners (Al Asmari, 2013). This was widely agreed, illustrating that teacher roles have changed from transmitting knowledge to supporting learners taking responsibility for their learning (Bolstad et al., 2012; OECD, 2015). As learners made academic progress, teachers moved

away from talking about task completion to giving feedback in constantly evolving learning environments (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014).

As learners begin to lead their learning, the teacher role has never been more important (Education Review Office, 2008). LA is not a free-ranged approach to learning, rather it requires clear boundaries to help define the purpose and structure of learning and these need to be negotiated actively and genuinely in good faith as roles evolve (Annan, 2018). The Education Review Office (ERO) (2018) stated teachers must consider how to reposition learners to enact their agency in the school context as agency builds over time and experience. Similarly, Davis (2019) found that the co-construction of learning required deliberate planning to ensure there was time for learner input. She noted that these deliberate acts increased learner autonomy over their learning, and, consequently, LA. Literature demonstrates clearly that teachers' willingness to shift from being the key decision-makers to actively including learners as partners is central to affording LA.

However, this repositioning of roles was not always embraced by teachers; resistance was consistent across studies. Fullan and Langworthy (2014) identified teachers who resisted the adoption of new practices were one of the most mentioned barriers to developing LA, as it challenges some deeply held beliefs about what it meant to be a teacher (Ayers, 2010). There were several other reasons for this. If teachers were responsible for learning outcomes, whose role was it to ensure learning occurred if these decisions were shared? (Biesta et al., 2015). Husbands and Pearce (2012) added some teachers were unwilling to accept responsibility for learners who were not achieving, therefore teachers gave learners all the responsibility for learning. Further examples included teachers giving learners too much control before they had the effective skills to manage their learning or teachers believing they only needed to facilitate learning (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014) whereas education should be about restructuring roles to work together (Bolstad et al., 2012). This lack of clarity and understanding about what is required when sharing roles challenged the development of LA.

The theme of power was raised several times. Al Asmari (2013) commented that to support learners to enact their agency, teachers must reduce their sense of coercion or influence and elevate learner knowledge that their voice influences

learning. Fitzpatrick et al. (2018) reinforced this with their finding that LA was promoted by diminishing the power differential between learners and teachers. Rajala et al. (2016) observed that inconsistent teacher responses to learners' opposition (such as the questioning of instructional activities) caused learners to be reluctant to enact their agency. Hill and Thrupp (2019) believed true partnership was never achievable in the school context because teachers were always positioned as the powerful authority. Furthermore, power redistribution was not only difficult to achieve, but took time (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018). Power is an essential consideration when developing LA.

Other challenges teachers encountered in the repositioning of their role included: fearing they would not have a place in class or being unsure what it was (Al Asmari, 2013); or they would lack control (Al Asmari, 2013; Walan et al., 2016). Some teachers found it difficult to trust learners to have a role in their learning (Walan et al., 2016) or felt that learners had certain learning styles that did not fit with LA (Al Asmari, 2013). Finally, lack of time and large class sizes both negatively impacted teachers' motivations to share roles with learners (Campbell et al., 2007).

The shift to repositioning roles was key to developing LA. However, it was evident achieving this was a complex process considering many aspects of learning. Not only must teachers change their thinking about what the teachers' role entails and, consequently their practices, they must also be willing to see learners as capable of taking on a role in their learning. Further to that, school systems have a role in supporting teachers to embrace this change confidently.

2.4.2 Repositioning the learner role in developing LA

Several studies supported the repositioning of learners as a key affordance to developing LA. Examples included the OECD (2015): "The learning environment recognises the learners as its core participants, encourages their active engagement, and develops in them an understanding of their own activity as learners" (p. 28). Respondents in the Bevan-Brown et al. (2011) study also emphasised the importance of learners being involved actively in their learning. Further, Fullan and Langworthy (2014) found learners in a LA environment were unwilling to be passive receivers of learning and instead began leading their own

learning. This repositioning of learners must ensure that they are not only active partners in learning decisions but also see themselves as such, elevating their engagement with LA. Learners must think they can make an intentional difference to their learning, else they were less likely to enact their agency (Clarke et al., 2016; Mercer, 2012). When consulted meaningfully, learners responded with insight (Husbands & Pearce, 2012). This was validated by Vaughn (2014) and Al Asmari (2013) who noted that learners enacting their agency were more likely to position themselves as active learners and take responsibility for their learning. Moreover, positioning learners as active decision-makers increased their trust in teachers, in their own autonomy which led to learners having decreased reliance on teachers and supported them to become confident risk takers (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018). The repositioning of learners supported the development of LA and was reliant on two main factors: learners were involved actively in their learning and believed they could make a difference to their learning, motivating them to enact their agency.

Factors that challenged the repositioning of learners, and therefore impacted the development of LA, included those related to learners being reluctant to shift into the role of increasing responsibility for their learning. For example, learners needed to become a partner in, and own, their learning process and progress (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). If learners did not engage with these changing roles, it was challenging to develop LA because this was an essential element of this approach. Harmandaoglu Baz et al. (2018) supported this, finding some learners wanted teachers to retain traditional roles and approaches and learners could be reluctant to accept responsibility for their learning (see also Biesta et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick et al., 2018). Another reason for this included learners being over-reliant on teachers or lacking motivation to be agentic (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2011). A further consideration was how teachers supported learners to see themselves as learning partners: If teachers lacked faith in learners' abilities or did not have the confidence to make room for them, learners' feelings about their voice being valued could be impacted (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018; Harmandaoglu Baz et al., 2018). This influenced learners enacting their agency. Learners must be consulted meaningfully; tokenism undermined effectiveness (Husbands and Pearce, 2012). Bevan-Brown et al. (2011) mentioned specifically that students with diverse needs required additional practices, including more support to scaffold learning, special resources and departments, to

develop LA. If these were lacking, learners might find it more challenging to enact their agency.

When considering developing LA, learners must have an important role in the repositioning of learning partnerships. Ayers (2010) emphasised learners were the most untapped resource within schools who could be drawn on as powerful vehicles for learning. To support learners to engage with this shift, learners must see they can, and do, make a difference to their learning environment. They must believe in themselves, LA and embrace changing teacher roles.

2.4.3 Repositioning the leadership role in developing LA

Across the literature, leaders, including Principals, syndicate/team and district leaders, were identified as key to affording LA (e.g., Bevan-Brown et al., 2011). Fullan and Langworthy (2014) further identified that leadership roles were “changing dramatically” (p. 52) and along with their changing roles, leadership also needed to develop a supportive school culture and expand its definition of school success to support LA. To develop innovative environments, leaders needed to see learner success as more than academic and this included the necessity to personalise learning and create environments of trust, risk-taking and collaboration (Education Review Office, 2018). Leaders needed to recognise the extent their roles influenced the development of LA; with leaders support LA thrived but without it, LA declined.

Furthermore, building leadership capacity in all teachers, rather than maintaining traditional hierarchical roles, afforded LA. This was termed teacher agency (TA) and defined as teachers being able to contribute actively “to shaping their work and its conditions” (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 624). These authors asserted TA was not only up to teachers to enact. Rather, it was subject to various influences including how they were positioned in their schools, influenced by leadership. One action that supported TA was identified by Bevan-Brown and colleagues: the practice of staff appraising their own professional needs (2011). New Zealand teachers have the potential to be supported in their agency through ‘*Teaching as Inquiry*’ (Ministry of Education, 2007). The framework used for this process, the ‘*Spirals of Inquiry*’ (Timperley et al., 2014), supported teachers to focus on the aspects of their practice

they identified as priorities. This example of TA highlighted the role leadership had in supporting teachers to enact their agency.

Leadership need to examine their role in supporting TA because it has a flow-on effect in the classroom. Correll (2017) noted TA aids teachers in prioritising learning foci based on the evidence they gathered, which consequently supported personalisation because the data were relevant to their particular learners. Teachers also needed to be agentic before learners could be; when teachers had a voice, they advocated for their learners, and learners taking control of their learning began with the teacher. Further literature supported this finding. Al Asmari (2013) noted that flexibility in teaching at the school-wide level promoted teachers' autonomy and therefore promoted LA. Harmandaoglu Baz et al. (2018) stated teachers needed agency before they could promote LA to their own students. Finally, when considering LA, leadership needed to support teachers to further enact their agency by encouraging teachers who chose to explore LA and for them to do this in ways that best suited them (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Correll, 2017; Education Review Office, 2016).

However, there was a tension when supporting TA. Biesta et al. (2015) noted some schools saw TA as a weakness and instead relied on data, whereas other schools argued TA was essential given the complexities of educational practices. This focus on data and achievement was supported by ERO in 2018; however, they also noted that if leadership constrained school structures that supported teacher collaboration, had shallow intentions toward learning and permitted unexceptional pedagogy, innovative practices (such as LA) were limited. These contrasting directives highlight the challenges faced by leadership.

To develop LA, leaders need to re-examine their role and beliefs. This might then support the development of learning environments that consider how they reposition teachers, and, consequently, learners, as agentic within this system. Although there are clear benefits, why this shift in roles was challenging is also clear.

2.4.4 Repositioning of the whānau role in developing LA

Across the LA literature, whānau were repositioned from passive or beyond-school participants to having key roles as learning partners. Findings by Bevan-

Brown et al. (2011) concluded engaged communities were important in the personalisation of learning. This was further supported by ERO (2016), who recognised the importance of whānau being involved actively in how schools operated and effective schools prioritising the development of reciprocal relationships focused on learning. Furthermore, schools that actively engaged whānau also ensured whānau could speak the language of learning (Education Review Office, 2018). Whānau needed good information about their children's learning and the school if they were to be active partners (Bonne & Stevens, 2017). Examples of active whānau roles included participating in their children's goal setting and helping prioritise what learning should occur (Bevan-Brown et al. 2011). ERO added that effective schools asked whānau specifically what motivated and engaged their children and worked together on developing home activities. In effective schools, whānau had roles in parent associations and contributed to the governance of schools as representatives on the Board of Trustees. Engaging whānau as partners occurred through communication including newsletters, open-door policies and learning blogs. As active partners of learning within the LA context, whānau were recognised as having multiple roles. (Education Review Office, 2015).

An example of whānau as an empowered and genuine partner of learning was given in a recent survey by Riwai-Couch et al. (2020). Findings showed that when schools were forced to close as a result of COVID 19 and learning occurred in the home, whānau felt empowered as decision-makers who were able to choose what was important for their children to learn, when learning occurred, and leading the subsequent learning. Whānau noted that "Learning at home felt like a reclaiming of space and provided parents with confidence to have greater say about what was important for their children's learning" (p. 61). This repositioning of the whānau role, in which families felt truly empowered to influence their children's learning, occurred in an environment physically removed from the school context. It is worth considering how schools may be able to replicate this genuine partnership and empowerment in a regular schooling environment.

However, the extent to which whānau were partners relied on the initiation and direction from schools, rather than being genuinely reciprocal relationships. Being repositioned into roles as equal learning partners may be challenging for some

whānau. Findings from Bonne and Stevens (2017) identified that while whānau were generally comfortable talking about their child's learning and progress with the school, they did not feel as strongly regarding how they could help their child's learning. Added to this, only half of the surveyed participants felt their school consulted with them genuinely about new directions or issues suggesting there were nearly as many who did not. Genuine consultation was essential if whānau were to have an active role in schools. Other factors that might negatively impact whānau repositioning as active partners were identified by ERO in 2015, including whānau being unlikely to get involved with their child's learning if schools questioned their contributions or their role in doing so. Although many schools show commitment to engaging whānau through the repositioning of roles, literature identified this is an ongoing challenge as engaged communities are not always easy to establish (Berryman et al., 2018; Bevan-Brown et al., 2011; Savage et al., 2011).

Whānau are an important part of developing LA. Schools must reposition whānau as valued contributors through active engagement with their child's learning, supporting learning beyond the classroom and as active partners in determining school priorities. Evidently, this is challenging and needs ongoing commitment if LA is to be embedded within schools.

Across all layers of the educational system, literature revealed that the repositioning of all stakeholders' roles is necessary to afford LA. The interconnectedness of the sector and their stakeholders is complex, highlighting the challenges involved in this repositioning. However, given the emphasis literature places on these evolving roles, to afford LA, connections must be emphasised and enacted.

2.5 Bespoke partnerships

Developing LA relies on the strength of partnerships among stakeholders. Literature made evident the need to transform from having relationships to cultivating active partnerships and these needed to be bespoke. Genuine caring, reciprocity and holding an appreciative viewpoint were emphasised as partnership aspects that afforded LA, particularly between teachers and learners. The impact of teacher partnerships with various stakeholders is reviewed in the following discussion.

2.5.1 Bespoke partnerships with learners

Developing practices that strengthen relationships between teachers and learners have come to the forefront of the work of teachers (and leaders) to help develop LA (Davis, 2019). A range of literature illustrated that, to reposition teacher and learner roles, it was essential to develop and sustain trusted relationships (Education Review Office, 2018; Fitzpatrick et al., 2018; Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). Developing interdependent relationships required consideration of many complex factors, including knowing learners individually (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). Annan (2018) found that teachers did this by building relationships with learners and, consequently, knew how to activate and engage them. In addition, she found teachers created emotionally safe classrooms by demonstrating consistency and fairness, creating familiar environments through cultural practices and values, made connections between home and school, and negotiated and personalised learning actively. Knowing learners individually was highlighted as a key aspect of partnership building because it created an environment in which teachers were trusted by their learners to challenge them continuously to take risks, reach for new goals and take the next steps in their learning (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). These were all essential aspects of developing learning partnerships that supported role repositioning in the LA environment.

Challenges to this included a lack of time and large class sizes, which negatively impacted teachers' developing partnerships with learners (Campbell et al., 2007). Another aspect of relationships influenced by teachers was on peer relationships in the classroom. Clarke et al. (2016) identified how social structures in the classroom were influenced by teacher actions and how they impacted relationships and, consequently, LA. One example was when teachers called on particular learners they believed would answer correctly rather than calling on learners who were less certain about lesson content; thus, contributions that were valued (and therefore who was perceived as having the right to speak) were impacted. This influenced how learners perceived what was prioritised about learning and, consequently, how they enacted their agency, and these affected social structures, which maintained these differences. Strong relationships helped teachers notice the contributions that all learners made, which resulted in higher

expectations and opportunities for all learners to enact their agency (Clarke et al., 2016).

Building partnerships between teachers and learners impacts the development of LA. When teachers know learners individually and consider the impact their influence has on the learning environment, they are able to develop environments that support risk-taking and stronger peer relationships. Without the active development of these partnerships, developing an environment that supports LA is challenging.

2.5.2 Developing partnerships among teaching colleagues

Strengthening relationships among teaching colleagues was identified as a practice that afforded LA. Although there were benefits for students and the school as a whole, most advantages at the teacher level included improved collegial relationships, teaching strategies becoming more learner-centred, decreased teacher workload, supporting co-teaching and co-planning, and increased effectiveness of teaching (Vangrieken et al., 2015). To support LA, Spencer and Juliani (2017) suggested teachers found like-minded teachers to work with. This afforded LA because when there was teacher collaboration within schools, teachers encouraged each other to try new approaches through shared purposes and momentum (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012).

However, engaging teachers in collaboration had some challenges. Vangrieken et al. (2015) conducted an analysis of literature regarding teacher collaboration and, although it did not focus on LA specifically, there were connections. They noted that it was not a solution to all problems; teacher collaboration did not guarantee the success of focus areas in schools (see also Bolstad et al., 2012). In fact, various negative consequences of teacher collaboration were identified, including creating a feeling of competitiveness among teachers, a loss of autonomy, being time-consuming, creating an increased workload, enforcing a conformity of practice and a lack of teacher unity. Various factors contributed to these consequences, including insufficient teacher buy-in, a mismatch/differences in personalities, resistance to changing traditional models of teacher relationships and the conflict between collegiality and who has the power to ultimately make decisions.

These challenges to teacher collaboration must be considered to ensure they do not derail the opportunities that teacher collaboration affords LA.

One action that schools could endorse to afford LA was strengthened teacher relationships through teacher collaboration (Vangrieken, 2015). Collaboration itself will not ensure LA occurs and there are many considerations to be dealt with to ensure collaboration is effective. However, the benefits of teacher collaboration in developing environments that afford LA outweigh the challenges in doing so.

2.5.3 Developing partnerships among learners

Relationships that increased learner interconnectedness afforded LA. This was recognised by the OECD who stated 'The Social Nature of Learning' was one of their Seven Principles of Learning (Groff, 2012). Hill and Thrupp (2019) found that developing learning communities through collaboration shifted learners from compliant receivers of learning to active contributors. Further benefits of collaboration among learners were validated by Fadel et al. (2015) who noted that, when done well, collaboration enabled a group to make better learning decisions than if they were on their own. Additionally, collaboration enhanced the development of dispositions generally identified with LA contexts, for example, critical thinking and creativity. When supported to develop these relationships, learners became active partners in developing environments that afforded LA.

There were several challenges to developing these relationships. When done poorly, collaboration became less effective for learners than working individually (Fadel et al., 2015). In developing relationships among learners, the role of the teacher was evident. Kokotsaki et al. (2016) and Clarke et al. (2016) noted that challenges to developing high-quality group work included learners perceived as successful academically affecting peer relationships which meant some students experienced more agency than others. Additionally, teachers needed to reflect on routines that stopped a culture of learning together because students could need support from teachers to show that collaboration was not cheating (Hill & Thrupp, 2019). Therefore, teachers must build a classroom culture that moves away from competition and instead embraces diversity and acceptance of ideas. Time is needed to develop relationships, including among peers, and cannot be squeezed in

at the start or end of a lesson (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). Finally, learners' socioeconomic class affected power relations among some learners thereby challenging the development of learning relationships (Kokotsaki et al., 2016), which Leadbeater (2004) suggested could influence the extent to which LA is developed. These findings support Mercer's (2012) claims about the complexity of learners enacting their agency.

Although learner relationships afford LA, they rely on teacher practices to flourish. Consideration must also be given to learners' lives beyond school and the role this has on learner/learner partnerships.

2.5.4 Impact of leadership on the development of teacher partnerships

The role of leadership strongly influenced whether the environment supported teacher collaboration and, consequently, LA. In Kolleck (2019), a collaborative culture was associated mostly with leadership practices and she identified that, specifically in primary schools, teacher collaboration was generally influenced by teacher satisfaction of leadership support. In 2018, ERO identified that, in effective schools, leadership had a role in developing relationships by supporting teacher collaboration. Vangrieken et al. (2015) further stated that an environment that supported teacher collaboration also nurtured a climate that supported teacher innovation; it enabled teachers to be flexible and adaptive; and it validated new teaching approaches focused on learner needs, including learner-centred approaches. Other benefits of collaboration included supporting teachers directly to develop an understanding of LA and, consequently, adapt their practices. These findings were recognised across a range of studies (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Correll, 2017; Education Review Office, 2016; Fullan & Langworthy, 2014; Treadwell, 2017). Bolstad et al. (2012) summarised that, when leadership promoted collaboration among schools, such as through sharing and interrogating practices, future-focused educational ideas could be supported. Leadership recognising the benefits of teacher collaboration and support had a role in affording LA.

Additionally, leaders must evaluate how school systems and practices afford the strengthening of teacher relationships. Research conducted by Vangrieken et al. (2015) found that, when leadership developed school-wide beliefs and systems that

supported teacher collaboration, teacher collaboration was increased. For example, school-wide practices that promoted whole-school beliefs reinforced collaboration, thus establishing a school culture of collaboration, provided team support over an extended period of time, promoted teachers learning from each other, encouraged discussions about what teachers believed was important, and enabled teachers to design their learners daily timetables. These practices were interwoven with leadership beliefs and roles and together influenced the extent LA was developed within and across schools.

Multiple factors challenged teacher collaboration. Interestingly, Collinson (2004) noted that if teachers did not engage in collaboration, it could often be related to external factors, such as the structure of the school (e.g., the school timetable), rather than internal factors (e.g., teacher attitudes, relationships). Similarly, Vangrieken et al. (2015) highlighted how leadership practices could hinder teacher collaboration, including a school culture of isolation, lack of school structures to support collaboration and work pressures. If the school climate does not support collaboration, it could end up being used as a mechanism for control whereby teachers are tied to “standardised performance expectations” (p. 29), constraining teacher autonomy and endorsing teacher discipline. Not providing enough time was also identified as a challenge to teacher collaboration by Vangrieken et al. (2015) and Collinson (2004). Leaders must establish the culture, systems and practices that support teacher collaboration to build relationships among teachers, which consequently afford LA.

2.5.5 Developing partnerships with whānau

Ayers (2010) stated that there cannot be a child centred-learning environment without it also being family centred. However, these partnerships are not straightforward. Understanding what helps create whānau/school partnerships is vital for the development of, and sharing of, successful approaches (Staub et al., 2018). Staub et al. (2018) also found one action that made a significant impact was ensuring schools had systems in place that communicated the school’s philosophy clearly. This was achieved in several ways. For example, a plain and informative website that reiterated information, regular newsletters and holding events that focused on specific topics. Meetings with whānau were learning-focused and

ensured whānau understood the school's "innovative educational concepts" (p. 9) and educational approaches.

Another practice that supported partnership-building was engaging with whānau in school representation (such as Board of Trustees) and school learning. Examples included learning conversations that were led by students and focused on learning goals and progress as well as having online access to their children's learning and teacher feedback. Both these practices actively developed two-way communications with whānau. With school systems in place, teachers could focus on partnerships with whānau that centred around learning. Whānau and communities could be supported to buy into school initiatives with simple, frequent communications that repeated key messages in different ways (Ayers, 2010; Education Review Office, 2018; Treadwell, 2017). Interestingly, ERO noted specifically that these partnerships need to "go beyond communication about achievement" (p. 17) and, rather, focus on what success means to learners (Education Review Office, 2015). Furthermore, although the 2018 research of Berryman et al. focused on learners who identify as Māori, they reiterated the importance of schools developing partnerships with whānau by respecting, valuing and knowing them. It was also essential for schools to develop reciprocal partnerships, including becoming aware of and sharing power. True reciprocity and power-sharing are complex issues and require careful consideration to establish relationships that are true partnerships.

Challenges have been identified across the literature and these, generally, related to school practices and perceptions about whānau. For example, ERO identified one barrier to developing whānau partnership was a lack of school-wide focus in this area. Instead, individual teachers developed whānau-centred relationships (Education Review Office, 2018). In the same year, Staub et al. (2018) found that if school-wide systems or regulations about developing whānau partnerships were lacking, teachers ended up having to explain and defend the school's approach to learning. They found other school practices that did not support partnership development included school events that were social rather than learning focused, and meetings in which topics were generic, unclear, or inconsistent. The outcome of such engagements were that whānau may not have understood why

schools changing practices, which could undermine their success. If schools' perceptions about whānau engagement was negative, relationships were also poor. For example, an ERO (2015) report found that schools which had a deficit approach to engaging hard-to-reach families had lower quality learning partnerships between teachers and whānau. Additionally, there was a belief that teachers knew best and, consequently did not actively seek ways to improve whānau engagement. This meant that whānau felt uncomfortable and unwelcome, which inhibited their willingness to address issues. Some teachers commented that whānau engagement was interfering with, rather than supporting, learning (Staub et al., 2018). Ayers (2010) agreed that parents can be made to feel unwelcome and their insights and knowledge were often dismissed as being "subjective and overly involved" (p. 52). This was supported by ERO who also found that only valuing school-based learning was a barrier to developing whānau-centred partnerships. Where schools did not value whānau relationships and invested minimal effort into developing systems that amplified them, these partnerships struggled to flourish Education Review Office, 2018).

Another consideration raised by Staub et al. in 2018 was that even though national policy expects schools to develop school-family partnerships, it was often up to teachers to take on this responsibility. They might be reluctant to do so because of a lack of understanding of how to do this (e.g., due to a lack of learning during pre-service training), which could lead to feelings of stress. If schools are not proactive and systematic in how they do this, teachers might never gain the skills and support to develop relationships to any great depth. Kolleck (2019) identified similar limitations with the focus of research prioritising teacher collaboration at the exclusion of whānau. A lack of knowledge of how to develop whānau-focused relationships limited their development.

Having positive and appreciative relationships with whānau underpinned the shift in beliefs and their repositioning as reciprocal partners of learning, both key to affording LA. There were many facets considered in developing these quality partnerships, but literature clearly identified some ways to address these. What was less clear was how to ensure partnerships had reciprocity and equal power and whether this was even possible in the current educational model.

Lifting relationships to the level of partnerships is essential in affording LA. In fact, Fullan and Langworthy (2014) suggested relationships took on a more “central place in the learning experience” (p. 14). Without strong partnerships, the shift to contexts that afford LA would be incredibly challenging. Without these partnerships, shifts in stakeholder beliefs and repositioning roles would be unlikely. Worthy of further consideration is what the OECD (2018) identified as “co-agency” (p. 4), powerful partnerships that relied on all stakeholders having equitable power, further reiterating both the importance and role of partnerships in developing LA.

2.6 Understanding stakeholder beliefs, experiences and efficacy about LA

The review of literature revealed that each stakeholder’s belief greatly influenced the extent to which LA could be advanced within schools. Those within schools, particularly leaders, notably influenced the examination and understanding of beliefs and their impact on affording and challenging LA.

2.6.1 Impact of teacher beliefs on the development of LA

A range of literature indicated that teacher beliefs directly afforded the extent LA was developed. Wedell (2009) posited that understanding teacher beliefs about LA was a core component of ensuring change towards the development of LA in schools. Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) also identified that lasting collective change was more likely to occur when teacher beliefs were targeted: their participants communicated that they valued being able to discuss and reflect on their beliefs and practices. Indeed, teacher beliefs impacted the conceptual framework that guided their practice (Al Asmari, 2013). Further, Al Asmari (2013) identified that teacher beliefs constrained, purposefully or intentionally, the depth to which LA was developed. For this reason, examining teachers’ beliefs before LA being undertaken in classrooms was crucial to the success of developing LA.

Interestingly, in addition to teacher beliefs impacting their engagement in LA, Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) found that teachers lacked belief in their learners’ abilities to develop agency. Examples of these limiting beliefs were found across multiple studies, which found teachers believed that learners did not have agency,

were unable to develop agency or that younger learners were less able to be agentic (e.g., Al Asmari, 2013; Harmandaoglu Baz et al., 2018). Further, Campbell et al. (2007) found that teachers believed that personalising learning was more likely to work with older learners and those identified as gifted, which caused teachers to question the effectiveness of LA for all learners. These teacher beliefs challenged and undermined the development of LA as a general learning strategy.

Thus, research highlighted the impact teacher beliefs had on the depth and extent LA occurred in classrooms. When teachers did not trust LA as a learning approach, they limited the practices that would develop it. Ayers (2010) asserted that teachers' self-knowledge was very important but was rarely attended to. For LA programmes to be successful in schools, teachers need to be supported to unpack their beliefs and challenged to integrate new understandings about the effectiveness of LA when they supported it.

2.6.2 Impact of learner beliefs on the development of LA

Various factors influenced learner beliefs, and these are worthy of consideration because they impacted the extent to which LA could be developed. A study by Mercer (2012) noted that, before learners enacted their agency, they needed to believe they could improve their learning in each setting (e.g., social, educational, family, classroom interactions). Therefore, it was essential to understand a learner's non-observable behaviours, such as their thoughts, feelings, motivation, and, most relevantly to this review, *their beliefs*. Indeed, studies indicated that what caused a learner to exercise their agency was a complex and dynamic learning system of which learner beliefs is a part. Mercer (2012) found beliefs were important in developing LA and that these were influenced by the experiences that learners had while enacting their agency, the purpose for being agentic and the learning context. Therefore, stakeholders, particularly teachers, needed to be aware of variances in LA depending on a range of different factors, including student beliefs, when considering how to afford LA.

The literature revealed several factors that limited learners' enactment of agency. Skinnari (2014) noted that learners were afraid to participate (use agency) if they were insecure. She suggested that such learners might need extra teacher

support and encouragement because their motivation was being impacted negatively. This supported Mercer's (2012) findings that, for learners to be agentic, they must have self-belief, which in turn was influenced by previous experiences. There was limited literature investigating the role of learner beliefs specifically and the impact such beliefs had on the development of LA and there is a dearth of such studies in the primary context. However, the available literature (Klemenčič 2015; Mercer, 2012; Skinnari, 2014; van Lier, 2008) suggested that the belief learners have in themselves and how learners experienced agency across time and place were key factors in whether LA was enacted.

Overall, teacher beliefs are related primarily to believing in the efficacy of LA as an approach for learning. By contrast, learner beliefs are affected by how they feel about themselves as learners and the factors that impact this, which in turn influence the extent to which they enact their agency. Therefore, unpacking and developing beliefs about learner efficacy and esteem should be considered and addressed alongside classroom routines and practices that facilitate the development of LA as a learning strategy.

2.6.3 Impact of leadership beliefs on the development of LA

Examining the role of leadership, especially Principals, is relevant to how LA is developed: "What the principal spends time attending to is the single most important strategic resource in any school" (Education Review Office, 2016, p. 14). An earlier OECD report affirmed this, finding that leadership influenced the direction of schools and outcomes of learning (2013). Therefore, leadership believing in and focusing on LA would greatly afford its development. Additionally, research has found that leadership being open to new opportunities, having a willingness to change, and believing that doing something different to develop LA was worthwhile were important factors in facilitating implementation (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). These authors also described the conditions that would create a shared belief in LA, including having a shared vision with a plan to achieve it; having ways of measuring the impact; and having high expectations of all stakeholders involved. Robinson (2007) concurred and included the need for leadership practices that supported school goals, examining teacher beliefs and actions, ensuring sustained resourcing of priorities, and protection of teaching time. Indeed, leadership had a key role in

affording LA through its prioritisation as a school focus, including its resourcing and time. An examination of teacher beliefs would further afford LA by unpacking barriers to its development. Importantly, leadership beliefs impacted the culture of a school, and, as such, might impact the extent to which LA was developed. If teachers were ready to make changes, conditions created by leadership (underpinned by their beliefs as noted earlier) were needed to support this. Fullan and Langworthy (2014) observed that leadership that was non-judgmental, committed to change and built a culture in which it was safe to take risks was essential to the development of LA. Further, it was important for leadership not to influence and control change. Robinson (2007) identified that it was useful to understand why school leaders and Principals do not spend more time on activities that develop the leadership dimensions identified previously. For example, if leadership knowledge is not current, approaches, such as LA, might not be implemented. If leaders do not examine the impact their beliefs have on school practices and focus, developing LA was unlikely to occur.

In summary, the role of leadership beliefs in developing LA was evident throughout the literature. Leadership choices informed a school's focus, systems and prioritising of resources. Without cohesiveness and clarity of beliefs around LA, developing LA might be challenging. Therefore, unpacking leadership beliefs is relevant to creating conditions that afford LA.

2.6.4 Impact of whānau beliefs on the development of LA

The need for the repositioning of whānau roles to support their role as partners in learning to afford LA was highlighted. However, to date, there are limited examples of schools supporting whānau to examine their beliefs regarding LA to promote this partnership. Bolstad et al. (2012) noted that wider public support for schools was needed if there was to be a paradigm shift in educational practice; whānau needed to understand the gap between the learning occurring in schools and what educational research suggests is actually needed. Supporting this, a study by Bevan-Brown et al. (2011) identified a mismatch between parental expectations and government initiatives, such as learning personalisation. Teachers reported feeling that they were not achieving in the areas of engaging communities, their requests for further support in this area, such as professional learning (PL), were not

being met due to competing PL needs and any PL not being linked directly to classroom activities were minimised. Findings from a Bonne and Stevens (2017) survey further found that whānau were likely to get information about educationally related information from friends, other parents and members of their whānau. This highlighted a gap that schools could fill to ensure clear and relevant information was being provided to whānau about education, which could develop understanding, and, consequently, whānau belief, in the merits of LA.

Finally, Leadbeater (2004) found low-socioeconomic families have less space, fewer resources and less time available than higher socio-economic families, which made supporting LA in the home more challenging for lower-income families. Whānau belief in LA was likely to be impacted if they lacked the physical, economical or cultural resources required to engage in and benefit from it. If schools do not articulate the aim and purpose of LA clearly, whānau struggled to develop a belief in this approach. This was further limited by a lack of in-school support to gain an understanding of whānau beliefs, as well as by external pressures on whānau including time, resources and financial strains.

Across each educational setting, a belief in LA supported its implementation. In fact, a belief in LA as an effective teaching and learning approach was vital to supporting deep and long-lasting shifts in educational practices. However, literature highlighted that, although important, stakeholders at each level were rarely supported to examine their beliefs as an inroad to affording LA; therefore, any sustained changes to practices were unlikely.

This literature review addressed key aspects of LA, such as the repositioning of roles, bespoke partnerships and beliefs, efficacy and esteem, and highlighted their interconnectedness. That is, LA cannot be developed without acknowledging the influence each factor has on the other. It was also evident from the literature review that LA not only benefitted learning but raised several educational concepts to be dealt with, such as the redefinition of success. However, literature also identified many areas of challenge for teachers if they wanted to continue to develop their practices to afford LA within schools. Many of these are beyond the scope of teachers' control. Leadbeater (2004) stated that there is no debate about putting learners at the centre of education, but it cannot stand-alone, it must be both truly

understood and throughout the whole educational system. To assist a shift within the system, this literature review makes a clear case for the need to reflect on the roles, relationships and beliefs of all stakeholders and how these can be amplified to support LA.

Finally, what became evident through an analysis of the literature was that much of what was identified as affording LA were also aspects of quality practice. This is affirming. However, it is also evident these practices need further examination for LA to be afforded in a meaningful way.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework and Research Design

3.1 Theoretical framework

This study aimed to identify the factors that afforded and challenged the development of LA within the classrooms and schools of six purposefully selected Aotearoa/New Zealand primary school teachers. This aim aligns closely with the work of Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological model* (1979) because it acknowledges and reinforces the interconnectedness of the various educational settings and the stakeholders involved in teaching and learning. Therefore, it is through a lens of interconnected environments this research was conducted and analysed.

First, Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that educational research should be carried out in real-life educational settings and that the purpose of the research should be discovery, not hypothesis testing, and involve the identification of the system that affects or is affected by the behaviour of the learner. Therefore, in alignment with Bronfenbrenner's beliefs, this study was conducted within schools and through interviews with practicing primary teachers. They were asked to reflect on factors that impacted their ability to develop LA to discover what afforded or challenged its implementation.

The requirements of an ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1976) means there must be simultaneous consideration of various factors, including the behaviour of the different participants as members of a system, that is "the requirement of reciprocity" (p. 9); the influence of factors on each other, not just one way. This is often accepted in principle "but disregarded in practice" (p. 9). The design of an ecological study must account for the existence of three or more influences in the setting and therefore enable the indirect influence of any one of these on the direct relations between the others. Learning does not happen in isolation; in fact, the opposite is true. Hogg (2012) identified a range of literature that recognised context and settings were key considerations because "learning results from social interaction between

individuals, society and culture” (p. 53). Therefore, examining multiple stakeholders and settings was necessary to identify factors that afforded and challenged the development of LA. Bronfenbrenner (1976) stated that the presence of these influences was not likely to be recognised unless such possibilities were considered systematically in the research setting. Research that undertakes the reversal of this process by constructing and strengthening the interconnections between ecological systems offers promise both for scientific understanding and for social policy or, in this case, school-wide systems and practices that influence and support stakeholders to execute their agency. Therefore, in alignment with educational research approaches, this study actively examined the reciprocal relationship between a range of stakeholders, the multiple settings within the school system, and their influences in developing LA.

Bronfenbrenner (1976) posited that how people learn was affected by the relationship between learners and the places where they lived their lives as well as the relationship and interconnections between these environments. He further added that the study of both, and how they affected learning, made up “the ecology of education” (p. 5). This approach was further supported by Bronfenbrenner’s *Ecological Model* (1976) in which the environment was represented as a nested arrangement, each one contained in the next, and in which the setting was defined as a place in which “the occupants engage in particular activities in particular roles (e.g. parent, teacher, pupil, etc.) for particular periods of time” (p. 5). Figure 1 demonstrates what occurs in the Aotearoa/New Zealand primary school setting and, consequently, what was relevant to this research design that focused on the examination of a range of settings and stakeholder roles to determine how these influenced each other and, consequently, the development of LA.

Figure 1

Settings in an Aotearoa/New Zealand primary school



Bronfenbrenner described each setting in specific terms (e.g., the micro-level related to daycare or the classroom contexts). However, to align more closely with and reflect this study, nested contexts were adapted to focus specifically on the classroom and school setting and the development of LA. The micro-level is the classroom environment containing learners and teachers. The meso setting was still placed within the school setting and explores the impact of leadership on developing LA. The macro-level focuses on settings beyond, yet still closely connected to, schools and will examine the role of whānau on developing LA. Owing to the scope of this study, the macro level (such as the Ministry of Education, preservice teacher training) will not be examined because teachers have less influence at this level, although it is acknowledged that this level has a direct influence on what happens within schools.

The interconnectedness of environments and stakeholders and their influence on the development of LA will be examined through the following questions being asked of the teachers in this study:

1. What is your understanding of the benefits of LA?
2. What factors have supported you in developing LA?
3. What factors have limited/been barriers to you developing LA?

3.2 Research design

A qualitative approach was selected as the research method for this study. Qualitative studies can offer a rich and detailed description of beliefs and favour an in-depth understanding of realities and contexts (Diaz Ramirez, 2014). Teacher voice was selected as the primary source of data for this study because teacher beliefs influence their instructional choices yet have been given little attention to date (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Further, as previously identified, it is teachers who determine the extent learners are active or passive in the learning environment (Al Asmari, 2013; Harmandaoglu Baz et al., 2018). Therefore, understanding teacher experiences about what supported and challenged them developing LA in their contexts was deemed important, relevant and worthy of investigation.

3.3 Participants

A purposive approach was used to select participants as “the researcher wants to ensure that he or she obtains a sample that is uniquely suited to the intent of the study” (Fraenkel et al, 2011, p. 430) and random sampling would have been unlikely to achieve this.

Potential participants were gathered initially from across Aotearoa/New Zealand using a Google Form survey (<https://forms.gle/1P9MbEMEK58zYuEN7>). The survey was placed on two online platforms (Twitter and Facebook) because these have high teacher engagement and were therefore likely to get an increased range of teacher responses. It was put up twice on different days and at different times to vary who might see it and therefore respond.

Fifteen questions were asked to assist selection and to be eligible for the study, teachers had to be teaching in a state school with learners in years four to eight (seven to 13 years old). State schools were prioritised because these constitute most schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand and therefore findings can be considered reflective of a wider range of teacher experiences. The year levels four to eight were selected because the range of responses that might have occurred if the full range of primary years were included was deemed to be potentially too varied for this study’s purpose.

Survey questions aimed to identify a range of teachers from different contexts to gather and compare perspectives and have as much diversity across the participants as possible. These included: school location (rural/urban), years of teaching experience, gender, ethnicity, decile rating of the school (which in the past has been used to indicate the social-economic status of the local community) and type of learning environment (single cell, joined classrooms, purpose-built modern learning environments). The second factor influencing participant selection was the self-identified interest in LA. This was relevant because those who identified as having a high interest in LA were likely to have explored this topic widely both through research and in their practice, and therefore would be in a strong position to respond to the questions in an evaluative way, supporting the aims of this study.

The responses in the survey were anonymous unless teachers voluntarily entered their email address, which identified them as being willing to be interviewed for this study, at which point their responses were de-identified (accessible only to the researcher and their supervisor). A total of 16 teachers agreed to be part of the study. From this group, nine teachers were identified as potential participants, as they fulfilled all the criteria listed here. The nine teachers were contacted allowing for some teacher withdrawal, which did occur (three teachers did not respond to follow up from the survey), thus leaving six participants (Table 1), which was the original aim.

Table 1

Participant profiles

Gender	Years teaching experience	Ethnicity identified as	School decile	School location	Learning environment	Interest in LA
3xMales	1 x 1-5 yrs	5 x New Zealand European/Pākeha	1 x 9-10	3 x rural	3 x single cell	5 x 5/5
3xFemales	2 x 6-10 yrs	1 x Māori/Tongan	1 x 7-8	3 x urban	2 x co-teaching	1 x 4/5
	2 x 11-15 yrs		2 x 3-4			
	1 x 21+yrs		2x 1-2			

This group offered a diverse range of participants. They teach across the North Island of Aotearoa/New Zealand within a range of primary contexts. A gap in teachers diversity was identified in the area of ethnicity and those with 16-20 years' experience. The participant data remains aggregated to ensure anonymity.

3.4 Data sources and collection

The primary source of data was through semi-structured interviews that took place over a one-month period. This was the selected tool because “every teacher has different interpretations of their own experiences based on their interactions with people around them as well as their environment and seeks to understand the reasons that lie behind those experiences” (Yen Dwee & Anthony, 2017, p. 20). Interview questions were designed to draw out individual interpretations.

Interviews were conducted *kanohi ki te kanohi* (face to face) because developing a relationship in person would increase participant trust in the process, develop a genuine connection and therefore support richer, more honest discussions, all increasing trustworthiness of the data. Each interview took between 45 minutes to one hour and were recorded and transcribed.

The interviews were structured around a range of questions. The aim of the study was included within these questions. Others were added to build rapport, help understand each teacher's beliefs and values and each teachers' experience. Once all questions were responded to, a range of prompts (such as leadership, assessment, technology) were provided. It was explained that these were based on themes that emerged in the LA literature. Participants were informed they had already discussed many of the themes and they were under no obligation to respond to the prompts but, if there were any that they would like to make further comment about, they were able to. Everyone chose to respond to the prompts in some way. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were informed that they could add notes to transcriptions later if they had further comment to make.

3.5 Data analysis

Data gathered from the open-ended conversation topics were analysed and thematised using grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) to enable the voices of

participants to emerge, rather than having pre-defined criteria imposed. Then responses to the 'prompts' described above were analysed in consideration of agreement (or lack thereof) with the extant literature. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Williams & Moser, 2019;) was used to analyse the transcribed interviews because it enabled accurate capturing and reporting on participant perspectives and ideas, which was the central aim of this study.

Each participant's transcription was read numerous times to become familiar with the data and identify initial ideas "in an organised and systematic way" (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 4). Open codes were identified as "distinct concepts and themes for categorization" (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 4) that related to aspects of the data. These were defined and applied across all participant interviews. Examples of codes included curriculum, assessment and technology and were categorised under stakeholder headings (e.g. teacher, learner), then further categorised under affordances and challenges. From there, axial codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Williams & Moser, 2019) were developed and collated into emerging themes and included the synthesising of open codes. These included teacher dispositions, leadership values and whānau communication. Then, any relevant data related to themes were collated. From this list, the themes were reviewed and checked to see if they still fitted with ideas identified in the initial data analysis to check for representativeness (Brink, 1993). At each stage, themes were discussed with the supervisor to review for clarity. Once finalised, each theme was named and described to capture the essence of the theme. Examples of initial themes included leadership culture, learners being assessment capable and whānau engagement. Each transcript was then read to identify supporting evidence from each participant. Because factors identified by participants could be both affordances and limitations, they were grouped under the respective theme under the headings of affordance or of challenge. These were then ranked in order from those with the most references from participants to the least.

3.6 Trustworthiness of qualitative research

This study was not deemed to be ideal but rather representative of the factors that impacted the development of LA in Aotearoa/New Zealand classrooms from teacher perspectives. However, the trustworthiness of research can be tested and

affirmed by considering the reliability, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the qualitative research methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The purposeful selection of diverse participants ensured the potential for transferability and the “accurate explanations and interpretation of the events” to a different setting (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 405). Reliability was achieved through the diversity of the participants demographics and conducting interviews face-to-face in the setting of the participants. As Brink (1993) suggests, gaining participant trust reduces potential errors which may affect reliability of data. Further, the research design has been clearly outlined and the process could be replicated. To ensure credibility, member checking (Cohen et al., 2013) was undertaken by sending the initial draft of findings to participants to ensure their information was represented accurately and to check that they felt anonymous. Four participants agreed with the findings. One asked clarifying questions about the different aspects of agency that were responded to in a follow-up email and they were satisfied with my response. One did not respond. This action increased the research validity because participant feedback is “perhaps the most important strategy” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 266) enabling participants to clear up any miscommunication, ensure they agreed with what was written and identify any inaccuracies.

This research is dependable and consistent rather than replicable because I “walk [ed] people through my work, from beginning to end, so they can understand the path I took and judge the trustworthiness of my outcomes” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 146). Confirmability has been achieved through the iterative process of checking and rechecking the data and evolving findings. Additionally, researcher bias was addressed through regular meetings with the supervisor in which data, findings and analysis were examined and discussed, codes and themes reviewed by the supervisor to ensure they were representative of findings, and researcher viewpoints were challenged to minimise personal views and perspectives that could have influenced how the data were interpreted (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 265). Furthermore, when synthesising participant interviews, as much as possible “low inference descriptors” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 267) were used, assisted by using transcriptions of interviews. This enabled the reader to examine participants’ actual feelings, language and experiences to increase

interpretive validity. Verbatim/direct quotations were used at the start of each section of findings to enable participants' exact words to give a sense of what was to come.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval (0000027813) was gained from Victoria University of Wellington, Faculty of Education. through which this study is conducted.

Before each interview, the purpose of the study was explained. Participants were then asked to sign a consent form (<https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/search?q=ethics+consent+to+interview>) that indicated the confidentiality of the data being collected, that no participant would be able to be identified individually through the disaggregating of data and how they could withdraw from the study.

Participants were interviewed individually, ensuring anonymity from other participants. Each interview was recorded with permission. Participants had the option to select if they would like to have a copy of the recording, a summary and the transcript and the option to view/adapt transcripts from the interview. Participants have each been given a code (P1-6) to ensure their anonymity in the findings presented in Chapter 4. Findings will be shared with participants at the conclusion of the study.

Chapter Four: Getting in the waka

4.1 Introduction

During interviews, participants discussed varying factors they felt afforded and challenged the development of LA within the Aotearoa/New Zealand primary school context. Owing to the scope of this study, the prominent themes emerging from the interview data are the focus of the following discussion: co-constructed repositioning of stakeholders; bespoke partnerships; and understanding beliefs, experiences and efficacy. Themes are presented in the order of importance they were given by the participants. Within each theme, participants reflected on the key affordances and challenges and to what extent they were influenced by stakeholders including teachers, leaders, learners, and whānau.

4.2 Co-constructed repositioning: *from passive to participatory*

4.2.1 *Changing teacher roles*

It's changing the narrative; it's taking us off being in control all the time. (P3)

Repositioning stakeholders as active learning partners by removing traditional hierarchical structures is a key affordance of LA. Although participants discussed the changing role of each stakeholder, it is clear this shift is especially pivotal for teachers and learners.

Teacher willingness to evolve their role by purposefully sharing power with learners affords LA. Teachers move from setting all tasks and solving any problem to consciously ensuring learners have authentic voice, choice and power, and then act on learner decisions. Participants reiterated that while the teacher role is changing, it is still very relevant. Teachers are still required to teach, scaffold and question learners. However, it is how these decisions are made that is evolving; why we are learning, who we are learning with and how we will learn. Participants described teacher actions that emphasised increased learner participation including empowering learners to choose what they learn about, who they learn with, what

goals to set, what resources to use and who else to connect with to support their learning. They place the responsibility of thinking and talking on learners, they model to learners that teachers are learners too by showing they are not holders of all knowledge, and run workshops based on what learners identify they want or need to learn. All participants accept this is messy, noisy, confusing and chaotic: “it can be scary” (P2) and “you have to give away a lot” (P4). Vital to this change in role is teachers having strong relationships and knowing each learner individually. All participants expressed that evolving roles are an aspect of LA that is incredibly challenging, rewarding and enjoyable.

Teachers are unwilling to compromise. (P6)

All participants had examples of colleagues reluctant to engage in the changing teacher role. Participants felt a common reason might be that some teachers believe that some of their colleagues think “that is the way he’s always done it” (P4) and it works, so why change? Participants feel some teachers may think a LA programme might not be effective and then they would be responsible for the lack of achievement, or there is a “fear of failure” (P5). These factors appear to stem from a lack of confidence and belief in LA. There are a number of other reasons for being reluctant to reposition their traditional roles to support LA. Participants thought these could be related to teachers’ comfort levels, which include being unnerved, those and “who find it hard to give up control” (P3); the challenge of not knowing what every learner is doing at all times; or the unpleasant feeling of chaos. Fundamentally, all participants feel that some teachers struggle with not being the expert. Some other challenges to developing LA which impacted a repositioning of the teacher role, are: feeling that there is a lack of time to develop the amplified learner role; the variance in how much choice learners have when there are a range of teachers in the learning environment; the challenge of teacher input and learner voice; and the mismatch between the learning focus and teacher feedback; “Sometimes teachers need to take control and sometimes the kids do, it’s a hard balance.” (P5)

4.2.2 Changing leadership roles

If we are expecting the kids to make decisions over their learning, why are teachers not expected to make decisions over ours? (P1)

All participants identified that LA is afforded when teachers were supported to enact their agency. They unanimously agreed that support occurs when leadership moves from their traditional role of making the decisions that teachers abide by to a shared partnership role, by facilitating increased autonomy and personalisation for teachers, underpinned by a higher-trust model. The reimagining of the leadership role to increase teacher agency (TA) is an affordance of LA, “if we are trying to build agentic learners, we [teachers] have to be that way ourselves” (P3). Justification for this shift in role includes participants knowing their learners’ interests, emotional requirements and academic next steps and feeling they should be able to adapt programmes as necessary. P3 expressed frustration with a lack of support for TA: “teachers should not have to wait to be able to explore ways to improve teaching and learning.” P4 added that having the freedom and leadership trust to personalise their teaching approaches “made learning exciting, interesting and fun.” P3 and P5 believe that ensuring there was buy-in from staff by not forcing teachers to engage with LA ultimately helps to get all teachers on the same page and committed to LA. Participants identified key leadership actions that support TA. First, everyone works together to develop a shared understanding of LA. Second, ensuring there is flexibility for teachers to put this understanding into practice: “a real support would be having a common definition in mind but how we achieve that goal could look really different” (P5).

All participants identified being able to reflect on and determine their professional strengths and next learning steps as important skills to develop, they felt as teachers they know “how we best support our learners” (P2). This reinforces to teachers that they are learners too. Examples of how performance appraisal systems support TA were given. P1 and P4 mentioned *Teaching as Inquiry* (Ministry of Education, 2007) as a way teachers focus on developing LA. P4’s school surveyed students and each teacher identified their next steps from responses. P4 felt this approach enhances the staff’s value of LA in their practice because all teachers focus on developing LA as a professional goal: “the focus on agentic learning for our

Teaching as Inquiry this year has definitely enhanced the majority of the staffs' perception of LA." Teachers are encouraged to extend themselves in the area they identified as important to them and their learners. Another example of TA within the appraisal system is at P1's school, which supports teachers to choose any aspect of the school vision, which includes LA, as a focus for their inquiry. Teachers also have agency regarding whom they ask to support the achievement of their goal(s) and appraise them; it did not have to be someone from their leadership team.

It's a learned helplessness that runs from the teachers all the way down. Teacher agency is a huge issue. (P6)

The shift in leadership role to support TA brought up some challenges. One consideration is a lack of continuity of how LA is developed across classrooms. Without building a shared understanding of LA initially, teachers were "doing LA differently...there isn't enough continuity" (P5). P5 further shared that the school staff re-evaluates the dispositions of LA annually and changes them. For example, they removed one disposition completely. They felt this impacted the consistency of teachers and, consequently, learners, understanding and applying the skills of LA over time. Another challenge is the lack of "being on the same waka" (P1), which occurs because teachers follow personalised goals. P1 wondered how they could bring together all the learning that teachers gain on their personalised paths so that everyone benefits. Another comment was about how a change in leadership strongly impacts the development of LA. P3 and P5 discussed the difficulties of a change in leadership that decreased TA. This affected the degree teachers develop LA directly in their classrooms. Finally, P6 found that some teachers struggle to be agentic. They may lack confidence, require extensive support, and may lack the motivation to extend their practice, even when leadership give them a wide berth to do so.

4.2.3 Changing learner role

It's all about voice and listening to that voice. Not just saying 'I heard you'; but 'Let's DO that, it's cool! It's exciting! It's different!' (P4)

All participants agree the aim and impact of repositioning teacher roles is to support the increasing input learners have into their educational decisions. Learners are more than participants in the classroom, they are active partners and key

stakeholders in learning decisions. All participants highly value this change in role because it makes learning relevant and personalised for each learner and supports teachers to “see every kid as a learner in their own right” (P3). Overall, participants perceive that learners are willing to engage with this shift in role. In fact, some learners are “just hungry and thirsty to lead their own path” (P1). It was agreed unanimously that developing learners as active partners is often complex and challenging. However, some key approaches support this transformation.

To be repositioned as partners and afford LA, participants believe learners must have an understanding of the dispositions of LA (e.g., reflection, resilience/growth mindset, creativity, curiosity) and the explicit teaching of dispositions greatly affords LA. P2 notes they “are really explicit about how we use them and use dispositions in different contexts.” This is supported by P1 and P3. Further facilitating this shift in learner role is “knowing yourself as a learner, how you learn, I try to set that up to happen” (P1). Finally, in an LA programme, “everything is transparent” (P6) so learners know what success looks like and can identify when they have/have not been successful, what helps/hinders, and what comes next.

Participants all identified a key approach to repositioning learners is through amplifying learner voice and choice. There are many common ways in how participants use learner voice and choice. These include learners deciding on topic content for learning; “allowing choice in how they can show their learning, so not just having kids write things but having them use tools like Twitter, Flipgrid, Sketchnoting, things like that” (P3); the style of writing used and expressing learning through the arts. Learners regularly choose whether they want to collaborate or work independently. At times, choice and voice is achieved by a co-designed approach with the teacher.

One variation between participants is the use of voice in how learning is timetabled. P3 and P5 provide their learners with a large degree of choice in planning their daily/weekly timetables, in which they can choose when to do various subjects that are specified by teachers. When necessary, students are scaffolded to do this (e.g., the teachers put in specific subjects and timing and learners choose the learning focus). P3 said flexibility through not having to follow other class timetable supports their programme to develop LA. It also frees them up for a lot more one-on-

one time with learners in which they are able to teach them exactly what they need, often identified by the learner themselves: “students are able to critique their learning and say “I’m doing this because I know what my next steps are” (P4).

To further support LA, participants ran explicit teaching workshops. At times, learners would select whether to attend a workshop or not, based on their self-identified goals or interests, teachers could select specific learners to attend, or there could be a combination of both; “it’s just grouping, but they do their own grouping” (P5). P5 says her learners request workshops, which she then runs based around specifically what they need to learn. P4 supports their learners to choose their level of work, “even if it is considered above where they are working or different to their year level, if you want to go do it, go do it.”

Underpinning all these approaches to develop the role of the learner is ensuring the transparency of learning. Participants do this in varied ways: using rubrics, learning progressions, exemplars, subject-specific resources (e.g., learning maps; numeracy stages, learning intentions and success criteria). Resources are co-constructed with learners or provided by the teacher. Students use them to set goals and identify next steps.

Participants identified the deliberate acts of teaching they use that increase the role of learners. In a classroom that prioritises LA, teachers move from primarily telling (what to do, how to do it) to questioning and prompting; “I’ve tried to give up all transmissive teaching from the board” (P4). This change supports learners being active in decision making about their learning as well as supporting its personalisation as teachers work with individuals and groups to “empower kids to own their learning journey” (P1).

They are just happy to be passive. (P1)

Although learner voice and choice are not new educational concepts, to afford LA, the role of the learner is magnified. All participants support this repositioning of the learner. However, for a variety of reasons, it is not always accomplished easily. Emotional wellbeing might impact engagement with the shift in roles. P1 noticed some learners are anxious. P2 agreed: “emotionally, if learners are in a place where they are not ready for learning, that can be really challenging.” This supports P4’s

and P6's experiences in which sharing power is something some learners find challenging. Learners who require additional support is another barrier mentioned by most participants. Although scaffolding and support is provided (e.g., increased break-down of learning steps and limiting choices to support decision-making), these generally require adult support, which was not always available. P2 added that it is also necessary to consider learners for whom routine and structure is important because increased agency can feel too loose for these children. Furthermore, participants found that some learners do not have self-belief or are afraid to make mistakes, "they are so afraid to do something wrong" (P6), which makes them more comfortable in a passive role.

Other challenges to increasing learner roles relate to school-wide practices. Participants identified that learners find it challenging to build onto and increase LA skills to lead their learning when approaches across the school are inconsistent. Also, practices that remove learners from having any input into assessment – "who designs the rubrics? We do!" (P5); the use of data walls; prioritising standardised testing tools for goal setting; and students not being familiar with or understanding the purpose of testing or how to use results to reflect on their learning - "they didn't have that agency of knowing what level they were or at and didn't know what they could do to be better. They didn't even know what the benchmark was for them" (P6). All these factors influence the ability to increase the learner role, which affords LA. Finally, although all participants identified the importance of developing dispositions to support learners to drive their learning, assessing LA dispositions is something participants found challenging. This is often a consequence of inconsistent school-wide assessment practices to support learners to reflect on the dispositions that afford LA.

4.2.4 The repositioning of the whānau role

I think in terms of whānau, they are really engaged. (P2)

To afford LA, whānau have an increased role in their child's learning. This involves a shift from whānau-as-supporters, directed how to support their children by schools, to whānau-as-active-partners. Participants described how these are actioned in several ways. One is through whānau having an increasingly active role

in their child's learning. P2 does by assisting their learners to ask whānau (parents, grandparents, older siblings) to take them on trips organised by learners, which support their personal inquiries/passion projects. P2 added "it's nice for parents to really feel like they know what's happening and be really involved." Another way is through whānau contributing to the learning happening in schools. P4 had a grandfather, an expert in eel catching (the students' chosen topic), who taught learners how to make hinaki (traditional Māori eel catchers). Another example of whānau as learning partners is at P2's school, in which they have two, formal half-hour learning conversations annually. Teachers and family members support learners because they share how they are going to develop their learning (e.g., using Learning Maps), review their academic progress and reflect on their goals. Learners identify the changes they want to make and tell their teachers and family how they can support them. P4 holds after-school learning workshops twice weekly (with literacy and mathematical foci) in which learners share and practice their goals, as well as teach whānau what they are learning. Family members are repositioned as active partners in their child's learning through becoming learners themselves; learners "are teaching their family. It's amazing!" (P4). One parent continues to attend these workshops, even though their child is no longer in the class, because they are learning so much. Participants gave similar examples of how they engage whānau-as-active-partners by making the learning process transparent for whānau to develop an understanding of what their child is learning, how they achieve it and what comes next. Most participants agree that communicating with whānau to explain and gain support for this shift in role is essential in affording LA.

There had been no community information about the programme and that was really hard, that was extremely hard. (P3)

Participants felt that engaging some whānau with this repositioning was challenging for various reasons. They wondered if families might lack confidence, feel nervous or anxious about what they have to offer to their child's learning and school, or believe schools are the learning experts. Some whānau are less likely to connect with schools, therefore engaging in their role as learning partners is more difficult. Another challenge, identified by P1 and P4, relates to the issue of cultural capital. P1 reflected that there might be "a disconnect between home learning and

agentic learning”, and it is through powerful discussions that whānau aspirations can be aligned to LA, which hopefully supports a repositioning of whānau. P4 recognises that his cultural identity is different to many of his whānau and he wonders how much influence this has regarding this shift in role. Finally, P2 noted some whānau are challenged in becoming partners in learning because of work commitments, being unable to drive or being unable to support trips physically.

The repositioning of roles for all stakeholders is identified as essential for the development of LA. Being supported to enact ones’ agency is a common theme and this relies generally on the actions of others. As with all the prominent themes, participants would develop environments to reposition learners and themselves, even when there is not a school-wide focus on LA. However, there is a strong flow-on effect, both affording and challenging LA, beginning with leadership.

4.3. Bespoke partnerships: from relationships to powerful partnerships

All participants discussed the important role relationships among stakeholders have in affording LA. These relationships support stakeholders to feel confidence and trust in the teachers, which then flows on to support the development of LA. Relationships are also essential in knowing each stakeholder individually so that learning environments can be co-constructed to ensure success.

4.3.1 Teacher relationships with learners

Relationships. Huge. HUGE! Relationships do have an effect on agency. They have to trust you then they learn to trust themselves and then they learn to make their own choices. It’s a progression. (P5)

All participants reiterated the importance of strong relationships with learners as essential for developing LA. They recognise the interconnection between relationships, confidence and trust and that “relationships are really central to learning” (P2). P2 and P4 mentioned explicitly the need to have safe and secure relationships with learners as effective learning underpinned by LA cannot occur until these are established. P3 supported this; they gave a lot of time to developing relationships and, when asked what the impact would be if this did not occur,

expressed that “learning probably would not happen”. Added to this, the environment in classrooms developing LA requires learners to take on challenges, take risks and sit with uncertainty as they lead their learning. Participants do not believe this can occur without learner trust in teachers that come from secure relationships.

There are many parallels in how participants develop relationships. Key is knowing each learner as an individual, such as knowing “where they’ve come from, their back story” (P4), knowing each learner as a culturally located individual, “not just categorising people under headings such as ‘Asian’” (P2), and, finally, understanding learner aspirations and goals. To further strengthen bonds, teachers develop reciprocal relationships by sharing themselves, their lives, their backstories. Furthermore, teachers view learners through an appreciative lens, recognising all learners are capable and having high expectations of their learners. They begin with what learners can do and already know, then build on learner strengths/interests. Classroom environments focus on individual progress and successes as well as developing a climate of collaboration, not competition; “we all ascend together, and we celebrate every success” (P6).

Participants gave examples of how they consciously develop relationships. P3 spends term one each year with relationships as a focus. P1’s school has a learning focus on strengthening relationships (whakawhanaungatanga) between all those involved in learning. This approach to relationship building was enhanced with leadership support and further reinforced by the leadership taking key points from Russell Bishop’s *Teaching to the North-East* (2019). Participants also gave examples of how developing strong relationships is especially vital for learners with complex backgrounds. The importance of helping learners feel confident in the teacher/learner relationship enables them to feel comfortable, safe and welcome. All participants believe student self-trust, supported strongly by teacher trust in them, helps learners enact their agency.

As well as differentiating for learning, most participants mentioned that the use of culturally responsive practices enhances relationships. Examples include the emphasis on collaborative learning strategies and how learners make choices about their learning, which supports them to reflect their culture and identity (e.g., presenting learning using waiata and exploring local history relevant to their

whakapapa/family history). When students are authentic partners in learning, “they will bring their own cultural agency, put their input and you will see learner culture throughout” (P6). P1 reflected on how there might be a difference between traditional cultural practices and how things are done in a LA classroom in which learners are supported to have input into their learning. The example given is that, during Kapa Haka, “you do it right and you do it like this” (P1).

A limitation for us is that teachers refuse to let learners into who they are. (P6)

Participants observed that some teachers do not develop strong relationships with learners. They believe that this results from teachers who lack a sense of reciprocity and “refuse to let students into who they are, it seems weird” (P6). P1 added “no learning happens without a significant relationship.” Other challenging beliefs include holding deficit views about certain students and lacking the willingness to understand individual learners’ cultures. Schools systems also impact relationships building. At P6's school, learners change teachers regularly. They note that the strong relationship they had with their class, compounded by other teachers not developing relationships with learners, meant learners developed their strongest relationship on them. For example, on one standardised test, the results were not reflective of the class’s ability. When questioned, the learners admitted “[y]ou weren’t here, we mucked around. Can we do it again?” because the teacher they had the key relationship with did not administer the test. They did their best learning for that *teacher* (not themselves or other teachers) which again highlights the role of relationships in affording learners to enact their agency. P6 supports their learners to overcome this. A final challenge for building personalised relationships involves those who hold leadership roles; it is more difficult to maintain consistency and depth of relationships with learners (and LA classroom programmes) when a range of teachers are involved in the teaching environment, which is further compounded by regularly being out of class.

4.3.2 Relationships among colleagues

If you are trying to do it by yourself, it’s quite hard. Having someone on board, someone to collaborate and discuss things with, is vital. (P3)

All participants agreed an environment that supported teacher collaboration actively afforded LA through removing feelings of isolation. Having like-minded colleagues helps with trialing ideas, discussing thinking and reflections, sharing resources and planning and developing collaborative programmes that support LA; “it is the power of everyone in the room” (P1). P5 believes that when teachers collaborate, they *grow quicker* and their learning about LA increases when working with people. P2 and P3 believe that collegial support assists LA as it becomes an ongoing focus of conversations. P6 videos their practice and shares this with colleagues, aiming to inspire others to try new activities to develop LA in their classrooms. P4 added that collaboration through having a critical friend or coach helps their understanding and implementation of LA. Also, collaboration is enhanced “when we had time to do it” (P1). P5 and P6 identified visiting other schools, observing and collaborating with other teachers (within and across schools) and having mentors to talk to, get support from and observe their teaching practice is professional learning that supports not only enhanced relationships but gained teacher belief in LA. They stated these need to be supported by leadership to occur.

Co-teaching is another aspect of collaborative practice that affords LA. Most participants agreed: “in terms of co-teaching, it is really beneficial being able to work with people who share those similar philosophies and also value that idea of agency” (P2). Participants believe co-teaching enables skill sharing and learning from each other. P3 recognised that “collaboration increases transparency between teachers and teaching”, and P6 agreed, “co-teaching de-privatises practice”.

Lots of the things we put in place have been watered down a little bit...no one is quite doing what they want. (P5)

Challenges to developing collaborative relationships have been identified. P5 notes that, when there is collaboration through co-teaching but teaching philosophies and values are not aligned closely, practices around LA are compromised and diluted and, as a result, teacher practices vary. P5 noted “one of our teachers in particular hasn't liked how much time we've had to put into it so lots of the things we put in place have been watered down.” Another challenge is having a range of teachers in the same learning environment where practices do not align. P5 recognises the impact this has on learners: it is good for students to be flexible by

having a range of teachers, approaches and practices, but a lack of consistency impacts the development of LA. P1 adds that, when teachers collaborated, “it was really slow because you try and get everyone's practice to align”, whereas, on their own (e.g., in a single classroom), they can speed up the way they develop LA because there is no need to liaise or collaborate. Compounding this, collaborating with three co-teachers was more challenging than two. When there are differing beliefs in the value of LA, it becomes the role of the more committed teacher to drive it, which P5 acknowledged is hard. Another challenge was a lack of time provided to support teachers to plan collaboratively, have discussions and do peer observations; all actions that participants say assist LA.

4.3.3 Relationships with leadership

It's being able to have robust discussions, academically rigorous conversations. (P1)

When it comes to growing LA across schools, the primary affordance of leadership is the development of a safe school culture supporting collegial relationships, which in turn supports teacher risk-taking, discussions and actions to develop LA. Further, LA is afforded by having “a Principal and teachers all around you who are supportive of change” (P5). P3 and P5 noted a culture that supports discussions that are challenging, clarifying, and academically rigorous between colleagues helps to deepen their understanding and, consequently, practices regarding LA. P4's leadership team fosters a school culture that supports a diverse staff who develop LA from different perspectives, “we've got some pretty innovative, exciting, young teachers with a variety of backgrounds.” Conversely, P6 notes that their leadership and school culture strongly prefer a particular type of teacher and this negatively impacts the opportunities to bring in teachers considered diverse, who might extend teacher learning regarding LA.

I think it depends on the culture of the school. (P4).

One participant identified an aspect of school culture influenced by leadership that they believe challenges teacher collaboration. P6 felt “there's no transparency between the classes.” This leads to P6 struggling to know what people were doing because the culture is one of hiding what's happening. This makes it more

challenging to both address issues that teachers might have, or amplify those that are having successes, in LA.

4.3.4 Relationships among learners

It's great to see students being able to connect to each other and learn from each other. (P2)

All participants identified that developing relationships among learners affords LA and several reasons for this were given. P2 believes collaboration encourages learners to connect with and learn from others in the room, believing it assists learners to see “it is not always teachers who are the experts”. P6 agrees learner collaboration helps expose learners to different ideas. P3 believes that developing peer relationships not only develops collaborative skills but supports learners on their individual pathways. P5 noticed that “encouraging collaboration influences learners to change their viewpoints, consider multiple perspectives, compromise and, consequently, grow their ideas and develop their creativity.” P4 explained how using collaboration strategies moves the classroom environment from competitive to collaborative, and this shift enhances peer relationships.

Participants did not identify any specific challenges to developing peer relationships or any negative consequences of doing so.

4.3.5 Relationships with whānau

It's all about the relationships, not just the learning. (P4)

All participants identified schools developing partnerships with families as an affordance of LA. Although all the identified actions are common examples of developing positive whānau relationships, participants felt that these are important foundations to ensure they can move into the active partnerships which support LA. P4 texts one family with positive feedback about their child, “every day I'll message them with one tiny good news story and it's just building, building, building, building.” In time, these parents have become highly engaged with the school. P2's school ensures teachers make contact with all whānau within the first two weeks of school starting. School-wide ways of connecting to families to develop relationships include

school picnics and showcase evenings during which students share their learning. P1 and P2 explicitly mentioned their schools offering consultation sessions with whānau to gather their thoughts and values to develop school actions, such as the school charter, curriculum, Te Tiriti O Waitangi and school values, which include LA. P2's school asks "what is important to whānau, what their school is doing well, what they need to work on and whether or not whānau would be willing to support the school and, if so, how?" P2 feels that these actions develop genuine reciprocity. All participants perceived that whānau are supportive of their children being in classrooms in which agency is a core value, evidenced by children often going home talking excitedly about their learning, enabling parents to feel connected to learning. According to participants, whānau believe their children are happy at school, which is important to them, and which, in turn, helps to enhance relationships and engage whānau support of classroom activities.

The connection with home and school can sometimes be a challenge. (P2).

Participants identified the challenge of developing relationships with some whānau. P4 finds that, despite using a range of approaches, including a range of communication methods and providing flexible opportunities and locations to meet, it is more difficult to build relationships with some whānau. P2 described similar experiences. They acknowledge whānau may be experiencing complicating factors, such as well-being concerns or complex family issues, which might impact their availability to build relationships with schools at that time.

It is evident that participants recognise the necessity of meaningful connections among stakeholders to develop LA and they actively pursue these relationships recognising their importance to learners as well as for developing LA. Although the word relationships is used primarily, it is clear that these connections are about learning partnerships. Participants share that partnerships among stakeholders rely on developing genuine reciprocity through knowing each other, holding an appreciative view, and actively sharing power. These partnerships are vital in creating an environment of trust and risk-taking required to develop LA and, when absent, participants note that developing LA is more challenging. Participants demonstrated their investment in these partnerships by using multiple approaches to connect and holding an appreciative mindset. Again, the role of leadership is evident.

Participants shared that, although the forming of partnerships occur without leadership focus and support, LA is greatly afforded when leadership are engaged in creating an environment that supports developing partnerships among stakeholders.

4.4 Beliefs, practices and efficacy: from some to all

Through discussion about beliefs, practices and efficacy, participants demonstrated these have a significant role in affording and challenging the development of LA. All stakeholders need to believe in LA for it to flourish.

4.4.1 Participant perceptions about the impact of teacher beliefs, experiences and efficacy in developing LA

Everyone needs to be on the same page, everyone needs to be invested in agency as a means for the kids accessing their learning. (P5)

All participants agree that an important affordance to the development of LA is believing it has benefits for learning and that these are clearly understood and strongly valued. There was consensus among participants regarding the range of benefits of LA, which further supports their belief in and commitment to it. The benefits of LA are that it: is an evidence-based approach supporting the development of lifelong skills; promotes greater student investment in learning; greater student confidence in themselves as learners; provides the ability to have more challenging conversations about learning; supports learning contexts that are more meaningful and purposeful; transferable across contexts and time; and strengthens relationships. Being agentic is seen as having the potential for learners to change their lives and “see themselves out of their own poverty” (P6). P2 added that their belief in LA is increased because learners might have poor self-esteem although, “[actually] they have lots of strengths in other areas, so how do we make sure that as a society we value that?” LA challenges what is deemed success, what are valued outcomes and, consequently, improve learner confidence and efficacy. All participants believe the dispositions of agency are valuable, lifelong skills, which cement their belief in developing LA.

If you don't get buy-in from the staff, it's not going to happen. (P4)

A lack of teacher belief in LA is identified as a primary challenge to its implementation. All participants had examples of teachers who do not buy into LA and this directly limited its development. Some factors that participants believe inhibit teachers' beliefs include teachers who "just don't get the why" (P3). The nature of LA means that teachers are required to "empower and innovate" (P1) and this demands a lot from teachers. If teacher belief in LA is not established alongside these other factors, its development is challenged.

4.4.2 Participant perception of the impact of leadership beliefs, experiences and efficacy in developing LA

I know in our staff that LA is really valued. (P2)

With Principal support and advocacy, LA thrives. P2 notes that, at their school, "LA is really valued by the Principal and leadership team and this leadership support of LA encourages teachers to believe in and value LA as well." All participants identified that, when their Principal and leadership teams believe in LA and create an environment of professional trust and risk taking, allowing space, time and flexibility, teachers are able to create learning environments that develop LA. P3 commented "it's about having trust in your teachers" and P5 agreed, reflecting that people and school support:

...[is] probably the biggest thing, it is the biggest barrier and enabler, being able to try new stuff, being able to make good and bad choices. If you're trying anything new, your fear is that it's not going to work and therefore you'll never be able to try it again. (P5).

Creating a shared understanding of LA is another leadership action that all participants identify as an affordance, e.g., having shared school values that encompass LA, and having whole-staff discussions. P5 noted that, with their Principal's support, LA is the focus of learning discussions, builds teacher practice, time is given to develop resources and shared planning, and they have a shared criterion of LA across all year levels. However, a change in Principal led to a shift in school focus, limiting time given to discussing agency and resulting in new staff valuing LA less.

A change in leadership was identified as strongly impacting the schools' belief in LA. P1's school changed most of the leadership team in a short period of time. However, their school maintains their valuing of LA because it is part of their school vision and the new leadership team believe in LA. The need for leadership belief is further highlighted by P3 who noted that, when they and a colleague have been supported to develop LA, they create innovative new resources and feel confident taking the time required to develop LA in their practices and with learners. When the Principal changes and support changes, it becomes challenging to focus on LA in the way they believe is necessary. P5 provided examples of how leadership belief in LA meant it was prioritised in staff discussions, during professional learning and by developing a shared understanding of LA across the school. A change in Principal led to a change in focus; "not to say that agency isn't happening, it's just not as visible or talked about as much as it used to be." P5 feels isolated in their ongoing passion for developing LA: "it's the same as your journey towards agency, there can be a lot of small steps away from it as well, you don't even notice it being eaten away." P6 noted different members of the leadership team hold different understandings of LA and, because leadership keeps changing, so does ideas about LA, which limits the traction LA can make. They also add that, although meeting daily, "there is never talk about LA being important".

Leadership providing time for staff reflection also supports the creation of a shared understanding of, and belief in, LA. P4 spoke of their school going through a period of rapid growth so the leadership team supported staff to take time to reflect on what they believe is important and it included keeping LA as a focus. This afforded LA as staff believed it should remain a priority.

It has to come from management, they have to want it to happen or it won't. (P5)

One challenge to leadership belief in LA is a lack of understanding of what it actually looks like in practice. Some participants identified examples in which leaders believe LA means teachers leave students to manage themselves and are not providing scaffolding or support; or in which "quality learning is quiet learners doing worksheets" (P6). P5's leaders believe student-directed learning/timetabling is students doing nothing, it is students having free time; and, if there is a leadership belief it is that the timing of programmes needs to be the same across classrooms.

Further challenges to LA included a lack of leadership belief in LA which leads to a lack of collective focus, limited investment of time, and reduced transparency among classes. P5 and P6 both agreed that when there isn't enough continuity LA is limited. A final challenge identified is having a culture in which teachers fear failure. P5 explained, "when things failed, the LA programme is automatically blamed." Therefore, lack of leadership belief in LA means participants had to constantly prove the programme works.

4.4.3 Participant perception about the impact of learner beliefs, experiences and efficacy in developing LA

The reason you help them to develop agency is so that if they want to know something, they can. (P6)

Participants focus on getting their learners to understand key messages about LA. These include LA is a teaching and learning approach which develops a range of skills and dispositions that learners can draw on their whole lives to find out about anything that interests them, and, when challenged, they will know what to do and be successful. Supporting learners to see the why of LA helps to develop their belief in it. How they advance these beliefs is through developing meaningful relationships in which learners know "they have a voice and their voice matters, their opinions matter" (P2), and which instills in learners the confidence to direct and drive their learning. P5 added that, although it is easier for teachers to do things for learners, "having learners own what they do increases their investment, and consequently their belief, in LA."

They're like 'Teacher, What's up? We do nothing in this class' when we first started doing it. (P6)

A lack of learner belief appeared to stem from learners not understanding why classroom practices are changing. For example, P6 notes that many of their learners' classroom experiences involves doing worksheets provided by the teacher and working independently, therefore, in a classroom that develops LA, they perceive that they are not doing work. The other is that learners might not experience the benefits of LA straight away, rather the advantages of being agentic may be more

obvious at high school, university or beyond. Therefore, learners might not place a high value on LA because it does not seem relevant to their immediate context.

4.4.4 Participant perception of the impact of whānau beliefs, experiences and efficacy in developing LA

The support of parents, that's a HUGE thing. (P5)

All participants recognised whānau as essential learning partners and articulated the need to ensure whānau support a shift in teaching and learning practices by building their belief in LA. P4 and P6 believe they have a responsibility in doing this; “what can we do for the community to help them value LA?” (P6). All participants identified that communication is essential to ensuring families are informed about, understand, and therefore trust in, LA, which is often seen as a new and different approach to learning. For example, during P1’s school consultation on their school’s charter, staff explained how learning is changing, asked whānau what their aspirations for their children were and then shared how LA could support these. Participants also noted that having honest conversations is essential so that whānau know about all aspects of the programme and therefore could have confidence and belief in LA. This enabled staff to learn of and address any fears and queries that whānau have. Participants also believe parents need to know that highly agentic classrooms are not suitable for every child, not a *silver bullet*. P3 and P4 stated the importance of having discussions with parents about LA classrooms. For example, arranging whānau meetings before children enter high LA classrooms so whānau are prepared for how learning could be different from when they had been at school.

If there is a disconnect between what a community wanted [and school], that would be a barrier. (P1)

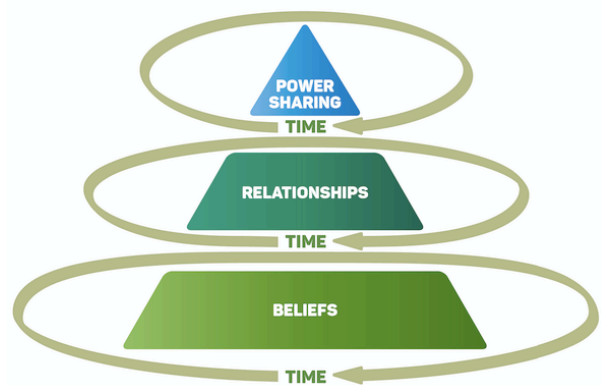
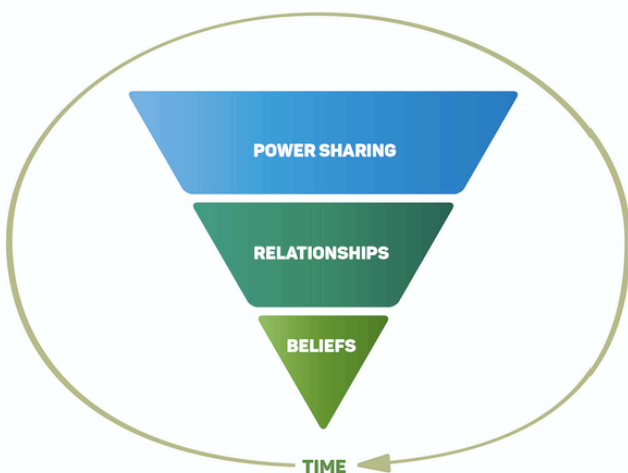
The difference between whānau school experiences and new programmes supporting LA was identified as a challenge by most participants. Compounding this was a lack of communication. Several participants identified a lack of communication created barriers between home and school. This limited whānau engagement in understanding and, consequently, in developing a belief in LA, impacting the success of classroom programmes directly. Additionally, P6 believed that, although parents may be happy that their children are happy, whānau do not always have a

clear understanding about what is happening in classrooms. Again, this might limit whānau belief in LA because they lack concrete knowledge about the underlying reasons for changing classroom practices.

The affordances and challenges to developing LA from participant perspectives are demonstrated in Figures 2 and 3. Figure 2 shows that a belief in LA means that it becomes a focus of and underpins what occurs at all levels of the school context. Belief in LA affords its development, which occurs through explicit and active discourse and being an ongoing focus of school processes, including having the time required to develop each layer. Without a definite belief in LA and the benefits it provides to learning and life, and/or prioritising other factors of LA, such as developing partnerships and power-sharing and providing the time essential to developing these, participants reflect that its development would be challenged and temporary, which is reflected in Figure 3.

Figure 3
Challenges

Figure 2
Affordances



Chapter Five: Discussion

This discussion focuses on the main emerging themes of understanding stakeholder beliefs, experiences and efficacy about LA; developing powerful partnerships; and the co-constructed repositioning of stakeholders in LA. The primary aim of this study was to identify factors that afford and limit the development of LA in Years 4–8 learners through understanding Aotearoa/New Zealand teachers' perspectives, to support the development of LA within and across classrooms.

This discussion recognises that the acts of teaching and learning are incredibly complex, and many factors influence what occurs within classrooms and schools. This was reinforced by Bronfenbrenner (1976) in his *ecological model* that noted how people learn is affected by both the relationships between people and the settings they occurred in; you cannot change one factor without others being impacted; this study had similar findings. This discussion also acknowledges that participants and their schools are undertaking positive and proactive efforts in their contexts to afford LA. Although there are prominent overlaps among the themes, there does appear to be a logical process that better affords the development of LA. First, stakeholders need to believe in LA and that it has purpose and benefit. Once there is consistent and aligned belief in LA, stakeholders need to develop bespoke partnerships that support learning and are essential in affording LA. Finally, when beliefs and partnerships are secure, stakeholders need to reposition their roles driven by a willingness to share power.

5.1 Belief, purpose and benefit

Belief in LA was a mandatory requirement to afford LA and is identified by participants as having the greatest influence on whether LA becomes a school's focus and, consequently, teacher practice. Like others, they identified that, although it is vital for all stakeholders to believe in LA, teacher and leadership belief were especially key (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; OECD, 2013).

All participants supported LA, believing that LA strengthened the development of learning dispositions, including creativity, resilience and reflection, which they felt

supported learning and life-long skills; LA enhanced engagement and motivation and supported in-depth discussions about learning. The benefits of LA were well supported by literature (e.g., Hannon, 2017; OECD, 2018; Spencer & Juliani, 2017). Participants added that, when teachers did not understand the why of LA, they were less likely to believe in it and spend the time needed to develop LA in their classrooms. By not examining teacher beliefs, there was a lack of clarity regarding whether the purpose and benefits of developing LA were understood. Additionally, teachers might not persist to develop LA if they perceived it was too challenging or, might limit the depth LA is developed purposefully (Al Asmari, 2013). All participants agreed that an examination of teacher beliefs was an essential approach to developing belief in LA, which was also well supported by literature. Wedell (2009) stated that understanding teacher beliefs about LA was a core component to ensuring change towards the development of LA in schools, as did Timperley et al. (2007) who found teacher beliefs impacted conceptual frameworks, which influenced their practices. However, it is worthy to note that, despite both participants and literature recognising the clear importance examining beliefs had in affording LA, participants did not give any specific examples of schools spending any time on unpacking, examining or challenging teacher beliefs. Whilst some participants were outspoken about their beliefs in LA, others were “creatively insubordinate” (Ayers, 2010, p. 143); their belief that LA is beneficial for learners now and in the future was so fundamental they would not be deterred from its growth. This reinforces Ayer’s (2010) opinion that teachers’ self-knowledge is very important yet rarely attended to.

Furthermore, participants agreed that a belief in LA was increased across all stakeholders when it was an embedded school practice. What became apparent was that for this to occur, leadership needed to believe in LA because this directly impacted the development of actions and systems that would support LA. ERO (2016) and OECD (2013) noted that a Principal’s focus was a critical school resource and influenced school direction and learning outcomes. For example, if leadership ensured LA was a school value, time was provided for shared planning, and LA was included as part of *Teaching as Inquiry* (Ministry of Education, 2007), LA thrived. All participants identified that co-constructing a shared definition and understanding of LA with teachers, learners, leadership, and whānau would greatly afford LA. However, this was not a common leadership practice. In fact, the role of leadership

in affording LA was highlighted clearly by two participants. Both their schools had LA as a school value, had spent significant time developing LA across the school, including being part of *Teacher Led Innovation Funds*⁴ focused on supporting LA, and had time and resourcing given to develop LA in their schools. Both these schools had a change in Principal and leadership teams. In one school, the belief in and prioritising of LA meant it remained a valued area of school growth. In the other school, it did not remain an area of focus and, within a couple of years, LA moved from being a highly visible and important practice evident in all classrooms to being reduced to only one classroom. This exemplifies the significant role leadership has in affording LA. Like Robinson (2007), participants identified several leadership actions that supported LA, and these included time, resourcing and ensuring LA was a school priority. Interestingly, Robinson (2007) mentioned specifically that an examination of teacher beliefs to unpack barriers is a dimension of leadership practice, however, it was again noted that no participants gave examples of this occurring. Other leadership practices identified as important by both participants and literature were creating safe environments that supported risk-taking, were non-judgmental and were committed to change (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014) because these supported teachers to feel safe to develop their belief in, and extend their practices around, developing LA. Participants agreed unanimously that a lack of leadership belief in LA was the greatest challenge to its development. LA must become embedded and part of the school culture and leadership had the greatest role and responsibility in ensuring this occurred.

A lack of belief in LA can flow on to learners. There was a disparity between participants and literature regarding teacher belief in both learners and LA. Participants did not believe learners would be unable to be agentic, given the opportunity and support to do so. In fact, the opposite was true. All participants found their learners relished the chance to make decisions about their learning, although they noted that some learners required support to become increasingly agentic. This contrasted with Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) and Harmandaoglu Baz et al. (2018) who found that, for various reasons, such as the age or academic ability of learners, teachers were reluctant to believe some learners could be agentic. To develop

⁴ Government initiative that supports teams of qualified teachers from a range of educational contexts to collaboratively develop innovative practices that improve learning outcomes.

learner belief in and see the purpose of LA, participants ensured they shared why developing the dispositions of LA were valuable to their learners, both in making current learning meaningful and relevant, but also providing them with the skills and dispositions they need to be successful in their futures. Participants did not mention specifically if they unpacked and explored learner belief in LA, possibly they felt that they already had learner buy-in. This corresponded with the fact that, in 2020, very little literature extensively discussed the role of belief in affording LA related to primary-aged learners. However, for learners to believe in and enact their agency, literature identified a number of conditions needed to be in place. These included having self-efficacy, self-belief they can make a difference to their learning, their previous experiences, the learning context and the understanding and recognition that these varied over time (Annan, 2016; Klemenčič, 2015; Mercer, 2012; van Lier, 2008). These conditions were not mentioned specifically by participants, rather, they discussed the importance of partnership and repositioning of roles as being key to affording LA.

Similarly, there was little explicit discussion of whānau beliefs and LA in the literature. Participants provided examples of how schools primarily engaged with whānau to support partnerships and reposition whānau roles, rather than how schools develop whānau belief in LA (e.g., through examining beliefs about school, learning, education and, consequently, the purpose of LA). This matched the limited amount of literature specifically regarding whānau beliefs and their role in affording LA. However, what the literature did state, is that whānau need to understand what is happening in schools, particularly regarding innovative practices such as LA, to build a belief in it. Bolstad et al. (2012) found that whānau needed to understand the gap between what was occurring in schools and what research suggested needed to happen. Bevan-Brown et al. (2011) further noted a mismatch between whānau expectations and government initiatives, such as LA. A potential consequence of this is that whānau seek out educational information from friends and family (Bonne & Stevens, 2017) rather than schools. Furthermore, it appeared that schools bypassed the stage of unpacking beliefs about LA and instead focused on supporting the whānau actions which supported school development of LA, such as establishing partnerships and participating as partners in learning. Perhaps as these are concrete actions, they may be perceived as putting LA into action. However, further

investigation about why this happens in schools might shed light on what could be done to support this area. For example, providing more time to learn about and plan for increased LA, ensuring stakeholders are informed about educational changes, being aware of the value of LA and its potential positive impacts. Because of a lack of evidence, it was hard to identify the exact role whānau beliefs had in affording LA. However, this does present schools with an opportunity because it is evident that all stakeholders need to have a belief in LA for it to be developed yet this aspect of LA appears underrated. What was particularly clear was that, again, leadership must ensure all stakeholders see the purpose of LA; it is leadership belief in and prioritisation of LA that most afford it.

5.2 Powerful Partnerships

Developing LA required stakeholders to shift from collegial relationships to bespoke and powerful partnerships, which both required and supported a repositioning of roles. Davis (2019) recognised that developing partnerships was now the key work of teachers and leaders.

All participants identified how immensely important developing partnerships with learners was, by contributing to building a learning environment that gained learner trust and supported their risk-taking. Targeting growth-mindset activities, having a relationship-building learning focus, making the effort to know each learner and having an appreciative mindset were all examples that participants gave of how they developed relationships with their learners. Participants believed these helped to establish foundations that supported a move into learning partnerships because, without trust in the teachers, participants felt their learners would not take the leap of faith they were being asked to take in co-constructing their learning. It is necessary to unpack this assumption with learners to confirm it. Participants added this was underpinned by knowing their learners individually and they accomplished this by sharing themselves with their learners, recognising specific cultural differences and learning each learner's unique story. Participants valued the impact that developing partnerships had on affording LA. Developing partnerships required teachers to know their learners individually, build emotionally secure learning environments in which learners could make connections between home and school, were fair, were actively negotiated and enabled personalised learning. Fullan and Langworthy

(2014) and Annan (2018) agreed. While Campbell et al. (2007) identified that it was a lack of time and large class sizes that negatively impacted teachers' developing partnerships with learners, participant views differed. Rather, it was practices, such as changing classes and the viewing of learners through a deficit lens that challenged teacher/learner partnerships. Given how participants discussed the extent to which they valued the impact of building partnerships, it is unlikely that these factors would become barriers, although smaller class sizes would make it easier to get to know each learner individually. Also, although participants and the literature did not specifically mention keeping learners for more than one year, this might be an approach for schools to consider when it comes to building teacher/learner partnerships, given the time it takes to build meaningful partnerships with learners and their whānau.

An interesting aspect of partnership that afforded LA concerned the impact of teachers on peer partnerships. Participants used collaborative practices to support learning interactions among learners because they believed that they created a positive learning environment that afforded LA. This was well supported in the literature, including the OECD (2012), who recognised the social nature of learning as central to the learning environment, and Hill and Thrupp (2019), who added that collaborative practices supported learners to become active contributors. However, an aspect of peer partnerships that was not discussed by participants, although mentioned in literature (Clarke et al., 2016; Kokotsaki et al., 2016), was the role social interactions and perceptions of status had on the developing of partnerships among learners and how these impacted the extent they enacted their agency directly. This would be a valuable area for further investigation because it impacted the extent learners were willing to engage with LA, such as repositioning their roles to take a greater lead in their learning, and, therefore, challenged the extent to which LA could be developed.

Teacher collaboration was another partnership identified as affording LA. All participants agreed that teacher collaboration was positive, and it supported their thinking and trialing of new ideas to develop LA, and it helped to keep LA at the forefront of teacher discussion and practice. This coincided with the discovery that teachers who share their ideas about LA, build momentum and a shared purpose

(Fullan & Langworthy, 2014; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Furthermore, teacher collaboration supported teaching approaches to become more learner centered (Vangrieken et al., 2015). The main challenges identified by participants was the time it takes to work collaboratively, especially for those teachers in leadership positions whose roles meant they had regular time out of their classrooms. Also, participants recognised their development of LA was challenged when teaching philosophies and beliefs about LA were not aligned because one teacher can end up driving LA, which was difficult, or practices regarding LA were inconsistent. These findings differed from Vangrieken et al. (2015), who ascertained that challenges included a feeling of competitiveness among teachers, a loss of autonomy, an increased workload and that collaboration could enforce a conformity of practice and a lack of teacher unity. However, both agreed a lack of time challenged teacher collaboration, which might affect teacher buy-in to collaboration, thereby limiting its benefits. This harks back to the notion that teachers must have a belief in LA to support changes in their practices.

Leadership have an important and complex role in supporting teacher partnerships (Kolleck, 2019; ERO, 2018). Participant findings further supported this. Teacher collaboration worked best when teachers were given time to work together. Additionally, a school culture that supported rigorous discussion about LA enhanced teacher understanding, belief in, and, ultimately, practices that developed LA. Additionally, findings revealed an environment supporting teacher collaboration encouraged teacher innovation, flexibility and adaptability, and affirmed new teaching approaches that focused on learner needs, such as learner-centred approaches (Vangrieken et al., 2015). One consideration raised by a participant that leaders need to consider was that a lack of teacher collaboration led to a lack of transparency among classes, which consequently made it challenging to know the extent LA was being developed across classrooms, identify teachers who might need support or, in fact, which teachers with strengths in this area who could be drawn on to support others. This contrasted with findings suggesting there might be a resistance to changing traditional models of teacher relationships and could create tension between collegiality as to who had the ultimate power to make decisions (Vangrieken et al., 2015). Challenges identified by both participants and Vangrieken et al. (2015) suggested there might be insufficient teacher buy-in or a

mismatch/difference in personalities, which again could be linked back to beliefs about LA.

Partnerships with whānau were essential to developing LA, yet these were complex in their actualisation, requiring several factors to align. All participants identified the importance of whānau as partners to afford LA. Examples of how these were developed within schools included bringing in whānau as experts in learning, ensuring whānau were active partners at learner-led conversations about learning, being represented on Boards of Trustees, and supporting learner-organised trips. Both Bevan-Brown et al. (2011) and ERO (2015) agreed, recognising the important role whānau had as learning partners and how this supported LA. Participants added that communication was vital to ensuring whānau understood and developed a belief in LA, which then led to feeling positive about developing partnerships. They again highlighted the role leadership had in this. Systems needed to be in place to communicate with and develop partnerships with whānau, otherwise it became the responsibility of the teacher to justify and defend LA, or LA was blamed if there were challenges within a programme. Two participants shared examples of the difference between leadership practices. When leadership was proactive in their communication with whānau, participants felt that whānau were positive about LA and on-board with what the school was trying to achieve. In two cases, with a change of Principal, communication processes changed. Participants felt that this impacted whānau perception about LA directly; consequently, participants felt that they had the responsibility of justifying LA. This corresponded with Staub et al. (2018) who agreed that leadership must have systems in place that ensured clear and consistent communication about the school's philosophy which could be done in multiple ways, including through school websites, regular newsletters and holding events focusing on specific topics. They added that meetings with whānau should be learning-focused, and ensure whānau understand the school's educational approaches, particularly approaches deemed innovative. If these did not occur, whānau derailed activities, such as learning conversations, in their attempt to ascertain what the school was trying to achieve in their changing approaches to learning.

Participants gave examples of schools pursuing reciprocal relationships with whānau, such as through consultative processes, and the sincerity of doing these with genuine intent was evident. However, there were still whānau that seemed reluctant or unable to engage with this partnership for various reasons, including work commitments, a belief that schools were the experts and lacking the confidence or feeling anxious about what they could offer. This was supported by ERO (2016), who recognised that schools were prioritising reciprocal relationships with whānau. However, Bonne and Stevens (2017) found whānau do not always feel they were consulted with genuinely, or, although they could talk about their child's learning, whānau did not always know how they could help. ERO (2015) added that if schools questioned the usefulness of contribution that whānau could make, they were less likely to become involved. Finally, if it is schools initiating whānau engagement and direct the role, whānau may take on these evolving roles. However, schools are still in a position of power. An ongoing challenge remains: how can genuine and reciprocal partnerships be grown between whānau and schools in which whānau feel they are empowered as decision-makers (Riwai-Couch et al., 2020)? All these factors challenged the extent to which whānau developed active learning partnerships. It was clear that whānau partnerships afforded LA, and this continues to be an area with which many schools grapple. Once more, leadership had a key role in establishing systems that reflected best practices that engaged whānau to develop genuine partnerships.

5.3 Repositioning roles

Belief in LA and bespoke partnerships flowed into the final theme that emerged unanimously across participant interviews and literature: stakeholders need to be positioned as having an active role in learning. To afford LA, all stakeholders must become authentic and active partners in learning, requiring a repositioning of their roles, and a relinquishing of power by another stakeholder as shown in Figure 4. Literature and participants suggested this was a common reflection of stakeholder power dynamics and went some way to affording LA. Conversely, Figure 5 demonstrates power flows if partnerships were powerful and reciprocal.

Figure 4

Power dynamics that afforded LA

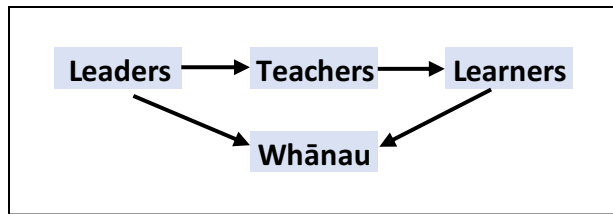
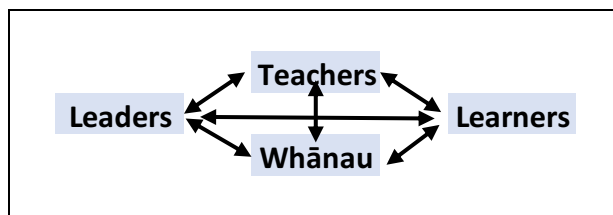


Figure 5

Power dynamics that greatly afforded LA



Fitzpatrick et al. (2018) recognised this power redistribution was challenging and took time; however, it must be considered when developing LA. For learners to become increasingly active in their roles, participants and literature agreed that teachers must share their power as the learning experts and be willing to reduce their potential for influence and coercion (Al Asmari, 2013; Fitzpatrick et al., 2018). Participants shared many examples of the benefits to LA when this repositioning occurred, and it was evident that these benefits outweighed the challenges. All participants were willing to sit with the discomfort of not being the experts, not knowing what every learner was doing at every moment, yet at the same time ensured they explicitly taught the skills and strategies learners required to be empowered, as well as being responsive to their learners by being flexible and adaptive. They noted some teachers were less comfortable and confident doing this, which challenged the depth to which LA was developed in their classrooms. Fullan and Langworthy (2014) agreed that teachers who lacked an understanding of LA could put all the responsibility for learning on learners before they have developed the skills to manage their learning. Al Asmari (2013) also found that some teachers feared not knowing what their role in the learning was. A further challenge from Biesta et al. (2015) and Husbands and Pearce (2012) was that teachers might be reluctant to take responsibility for learners identified as not achieving. Although

participants were willing to redistribute their power to ensure learners could take on responsibility and become true partners in their learning, it was evident that this was an ongoing challenge for many teachers. Again, the role of beliefs in all aspects of developing LA is worthy of examination. If teachers understood LA, what it looked like in practice and how to make it happen, would these challenges continue? The repositioning of roles was a vital aspect of affording LA. Perhaps, as Hill and Thrupp (2019) believed, true partnership is never achievable because teachers are always positioned as the powerful authority. This needs to change if LA is to become an established approach in schools because although there are teachers like the participants in this study who willingly relinquish their traditional roles of holding all the power, it must move beyond the few to become the many for LA to be widely afforded.

Learners being able to reposition their roles and have power in the learning environment was ultimately strongly influenced by teachers. Participants had mixed examples of learners being willing to take on the sharing of power and develop this over time and contexts. Learner willingness to be active partners and share power appeared to be influenced by the culture of the classroom or school, and how much teachers and leadership believed in LA. The more LA was embedded as a practice, the more willing learners were to be active in their learning. This aligned with Annan (2018) who found that teachers need to genuinely and authentically develop these changing learner roles for learners to enact their agency. For this to occur, participants noted that school-wide practices must support the approaches that afforded LA and hand over the power of learning, because it relied on a range of resources that learners must become familiar with over time; for example, tools to support self-reflection, such as writing progressions, graphic organisers, and Learning Maps (Annan & Wootton, 2016b). Another area agreed on by both participants and literature concerns supporting learners with diverse learning needs. These learners could take on active roles, however, additional support and resources were required (Bevan-Brown et al., 2011). The extent learners enacted their power was at the behest of their school and teachers, therefore the shift in power must begin with schools.

All participants identified having professional agency as an essential aspect that afforded the development of agency for students. For teachers to enact their agency, Fullan and Langworthy (2014) believed leaders must be willing to change their roles dramatically to build capacity in all teachers. Both participants and the literature found that there were multiple ways to do this, such as through *Teaching as Inquiry* (Ministry of Education, 2007) and staff appraisals. Some tensions were evident. One participant wondered if all teachers were on diverse professional learning paths and how these could be captured and shared so all could benefit? Furthermore, what is the balance between differentiation and having a shared focus for the benefit of the school? Interestingly, both Harmandaoglu Baz et al. (2018) and Al Asmari (2013) found that developing LA at the student level was afforded by teachers having agency and flexibility at the school-wide level. All participants agreed, adding that they did not believe they should have to wait to make changes to their programmes if it benefitted learning, changes should not have to be identical across classrooms nor should class timetables or professional learning goals; and they should have the agency, the power, to respond in ways that improved learning when necessary. For genuine power-sharing to occur in classrooms, whereby teachers can respond to learner interests and needs in timely ways - essential to developing LA - leadership must consider how they adapt their practices to enable all teachers to have the power to make decisions that supported this without fear of retribution if these decisions took an unplanned path. Teacher agency and power, as for learners, was not a free-for-all but required a belief in LA, systems needed to be in place to support partnerships and role repositioning; there must be reciprocal trust, an appreciative lens and a willingness to relinquish the role of being the expert at all times. Finally, leadership agency and power was impacted by influences outside the school; however, this was beyond the scope of this study.

For whānau to become genuine partners in learning, there also needed to be a repositioning of their role. This role encompassed ongoing support of their child's learning, although it was more than that. Partnerships were central to supporting repositioning but a shift to genuine reciprocity and equality of power in the school setting was also needed. In participant interviews, everyone mentioned the essentiality of developing whānau relationships to affording LA, and examples of engaging in reciprocal interactions were given, including consultation evenings and

teachers sharing themselves with learners. However, the sharing of power was not mentioned specifically. This might be because it was inferred as an essential part of developing partnerships and repositioning whānau roles or possibly it was beyond the scope of the classroom teacher to make a shift in these power dynamics. Although a range of literature did examine the need for whānau learning partnerships specifically, only two mentioned reciprocity and the need to share power (Berryman et al., 2018; Education Review Office, 2016). Furthermore, even if whānau were willing to engage in developing partnerships and, subsequently, repositioning their roles, is it true power-sharing? Participant examples highlighted that it was schools that initiated communication, sought information through consultation, provided information, explained any changes to educational practices, and informed whānau about the role they wanted them to take on to support LA alongside their children. These were well-intentioned and aimed to support evidence-based educational practices. After all, schools are experts in education. However, this did not necessarily equate to reciprocity and power-sharing. For LA to be afforded, the whānau role must be extended further than just being part of the school community; rather it is being an equal participant of the learning and, for that to happen, whānau must believe they have a place, they have something to offer, and they have trust in the school. Whānau must have power and, to develop power, whānau need to feel like they belong in the school, which begins with establishing active partnerships. The example given by Riwai-Couch et al. (2020) occurred when whānau were directing their children's learning at home during Covid-19. How could this be expanded to occur in the school context? Is this extensive shift possible because, historically in this context, schools and education are the innate holders of power? It is interesting to consider what true partnership, reciprocity and power-sharing look like in the school setting. This is an incredibly challenging issue, however, worthy of further research given its importance in developing LA.

Ongoing reflection needs to occur to develop true reciprocity and, consequently, genuine power-sharing. This might be beyond the scope of individual schools and require a systemic shift. Nonetheless, this should not be a barrier for schools, learners and whānau to continue to work towards true partnerships, essential to developing LA.

The primary aim of this study was to identify the affordances and challenges that teachers in Aotearoa/New Zealand experienced when developing LA in and across their schools. A positive finding was that much of the research and participant viewpoints aligned, such as that LA supported higher engagement in learning, developed skills and dispositions deemed important for learning and life, and provided opportunities to make learning meaningful. These factors help reduce the confusion about developing LA which might have arisen had core components about LA been significantly disparate. Furthermore, Aotearoa/New Zealand is well placed to support schools to develop LA owing to its flexible curriculum, *Teaching as Inquiry*, and self-governing school system.

However, it was also evident that developing LA was complex and required key components to afford its development. First, schools needed to ensure there was buy-in to LA by all stakeholders. This required making time to unpack beliefs, examine, challenge and support the overcoming of barriers, highlight, build on and recognise strengths, which needed to be repeated in an ongoing way as beliefs evolved and people changed. Furthermore, reimagining what was deemed a successful learner was worthy of reflection. As the aim and purpose of school was evolving, so must the definition of what it means to be successful. Belief in LA further affords schools to grow learner readiness and, consequently, their personalised accomplishments. Next, schools must ensure they develop active and powerful partnerships among all stakeholders so that everyone recognises and becomes an active partner in the decisions regarding all aspects of learning. Finally, for LA to become an established approach to teaching and learning, stakeholders need to be willing to reposition their roles in learning. This requires ensuring reciprocity at all levels; the giving away and taking on of traditional power structures. Additionally, it was evident that, although all stakeholders in the learning context had a part in affording (and challenging) LA, the role of leadership was especially important because, ultimately, they were responsible for creating a culture that supported the systems so all stakeholders can enact their agency. Leadership also needed to provide the time to unpack, implement, examine and reflect on LA because time was a commonly identified as an affordance and challenge to its development.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This research identified six teachers' perspectives regarding the affordances and challenges of developing LA within years 5-8 in primary schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Based on the qualitative analysis and thematising of semi-structured interviews, it is concluded that there are three main factors that impact the development of LA in Aotearoa/New Zealand primary school's contexts. Firstly, LA cannot be advanced without all stakeholders firstly holding a belief in LA. Powerful partnerships between all stakeholders must be promoted. Lastly, there must be a redistribution of power through the repositioning of all stakeholder roles. What also became clear is that leadership plays a key role in the extent to which LA is developed. Those who hold leadership positions must examine the extent their school culture, systems and practices afford teachers, learners and whānau to believe in and embed LA, to develop partnerships, and empower all stakeholders to participate in learning. It is of concern that some teachers feel the need to be "creatively insubordinate" (Ayers, 2010, p. 143) because school leaders cause them to feel fearful of developing LA openly. All findings within this study concur that developing LA requires time - a lot of time - to know each stakeholder well. For example, it is vital to understand what might be holding people back or taking them forward in their thoughts and practices regarding LA because these afford and challenge its development. This takes time, commitment and effort. However, LA is worth the time and effort because, ultimately, everybody benefits.

This study's findings will support schools who recognise the need to implement programmes that support LA yet may not know where to start or may not have had the traction they hoped for; the literature in this area is vast. Although there is lack of LA research prioritising teachers' viewpoints, this study demonstrates that teachers' perspectives are relevant and insightful for progressing LA. The passion and knowledge from the teachers involved in this research highlights key considerations for reflection and, if implemented, would support the spreading and embedding of LA. If LA is a priority, time must be assured to consider the factors raised in this research and reflect on their school's through these lenses.

As this study progressed, several unexpected insights and questions arose. Given the importance of beliefs in affording LA, why does it appear so little time is given to ensuring belief in LA is established prior to moving into the other aspect of LA often actioned in schools: partnerships and repositioning of roles? Moreover, how can whānau be repositioned as key partners in our current educational system? Although identified as essential to developing LA, (e.g. Education Review Office, 2015), whānau are still at the behest of schools in the extent to which they can engage in their child's learning. How must schools change to keep moving forward in this area? Can it even be done within the current model? Also, as Aotearoa/New Zealand grows in diversity, how do schools recognise and accommodate learners' cultural requirements, found to be an area not currently well catered for (Bevan-Brown et al., 2011)? Finally, the concept of success. The Aotearoa/New Zealand education system is influenced by neoliberal values; we must ensure LA does not increase the gap between high and low achieving learners or limit what schools recognise as success (Swan, 2017). Our current educational industrial model is failing some learners, whereas it is benefitting others, so the time has come for us to ask, "what does it mean to succeed?" (Hannon 2017, p. 11), and change what schools are doing to support this new definition of success. Importantly, leaders must avoid creating a hierarchy of success where academic achievement is most valued (Berryman et al., 2018; Bishop, 2019; Savage et al., 2011).

Underlying the theme of power is *who holds it*. Although the focus of this study is LA, perhaps the real shift in beliefs needs to be in line with what OECD (2018) identify as 'co-agency' (p. 4), in which all stakeholders are elevated to positions of equitable power and partnerships. Perhaps co-agency, as noted by one participant, might ensure our learners and their whānau will be able to see themselves out of their own poverty.

The potential limitations of this study are acknowledged. The sample size of six is small, and although participant data were varied (age, gender, experience), owing to the small number of participants it cannot be assumed that results are generalisable. There is a sample bias because, although participants include a range of genders, school types and year levels, there is a lack of cultural diversity. All school settings had commonalities, however the small number of schools included in

this study could be a limitation. Finally, all participants had a passion and interest in LA. Teachers that lack belief in the benefits of LA might have provided a different perspective.

Despite the limitations of this research, it highlights key actions to be considered and initiated to progress LA within and across classrooms and schools. To address some of the limitations, some considerations for future research are identified. There is very little literature that examines whānau and learner beliefs in the area of LA. Given the importance beliefs have in affording LA, this is an interesting area for further research. Additionally, it would be interesting to interview teachers who lack belief in LA because this would likely provide a different perspective in terms of affordances and challenges. There was only one teacher from each school interviewed. Discussing LA with all stakeholders from one school might have uncovered a range of perspectives, which would be of value to explore, particularly learner and whānau beliefs about LA and the investigation of power sharing and reciprocity among stakeholders, again particularly learners and whānau. Stakeholders in this study remain within the immediate school context. It would be useful to examine the role those beyond schools have, for example, teacher-training providers and the Ministry of Education, in the implementation of LA. All participants interviewed were from state schools. NZ offers a range of educational approaches and, examining how LA is developed across these, might highlight further learnings. Lastly, owing to the scope of this research, school practices relevant to learning could not be examined. These include the role of assessment, technology, modern learning environments, curriculum, and teaching approaches. However, this study suggests that these align closely to the sharing power aspect of LA and, therefore, would be more deeply and lastingly embedded once beliefs, partnerships and sharing power are addressed.

There are many valid reasons why LA benefits learning. What also became clear through this research is that, although crucial, developing LA is challenging. However, schools must overcome these challenges or become obsolete. Lichtman (2014) recognised “change at most schools is not hard; it is *uncomfortable*. We need to get some perspective on the difference between *hard* and *uncomfortable*” (p. xii). The teachers in this research recognised that developing LA is uncomfortable but,

also, that they and all stakeholders need to position themselves to be willing to feel this discomfort and, consequently, overcome these challenges.

Part of this change needs to be a wider discussion about the purpose of education because it is under-examined and no longer relevant (Biesta et al., 2015; Hannon, 2017). Sahlberg (Fidler, 2009-present) agrees:

You know the main purpose, not the only one, but the main purpose of education should be to help people to realise their own purpose, their own passion, what they really want to do in life. (Audio podcast)

It is worthy to consider what schools might look like as they adapt to support our learners to realise their purpose and their passions. How might these changes be reflected in a society in which learners feel successful following the unique path they have forged for themselves? LA provides a way forward in this regard. It is exciting to imagine.

From this research, it is more evident than ever that LA is a way of working in genuine partnerships that endorse our learners to be successful and be prepared for what their lives bring. As we started with Ken Robinson, it seems fitting to finish with a thought from him:

As we face a very uncertain future, the answer is not to do better what we've done before. We have to do something else...The world is undergoing revolutionary changes; we need a revolution in education too. Like most revolutions, this one has been brewing for a long time, and in many places it is already well underway. It is not coming from the top down; it is coming, as it must do, from the ground up. (Robinson & Aronica, 2016, p. xxvi).

We must accelerate our work in this area and do this with purpose, integrity and guarantee the required resourcing. Then, we may just discover that LA ensures...

we all ascend together.

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