

**‘The Inside View’
Investigating the Use of Narrative Assessment
to Support Student Identity, Wellbeing,
and Participation in Learning in a
New Zealand Secondary School.**

A thesis presented to the University of Canterbury
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Dedications

To Jack, Emily, and Meg ...

For teaching me unconditional love

To Janice, Bernard, Pamela, Philippa, Leonie, Bernadette,
Nola, Monica, Barry, Michael, Lynden, and Graeme ...

For teaching me hope, courage, love and resilience

To Annie Cecilia (Nancy) Doolan

For teaching me to have fun along the way

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is all my own work and that, to the very best of my knowledge and understanding, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor any material which has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Acknowledgements

This project has been realized through the generous support of many people whose encouragement and care is so appreciated. I wish to use this space to acknowledge their influence and actions as they have helped me through the last four years.

I want to thank the research participants who have contributed to this project, giving their time in the hope that all students will access the quality education they deserve. I especially wish to thank the families of Woody and Kirsty. You trusted me to honour your children and their participation within the project. I hope I have not let you down. To the adult research participants thank you for all the times you have gone out of your way to make this project better. How lucky we are to have you in our community. To Kirsty and Woody, thank you. You have taught me to be a better teacher, researcher and advocate for all students.

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To Jack and Emily – this time it is true! I am actually finished this study! Now I can return to you, to be the Mum I want to be. And for me - the Paparoas are calling. It is time to head over the hill and play.

Abstract

New Zealand education policies and documents (Ministry of Education, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011a, 2014a) situate students at the centre of assessment processes that are underpinned by the New Zealand Curriculum. They identify building student assessment capability as crucial to achieving improvement in learning. Documents recognize the impact of quality interactions and relationships on effective assessment. However these core beliefs about assessment are not observed to guide teaching practices for all students. Disabled students remain invisible in assessment data and practices within New Zealand secondary schools. There appears to be little or no assessment data about learning outcomes for this group of students. This thesis investigates possible ways to recognize the diversity of student capability and learning through the use of narrative assessment. It challenges the absence of disabled students in assessment landscapes as educator roles and responsibilities within assessment, teaching and learning are framed within an inclusive pedagogy.

This research project focuses on how a team of adults and two students labeled as disabled make sense of assessment and learning within the context of narrative assessment in the students' regular high school. The project examines the consequences of narrative assessment on student identity, wellbeing and participation within learning. The study offers opportunities to observe how specialists from outside of the school respond to the use of narrative as they work with the two student research participants.

This study undertakes a critical inquiry that recognises the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi – partnership, protection and participation – as pivotal to inclusive practice where all students are valued as learners. It investigates how narrative assessment can honour these principles in everyday teaching practice.

The project aims to inform education policy and practice, with a view to enriching learning outcomes and opportunities for disabled students who are frequently marginalized by inequitable assessment processes.

It is argued that narrative assessment can support the construction of student identity and wellbeing. It can support the recognition of disabled students as partners in their learning. However the value of narrative assessment can be undermined by the responses of educators and other professionals who continue to work within deficit models of assessment, teaching and learning.

Within this thesis adult participants from family and education contexts have clear ideas about the value and validity of assessment practices and processes that do not respect a presumption of competence or a need to establish a relationship with a student being assessed. Their views challenge everyday practices that fulfill assessment contracts, but ignore Treaty of Waitangi and New Zealand Curriculum commitments. Their views can inform better ways of working between specialists and schools supporting disabled students.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction

A specialist was working through an assessment exercise with Woody at school (Woody is a student who is labeled as severely disabled and non verbal). Woody had been working in class prior to the assessment exercise with the specialist. Within class he had been quite verbal and was observed to be interested in the work on his Toughbook computer. During the following assessment session with the specialist Woody appeared listless, with his head down. He made very little noise. He did not search the room for sounds or people. The specialist completed her work, stating that it appeared to be “one of those days” (where Woody’s impairment affected his ability to participate in assessments). The assessment data that she had collected was sparse. She would try again tomorrow. When the specialist had gone I asked Woody what he was doing. I told him I knew that he hadn’t tried and that he was able to do so much more. I told him the specialist would think he couldn’t do things when he could. Woody leaned over towards me and laughed.

I was stunned as I realized that Woody had made a choice about participating within the assessment exercise. As an educator I was suddenly aware that there would have been occasions in my work where I had interpreted a lack of participation by students as a reflection of impairment, not student choice. I was also concerned about how Woody would be identified within the assessment data. I worried that his actions might result in him not accessing a particular piece of equipment because he was observed to not be ready to use it.

Woody’s mother, Kate and grandmother, Margaret were not stunned at all. They recognized that Woody had been making choices for a number of years. They were both clear that if assessors did not take the time to establish a relationship with Woody then he ignored them. Further to this, if Woody ignored the specialist, his family chose to ignore the assessment report, not recognizing it as valid or valuable. I asked Margaret what the family would do if Woody missed out on resourcing they thought he was entitled to through his decision to not participate in the

assessment tasks. She stated, “that is when we fight. We pick our battles. If we know Woody needs it, that’s when we fight.”

This scenario, which I would suggest is not dissimilar to the daily experiences of many disabled students in New Zealand schools, captures the essence of inquiry within this thesis. How do we recognize the diversity of student capability and learning through the assessment processes we undertake? The purposes and consequences of our assessment choices, particularly for disabled students themselves, are investigated with a focus on student identity, wellbeing and participation in learning. This is a study about the introduction of a narrative assessment approach with disabled students and those supporting them in their learning.

Establishing the context

In this chapter I discuss the rationale for this study. I introduce New Zealand’s educational context and some of the key terms that will be used in the thesis. I position the research within the field of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) and as inquiry through critical pedagogy. Four key documents that inform the study are introduced. I identify key influences in my work as a researcher. The chapter concludes with the research questions and a brief outline of further chapters.

Rationale for the study

This study challenges the use of assessment practices and processes that recognize disabled students as incompetent and uneducable. It recognizes that the consequences of assessments can support or limit disabled students’ access to learning and life opportunities (Human Rights Commission, 2014; Macartney, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2014; Swann, Peacock, Hart, & Drummond, 2012). The study has been undertaken within a Disability Studies in Education (DSE) framework, in the belief that this work may contribute to the advancement of inclusive and democratic schools where all students are recognized as learners (Skidmore, 2002; Slee, 2001, 2011; Valle & Connor, 2011). It values an inclusive pedagogy where teachers recognize their responsibility to develop rich learning communities that support all students to participate in, and access learning opportunities (ERO, 2014; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The ultimate goal for this study is to inform education policy and practice, with a view to enriching

learning outcomes and opportunities for disabled students who are frequently marginalized by inequitable assessment processes.

Drawing on literature from the assessment and Disability Studies in Education fields this study is immediately confronted by a range of competing discourses and documents that both situate all students at the centre of assessment processes (Absolum, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2007; 2011a; Murray, 2000; Wiliam, 2011), and endorse deficit-based assessment approaches that identify some students as not ready to participate in the New Zealand curriculum (Central Region Special Schools, 2003). Documents and policies may suggest inclusive ways of working, yet are based within notions of deficit (Gordon & Morton, 2008; Loxley & Thomas, 2001; Pearl, 1997; Valencia, 1997). Educators are confronted by a range of confusing messages about the educability of all students (Black-Hawkins, 2012; Bourke & O'Neill, 2012; Florian, 2006; Rutherford, 2008). This study responds by sending a clear message that all students are educable, that they can be participants in their own learning and that it is our responsibility as educators to support them to reveal their strengths. This requires us to pay close attention to the purposes and consequences of the assessment approaches we use with, and for students.

The right to education for all students

Disabled students in New Zealand are entitled to access the same quality of education as their peers, that is, to have equal opportunities to learn (Minister of Disability Issues, 2001; New Zealand Legislation, 1989). This is not a privilege. It is a right. However, that right is currently open to interpretation and is not yet enforceable by individual students (Human Rights Commission, 2014). New Zealand is part of a global community that has enshrined disabled student rights within legislation and policy making. It is a signatory to a range of international human rights treaties including the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2006) recognizes the right to assessment that supports learning and development as implicit within the right to an

inclusive education (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2012). This study has been undertaken in the belief that the rights expressed in national (Education Act, 1989; Human Rights Act, 1993; New Zealand Disability Strategy, 2001) and global education policy and legislation (UNCROC, 2006) are not realised in day to day assessment practices for disabled students.

New Zealand has an education system that serves many students well (Hattie, 2003). However, we are now in the position of observing significant rates of disparity between those students recognized as low and high achievers in New Zealand schools (OECD, 2014). Of great concern are the experiences and access to learning opportunities for students who are recognized as having special education needs (ERO, 2012a, 2014; Hattie, 2003; Human Rights Commission, 2014; Macfarlane, 2012; Ministry of Education, 2014a; Thrupp & White, 2013). There is recognition that access to learning opportunities and achievement has direct links to access to life opportunities such as employment and wellbeing (Ministry of Education, 2014a). When we deny some groups of students access to learning opportunities we are denying them opportunities to potential life opportunities.

Access to learning opportunities is often determined by assessment practices that inform teaching. Yet government agencies (ERO, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Human Rights Commission, 2014) in New Zealand express concern that disabled students continue to be excluded from assessment processes. They challenge schools to address this inequity, recognising that improvements in educational outcomes for disabled students are unachievable if the students are not being assessed. They warn that at this time, opportunities to plan focused, personalised programmes of learning from authentic assessment information are wasted.

While this study accepts that inclusive education is about all students, it recognizes that disabled students continue to be marginalized and excluded from the quality education they are entitled to (Kearney, 2009; Macartney, 2009; Slee, 2011). It argues that inequitable assessment choices and their consequences support disabled students' continuing exclusion from learning opportunities.

Inclusion

Education literature and research produces many definitions of inclusion, reflecting a diverse range of perspectives and understandings. Smith (2010) reminds us not to get too focussed on defining inclusion, but to ask ourselves who is benefitting from the definitions and how they are being used. Within this work I draw on many definitions of inclusion that reflect the key beliefs that guide my practice. Two key definitions encompass the many others I have read about and recognise in my thinking, caring and living. Within this work inclusion can be understood as

“...a belief, philosophy, practice and educational imperative that argues that all children and students have a sense of place, position and power in an educational setting. This means that irrespective of student need, the pedagogical practices involved in learning, teaching and assessment must be inclusionary. This by definition means that diversity is valued, understood and used to support each child’s learning.” (Bourke & Mentis, 2013, p. 864)

or to put it more simply, “it’s about the way we treat each other” (Ballard, 2013).

This study recognizes that inclusive practices support the need for changing attitudes towards disability/ability and locating this need within a social justice (Gerrard, 1994; Loxley & Thomas, 2001) and human rights perspective (Ainscow and Miles, 2008; Connor & Ferri, 2007; Ware, 2004). This may mean challenging some of the taken for granted “common sense” notions of what is acceptable language, what is evidence based, and what is best practice (and who says so) as we investigate how assessment can support students as learners (Macfarlane, 2009; 2012).

Locating research about the experiences of disabled students and assessment in New Zealand

Within the last decade a number of studies have focussed on the educational experiences of disabled students and those supporting their learning both in New Zealand (Guerin, 2008; Kearney, 2009; MacArthur, 2009; Rutherford, 2008) and overseas (Connors & Stalker, 2003). However, New Zealand education research remains silent in its considerations of the experiences of disabled students and their families within the assessment processes and practices of New Zealand secondary schools.

The research literature provides many examples of the use of narrative approaches to assessment within early childhood settings both in New Zealand (Carr, 2001; Carr & Lee, 2012; Dunn, 2004; Gunn & Vocht van Alpen, 2010; Hatherly & Sands, 2002) and overseas (Fleer, 2002). A small number of studies focussed on the use of narrative assessment with students with special education needs in the early childhood setting (Lepper, Williamson & Cullen, 2003; Williamson, Cullen & Lepper, 2006).

The use of narrative assessment in primary schools has been the focus of a small number of studies (Davis & Molloy, 2004; Margrain, 2010, 2013; Molloy, 2005; Smith, Davis & Molloy, 2012). Picken (2012) and Picken and Milligan (2013) have explored the use of learning stories in secondary school social studies programmes. However, the use of narrative assessment continues to be relatively new to educational practice and research in New Zealand schools. One initiative that has supported the development of teacher resources and further research is the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Exemplars for Students with Special Education Needs project undertaken in 2007 and 2008. The project provided participants with the opportunities for further research and reflection on the use of narrative assessment to promote participation and belonging (Morton & McMenamin, 2011) and the transformational nature of the project for educators and parents (Morton, McMenamin, Moore & Molloy, 2012). A three year project (Bourke & Mentis, 2010) evaluated the development of the curriculum exemplars and teachers' guide.

Critical pedagogy

I chose to work within a critical pedagogy framework because it offered me the chance to question and investigate why a group of students continue to be invisible within New Zealand educational assessment landscapes. It offered the opportunity to investigate how assessment practices can recognize the diversity of learning that inclusive practice values. Disabled students are not getting a fair deal in the assessment practices New Zealand schools are using. What are the outcomes of our assessment practices for all students? What and how can this change so that current inequitable practices are resisted, rather than endorsed? I drew on Giroux and Giroux's

(2008) assertion that critical pedagogy can support democratic educators to critically scrutinise knowledge, power, values and institutions within the research process. Critical pedagogy recognises that education is not neutral. It is complex and contradictory, encompassing multiple realities and change (Kincheloe, 2008; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Monchinski, 2010)

Critical pedagogy is about critical reflection and action (Wink, 2011). It is about recognising how things are, how they could be and acting upon this information to inform democratic change (Kincheloe, 2008). It asks how and why knowledge gets constructed in particular ways, and how and why some forms of knowledge hold more legitimacy and power than others. (Apple, 1996; McLaren, 1989). Critical pedagogy demands that I, as a researcher, question the consequences of taken for granted assumptions and beliefs for the students I work with. Critical pedagogy can be thought of as an ongoing dialogue between theory and practise, where both inform the other. Therefore they are constantly changing and evolving (Monchinski, 2010). For these reasons it suited the aims of this project. It supported a focus on investigating inequities and imagining better ways of working through assessment dilemmas.

I chose this approach, knowing that my own practices, beliefs and assumptions would be under scrutiny, that conflict and differences in opinion were likely, and that we, the research participants, may recognise some of our current practices as unethical and exclusive. I knew that making sense of the political structure of the study school, and the relationships between the students, their families and professionals could raise some uncomfortable issues and conversations. I believed that these challenges could be spaces for new learning and professional growth (hooks, 1994). I was also mindful of how this work could be undertaken. I was supported by Kincheloe's (2008) assertion that such reconstruction of teaching work is possible when "we work in solidarity with love, respect and justice as our guiding lights" (p. 3).

Disability Studies in Education (DSE)

I chose to research through a DSE lens because it provides a framework for resisting practices of exclusion in education (Morton, 2012). DSE is an evolving interdisciplinary field that challenges traditional special education research paradigms, providing new ways of theorizing

about disability and inclusive education (Allan, 2008; Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, 2008; Gabel & Danforth, 2002, 2008; Smith, Gallagher, Owen, & Skrtic, 2009). It can be understood as a means to explore and understand issues of disability in cultural contexts (Smith, 2010). Researchers ask questions about everyday issues for disabled people, challenging practices of segregation and discrimination. Ware, cited in Smith (2010), suggests this research could be better defined as “pissed off research” (p. 3), alluding to the frustrations participants experience in raising awareness of the day to day battles they face to realise their human rights. Both parent participants in this study alluded to these feelings as motivation for participating in the study.

DSE aims to develop and deepen understandings of the daily lives of people with disabilities through privileging their knowledge, interests, histories, expertise, narratives, and perspectives in making sense of the meanings, experiences and lived effects of being viewed as “disabled” or “impaired” (Macartney & Morton, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). The inclusion of disabled students as participants in this study was recognized as pivotal to developing educator understandings of the consequences of assessment, particularly wellbeing and identity.

The study recognizes DSE as an approach that draws on the humanities-based work of Disability Studies and applies it to educational issues (Connor, Valle, & Hale, 2012), to investigate practices, beliefs, attitudes and expectations that disable learners within education (Valle & Connor, 2011) especially in the construction of assessment and its consequences (Morton, 2012).

The context of the study

Over one school year I worked with two disabled students, their families, school staff and other professionals supporting them, as we introduced and investigated the use of narrative assessment in our local secondary school. Study participants had the opportunity to make sense of a new way of working together, utilizing a collaborative approach to assessment. The study focussed on inclusive practice, through an investigation of assessment and its consequences for the disabled students, their families, and educators within the school. This research was undertaken in the community environments (school, home, town amenities) where the students lived and worked.

Education is not neutral (Penson, 2012). It does not occur in isolation from broader social, political and historical contexts (Kincheloe, 2012). Therefore, micro level practices have been examined in relation to the macro level contexts that construct ways of valuing learners and identifying competence in New Zealand.

This study is a response to an identified problem in practice –finding an assessment approach that could recognize the diversity of student capability and learning within a New Zealand secondary school. The use of a critical ethnography approach in this research was influenced by a range of New Zealand studies that explored issues in education for teachers and students (Bleaken, 2012; Fitzpatrick, 2010; Lang, 2013; Palmer, 2000) using this methodology. Their work offered rich descriptions of problems in practice, providing narratives that made strong connections between theory and practice. Their approaches to research suited the focus and aims of this study.

At the time this PhD study was being undertaken no studies had been carried out in New Zealand where disabled secondary school students, their families and school staff supporting them were primary participants, working together with a focus on assessment. The invisibility of these groups of people in education and disability literature provided a focus for this investigation.

The school: Ivory Lake High School

This research was undertaken at Ivory Lake High School, a decile four secondary school in a rural town in New Zealand. Schools in New Zealand are given a decile ranking between one and ten, based on the socioeconomic status of that school's community. A school that has a decile ranking of one would be perceived to be within a community identified as having the lowest socio economic profile. Ivory Lake High School had a roll of approximately 600 students. It drew on a wide base of small rural communities and many pupils travelled a significant distance to get to school. Students commonly ranged in age from 13- 18 years. Disabled students funded through the Ministry of Education's Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) could stay at school until the end of the school year when they turned 21.

The school had a growing roll of students recognised as requiring extra support to access the curriculum. Some of these students may have been receiving Ministry of Education funding, but many were not. At the time the research was undertaken Ivory Lake High School was undergoing significant changes in its timetabling and the composition of classes for students recognised as having special education needs. These were students funded through the ORS scheme and students who may have been considered for this scheme, but their funding applications were declined by the Ministry of Education.

Despite having participated in classrooms with their peers throughout their primary school lives, upon entering secondary school students funded through the ORS scheme had been physically separated from their nondisabled or non- labeled peers into a classroom known as a home room. The home room was on the outer perimeter of the school grounds. It had one classroom teacher and a range of teachers' aides. An alternative curriculum was used within the homeroom. Staff were observed to refer to these students in terms of the teacher – “they’re Sue’s kids” or to the homeroom – “they’re Room 1 students.”

At the beginning of the 2011 school year the home room was disbanded and the students were designated regular form classes with their peers. There was no information from management to staff to indicate this change was going to occur. Teachers returned from their holidays to find their class rolls now included students from the homeroom. Little or no formal professional conversations were observed as taking place across the school departments about these changes and their consequences for staff, students and their families.

Priority Learners in New Zealand schools

The New Zealand government has identified four groups of students as priority learners within initiatives to raise learning and achievement. These are Māori students, Pasifika students, students from low socio-economic families and students with special education needs (Ministry of Education, n.d.-a). Students within these groups are overrepresented in data that shows they have historically been unsuccessful in the New Zealand schooling system (ERO, 2012a, 2012b).

Students who have high special education needs qualify for Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) funding. The Ministry of Education currently recognizes approximately 30,000 students as having high special education needs, approximately three per cent of the school population (Ministry of Education, n.d.-a). Students funded through ORS must have demonstrated various levels of (in)competence to be able to receive funding. The ORS scheme provides resources for students with severe disabilities in the areas of learning, hearing, vision, mobility, language use or communication. It is expected students funded through ORS will present with a high level of need throughout their school life (Ministry of Education, n.d.-b). Students funded through the ORS scheme are entitled to a fixed component of extra teaching support and may receive teacher's aide support. Both of the student participants within this study received ORS funding.

In 2012 the government initiated a review of Special Education that focused on students with high special education needs. Recommendations from the review are being implemented under a strategy plan, "Success for All." The plan is based on three key elements to raise the achievement of students with special education needs:

- Children need to be present and included in their school or kura with their peer group
- Participating in the curriculum, and
- Learning, growing and developing with their peers

(Ministry of Education, n.d.-a, p.3)

This study is an opportunity to introduce an assessment approach that can support these elements of inclusive practice within a secondary school setting. Its focus on participation, student identity and wellbeing supports students learning, growing and developing together within the context of their regular classrooms.

Assessment for disabled students in New Zealand secondary schools

The lack of information about the outcomes of assessment for disabled students is a concern in this project. Schools are yet to make sense of how to engage in assessment and evaluation processes that are responsive to student strengths and needs (ERO, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). When the government's Education Review Office investigated how schools include students with special needs (2012a) it was able to identify innovative and creative schools that recognized

disabled students at the centre of assessment processes. However, these schools were the exception rather than the rule. A critical skill identified in ERO's review was that of assessors getting to know students as individuals with skills, interests and capabilities. This finding is supported by recommendations from earlier assessment and curriculum documents (Ministry of Education, 2007, 2011a) and DSE research (Biklen, 2000; Bogdan & Taylor, 1989; Goode, 1984, 1992; Morton, 2012; Snow, 2007; Taylor, 2000).

New Zealand secondary schools are challenged to demonstrate educational outcomes for all students. The New Zealand Qualifications Framework that is used in secondary schools does not allow a comparison with the learning outcomes of non-disabled students (Human Rights Commission, 2014). Assessment within secondary schools in New Zealand primarily focuses on the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). Achievement within this framework serves two main purposes that focus on participation in the economy: influencing access to employment and affecting or defining progression to higher level qualifications within secondary and then tertiary education (Crooks, 2011). Goodley (2011) warns that educational policy based on expectations of all students as able participants in an economy is problematic for disabled students who require extra resources and support to access learning.

As this thesis is being written the Ministry of Education is reviewing some of the qualifications offered to secondary school students who are not working at the same curriculum levels as their same age peers. In 2015 a revised National Certificate in Supported Learning will be available for schools to access (Ministry of Education, 2014b). Information about the requirements of this qualification and how it is to be recognized nationally were not available at the time of writing.

The invisibility of disabled students in national assessment data was mirrored within the school context where the study was undertaken. I had access to all assessment data being held in the school for the students who were the focus of this study. Assessment data I sighted was usually in the form of specialist assessments for health, physical, sensory and intellectual profiles. Both students had Individual Education Plans, but were missing from schoolwide assessment data. I was able to locate minimal data that recognized the students as learners within an education context.

Narrative Assessment

This study is interested in whether narrative assessment can support the visibility and construction of disabled students as learners in a secondary school context. Within this project narrative assessment can be interpreted as working with narrative to support assessment for learning (Ministry of Education, 2009). Narrative assessment is based on the sociocultural belief that context does make a difference to student learning and assessment results (Bourke, Mentis, & Todd, 2011) and that learning is not always linear (McIlroy & Guerin, 2014). Storied accounts or narratives (also referred to as learning stories) that support the identification of all students as learners are used to “capture and document learning in authentic contexts” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 28). Observations, photos, videos and assessment tools may record learning that shows progress over time rather than relying on a single source of information. Narrative assessment is an interactive process where family, whānau, the student, their peers, school staff and community members may contribute and share stories about learning they observe. Although the student is the focus of this work stories may document group and class learning.

Narrative assessment can be understood as a democratic approach where the purposes and consequences of the assessment process strengthen connections between the student and the world they inhabit. This approach resists deficit discourses and positioning, valuing the passion for learning educators, students and families share through their focus on affective learning (Carr & Lee, 2012).

The emergence of Narrative Assessment in New Zealand Schools

Learning stories were developed in New Zealand to support the construction of learner identities within early childhood education (Carr & Lee, 2012). This work was supported within the principles of the early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996). The sociocultural focus of Te Whāriki recognizes learning as reciprocal and responsive relationships with people, places and things (Carr & Lee, 2012). The more recent New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) is based on the same sociocultural values and links have been made between the key competencies inherent in the school curriculum and the strands of outcome within Te Whāriki. In the last two decades collaboration between schools, professional development facilitators and universities has provided opportunities for the innovative

development of learning stories across a wide range of audiences (Carr & Lee, 2012) and for critical inquiry into narrative assessment as an approach that can support teaching for equity (Gunn & de Vocht van Alpen, 2010).

Narrative assessment is emerging as an inclusive assessment approach in primary schools (Bourke & Mentis, 2014). The Ministry of Education's Curriculum Exemplars for Students with Special Education Needs project in 2007 and 2008 supported a modified version of the early childhood narrative assessment exemplars for primary and secondary school students. The project arose from earlier research (McMenamin, Millar, Morton, Mutch, Nuttall, & Tyler-Merrick, 2004) that investigated curriculum policy and special education support. A number of recommendations were made, including the development of exemplars of inclusionary practices that could support teachers to make sense of teaching all students within the New Zealand curriculum (McMenamin et al., 2004). The report also highlighted the need for curriculum policy to be developed simultaneously with assessment policy.

The Ministry of Education project in 2007 and 2008 responded to these concerns. It provided opportunities for teacher professional development, the development of narrative assessment exemplars that valued all students and teachers as learners, establishing strong links between curriculum and the process of assessment for students with special education needs. Effective pedagogy and teacher understandings of curriculum were pivotal in this process. The project was an opportunity to utilize the wealth of knowledge from early childhood education's experiences and uses of learning stories and to link it with the key competencies, learning areas and effective pedagogy within the New Zealand Curriculum.

Documents that support inclusive practice in New Zealand schools

I wanted to consider assessment practice within a wider inclusive education context. I wished to draw on New Zealand documents that inform democratic principles to support this critical inquiry. I identified four key documents that can inform inclusive school practices that recognize the achievements of all students. The Treaty of Waitangi is one of the documents. The principles of participation, partnership and protection inherent in the Treaty of Waitangi inform the principles and core values of the other three documents: The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry

of Education, 2007), the Ministry of Education's Position Paper: Assessment (2011a) and the Educultural Wheel (Macfarlane, 2004). These same principles feature strongly in assessment and DSE literature (Absolum, 2006; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gunn & de Vocht van Alpen, 2010; Macfarlane, 2012; Morton, McMenamin, Moore, & Molloy, 2012; Valle & Connor, 2011; Wearmouth, Berryman, & Glynn, 2009; Wiliam, 2011). In the study these principles can support us to recognize the consequences of our use of narrative assessment for the students working with us.

Tiriti o Waitangi - Treaty of Waitangi

New Zealand school communities that are committed to inclusive practices may find support for their work within Tiriti o Waitangi - the Treaty of Waitangi (Macfarlane, Macfarlane, Savage, & Glynn, 2012). The Treaty of Waitangi is a founding document of New Zealand. Although it was signed in 1840 it continues to influence the lives of all New Zealanders to varying degrees and in varying ways (Berryman & Macfarlane, 2011). The Treaty of Waitangi established a bicultural context for Pakeha (European) and Māori as equal partners, a context that continues to be relevant in the complex bicultural/multicultural mix of a more diverse New Zealand today (Macfarlane, 2012).

The treaty is based on the three principles of partnership, protection and participation. It determines a context for the relationship between the Crown, iwi and Māori (Ministry of Education, 2008a; 2011b). The Treaty of Waitangi was written in Māori and English versions, but the English version was endorsed as the official version (Orange, 2013). It was assumed that the different versions had the same meanings, but disparities in interpretations of concepts and language meant that various signatories had very different understandings of what they were signing (Biggs, 1989). These differences have had substantial and ongoing impacts on life opportunities for Māori. This is evident in the overrepresentation of Māori in statistics relating to poverty, unemployment, income, physical and mental health issues, crime and incarceration, educational underachievement and in special education services (Berryman & Macfarlane, 2011; Bevan-Brown, 2006; Cherrington, 2009; Hutchings, Barnes, Taupo, Bright, Pihama, & Lee, 2012; Nairn, 2007).

Recent research focused on outcomes for Māori learners (Berryman & Woller, 2013; Bevan-Brown, 2006; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop, O’Sullivan & Berryman, 2010; Macfarlane, 2000, 2007; Macfarlane, 2012; Margrain & Macfarlane, 2011; Wearmouth, Berryman, & Glynn, 2009) has identified approaches that support educators to make sense of culturally responsive ways of working. There is evidence (Bishop, O’Sullivan, & Berryman, 2010) that programmes that have targeted Māori students have also realized benefits for other minoritised and non minority students. As educators have accessed this research and literature there have been opportunities to reflect and reimagine reciprocity and responsiveness in their practice (McIlroy & Guerin, 2014). This project utilizes one such approach, the Educultural Wheel (Macfarlane, 2004).

The Educultural Wheel

Within this thesis the Educultural Wheel is recognized as a New Zealand framework for inclusive practice. The Educultural Wheel identifies five core values in terms of understanding a Māori worldview. They are expressed as key cultural concept bases for effective classroom strategies. The first four core values develop and support the realization of the fifth core value: pumanawatanga. These concepts are relational and intertwined. Although they are recognized individually here none occur without the other, and they strengthen each other. They are

- whanaungatanga (building relationships)
 - rangatiratanga (teacher effectiveness)
 - manaakitanga (ethic of caring)
 - kotahitanga (ethic of bonding)
 - pumanawatanga (morale, tone, pulse - breathing life into the other four values)
- (Macfarlane et al., 2012).

The concepts inherent in the wheel can guide educators in their responsibilities to all students, and their whānau in their local community. The Educultural Wheel can support educators to reflect critically and ethically upon their work. Figure 1 presents the Educultural Wheel and the prompts that can support educator reflection.

The Educultural Wheel

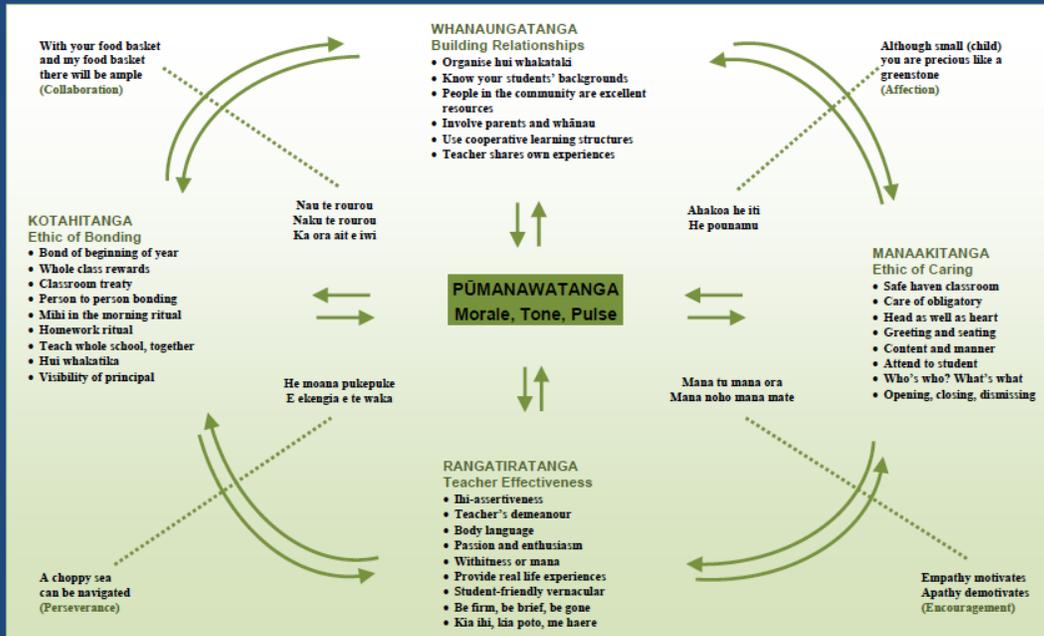


Figure 1: The Educational Wheel (Macarlane, 2004, p. 30).

The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC)

Education in New Zealand is supported by three mandated curricula – The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), The Māori Curriculum Te Marautanga o Aotearoa (Ministry of Education, 2008b) and the early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996). The work undertaken in this project utilizes the New Zealand Curriculum as it is situated within English medium education.

The New Zealand Curriculum recognizes all students as learners, declaring its commitment to inclusive ideals as a document that is,

“non-sexist, non-racist, and non-discriminatory; it ensures that student’s identities, languages, abilities, and talents are recognised and affirmed and that their learning needs are addressed”

(Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9).

The New Zealand Curriculum is constructed as a document based on human rights and inclusive discourses. It values a sociocultural approach that recognizes learning in many contexts, emphasizing a transformational model of learning that values the co-construction of knowledge (McIlroy & Guerin, 2014). Teachers and students are recognized as learning together and from each other in the reciprocal process Māori recognize as the concept of “ako”.

The New Zealand Curriculum provides a framework for assessment through eight subject learning areas that are graded from level one to level eight. Students entering school at five years old will start at level one, with the goal of working their way through their schooling to level eight. Historically special education discourses have identified some students as “not ready” for learning, reinforcing the need for specialist or alternative curriculum. The New Zealand Curriculum challenges this discourse. All students are deemed capable of learning at level one, that is, all students are recognized as learners within the curriculum.

Although the learning areas have stated achievement objectives by level there is recognition that learning is not always linear, and that learning can be supported across the various areas, rather than confined by them. (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Ministry of Education Position Paper: Assessment

This paper presents the Ministry of Education’s vision of what New Zealand’s assessment landscape should look like if assessment is to be used effectively across macro and micro settings. It is based on six key principles that inform effective assessment for all students. The principles are:

- The student is at the centre
- The curriculum underpins assessment
- Building assessment capability is crucial to achieving improvement
- An assessment capable system is an accountable system.
- A range of evidence drawn from multiple sources potentially enables a more accurate response
- Effective assessment is reliant on quality relationships and interactions.

(Ministry of Education, 2011a, p.4-5)

The position paper recognizes effective assessment as informing an improvement in teaching and learning. It has a vision of all students in all schools progressing “as far as possible and in the most appropriate way possible, according to their own context” (p.3). It recognizes the need for a learning system where all participants have a shared understanding of assessment roles in learning, and learning is reciprocal and collaborative. The position paper has a strong focus on assessment for learning.

Themes evident in key documents

Table 1 presents a summary of the principles evident within the Treaty of Waitangi, the NZC, the Assessment position paper and the Educultural Wheel. Considerations of these principles inform ways of working within this study.

Table 1: Overview of themes evident in key documents informing this study

| Treaty of Waitangi principles | New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) MOE position paper: Assessment (Ministry of Education, 2011a) | Educultural Wheel (Macfarlane, 2004) |
|--|--|--|
| Principle 1: Partnership Creating communities that value diversity. | Community engagement Recognising the potential of all community members. Sharing narratives and lived experiences. Quality interactions and relationships | Whanaungatanga Building respectful relationships with high expectations. Facilitating engagement and sharing responsibilities |
| Principle 1: Partnership Principle 3: Participation Supporting student/family voice and engagement Shared responsibility for teaching and learning. | Future focus, Coherence Teaching with a focus on lifelong learning. Developing critical consciousness in ourselves and students. Student at the centre | Rangatiratanga Advocacy Accountability Determination Defining our shared commitments. |
| Principle 2: Protection Supporting all students to access learning opportunities. | Cultural diversity, Learning to learn Experiencing the joy of learning. Giving voice to lived experiences and connecting to curriculum. Building assessment capability. | Pumanawatanga Enabling potential Honouring uniqueness Recognizing strengths and potential. |
| Principle 2: Protection Considering student wellbeing | High Expectations Valuing intellectual and | Manaakitanga Caring about learning and |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| in decision making around teaching, learning and assessment. | emotional ways of knowing. High (and reasonable) expectations supported by quality teaching. A range of evidence from multiple sources. Accountability. | learners. Doing no harm. Using the head, the heart and the hand. Ensuring that evidence based practice is ethical, informed and safe. |
| Principle 1:Partnership Principle 2:Protection Principle 3:Participation Participation and belonging | Inclusion Imagining personal and educative transformation. Being able to “walk in another’s shoes.” Curriculum underpins assessment. | Kotahitanga Enabling belonging, Achieving unity. Working together to enable belonging. Student presence, participation, learning, and achievement. |

My positioning as a teacher researcher

I come to this research with my own life experiences, assumptions, values and beliefs. These need to be acknowledged. In the process of considering my positioning as a researcher I have returned to those formative influences and experiences of my childhood that are also visible in the ways I work and act as a teacher researcher. I am a fourth generation West Coaster of strong Irish Catholic roots. In New Zealand I am recognized as pākehā (of European descent). The South Island’s West Coast (Te Tai Poutini) is my whānau turangawaewae (the land where our family walks and belongs). I am one of eleven children and part of a huge extended whānau (family) that has links in many West Coast communities. As I consider the impact of family I recognize three key themes inherent in the ways I work and live: the importance of whanaungatanga (relationships), manaakitanga (an ethic of care), and resilience.

When you are one of eleven children you grow up learning about relationships everyday. For me this meant understanding that even when I had decided I didn’t want a particular sister or brother anymore I still had to live with them. Games had to be negotiated, debated, argued and rules agreed upon. Fights had to be settled. Relationships could be a battlefield and our parents often left us (their children) to sort it out for ourselves. At times this worked. At other times we fought and scrapped our way to some sort of resolution over a number of days. We had to learn to live with each other.

In the many roles I have undertaken in education (teacher, specialist teacher, senior teacher, acting principal, special education advisor, visiting teacher etc) being able to maintain and

develop positive relationships with a wide range of people has, and continues to be crucial. Taking the time to develop respectful relationships is hard work. Sometimes it takes me completely outside my comfort zone, especially when I work with people who have very different values to my own. I have had to learn to step back and consider the views of others, to listen, to rethink possible ways forward, and to consider what supports and what stops people from being honest about issues being discussed. I have to constantly think about my position as a teacher or a researcher and the impact of this role on the relationships I am in. The work I completed in my Masters thesis (Guerin, 2008) reminded me of the lessons from my childhood – that it is the little things we do on a regular basis that sustain relationships.

Manaakitanga is about an ethic of caring (Macfarlane, 2004; Macfarlane et al., 2012). It is about reciprocal respect and trust, and caring for a person's wellbeing ([www. Hereooora.tki.org.nz](http://www.Hereooora.tki.org.nz)). Recently I have recognized the many ways my mother demonstrated manaakitanga within her lifetime. My childhood was full of people – not just family members, but community members who may have needed someone to care. Mum recognized this in many ways. She invited the Anglican minister for lunch on Sunday because he was on his own. She cared for a neighbour's disabled child for a week so she could have a rare holiday. Mum worked at a rest home. She would invite some of the rest home residents home for tea because no-one had visited them for a while. On one occasion one of my sister's friends came to stay for a night after a family argument. She stayed for three months. These expectations and experiences were the norm for me as a child. There was always space for one more at our place. As a child I assumed everybody cared for each other. As an adult I now recognize the responsibility an ethic of care demands.

I have had the opportunity to read the work of democratic educators who also recognize an ethic of care as a central responsibility of being an educator (Freire, 1994, 1998, 2005; hooks, 1994; Monchinski, 2010; Wink, 2011). They have helped me make sense of what this can look like in practice. As an educator an ethic of care has challenged me to consider the impact of my actions on students' wellbeing and identity. This means considering the impact on their family too (Macfarlane et al., 2012; Wearmouth, Berryman, & Glynn, 2009). If the work I do does not support a better outcome for the student and their family I have to question why I am doing it at all. An ethic of care also demands that I set high, but achievable expectations for the students I

work with (Macfarlane, 2004). For me, this translates into a belief that everyone is a learner, that everyone belongs in school, that everyone can work within the New Zealand curriculum. A clear distinction to make here is that caring is not about me supporting an ongoing dependence on a “specialist teacher” to solve issues. It is about an expectation that we are all learners and we need to reflect on how our actions limit or support learning opportunities for each other. As an educator I need to remind myself to “walk in someone else’s shoes” as I consider ethical dilemmas in teaching, learning and assessment. An ethic of care has also challenged me to recognize in my work what my mother had taught me long ago – that when we recognize diversity as a gift the concept of deficit – so entrenched in many education practices – is unacceptable.

None of these ideals can be enacted in daily life without resilience. It takes resilience to live in small isolated rural communities in New Zealand. Economic policies make life hard, especially in the face of primary industries closing down. Similarly, in education, it takes resilience to fight battles for rights to be realized. In the many educator roles I have undertaken I have recognized the importance of resilience.

I recognize resilience in the disabled students who turn up to school everyday, unsure if their access to a quality education is to be realized; in their families and schools that fight for resourcing and access to professional development; in educators who turn up to work worried that they are not skilled enough to teach all of their students; in professionals who are conflicted by work policies that challenge their beliefs. It takes resilience to keep teaching in the face of reluctance and resistance to inclusive practice.

Many of the messages I receive from others are based in good intentions, but they also illustrate the continuing impact of deficit discourses in education. I have been told to lower my expectations for disabled students, that I am mean for expecting disabled students to come inside after break like everyone else, that I am a wonderful teacher because I think all students should go on the ski trip or camp, regardless of challenge. I have been asked why I bother speaking to non verbal students as if they can think. I have been told that I am a special kind of person that can teach all kids because not everyone can. I have worked with parents who have been told their child is a vegetable who has no future, that their dreams for their child are unrealistic, that their

observations of their child's learning at home are not recognized at school. It takes resilience to challenge these deficit discourses every day.

Resilience is framed in hope, that our work can make things better for everyone. I recognise the influence of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) and culturally responsive pedagogical literature in supporting resilience for me. Listening to and reading the perspectives of disabled people themselves has taught me there are more inclusive ways of working. I recognize these fields of literature as sustaining me, supporting my evolving understanding of the many complex and contradictory ways I and others work in everyday practice. It motivates me to complete this research so that more voices are heard and that more equitable assessment practices may be enacted.

Language

The wide range of documents and policies I have used within this project describe disability, impairment, inclusion, and special education in many ways. At times the same terms have been used to describe opposing discourses. If I refer to a document in this thesis I use the term the document uses. I am mindful that the use of disability related terms can reinforce a link between disability and negativity, inability and inferiority (Valle & Connor, 2011), reinforcing stereotypes of disabled people (Linton, 1998; Penson, 2012; Smith, 2010). Therefore it is necessary to clarify my use of some key terms within this research and the meanings I attribute to the terms I use.

I have chosen to use the term *disabled students* within the context of this work. I have made this choice, drawing on Slee's (2001, p.175) thinking that, "*when I speak of disabled people I use the word "disabled" as a verb rather than an adjective in the first instance. People are not of themselves disabled, it is a relational concept within a sociological discourse rather than a pathological descriptor within a medical discourse.*"

Throughout this thesis other participants or cited resources may have used the terms *students with special education needs* or *students with disabilities*. This is consistent with people first language that emphasizes the individual first. If these terms are used in documentation or quotes

they are written here in their original form. While appreciating the diversity within this group of students the three terms are attributed the same meaning within this project.

As a teacher I have received many confusing messages about inclusion. Often government policies, media releases, teacher professional development and education resources have used the term “inclusion” interactively with the term “special education”. The term inclusion has been used to describe special schools and segregated settings as well as the physical presence of students in their regular schools. The continuing lack of clarity in language and terms being used is a barrier to educators trying to make sense of inclusive and exclusive practice and special education within New Zealand (Kearney, 2009; Macartney & Morton, 2011; McMaster, 2012) and overseas (Belanger & Gougeon, 2009; Loxley & Thomas, 2001; Slee, 2006). Within this study the terms *inclusion* and *inclusive practice* are used interchangeably. The term *special education* is not recognized as meaning inclusion or inclusive practice.

In discussions about the work undertaken with Woody and Kirsty the terms *narratives* and *learning stories* are used interchangeably throughout this thesis. These are stories that describe or observe learning.

Research questions

This chapter positions this thesis in a socio-cultural context where New Zealand education assessment practices fail to recognize the diversity of student learning and capability. It is a context that renders many disabled students invisible within secondary school assessment and achievement data. The thesis focuses on the introduction and use of narrative assessment within a secondary school, as I examine how this assessment approach can support student identity, wellbeing and participation in learning. The Treaty of Waitangi’s principles of participation, partnership and protection provide a framework to investigate these concepts. Three research questions are identified:

How does narrative assessment influence conceptions of student identity for disabled students in secondary school?

How do the students and their supporters make sense of narrative assessment?

How does narrative assessment support disabled students to be recognized as participants within

their own learning at secondary school?

The Individual Education Plan is recognized in New Zealand as pivotal to the assessment and learning of disabled students. This study was an opportunity to investigate how narrative assessment could be utilized to reimagine traditional ways of working with students in the IEP process.

Summary

In this chapter I have introduced the research context and the four key documents that inform a democratic approach to assessment within this project. I have situated the project within DSE to question and investigate the consequences of assessment for disabled students. I have introduced narrative assessment as a strengths based approach that can challenge exclusionary assessment approaches. I question the relationships between policy and the assessment practices students participate in during their school days. The invisibility of disabled students in New Zealand secondary school assessment landscapes is used as a platform to explore possible uses of narrative assessment to recognize diversity in learning. Research questions have been identified in response to these concerns.

Outline of chapters

In chapter two I present a literature review focused on theories, approaches and consequences of assessment. I examine curriculum, teaching and learning. Narrative assessment is critiqued.

In chapter three I introduce and justify the methodological approaches undertaken within the study. The application of these approaches to research methods and design is detailed. Data collection methods and the analysis of the data is described. Ethical considerations related to methods and data collection are presented.

In chapter four I introduce the participants within the learning community of this study. I discuss the ethical and practice related issues of researching with disabled students with limited communication skills. A framework for the findings chapters is introduced.

Chapter five is the first of three findings chapters. The construction of learner identity through the use of narrative assessment is critiqued.

In chapter six I provide narratives and documents that describe a student's participation within her own learning over one school year. The use of narrative assessment to support the student's evolving role as a participant in her learning is critiqued.

In chapter seven I examine the responses of specialists from outside of the school in relation to the use of narrative assessment with the two students. I use narratives from school and family participants to consider the impact of these responses.

In chapter eight a summary of the key research findings is presented. I identify theoretical and practical implications of the study. Implications for future research are identified.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter presents current literature that informs this study. It focuses on assessment practice within New Zealand and globally. Within this work curriculum, teaching, learning, pedagogy, and assessment are observed to be relational, intertwined and interdependent. They are also recognised as social constructions. The chapter begins by defining social constructionism. Constructions of teaching, learning, curriculum, and pedagogy are introduced. Literature on effective assessment as inclusive practice is detailed. Considerations of student wellbeing, learner identity and participation are examined.

Assessment theory and approaches evident within New Zealand's education system are discussed. Narrative assessment is defined and critiqued. The chapter concludes with identifying links between assessment practices and approaches such as narrative assessment and the use of Individual Education Plans for disabled students in New Zealand schools.

Social Constructionism

Within this study teaching, learning, curriculum and pedagogy can be understood as being social constructions within social contexts. This study draws on Bjarnason's (2006) interpretation of social constructionism as people constructing "our own and each other's identities through our everyday encounters with each other in social interactions via language and other symbols" (p.252). Within a social constructionism epistemology human interaction is recognized as pivotal to understanding knowledge, meaning and the nature of reality (Burr, 1995; Gergen & Gergen, 2008).

From a social constructionist perspective language can be understood as a form of social action (Burr, 1995; Freire, 1994, 2005; Kincheloe, 2012). Socially constructed understandings are continually being produced, and then contested by new social interactions (MacArthur, Higgins & Quinlivan, 2012). Social constructionists are challenged to examine language, the spoken

word and text within the process of challenging our common sense knowledge of ourselves and the world we inhabit (Burr, 1995). This process can help educators to make sense of inclusive practice. If schools are recognized as ‘cultures in the making’ (MacArthur et.al., 2012, p. 241) then meanings about diverse groups of students and their place in society can be contested and reframed. For example, Macartney (2009) asks educators to recognize and challenge social constructions of the idea of ‘normal’ and the consequences of these constructions on the students and their families, as well as teachers’ own practice.

Utilising social constructionist and critical pedagogy epistemologies in this study

This study combines critical pedagogy with social constructionism as I attempt to interpret and analyse interactions between the school context and wider socio political cultural considerations. This study recognizes the use of social constructionism and critical pedagogy as relational epistemologies, informing and supporting an urgent need for change. They demand the examining of taken-for-granted knowledges about, and practices of, assessment that this study wants to challenge and investigate. I recognize critical pedagogy and social constructionism as tools to support this inquiry.

Understanding social constructions can help educators to understand the ways that students are valued and the consequences of assessment practices for them as school community members. In this study social constructionism can help participants make sense of assessment as exclusionary practice that cannot be tolerated. It recognizes the fluidity of meaning making so that changes to these constructions are possible through critical engagement with understandings about disability and curriculum. Critical pedagogy supports this investigation by asking how constructions of assessment, teaching, learning and pedagogy can change so that all students are valued as learners. The use of both social constructionism and critical pedagogy in this study can draw attention to inequitable assessment as a problem and to suggest potential solutions.

In using a social constructionist approach this study draws on the work of disability studies researchers (Biklen, 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Ferguson, 2002; Ferguson, Ferguson & Taylor, 1992; Gleason, 1996; Goode, 1984, 1992; Macartney, 2008, 2009, 2014) who have questioned social constructions of people deemed “disabled,” reconstructing competence as a relational process.

Researchers need to pay attention to how disability is constructed and how conclusions are drawn within the research process (Biklen, 2011; Klotz, 2004). Similarly MacArthur et. al., (2012) and Morton, Rietveld, Guerin, McIlroy & Duke (2012) remind educators to pay attention to how disability is constructed and how conclusions are drawn within school and classroom settings. The work of Freire (1994, 1998, 2005), Kincheloe (2008, 2012) and Monchinski (2010) support a critical pedagogy investigation that challenges the status quo for disabled students who continue to be marginalized in assessment practices in New Zealand secondary schools.

Teaching and Learning

Through daily teaching practice educators act upon, and construct assessment, learning opportunities, curriculum, and competence (Morton & McMenemy, 2011; Morton, Rietveld, et al., 2012). The importance of teacher beliefs, teacher interpretations of instructional pedagogy and the ability of teachers to translate this pedagogy into meaningful teaching and learning is critical (Florian, 2009; Morton, McMenemy et al., 2012). Every teacher has to identify their own assumptions and beliefs about how people learn, and how this translates into the ways they construct their learning environment (Page, 2010). This can be recognised as ongoing reflexive practice that supports effective teaching (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Teaching and learning practices that focus on recognising, strengthening and transforming students' learning capacity support an inclusive culture where everybody belongs and schools take responsibility for all learners (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2010; Skidmore, 2002; Swann et al., 2012). These practices challenge historical notions of deficit that demand different or additional curriculum for some students (Morton, Rietveld et al., 2012).

This study recognises that a culture of learning only develops in an environment where all people are recognised as actively participating in, and contributing to a co-constructed curriculum (Morton, Rietveld et al., 2012). It engages with ideas of teaching and learning informed by sociocultural theory (Bruner, 1986; Cowie & Carr, 2004; Folland & Matre, 2005; Vygotsky, 1987). This view defines learning as a social and collaborative activity where participants develop their thinking together. Teaching and learning are understood as interdependent and

relational. Individual learning can be seen as situated within the social environment (James, 2006).

Learning is recognised as a mediated activity in which cultural artefacts (materials such as books and equipment, symbolic tools such as language) have a pivotal role (Bruner, 1991). Bruner suggests that it is through these interactions that we construct our own realities, using the narrative form to communicate these. Identity construction is important (Gipps, 2002; James, 2006) as is the concept of engaged participation (Cowie and Carr, 2004).

A sociocultural approach to learning recognises the classroom as a community of learners (Wenger, 2000; Willis, 2010) where the teacher is responsible for creating an environment that supports individuals thinking and acting beyond their current level of competence (Cowie & Carr, 2004). Learners contribute to both generating problems and solutions. They are supported to work in, as Vygotsky describes, their zone of proximal development (James, 2006). The emphasis is on ‘development as the transformation to participation in a range of contexts’ (Cowie & Carr, 2004). The learner is encouraged to make sense of activities with guidance from more expert others. In this way learning is scaffolded. When the learner can cope on their own this support is faded or withdrawn (James, 2006). Teachers and students are learners together.

Ways of knowing are developed through dialogue between people in meaningful exchanges of ideas and interpretations (Smith & Barr, 2008). In this way children and young people are recognised as competent, complex, creative people who are all capable of participating fully in a community of learners (Swann et al., 2012; Wink, 2011; Wink & Wink, 2004). Learning is recognised as learning through participation, rather than acquisition of knowledge (Pollard et al., 2014).

A sociocultural approach to assessment recognises the dynamic interaction between teaching, learning and assessment. Assessment that respects this way of working needs to be spread across people, places and time (Cowie & Carr, 2004). Sociocultural theory’s focus on shared understandings and constructions of learning within a community challenges historical models of learning and assessment that focused on the individual learner. This does not mean that group

assessments ignore individual participants' roles and interactions (Hatherly & Richardson, 2007). Within this project narrative assessment is identified as a form of sociocultural assessment.

Many of the sociocultural ideas about learning reflect and endorse understandings of learning in Te Ao Māori (the Māori world). For example the Māori concept of ako describes a teaching and learning relationship, where the student learns from the teacher and the teacher is also learning from the student. The principle of reciprocity is valued. Ako also recognises that the learner and their whānau (family) cannot be separated (Ministry of Education, 2008). Sociocultural ideas also reflect areas of Paulo Freire's views of teaching and learning. Freire (1997) recognised the importance of people sharing learning together, that we are all teachers and all learners.

The banking model of education

Freire (1997, 1998, 2005) recognized all human beings as capable of continuous learning and development, and that education could support people to become truly human. However, education in this process is an act of curiosity and transformation – of inquiry and praxis, not the banking system of education he recognized in many educational institutions.

The banking model of education (Freire, 1994, 1997) identifies knowledge as being in a teacher's head. The teacher's role is to ensure their students receive that knowledge, that it is transmitted from the teacher to the students. In this model the teacher controls what is deemed as knowledge, and who knows what. Knowledge is recognized as politically neutral and is not questioned (Wink, 2011). The teacher has all the power. Lessons are teacher directed and opportunities for students to interact with the knowledge and with each other are limited. Knowledge may be defined in structured and narrow terms, requiring the regurgitation of facts and concepts to demonstrate competence. In contrast to this limited means of understanding teaching and knowledge Freire (1994, 1997) and hooks (1994) promote the concept of education as the practice of freedom.

Transforming teaching and learning: Education as the practice of freedom

Education as a practice of freedom recognizes that even with the limitations placed on and by educators, the classroom is a place of possibilities (hooks, 1994). Education is a co-constructed and collaborative teaching and learning process where both teachers and students work together to learn and grow as people – as humans (Freire, 1994, 1997). Central to this practice is an engaged pedagogy that supports risk taking and reimaginings of learning by both teachers and students. There are challenges for teachers – letting go of traditional ways of working, supporting students to act responsibly, recognizing the classroom as a space to empower all (including teachers themselves), and learning from the sharing of knowledge together. In this way education as a practice of freedom supports the class as a community of learners together. hooks (1994) reminds us that the teacher is not powerless in this situation, but is, like the students, equally committed to creating a learning context. The power in such a classroom is recognized as inherent in the learning process, in the establishing of the learning community. In this way the respect and care demanded by the Maori concept of manaakitanga is enacted.

Teachers and students are in a relationship of reciprocity, one that acknowledges “there is no teaching without learning” (Freire, 1998, p 31). Within this mutual and respectful educational process is the opportunity for transformative learning. The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) supports a transformational approach to learning through a sociocultural framework that recognises students and teachers as learners together. In this way it can encourage educators to transform assessment processes that support the authentic participation of students in their classrooms.

Education as a practice of freedom can be understood as an aspect of teaching that is sacred, a belief that “our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (hooks, 1994, p.13).

Curriculum

This study understands curriculum in three ways, ‘curriculum as prepared’, ‘curriculum as enacted’, and the ‘hidden curriculum’. Firstly the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of

Education, 2007) is an official document that guides schools to develop their own curriculum in response to community needs. This may be understood as “curriculum as prepared.” Secondly curriculum is understood as the way the New Zealand Curriculum is shaped and enacted in New Zealand’s school communities. Decisions about how to construct curriculum are influenced by the beliefs and assumptions of community members about diversity, disability, teaching, learning, competence and educator roles (Kasa-Hendrickson, 2005; Kluth, 2003; Morton, Rietveld et al., 2012; Smith & Barr, 2008). Thirdly this study recognises a hidden curriculum – the “pedagogical unsaid” (McLaren, 1998, p.45) – where the ongoing maintenance of dominant culture is unchallenged through institutional processes (Wink, 2011). Clough (2005) suggests that “the curriculum is and always has been a selection from culture for particular ends... what and whom we choose to teach are vital determinants of the part which those students are able to play in shaping a society’s development” (p.80).

Elba-Luwisch (2007) and Olson (2000) conceptualise curriculum as a multi-storied process, developed and shaped by teachers’ experiences and narratives. When it is conceptualised in this way they argue that it becomes possible to challenge the constraints and conditions that these contexts impose. Pearl (1997) suggests that if we are serious about curriculum supporting learning opportunities for all students we need to ask ourselves what constitutes important knowledge. He suggests that “the excluded be included and the undiscussable be discussed” (p.217) if curriculum is to be investigated and constructed as responsive to learners and their communities.

Brown, Irving & Keegan (2014) recognise a dearth in literature examining teachers’ conceptions of curriculum. If educators wish to make sense of teaching and learning, the authors propose they need to develop an understanding of the tensions inherent in curriculum, They suggest educators need to identify tensions in curriculum by asking who should determine what is taught (with consideration of student needs, teacher knowledge, and society’s issues) and what is to be taught (which knowledge is valued).

Nuthall (2007) further challenged educators to recognise the importance of the process of using language in creating curriculum knowledge and the conditions for thinking about, and acquiring

knowledge. He recognised classrooms as language communities, where specific structures of language define the frameworks through which thinking occurs and knowledge is constructed. Smith & Barr's (2008) view of curriculum as inquiry recognises the value of this language community in co-constructing learning through social interactions. Curriculum is enacted through pedagogy - the ways that we understand and construct our teaching and learning.

Pedagogy

Within this study pedagogy can be understood as a relationship with children based on an educator's professional knowledge. That knowledge informs learning and educator responses to wider social and political contexts that influence students' knowledge, experiences and opportunities (Carrington, MacArthur, Kearney, Kimber, Mercer, Morton & Rutherford, 2012). Our view of disability influences our understanding and enactment of inclusive education practice. We make sense of disability and inclusion through a discourse, that is the ideas, knowledge and understandings of disability that we have developed over time. These ideas determine the ways we act, think, speak and practise as teachers of all students (Jordan, Schwartz and McGhie-Richmond, 2009; MacArthur, Purdue and Ballard, 2003; Macartney, 2009). Teacher understandings, assumptions and beliefs shape pedagogy as do social constructions of teaching, assessment, curriculum and learning (Morton, Rietveld et al., 2012). Investigations of assessment cannot ignore the impact of pedagogy. This is not a simple task as the relational nature of these social constructions can make it difficult to separate or understand their impact on each other.

Inclusive education requires knowledgeable teachers who can utilise a wide range of effective pedagogies to meet the needs of diverse students (Carrington et al., 2012). Alton-Lee (2003) recognises the importance of pedagogical practices that empower classes to work as caring, inclusive learning communities that are responsive to diversity. Pedagogy that scaffolds and provides opportunities for feedback on student learning and engagement is valued. Student autonomy and participation is supported through a range of learning orientations, student regulation, metacognitive strategies and a co-constructivist approach to goal oriented assessment.

This study is informed by Skidmore's (2002) recognition of pedagogy being shaped by discourses that may view disability as difference or as an element of student diversity. This study values a discourse of inclusion where all students are recognised as having an open-ended potential for learning; where sources of difficulty in learning are attributed to insufficiently responsive presentation of the curriculum; where support for learning seeks to reform curriculum and develop pedagogy across the school; where teaching expertise centres in engendering the active participation of all students in the learning process ; and where a common curriculum is provided for all students (p. 120).

Effective pedagogy supports all educators to teach all students (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Smith & Barr, 2008). Drawing on research about the kinds of teaching approaches that consistently have a positive impact on student learning the NZC (Ministry of Education, 2007) has identified that students learn best when teachers:

- Create a supportive learning environment,
- Encourage reflective thought and action,
- Enhance the relevance of new learning,
- Facilitate shared learning,
- Make connections to prior learning and experience;
- Provide sufficient opportunities to learn; and
- inquire into the teaching-learning relationship.

(p. 34).

Assessment

This section defines assessment. It locates literature focused on approaches to assessment, the purposes, uses and consequences of a range of assessment practices and processes and educators understandings of these. It describes assessment within a New Zealand education context.

Defining assessment

This project utilizes Rinaldi's (2006) definition of assessment as "deciding what to give value to" (p. 70). This definition supports educators to think about assessment in terms of the learning they value. This study focuses on assessment that is effective, identifying it as a key component

of quality teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, 2011a). Effective assessment is defined as a process that “entails a purposeful gathering of quality student assessment information and the appropriate use of it to *inquire, decide, adapt* and *transform* in order to improve student learning...It also requires a high level of responsiveness to unique learning and learner contexts. It includes collaborative exchanges of information between participants in a process of reciprocal learning or ako” (Ministry of Education, 2011a, p. 4).

Defining assessment requires that we reflect on the purposes of assessment (Gipps, 1996; Macartney, 2009). The New Zealand curriculum document identifies a number of characteristics of effective assessment, stating that it:

- Benefits students
- Involves students
- Supports teaching and learning goals
- Is planned and communicated
- Is suited to the purpose, and
- Is valid and fair

(p. 40)

Within this study narrative assessment is recognised as an approach that can meet the criteria for effective assessment when it is used formatively with considerations of effective and inclusive pedagogy.

The purposes and consequences of assessment

Assessment can be seen as a tool for social thinking and action (Cowie & Carr, 2004), as a method for accountability, a strategy to attract funding, and as an approach to support teaching and learning (Bourke & Mentis, 2013; Gilmore & Smith, 2008). It may serve multiple roles in promoting teacher learning, leadership and professional development (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007). Assessment provides the means by which schooling outcomes can be monitored by various stakeholder groups. It can be used to decide which students get access to which types of education (Macartney, 2009; Morton, 2012). Assessment can also be used to identify what needs to be different (Brown et. al., 2014). It is situated within, and is often constructed by, broader social, political, and economic purposes and contexts (Brady & Kennedy, 2012). Its

purpose can mean different things to various stakeholders at any given point in time.

As understandings of assessment purposes have changed so too have assessment practices (Broadfoot, 2007). The purposes of assessment are often aligned to the assessment formats we choose to use. Historically educational assessment has been used to identify whether or not students have particular capabilities or have learned what has been taught (Morton, Rietveld et al., 2012). This has usually been in the form of summative assessment, an approach that is recognized as assessment of learning. Stobart (2008) and Broadfoot (2007) identify summative assessment as an approach that encourages teachers to embrace transmission teaching, and values high stakes testing where certain groups of students are more likely to fail. The more recent use of formative assessment is focused on assessment as building on and enhancing learning to support both teacher and learner to plan next learning steps (Morton, Rietveld et al., 2012).

Disabled students have historically been assessed with a focus on deficits and remediation (Macartney, 2009; Valle & Connor, 2011). Decisions about ‘ability’ and ‘normality’ based on psychometric or other forms of assessment have led to decisions about what can and should be studied, and by whom (Kincheloe, 2008; Macartney, 2009). Assessment has been used to categorise and differentiate students, and this information may have been used for access to funding or academic streaming. The dominance of clinical approaches to assessment that focus on individual deficit ignore the sociocultural recognition of learning across contexts. This has supported unequal access to curriculum and learning opportunities for some students (Macfarlane, Blampied & Macfarlane, 2011). Macfarlane, Blampied and Macfarlane urge a critical rethink and repositioning of mainstream and special education assessment approaches, advocating for a “best fit” approach where the assessment used is most responsive to the needs of the student being assessed. Their concerns relate to the outcomes for students assessed in these ways, and their impact on access to learning, and life opportunities. Achievement at school is closely linked to life choices and opportunities for participation in wider society (Bishop, O’ Sullivan & Berryman, 2010).

The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) identifies the primary purpose of assessment being “ to improve students’ learning and teachers’ teaching as both student and teacher respond to the information it provides” (p.39). It defines assessment as “an ongoing process that arises out of the interaction between teaching and learning” (p.39). Valle and Connor (2011) challenge traditional special education practice where the focus of assessment is on deficit. They suggest that the purpose of assessment is to focus on strengths and skills, that is, to know what students can do. They recognize the need to understand the challenges for students, but also to avoid the unintended consequences of deficit based assessment, such as a lowering of expectations, or the loss of assumption of competence.

Absolum et al., (2009) suggest that the prevailing purpose of assessment should be to improve the assessment capabilities of all students by developing the assessment capabilities of teachers, school leaders, parents and those who support them. Students can co-construct their own learning, working jointly with teachers to identify problems, possible learning strategies and preferred educational outcomes (Thousand & Rosenberg, 2005). Educators need to focus on developing students’ assessment capabilities as a priority (Absolum et. al, 2009; OECD, 2013). Students need to know how to participate in assessment processes. They need to learn how to obtain evidence of learning, how to interpret assessment information and when to seek clarification. This can be understood as students learning to learn. Feedback in assessment is identified as a powerful strategy within this process. In this way assessment can be a means of supporting student voice and determining future learning within an inclusive environment (Bourke & Mentis, 2013).

Quality assessment is a reciprocal process, developing out of student and teacher decisions and interactions. Some of these decisions are subconscious and may be thought of as invisible or taken for granted. Developing the assessment capabilities of students requires teachers who have a sound curriculum, pedagogical and assessment knowledge, and who are able to use this knowledge constructively in their practice (Ministry of Education, 2011a). Pettifor and Saklofske (2012) challenge educators to think about the purpose of education, to question whether assessment serves the best interests of the child, the school, and society.

The design, implementation and use of assessment can support or reduce student motivation, participation and performance (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2012; Slee, 2001; Taylor, 2000). When assessment is not well designed or implemented it can intensify inequity in education, supporting the notion of some students being incapable of learning. Within this study participants recognized there would be challenges in considering and enacting assessment in a flexible manner in a secondary school. This meant taking time to identify forms of assessment that ensured all students could demonstrate competence (Macartney, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2011a). Within this work we drew on the wisdom of the Ministry of Education (2011a) which reminded us that to achieve valued student outcomes we needed to “assess what we value rather than narrow our focus to value what we assess” (p. 18).

Educational assessment has been used successfully to endorse unequal power relations in society (Bishop, O’Sullivan & Berryman, 2010; Broadfoot, 2007; Kincheloe, 2008; Slee, 2001). Educational and social disparities can remain unchallenged by assessment that serves the majority culture well, but that ignores the need for learning opportunities that are culturally appropriate and responsive to marginalised and minoritised peoples (Corbett & Norwich, 2005; Kincheloe, 2008; Slee, 2001). Educator understandings of assessment and pedagogy can support more responsive ways of working with a focus on equity.

Teacher understandings of assessment

Assessment practices are determined by how teachers make sense of their roles as practitioners and what they identify as the purpose of assessment (Smith, 1996). Understanding assessment is also about understanding learning and teaching. Teachers’ understanding of how learning takes place is crucial to the way they construct teaching, curriculum and assessment (Brown et al., 2014; Fottland & Matre, 2005). Educator beliefs and attitudes about disability, diversity and competence can limit or support learning opportunities for students to reveal their strengths (Smith, 2010; Snow, 2007; Valle & Connor, 2011). Teacher beliefs about student capability influence what teachers focus on in student learning, what they assess, and what they identify as progress and achievement (Skidmore, 2002). This can perpetuate a self fulfilling prophecy as assessment choices may recognise a student as incompetent or incapable of learning.

Brown et al., (2014) remind us that educators can hold apparently competing ideas and

conceptions about teaching, learning and assessment in their minds. They can draw on various assessment choices as they feel they need them. Teachers' ideas about assessment are likely to reflect legal, cultural and social priorities placed upon assessment within their work environments. These ideas support them to work effectively within their own policy or legal framework (Brown, 2011). This means that as assessment policy changes so too do teachers' conceptions and uses of assessment.

Teacher values and beliefs about themselves in relation to others also influence the ways they interpret, experience and implement assessment practices (Brown, 2011; Brown et al., 2014; Morton, Rietveld et al., 2012; Smith, 1996). This, in turn, affects the opportunities students have to develop a sense of belonging with their peers through working alongside each other, sharing understandings of learning and participation, and valuing the unique strengths each person brings to the classroom (Connors & Stalker, 2003; Rietveld, 2002). One means of supporting teachers to see possibilities and alternative ways of working is the use of teacher and disabled people's narratives (Clandinin & Raymond, 2006; Schweir, 2012) that demonstrate how peers have reimagined their practice in response to teaching all students.

Bourke and Mentis (2014) suggest that supporting teachers to develop greater understandings of assessment can result in better learning conditions being made for the student. Teachers can be guided in their assessment practices by the eight principles for school and teacher decision making in the NZC (Cowie, 2009). Cowie (2009) suggests that understanding classroom assessment can also help teachers make sense of the principles as they relate to students as lifelong learners.

Teachers' use of assessment

When assessment is used effectively in the classroom to support learning, levels of student achievement are enhanced (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007). Within this process assessment is used by teachers to modify their teaching in response to the use of assessment (Alton-Lee, 2003; Black, 1998). Schools focussed on improving learning through assessment have environments that:

- provide effective feedback,

- ensure students are active participants in their own learning
- provide teaching that responds to the assessment data
- recognise the effects of assessment on student motivation and self esteem, and
- develop the assessment capabilities of students so they can self assess and make sense of future learning.

(Assessment Reform Group, 1999)

There are concerns (Absolum et al., 2009; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Swann et al., 2012) that schools' capacity and skills to engage with assessment undermines a truly formative approach where assessment informs pedagogical practice. This study responds to this concern with the use of a learning community focused on assessment practices and processes.

At times teachers' enactment of assessment can differ from the original intentions of policy makers (Brown et. al., 2014). This may reflect differing understandings of the purpose, and use of assessment. It may reflect people using the same terms and language, but not understanding that they hold very different meanings for each other. At times teachers can use their interpretations of policy to enact what they perceive to be more fair and equitable assessment processes than the original policy makers envisioned. In effect teachers can be observed to be "flying under the radar" (McIlroy & Guerin, 2014) as they enact policy through their understandings of the purpose of education. This can be recognized as an ethical dilemma. Brown et al. (2014) suggest it is why and how we use assessment that is important. They remind educators to understand the consequences resulting from their assessment practices in considering if the assessment is "fair, appropriate and effective- in other words, valid" (p. 28). Brady and Kennedy (2012) remind us that teacher's professional and personal beliefs about assessment can be conflicted as contexts drive the purposes of assessment. They warn that although contexts need to be recognised they should not determine the forms that assessments take.

Teacher use of assessment approaches in practice

Over the last decades in New Zealand there has been a shift in emphasis from gathering assessment to ascertain individual achievement levels to one of gathering assessment data to

inform learning (Bishop, O'Sullivan & Berryman, 2010). This can be interpreted as a move from assessment of learning to one of assessment for /as learning. Although teachers may recognise the educational benefits of formative assessment, much of their assessment practice prioritises summative assessment and assessment for accountability within their daily work (Christmas, 2009; Hill, 2000; Morton, McMenamin et al., 2012). When Hill (2000) investigated why this would happen she was able to identify power dynamics within the self managing school as contributing to this practice. However, when Christmas (2009) studied the knowledge and practices of four dynamic teachers she found they had distinct understandings of assessment theory, they prioritised formative assessment, determining which assessment practices were worthwhile and they recreated their classroom cultures to involve students within assessment processes. These teachers reflected on the purpose of assessment and were reluctant to undertake any assessment they felt was without purpose.

Different assessment strands may stand alone and it has been suggested (Neyland, 2007) that they cannot be used for different purposes. Christmas (2009) disagrees, finding that teachers can make use of the same data for summative, formative and diagnostic purposes. She also suggests that teachers' understandings and adaptations of assessment practices reject the limitations and distinctions that researchers have identified. Some approaches to using assessment for learning and assessment of learning in the same tasks appear promising, but Crooks (2011) warns that careful consideration of sequence of assessment activity is required to achieve high validity for both purposes. Likewise Mitchell (2010) suggests that assessment can serve both summative and formative purposes, and that understanding how feedback enables students to improve their performances is pivotal to decisions about how the assessment is defined.

Bourke and Mentis (2014) recognise New Zealand teachers as using multiple forms of assessment approaches and tools in their practice. They suggest these approaches have the potential to integrate and strengthen the use of narrative in student learning. Narrative assessment as an approach can include both formative and summative functions. Bourke and Mentis (2014) remind educators that an assessment tool is not fundamentally summative or formative – it is the purpose that defines its function. In saying this some assessments are limited in their design to be unpacked or applied to ongoing learning. For example, a multi choice activity that gives a

percentage and no function around ‘categories’ of questions would be a challenge to use formatively. Educators need to develop a deeper understanding of diverse approaches to assessment in order to fully comprehend the potential for different purposes of these assessments.

Teacher responsibilities to students through their use of assessment

Teachers have a responsibility to the students they assess. They are accountable to those students, supporting them to develop self regulation, and self determination through the assessment process (Bourke & Mentis, 2014). Part of this process is recognizing assessment practices that are fair and equitable. When Scott, Webber, Lupart, Aitken and Scott (2014) analysed data from a two year study on student assessment practices they found issues of fairness and equity were a widespread concern for educators, students and parents. These issues commonly arose during discussions that related to inclusion, special education, exceptionalities, but also in whole class contexts. The authors investigated how assessment practices could promote fairness and equity. They identified five key principles:

- Educators must strive to address the personal impact of assessment practices on individual students and their families.
- Assessment must be differentiated to accommodate the ability, social, cultural, and linguistic background of the students.
- All members of school communities must challenge the complacency associated with accepting indefensible assessment practices.
- The frequency, intensity and intrusiveness of assessments must not be overwhelming for students and their families.
- Assessment must not be used to counter inappropriate student behavior or reward desired behavior. (p. 52)

This study recognizes these five key principles as supporting inclusive practice through assessment that is fair and equitable.

Student identity, wellbeing and assessment

This study chooses to focus on the outcomes of assessment for disabled students. Of particular interest are constructions of student identity and wellbeing as well as student participation in their own learning. It draws on the work of Goode (1984, 1992) who undertook observational studies of life for persons with a range of disabilities. Goode recognises the impact of social relationships on the ways we define people, and our constructions of their social identities. Intimacy is recognised as a crucial factor in how we see students with special education needs, and how we choose to interact with them. The impact of intimacy is clear when we consider that the assessment of disabled people is often undertaken by those with little knowledge or relationship with the person being assessed. At times specialists may be engaged to make diagnostic decisions from just one visit with a student. This may or may not be undertaken with family or those who know the student intimately, people who can offer valuable information and insights to support opportunities for the student to demonstrate competence (Macartney, 2009).

Teachers can support the development of positive student identity as they plan, teach, and assess in response to their knowledge of the students. Our understandings of teacher support and its impact on student learning and identity can be enhanced by observations within natural school contexts using narrative (Fotland & Matre, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2009, Wansart, 1995). Identity is relational Taylor (2000) and Macartney (2008). As teachers we need to think about the skills and knowledge students may demonstrate outside of our classrooms. Student and family participation in learning processes can support us to recognize competence through a range of contexts and people (Cowie & Carr, 2004; Wearmouth, Berryman, & Glynn, 2009).

The teacher has a pivotal role in supporting students to feel validated and included within their learning environments (Corbett & Norwich, 2005). Knowing the student well is crucial. Teachers can use their knowledge of students to support participation within their school environments. It is important they respect and validate the student's identity and the way they see themselves (Mahuika, Berryman & Bishop, 2011). The teacher guides the students to succeed while respecting their experiences of difference.

Assessment signals messages to students about themselves as learners (Morton, Rietveld et al., 2012). It influences the learning experiences of individual students (OECD, 2013), shaping

constructions of competence (Biklen & Bourke, 2006) and self determination (Bourke & Mentis, 2013). Assessment can support learners' beliefs about their capacity as learners (Cowie & Carr, 2004; Hipkins, 2009), affecting their achievement (Black & Wiliam, 1998). If we teach students how to make their own assessment decisions, over time they are more likely to have a positive view of themselves as learners (Bourke & Mentis, 2013; Ministry of Education, 2011a). In these ways learning can be viewed as identity construction. Bourke and Mentis (2013) suggest that "...each child builds, grows and forms his or her identity *as a student* by making choices about what he or she wants to learn, how and why, and with whom" (p. 855). Gilmore and Smith (2008) stress the importance of educators paying attention to how students receive and react to assessment from a social, emotional, or psychological perspective. This information can inform curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment decision making.

Having a sense of belonging is pivotal to wellbeing. Fair and equitable assessment practices develop from a valuing of respect or *manaakitanga* (Macfarlane, 2012) for the dignity and wellbeing of all students being assessed (Scott et al., 2014). Teaching and assessment practices can support the ways that students are valued within their schools. They can send clear messages about recognising everyone as a learner. An example is the use of classroom charts that position students as "above" and "below" set criteria so that everyone knows who is achieving at a task and who is not. The use of such charts is based on the assumption that those students who are below will be motivated to change their status through hard work. This thinking is challenged by sociocultural approaches that recognise context as pivotal to learning.

Flexible teaching and assessment processes identify ways for all students to be competent. This is particularly important for students with special education needs who may have disabilities that peers are unsure about how to respond to (Morton, Rietveld et al., 2012). If the student is at the centre of assessment teachers need to consider the impact of the assessment on the wellbeing of that person, and others within the school community. Macfarlane (2012) and Bishop, O'Sullivan and Berryman (2010) remind us that if we adhere to the principle of "do no harm" we are able to think about assessment as a process that supports the wellbeing of a person, not one that identifies them as a failure or as not being valued within their school.

The student as a participant in their own learning

This study recognizes that inclusive education needs to situate the learner at the centre of any discussion about education (Biklen 2000a, 2000b; Murray, 2000). It needs to examine the opportunities for learning it can create for the person with a disability. Central to these beliefs is the expectation that to address and support a student's learning and teaching educators and others need to learn about that student's perceptions and experiences of the world (Absolum et al., 2009; Biklen 2000a, 2000b; Macartney, 2008). Learning can then be negotiated between the students and those supporting them. Teacher – student relationships that honour students as partners in their learning strengthen student identity and wellbeing (Mahuika, Berryman & Bishop, 2011).

Educators have a responsibility to listen to, to develop, and to value students' voices and identities (Absolum et al., 2009; Wearmouth, Berryman & Glynn, 2009). Student's sense of themselves as learners can be defined by how they experience themselves through participation in school as well as how others define them (Wearmouth, Berryman, & Glynn, 2009). Smith and Smith, (2007) lament that the ideal of student voice in school learning and the assessment of student progress is yet to be realised. Issues such as how students understand, interpret and act on feedback can support the mutual construction of achievement and learner identity. Being a participant within a community of learners can support the experience of competence, especially for disabled students who may not experience success as often as academically able peers. Learning community members can experience competence and are recognised as competent within their communities and classrooms (Wenger, 2004).

Central to inclusive practice is the concept of student self determination and participation in decision making around learning, teaching and assessment. When the student is at the centre of the assessment process and interventions are closely aligned to learning goals there is the potential to raise student achievement and to lessen disparities (OECD, 2013). Student participation in the assessment process is crucial if we are to support learners to share their reality between their goals and assessment of those goals (Bourke & Mentis, 2013). The same authors warn that the plethora of adults who usually support disabled students (teachers, specialists, support staff) can overwhelm and threaten the authentic voice and participation of

students in their learning processes.

Gilmore and Smith (2008) drew on a number of studies to consider how students experience assessment. They highlighted a number of recommendations including the impact of positive classroom assessment climates in supporting student participation, motivation, self esteem and confidence. They recognized the importance of promoting student voice in learning and assessment, helping to clarify which types of assessment tasks students felt supported them to demonstrate competence. Students understanding of learning aims and success criteria was valued, with an emphasis on teachers providing explicit criteria and teaching to support student capability within the assessment process. As Gilmore and Smith succinctly put it, “think of the students” (p.2). Gilmore and Smith’s work is supported by that of Alton-Lee (2003) who identifies student participation, and positive teacher responses to assessment data as pivotal in quality teaching and learning.

Assessment practices in New Zealand schools

New Zealand schools draw on three types of referencing when assessing students: norm referenced, criterion referenced and ipsative assessment. When teachers compare a student’s progress against other children’s development they are using norm referenced assessment. This type of testing traditionally categorises students as above average, average and below average. Within New Zealand schools norm referenced assessments are common, especially in literacy and numeracy e.g. Progress and Achievement tests. National standards is another example of policy and practice that values norm referenced assessment of the essential skills of reading, writing and mathematics. Students funded through ORS would usually be placed in the below average group for these tests.

When a student’s performance is compared to an external measure rather than to other pupils a teacher is using criterion referenced assessment. The learning area guidelines within the NZ curriculum document could be used to identify criteria at specific academic levels (Guerin, McIlroy & Moore, 2013). Teachers can assess against this criteria. Students funded through ORS would typically be assessed as working at level one of the curriculum.

The introduction of socio constructivist theories of learning in the 1990s has demanded new assessment practices (Christmas, 2009). Ipsative assessment is a response to this demand. A student's progress and achievements are recognized through utilising records of the student's previous learning (Guerin, McIlroy & Moore, 2013). This approach values the use of records of the student's previous learning as it builds an understanding of the individual's progress over time (Ministry of Education, 2009a). Narrative assessment is an example of ipsative assessment.

Over the last two decades New Zealand education assessment practices have focused on formative assessment, an approach that supports student participation within learning processes. This approach values assessment as informing learning, in contrast to historical uses of summative assessment for reporting and evaluation of student achievement. An important distinction here is that the terms summative and formative do not apply to an assessment itself. They apply to what we do with the assessment, what function the assessment data serves in student and teacher learning. When educators, learners and their peers use assessment information formatively they use evidence about student achievement to make decisions about future steps in learning. The decisions they make are likely to be better for the consideration of the evidence (William, 2011). Formative assessment is recognised as having a positive impact on learning outcomes for students with special education needs (Black & William, 1998; Bourke & Mentis, 2014; Mitchell, 2010).

Assessment and accountability

Progress and achievement for all students in New Zealand schools is now identified and recognised through two pivotal assessment and accountability constructions. They are National Standards in primary schools and the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) in secondary schools.

Secondary Schools: National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA)

NCEA is a national qualification that is part of the New Zealand Qualification Authority's Framework (2001). Secondary school students usually enter NCEA at Year 11. They begin at Level one, and may progress through levels two and three while in Years 12 and 13. NCEA is a credits based approach that uses achievement and /or unit standards to define progress and

achievement. Students are required to earn a certain amount of credits to be able to achieve a certificate at each of the three levels. Achievement standards are focussed on learning towards higher academic (tertiary) work while unit standards are focussed on learning for vocational subjects. Achievement within this framework influences access to employment and defines progression to higher level qualifications (Crooks, 2011).

Within the NCEA framework schools have the flexibility to design programmes that reflect learner strengths and needs. These programmes can link with a wider range of options provided by tertiary courses and trades focussed programmes. Ideally schools can match student preferences and skills, and workplace skill requisites so that students have flexible pathways of learning. Yet some students continue to be absent or poorly represented within NCEA data. Confusions about unit and achievement standards, subject choices and prerequisites, and UE requirements remain. Students and their families may make choices about subjects without realising the consequences of their choices on future learning pathways (Jensen, McKinley, & Madjar, 2010; Madjar, McKinley, Jensen, & Van der Merwe, 2009).

Not all students have equal access to opportunities for demonstrating competence within the NZQA framework. Disabled students remain conspicuously absent in secondary school learning pathways and NCEA data. Many disabled students do not get to access NCEA in any meaningful way. If assessment is about learning opportunities for all this lack of information challenges secondary school assessment practices and their links to the real world for students.

Formative assessment

Formative assessment is often defined as assessment *for* learning. It requires a reciprocal relationship between the teacher and the student. Formative assessment recognises learning as progress over time. It values assessment across people, settings and time. It aims to identify learning as it is developing, enhancing and shaping new learning (Bell & Cowie, 1996; Broadfoot, 2007; OECD, 2013). The Ministry of Education (2011a) suggests that if assessment is to be truly formative then it is crucial to follow through on what has been learned during the inquiry with adjustments that “transform practice and improve learning” (p.14). This may be recognised as transformative assessment.

Formative assessment also supports teachers to reflect on their own practice and ways they can work differently. Teachers can use their pedagogical knowledge, and their knowledge of their students' current understandings to link and respond to the thinking of each student (Bell & Cowie, 2001; Bishop, O'Sullivan & Berryman, 2010; Crooks, 2011). This is pivotal to the process of providing feedback that supports further learning. It can help schools to think about ways they provide feedback and ensure students are assessment literate. Teacher capacity and capability can determine the effectiveness of this type of assessment (OECD, 2013). Schools can focus on embedding formative assessment within the larger evaluation and assessment framework, providing support to teachers to make sense of this way of working (OECD, 2013).

This project recognizes teachers' use of formative assessment as both planned and interactive (Cowie & Bell, 1999). Planned formative assessment refers to teachers planned eliciting of information about their students understandings and skills using a range of specific tasks. This planned activity may occur within lessons and at the end of units of work. It is more likely to occur within whole class teaching situations (Cowie & Bell, 1999). Interactive formative assessment occurs during student-teacher interactions. The assessment arises from the learning activity, rather than being planned. Teachers within Cowie and Bell's (1999) study described interactive formative assessment as student driven rather than curriculum driven. Interactive formative assessment is dependent on teachers noticing, recognizing and responding to student learning. Teachers within Cowie and Bell's (1999) study recognized the importance of pedagogical knowledge, context knowledge and knowledge of the student within this assessment process. Within this project narrative assessment draws on both planned and interactive formative assessment.

Challenges to using formative assessment in New Zealand secondary schools

The use of formative assessment challenges New Zealand secondary schools that traditionally value a summative approach to assessment. Hill (2011) investigated enablers and barriers to implementing assessment for learning in secondary schools. Secondary school teachers' focus on student performance was recognised as a challenge. When assessment for learning practices were aligned with NCEA assessments teachers were observed to place more professional and cultural value on this approach. The micropolitics of secondary subject departments were recognised as

a factor in teacher resistance to change. The skills and knowledge of school management in leading assessment change was recognised as crucial in moving schools to more formative ways of assessing.

Authentic assessment

Bourke, Mentis and Todd (2011) suggest that authentic assessment is an inclusive assessment approach that makes learning visible for students with special education needs. Authentic assessment recognises personal histories of students and this information can inform more meaningful assessment tasks and practices (Brady & Kennedy, 2012). It can be used to describe holistic assessments that are part of classroom culture. These assessments support students to demonstrate competence by using knowledge and skills within real world situations (Goodwin & Macdonald, 1997). Authentic assessment is defined as “processes that aim to gain information on real events in the learner’s context as assessment” (Bourke, Mentis & Todd, 2011, p.407). The focus is on real life learning that recognises multiple responses through constructing and performing tasks in every day situations. This project recognizes narrative assessment as authentic assessment.

Authentic assessment is supported through partnerships where a range of people may contribute observations from multiple contexts of the child’s life. Authentic assessment draws on multiple resources to demonstrate competence. These may include portfolios, learning stories, self assessment, peer assessment, videos, graphic organisers, e portfolios and digital stories, and journals. In this study narrative assessment is recognised as a form of authentic assessment.

Narrative assessment

At times teachers may feel unsure about how to assess students whose learning is not visible within traditional assessment tools. Narrative assessment is one response to this challenge (McIlroy & Guerin, 2014; Morton & McMenamin, 2011; Morton, McMenamin et al., 2012). It is an approach that recognises all students as learners. Narrative assessment identifies student strengths, skills, and learning support needs. When narrative assessment is used formatively challenges students face are recognised as opportunities for future learning.

The use of narrative can be an effective professional development tool that provides opportunities for teachers to reflect on their current practice and its consequences for their students (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It can also support students to recognise each other as learners, to have a base for self assessment, and to provide a platform for planning for future learning (Ministry of Education, 2009). In these ways narrative assessment can help to make both teacher and student learning visible.

Narrative assessment can challenge context specific productions of knowledge as it draws on a wealth of experiences and knowledge from family and wider community members. Learning stories, or narratives may be observations from a variety of people and contexts that are familiar and important to the student. This may include the student themselves (Picken, 2012). In this way the learner's abilities are recognised across a range of contexts. Although the student is the focus of this work stories may document group and class learning. Even within the classroom that is familiar to the teacher, it can provide a view "through different eyes" (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2010) as the comments and actions of students are understood through peer interaction.

Narratives may be presented within a framework that links the observed learning (learning stories) to the learning areas, key competencies and effective pedagogy detailed within the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). This work is strengthened when the learning and key competency goals are also used within the student's Individual Education Plan (McIlroy & Guerin, 2014). Narrative assessment can be recognised as an 'identity- referenced' assessment approach (Carr, 2005, p. 46) that identifies student strengths, skills, and current learning support needs with a focus on new learning and teaching. A narrative approach to assessment can support meeting the challenges of co-authoring curriculum and assessment, developing student agency for learning, connecting with communities, developing reciprocal relationships, recognising learning journeys and learning over time, and appropriating a repertoire of practices where learning is disseminated over languages and modes of meaning making (Carr & Lee, 2012).

Learning Stories

The learning story format emerged through the work of Carr (1998). Learning stories are a response to a change in assessment focus from behaviour alone to the ways people make sense of

their experiences (Dunn, 2004). They are also a response to the question of how to assess the progress of children within New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki (Carr, 2001; Dunn, 2004; Williamson, Cullen & Lepper, 2006) and more recently, the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (Morton, McMenemy et al., 2012).

Learning stories are assessment narratives, storied accounts of children's progress over time from a range of people who know the child well. The stories draw from the child's experiences within a range of everyday contexts. The child is identified as an active learner through the observations and perspectives of a variety of contributors, including family. In this way family members recognize their child as a participant in their own learning. Assessment tasks are shared with a focus on encouraging the child to recognize themselves as capable learners. The stories are a credit based approach to assessment that recognizes and celebrates student strengths (Guerin, McIlroy & Moore, 2013). Learning stories challenge traditional assessment approaches that value emotional detachment as procuring objectivity in assessment processes. They focus on meaning-making. They celebrate the personal voice to authenticate objectivity (Dunn, 2004).

Learning stories can also provide teachers with information that, when linked with pedagogical knowledge, can support them as they revisit their participation, skills and knowledge in their interactions with their students. Learning stories utilise observation, interpretation and analysis with possible responses (Ministry of Education, 2009a).

Assessments can support participation and can be jointly constructed as an artifact of the community of practice (Cowie & Carr, 2004). Williamson et al., (2006) detail the positive impact the use of learning stories had on teams working together to support students with special education needs. The role of expert was shared among team members and team members reported a level of empowerment provided by the holistic approach. The researchers found that learning stories supported parent capability and 'de-experted' the role of assessment.

The recent work of Bourke and Mentis (2014) has considered the use of a range of assessment approaches within learning story strings. The stories as a form of narrative assessment can use a combination of assessment approaches. The authors suggest that stories can be strengthened by

identifying aspects of other assessment approaches that recognise learning ‘outcomes of the moment’(p.5) . An example would be using running record data. Bourke and Mentis (2014) suggest that “all approaches can play a pivotal role in an integrated approach to narrative assessment when used intentionally and with the purpose of narrating learning through a learning story” (p.5).

Learning Story Framework used in the study

Although learning stories have emerged in response to New Zealand’s early childhood curriculum they have recently been utilised in a modified form in primary schools (Davis & Molloy, 2004; Molloy, 2005), in secondary school (Picken, 2012; Picken & Milligan, 2013), and in work with students with special education needs (Lepper, Williamson & Cullen, 2003, Ministry of Education, 2009, 2010). In the early 2000s early childhood centres in New Zealand worked with a generic learning story format, but professional development and policy work have supported teachers to develop and adapt this format to accommodate their varying assessment practices and community needs. This project utilised the evolved learning story format used in the Ministry of Education’s narrative assessment exemplars (2009, 2010). A template of the format used in this project is presented in Appendix 1. Stories are linked to the New Zealand curriculum through both key competencies and learning areas, future learning, and effective pedagogy, and reflective questions on practice. Key learning goals are identified and an analysis of learning is visible (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2010).

The use of narrative assessment within secondary schools is a recent initiative (Picken, 2012; Picken & Milligan, 2013). Within this project narrative assessment focussed on, and prioritised, learning goals identified by students and those supporting them at their IEP meeting or other learning forums. Stories were written by students, family, school staff or community members known to the student. Stories were presented in written text with photos and as electronic resources the students could access using audio feedback, symbols, text and a Toughbook or laptop computer.

Learning Dispositions

Carr (2001) contends that teaching knowledge and technical skills is not enough, that children require ‘participation repertoires’ to support their evolving identity as learners for ongoing learning as adults in a changing world. These repertoires can be defined as learning dispositions. They are an inclination to learn. A disposition to learn depends on the specific learning context, the nature of the learning tasks and the expected benefits of completing the task. Assessment of such attributes requires children to have opportunities to be actively engaged in personally significant experiences and relationships (Hatherly & Richardson, 2007).

Carr (2001) describes learning dispositions as “being ready, willing and able to participate in various ways” (p.21). Engagement, response and reciprocity are essential between the learner and the environment. Experiences of success in an activity can improve the development of future dispositions to learn (Sadler, 2002). Dunn (2004) suggests that the cost of not paying attention to learning dispositions is to limit a child’s potential by teaching sets of skills without increasing positive learning experiences.

The learning story assessment framework is constructed around learning dispositions. Within the context of the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) these dispositions can be situated within the key competencies: Thinking, Participating and Contributing, Using Language, Symbols and Text, Managing Self and Relating to Others (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2010).

Carr’s (2006) dimensions of strengths for key competencies is used as a framework for making sense of the ways in which the key competencies develop over time. Carr’s four dimensions (agency, breadth, continuity and depth) can support teachers to describe ways in which “students’ interactions with people, places, ideas and things change over time”(p.21). Recently Carr & Lee (2012), have identified a further dimension, one that focuses on affect – the enthusiasm, excitement and passion for teaching and learning evident when people are proud of their work, and excited by possibilities.

Learning stories and their focus on dispositions offer the opportunity for educators to reconceptualise assessment as supporting the construction of learner identity as caring and

democratic citizens (Carr & Lee, 2012). These aspects of learning are captured, simultaneously providing opportunities for teachers and students to co-construct learning together.

Challenges to using Narrative Assessment as a resource

Narrative assessment can support transformational learning, but education is not a neutral process. Educators need to be mindful of historical assumptions, beliefs and ways of working within the contexts they inhabit in a bid to avoid using narrative assessment as a “means of surveillance and governance of the child” (Gunn & de Vocht van Alphen, 2010, p.12). Notions of participation and partnership inherent in narrative assessment need to be considered in relation to the outcomes and consequences of the assessment process for the participants. There is a danger that teachers will use a new framework to reframe historical uses of assessment.

Picken’s (2012) investigation into using learning stories in secondary schools social studies identified a number of challenges for schools. It was critical that shared understandings between all participants in the learning story process were established from the beginning of the project. Teacher planning needed to be reconsidered for formative assessment approaches and the concept-led approach of the social studies curriculum to work seamlessly. The use of classroom time required rethinking as the teacher role changed to formative ways of working. Picken and Milligan (2013) suggest learning stories can become part of a teacher’s toolkit. They warn that teacher inquiry into their priorities for learning, into interventions that can improve student outcomes and the impact of their actions on their students is essential if learning stories are to be used effectively. They also suggest that schools use an iterative approach re/designing their own learning story instrument in response to their school context.

Bourke and Mentis (2010) evaluated the Curriculum Exemplars for Students with Special Education Needs project, the development of narrative assessment exemplars from the project, and the introduction of professional development and learning for teachers in the use of learning stories. They also collected data on current assessment practices used in primary and secondary schools for students identified as having high and very high needs. They identified the following challenges for educators using narrative assessment:

- There is a need to link exemplars, learning stories and narrative assessment to the

curriculum. There is a challenge here for parents and teachers aides who are not familiar with the NZC.

- A barrier to the introduction of learning stories was time – for both professional development and to implement the stories within the classroom.
- Learning stories require a skilled narrator. Teacher’s aides do not have pedagogical knowledge or teaching skills to narrate in an analytical and assessment paradigm.
- There is a danger that narratives become ‘storytelling’ rather than assessment, teaching as inquiry, or identifying future student learning.
- The general level of learning stories developed in the field did not match the quality of the exemplars, with a lack of stories that met the criteria for effective learning stories.

(p.5)

The report recommended that narrative assessment has the potential to enhance and support student learning, but that classroom teachers need to actively participate in the process, rather than this being seen as a teacher’s aide or specialist teacher role.

Individual Education Plans

In New Zealand the Individual Education Plan (I E P) is recognised as a key document for assessment and planning learning for those students identified as having special education needs. Traditionally IEPs have been written once a term, or twice yearly as learning plans for specific students requiring adaptations to curriculum and resources to be able to access learning. Within this study the students’ IEPs are recognized as the assessment document most commonly referred to in discussions about Woody’s and Kirsty’s learning.

The historical use of IEPs can be problematic. Their focus on individual deficit requiring remediation through adaptation and specialist input sits within the medical model discourse of historical special education practice. These deficit based practices do not recognise or value learning for those students with special education needs (Guerin, 2008; Macartney, 2008).

The historical focus on individual needs is being challenged by a growing recognition of the importance of students and those supporting them working collaboratively, sharing understandings of, and participating in, assessment processes to support learning (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2011c). Student autonomy and participation in assessment processes can be developed through strong links between narrative assessment and the learning goals developed in IEPs and learning plan meetings (McIlroy & Guerin, 2014; Saggars, Macartney & Guerin, 2012).

Recent teacher driven initiatives include the development of collaborative learning plans that focus on identifying learning needs for and with disabled students and those supporting them (Ministry of Education, 2011c). Learning goals can be driven by what students love and aspire to do in a bid to connect curriculum to the real worlds of students (Ministry of Education, 2014a). Learning goals can also be identified for those supporting the student so that they can have access to information they need. Plans developed in student accessible formats are used as part of daily practice. Students can be involved in goal planning and review and information can be gathered from a range of contexts important to the student and their family. Close links between narrative assessment and the use of collaborative learning plans has supported stronger school-family relationships and student participation (McIlroy & Guerin, 2014). This research project has continued to support this work, developing its own reimagining of learning plans as part of an ongoing learning dialogue amongst participants within the context of narrative assessment.

Summary

This chapter has presented a literature review that informs this study. It has discussed social constructionism and critical pedagogy as interpretive epistemologies that inform this study. Teaching, learning, curriculum and pedagogy have been defined. I have discussed assessment theory and approaches evident within New Zealand's education system. Narrative assessment has been defined and critiqued. Chapter three discusses the methodology used within the project.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss how I have situated my data analysis within an interpretive methodology. I explain how I have used narrative and critical inquiry, and ethnography as theoretical tools in this study. In the methods section I describe my practices and timeline for gathering and analysing data. The ethical issues related to this research are identified and my responses to them are discussed.

I consider ways I have understood and responded to issues of representation and reflexivity. I then outline my process and timeline for writing up the thesis and acknowledge the limitations of the study.

A collaborative approach to inclusive research

This project values collaboration in both the teaching and research aspects of the study. It recognizes that collaborative processes can be used to prepare and assess curriculum and to identify and break down barriers for all students working in schools. It recognizes collaborative processes can support the presentation of multiple perspectives within research. Collaborative processes can also support efforts to bridge the gap between inclusive education research and theory and its sustainable use in classroom practice (Grima-Farrell, Bain, & MacDonagh, 2011; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). Rix (2005) warns that without reflection the significance of the learning that can occur through collaboration is diminished. The methodology of this project supported ongoing participant and researcher reflection that recognized new learning and interrupted previously unchallenged ways of working.

Interpretive Methodology

This project draws on an interpretive methodology as it is driven by a need to not only ask about *what* assessment is, but also *why* and *how* it is used to construct and support learner identity and wellbeing (Robinson-Lyles, 2013). Interpretive methodology recognises the complexity of

making meaning of everyday situations that may appear on the surface to be simple and irrelevant. Part of this meaning making is a deep examination of text as the researcher tries to understand varying perspectives of participants and how their views and thoughts shape their actions (Neuman, 2000) and realities (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Within an interpretive methodology the researcher is interested in social life as it is constructed and lived by individuals within a specific context (Burr, 1995; Ferguson, Ferguson & Taylor, 1992). This was recognised in my role as an interpretive researcher who spent one school year working with a small group of educators, family and students from one school setting. During this time a range of methods were used to gather considerable quantities of detailed data in a bid to develop an in-depth understanding of how the participants made sense of assessment as an inclusive practice. The relational nature of shared interactions was recognised within this process. Ethnographic, narrative and descriptive data were used to support the meaning-making focus of this research project. The use of this data to make sense of the ways participants construct meaning in their every day lives (Neuman, 2000) is a feature of qualitative approaches to research.

The qualitative focus on in depth examination and exploring the complexities connected with constructing meaning and understanding suited this study. It supported our aim to investigate research questions about the impact of narrative assessment on student identity and how the participants made sense of the use of narrative assessment. A qualitative approach to research best suited the need to reposition myself, from historical ways of working in a teaching role, to see the world from a place less dominant (Apple, 1996).

Qualitative research is naturalistic, occurring in authentic settings. It involves rich descriptive data that focuses on words or images rather than numbers. It is concerned with process, not solely outcomes. It is inductive and has a focus on people's perspectives and meanings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). I wished to tell the stories of students, family and school participants from their perspectives, and in so doing, tell their stories of change (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) within the natural settings in which they lived and worked. I wanted to explore the ways that participants

created and used new understandings of assessment by observing their diverse behaviours, actions and thoughts (Davidson & Tolich, 2003) within a social context (Kincheloe, 2012).

Ethnography

Ethnography is an approach to social research that works in contrast to earlier scientific methods of research where detachment from those being researched was encouraged. It challenges positivist approaches to research that ignore contemporary social, cultural, political, economic and epistemological changes and contexts (Collins, 2006; Kincheloe, 2012). Ethnography builds on the social constructionist perspective that people create and define the social world through their interactions (Crotty, 1998; Neuman, 2000). It is a means of investigating events as they evolve in natural settings (Kincheloe, 2012). Ethnography “attempts to gain knowledge about a particular culture, to identify patterns of social interaction, and to develop interpretations of societies and social institutions” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 22). Ethnography is layered, encompassing multiple perspectives and texts (Morton, 2006).

Ethnographic research practices and responsibilities

The ethnographer has a responsibility to work flexibly, blending in and developing positive relationships with those in the research setting, spending time with them to become familiar with the social worlds they inhabit as they interact in a variety of settings. I was mindful of not determining the outcome or focus of the project (Carspecken, 1996; Pole & Morrison, 2003). I recognised that ethnographic work could be messy and unpredictable as it responds to social action as it unfolds (Pole & Morrison, 2003). This meant that at times I had to accept the uncertainty of the research outcomes rather than predetermining how I envisioned they would be or how they could be achieved.

Ethnography and the school context

Much of what goes on in schools is taken for granted and therefore invisible (Ainscow, 2005). The challenge for the ethnographer is to recognise and respond to everyday practices and ways of thinking, to “interrupt” shared insider knowledge in order to develop inclusive education systems. Within this study the term “interrupting” is aligned to participants noticing the consequences of previously taken for granted practices as being exclusive, inequitable or unfair –

barriers to inclusive ways of working. A key focus of ethnography for the teacher researcher is what the educator takes for granted (Delamont, 2002) – to make the familiar unfamiliar. I recognised this challenge in the study. I would be working in the setting of my own school, in classrooms with educators and students I knew. I was familiar with the school routines and ways of working. Throughout the project I constantly reflected on aspects of daily routines, questioning how they supported or hindered inclusive practices.

A further challenge for the ethnographer is the consideration of fieldwork identity, locating a role for themselves, and identifying and managing entry and exit strategies from the school. This was particularly important in light of my previous employment and roles at the school, and possible employment following the research period. Although I had explained my role as a researcher in school to the staff, there were occasions where it was evident that staff continued to assume I was working in a paid teaching role. At these times I immediately clarified my position so that expectations were focussed on my current researcher role, rather than my historical teaching role within the school.

Critical ethnography

Ethnography can provide rich, thick data from a specific context such as a school. The challenge for the critical ethnographer is to examine this data in relation to the broader social hierarchies and power relations embedded within the day to day actions of those within the setting being studied (Willis, 1977). Critical ethnography extends the work of conventional ethnography due to its specific focus on the relations of power (Thomas, 1993). It is political, with a focus on social inequality, justice and transformation. This research project grew from an identified problem in practice. The problem was observed to be wider than one school. The project was undertaken with a focus on transformation, on better outcomes for disabled students within a much wider context than a single school.

Critical ethnography is a valued way of working in this project because it has offered opportunities for the participants to investigate assessment within micro- and macro-political contexts. Although adult participants focussed on addressing problems and issues within their local school there were times when it became apparent that education policy hindered this

process. An example is the plethora of information about inclusion and assessment provided by education agencies, but the lack of exemplars to support secondary school teachers to imagine a way forward. Exemplars provided to teachers did not include any examples of work by disabled students. Participants began to recognise the complexity of translating policy into practice when national educational resources reinforced the invisibility of disabled students in assessment processes.

Thomas (1993) suggests the overarching purpose of critical ethnography is “about freedom from social repression and a vision of a better society” (p. 71). It is research where the critical ethnographer uses knowledge to instigate change through describing, analysing, and opening to scrutiny “otherwise hidden agendas, power centers, and assumptions that inhibit, repress and constrain.” (pp. 2-3). Part of this process is the recognition that all actions are open to scrutiny, whether they be within the school or national context. When we understand the broader social context of our lives, opportunities for revising, reimagining, and reworking ways of being are possible. Narrative Inquiry supports the ethnographic approach of this study.

Narrative Inquiry

This study adopts a narrative inquiry approach to explore the use of narratives (or storied accounts) about assessment, to tell the stories of the participants and how they make sense of new learning in their thoughts and actions. Documents gathered within the research process are also recognised as narratives that support understandings of constructions within educational experiences. Draper et al., (2011) recognize the importance of narrative inquiry as a means to make visible the “private, local work (of teaching) public and open to the scrutiny of others” (p. 14) as teachers share stories from their everyday practice. The narratives of students, families and teachers are valued as opportunities to consider how they construct and act upon their realities (Freire, 1997; Goodley, 2001) rather than being determined by preconceived criteria. In doing so there are opportunities for other educators, students and families to consider the ways that study participants have worked together and to adapt them to their own practices if desired.

Within this study narrative inquiry is a tool for guiding the analysis of data. Research has developed out of the telling, questioning and interpretations of the narratives, rather than

determining how the narratives could support predetermined ideas (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). The ability of narratives to offer different ways of seeing, of interpreting everyday situations through storied accounts suited this project. It offered possibilities for traditional assessment practices to be challenged. In this way narrative inquiry supported the examination of day-to-day teaching and learning practice through accessing multiple perspectives of the education experiences of the participants (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011).

Narratives were recognised in this project as having the potential to offer complex explanations of student and teacher identities. They were used to examine issues of equitable and fair assessment. Research participants accepted that narratives could reveal contradictions in practice (Elba- Luwisch, 2007; Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). In line with the sociocultural paradigm this study is situated within context, reflexivity, difference, multiple perspectives and identities were valued within the narrative inquiry approach.

Elba- Luwisch (2007) suggests that narrative is contextual and relational, reminding researchers that while the individual's biography occurs within a wider historical story, there is a need to pay attention to the embeddedness of the teacher in a school and school system. The mandated curricula, ideologies, pedagogical trends, and reform processes within this setting need to be investigated. The task for the researcher is to apply critical analysis beyond the everyday narratives of the subjects to the larger processes in which they are embedded. It is in this work that concepts or themes that are embedded in social processes of political and cultural control can become evident (Thomas, 1993; Winslade & Monk, 2000). In this way narratives can be understood as a means for us to make sense of sociocultural life (Goodley, Lawthorn, Clough, & Moore, 2004).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) warn that narrative inquiry is more than just collecting and analysing stories, that it is relationship that is at the heart of such research. As a researcher I was mindful of my influence on other participants within the research process. I respected that people shared information freely, that they trusted I would use this information in ways that would not harm others.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) identify a number of challenges for the narrative researcher as fieldwork is undertaken. Considerations of ethnographic and phenomenological features could be problematic as researchers position their research texts theoretically. This can be seen as a natural process as researchers continually reframe the focus of their inquiry and the contexts they work within (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Researchers can be guided in narrative inquiry by questioning themselves throughout their projects. As a participant researcher I needed to consider my priorities and objectives and their influence on the narratives of the study participants. Throughout the project I needed to be able to answer questions about my role as narrator. Had I identified who was narrating a particular story? Had I provided accounts of narrators to the reader so they could make judgements of reliability in this work? Considerations of these questions supported researcher reflexivity and re-presentation.

The teacher as researcher

Teacher researchers are pivotal to the recognition of knowledge being constructed within schools, knowledge that has historically been ignored in favour of that produced by academics in university (Deppeler, 2014). Teacher research can challenge historical ways of working where academic researchers may reinforce traditional concepts of schooling, privileging “outsider” voices (Deppeler, 2014). Teachers can lead the way in rigorous education reform, engaging in learning through qualitative research, embedded in the struggle for rigorous high-quality education, and the political goals of social justice and inclusion (Kincheloe, 2012). Critical teacher research supports an interpretive investigation into the ways that power can undermine democratic practice. Teachers working in this way are challenged by the notion of learning as an act of knowledge transmission. Instead “it becomes a sophisticated form of knowledge work that is an inseparable aspect of the democratic process, as it raises questions about the complex ways that knowledge, curricula, and consciousness are produced” (Kincheloe, 2012, p.199).

A strength of the dual teacher researcher role is that of having worked within the school and the wider education setting – with the curricula, across a range of students and classrooms, and communities. Research can add to this experience by providing possible links to outside

influences not visible within the school context. Critical teachers who can question and reframe understandings of power and the forces that shape it within educational policy and education initiatives are pivotal to school change (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011). They question their own professional practice, and in the process, the practices and structures within the schools where they work. Teacher researchers may challenge traditional ways of working, preferring to investigate educational practice through collaborative ways of working such as a learning community (Deppeler, 2014; Kincheloe, 2012). This study favoured this collaborative way of working together to investigate assessment and its consequences for disabled students at both micro and macro levels.

The critical researcher

My understanding of the role of a critical researcher engaged in educational inquiry is best reflected in Kincheloe and McLaren's (1994) suggestion that it is someone who "attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts certain basic assumptions:

- That all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations which are socially and historically constituted;
- That the facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription;
- That the relationship between concept and object and signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption;
- That language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness);
- That certain groups in any society are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression which characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary or inevitable;
- That oppression has many faces and that focussing on only one at the expense of others (e.g.class oppression vs racism) often elides the interconnections among them;

- And finally that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race and gender oppression” (pp. 139-140).

As a critical researcher and a critical teacher my investigations are focussed on the complexity of educational and schooling processes. Researching my own practice has offered opportunities to reinvent ways I work and make sense of wider social, political, economic and cultural contexts and their influence on my teaching and learning.

Research Design and Methods

Data collection / gathering

The complexities and subtleties of classroom and school based research are best captured by using a range of research methods that can support comprehensive analysis of, and from, a range of perspectives (Collins, 2006; Jones, 2014). Within this project interviews, conversations, texts, emails, learning community meetings, school and specialist assessment data, learning stories, journaling, participant observations, and the collection of personal and professional documents supported the investigation of multiple viewpoints of the students, school staff, outside agencies and family/whānau. Working with students with diverse learning needs demanded a flexible research design methodology (Hodge, 2007; Jones, 2014) that was created collaboratively with those who knew the students best, their families. Information from the family participants was used to provide multiple opportunities and ways for the student participants to interact and respond across the research settings. An example is Kirsty’s family providing text messages from their home that demonstrated Kirsty’s thoughts about school.

Within the study I worked in a range of roles (teacher, researcher, observer, facilitator, carer) within school and community settings as I gathered data. In one day I may have been observing or co-teaching students, helping with student personal care during breaks, facilitating professional development sessions, discussing planning with teachers or participating in learning community meetings. The role of teacher researcher was complex and, at times, demanding. Sometimes my actions were in response to spontaneous requests from study participants e.g. helping to plan a lesson with Kirsty’s class. At other times I initiated tasks such as setting up the

research learning community. The array of data sources used within this study reflects the many roles and contexts that I worked within during the study.

Participant observation / Field notes

Field notes contained my descriptions, interpretations, hunches, ideas, responses and observations. They were written before and after interviews, meetings, informal and formal conversations, classroom observations, and any work I undertook in the school day. I also kept a research diary that became a catalogue of comments, ideas, observations and reminders, a document that informed many of the practical aspects of teaching and researching together.

Interviews

Interviewing the participants was one avenue for generating data. All of the adult participants were interviewed individually twice during the twelve month project with interviews lasting between 40 to 90 minutes. Interviews took place at the beginning, and at the end of the school year. The familiarity I had with a number of participants meant that I felt comfortable choosing a semi-structured interview format. I welcomed the opportunity for those being interviewed to question me, but was also mindful of self-monitoring (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2011) so that the interviewee had opportunities to talk.

Interviewing adult participants

Prior to the first interview I provided the participants with an interview question guide (Appendix 2) that I had trialled with peers who were familiar with both the education system and with supporting disabled students. I invited research participants to ask for any information they wanted from me and to add any comments they felt were relevant to the project and their participation within it. I wanted to gather particular information from the participants, as well as inviting them to provide information they saw as important within their roles supporting the students. The initial interviews focused on the skills, knowledge and experiences adult participants brought to the project and how they perceived their roles and responsibilities related to student assessment at the school.

The second interview focused on the research participants' knowledge as a result of working in the study, how this knowledge had been used by the individual or the research learning community, and what this meant for the participants in their daily practice/lives. Although a question guide (Appendix 3) was used, there were opportunities for participants to discuss how they made sense of what they had learned for themselves and for the students. The second interview was an opportunity for adult participants to discuss their perceptions of the students as learners and how they could support any future learning opportunities for the students.

Interviews were audio taped with the permission of the participants. Interviews were recorded into electronic files that were transcribed by a third person. After I received each transcribed interview I listened to the electronic file on my computer at the same time as reading the transcribed work. I made adjustments and added in comments if I felt this was needed to improve the transcription. This included identifying non verbal information such as laughter, anger and silences as part of the process of reflecting on the power relations within the interview process (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Adult participants were sent a written copy of their interview and invited to provide feedback, to add or delete comments and to confirm that the transcription was an accurate record of the interview. I retained the electronic copies of the interviews and participants could access them at any time during the project.

Participant initiated interviews

In addition to these planned interviews there were four occasions where adult participants approached me and asked if I would record an informal interview about something they felt was an "aha" moment. They talked about examples of new learning taking place, both for themselves and for the students. These interviews were significant because they were participant initiated and driven. These interview requests reflected both enthusiasm for the project and a growing awareness by individuals of changes in their practice. Four informal interviews were recorded on video using my laptop computer. These video clips were revisited throughout the project. At times the issues raised in these interviews became part of the wider dialogue of the research learning community through our scheduled meetings.

Challenges to interviewing student participants

I planned to interview both Woody and Kirsty throughout the project. I was mindful that they had never experienced an individual interview before (Collins, 2006), and that they may respond differently to me, in a researcher role. I perceived they may want to please me with their answers. At the beginning of the project I did not have any understanding of the sounds Woody made and what they could mean. I could not make sense of his communications at this time. I was mindful that Kirsty's historical ways of working with people in authority included saying, 'yes' to all of their questions. In discussions with family members I made the decision early in the project that rather than interviewing the students in taped, transcribed semi formal settings that I would take notes from our day to day working together and our conversations as we worked together throughout the year. These notes would be used to build a picture of student wishes, requests, achievements and other communications throughout the project. As I was in school every week there were many opportunities for the students and myself to work together during the project.

I was mindful that often I needed to check my interpretations of Woody's responses with others who knew him more intimately than me so that, as authentically as possible, I was true to the intent of his communication with me. I felt more comfortable discussing various situations and issues with Kirsty and Woody in the natural settings of day to day conversations, whether they were with me or their peers, or others in school or community settings. Although Woody was recognised as non verbal I worked from a discourse of competence, believing that he could understand what I was saying. I used words, symbols, photos and electronic resources to convey messages to, and to respond to messages from Woody. I provided opportunities for Woody to use sounds, pointing, eye gazing, gesture and body movements to communicate with me. Margaret his relative (and a teacher's aide at the school) and I regularly discussed Woody's responses to me as I worked with him. I relied on her intimate knowledge of his communication to guide my work and make sense of his verbal responses. Over time as I got to know Woody I became more confident that I could interpret his communication without having to consult others.

Like Collins (2006) I considered times when the students may have been tired, unwell, upset or distracted. This meant that planned research activities such as working together may have changed or not have taken place at all. Sometimes health issues impacted on Woody and Kirsty's ability to participate and the research needed to respect this.

Conversations

Formal and informal conversations with all participants were a source of data throughout the project. These occurred in teaching and non teaching spaces, in classrooms, when participants relaxed over morning tea, at a Sunday tea with one of the families, and at the community pool as we were in the water together, or in the spa with the students after a hard workout. I recognised conversations as opportunities to challenge my assumptions of how the adult participants viewed their roles and ways of working together to support Kirsty and Woody with their peers.

Conversations throughout the project with adult participants, families and school staff contributed to strengthening relationships and reciprocal trust and respect between and among the participants. Teacher Sophie Wilder (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003) observed that when parents and school staff establish trust through dialogue it is like "neighbours chatting over the fence" (p.71). I observed the many ways that participants, (including myself) developed trust through formal and informal conversations.

At times these conversations remained informal. At other times they formed the basis of a critical space where difficult and complex day to day issues could be discussed in relation to wider issues of inclusion and power. Sometimes the conversations may have continued in the more formal setting of the research learning community meeting. There were times when participants commented that their views held value because they had been raised within the wider learning community.

Research learning community meetings

Early in the project the adult participants met and discussed possible ways of working together. We agreed to meet for research learning community meetings each term. The agenda could be set collaboratively and discussions would focus on assessment, curriculum and any other matters that adult participants wished to raise (including observations of, and responses from, the student

participants) as we worked through the research process together. The first meeting was a full day meeting that included a professional development component on narrative assessment and establishing and negotiating boundaries that we wanted to work within. I led this meeting. Other participants had opportunities to lead meetings that followed. Minutes were kept for each meeting. Participants were emailed copies of the minutes and they were used by the group to decide on the focus of future meetings.

Individual Education Plan meetings and meetings with outside agencies

During the course of the school year I was invited to join the Individual Education Planning meetings and meetings with specialists from outside agencies for Woody and Kirsty. I did not attend meetings unless all those present were aware of my role as a researcher and were happy for me to participate. Emails would usually be sent to attendees after each meeting and I was included in these communication loops. I received copies of documentation such as the Individual Education plan, specialist reports and meeting minutes following these meetings. I also kept field notes that were written during and following my attendance at the meetings.

Journals

Adult participants were invited to keep a journal recording thoughts, stories, ideas, and experiences during the project. I wanted to provide the adult participants with the opportunity to add their perspectives about any aspect of the project, including issues I may not have considered. In addition to these journals adult participants contributed to ongoing learning journals about Kirsty and Woody. These journals had narratives, examples of work, observations and conversations that were part of daily work between the adult and student participants. These journals had entries added over the school day as various adult participants worked with Kirsty and Woody. The journals included notes, quotes and questions to and from the students. The journals were collected at the end of the school year. I used data within them as I searched for coding themes in the data analysis process. I returned to them as I wrote the findings chapters and have used some quotes within these chapters.

Four adult participants chose to keep journals. The four adult participants worked at the school. The journals were used in a variety of ways, often offering very personal and emotional spaces

for participants to say what they wanted without feeling like they had crossed some boundary between their professional and personal roles. The participants wrote about the day to day reality of supporting disabled students in a secondary school environment. They also recorded recollections of conversations, lessons, school routines and comments from students. These entries were often linked to the development of a possible narrative or as a reflection of a successful or challenging situation in school. The participants who did write journals were adamant that their narratives conveyed the “real world” and that the data should be included in the research process.

I also kept a journal during the project. I used this as a basis for research memos and reflection on the changing dynamics of the project. The journal was a record of my experiences in the research, and observations of the experiences of research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Observations in teaching spaces

As a teacher researcher I was at the school at least two days a week over the ten months of the school year. I regularly attended classes where Woody and Kirsty were being taught. Within classrooms I worked with teachers, support staff or the students themselves. I undertook co-teaching, support staff, participant observer and data collection roles. This information was used during the process of identifying themes and was revisited once I had identified key themes for the findings chapters. At times narratives from the classroom were used in the learning story strings and photos and text may have been used at IEP meetings.

I wanted to make sense of the contexts participants were working within. The busyness of the classroom reminded me frequently of the complexities educators face in meeting a range of student needs in a limited timeframe. It was important to me that teachers didn't feel that I was critiquing their work, and that my presence didn't add stress to their work. I recognised that my presence would change the dynamics of a classroom as I did not usually attend these classes. Sometimes I had the opportunity to grab five minutes with teachers at the end of the class to thank them for allowing me to work within their spaces. These after class informal conversations were an opportunity for teachers to comment about how they supported their students, the ways

they assessed throughout lessons and their worldviews on inclusion enacted in practical day to day tasks.

Sometimes I emailed a teacher to ask for clarification or to continue a discussion from these end of class comments. These emails became opportunities to create a critical space for dialogue between us. These emails were collected as data and used when coding themes and revisited during the writing of the findings chapters.

Emails

Emails proved to be an easy and quick way to capture the essence of conversations, class observations, ideas from practice and for participants to ask each other questions as we made sense of working together. All emails were printed in hard copy and filed with other project data. They were used to check for coding themes and for quotes within the findings chapter. They provided a clear record of conversations over time.

Teaching artefacts and professional documentation

A huge range of documents were identified and gathered during the research process. Woody's family had kept all original documents relating to health and education since Woody's birth. They were able to provide copies of these to me. Similarly, Kirsty's family had a large bank of assessment documents that they made available for the project. These documents included early childhood centre, primary and secondary school certificates, reports, texts, profile books, transition and Individual Education Plans, Clicker 5 documents, medical and special education diagnostic assessments and reports.

The families also chose to offer me correspondence between them and various agencies and schools. The school also offered many documents to support this project. School policy and planning data was accessed and a myriad of teaching plans, curriculum and department guidelines were collected. Throughout the project the students' learning and assessment data was collected. Assessment data included learning stories, videos, photos, student generated documents, planning notes, reports, Individual Education Plans, profile books from the school, and diagnostic reports and assessment data from outside agencies.

Methods

Appendix 4 summarises the timeframe for the study in table format. This includes the collection of data, analysis of data, chapter drafting, presenting, publishing and final write up of the thesis. The data was collected between November 2010 and December 2011. A range of different media were employed in data gathering.

Generating and collecting Woody and Kirsty's data

Woody required the use of an alternative communication system on his computer. This meant his computer was set up with symbols that he could point to. Instead of using text only resources both Woody and Kirsty had information presented in symbol and text formats with access to audio feedback so they could hear what the text said. During the study adult participants working within the school videoed both Kirsty and Woody. This was explained to the students and their families and consent was obtained for the videoing to take place. At times video was played back to Woody's family member to provide verification of our interpretations of his gestures. Kirsty often presented her schoolwork in Clicker 5 format. This meant she had photos and text together and this was in electronic format on her computer. Resources were developed using these assistive technologies that supported both Kirsty and Woody in their daily lives. Photos and computer generated resources were very much a part of the day to day lives of these students in school and at home.

Data analysis

Data were analysed with a focus on the research questions:

- How does narrative assessment influence conceptions of student identity for disabled students in secondary school?
- How do the students and their supporters make sense of narrative assessment?
- How does narrative assessment support disabled students to be recognized as participants within their own learning at secondary school?

Data were analysed inductively. The data analysis process was based in a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hatch, 2002). The grounded theory approach suggests that theory is developed from data rather than data being used to fit predetermined ideas. Hatch

(2002) suggests that, although analysis can be grounded in data, researcher interpretation that begins early in the analysis process can challenge the notion of theory as being totally grounded. This study used an ongoing analysis process that reframed both themes and theories throughout the research period.

Researchers bring their own knowledge and beliefs about topics to their studies. Interpretations of data can be influenced by these beliefs. I recognized the importance of researcher reflexivity within the data analysis process. At times emerging ideas and themes were shared with the research learning community participants as we discussed interpretations within our particular community context. An example is the need to clarify and develop shared understandings of the term “*student participation in learning*” and what this could mean for our differing roles and historical ways of working with Woody and Kirsty.

The data analysis process was ongoing and informed ideas for ways the project could develop. I began this process by rereading key texts on narrative assessment, inclusion and curriculum (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2003; Carr & Lee, 2012; Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2011a, 2011c; Skidmore, 2002; Slee, 2011). Alongside these texts I read the narratives of participants as I searched for meanings within the data. Identification of themes through the analysis of narratives, meeting notes, videos, journals and classroom observations was a continuous task within the study. This analysis involved revisiting text and transcripts; recording and coding emerging themes, ideas and possible links to theory; organising agendas and meetings based on issues raised in the data; the use of analytical and research memos; email and Skype dialogues with participants and university supervisors; organising and writing up the participants’ data as a series of narratives, reading and reflecting on current research and theory connected to possible themes; and writing and presenting academic papers based on practice and theory at education conferences.

The sheer volume of data was problematic. At times I felt overwhelmed by the amount of text. I used A2 sheets of paper to design a coding framework. I began by identifying codes within the initial interviews transcripts. These were in electronic format. I was able to use the computer highlighter tool to colour code from the emerging categories list I developed on the A2 sheets. I

pasted some excerpts from transcribed interviews on to the A2 sheets as I developed and redefined categories. I searched through emails and notes making my own codes on the top of each email page. I watched videos and listened and looked for connections to previous codes or any new idea or theme that could be emerging. The A2 sheets were added to as the study progressed. Throughout the study I continually searched for similarities between codes and comments and for new or emerging themes. Following the second interviews further coding and chunking of data into subsets of related topics was undertaken. At the end of the study the A2 sheets had 53 codes. I set about searching for similarity amongst codes and reduced them to chunks of meanings organised around specific points. I used A2 sheets to think about ways of mapping and linking data. Notes and diagrams reframed codes and I reduced data back to a possible twelve codes. These codes were used within the writing of the findings chapters. Appendix 5 provides a themes chart that summarises the codes identified within this process.

Within the data analysis process the research questions were used to ‘anchor’ the data into a focus on key aims of the research. This helped me to concentrate on selecting data that supported or challenged the key themes. The volume of data meant that I could easily lose sight of the specific focus of this work. I had to make sense of which themes were more important within the context of this work. The reoccurrence of themes across participants’ statements was a marker for further investigation. For example, across the range of participant roles the theme of knowing a student well was continually raised as an issue. I returned to this theme numerous times as I tried to make sense of the meanings participants attributed to it. Similarly if I had identified common themes in assessment literature, but they were not evident in study data I investigated how and why this could be. Sometimes this may have due to participant roles. At other times participants raised issues that had not featured strongly in the literature. An example is a family’s decision to disregard any assessment information where the assessor had not taken the time to get to know their child. This information strengthened the study’s considerations of what may be recognised as valid assessment by participants. At times I recognised the potential to use data in further publications, but not to use it as strongly in this thesis. The data analysis process made visible the wealth of information I had collected.

Participants were also involved in the analysis through voicing opinions about a theme or possible scenario for developing the research. I used data to inform group decision making around the most appropriate ways of working with the participants, within the classrooms and wider school, and with agencies. An example is the use of learning stories within the research group meetings to think about wider issues of student participation and access to learning opportunities.

Analysis of data supported decision making around many of the ways we enacted our practice together. It also provided spaces for us to discuss, identify and reflect on wider issues inherent in attempting to make sense of educational policy, our research questions, and the ways we constructed assessment. An example is clarifying participants' understandings and uses of the term "student participation in learning" in response to comments within the data that had been collected. These discussions made visible the possible links between data, our everyday actions and the broader theoretical understandings of inclusion. In many ways it informed the "learning on the edge of chaos" (Lovett, 2002, p. 101) nature of a research learning community. At times I made notes to myself, often sending a research memo to my supervisors as a marker for engaging in critical dialogue within the PhD process.

Ethics

In 2010 I completed a research proposal which was accepted and approved by the Academic Standards Committee of the University of Canterbury. The proposal included information about the rationale, focus, methodology, research design and ethical issues central to the project. An accompanying ethics application was accepted and approved by the same committee. Issues identified in this study included the selection of participants for the study, gaining consent from disabled students and supporting their participation in the project, and maintaining confidentiality and anonymity within a small rural setting.

My considerations of ethics in this project went beyond the original university application. I was aware of the interrelated nature of participant researcher work and envisaged developing strong connections with other participants throughout the study. Issues of researcher reflexivity and representation required constant attention. As a researcher and an educator I wish to design a study

that supported the democratic ideals of my work. Considerations of the consequences and contribution of the study towards inclusive practices for all students were paramount.

Enacting democratic ways of working in research

I drew on the work of two sets of researchers to identify questions that could guide my commitment to a democratic of working. I began the project by focusing on a framework for working that I recognized as empowering and reflective in earlier research projects (Guerin, 2008). The questions are raised by Armstrong and Moore (2004) who suggest monitoring democratic practice within qualitative research by asking:

- Why am I doing this project rather than something else?
- In whose interests is this project?
- What connection has it to developing inclusive cultures and practices?
- Am I consulting others involved as far as I reasonably can?
- Does it actually challenge existing practices which shore up exclusions and, if so, what are the implications? (p. 8)

These questions supported my belief that inclusive education research can make a positive difference, but that it requires constant reflection on ways of working, authentic collaboration and the disruption of exclusionary practices. During the project I read numerous texts. I was challenged by the questions of Harrison, MacGibbon, and Morton (2001) who suggest researchers query their project's democratic and emancipatory aims by asking themselves:

- What relationship(s) do we wish to have with our participants? What strategies are we using to establish, maintain, alter or end a relationship? Why?
- When we claim a collaborative relationship with research participants, who says it's a collaborative relationship? Why is the claim being made? Who benefits from this claim and how?
- Who benefits, and how from claims about 'voice'? Whose stories are we telling? Why have we chosen to tell particular stories, at a particular time, in a particular place? (p. 342)

Used in tandem these questions were challenging and, at times, frustrating. Their demand for

consideration of intent, participation, consequence, historical ways of working, representation and reflexivity in all activities made the research process more complex and long winded. In saying this, I also felt they supported me to make sense of ethical ways of working together with a focus on democratic ideals and respect for each other. As the relationships between the research participants became less formal I found these questions gained importance as anchors to focus on the purpose and consequences of the study we were participating within.

The questions were revisited many times during the project. They formed part of the ongoing data analysis and informed ways forward, for me as a researcher, but also for the research participants as well. An example is participants' considerations of how we perceived students could have a voice in their IEP meetings. This meant that we had to rethink how we also participated in the same meetings so that student aspirations could be clearly fore fronted at the meetings.

Manaakitanga within the research process: building relationships

The concept of manaakitanga, discussed in chapter one, is pivotal in this research work. I was interested in how manaakitanga could be enacted through assessment of student learning. I also wished to work as a researcher respecting people in the school and other contexts I may be involved in. This meant recognizing that the ethic of care that is central to my work as an educator was equally relevant to the way I undertook my researcher responsibilities. Like Meyer, Ashburner, and Holman (2006) I recognized caring as an ethical standard in this research project. This was evidenced through actions such as providing food to share at our research learning community meetings. I was aware that people had to rush from appointments to make time for our regular meetings and I wished them to be able to enjoy food together before they rushed off to their next meeting. I located books that could support participants to understand a concept better. At times I would complete care responsibilities for Woody. This could be feeding him morning tea as the aides rushed to ensure everyone had their food and drink within the limited time of school breaks. This also offered me time to enjoy just being with the students without the pressure of being a staff member responsible for a roster of duties.

During the project many people reciprocated by providing me with food and care when I had

numerous commitments in my day. Whether it was making a cup of tea for someone, changing venues because of last minute childcare arrangements falling through, providing advice for job applications, helping someone develop their curriculum vitae for an application in many small ways we developed relationships of trust that were reciprocal and respectful of each other. In these ways we developed trustworthiness and a sense of community among the research participants. Over the duration of the project validity and reliability were supported through the development of trust. The small day to day actions of helping each other described above supported the democratic ideals we aspired to.

This research was undertaken with a belief that all participants could strengthen the project by contributing their perspectives on their work together. This did not mean that everyone had to share the same workload or responsibilities. Participants were able to work collaboratively, yet have shared and distinct purposes within their work (Bigby, Frawley, & Ramcharan, 2014). I recognised that at times Woody and Kirsty may not be able to be involved or that their contributions could be misinterpreted (Bigby et al., 2014). Recognising these dilemmas, the research design identified drawing on the intimate knowledge that others had of both Kirsty and Woody as being a valid contribution to our work together throughout the project.

Representation

Britzman (1991) recognises the ethical dilemma of the researcher having “to reconstruct and critically re-present the voices of others, and, in so doing, care for their integrity, humanity, and struggles” (p. 12). I was mindful of this huge responsibility within a year long project where there were many stories to tell and a multitude of perspectives within those stories. I recognised the complex relationship between the stories of the research participants in the research context and my stories about them (Kincheloe, 2012). One dilemma for me was to consider possible power dimensions within the interpretive research process. This included recognising the power I had as the researcher writing and re-presenting the participants’ stories and experiences. Representing the actions, perspectives and experiences of the participants involved thinking about my responsibility to the other participants as author and narrator.

I also recognised a responsibility to others who read this work or listen to presentations of this work (Morton, 2006). This research will be presented in a variety of forums including this thesis, conference presentations and academic articles. There will be tellings and retellings of the study. Being solely responsible for the construction and shaping of texts within this study meant that my work could distort or misinterpret the voices of the participants and the stories that they wanted to tell. I also ran the risk of misinterpreting or reinterpreting the messages of the participants, and thus perhaps the opportunities to identify themes within wider power structures and contexts. One way of addressing this concern was to continually ask participants for feedback on my interpretations of discussions and comments.

I sought opportunities for other participants to contribute to research documentation. Within the research learning community meetings all participants had opportunities to be minute recorders and to lead discussions so that records were not only of my making. A joint presentation to school staff at the end of the year was written in the words of the other participants, rather than mine. I continually challenged myself to recognise the way I framed my notes and messages to others. At times participants were adamant that literal records of the language they used to convey ideas be recorded so that the frustrations, anger, joy or emotion they attached to a situation be conveyed accurately to others. If I was unsure about the message being conveyed I questioned study participants about their statements so that I could check my interpretations.

Reflexivity

Research is a power-driven act (Kincheloe, 2012). It is never neutral and researchers are not culturally (Zeni, 2009), or politically neutral (Kincheloe, 2012; Somekh, 2009). Researcher beliefs and assumptions about disability and special education are pivotal to the framing of disability within their work. These may be unconscious or taken for granted by the researcher. These can include the choices the researcher makes about whose views are challenged and whose are supported within their work (Bogdan & Kugelmass, 1984; Morton, 2006). There is a need for the researcher to clarify, to identify their own positionings, and the broader political and social values they adhere to in making choices within their work. This reflexivity is at the heart of action research, “deepening self understanding and raising sensitivity to the nuances of professional experience – a process of self-education.” (Somekh, 2009, p. 371).

I chose to support reflexivity in a number of ways. I have written a section in chapter one of this thesis document that identifies personal and professional experiences that have shaped my thinking as a teacher researcher. I have identified myself as Pakeha middle class female researcher with experiences working in primary and secondary schools in rural settings in New Zealand.

Reflexivity is making a judgement about reality that is dependent on our previous experiences, assumptions and thoughts (Winter, 2009). The challenge is to recognise the opinions and ideas that are part of our current selves, and our sense of “expertise” (Winter, 2009, p. 343) as we engage in inquiry processes where we are open to change. Throughout the research process I was able to revisit data to reflect on ways theories and assumptions had been disrupted or challenged by my work with the participants. At times participants requested a chance to discuss ways they recognised tensions or disruptions in their work. These discussions often supported my awareness of changes in my thinking as well. I was able to recognise changes in my practice within other schools as a direct result of the work undertaken in this project.

An example of this change was the development of student accessible Individual Education Plan formats. Prior to the study I had paid attention to the participation of students in their IEP processes, but the plans had been written in text. They were accessible to people who could read words at a level conversant with secondary school. The students were emergent readers of text and/or symbols. My assumptions about learner participation had not extended to making learning plans accessible to the very people they were written about. As I worked through the study I realised that I could no longer produce plans that were not accessible to the learners who were the focus of them. I became aware of how I had limited the students’ participation in their learning and goal setting through my (well intentioned) actions.

Ongoing dialogue with the participants and my supervisors supported me to continually identify areas of discomfort, and possible challenges to historical ways of working and thinking. My researcher journal, field notes, research memos, writing and rewriting, meeting minutes and presentations undertaken during this project also supported this process.

I recognised my responsibility as a researcher to inform readers of this work of my positioning and reflexivity so that they could make sense of how I constructed the research and its accompanying text (Fine, 1998; Lather, 2003). This document outlines the design, methods and ways I chose to construct the research so that readers can critique the trustworthiness and validity of my analysis and conclusions.

Conflicts within the researcher role

At times my participation in meetings and other related activities was problematic. I had gotten to know the research participants well. I knew many of the specialists through my past work as a teacher in a number of local schools. I was aware of competing and conflicting opinions and views held by those attending meetings and other activities. I continually reflected on my role and responsibilities as a participant researcher, not as a teacher. I recognised tensions between my historical ways of working with these people and the new researcher role I was undertaking. An example was being asked by a specialist to express a view about a teacher's decisions for practice with a student. In my historical role as a teacher I would have been involved in the decision making so could have participated in the conversation. As a researcher I did not believe it was ethical for me to make any comment about an individual teacher's practices.

There were times when, rather than participate in rigorous discussion, I chose to say nothing because I did not wish to further aggravate relationships between school, home and the professionals. I was aware that I would be leaving the school at the end of the project and I did not wish to cause harm to any students or those supporting them, the people who would continue working together after I left. There were times within the project when I was challenged by my observation of practices that I felt were exclusionary or disrespectful of others. In my previous teaching role these practices would have been challenged. However, I recognised the ethical responsibility of the researcher role. At these times I chose to concentrate on the wider focus of the research project, rather than confront specific practices such as denying a student access to a resource I may have thought they were entitled to.

Working within a researcher role required me to be aware of the need to respect all participants. People had given permission for me to attend meetings, to observe them and to communicate with them. I needed to honour their permission while also examining structures and systems that could support or limit inclusive practice. This was at times challenging, and complex. I recognized the responsibility of clarifying my understanding of observed acts (Carspecken, 2012). How could I ensure I respected all participants even when someone did something I did not like? I reminded myself to focus on wider issues being presented within these observations, rather than the individuals themselves.

A further consideration in my researcher role was the composition of the research learning community in relation to the wider schools staff, specialists and others supporting students in their learning. In chapter four I list the research participants. In chapters 5 and 6 I use the term 'we' to describe various research participants. This is not to say that working as a group was always a harmonious process where mutual agreement was realized immediately. We had to negotiate around each others' needs to support a collaborative relationship. At times meetings were shifted due to childcare or health issues. We had to think about who was able to meet, and where and when would suit most needs. In saying this, at the time of the project the school was experiencing a range of issues in its delivery of teaching and learning. This context supported research participants to work together as many were motivated by a need for change from historical ways of working.

Presentations/ versions of this thesis

Although the presentation of this work is in thesis form, fulfilling academic guidelines, I did not consider written text as the only way to gather data and present findings. Accessibility is recognised as an issue in data collection and analysis. This thesis work will be completed alongside a Woody- and Kirsty- accessible version that uses visual symbols, audio feedback, and presents findings in plain English.

Gaining consent: Principal and Board of Trustees

The study took place in a school where I had previously worked as a teacher. I had identified two students funded through the ORS scheme who were enrolled in this school and who had not had

any experience of working within a narrative assessment model. I approached the principal for permission to work in the school, with these students and the various staff who supported them in the community and school settings in which they participated. After discussing this with the principal I wrote a formal proposal to the Board of Trustees. I offered to make a presentation to the Board of Trustees, but the principal did not think this was needed and the formal proposal was forwarded to the Board of Trustees meeting. This work was discussed at the Board of Trustees Meeting and written consent was obtained to work within the whole school.

Gaining consent: Staff, student and family member consent

As a teacher who had worked at the secondary school and a number of primary schools in this rural area I already knew a number of families with disabled children. I already knew the families that had disabled children at the secondary school, although I had not worked with all of them. I approached the parents of two disabled students verbally to ascertain if they were interested in their son or daughter participating in this project and if they would support it by becoming participants themselves. The parents agreed to this verbally. Similarly, school staff working closely with the two students were identified and approached verbally to gauge interest in participating in the project. I did not speak with the two students, Woody and Kirsty, at this stage.

At the beginning of the project planning process a core group of staff was identified as continuing to work with the students for the following school year. This included Head of Learning Support, specialist teachers based at the school and teachers' aides. These identified staff were approached verbally to ascertain their interest in joining the project. No classroom teachers could be confirmed prior to the new school year. Follow up written information sheets about the project and consent forms were sent to the school Board of Trustees, principal, teachers, teacher aides, and parents (Appendices 6-13). These were signed and returned to me at the beginning of the 2011 school year.

Informing the wider school staff about the project

At the beginning of the 2011 school year a school wide staff meeting was held and school staff were presented with some information about the project. Follow up emails were sent to all

teachers working with Woody and Kirsty. These classroom teachers were invited to join the project. None of these teachers took up this offer, but all agreed to me being within their classrooms throughout the year. The most common reason given for not participating was the busyness of balancing a huge number of students across classes. Throughout the school year staff were emailed copies of narrative assessments completed with the students and a number of informal conversations took place between myself and classroom teachers as we discussed various curriculum and assessment issues, ideas, experiences and possible solutions.

Towards the end of the school year some of the research participants chose to present a powerpoint workshop on narrative assessment to the wider staff. This powerpoint is provided in Appendix 14. Following the completion of this thesis a summary of the research findings will be presented to the school staff.

The roles of disabled students as research participants

The inclusion of people with disabilities in research can be undertaken in diverse ways that frame a variety of participant roles and outcomes (Bigby et al., 2014; Conder, Milner, & Mirfin-Veitch, 2011). Bigby et al., (2014) suggest three broad approaches to the inclusion of people with intellectual disability in research: advisory, leading and controlling, and collaborative group. They describe collaborative group research as suiting the social constructionist and participatory paradigms this study is situated within.

Within collaborative group research the participants may work in a group consisting of disabled and non disabled members. The leadership may be academic, and control may be dispersed among the team members. There may be shared and distinctive purposes between academics and people with intellectual disability. The aim of the research may be new knowledge for social change with a range of adapted methods such as collective interviews, focus groups and iterative analysis being used. With these considerations in mind the use of a collaborative research group of educators, family and disabled students appealed. I was not sure what this participation could look like or how it could be supported, but I believed that it was the adult participants' responsibility to make it possible.

Student participation

There is a growing recognition of the need to listen to young people with disabilities (Fielding, 2002; Fitzgerald, Stride, & Jobling, 2012) to be able to understand their perspectives and their lived experiences. Historically children and young people have not been viewed as capable of participating in research with others resulting in work where, although they may have been part of a research project their voices and perspectives are negated in deference to adult perspectives (Collins, 2006). Disabled students' perspectives and experiences can support teacher understanding of the consequences of practices they enact in classrooms and schools (Valle & Connor, 2011). As a critical teacher/ researcher I wanted to engage in dialogues with the students about their school community and the problems of learning and living within them.

I wished to understand both Woody and Kirsty better, to try and make sense of the world from their perspectives. I wanted to know how they perceived themselves and how they saw themselves in relation to others in their community (including myself). In this way I hoped to make sense of how they experienced schooling and their lived worlds (Freire, 1996). Knowing what and how they made meaning of their education experiences could support me to think about how to engage them within the research. It could support adult participants to think about how Woody and Kirsty could participate in new learning about things they did not know and things they wanted to know. I wished to understand the students' points of view, their knowledge and interests (McNaughton, 1991) so that I could be better informed as a teacher researcher working to develop more inclusive assessment practices with all students.

Working with the students

This project involved working with students who have intellectual disabilities and communicative differences. I was mindful that issues such as gaining informed consent must be considered and addressed (Guerin, 2008; Gwynn, 2004; Sanderson, 2010). I was aware that the participation of two students who were resourced at the highest levels of special education funding could be challenging and would require some "thinking outside the square." I wanted to honour the uniqueness of each student, accepting the challenge of recognising ways to represent them with respect and authenticity (O'Hanlon, 2013). As I was familiar with the students I expected that our experiences of knowing each other would enhance the project. I was also

mindful that people with special education needs may comply with requests from those they perceive to be in authority (Bray, 1998).

A priority was identifying ways of communicating that respected Woody and Kirsty's individual preferences and skills. There were considerable differences in the ways the students communicated and interacted so I drew on family knowledge to identify communicative means (symbols, photos, key words, graphic organisers) that they believed were the most appropriate to use with their son or daughter. Goode (1984,1992) has demonstrated the impact of intimacy on the recognition of competence and participation by persons with severe disabilities and I wished to conduct this research with a presumption of competence. I also respected that, even with these considerations, there may be doubt that a student was able to make a fully informed decision or to clearly communicate a decision to participate.

Gaining student consent

I responded to this dilemma by providing multiple avenues for consent to be obtained. I asked the families for permission as the student's representative. I adapted traditional consent forms to use with Woody and Kirsty. I also made a commitment early in the research process to take one school term (10 weeks) working, observing and interacting with Woody and Kirsty in their school environments so that I could get to know them, to make sense of the ways they interacted with others, so that I could develop a relationship with them. During this time I asked many questions of them, their families, their teachers, teachers' aides and peers as I developed a more intimate knowledge of them as people. I gained consent from their parents at the beginning of the project, but in the tenth week of the project I felt that I knew Woody and Kirsty well enough to seek their consent to participate in the project, using adapted forms that I had designed.

Woody and Kirsty had computers to access literacy software. I made both Woody and Kirsty electronic books using Clicker 5, software they were both familiar with, that they used in their daily lives. Attending to Bray's (1998) caution that people with special education needs often have a reduced vocabulary and difficulty understanding abstract concepts I made several books using simplified text. I checked these texts with those who knew the students most intimately to ensure that, as much as possible, the text would be understood by Woody and Kirsty. Each book

had simplified text accompanied by photos relevant to the people being named or the question being asked on a specific page. This format is consistent with the Clicker 5 books the students were already familiar with in their day to day school practices. Clicker 5 is software that enables the reader to replay a book as many times as they like. By clicking on a button the reader can have the text read aloud by the computer. I was mindful of the need to use language that was not ambiguous and to highlight key points in clear terms. I ensured copies of the books were available for both home and school settings so that family could also discuss the research with Woody and Kirsty. A copy of the adapted book is presented in Appendix 15.

Woody, Margaret (teachers' aide/ relative) and I went through his book together. For the purposes of reliability Margaret videoed this session. This allowed us the chance to review the video and check our interpretations of Woody's physical gestures in response to my question about participation. If there was any doubt about our interpretations of Woody's response we agreed that we could refer the video to his mother for further clarification or reread the story and video. Using information gained from the term I had spent working with Woody and others I positioned myself so that he could hear me. I sat with Woody and played the book a number of times on the computer. When Woody was asked, "do you want to work with Annie?" he moved his body towards me and put his hand on my arm. This was interpreted by both Margaret and myself as a yes. In our work together over the term we recognised that when Woody did not wish to do something or he disagreed with us he would turn his head away from our bodies. We observed Woody to smile, to lean towards my body and to touch my arm – all three gestures being symbolic of agreement as observed by those who knew him best.

Using the photos of his two favourite characters (as suggested by family) Woody was able to indicate a choice of pseudonym first using eye gaze, and then touching the Woody symbol with his hand. This activity was undertaken three times and videoed so that we could check our interpretations of Woody's choice.

Kirsty's mother recognised that when Kirsty worked with an assessor she would answer "yes" to all questions as most times Kirsty would perceive that this is the answer others in authority wished to hear. In my work with Kirsty I had observed these same behaviours. I also knew that

when Kirsty was stressed or did not want to do something she may still say “yes”, but would also make a statement alleging I had broken a part of her body, usually her hand or finger.

I sat with Kirsty and Isabel, her specialist teacher and we read the Clicker 5 book a number of times using Kirsty’s computer. The time I had undertaken observing and working with Kirsty informed the ways that I presented this material to her. It was important for Kirsty to have the book read a number of times as any new material, particularly that which has her photo in it, is exciting. I understood that Kirsty would need time to look at the photos and familiarise herself with them before she attended to the text. We spent at least an hour working together. At the end of the hour Kirsty was asked if she would like to join the project. Kirsty was able to say, “I work Annie. I work Mum, I work Ms X. Kirsty yes.” Kirsty was able to choose a pseudonym that had personal significance for her by verbally stating the name she wished to be known by.

Privacy and anonymity within a small rural community

All participants were assured of their privacy being protected throughout, and following, the conclusion of this project. All identifying information given would remain confidential to myself, the supervisors and the person transcribing. Pseudonyms were used in all research material to ensure the anonymity of the school and the participants.

Although all these safeguards were in place I was very aware that I lived in a small rural town and that many people within that community knew of me and my work as a teacher at the school where the research was being undertaken. Within routine tasks such as supermarket shopping people would stop me and ask how my work was going. I was mindful of the need to speak convivially, but also not to discuss the project. This was at times made more difficult when someone would pass a comment about one of the students and how a proud family member had commented on their progress. A simple question such as, “what exactly are you doing at the school?” could compromise my position. At times I had to think very carefully about how I could respond without deceiving or misrepresenting myself, but also remain true to the confidentiality of the work.

It is my experience that when you live in a small rural community it is also very easy to identify those students who are deemed disabled. The students' specific disabilities make them easily identifiable. The use of pseudonyms and promises of confidentiality could be limited in their effectiveness. I was aware that once the findings were published the school and the students could be identified (Cardno, 2003). The families and school staff seemed much less concerned about this dilemma than I. They saw the possible benefits of the project outweighing any identification issues. I understood their views, but also recognised my responsibility as a researcher to consider all aspects of ethics in this work.

The narrative assessment resources

A central focus of the project was the introduction and development of narrative assessment within the secondary school. Learning stories and a range of visual resources supporting them were developed throughout the project. I was perplexed at what I considered to be rich data - practical exemplars of narrative assessment that other secondary school teachers and families may want to use as a catalyst for addressing some of the practical issues of assessment. Yet these resources would clearly identify the students, at times staff, and the school. As a teacher I believed these resources could be a wonderful professional development resource – a starting point for conversations about accessing curriculum and identifying all students as learners. As a researcher I recognised that the project set boundaries around their use outside of the school. Reluctantly, I decided to use only one story string within this thesis document. I replaced photos within it that identified the student with photos or pictures that could not identify staff, students, or the school.

Storage of data

Data transcriptions, assessment data, workbooks, field notes and all copies of documents used in the project were stored in a locked cabinet in an office at my residence. Data was also stored on my computer. Data was copied on to a flash drive and kept locked at a separate address in case of damage to the original data.

Member checking

Participants were sent transcripts of interviews, observations, meeting minutes and journal transcriptions to read. Any comments made and errors identified were amended in final copies of such notes. Participants were given copies of these final transcripts. They were invited to participate in member checks by giving feedback throughout the research process.

Right to withdraw from the study

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research process at any time. When two of the original twelve participants left the school during the project information relating to their input was destroyed.

Participants were informed that data would be retained for five years. It would be used for this thesis, a follow up participant meeting, and any subsequent articles, presentations or papers related to the project. Any future teaching materials published as a result of this intervention would also utilise this data. Copies of any subsequent articles, papers or presentations would be passed on to participants.

Limitations of the research

This research was undertaken in one secondary school in a rural New Zealand community. The study was limited to a group of ten participants: two disabled students, their mothers, three teachers (including myself as a researcher), and three teachers' aides. The study was limited to participants working and living with the disabled students. A broader range of settings and diverse populations could result in the identification of other issues, for example, the inclusion of a wider range of teachers from within the secondary school. The specialists who supported Woody and Kirsty could be included in a broader consideration of perspectives about their assessments. I am also mindful that Woody's and Kirsty's impairments were unique to their ways of working and participating. The inclusion of a broader range of students could inform future studies in different ways.

The participants in this study recognised a need for change and they embraced participation in this project. Their positive approach to the work we did together was enacted in many ways that

less accommodating teams may not demonstrate. Teams that may not have an agreed focus or way of working may add a different perspective to a future study.

Participant researcher work demands continual critical reflection on this dual role. Throughout this work I have attempted to use my knowledge from teaching and research to inform ways of working. I have been mindful that at times this has caused tension as I may have wanted to respond in an historical teaching role to a research issue. Tensions also exist in the writing up of the thesis as at times I have described the participants as “they” and at other times as “we”. This is reflective of the many ways that researcher and participant roles merged in the day to day work of the study.

Summary

Within this chapter I have discussed the interpretive methodology the project is situated within. I have discussed research methods and presented an outline of data collection and analysis. Ethical issues have been identified and discussed. Specific attention has been paid to how the participation of disabled students can be realized within democratic ways of working. A number of limitations within the research process have been identified. The next chapter introduces the project participants and describes the research learning community.

Chapter 4

The Participants and the Research Learning Community

Introduction

This chapter introduces the key participants within the study. It details their motivation for joining the project and their understandings of inclusion and assessment at the beginning of the project. Over the school year the study was undertaken the adult participants worked within a learning community. This chapter describes the research learning community and some of the challenges inherent in collaborating across a variety of people and contexts.

Introducing the research participants

The project began with twelve identified key participants (two students, two parents, seven school staff and myself). I worked as a researcher who was also a registered teacher. This work was unpaid. During the project two school staff participants left the school and specific data related to their work in the study was destroyed. Throughout the year the views of classroom teachers, specialists, wider family members and other community members contributed information that enriched this project. Following is a brief introduction to the ten key participants who took part in this research throughout the school year. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the key participants within the study and their roles in relation to each other and is presented at the end of these introductions.

Annie- teacher researcher

At the time of the study I had been teaching in a variety of positions in primary schools for 28 years. During the two years prior to the study I had worked at a secondary school as an Ongoing Resource Scheme teacher and a Special Education Needs Co-ordinator. In these roles I had worked with students who were either funded through the ORS scheme or who were on the school's special needs register. This meant the students had been identified as having some difficulties accessing learning.

My motivation to undertake this study was the lack of school based information about disabled students as learners in their local secondary school. I could not see how schools and educators, myself included, were recognising a diversity of evidence of learning. I observed teachers and families who were frustrated by narrow assessment practices that rewarded literate students, and failed to recognise diverse examples of learning. I wanted to know how narrative assessment could influence conceptions of student identity for disabled students in secondary school. How could the students and their supporters make sense of narrative assessment? I wanted to examine how narrative assessment could support disabled students to be recognized as participants within their own learning at secondary school.

Woody - student

At the time of the study Woody was a Year 10 student, aged 14 years. Woody is interested in stock car racing and being on his grandparent's farm. Woody is one of four children. He enjoys his wider family that socialises together regularly. Woody's favourite restaurant is McDonalds. He loves movies and the characters from a range of Pixar movies. He likes a beer at his grandad's every Sunday afternoon when his wider family meet together for a meal. Woody enjoys the local aquatic centre and his time in the swimming pool is the only time where he is able to move in space for a few minutes without the support of other people. His favourite place in the aquatic centre is the spa.

Woody has been labelled as severely disabled. He receives funding within the category of ORS Very High Needs. At the time the study was undertaken this equated to approximately 17 hours of teachers' aide support in school and one day a week specialist teacher support. Woody requires support for all physical tasks. He is in a wheelchair and is labelled as nonverbal. He is labelled as having an intellectual disability.

Woody was not observed to be a participant in any kind of assessment processes focussed on his learning at school at the beginning of this project. This is not to say that he did not make choices about his participation in assessments. Woody's mother recognised that when Woody didn't like someone or if someone didn't take the time to get to know him he would simply ignore them. This was usually communicated by Woody turning his body away from the person. At times

Woody would place his fingers in his ears. This could be a sign that he did not want to listen to someone, but it was also recognised as a gesture that had other communicative functions. At times I recognised the vocalisations Woody made could indicate his willingness to work with someone or not.

Woody's mother also talked about how Woody's ill health impacted on his ability to participate in assessments at school. Woody had undergone a number of surgical operations and these too had a significant impact on his ability to cope with schoolwork.

The files of assessment documents provided by Woody's family for this project contained a large number of diagnostic reports from health, communication and special education professionals. There were also a range of planning documents from Woody's primary school. These documents detailed curriculum adaptations and differentiations, and Individual Education Plans that had been developed closely with family members.

My relationship to and with Woody

I had worked with Woody at various times during his attendance at another school. In saying this I was never assigned or employed as a specialist teacher providing specific support to him. My knowledge of Woody was derived from experiences of getting to know him as a pupil in a primary school where I worked as a specialist teacher for five years. I had also worked with his relative, Margaret, who was a teacher's aide at his previous school.

Kate – parent

Kate is Woody's mother. At the beginning of the project Kate was studying for a qualification through a New Zealand tertiary organisation. Kate saw herself completing her degree in future years as well as balancing this with parenting her four children.

Kate's motivation to join this project was to enhance inclusive practices. She saw research as a way forward stating, "*ongoing research is great...I am always pleased when I hear of new things coming up, and new ideas.*" Kate was interested in narrative assessment as an approach that could support Woody's experiences at secondary school. She also wished to find out more about

the range of communication devices and strategies others were using with students who have similar needs to her child.

Kate understood her participation in the project as being supportive of a more inclusive way of working in schools. She saw inclusion as a balancing act, *“I think inclusion can work. I still think though, there needs to be the ability for the likes of Woody to be actually withdrawn as well, at times, when he needs to be, cos at times I mean he obviously gets wound up and stressed out. So that would be very disruptive to a standard classroom... I mean I'd love him to be more included, but because of his extent of his disability, it's very hard for him to be involved in other extracurricular, well, out of school activities, because he can't access them himself. He has to be taken by someone all the time, cos he's not independent. I mean he's 14, and he's totally dependent on somebody else to care for him full-time.”*

Kate said she had found IEPs collaborative and informative ways of planning assessment and learning. Although Kate possessed a huge number of files of reports and assessment documents related to Woody she recognised the IEP as the most significant assessment information about Woody's learning and progress for her family. Kate recognised teacher knowledge of Woody as a significant factor in assessment that she valued as his mother.

Margaret – teacher's aide

Margaret is both a teacher's aide and a relative of Woody. Margaret had spent the previous ten years working as an aide with Woody and with other students. She had spent nine years in a primary school and the previous year had joined the staff at the secondary school. Although Margaret is not a trained teacher she had previously worked for some time as an ORS teacher in the primary school. She undertook this role through having a limited authority to teach. This means the school had advertised the ORS teacher position, but had not secured a practising teacher to fulfil the vacancy. The school offered the position to Margaret on a fixed term contract until a registered teacher could be employed. Margaret had completed a two year advanced certificate in 'severe communication disorders and autism' through a New Zealand university. She had undertaken numerous workshops and courses in a bid to understand meeting Woody's communication needs.

Margaret's motivation to join the project was to find out more about ways to support Woody's communication. She was interested to see how narrative assessment could recognise Woody as a learner in his school. Prior to the study Margaret had collected narratives, photos and videos from many contexts where she observed Woody learning, but she had not known of any way that this information could be linked to the New Zealand Curriculum to show that Woody as a learner. Margaret thought she needed help with understanding the analysis and data used in narrative assessment. She wanted to know how she could link the data (photos, videos, stories) to curriculum through this assessment approach.

Margaret thought that her participation in the project could support more inclusive ways of working at the school, especially in light of the changes she had observed moving from primary school regular classroom support to secondary school segregated learning contexts. She saw inclusion as a variable practice stating, *"I've seen both sides of inclusion. We've had some staff that have physically excluded us from their work and that hurts big time. And to see a model of where inclusion is working really well, and it's starting to tick here in the school, gives you hope for the future, and for that model to go out into the community and it's not just an education thing, inclusion is it?"* She recognised this as a community responsibility, suggesting, *"The key component for me is that everyone has to buy in to it."*

Although many of the participants recognised Margaret as a skilled educator she described herself as not knowing anything about assessment at the beginning of the project. Margaret saw her participation in the project as one way to develop better skills for supporting all students in the classrooms she worked within. She thought that the IEP process was important because, *"the needs of the student and the family and the school are all discussed at the one time."*

Kirsty – student

At the time the study was undertaken Kirsty was a Year 10 student, aged 15 years. Kirsty loves her horses, Facebook, texting and the television programme "Home and Away." Kirsty is one of three children in a family where her older siblings have included her in their social circles with partners and friends. Kirsty lives in a rural area, some distance from the school. In the year prior to joining the project Kirsty had started to recognise some of the sight words she had been

learning in a variety of environments. School staff and family recognised this as a breakthrough as Kirsty did not always appear to value literacy. When Kirsty recognised a new word she would proudly say, “I know that” to students, staff and family members.

Kirsty received funding from two separate agencies, one through the ORS scheme as a student with High Needs and one through a specialist school for students with a specific type of impairment. She is labelled as a student who has an intellectual and a sensory disability. At the commencement of the project Kirsty received five hours specialist teacher support and approximately 13 hours teachers’ aide support each week.

At the beginning of the project Kirsty didn’t appear to be a participant in assessment processes focussed on her learning at school. A file of assessment data for Kirsty contained many diagnostic reports from communication, sensory and special education professionals. No documents contained examples of Kirsty’s work.

My relationship with and to Kirsty

I had worked as Kirsty’s ORS teacher in her first year at high school as she had transitioned from her small rural primary school. This was in the year prior to undertaking the research. I had a professional knowledge of her skills and abilities, and I had established what I perceived to be a positive relationship with Kirsty and her family.

Marie – parent

Marie is Kirsty’s mother. Marie had not been in paid work since Kirsty’s birth 15 years earlier. She felt she needed to care for Kirsty as a priority over income. She saw her care of Kirsty as a lifelong commitment as her mother. Kirsty’s family lived at least 30 minutes drive from the school in an isolated location. Marie had health needs that affected her ability to participate in all project meetings. At times we shifted meetings, used email or phone, and asked Marie for ways that we could support her participation.

Marie was motivated to join this project in the hope that teachers and others working with disabled students would gain more understanding about different ways of working with all

students. She wanted teachers to understand that *“you can’t treat them (students) all the same sometimes.”*

Marie recognised that inclusion was not a simple concept. She talked about inclusion as problematic, including among her family members, stating, *“inclusion to me is that Kirsty is not... I mean she knows she’s different, but not to be sorta made to feel any more different than she has to be. I think as far as Kirsty’s concerned, that her mainstreaming more this year is good for Kirsty, because she’s so social. I have talked to some family members, and some friends, and they don’t think that it is a good thing, but knowing Kirsty, I think that it’s better. I mean she mightn’t get much out of maybe going to Science or Maths or English or whatever, but because she’s so social that’s more important to her than, yeah, being stuck in a different class.”*

At the beginning of the project Marie reported that she found the IEP process to be a positive experience. She valued assessment data in the form of previous Individual Education Plans from Kirsty’s primary school because she saw these as reflecting an authentic relationship between school and home. She said she recognised that the teacher knew her daughter well and cared about her learning. Marie saw some reporting by schools as valid and others as of no relevance to Kirsty and her family. Like all of the research participants, except myself, she had no knowledge of narrative assessment at the beginning of the study. Marie was interested in learning how narrative assessment could support Kirsty’s wellbeing and sense of belonging at school.

Hilary – Teacher’s aide

Hilary is a teacher’s aide who had worked in secondary schools in two rural locations for two and a half years at the beginning of this project. Hilary came to these jobs with a range of experiences in education. She had completed supervising courses at playcentre and 18 months of her primary teaching diploma course at Teachers College before dropping out many years earlier. She had not completed any professional development courses in the two and a half years she had been working as a teacher’s aide.

Hilary was motivated to join this project as part of her learning:

“I want to learn a little bit more about what’s happening... I’m deadly interested, into you know special needs and all that sort of thing, I can’t be bothered studying, so I’m a person who would rather see it than read it... to join this it’s just something that I can learn from or be taught something. To me it would be great... I want to learn everything, everything I can. I want to be like a big sponge... There’s thousands of things. Just get down to their (the students) level and realise how they think. Just I wanna be on their level 24/7.”

Hilary also said she believed that assessment should be a process that draws from the contributions of all those who know a student. She wanted to see how this could happen within the project. Hilary had attended Individual Education Plan meetings, but stated that she had never been asked to, or had contributed to the meeting discussion. She did not observe any link between the IEP and her work with students. She had seen some documents and assessments, but did not regularly access the students’ IEPs. Hilary worked in classrooms with teachers and students, but had yet to sight any planning to guide her work. She stated that nobody had explained to her how the IEP worked in any way in the classroom *“so it could probably work, but to me it doesn’t.”*

Hilary used her prior knowledge and experience from playcentre (early childhood education) training as the sole means of assessments she undertook in the classroom. The assessments were written observations focussed on behaviour. Hilary identified knowing a student well, and knowing what interests them, as important for assessment.

Isabel – Head of Department, Assisted Learning

Isabel had been teaching for 15 years at the commencement of this project. She had worked as both a primary and secondary teacher. She had completed a post graduate diploma in Special Teaching Needs. Isabel had undertaken specialist literacy work. She had worked with a range of students with special education needs in both primary and secondary school. Isabel had been a subject teacher in the secondary school. She had taught within both alternative education (supporting students who had been excluded from school) and as an ORS teacher supporting other teachers in regular classrooms. She had trained in restorative justice and conversational based learning. Isabel identified work on formative assessment as a key professional

development opportunity she had taken up. At the time of the project Isabel had direct responsibility for the Assisted Learning department. She was responsible for teacher's aide staffing and ORS teachers employed at the school. Isabel was also responsible for supporting teachers working with up to thirty identified students who were not entitled to any individual special education funding. The students were in regular classes. These students often demonstrated competence two or more curriculum levels below their peers.

Isabel's motivation for joining the project was to increase her own professional knowledge focussed on learning, teaching and assessment for students across the school. She wanted to learn how to use assistive technology resources to support teaching, learning and assessment. She also framed her desire to join the project as being based in social justice, stating, *"For me inclusion is that we have to have the right. It's our right to be part of the school, part of all of the experiences everybody has... Once you work in this area and you get over the, you know, these kids' disabilities or their learning challenges, you see past that, you just see the student and their families. And they have to fight for every little right. Here we're fighting for the right to be part of classes... They need to be with their peers. You know, we live in a world – we don't live in little separate societies. I mean part of it's a hangover from 'those kids went to special schools,' they weren't around, they weren't visible, and that lack of visibility isn't okay anymore. We're not taking it anymore."*

Isabel saw the possibility of using narrative assessment to support students to be recognised as learners within the school's regular classes as part of developing wider school inclusive practices.

Jane – Specialist teacher

Jane had been teaching for eight years in a primary school. She recently joined the secondary school as a part time specialist teacher. She had responsibility for supporting three disabled students and their teachers in their regular classrooms within the school. She also had some time set aside where she worked one to one with Kirsty. At the beginning of the project Jane was uncertain of the finer details of her new teaching role and was negotiating ways of working with other staff to support them and the students. Jane said that in her previous work as a senior

primary school teacher she had taught students within the New Zealand Curriculum, but she had rarely dealt with the students who did not achieve at the expected curriculum level for their age.

Jane was motivated to participate in the project to learn more about assessment, especially in her role as a teacher working with students funded through the ORS scheme. She wanted to learn about a variety of ways of individualising assessment, especially for those students working predominantly at level one of the New Zealand curriculum.

Jane saw making sense of meaningful assessment for students funded through ORS as a challenge in her new position, *“I think for me, my biggest obstacle, (is) how to go about assessing you know a student with ORS. Because I have come kind of you know like the secondary come from – well they need to be achieving at this level when they leave my classroom, and you know. So it is very much driven from the National Standards, from the, you know, curriculum. So I haven’t had to deal with, well hang on, this child is only working at Level 1, what are you going to do or how are you going to assess them... I would be hopefully focussing on what she can do and you know again I’m not too sure how I go about that... You know, it’s all just, it’s a bit of a grey area still for me and I think that’s why it’s important for me to be on this project, to swap that thinking of, everyone doesn’t fit in this box, this assessment isn’t for everyone, but this is how you can assess”*.

Jane talked about a range of skills she had used in the primary school setting, but felt she needed support to make sense of how to use these skills in a secondary school setting. She wanted to learn as much as possible from being a participant in the study.

Penny – teacher’s aide

Penny is a teacher’s aide. At the commencement of the project she had worked in both primary and secondary schools over a period of 12 years. Penny had completed an advanced certificate in special needs, a tertiary qualification. She had undertaken other professional development opportunities offered to her by schools.

Penny was motivated to participate in this project because she thought it would be interesting, that she could learn a lot from the experience and that the students she worked with (predominantly funded through ORS) could benefit from this too. Penny had strong relationships with family members, often texting them throughout the week to relay stories of how their children were succeeding at school.

Penny saw assessment as a teacher skill and task. Apart from specialist teacher support she did not observe classroom teachers planning for the needs of students funded through ORS and was indignant that as a lower paid staff member she was expected to teach or adapt planning for the students. She described herself as being situated “*between a rock and a hard place.*” She felt conflicted by her desire to care for and support the students, and her perception that she was expected to complete teacher roles and responsibilities within the teacher’s aide position.

Penny identified attending IEP meetings as her sole (authentic) responsibility in an assessment process. Penny thought IEP meetings could be valuable, stating, “*I think the goals that are set for the students is really good, but they have to be realistic, and I think it’s really important that the parents request what they want too – not what we want. We don’t have to put up with the kids 24/7. It’s gotta really carry on for when they get home.*”

Figure 2 presents key participants within the study and their roles in relation to each other.

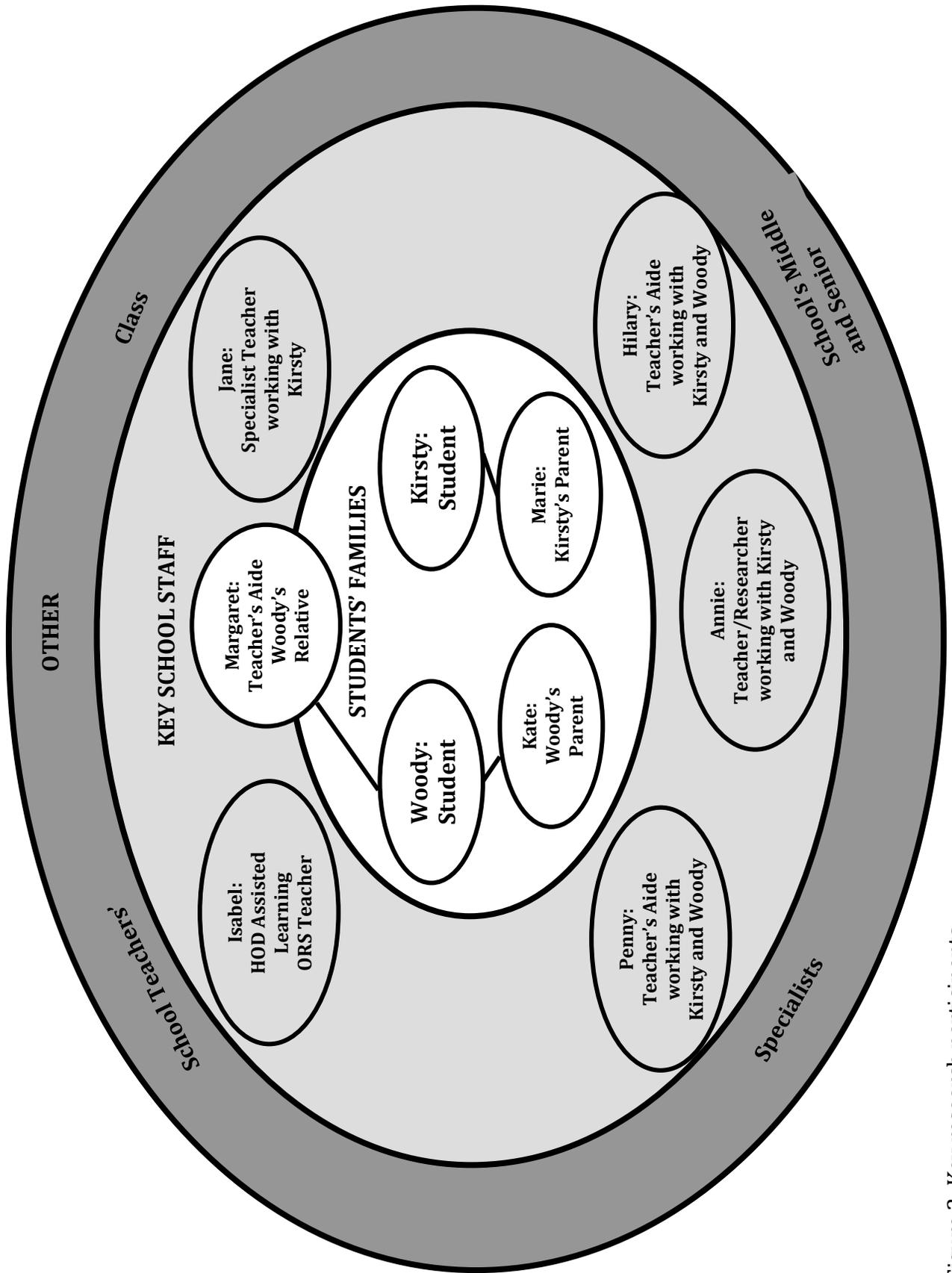


Figure 2: Key research participants

Having presented the key participants within the study I now introduce the research learning community as it was enacted within the study.

Collaboration through the research learning community

Inclusion infers a whole school approach to social relations where the knowledge and contributions of parents, school staff and students is equally valued (Laluvein, 2010; Morton, Rietveld et al., 2012). When collaboration utilises inclusive principles it allows us to draw on the strengths, interests and learning styles of different members of a teaching and learning group, enhancing the learning opportunities and environment for all students (Laluvein, 2009; Rix, 2005; Thousand & Rosenberg, 2005). With these considerations in mind the study utilized a learning community approach. This was recognized as supporting principles inherent in the four key documents that informed this work (Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand Curriculum, Ministry of Education Position Paper: Assessment, and the Educultural Wheel) and in literature focused on the inclusion of people with disabilities in research (Bigby, Frawley, & Ramacharan, 2014).

The composition of the research learning community

The research learning community within this project comprised of the eight adult research participants. I had wished to include the two student research participants, but I soon found that this was a much more difficult task than I had imagined. I was learning how to communicate with Woody, but I relied on family members to constantly check my interpretations of his gestures at the early stage of the project. I was challenged to see how he could participate meaningfully as a research learning community member.

Similarly I was challenged with Kirsty's ability to participate as cognitive issues and a short concentration span made it difficult for her to follow discussions of longer than one or two minutes. I had to rethink the ways that Kirsty and Woody could participate, how their voices could be heard in learning community activities and actions. The adult participants were identified as core research learning community members. Although the student participants were not identified as core research learning community members, information gleaned from a range of contexts where they worked and lived was used to inform the work of the adult participants. Narratives, observations, video, photos and assessment profiles of both students supported this

work.

Gaining student information for the research learning community

Adult participants recognized the responsibility of supporting the students to know their views were valued, in whatever shape or form they were communicated. We had to rethink our constructions of learning community in response to the daily health and other needs of the students. For example Woody may have been more able to participate in learning activities that we observed (and used this information to plan for future learning in our community meetings) in the morning. If we wished to have the best opportunity to understand his communication and learning to inform our work it made sense to work with him in the morning. In this way, although he may not have been a research learning community participant his interactions and communications were valued. Similarly, participants respected there were times when Kirsty was more likely to attend to conversations. Information was gathered at these times to better inform learning community meetings.

Key tasks for the research learning community

One of the key tasks for the research learning community participants was to share language and understandings of educational processes. Part of this work involved examining discourse. At the first learning community meeting participants identified a set of learning goals for the whole group to focus on during the school year. They were:

- To learn about and use narrative assessment in our work with Kirsty and Woody, perhaps with other students if we recognise it as supporting teaching and learning in this school.
- Developing a school report format that better reflects individual strengths and needs. The report would need to be collaborative, reflecting what family want and that all participants see as manageable. This may include different ways of assessing progress and achievement not in use at the school at the beginning of the project.
- Developing systems that better support consistency in our approaches with students across a range of classes they participate in.
- Developing a better, more reflective way of reporting linked to practical, achievable IEP goals. This may include thinking differently about the things we focus on at school.

- Considering how IEPs are used in the school. Are they manageable, working plans that reflect goals the family and school agree on?

(Meeting minutes, 2011)

These goals reflected our inquiry into ways that we could recognise all students as learners, valuing their unique learning strengths and potential. The goals could help us make sense of how narrative assessment could support student participation in learning. We were interested in what this could look like for the school and some of its structures, for example the school report format and the IEP meeting structures. At each of the following learning community meetings these goals were revisited with a focus on Kirsty and Woody's learning across contexts.

Sharing information

The learning community developed within this study provided opportunities for reciprocal learning from each other. This reciprocal process supported participants to share information. I provided research about inclusive policies and practice with participants. Other adult participants shared observations from home, school and community contexts. The students' comments and gestures in their everyday classroom work were interpreted and used as information to support our conversations. Family members and educators shared videos, emails, learning stories and observations from practice. Information between home and school was shared in many daily interactions and used at the learning community meetings to reflect on learning and ways forward. Minutes were written and shared by email with all research learning community members.

Building trust in the research learning community

Partnerships require reciprocity, meaningful dialogue, shared understandings and clear information to be able to work. (Guerin, 2008). I recognized the importance of the learning community members trusting and respecting each other if we were to take some risks, to problem solve in creative and flexible ways (Deppeler, 2014). The issue of risk was balanced by the trust that had been established in historical partnerships between myself, families, and school staff. The participants had all shared some previous experiences together prior to the study being undertaken.

Challenges to a responsive way of working together

I was mindful of Pedraza's (2002) caution about not predetermining ways the group could work together, or defining lists of actions that are strictly adhered to, but rather to develop a focus of collaboratively working out the critical issues that required our attention within the limitations of one school year. Although the group identified a set of questions to focus on throughout the year the participants agreed to work responsively from day to day dilemmas. We began working together with recognizing knowledge we already had, and sharing our different perspectives together (Pedraza, 2002). Throughout the study this information served to remind us of our starting points in working together, and to recognize ways that our thinking and practices changed over time.

The learning community met regularly throughout the project and at the completion of this project two members made a powerpoint presentation (Appendix 14) to the whole school staff about narrative assessment and the outcomes they recognised as being achieved within this process. This was an initiative driven by adult participants other than myself. They wished to share information about this new way of working with staff school wide.

The collaborative development of learning story strings

One of the tasks of the research learning community meetings was the development of learning story strings. I facilitated discussions focused on the New Zealand Curriculum at these meetings. Research learning community participants worked together to write a string of stories using the data of emails, observations, memos and journals to identify learning that was occurring and possible ways to support future learning. We discussed the evidence of learning within data, linking it to both the New Zealand Curriculum and the student's Individual Education Plan. These sessions were an opportunity to clarify understandings about assessment and what learning can look like. The draft strings were included in the meeting minutes that were emailed to all meeting participants. Participants were able to provide feedback to each other about any changes they wished to make. We used exemplars from the Ministry of Education's website (throughdifferenteyes.org) to guide our work.

Other learning communities emerging throughout the study

The research learning community sought information from both Woody and Kirsty as the research participants focussed on the introduction of narrative assessment. As the project progressed it became apparent that Woody and Kirsty were participants within a variety of other learning communities within their school and community. Some of these communities were constructed by classroom teachers. An example is the Physical Education class that Woody participated in. The teacher was adamant that at Year 10 the students were responsible for each other. She declined the support of a teachers' aide for Woody. There are many photos and videos from this class that demonstrate Woody participating in activities with his peers. Classroom observations include comments from Woody's peers that reflect an expectation of him as a learner completing activities with them.

Some learning communities were constructed by the students themselves. An example is the texting community that Kirsty chose to participate in. As she experimented with literacy she began sending texts to a small group of students (both disabled and not) and adults. These people responded to her texts and supported her to make sense of how to communicate her messages in this media. She responded to their comments and feedback by using new words that had not previously been visible in her literacy skills. Kirsty extended this network to join facebook where photos and text could be presented together. This also meant she was able to tap into a wider audience to demonstrate her skills. She was highly motivated by her interactions with other texters and social media users and copied words and terms they used as she developed these literacy skills.

Summary

This chapter has introduced the key participants in the study and their roles in relation to the student participants who are the focus of the narrative assessment work that was undertaken. The formation and use of a research learning community has been discussed. Considerations of how the community could work, the roles of its members and its agreed focus for the study have been stated.

The findings section of the thesis presents three discussion chapters and a final summary chapter. The chapters focus on ways that research participants have been able to make sense of narrative

assessment to recognize diversity in student capability and learning. The chapters are linked around four key themes. The themes draw from the principles of participation, protection and partnership in the Treaty of Waitangi as I critically examine the use of narrative assessment and the outcomes of this approach for the students and those supporting them. The themes are also recognised as principles in assessment and inclusive education (Ministry of Education, 2011a, 2014a, 2014b) and DSE research (Biklen, 2000a, 2000b; Morton, Rietveld et al., 2012; Murray, 2000; Slee, 2011; Valle & Connor, 2011). The themes are:

- Positioning the student at the centre of assessment;
- Presuming and recognising student competence;
- Developing relationships and collaboration; and
- Recognising and responding to student voice and agency.

Table 2 presents a summary of the themes and the focus of inquiry within the themes across each of the findings chapters.

Table 2: Key themes in findings chapters

| | Chapter 5 | Chapter 6 | Chapter 7 |
|--|---|--|--|
| PARTNERSHIP, PROTECTION, AND PARTICIPATION Positioning students at the centre of assessment. | Making learning information accessible to students. Recognising Woody as a partner in learning/ learner. Sharing learning with peers, family, specialists. Using the language of learning. | Teaching Kirsty to participate in learning conversations. Teaching, modelling and supporting students to be partners in learning. Supporting students to be assessment capable. Recognising dialogue. | Recognising the relationship between the assessor and the assessed as pivotal to student outcomes. |
| PROTECTION Presuming and recognising student competence. | Knowing the learner. Constructing student identity Recognising competence through context of unique communication methods and situations / within NZC. Teaching with a belief in ability. | Recognising competence through participation in learning conversations. Self and peer assessment. Recognising competence across contexts and planning from this evidence. | The changing role of the specialist in assessment processes. Creating and finding contexts for experiencing and demonstrating competence. Teaching others to value strengths, not prioritise deficits. Assessor competence. |
| PARTNERSHIP Developing relationships and collaboration. | Establishing respectful and reciprocal relationships. Educator and family understandings of ways students experience the | Professional responsibilities to build positive relationships. Strengthening relationships through sharing | The potential of collaborative assessment as inclusive practice. Protecting the mana of student and family through |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| | world. | information. Developing relationships across contexts. | assessment. Specialists and educators who value collaboration and a shared commitment to inclusive practice. |
| PARTICIPATION Recognising and responding to student voice and agency. | Being valued as belonging – as a participant in learning. Recognising unique ways of dialoguing. The use of learning stories to recognise student voice. Utilising the knowledge of peers who know the student well. | Supporting risk taking, Supporting student led initiatives. Student trust and adult responses in agency. Modelling participation and providing opportunities to practice. | Recognising advocacy for the voice of the child. Recognising the student as a partner in assessment. |

Chapter 5 investigates the formative use of narrative assessment in the construction of learner identity. It describes how research participants collaborated to make sense of recognizing and supporting Woody as a learner in his secondary school. A framework for considering learner identity themes through identifying the purposes (and consequences) of learning stories for students and their families is discussed. The framework supports an understanding of how we were able to position a severely disabled student at the centre of assessment processes, presuming and recognising competence in response to his unique ways of communicating and participating in learning. Examples of student agency and voice are recognised as opportunities to critically examine effective pedagogy.

The use of the term “we” in this chapter denotes those school and family based adults who participated in the research project with a focus on Woody’s learning. These people were Woody’s mother Kate, Head of Department (and Woody’s ORS teacher) Isabel, teacher’s aides Margaret and Penny, and myself as practitioner researcher. At times we discussed this work with other research learning community members and classroom teachers as we shared ways of working together. The term “peers” in this chapter denotes students who were in the high school setting. There is no distinction between disabled and non-disabled students in the use of this term.

In chapter six I provide narratives and documents that describe Kirsty’s participation within her own learning over one school year. The cultural values of the Educultural Wheel are used to

examine ways that Kirsty was supported in her transformation from passive student to active participant within assessment and learning processes at school. Chapter 6 builds on the themes inherent in Chapter 5 with a focus on educator responsibilities to teach, model, support and provide opportunities for students to participate in their learning. Educator responses to Kirsty's evolving participatory role as a student who has something to say about her learning are critically examined. Discussions about presuming competence move beyond the realm of adult responsibility as the impact of student and peer assessments on student voice and agency is recognised. Chapter 6 links Kirsty's positioning as a partner in learning to her growing voice and role as an IEP team member.

The use of the term "we" in this chapter denotes those school and family based adults who participated in the research with a focus on Kirsty's learning. These people were Kirsty's mother, Marie; Head of Department Isabel; specialist teacher Jane; teacher's aides Penny and Hilary; and myself as practitioner researcher. At times we discussed this work with other research learning community members and classroom teachers as we shared ways of working together. The term "peers" in this chapter denotes students who were in the high school setting. There is no distinction made between disabled and non-disabled students in the use of this term.

Chapter 7 discusses the use of narrative assessment as an approach that legitimises students' unique learning strengths and potential. It critiques the responses of specialist assessors to the school's use of narrative assessment with its disabled students. These responses are considered in relation to student wellbeing, with a strong focus on the principle of protection. Three narratives are provided to critically examine the relationship between the assessor and the assessed, and the outcomes of these relationships for the students. The construction of student (in)competence is discussed as consideration of students as participants within specialist assessment is questioned. The impact of quality relationships and the use of collaboration to strengthen assessment processes is considered within the context of advocacy for the student.

The thesis concludes with a summary of the key research findings in Chapter 8. The use of narrative assessment as an approach that supports educators to recognise diversity in student capability and learning is discussed. Student outcomes from the use of narrative assessment are

identified. Tensions between the strength based school assessments and other deficit based assessment approaches evident in this study are discussed and recommendations for more inclusive assessment practice are made.

Chapter 5

Woody: Constructing learner identity

Introduction

This chapter uses excerpts from Woody's narrative assessment data to investigate how learner identity can be constructed and supported. The work of Carr and Lee (2012) is used to examine student identity through the consideration of four assessment design principles. A more recent fifth principle is introduced and discussed. Links are made between Woody's narrative assessment data and ways that this assessment approach can help educators recognise diversity in student capability and learning. A number of changes in the ways that Woody is recognised as a learner during the school year are identified. The chapter concludes with a summary of guiding questions for educators. These questions have emerged from considerations of learner identity within this project.

During the year the study was undertaken three learning story strings were developed for Woody by school staff members. The learning story strings focused on Woody's use of communication across a range of settings, his physical skills in the swimming pool, and his choice making skills using symbols across settings. A fourth learning story string was provided by a visiting specialist. This string focused on choice making skills in a range of activities. These strings were completed in adult accessible and Woody accessible versions. One of the learning story strings was developed with a focus on communication. Excerpts from the string are used in this chapter. The full string is presented in Appendix 16. Reading the full narrative assessment string before continuing with reading this chapter will support an understanding of how we framed learning and progress within our own school context.

Assessment that recognises and supports learner identity

Assessment plays a pivotal role in identity formation (Biklen & Bourke, 2006; Gipps, 2002; Kliewer, Biklen & Hendrickson, 2006) and educator constructions of ability (Kasa-Hendrickson, 2005; Swann et. al., 2012). The social construction of disability and competence can be challenged by sociocultural forms of assessment such as narrative assessment. Sociocultural

forms of assessment privilege social and cultural contexts, and interactions within and between those contexts, rejecting fixed notions of medical abnormality or deficit inherent in traditional assessment approaches (Biklen & Kliewer, 2006). Sociocultural assessment ignores impairment as an identity in itself, privileging the strengths and knowledges evident in observed interactions and experiences. The formative use of narratives can support this work. A pivotal position within this work is the presumption of competence, getting to know a person through engagement ((Biklen, 2000a, 2000b; Biklen & Kliewer, 2006; Bogdan & Taylor, 1989; Snow, 2007).

We believed that the learning environments and assessment practices we enact are pivotal in learning and that the formative use of narrative assessment could support our understanding of the purposes and consequences of assessment. School staff, family members and the students themselves can collect evidence of learning, and use this evidence to both support further learning and assess learning that has occurred (Ministry of Education, 2009; Carr & Lee, 2012). The learning outcomes can be conceptualised as an “intermingling of stores of knowledge and stores of dispositions” (Carr & Lee, 2012, p.129) and learner identity themes that represent a “dimension of strengthening or progression” (p.129).

Carr and Lee (2012) explain four principles of narrative assessment as learning stories that address the notion of learner identity. They are:

- Agency and Dialogue: Co-authoring and co-constructing practices;
- Breadth: Making connections across boundaries and between places;
- Continuities: Recognising and re-cognising learning continuities; and
- Distribution: Appropriating knowledges and learning dispositions in a range of increasingly complex ways.

Carr and Lee (2012) have recently identified a fifth dimension. In their work with families and educators they recognise the sustainment of a passion for learning in both teachers and students. They call this E for Excitement, Enthusiasm, Exuberance or Elan.

Table 3 provides a framework for considering these principles through identifying the purposes (and consequences) of learning stories for students and their families, balancing goals and interests, and dimensions of progress.

Table 3: Purposes and consequences, balancing acts and dimensions of progress (Carr & Lee, 2012, p. 136)

| | Agency | Breadth | Continuities | Distribution |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| Purposes for and consequences of Learning Stories for Children and families | Co-authoring curriculum and assessment | Connecting with communities outside the classroom and encouraging reciprocal engagement with families | Recognising learning journeys and the continuities of the learning over time | Distributing the learning across languages and modes: appropriating a repertoire of practices where the learning is distributed over a number of languages and other modes of meaning-making |
| Balancing goals and interests | Working things out for oneself <i>and</i> engaging in dialogue | Local classroom and early childhood centre focus <i>and</i> communicating with family and keeping the learning relevant to the wider community | Documenting expertise at one moment in time <i>and</i> constructing chains of linked episodes, finding planning directions <i>and</i> keeping an eye on developing longer-term learner identities | A focus on one language or mode at a time <i>and</i> a focus on an interest or open-ended task that may require a multimodal approach |
| Dimensions of progress | Children initiate their own learning pathways and journeys and are becoming self-assessors. They can dialogue about their learning with increasing confidence and competence | Stronger and more diverse connections are made with family and community knowledges and interests, outside the centre and the classroom | Chains of learning episodes are recognised and negotiated, linking the present with the past and the future. The 'next steps' are more frequently co-constructed. So are longer term visions and possible selves | The learning is distributed across an increasing number of languages and modes of representing and communicating and they may be combined in increasingly complex ways |

This framework has been developed in response to the use of learning stories as narrative assessment in early childhood centres and primary school. I believed it was just as relevant within the secondary school setting where learner identity is traditionally constructed through

national frameworks such as National Certificate in Educational Achievement. These national frameworks did not recognise Woody as a learner or as having any learner role. Using excerpts from one of the learning story strings focussed on Woody's communication skills (Appendix 16) and the framework provided in Table 3 it is possible to identify some of the ways Woody's identity as a learner has been constructed within the school and other environments. It is also possible to make visible some of the ways in which socio-cultural assessment can support inclusive practice. Prior to discussing these themes a brief shared history of the context of the work is presented.

Shared history of those supporting Woody

This string of learning stories was a starting point for the school's changed practices when they focussed on Woody's use of communication. At his most recent IEP meeting Woody's family had made a request for support to help Woody learn to communicate using symbols that could be understood by others not familiar with him. They asserted that this request had been made to others including specialists over a long period of time. They felt frustrated that Woody appeared no better off than when requests for support had been made years earlier. At the time of the IEP meeting people who did not know Woody well could not understand his communicative efforts towards them.

Woody had a Toughbook (a portable laptop that could withstand many knocks and accidents). The Toughbook had a large number of symbols programmed into it by specialists, but to date family members perceived that little work, outside of their family and previous school employees, had focussed on actually knowing if Woody could use the symbols.

Woody's family had intimate knowledge of his gestures and vocalisations so they often understood his communications when others could not. They recognised a need for Woody to be able to communicate with others in easily understandable ways as they imagined that Woody would one day be an adult living in a supported arrangement that may not include family. At the IEP meeting, discussion centred on Woody being able to communicate a choice using a symbol, and in the longer term being an adult who could communicate clearly to others using symbols. The learning story string commenced shortly after the IEP meeting. My analysis of the learning

story string makes use of the themes of agency, breadth, continuities and distribution outlined in Carr and Lee's table. I use these to investigate the construction of Woody's identity as a complex and skilled learner through narrative assessment.

Agency and Dialogue: How did we position Woody with agency?

Assessment for learning has the potential to transform learning from an exercise of knowledge transmission to one where teachers and students are actively involved in learning together (Black et al., 2002; Swaffield, 2011). Part of this process allows a teacher to support student agency and build dialogue. Agency is "about authoring and responsibility, and includes taking the initiative and asking questions" (Carr, 2009: p 35). Current New Zealand educational policy (Ministry of Education, 2011a) recognises the student is at the centre of assessment practices and that there is an educator responsibility to build student assessment capability. This responsibility extends to all students, regardless of diverse challenges, strengths and needs (Absolum et al., 2009).

As adult participants in the study we were confronted by the challenge of how to recognise and build assessment capability with a student labelled as severely disabled. We agreed to some key beliefs as we started working together. We worked with a belief in Woody's capacity to communicate in a variety of contexts. We recognised the need to develop a dialogue with him using both symbols and text. We also accepted that dialogue may be in unpredictable or unique forms and that it was our responsibility to make sense of Woody's communication. We worked with a belief that Woody would have a view about his work and he needed the opportunity to share this view. It was our responsibility to reconstruct dialogue in a way that could work for all of us to make sense of Woody's learning, both in the short and long term.

We recognised a tension in that many of the learning stories we had previously read involved learners who could communicate in a way that was easily understood by others. Dialogue could be recorded with comments from students themselves. Woody was labelled as a non verbal student who used limited gesture and vocalisations to communicate. Using lessons learned from the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Exemplars for Students with Special Education Needs project (Ministry of Education, 2009) we agreed that we would need to use our knowledge of Woody, his family's knowledge, observations in class, at the pool and at home, and the

observations of peers in our work. This would support us to make sense of Woody's particular ways of communicating. We also accepted that there could be times when we misinterpreted communication, but that we would all work with the best intent to make sense of what we could see and hear.

Our observations strengthened our knowledge of Woody. Earlier in the project I had spent ten weeks working with and alongside Woody with a focus on getting to know him and his unique ways of communicating. I felt more confident about understanding his communications after this time. However, using the knowledge of many people observing and working with Woody over many settings built a much stronger picture and informed a deeper understanding of possible ways to dialogue with him. For example, we learned that if we wished to engage with Woody it was very important to work on one particular side of his body. He was more likely to move towards a person if they worked on his right side. He was also more likely to respond to a question if given at least two minutes to choose a symbol or picture. We had to learn to wait, to appreciate that if Woody was to reveal a skill with dialogue we had to provide the opportunity of processing time to support this.

We recognised that if we wished to work in partnership with Woody we needed to make his assessment information accessible and available to him. A range of learning stories in electronic format was available within the classroom where he spent one or two periods each day. Students also had access to these stories in hard copy in the class library. A range of Woody's learning stories were available on his Toughbook in the form of electronic books with audio feedback. This meant that Woody and his peers could listen to the stories and videos of his work being read and played back. We recognised that our uses of them was part of an ongoing dialogue about and with Woody. The dialogue was about his and our learning together. We also recognised them as supporting Woody's understandings of how we valued him as a learner, as someone who belonged in our community (Bourke & Mentis, 2014; Morton, McMEnamin et al., 2012).

We used our observations of Woody's reading of his learning stories to inform future practice. We observed Woody choosing to read the same learning story over and over again on his Toughbook. Which photos did he return to repeatedly? Were there certain people he was more

interested in looking at? When other students were reading books on his Toughbook with him how did he respond (loud rocking, yelling, sustained looking, pointing with his hand)? These observations taught us much about how Woody was communicating what he liked and didn't like about the work we were doing together. An example is that when Woody was given a menu to choose a story from more often than not he chose the stories about drinking coke with his friend Duncan. We learned that Duncan was the person Woody was most likely to engage with, to trick with card choice, and to laugh at when he had made a most unlikely choice of symbol. Woody was more likely to reveal a skill when he was working with Duncan.

The collection of learning stories worked to sustain Woody's interest by revisiting episodes of learning. We often used the stories of previous learning prior to pool visits as a reminder of learning goals, including bring to mind what we had achieved and what we were focussing on in the next period. In this way we endeavoured to support a co-authoring and co-construction of both curriculum and assessment that reflected the interests of Woody, links to the English learning area, and the key competencies of using languages, symbols and texts, and managing self.

Of critical importance was that the adults noticed as many ways as possible that Woody communicated to others. These included changes in vocalisations, rocking, turning his body away, looking intently, grabbing a symbol, leaning in towards a person and using his wheelchair to move. The adults had a responsibility to respond to these communication attempts by asking questions, producing new symbols that Woody may need, accepting that Woody had something to say and telling him this was so. Sometimes it took a number of adults looking at a video or within a classroom to work out what was being communicated.

We had to reimagine self assessment and the ways we could support Woody to participate in learning with us. We asked him to choose photos to match text, to choose the learning stories he wished to revisit, and allowed him as long as he wished to read the books. This may have meant he pushed the replay button for a specific page numerous times. We recognised this opportunity to take as long as he wished as a significant part of dialogue and a possible opportunity for

agency. When Woody replayed the same page many times it usually featured a person or symbol of high interest to him. This information shaped further ways we chose to work together.

We paid attention to the vocabulary of learning, as we focussed on our views of ourselves and Woody as capable and competent learners (Cowie & Carr, 2009; Wansart, 2005). We used words such as *reading, choosing, thinking* when we labelled actions within tasks Woody was undertaking. We recognised the importance of modelling this use of language to Woody and to his peers. It sent a clear message that we are all learners and that the school recognised all students as learners. When Woody chose a symbol within his work we used language that labelled what he was doing and that recognised him as an active learner e.g. “You chose spa. Great communicating.” Another example is “You read coke and then water. You chose coke. Here is your coke.” We used vocabulary that identified Woody with learner roles throughout the learning stories. We also used this vocabulary as we reflected on what the narratives were telling us about Woody as a learner. The following excerpts taken from Woody- accessible learning stories are examples:

I can solve problems on my own.

I am at the pool. The noodles are on my arms. The noodles are on my feet. I hate noodles on me. How can I get them off? ...I can solve these problems on my own...I can get rid of the noodles. Now I am learning to get rid of the flippers.

I can make choices

I can make choices. I have used my eyes to make choices. I am learning to use my hands too. I see the choices. Please wait while I look. ...I can make choices with different people. After all that work I get my drink! When I take the symbol I am making a choice. Now I am learning to point at my choice on the choice board.

We were not always sure about why things happened, but we persevered with revisiting learning stories in the belief that Woody could understand the work we were doing together. We observed progress over time and attributed this to possible ways we were working. When Woody independently reached for a symbol we recognised the regular revisiting of learning stories about

choosing symbols as making a contribution to this demonstration of new found (to us) competence. This example showed us that Woody was working things out for himself – initiating his own way forward on his learning pathway (Cowie & Carr, 2009).

Breadth: How did we include multiple voices and connect with families, other communities and real world problems?

Diversity is at the heart of inclusion (Valle & Connor, 2011). Being able to include multiple voices in teaching and learning processes values the connections between family, school, students and educators (Hatherly & Richardson, 2007; Macfarlane, 2004; Macfarlane et al., 2012). It recognises multiple identities as being developed through interconnectedness across a range of contexts (Klotz, 2004; Macartney, 2009; Wansart, 1995; Wenger, 1998). Being able to connect with wider communities and real world problems contributes to authentic learning that recognises student aspirations and supports all students to access learning opportunities (Ministry of Education, 2011c; Morton, Rietveld et al., 2012).

August

Everyone was eating morning tea... Woody's friend, Duncan came over to see Woody and he offered to help me with physical prompts when we offered Woody a choice of drinks. We got the symbols visuals out. I asked Woody what he wanted as I put the two visuals (coke / water) in front of his face, one on the left, one on the right. Woody looked intently at the coke symbol and then looked intently at the water visual. His nose almost touched the visuals. He did not move his arm. After approximately one minute I asked Duncan to put his hand under Woody's wrist to provide a physical prompt for Woody. He did so. Woody's hand immediately went to grab the Coke visual. I gave him a sip of Coke. I repeated the task changing the position of the cards. Duncan stood behind Woody. I said, "What do you want Woody?" Woody's hand shot up straight away and he grabbed the Coke card from my hand. Woody did not need Duncan's physical support after all! I was so surprised. Great choice making Woody! Woody got his sip of Coke as he had requested. We are amazed at your thinking and choice making Woody. Duncan and I think we might need to make more visuals so you can choose more things in your day. (Annie)

Continued over...

September

At art, period 5 I showed Woody a palette containing six blocks of tempera paint. He first pointed to the yellow block using his right hand (his preferred hand when making choices). Yellow is his favourite colour. I got brushes, paper and water organised and asked what colour he would like to start with, offering him the palette. He chose BLACK! This was on the bottom right of the palette. What a temperamental artist! (Margaret, teacher's aide)

28 September

Although Woody has had quite a bit of time away from school today he was able to demonstrate some new skills in the aquatic centre pool. Woody was making clear choices from the three symbols on the board. He looked directly at the float symbol, and later the ball symbol before pulling them off the board. We did the activities that Woody requested in the order he had determined. (Isabel, teacher)

October

It was the school holidays. Woody and two his two brothers went to the pool with me. It was great for Woody's brothers to see him making choices about what he wanted to do. They loved that he wanted to do some of the same things that they did. They were so proud of him. (Margaret as a relative).

The narratives position Woody as someone making choices about his morning tea, his participation in art and swimming. The stories demonstrate the differing faces of Woody's identity as a skilled communicator who is also a student, a brother, and a friend. Woody's brothers recognised their similarities to Woody when they visited the pool in the school holidays and saw that Woody was choosing the same activities as them. This information was realised when Woody chose his activities using the symbols board within the pool. Connectedness in learning is evident as the literacy focus of the learning stories is demonstrated across school and community contexts. In this way the narratives recognise that learning is not limited to the classroom (Carr, 2009; Cowie & Carr, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2009). The learning story string (Appendix 16) recognises skills within the English learning area as having functional uses beyond the classroom.

Having numerous people observe Woody's learning within a range of natural settings resulted in some moments of spontaneous celebration as new levels of competence were recognised. The following narrative is an example:

July

What a day! I was in the classroom at break and Woody was in his wheelchair near the table. I went to the fridge to grab my Coke. Woody looked at the drink as I poured it into a glass. I looked at him and said, "If you want some come and get it." He put his hands on the wheels of his chair and wheeled over to the bench where the coke was. He used his upper body to help move his chair. The students and adults could not believe it. For the first time, and after years of us trying, we saw Woody move himself in his chair. You must love Coke Woody! (Penny, teacher's aide)

This learning story demonstrates how narrative assessment can recognise student competence and capability and support educator inquiry. It is also a powerful reminder of motivation in student learning. We recognized that Woody was very taken with the Coke and that it could provide opportunities for him to reveal more hidden skills. We also recognized that Woody had skills he was not revealing to us unless he saw a need to do so. How could we provide opportunities for these skills to be revealed to us? What did this say about our expectations of Woody at school?

We observed that Woody had connected the movement of the wheelchair to being able to get the Coke. We interpreted that he expected that getting the Coke meant that he would be getting a drink. He was demonstrating the roles of a thinker and a problem solver. We began to search for evidence of learning that we may have missed and to plan for how we could use this information in our teaching.

Carr and Lee (2012) suggest that learner identity is constructed through negotiated experiences across communities. Identity is recognised as multifaceted, as we develop a vehicle for carrying our experiences from context to context. Identity allows us to apply learning between and across contexts (Biklen, 2000a, 2000b; Hatherley & Sands, 2002; Klotz, 2004; Morton, McMenamin et al., 2012). Documenting and discussing the interconnections between meaning making in a range of complex environments and contexts supports the recognition and development of learner roles (Carr, 2009). Learning stories can support this process by documenting the many ways we are viewed across contexts as a learner. For example Woody was able to make a clearly communicated choice using symbols in the pool, in the classroom and in the spa. He was able to

make a clearly communicated choice using a symbol to a range of adults, peers and family members. He was able to make a clearly communicated choice using a symbol on his Toughbook, on a floatboard, or presented by an adult as a card. He could use symbols (reader) to request a preferred drink (communicator and thinker), to play a joke (curious / sense of humour), to respond to a question (decision maker) or to try a new activity (risk taker).

The use of video supported this work, particularly when others may have doubted whether Woody could demonstrate a particular skill. In this way his identity as a competent communicator was supported across people who may not have been in a particular setting when he demonstrated competence in a skill. This is also true of occasions where a person assessing Woody may not have been well known to him so he may have been less likely to demonstrate knowledge to them.

Considerations of breadth within assessment processes and their consequences focus on strong connections across learning. Participants recognised the importance of visual symbols within our work with Woody. The symbols used within the learning stories served a dual role in the process of connectedness across people, places and time. They served as a means of communicating a need, want or choice. They also served as a boundary object. A boundary object is an artefact that can serve many purposes of importance across contexts (Carr & Lee, 2012; Moss, Girard & Greeno, 2008). It can be used to support communication, cooperation and learning across home and school. The learning stories are another example of a boundary object as they shared knowledge with a range of people in a variety of roles.

We recognised the symbols as deeply important to Woody as they were understood within home, school and community knowledges. They informed ways of interacting, demonstrating competence and new learning within, and across, communities that Woody participated in. Other people not familiar with Woody could understand the symbols and a possible message from Woody. In this way the symbols supported recognition of Woody as a communicator across many people, in various places, at different times.

The use of the symbols constructed Woody as someone who had something to say. It was up to community members to respond to the conversations that took place. The use of the symbols and the learning stories about them offered opportunities for conversations between people within a variety of settings to focus on the learning that was occurring and a way forward. An example is the use of a Coke or water symbol to choose a drink at school. Woody's family met at his grandparents each Sunday for a wider family dinner. Each week Woody looked forward to having a glass of beer with his grandad. The inclusion of a new drink symbol for beer meant that Woody could request the beer when he wanted it, not when others thought he might want it.

Throughout the study we recognised the need for regular communication and sharing of information about Woody's learning. Staying connected with each other was essential within a sociocultural approach to assessment. One simple way to share learning across people was the use of email and powerpoints or electronic books. We were busy people. Through email we could access information at times that most suited us individually. We were able to share stories to go into new strings through email. Woody took his Toughbook home and family members watched his videos and electronic books, often commenting via email to other research learning community members. Learning stories were shared with Woody's class teachers via email and they were invited to look at his stories on his Toughbook when he was in their classes.

As research learning community members we were aware of our responsibility to inform others from outside of the school about Woody's success. This responsibility was a recognition of the importance of supporting partnerships (Guerin, 2008) and whanaungatanga (Macfarlane, 2004). The sharing of narratives was recognised as honouring Woody's unique ways of learning (Macfarlane, 2004; Macfarlane et. al., 2012) and developing a shared understanding of his competence across a range of communicative contexts and people (Ministry of Education, 2009). Learning story strings were shared with the range of specialists supporting Woody prior to their visiting the school. IEP members received learning story strings prior to IEP meetings so that when they arrived at school they were aware of the skills Woody was demonstrating. Our actions supported the strengths based approach to assessment that we valued. We hoped it would also set the scene for other assessors to challenge deficit based ways of working and to think about how they could support recognitions of Woody as a learner (Morton, McMenamin et al., 2012).

Continuities: How did we provide navigation markers of the journey so far, and possible future, for Woody and other students?

Assessment needs to pay attention to the skills, knowledge and dispositions that current students require to become confident, connected adults in their future lives (Hatherley & Richardson, 2007; Hipkins et. al., 2014; Ministry of Education, 2007). We recognised the concept of “confident and connected adult” as being unique to each student and their way of being within their communities. We thought narrative assessment could support the recognition of current progress and future planning with a focus on short and long term aspirations.

Learning stories can illustrate continuities and progression in knowledges and skills evident over time. They can support a recognition of the changing learning communities students participate in as they make increasing connections to learning beyond the classroom. They can support the recognition of continuity in respect to competence becoming more secure, more generalisable and more complex (Carr, 2009).

Through the IEP meeting process the adult participants expressed a belief in exploring what Woody could do in a variety of learning environments and how learning could be recognised as a process over time. There was a focus on past skills, but also a need to focus on the skills Woody would require to communicate effectively to people unfamiliar with him in his life as an adult. We recognised learning as occurring in many steps over time. No time limit was set for any of the assessment we were undertaking. We accepted that learning could be messy and unpredictable. It may or may not be linear. The narrative strings could help us make sense of Woody’s learning in its many forms. At the beginning of this study we needed to establish clear goals so that our assessment was focussed on skills and knowledges to support Woody’s learning. The IEP goals could determine learning and assessment purposes that had clear links to the learning areas and key competencies within the NZC. The learning story string provides clear examples of the focus of our work and its relevance to family and school aspirations for Woody.

IEP Goal:

Woody will indicate choices using his hands to either point or give a visual to another person. Adults not familiar with Woody will be able to understand the choice he has made.

Prior Learning:

Prior to this work commencing observations show that Woody is eye pointing and gazing for choice making. This is recognised and responded to immediately by those familiar with Woody. It is a family request that choice making be more obvious to unfamiliar adults with a long term goal of independence/interdependence for Woody.

Key Competencies across Learning Areas: Understanding language, symbols and text: *Using visuals is one means that Woody can use to communicate his needs and wants.*

Relating to Others: *Woody is relating to others as communication partners, rather than a means or vehicle for supplying his needs or wants.*

Level One English: *Woody is learning to use symbols to communicate different messages across different audiences. This involves identifying the purposes of simple text across a range of places.*

The adults supporting Woody continued to use observations, learning stories, videos, peer and sibling comments and Woody's responses to inform next step thinking and planning with both short term and long term goals. Goals were shared in the IEP, learning stories, videos, and within our daily conversations with Woody. They were shared with Woody's peers as we made explicit the focus of our work and observations of progress within our work. In this way the students began to understand possible future ways of working together. A focus on strengths allowed us to recognise learning that had occurred and possible ways forward.

The learning stories detailed how we provided modelling and scaffolding of prompts within this work so that teaching was evident and markers of student progress were clear. At times we felt that we were getting nowhere or that our expectations for Woody may be too high. The stories supported us to make sense of understanding the relevance of continuing to work on new learning. Sometimes the stories showed us learning that we missed in the everyday busyness of teaching. At times they gave us the confidence to move forward in bold ways. An example is our

use of a narrow selection of known symbols in June moving to the introduction of new communication symbols by September.

We recognised many occurrences of learning across the narratives in the learning story strings. At times we chose to focus on one key competency or one area of learning. This may have been in response to feeling overwhelmed with so much information, or wanting to remain focussed on the key IEP goal. We recognised that documenting the learning stories meant we could always revisit them and use a story in more than one string if its learning was applicable across contexts. We learned to recognise there are many learning episodes in a string and all of them support us to construct and reconstruct Woody as a learner. What became critical was what we chose to notice, recognise and respond to (Carr, 2009) as we thought about learning as an open ended task.

The formative use of narratives signalled a change in our understanding of learning and achievement. Historically Woody had experienced assessment based on linear progressions as markers of achievement. The use of narratives supported us to recognise learning as complex, unpredictable, non-linear and, at times inconsistent. The narratives documented and presented learning as expertise in the moment. They captured learning that may have been repeated, but also learning that may not have been observed again during the study. Narratives also constructed learning as chains of linked episodes where new learning was linked to prior knowledge and experience. In this way narrative assessment supported a recognition of diverse ways of learning and student competence informed by the observations of many. The narratives informed possible future directions and checkpoints for longer term learning goals, linking past, present and future learning.

As a learning community we began to consider the ways in which future learning could be supported from information within current learning stories. Each learning story string concluded with an analysis section to support this work. The excerpt over is an example:

Analysis

Woody is using symbols to clearly make choices about his drink. He is also making clear choices about which exercise he will do using his hands to take a symbol off the board in the pool (Understanding language, symbols, text / Thinking). We believe that Woody is using symbols to communicate with others as he often laughs at us before he makes a choice we think he doesn't want (Level One English, purposes and audience). He also responds differently to various communication partners. He always laughs when his friend Duncan has the symbols. Woody was recently able to show Lisa (specialist teacher from outside of the school) his skills at selecting a choice from a visual menu and taking the symbol off the board.

... For the first time since entering high school Woody is able to convey a choice using a symbol, to someone other than his immediate family. The choice of card is interpreted as a preference for Woody. Recently we have extended the choice of cards from two to four. This means we can offer more choices on one page. Woody appears to be coping with this extra menu.

What is Woody teaching us?

Woody is showing us that he is thinking. He can make choices using both his eye gaze and his hands for highly reinforcing activities and objects. We have learned to wait as sometimes he may gaze at both symbols for a long time before he actually uses his hand to choose a card. He does not always choose the card that he has gazed the longest at. We believe by giving him a longer period of time to choose he is showing us he is thinking about what he wants before he takes the card...

Woody is teaching us that he is comfortable in the swimming environment. We interpret his risk taking as him having a sense of freedom in the water. He is making definite choices and he doesn't always choose the easiest option. We interpret Woody's choice making as him understanding the symbols and communicating to us what he would like to do next.

Where to next?

Widen the range of communication options throughout the day and the different environments Woody lives and works in. Practise these choosing skills anywhere... We agree we think it is better to concentrate on pointing than having to give a card to someone. A further consideration is a Yes / Stop/ No visual card that could be placed at any activity so that Woody can choose yes/ no responses or indicate to us he wants to stop and have a break. We would like to introduce this resource to Woody's peers and teachers and to those specialists who visit to support us at home and school.

The focus on analysis and future teaching and learning recognises the learning journey so far and progress over time. It informs possible new ways of working.

Woody's unique learning potential and styles are valued as informing curriculum and pedagogy. Our practice is responsive to the ways we recognise Woody engaging with us, making choices, demonstrating his understanding of symbols and language across contexts. Woody's choice of communication partner is recognised as dialogue to inform responsive practice. His response of laughing before making a choice is recognised as him working things out for himself and engaging in this dialogue. Learning behaviours such as taking risks, perseverance and considering choice are made visible through this section of work.

Distribution: How did we integrate dispositional knowledge and practice with subject knowledge and practice in a range of modes and with a range of people, resources and activities?

When we appropriate knowledges and learning dispositions we make sense of them in our own ways and use them to inform new learning. Learning stories can support this work in a number of ways. They use text (or audio feedback) to tell a story, to narrate a reality. Photos and videos can capture a world of gesture, gaze, action, sound, speech and movement. They use a diversity of resources to recognise and support learning opportunity (Carr, 2009; Carr & Lee, 2012; Ministry of Education, 2009). Student motivation and interest is supported through connections to these resources and their use to sustain new learning.

Accessibility was critical in this process. If we wished to support Woody as a participant in his learning we needed to ensure he could access as much information as possible in as many ways as possible. We used Powerpoint, Clicker 5, symbols, posters and cards with symbols and text, video, people talking, audio feedback, photos, scanned work and learning stories to support student accessible forms of assessment. We wanted to make every opportunity for Woody to revisit his learning, to share it with others and to help him make sense of oral, visual and written literacy. We provided opportunities every day where Woody could access stories about his

learning. We ensured he had opportunities to participate in class learning using symbols, photos, simple text and audio feedback.

The use of technology to support Woody's access to his learning stories challenged us to think about his use of the ipad across a range of subjects. Woody was able to demonstrate the skill of pressing the button to take photos. How could this skill be used so that he could take photos of the things that interested him? How could we support him to let us know what he wanted to do? The use of photos and symbols appeared to be the dominant mode of communicating and it was our responsibility to think about how to use them effectively in our teaching and learning with Woody.

Woody's evolving knowledge and use of symbols across contexts challenged us to rethink the ways we introduced new learning to him and the ways we interpreted his understanding of knowledge. Over the year we recognised that we needed to provide more opportunities for Woody to use and see the symbols we had introduced to him across the school. We introduced them within subject work where previous learning had been presented in text format. The symbols were included in poster work in a regular classroom where Woody had to complete a science project alongside peers. A Social Studies project was completed in electronic format using symbols and Woody pressed the audio feedback button on his laptop so his peers could hear the work.

Over time we recognised that the symbols needed to appear in more classrooms so Woody could understand what was going on and his peers could understand what he was doing. Some teachers understood this as part of the process of communicating together. Others saw it as babyish because very little text was used. Some teachers saw communication as a basic right, while others struggled to grasp the need for Woody to communicate when he had an adult with him throughout the day. Our changing focus from assessment for and with Woody, to a questioning of wider school practices made visible tensions across and within staff beliefs and assumptions. The concerns raised by some teachers about the wider use of visual symbols in the school were not observed to be shared by the students. Many of the students had been exposed to communicating through symbols with their peers at primary school. The students in Woody's

classes were observed to make sense of the visuals quickly and did not appear to have any issues around using them.

As part of the process of recognising learning that was occurring and that could occur we began to think about extending the range of symbols Woody had access to. Were we limiting his conversation opportunities by limiting the range of symbols? We decided as a group to think about and make a communication book that reflected the things most important to Woody at this point in time: food, drink, classmates, school staff, prized possessions and desirable activities. With our focus on future learning we could also include symbols and statements that conveyed feelings and emotions. We thought about various contexts and requests that Woody was able to make or could possibly make as we considered new symbols. We used information from the cards we were using to consider Woody's visual impairment and our observations about card size and maximum number of choices on a page. These actions reflected our belief in Woody's potential literacy skills and their relevance in his life. The design of the communication book was a collaborative effort that also reflected the strong sense of community among the research participants.

An issue we recognised as we worked together was that of sharing our understanding of language. We needed to make sense of the terms within dispositional and subject knowledge used within the assessment data. Developing a shared understanding and use of language for key terms was pivotal to recognising achievement and planning future learning. When some of the learning stories were constructed within one of the learning community meetings we spent a considerable part of the meeting discussing shared language so that all participants developed understanding of what was being written and what it meant. This helped develop our confidence in the assessment process as a shared undertaking where language did not isolate anyone due to their role or use of terms. This process supported all of us to be more assessment literate, but also to be more inclusive in our ways of sharing information and understanding learning.

When sharing the learning stories with Woody we also had to clarify what the specific terms meant so that Woody was developing an understanding of our ways of using key terms in his work. We explained words as we used them in stories. In this way the learning stories became a shared assessment and planning tool. They documented and constructed the learning journey

across various modes and languages that were relevant to Woody as we communicated, recognised, reconceptualised and made sense of learning together.

Enthusiasm, exuberance, elan, and excitement: How did we sustain Woody's and our enthusiasm for learning?

A passion for teaching and learning is part of an ethic of caring about the students we work with and the work we do as educators (Gozemba and de Royes, 2002; Macfarlane, 2004; Wink, 2011). This may be recognised within the Māori concept of manaakitanga where effective pedagogy is realised through quality teaching and compassion. It may also be recognised within the Māori concept of ako where teachers and students share reciprocal roles in learning together.

Working within a secondary school that recognised National Certificate in Educational Achievement as its most valued assessment framework constructed Woody as incompetent and incapable. This deficit view was challenged by the use of narrative assessment to recognise the strengths and skills Woody possessed across a variety of context, people and places. Learning stories recognised Woody as a resilient learner, someone who may have to focus and process instructions much longer than others, but who could translate his knowledge into action when given time. We recognised in Woody a passion for learning. This was demonstrated in his perseverance at tasks, his constant revisiting of the learning stories and videos, and his laughter, at and with us, when we were surprised to observe competence we thought did not exist. Our observations were that Woody was enjoying this new learning, that it was relevant to him, and that he was successful at it.

Like participants in the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Exemplars for Learners with Special Education Needs project (2009) we found that the use of narrative assessment was like seeing the students and ourselves through different eyes. This supported us to keep motivated and persevere with a new way of working. We could recognise the learning that was occurring in many ways. We were excited. We had recognised Woody as a learner long before the use of narrative assessment, but this was the first assessment approach to validate our beliefs and to value his efforts.

It was not only the research learning community members who were excited to find an assessment approach that recognised learning in so many ways. Isabel, as Head of Department – Assisted Learning, emailed examples of learning stories to those classroom teachers working with Woody and Kirsty shortly before school reports were to be written. She provided the strings as assessment to be used within the reports, rather than the historical report rating of 1 - 4 to demonstrate competence in learning related to a specific academic subject. One of the teachers sent an email to her expressing relief at being able to present the narratives rather than puzzling over how to grade Woody numerically. He stated, *“Oh well you know, if I don’t have to think about the numbers I can just think about the kids.”* His report comments reflected a knowledge of Woody, not apparent through the use of number grading. A number of other classroom teachers expressed relief, and enthusiasm for, a way of working that recognised students as learners within their classes. They were able to express their frustrations with trying to assess students they recognised as learners within a limiting grading system that did not recognise the diverse ways knowledge could be observed .

As a group of research participants we were enthusiastic and excited by the progress documented in the learning stories. We began to reconsider many of the ways we were working. This led to us discussing and rethinking student participation, IEP meetings, family and school partnerships, the ways we recognised learning, and the purposes of assessment within the school. This enthusiasm translated into decisions to make a presentation about narrative assessment at a full school staff meeting (Appendix 14), the redesigning of student accessible IEPs, an updated process for student participation within the IEP process and clear links to narrative assessment to inform this work. A framework for a possible way forward was developed to trial (Appendix 17). The enthusiasm and excitement we had for our work with Woody and Kirsty was transferred to a wider community concern and responsibility for teaching and learning with all students. We recognised tensions as some school staff embraced our work while others resisted it. However the successes we experienced in using narrative assessment with Woody motivated us to continue with a focus on its use school wide.

NZC: Supporting inclusive assessment practice through effective pedagogy

The process of using narrative assessment to construct and develop Woody's identity as a learner was supported through the use of effective pedagogy. A sense of agency and dialogue was supported through the high expectations of adults and peers who already had a strong knowledge of Woody, his interests and his preferred ways of working. The use of previous learning stories helped to make connections to prior learning and experience while supporting understanding of the relevance of continuing to work on new learning. We worked to provide Woody with multiple opportunities to learn in many contexts, facilitating as many shared learning experiences as possible.

We provided modelling and scaffolding of prompts within this work. An example is the use of a second communication partner who could stand behind Woody and support his wrist as he made a symbol choice. That partner could support Woody to touch the symbol or to give it to another person so that a choice was communicated. When Woody chose to point to the symbol unaided we withdrew this support. This work was supported through the use of a collaborative learning community that drew on members from Woody's family and the school. An extension of this community was the sharing of narrative assessment with specialists from outside the school who may not have had as intimate a knowledge of Woody as those closer to him.

Communication is an interdependent and reciprocal activity. We recognised the need for peers to learn how to use the symbols and to engage in conversation with Woody as an extension of his learning journey. We facilitated shared learning in a range of contexts, modelling ways of working and communicating and the expectation that Woody could participate in this work. The learning stories detailed a number of supportive learning environments both within and outside of the school. We recognised the social and cultural contexts of these environments, being mindful of the ways we spoke and interacted with each other as well as to all of the students. This included thinking about ways to make information accessible for everyone and introducing the use of symbols as meaningful, rather than babyish within a secondary school. We provided ideas and language about learning goals to the students, naming what Woody was learning, and what we envisaged him being able to learn. We relied on key people like Woody's friend Duncan, to help us think creatively about ways of working with him. Students' casual

comments often provoked us to rethink ways of working or to rethink the relevance of new learning. Students were keen to comment on each other's learning. The following excerpt reflects their perceptions of Woody's current and possible future learning.

What do Woody's peers think?

*"Woody's favourite drink is Coke. He is good at choosing Coke, not water."
(Hillary)*

*"It's a good thing that Woody can use visuals because he can choose what he wants. When he uses the visuals we can understand him. I think that is cool."
(Katy)*

*"It is really easy for Woody to use symbols and to point to them. It lets us know what he wants."
(Tina)*

*"It's going to be a good thing for Woody as he gets older because he won't need a trained person looking after him. Anyone will be able to understand what he wants."
(Duncan)*

What do Woody's family think?

*"It's good to see him (Woody) making progress. I think that sticking to the pointing and not worrying about (Woody) handing the card over is a good idea."
Kate (mother).*

Narrative assessment provided information to the learning community supporting Woody to inform pedagogical decisions in future teaching and learning together. This included us inquiring into the impact of our teaching and learning on Woody and his peers. The learning stories provided evidence of progress over time. When we made clear links between the IEP, the New Zealand Curriculum and our actions we were able to think about ways of working for all students, not just for Woody. This was evidenced by the decision to use narrative assessment with a wider range of students, to rethink the ways symbols were being used in the school, and to develop a communication book for Woody that research participants perceived to be useful and functional.

Supporting student identity through formative assessment

Wiliam (2011) reminds educators to think about how they make teaching adaptive to the student's needs. Using strategies identified by Leahy, Lyon, Thompson & Wiliam (2005) we

were able to consider how formative assessment supported effective teaching and learning for Woody. We considered that effective teaching and learning constructs all students as learners.

Throughout the project we made our learning goals and aspirations explicit. These were shared in the IEP, learning stories, videos, and within our daily conversations with Woody. They were shared with Woody's peers as we made explicit the focus of our work and observations of progress within our work. We structured learning tasks so that they offered many opportunities for Woody to have skills modelled, and for them to be practised with a range of people in a range of places. We involved peers in this process so they too were partners in learning.

We provided feedback about learning that was occurring and future learning that could take place. Woody's family, peers, educators and specialists provided feedback in our stories and daily practice. We provided feedback in as many modes as possible to ensure Woody had many opportunities to make sense of what he had learned and what he could learn next. The feedback was specific to Woody. We wanted to provide information that would cause him to think about, and show us what he aspired to learn next.

We recognised Woody as a learner and expected him to participate in learning. Throughout the project this meant that we had to reimagine ways to support him to recognise himself as a learner. This included careful consideration of the language we used to identify his learning behaviour, and that of his peers. We provided visual resources to support Woody to reveal competence, both to us and to his peers. We saw this as a starting point in a change from Woody being a passive learner to our recognition of him as an active participant in his learning. These actions positioned Woody at the centre of the assessment processes supporting his learning.

The Educultural Wheel: Supporting inclusive assessment practice through manaakitanga

The development and use of learning story strings in Woody's narrative assessment work is supported through many of the actions inherent within the concept of manaakitanga. Of greatest importance to us in this process was our knowledge of Woody as a person – our knowing the learner. Taking the time to know Woody supported us to think outside the square as we grappled

with notions of dialogue, agency, participation and self assessment. We wished to support respectful and reciprocal relationships with Woody and his family. We earned the respect of Woody's family by taking the time to get to know him, by asking them to share their knowledge of him with us. We worked together rather than in an "expert" role, co-constructing and negotiating ways forward. This compassion for another person can be recognised as an ethic of care (Noddings, 2002; Macfarlane, 2004; Monchinski, 2010). It is recognised in the ways we speak to each other, the ways we model and set standards of behaviour with each other, the ways we treat each other. In this way we realise Ballard's (2012) definition of inclusion.

When we think about assessment from an ethic of care or manaakitanga we are thinking about how ethical and informed our practices are (Macfarlane, 2004; Macfarlane, 2012). How do they support the wellbeing of the student? Such an approach recognises the psychological and spiritual domains of others, valuing cooperative ways of working that let a student know they are valued (Macfarlane, 2013). A further aspect of this work is consideration of the threat of failure to a student. Do our assessment practices support a student to take risks and to succeed? Narrative assessment supported us in our considerations of these concerns and the ways we responded to them. We recognised many of the ways that Woody was showing us he was participating. We identified the formative use of narrative as the first assessment approach to value Woody as a learner in the secondary school context. We set high expectations that he would learn, but also provided support for him to take risks in his learning.

The provision of opportunities for learning supported a growing sense of belonging for Woody as a communicator, a participant, a classmate, and a brother. Learning plans recognised the importance of relevant skills that were meaningful to Woody and his family (McIlroy & Guerin, 2014). We recognised students, educators and family as learners who held a variety of roles that could support each other in this work. We had a strong focus on Woody (and other students) achieving, persisting and being responsible for learning. These high expectations translated into progress over time. By creating learning opportunities for Woody we began to create learning opportunities for all students. We thought about student accessible learning plans and reports, structuring curriculum so it could be accessible and meaningful for all the students in our classes. The enthusiasm and excitement Carr and Lee (2012) describe was evident as a passion for

learning where paying attention to effective pedagogy supported ethical ways of working. This process made visible to us many of our taken for granted assumptions and beliefs we held about assessment, teaching and learning. In this way manaakitanga supported a reimagining of practice through a democratic lens.

The use of narrative assessment to support more inclusive ways of working

The diverse and unique ways Woody demonstrated knowledge were noticed, recognized and responded to within the assessment approach of this study. Table 4 summarises some of the key changes in our use of assessment and signals better outcomes for Woody as a participant in this process. The most significant outcome for Woody within this study was that through our use of narrative assessment he was visible as a learner.

Table 4: Assessment that supports the construction of Woody as learner

| Moving from | Moving towards |
|---|--|
| Defining Woody's needs and challenges by impairment. | Recognising Woody's strengths and his unique ways of communicating his wants and needs. Recognising multiple representations and identities across home, school and community contexts. Recognising Woody's needs and challenges as future learning. |
| Assessment that provides information to adults about Woody. | Assessment that provides information to Woody, his peers and those supporting them. An expectation that Woody is at the centre of assessment processes. |
| Relying on single and /or isolated sources of information to make decisions about student competency. | Using the voices of whānau/family, school, professional knowledge to recognise competency in a variety of settings meaningful to Woody. |
| Using assessment that defines achievement through progressions in a linear fashion, steps or grades. | Using assessment that recognises knowledge as complex, non linear, perhaps inconsistent and irregular. Assessment recognises learning as evolving. |
| Focus on Woody's achievements as well below his peers. | Detailed narratives of progress over time, a cumulative record of Woody's progress. |
| Recognising Woody as a non verbal student. Student responsibility to demonstrate communication skills. | Understanding dialogue through Woody's gestures, sounds, reactions and choice making. Educator responsibility to recognise and support opportunities for dialogue. |
| Responsibility for assessment lies with specialists and education professionals. | Student and whānau / family actively involved and valued in assessment processes. |
| Academic achievement is recognised as learning. Assessment recognises Woody as a learner who is too difficult to teach, too disabled. | Thinking about how curriculum can support Woody, reframing literacy, and recognising the many ways we respond to Woody's learning. |

How did the research participants think the use of narrative assessment supported the recognition of Woody as a learner?

The research participants who lived and worked most closely with Woody were asked to consider how the use of narrative assessment supported the recognition of Woody as a learner.

Throughout the study Woody was presented with a range of electronic books about his learning achievements. These books were on his computer alongside a myriad of other resources from classrooms at secondary school and stories from home. When Woody could have time to read what he wanted he was observed to choose these books to look at independently. Although I was unable to interview him about his opinion and experiences of narrative assessment I interpreted these independent choices to read the books as indicative of an interest in himself and his learning. The learning stories themselves further supported this view through their examples of Woody striving for new learning.

Kate, Woody's mother, was positive about the value of an assessment approach that she recognised as valid assessment of, and with Woody. She liked the idea of learning stories being presented in a portfolio over the time a student attended school, stating

"I think a lot of families would appreciate that too because, you often don't see small gains, and written in a written form that's not going to be obvious, where if with a narrative assessment you can look over a whole thread, a whole running record of what's been going on, and you can see the gains, even when they are small. So you can see from where they started to where they are now."

In contrast to many of the assessments that had been undertaken with her son Kate recognised narrative as an authentic and valid process. She stated,

"you take a lot of people, they come in from the outside, they're only there for an hour so they're only just looking, well, from an outside view so they don't see, they don't know who he is, they don't know what he is capable of, cos he takes a while to warm up to a person a lot of the time too. So, yeah, you've got to probably gain his trust like any person...but narrative assessment that is the inside view."

Margaret, Woody's relative and a teacher's aide, viewed narrative assessment as supporting a range of people within the school and family to value Woody as a learner. She identified the

potential of this approach to support a more inclusive school. She also recognised the impact of this work for Woody and his dad. Margaret stated,

“I think it’s set a foundation now for the way people view him, I’m sure it has, and the way his family view him too I’m sure, because there’s nothing like some written document that actually makes concrete things that you know already to be true in your head or your heart, but to actually read it and see that other people have observed it too. That makes it even more special and that makes it enduring, because it’s written down and it can go forward with him and we can build on it. That’s really special to me. Perhaps for his dad who he doesn’t have a hang of a lot of contact with, this is a document that he can have that says, “This is my son. This is what he can do.” That’s really special. And for the rest of the school to see the students and the staff warm to him this year because we’ve been included in their classes, and for them to say... oh, we just get little statements in the corridors now that make you feel like you’re part of the body of the school and not seen as ‘the boy in the wheelchair.’ So, it’s the getting to know the student and the person who’s actually looking out for information that can be recorded in a learning string, they regard that person differently, I’m sure. They’re looking for opportunities of learning.”

Isabel, as Woody’s ORS teacher, recognised the impact of narrative assessment on her teaching and understandings of curriculum. She also recognised how schoolwide systems would need to be reconsidered. She stated,

“I think the learning stories were great. I think it’s really exciting being part of something where we noticed changes and we saw progress, because we were clear about our goals and we could see those little steps. It also made us aware of our own teaching, the level of prompting we were using, all those sort of subtle things that just all flow on from when you start looking at goals, curriculum, how we’re teaching, what we’re going to use, what are we saying, what systems of support prompts are we using to help that learner become more independent...it’s pulled all those sorts of issues for me as the SENCO and a Head of Department and trying to push that change, to see all those things come in as part of a much broader picture of teaching and learning and assessment, that it is something different from deficit models where they’re all going to fail anyway or - and you find yourself asking questions like, you know, well who’s the assessment for? Does it look good because there’s a whole set of stuff? Is it - does it actually show what they’re good at? Is it based around their goals for learning? We know they’re behind their peers in many things, but our job is to teach them, they are learners”.

Penny was one of a number of teacher’s aides working in the school. She was able to think about narrative assessment as a tool for raising learner expectations. She said,

“Assessments - when I first started the teacher aide was just give them (students) a paper and let them do the test and that was it, where today it’s a lot more visual really... The resources are definitely a lot better. The main strength (of narrative assessments) is seeing those children achieve, really. If they can achieve by doing, looking back at, looking at their learning stories and then going forward and you can actually see the improvement in those students from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, you can actually go through and look at their work

and you can just push them that wee bit harder. And if it's a subject that they really enjoy, they don't realise that they're actually working so hard."

Summary

This chapter has investigated ways that our use of narrative assessment supported the construction of Woody as a learner. Participants recognized Woody's continual revisiting of his narrative work as proof of his interest in learning. Participants made sense of challenges to teaching that required a rethinking of how students dialogue and participate in assessment processes and practices. This chapter highlights the importance of strong relationships where students are presumed to be competent and where adults have taken the time to get to know the student well. The use of the framework and learning story string in this chapter has allowed us to make visible some of the considerations and ways that educators and families working together can construct learner identities across settings. As participants with a learning community focussed on a strengths based and democratic approach to assessment we were guided in our work by the following questions:

- How do we provide all students with access to learning opportunities?
- How do we teach with a focus on preparing students for lifelong participation in this community?
- Do we recognise and understand the purposes and consequences of the assessments we undertake with our students?
- How do we provide multiple opportunities for students to show what they know and can do across contexts?
- How do we get to know and understand the skills and aspirations of the students we work with?

Chapter 6 builds on our work with Woody as we examine the transformative potential of narrative assessment through an examination of Kirsty's roles in her learning.

Chapter 6

Kirsty: Transforming participation

Introduction

This chapter discusses student participation and autonomy within learning. It compares and contrasts Kirsty's involvement in her two IEP meetings during the school year and investigates some ways that narrative assessment supported student participation within the IEP process. The Educultural Wheel (Macfarlane, 2004) is used as a tool to identify strategies that supported Kirsty to take risks in her learning, to develop confidence in her ability to participate in, and partner with, others in her learning planning and goal setting. Links are made between the use of narrative assessment and Kirsty's evolving participant learner role. Strategies are linked to the broader principles of partnership, participation and protection inherent in the Treaty of Waitangi. The chapter concludes by examining some of the outcomes of using narrative assessment for Kirsty. A set of questions to guide educators in future assessment practice is included.

Participation

Participatory relationships are pivotal to sustaining democratic citizenship (Absolum, 2006) and identity (Rubin, Biklen, Kasa-Hendrickson, Kluth, Cardinal & Broderick, 2001; Wearmouth, et al., 2009). Participation may take many forms, some that reinforce exclusionary practices. The work of DSE scholars (Biklen, 2000a, 2000b; Macartney & Morton, 2013; Rubin et al., 2001; Wearmouth, Berryman, & Glynn, 2009) and other education researchers (Absolum, 2006; Wiliam, 2011) has demonstrated the many ways that participation can be shaped and limited by discourses of deficit and difference. Our work in this study was situated within an inclusive pedagogy that demanded the active participation of all students in their learning processes (Skidmore, 2002). We worked with a belief that when students participate in learning processes they become assessment resources for each other, and become owners of their own learning (Wiliam, 2011). Within this study participation in learning processes can be understood as participation in power (Freire, 1998; Monchinski, 2012), especially for disabled students who historically have no say in their learning (Biklen, 2000a, 2000b). We also believed that assessment could help us to know and understand Kirsty and the ways she participated in

learning and relationships within the many contexts of her life (Macartney & Morton, 2013; Wansart, 1995).

Assessments are a tool for social thought and action, supporting mutual feedback and dialogue about learning (Cowie & Carr, 2009). This study valued a sociocultural view that recognizes learning and development as a reciprocal and relational activity where we learn from each other, within and across cultural and social contexts. (Carr & Lee, 2012) Adult participants believed the co-construction of knowledge across contexts had the potential to support Kirsty's transformation from merely being present at school to participating in learning decision making. Within this work we recognized development as "the transformation of participation in a range of contexts" (Cowie & Carr, 2009, p. 105).

In considering student participation and autonomy I have chosen to focus on Gilmore and Smith's (2008) recommendation that we need to "find, understand and communicate ways for students to have a voice in their learning and the assessment of their progress" (p. 22). Although Gilmore and Smith's recommendation has strong support within teaching I would suggest that disabled students, especially those with intellectual impairments, are not valued as participants in learning decisions. Education policy promotes the student as at the centre of assessment (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2011a, 2011c), but the lack of exemplars and teaching resources to support disabled students in these roles suggests the reality is very different.

With these considerations of student participation in mind a number of tensions and challenges became visible in our work. For many of the disabled students we worked with active participation was framed within adult support, rather than student autonomy. We wished to reimagine assessment for Kirsty so that her role as a participant could be realized. A further challenge was to make sense of what active student participation could look like for Kirsty and for ourselves. We thought that by focusing on supporting student participation we may also develop Kirsty's understanding of her learning and how she wanted to frame new learning. We hoped this would translate into a higher level of engagement for Kirsty in her learning (Absolum et al., 2009). We recognized student participation and feedback as critical in supporting us to make effective teaching and learning decisions. Central to this process was paying attention to

the ways we used narrative assessment with Kirsty, and the consequences of this use (Absolum et al., 2009). We also needed to pay attention to what narrative assessment was telling us about the consequences of our work on Kirsty's learning.

Understanding what it means to have a right to agency as an individual, and understanding what it means to enact that agency can support educators to understand how schools and learning within them can be (Absolum, 2006; Absolum et al., 2009). Presenting students with the opportunities to express their views about their learning, efforts and achievements supports this work. We recognized our responsibility to develop student assessment capability through these processes. With these thoughts in mind this chapter examines the use of narrative assessment to support the transformative participatory roles Kirsty undertook as she engaged in dialogue about her learning over the school year.

Shared history of those supporting Kirsty

Kirsty was recognized as an emergent reader and writer at the beginning of this project. She was able to write approximately seven sight words correctly and to write the names of her family members. This knowledge may have been observed on one school day, but may not have been demonstrated on another day. Kirsty was learning to write her address and phone number during the school year of the project. Kirsty had a specialist teacher, Jane who supported her at school for five hours per week.

Kirsty had a laptop and was familiar with the Clicker 5 literacy programme that had been introduced to her the previous year. Although she loved her laptop and looking at the Clicker 5 programme Kirsty was yet to write independently using these resources. Family and school staff recognized that it had taken the whole of the previous year for Kirsty to begin to feel that she belonged at her new high school. She had moved from a small rural primary school and although she had participated in a term long transition programme she found many changes at school overwhelming. Her sensory impairment contributed to some of these issues. An example is the noises she had not encountered before. One of her classrooms was on the bottom floor of a building. Kirsty found it difficult to focus as she was constantly distracted by the sounds of students in upstairs classrooms moving their chairs. She described this noise as hurting and loud.

Kirsty also found the sound of the new school bell irritating and grating. She would become highly agitated when it sounded.

Kirsty received support from a number of specialists who visited the school during the year. The focus of much of this support was on her sensory impairment, literacy, and Kirsty's day to day skills of managing herself. Kirsty also had a medical issue that compromised her presence at school during the year. Health professionals outside of the school worked with the family on these issues.

During the study participants worked together to develop three learning story strings that focused on Kirsty's literacy skills. One string focused on Kirsty's development and use of texting to communicate. A further string focused on Kirsty's writing skills. The third string focused on Kirsty's use of language, symbols and texts to participate in family and school life.

Kirsty's IEP meetings during the school year

IEP meetings and the learning plan emanating from them are traditionally recognized as key assessment documents and processes for planning for students labeled as having special education needs (Guerin, 2008; Macartney, 2009; McIlroy & Guerin, 2014). Education policy in New Zealand promotes this process as student centered, collaborative and strengths based (Ministry of Education, 2011c). There are concerns that projections of equitable participation are yet to be realized (Macartney, 2009; McIlroy & Guerin, 2014; Mitchell, Morton, & Hornby, 2010). Student participation and understanding of the IEP process requires teacher support. Participation skills, goal setting and self-determination can be recognized as part of the curriculum for students with special education needs who attend IEP meetings and participate in this process (Mitchell et al., 2010).

Kirsty and the team supporting her attended two IEP meetings during the school year. The focus of these meetings was to celebrate learning that had occurred and to identify new goals for Kirsty in her future learning.

The first IEP Meeting - April

Kirsty's first IEP meeting for the year was held at the school in April. Prior to the meeting the previous individual learning plan had been emailed to adult participants. This was in a text only format. Seven participants attended Kirsty's first IEP meeting for the year: Kirsty, her mum Marie, Jane (specialist teacher), Isabel (HOD), Penny (teacher's aide), Judy (specialist from an outside funding agency) and myself (practitioner researcher). Kirsty knew five of the participants. Judy had met Kirsty for the first time the morning of the meeting.

Isabel introduced the meeting and Kirsty's books were on display for adults to look at. Kirsty was invited to speak about her work by Isabel. There had been brief discussions between Kirsty and her specialist teacher about her work prior to the meeting. Kirsty appeared to read to herself from her work folder and then talked to her mother. The adult participants talked about Kirsty's work. Some statements and questions were directed to Kirsty. Many were directed to and from Judy, a specialist who had no prior knowledge of Kirsty.

Kirsty continued to talk throughout the meeting, often over the top of the adults. Many of Kirsty's statements were perceived by adults to have little or no bearing on the discussion of her schoolwork or learning. Kirsty talked about things such as her teacher's baby, her horse, and her favourite television programme. Adults present at the meeting used positive statements to identify successes within Kirsty's work using the books available at the meeting e.g. "You have a positive attitude," "you are working with lots of people," and "you are great at bingo."

Kirsty's mother, Marie shared some reports with Judy at the meeting. Judy asked many questions. Approximately half of the meeting time was used by other adult participants to answer these questions. Kirsty responded to a couple of questions from adults with single word answers. She shrugged, yawned, talked to her mother and after thirty minutes she left the room. In her absence the adults discussed Kirsty's current achievements and set new learning goals. Following the meeting the new IEP was written up within a week and emailed to all adult participants. It was in a text format.

Participation in the narrative assessment project between the two IEP meetings

A second IEP meeting was held in November. Between April and November Kirsty and a group of adults supporting her and other students participated in the process of learning about, and introducing, narrative assessment into the school. This work was undertaken in a number of ways. The adults supporting Kirsty engaged in a number of research learning community meetings that focussed on understanding the New Zealand Curriculum, defining and sharing the language of assessment, co writing learning story strings, and identifying challenges with a focus on better ways of working together. The information they shared also helped to identify possible new learning goals for Kirsty and for themselves.

For Kirsty this project meant learning about narratives, working with staff as they developed learning story strings, helping to write these learning stories on Clicker 5 in a Kirsty- accessible format, sharing stories from home and community settings, commenting on her learning efforts and developing a wider range of vocabulary in both written and spoken form. As the year progressed Kirsty started to write her own learning stories. The stories included photos and simple sentences conveying what the learning was about. At times these sentences were hard to decipher and Kirsty would work with staff to help them understand her messages. These stories were usually electronic books with audio feedback. Kirsty used these stories to let others know about lessons she had enjoyed. Typically these books would be about Science or English, classes that were highly reinforcing to her. Within these classes we observed Kirsty to be highly engaged in work and to have positive relationships with her teachers.

Kirsty was one of a number of students working within a narrative assessment approach by the final term of the year. The students had been supported to observe and comment on their own and others' work. Narratives were able to demonstrate Kirsty's competence as a writer, a reader, a texter, a communicator and a swimmer. Towards the end of the year Kirsty was observed beginning to participate in a new role: commenting on her peers' learning and relating it to her interactions with them and her experiences e.g. she was able to say "Woody can choose Coke. I know what he wants. He likes Coke. I like Coke too."

Between Kirsty's two IEP meetings three narrative assessment learning story strings were completed. These strings related to IEP goals based on communication and literacy. They demonstrated Kirsty's recently acquired skills in writing, reading and texting across school, community and home contexts.

The stories within the strings detailed Kirsty writing notes to family members and peers at school. She was observed texting to argue, support, show affection and state her choices to others. Kirsty was able to recognize names of people on documents within a variety of environments. Recently she had begun to identify known sight words in magazines, books, posters and other resources in the school, home, shops and wider community. Stories showed how Kirsty loved searching through books looking for, and circling any words she could recognize. Kirsty identified herself as a learner. In October she was able to state (connectors added in by adults) that,

"I am good at working in English class, but sometimes it is too loud in Social Studies. I help Penny (teacher's aide) do my big work. I can find some words on my own. It is hard work. I can spell the, to, is, it, and, he. I can spell lots of names. I can spell swimming and science. I use a pen to write with Mrs Scott. I go home and do lots of writing work. Writing is hard work, but I like it. It is easier to write at home because Mum and Dad help me. I want Ms Denver to teach me to write more names."

Preparing for the second IEP meeting

Prior to the second IEP meeting the three narrative assessment learning story strings were emailed to all meeting participants. Two weeks before the meeting Kirsty met with Jane, her specialist teacher to discuss her learning and possible new goals. Jane and Kirsty discussed the two most exciting areas of learning for Kirsty – texting and swimming. They discussed how they could share this information at the IEP meeting. Jane set some time aside so that they could work together on a book about Kirsty's learning before the IEP meeting.

Before Jane could meet her, Kirsty took matters into her own hands. Later in the week she was working in class. She told Penny, a teacher's aide, she wanted to write a book using her computer. She wanted to use photos of her work. Kirsty wanted to make a book about writing

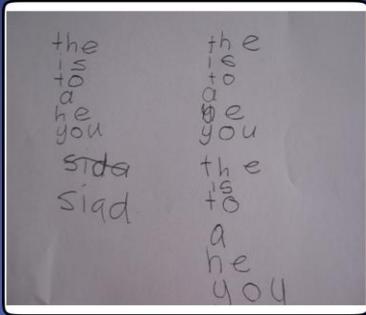
and all the words she had learned in the year. She selected some photos she wished to use from the computer.

Penny and Kirsty worked together. Kirsty attempted to write all sentences independently. Most sentences started with the words “I can” or “I am”, words that Kirsty had learned to read and write this year. Over two periods Kirsty wrote her book with support from Penny. Kirsty deleted and rewrote statements as she thought about what she wanted to say. Penny and Kirsty shared reading the book together. They asked me to have a look at it. I talked to Kirsty about her achievements and asked her what she wanted to learn next. We added one final page to her book that stated a new learning goal and how she could use this new knowledge.

Kirsty wanted her book to go to her IEP meeting, but she also felt nervous about reading it to the adults. Penny suggested that Kirsty take the laptop with the book on it to the meeting. This meant that Kirsty could either present the book and talk about it, or if she felt uncomfortable doing so, she could just press the narration button and let the computer read the book to the other participants. Kirsty felt happy with the idea that she could choose on the day of the meeting depending how she felt. She practiced using the laptop in preparation for the meeting. Figure 3 presents the book:

Figure 3: Kirsty's learning book

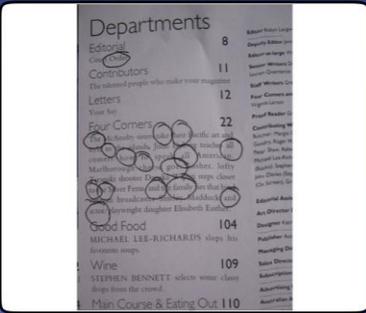




I can write my family words.

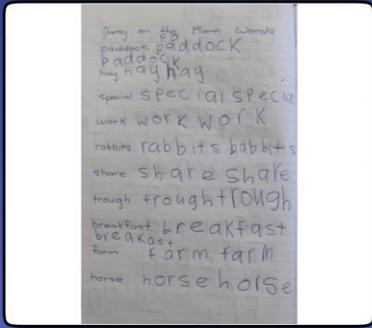


I can type my words on the computer.



I can find words on a page.

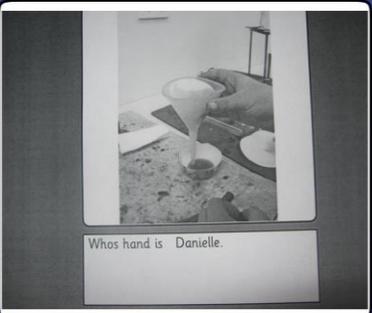




I am learning new words to write.



I can draw pictures for Science.



I can write stories on the computer.





I want to learn more spelling words with Mrs E and Ms D. I will use the new words in my stories, on my cellphone and on the computer.



The second IEP meeting – November

The second IEP meeting was held at school in November. There were seven participants: Kirsty, her mother Marie, Isabel (Head of Department, Assisted Learning), Jane (specialist teacher), Penny (teacher's aide), Sam (a different specialist, from the same agency as Judy) and myself. Like Judy, Sam had only met Kirsty the morning of the meeting.

Isabel welcomed everyone, making a special mention that Kirsty would be the first person to speak to the group. Kirsty used her computer to play back her story about her writing. The adult participants discussed her writing skills with her and asked Kirsty about her new learning goal. Rather than asking adults for information Sam acknowledged not knowing Kirsty, but told her he was able to see she had been working hard on her writing and on deciding a new learning goal for herself. He had read the learning story strings sent prior to the meeting. He asked her some questions about her texting and she was able to take her phone out and show him some texts she had sent and received. Kirsty was able to discuss her texting skills with all of the participants.

Following her electronic book presentation Kirsty's specialist teacher played a powerpoint that Kirsty and her had made together focused on swimming skills. A discussion between the participants acknowledged learning in the pool and new goals that both family and school were happy with. Kirsty interrupted the discussion to say that she wanted to learn about how to get a job. She wanted the adults to help her get a job. The discussion changed to this new goal that had not been considered, and possible ways to help Kirsty develop skills for work and work

opportunities. The adults discussed some options with Kirsty and also pledged to follow up her request with the school careers department. Kirsty stayed for the whole meeting.

A week after the meeting participants received a copy of the learning plan. Three of the goals were written directly from Kirsty’s requests for new learning. A student accessible IEP was developed on Clicker 5 for Kirsty to use.

Changes in Ivory Lake High School’s IEP meeting and learning plan formats

A number of adult initiated changes to the school’s IEP meetings and learning plan formats were made over the school year. Many of these changes arose from discussions within the research learning community. Some arose from considerations of how the use of narrative assessment could support student participation within learning conversations. Table 5 identifies changes to IEP formats and meetings made within the school year.

Table 5: Changes in IEP formats and meetings over the school year

| From | To |
|--|--|
| Students attend meetings, but may have little or no prior conversation about their learning. | Students attend meetings having discussed learning goals and challenges and possible new learning. Kirsty attends her meeting with her prepared learning story to share. |
| Previous IEP plan sent out prior to meeting. | Narrative assessment strings and previous IEP plan sent out prior to meeting. |
| Conversations at meeting are led by adults. | Students are supported to lead conversations about their learning. |
| The IEP has many goals. Goals are overwhelmingly written from diagnostic assessments and use specialist terms. | IEP is limited to two pages and a few priority goals that are in the context of the NZC. Use of layman language so that people accessing the plan understand the intent of the goals. |
| Goals are determined by adults. | Goals are negotiated and students are supported to participate in goal setting. |
| A text only plan is provided to IEP members. | A student- accessible plan is provided. A text only plan may also be provided. The student has daily access to the plan, possibly on a laptop. |
| The plan is shared with the IEP participants and stored in the Learning Support office. | The plan is shared with IEP participants and added to the school’s electronic files so that any teacher working with the student can access it at any time. The plan is also available electronically to the aides supporting the student. |

Undoubtedly these changes supported Kirsty's evolving role as a learner over the school year. An issue that arose from the IEP meetings had considerable impact on Kirsty's participation, but was beyond the control of the school. This issue related to the preparedness of IEP team members.

Within this study the IEP meeting was recognized as an opportunity to support learning conversations where students would be supported to participate in decision making. Time and opportunities for Kirsty to participate in the first IEP meeting were wasted by members having to repeatedly provide information about Kirsty to Judy, a specialist. Judy appeared to have little or no knowledge about Kirsty. Precious time was diverted to answering her concerns and queries, some of which could have been answered if she had read her own agency's data prior to the meeting. At the end of the meeting Judy was much better informed about Kirsty, but no-one else had appeared to benefit from the discussion in terms of setting authentic learning goals. Kirsty had been present in a meeting that did not teach her anything about participation in decision making.

In contrast, another specialist, Sam, attended the second IEP meeting. It was clear that he had read Kirsty's narrative assessment strings prior to the meeting. Sam's use of information from the narratives supported opportunities for Kirsty to participate in learning discussions. Sam was less focused on impairment and more focused on present learning and future directions. Parallel to his responses the IEP meeting participants also focused on shared understandings of future goals rather than informing him about Kirsty's impairments. The impact of IEP members' preparedness on students' ability to participate in IEP meetings is recognized within this study as a possible focus for future research.

Considerations of Kirsty's participation in the two IEP meetings

The narratives of the two IEP meetings detail different levels of participation by Kirsty in the decision making process in those meetings. Within this work Kirsty's participation in her IEPs can also be understood as reflective of her participation in learning and assessment dialogues (Ministry of Education, 2011a, 2011c). A number of changes within our work with Kirsty supported her transformation from merely being present at her first IEP meeting to being a

participant within her second IEP meeting. Although these changes were not solely attributed to the use of narrative assessment many of them were made as we reframed assessment with considerations of student wellbeing, identity and participation in learning.

The transformative potential of narrative assessment for Kirsty

Meaningful inclusion recognizes the importance of students understanding learning, their roles within learning, and their ability to understand themselves and others (Bourke & Mentis, 2013; OECD, 2013). It connects learning to the experiences of the student (Bishop, O'Sullivan, & Berryman, 2010; Ministry of Education, 2009). Starratt (2004) challenges schools to enrich learning by instilling academic learning with connections to personal experience. He suggests that learning that is not authentic and responsive to the needs of students' lives or worlds is both inappropriate and unethical. Student's goals, values and aspirations need to be acknowledged within this work (Bourke & Mentis, 2013). Educational policies reiterate this view, valuing student participation in, and ownership of, their own learning (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2010, 2011a, 2011c). The reality for many disabled students in New Zealand is a lack of relevance and connection between their aspirations and goals, and the learning tasks they participate in (Bishop, O'Sullivan, & Berryman, 2010). Early childhood settings using sociocultural assessment can provide avenues for students to achieve access, ownership and legitimation within their learning (Cowie & Carr, 2009). Within this work it is suggested that secondary schools can achieve similar outcomes for students.

The use of narrative assessment strengthened Kirsty's opportunities to participate in learning in a number of ways. Kirsty was able to access the learning stories, to label some of her new learning, to suggest new learning, and to participate in her IEP meeting. For the first time in her school life Kirsty had stories, in print, symbols, photos, video and electronic books that demonstrated she was a learner. The books told her peers, her family, her teachers and specialists that Kirsty was making progress and developing skills she had not demonstrated in the previous year. Learning challenges were acknowledged as possible future learning goals. The learning stories contained identity descriptors that recognized Kirsty as a writer, a communicator, a reader, a thinker, a texter, a scientist and a swimmer. She knew what these words meant in relation to her learning experiences. Over the year she learned to spell some of these words independently.

These learning story strings also identified a future focus on learning so Kirsty had information about possible new learning goals. The learning process was made more transparent for Kirsty and for those supporting her (Absolum, 2006). Kirsty loved rereading these stories every day. She would go to her laptop first thing in the morning and open it up to access the stories. One of the first literacy skills that became evident to observers was that of Kirsty locating the folder on her laptop that had her learning stories, opening it, and reading the stories.

Kirsty was keen to show these stories to anyone who would listen, inviting peers or adults to sit with her. As she was listening to stories on the computer Kirsty would make comments such as “I write book” or “I text Penny.” This was a change from historical ways of working where Kirsty relied on adults to tell her what and how she was learning. Whenever Kirsty invited adults to listen to her stories we did so. We were able to ask her questions about her learning or to reiterate to her that she was using a new skill. Sometimes these conversations were opportunities to think about new learning. The accessibility of the learning stories helped to build connections between IEP goals, and learning that was occurring in and between home and school. This process helped Kirsty begin to make sense of her role in learning across contexts. She began to ask why or how she could or couldn’t participate in specific subjects, or events. She also began to verbalise the aspirations she had, with an expectation that school could help her to achieve these. An example was her determination to use her newfound texting skills on facebook.

Kirsty began to use language that identified herself as a reader, a writer, a person who could text, a computer expert and someone who had something to say. Kirsty began to recognize a learning goal. She started taking risks within conversations about her learning. An example is the IEP meeting where she identified a new learning goal for herself, expecting adults would support her to realize it. Kirsty began to demonstrate an expectation that she would be listened to and that the adults valued her contribution. She began to question adults about work and decisions being made on her behalf. This was in contrast to her historical stance of simply refusing to engage in some tasks, especially when she did not understand their relevance. Although her questions were challenging at times we recognized her use of them as a sign of progress in her understanding of herself as an active learner.

Over the school year Kirsty became more involved in commenting on her own work, and the work of her peers, as staff supported her to develop self and peer assessment skills. We taught Kirsty about her learning goals and what they meant. In this way we could support her to make sense of how and whether she could achieve them (OECD, 2013). We observed her growing ability to self assess – to recognize ways in which she was learning and to talk about these, linking these ways to possible new goals. An example that demonstrates this is that during the latter part of the year Kirsty made the decision that there were specific words she wanted to learn to spell. Each week she asked an adult to make a list of the words she said. The adult had to put the words in the left hand margin of a page in her book and Kirsty would copy the words until the page was filled. Often the words were ones she had needed to complete a classroom task in the previous week. Kirsty carried her lists around with her and practiced writing throughout the day.

Supporting student agency and participation through inclusive practice

Kirsty's growing sense of agency was supported by the use of narrative assessment. It was also part of a much bigger picture where assessment informed, and was informed by, pedagogical values and practices. The Educultural Wheel (Macfarlane, 2004) can provide a lens for critical examination of some of the ways this agency was supported within the school. The Educultural Wheel identifies culturally inclusive strategies premised on five core values. The values draw on the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. They support effective pedagogy and the principles of the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). The five values are listed separately in this work as successful strategies are identified. The values are recognized as being interrelated and as strengthening each other in the process of addressing school inequity (Macfarlane, 2004; Macfarlane et al., 2012). Figure 4 uses the Educultural Wheel to summarise many ways that Kirsty was supported to have a voice in her learning through the use of narrative assessment.

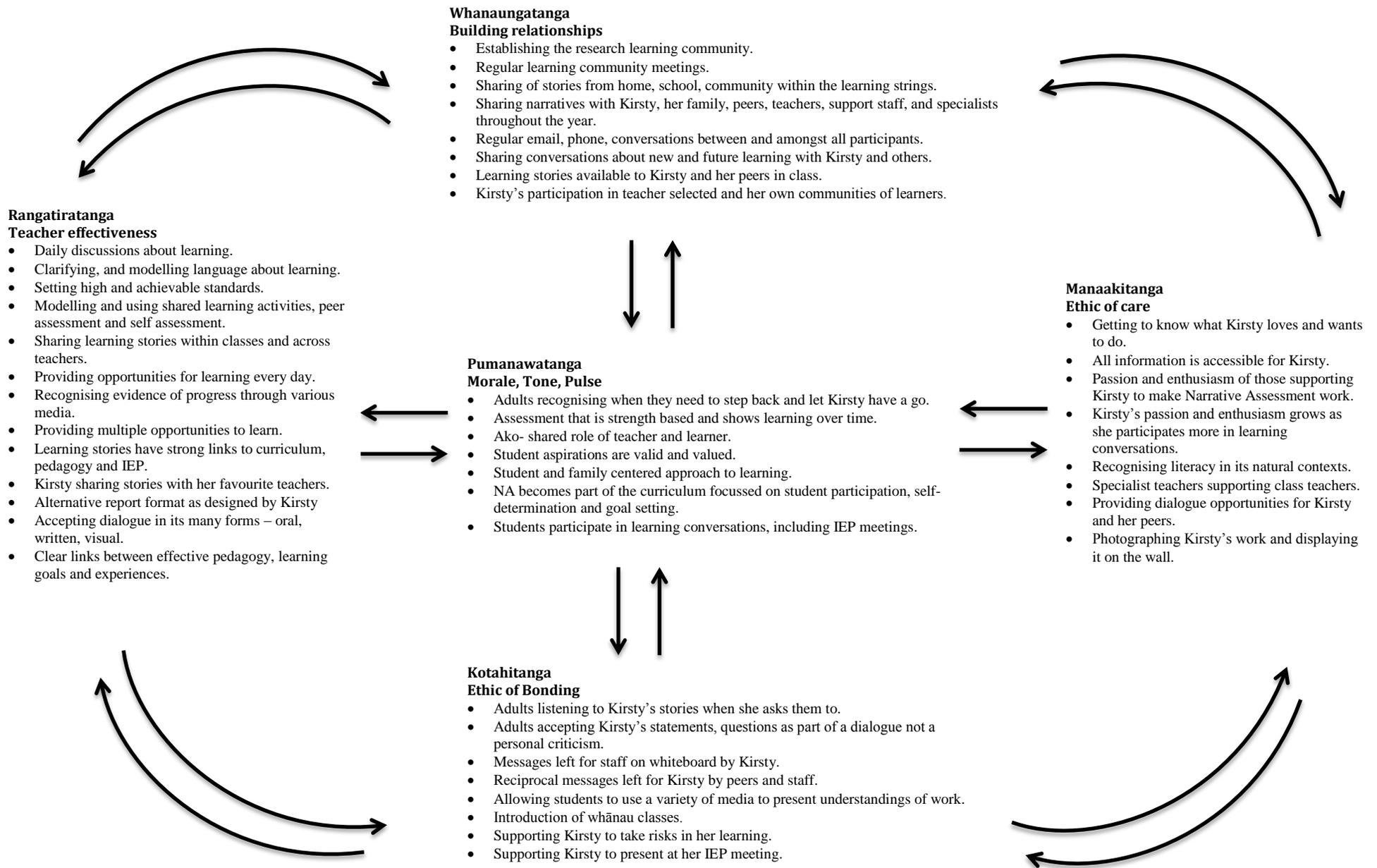


Figure 4: How did we use narrative assessment to support Kirsty's participation in her learning?

Whanaungatanga

Whanaungatanga is about building respectful working relationships (Macfarlane, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2011b). It is about partnership. Partnership is a principle of many documents and policies, including the Treaty of Waitangi and the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). It is recognized as a means of both furthering social democracy and increasing student achievement (Timperley & Robinson, 2002). Within this study relationships were recognized in many forms between and among family, school and specialist contexts. Family was pivotal to all decision making, with parental support recognized as influential and essential in supporting Kirsty's learning.

Relationships were at the core of our work together. We saw it as a professional responsibility to build many positive relationships including those with the students and between the students. Time spent building Kirsty's trust and our trust of each other was valued. This happened in many small ways on a day to day basis. We shared Kirsty's learning stories with her. We asked her about her learning. When she made statements about her learning, such as "I read that" we stopped and gave her time to demonstrate those skills to us. When other students passed comments about Kirsty's learning we stopped and listened to them too. We repeated those comments within classes so that the students would know we valued their input. The availability of learning stories within the classroom offered opportunities for peers to comment on learning, and their aspirations for their own learning.

One of our key messages was that everyone has a voice- that all students belong and that they are important to have a connection with. Learning stories also recognized this voice in contexts outside of the classroom. This was particularly important as Kirsty's learning stories began to demonstrate her growing skill at texting with stories from home and conversations among her friends. In many ways this information had the effect of depolarizing communication, supporting ongoing conversations between people within home and school contexts. It strengthened the relationships between all research participants. It also acknowledged that not all learning occurs in the classroom – that valuable contributions to assessment can be made by a variety of people who know the student well.

Central to whanaungatanga is the concept of trust. In the second IEP meeting Kirsty was able to demonstrate her belief that she was a participant who had something to say and she trusted that the adults would listen to her. She added a new goal that had not been discussed prior to the meeting and the adults responded by engaging in discussion with her and each other about this new possibility.

Over the year we began to recognize a variety of relationships that Kirsty had developed. Some of these were within teacher directed learning communities e.g. in a Physical Education or English class. Some were chosen by Kirsty e.g. choosing which team to work with in Science projects. Wider learning communities were established as Kirsty began to develop texting skills. She chose who she would text messages to and who could be her friend on facebook. Kirsty had a range of friends across the school. Some friends were from her primary school years, some from her form classes and some from the learning support area.

The research learning community was a hub from which all of our work was generated. New ideas were shared. We developed learning story frameworks that could work for us and for Kirsty. We discussed problems in our work, and identified better ways of working. An example is Kirsty's family's dislike of the school report format. Through the research learning community family and staff worked together to change the format to one that better reflected the students' progress and achievements.

The team supporting Kirsty involved a large number of adults. It was important to share information with everybody. We used email, phone, and everyday conversations to stay in touch with a focus on making learning better for all of us. We ensured the research learning community meetings occurred regularly and the agendas stayed true to a focus on assessment that supported student wellbeing, identity and participation in learning. We shared Kirsty's narrative assessments with all people involved in supporting her. This gave us the chance to provide outside specialists with strengths based information that revealed skills that may not have been visible to them within one off visits to assess Kirsty. In this way we hoped the information would also strengthen their assessment work.

An important consideration in our work was that Kirsty's narratives would be shared with wider family members, that they would get the chance to participate in and read the many narratives about their treasured sister, niece, and granddaughter. We also recognized this as supporting manaakitanga – the caring, nurturing relationships that families develop as they watch their children grow and learn.

Manaakitanga

Manaakitanga is about an ethic of caring. It is about relationships of sincerity, integrity and respect (Macfarlane, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2011b). Central to care is taking the time to get to know the student (Biklen, 2000a, 2000b). Kirsty was clear about what she was interested in and what she wanted to learn. At the beginning of the year we were aware of some of her interests, but we did not use this information well to plan further teaching and learning with her. Learning goals were centered on literacy, but we did not realize the huge potential of texting and social media to support Kirsty's aspirations of being able to communicate with her peers. Over the duration of the study we began to recognize the need to personalize her learning, to use as many modes as possible to build on the new words she was texting and learning.

Jane, who was Kirsty's specialist teacher began a dialogue journal. Each time they worked together Jane would leave messages for Kirsty at the end of the work they had done. Sometimes the messages were a form of assessment, a record of new learning or future goals. Kirsty responded to these messages by being able to state what she was learning and what she would learn next. Sometimes these responses were verbal, sometimes they were written. Jane's intimate knowledge of Kirsty supported her to decipher these messages as often they were difficult to understand. This dialogue continued throughout the project. There were many statements that acknowledged success, as well as requests for new things Kirsty wished to learn.

Another dialogue was demonstrated in the daily opportunities for Kirsty to use the whiteboard in the learning support area she visited before her school day began. Each morning when she came in she would add her name to the whiteboard as part of the student roll. On a number of

occasions Kirsty left messages for the teachers (such as her address and phone number or the names of Home and Away characters). Kirsty may have moved off to her regular class, leaving the teacher to discover the writing. Sometimes teachers wrote a response to her work and left it on the whiteboard for Kirsty to find.

Teachers often photographed the lists and messages, recognizing them as evidence of new learning. These photos made their ways into learning stories and on to classroom walls where Kirsty's new learning was acknowledged among her peers. The photos were shared in electronic format so Kirsty could use them on her computer in her writing. In these ways educators focused on recognizing all learning as significant. They thought about Kirsty's wellbeing, her feelings and her learning. Strong connections were made between prior and new learning so Kirsty was continually informed about her learner progress. At times Kirsty was able to make connections herself.

This support extended to working with Kirsty's teachers in regular classrooms. Some teachers were anxious about their ability to teach Kirsty. The specialist teacher worked alongside these teachers supporting them with planning and assessment issues. The presence of an extra teacher appeared to have a significant effect in the classroom. Teachers were supported to recognize new learning for Kirsty. This may have been as simple as Kirsty recognizing words she knew on a magazine page. When literacy was reframed in this way teachers began to relax, rather than put themselves under pressure to try and make Kirsty "fit" the cognitive domains of her Year 10 peers. At times this led to classroom teachers reframing their ideas about assessment so that more flexible approaches recognized learning. The ethic of caring extended beyond Kirsty to thinking about, and supporting, educators and others who worked with her.

Manaakitanga challenges us to think about the consequences of assessment, especially for those being assessed (Macfarlane, 2004; Macfarlane et al., 2012). Narrative assessment recognized Kirsty's strengths. It also recognized her challenges – as possible future learning. Rather than focusing on the seven sight words she could write at the beginning of the year we saw evidence, through narrative assessment, of more than fifty words Kirsty was using in her texting and social media activities. More importantly, the learning stories reflected how Kirsty

was using these new words – to argue with her parents, to request something, to keep in touch, to affirm, and to plan for a future event. This learning had purpose. It had strong connections to Kirsty’s world.

The learning stories that Kirsty and her peers were reading about Kirsty recognized her literacy skills in a range of natural contexts. Strong connections were made between Kirsty’s learning goals and her experiences across a range of contexts. We began to question the value and validity of assessment tools that recognized Kirsty as illiterate when we had evidence of a much more skilled writer. Some participants recognized this tension in the principle of protection evident in the Treaty of Waitangi. We began to understand how responsive teaching and learning challenges the harm we may unwittingly inflict on students through the assessment choices we make.

Considerations of accessibility to information are vital to student and teacher reciprocity. Information needed to be accessible to all students, including Kirsty. We needed to use our knowledge of Kirsty to rethink how she could make sense of the information we were sharing together. In many ways Kirsty had already understood this. She had sought help to make her own book to present at the meeting. She had talked with a number of adults about her learning and what she wanted to do next. She began to use Clicker 5 to clearly state her admiration for teachers, her need to find out something new and to identify peers who she wanted as friends. We recognized our responsibility to teach Kirsty to use Clicker 5 software in as many ways as possible as it provided her with future independent access to information and a means to communicate her views.

When information was accessible to Kirsty she had the opportunity to demonstrate her competence and us the opportunity to see what she was thinking. This information supported further learning conversations. An example is the provision of an accessible version of her IEP on her laptop. She could refer to this each day as she thought about her new learning. This transformed the learning plan from a twice – a –year document for adults in to a ‘living document’ (Ministry of Education, 2011c, p. 6) that was part of the everyday dialogue of learning. This also provided Kirsty with the opportunity to think about and ask adults about

following up decisions from the meeting. It supported her to recognize her progress and learning as she would make statements to let us know she had achieved a goal.

A further commitment to manaakitanga can be realised in our efforts to teach Kirsty how to participate in learning conversations, including an IEP meeting (Absolum et al., 2009). We needed to model participation and provide opportunities for Kirsty to participate in games and activities with her peers. We needed to teach her what goals could be and how they could be relevant to planning learning. These steps supported Kirsty to feel confident in conversations about learning. They developed trust between us and supported the reciprocity that manaakitanga demands.

Rangatiratanga

Rangatiratanga is related to teacher effectiveness. Within a secondary school students are taught by a number of teachers across curriculum areas. Within schools departments may be run in very different ways, determining how assessment is understood, valued and enacted (Hill, 2011). As Kirsty entered more classrooms support staff and specialist teachers worked to help classroom teachers get to know Kirsty and to make sense of her strengths and needs. Narrative assessment strings were shared with classroom teachers so they would have some understanding of Kirsty's skills and challenges. We hoped this would strengthen their understandings of Kirsty's growing literacy skills and provide a shared platform for our work together.

Many teachers had not taught a student who was working at level one of the curriculum. Some teachers felt unsure of what to do. Observations showed teachers relied heavily on teacher's aides to plan and assess the students. Over time Kirsty challenged some of these situations by bypassing the aide and asking the teacher something directly herself. Kirsty did have teachers who embraced her inclusion in their classes. They were observed to apply the same pedagogical approaches to all of their students, rather than focusing on what was different about Kirsty. This included setting high, but achievable standards; providing many opportunities to learn; making connections between prior and new learning; and encouraging reflective thought and action (Ministry of Education, 2007). What became clear in classroom

observations was that the teacher's knowledge of pedagogy and effectiveness appeared to influence the learning opportunities for Kirsty far more than her impairment.

Kirsty was very clear about who she thought was a good teacher for her. After her science lessons she would return to the learning area and take out her computer. She would make an electronic book about the science lesson. She knew that Penny (teacher's aide) had taken photos in her science class. She had learned how to download them from the camera and to insert them in the electronic book. The book would have the photos of the experiment or work the class had done. It would have simple text that Kirsty had written and then checked with one of the staff. At times these books were difficult to understand due to Kirsty's structure of language. However support staff worked to make sense of the text before Kirsty finished the book. She would print the book off and return to the science area, searching for her science teacher. Kirsty would present the book to him. The science teacher responded by engaging in a discussion with her about her science work. Kirsty retained an electronic copy of the book on her computer to revisit her learning in this class. The positive impact of this teacher on Kirsty's recognition of herself as a participant in learning conversations is evident. Once again Kirsty demonstrated her new found literacy skills to communicate her interest and motivation to her teacher. She was participating in another learning dialogue.

Kirsty benefitted from teachers who recognized and used co-operative learning strategies in class. Within these groupings Kirsty was supported by peers who had a deeper knowledge of a subject than she did. She also had the opportunity to demonstrate skills others did not possess. An example is in Science class when many of the students were squeamish at the thought of dissecting a sheep's heart. Kirsty took the knife and dissected the heart with little fuss, earning a new level of respect from her peers. Sharing learning together was a positive strategy for providing supported learning opportunities for all students. It reinforced the interrelated nature of learning. Many of Kirsty's learning stories involved a range of peers.

The use of learning stories supported this work as we labeled many of the skills that Kirsty was demonstrating within these narratives. Kirsty revisited these stories constantly. We were teaching her the labels of learning through the books. We were also demonstrating the high

expectations we had for Kirsty to our peers, other teachers and support staff in the school. Kirsty had also been part of many day to day conversations about her learning and possible new goals within some of her classes. We were using the labels of learning with Kirsty and her peers. Over time we began to observe them using the same labels with each other.

Narrative assessment made clear links between the curriculum's key competencies, learning areas and effective pedagogy and the day to day learning Kirsty was undertaking. It provided an analysis of learning, identifying effective teaching and learning strategies. Learning stories shared expectations of Kirsty as a learner, a participant in her own schooling, and someone who could plan next goals with us. Kirsty was positioned within a variety of learning communities that met a range of needs. She was able to co-construct learning with school, family members and friends as she began to make sense of literacy across contexts. Adults recognized the importance of being clear in the language they used with Kirsty so as to avoid confusing her about the learning that had occurred and the goals for future learning. This was important to Kirsty as she wished to know exactly what she could do and what she could learn next. The importance of dialogue in this process was recognized. Dialogue may have been in written, oral, electronic, visual or other forms.

The responses of educators to Kirsty's questions, statements and ideas were critical in supporting her emerging sense of agency over the school year. For example at the end of the year school reports were being written. Kirsty could not read her school report so it had no connection with her learning. She was aware that reports went home and her parents read them. She said to Jane her specialist teacher she wanted a school report. Jane replied that all the students would get a report. Kirsty stated that she wanted to do her own report and take it home. Jane was unsure what this meant, but supported Kirsty to make a report. The report Kirsty took home was an A2 card filled with photos of the many activities she had undertaken throughout the school year. Kirsty could speak to each of the myriad of photos, explaining what she had done. We perceived the report to be meaningful and accessible to Kirsty and her family. It was therefore a valid and valued assessment tool that recognized progress during the school year.

Central to teacher effectiveness was the ability to provide a responsive curriculum, with work that engaged Kirsty (Wansart, 1995). It was important to accept her attempts at writing as valued even when stories were difficult to decipher. When teachers provided Kirsty with a space to show she was a learner she repaid them many times over by writing notes and stories and practicing words from their subject area so she could be an even better learner. Kirsty thrived when she was given multiple opportunities to practice new skills (Ministry of Education, 2007). She would go home and practice writing she had learned at school. She would bring photos from home to include in new writing. In many ways she linked new learning with her experiences outside of school. When teachers fostered this she often responded by using a new word or skill. In this way a belief in Kirsty's competence became a self fulfilling prophecy (Biklen, 2000a; Snow, 2013; Wansart, 1995).

Kotahitanga

Kotahitanga is related to the ethic of bonding. This ethic recognizes the importance of being valued as a participant, as someone who belongs, as central to inclusive communities. The principles of partnership, participation and protection are embraced as values that support safe learning environments (Macfarlane et al., 2012). The New Zealand Curriculum is written in the belief that all students belong and are participants in learning (Absolum et al., 2009; Ministry of Education, 2007, 2009, 2011a). We knew Kirsty had struggled to make sense of being part of her new secondary school in her previous year. We hoped to support her to develop a sense of belonging as she worked through the school year of the project.

Kirsty's learning stories demonstrated that, across classes, there were many opportunities for her to work alongside peers who were supportive and who also recognized her as a partner in their learning together. When teachers used shared learning approaches Kirsty was more likely to demonstrate competence. Kirsty was observed to contribute feedback to her peers on a regular basis. She identified key friends in her classes, and often mimicked their working behavior so she would appear to be the same as them. Kirsty's sensory disability meant that she was best working at the front of the room nearest the teacher. However, if her friends were placed elsewhere she would move herself to be near them. This also meant that when shared learning approaches were being used Kirsty would automatically be in a group with them.

Adult participants wished to help Kirsty to take risks in her learning, but in ways that she would feel supported to do so. This was strongly evident in the second IEP meeting where we recognized Kirsty's nervousness about presenting her work, but we also had faith that she was capable of providing this information to the meeting participants. We recognized the use of the computer narration button as a prompt and a safety net that made presenting a less formidable task. Our faith in Kirsty was rewarded in the learning conversations that resulted from the presentation and her observed enthusiasm for discussing her new texting and writing skills. These examples illustrate Kirsty's emerging identity as a participant and possible assessor in her own learning (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2012; Wiliam, 2011).

One way that teachers supported Kirsty's sense of belonging was to accept her electronic work as a valid contribution. Many of Kirsty's year 10 peers completed posters and large amounts of paperwork for assignments. When students had to complete a research project Kirsty was able to do this using photos and simple text in an electronic format. In this way she could demonstrate to her peers that she too was learning with them. Teachers who responded to her efforts by showcasing her work alongside that of her peers supported her identity as a learner and her place as a learner within her school community.

A further school wide change supported Kirsty to feel valued. In the year the project was undertaken the school management disbanded the special needs classroom and students joined regular classes with their peers. All students in the school joined whānau classes – classes that were formed with a range of students across school years. This supported Kirsty to develop a range of friends she would not have had access to in her previous year. Whānau classes met every morning before formal classes began.

Every day in small ways Kirsty's sense of belonging was supported through adults and peers who stopped and listened to her, to her stories and to her reading her work, her latest new word or a word she recognized on a poster or in a magazine. Dialogue was critical to Kirsty's engagement in learning and her identity as a learner at secondary school. She loved that she could leave messages on a whiteboard, go to class, and come back to find a response. She

made very clear links to learning and communication. This was evidenced by her enthusiasm for leaving messages in school, at home, in her grandparents' house and to friends and wider family in the wider community.

Pumanawatanga

Pumanawatanga relates to the morale, the tone or the pulse of the school environments and relationships with its community. The school may be recognized as dynamic, as alive and responsive to its community's needs and strengths (Macfarlane, 2004). Pumanawatanga is about pride and passion – the excitement and enthusiasm Carr and Lee (2012) recognize in their work. For students assessment can be seen as a reciprocal process that recognises each student as belonging, as having a say in their own learning (Absloun et al., 2009; Ministry of Education, 2011a; Wiliam, 2011). Within this process teachers and students share their roles together. Clear links between the personal world of the student and the curriculum are made. In this way the curriculum may be seen as responsive to the personalized learning of students (Hipkins et al., 2014). Processes such as the IEP and its meetings and plans reflect a high level of student voice and participation. In such schools student agency and dialogue is valued as contributing to a more democratic form of education (McIlroy & Guerin, 2014).

Creating a supportive learning environment for all the students was a much larger task than that for the research learning community in this study. School management is pivotal to this process as systems and values are enmeshed in inclusive ways of working. During this project there were a number of unpredicted changes in senior school management. Teacher inquiry and dialogue with management was disrupted by these many changes and opportunities for reimagining ways of working together were limited. However, this study recognized some key values that informed our attempts at inclusive practice. These included valuing student and family knowledge and participation, developing a responsive curriculum, the use of strengths based assessment that values all students as learners, recognizing that we are all learners and teachers, and the need to value student aspirations.

Recognising the consequences of our actions on Kirsty's participation in her learning Student agency can be negated or weakened by adults supporting them (Absolum, 2006; Bourke & Mentis, 2014; Wiliam, 2011). A challenge for disabled students is that often there is a plethora of adults (specialists, educators, parents) who may determine goals for them. Kirsty was no different. At the time of the project a group of fourteen adults (educators, specialists, teachers' aides) were employed to support her learning. As Kirsty took more ownership, in and of her learning, it became apparent that adult participants also had to change their historical ways of working with her.

At times recognising Kirsty as a participant in her own learning was challenging for us. Her presence in an IEP meeting did not guarantee her participation. It was our responsibility to teach her how to be a participant and to show her ways that this could happen (Ministry of Education, 2011c; Mitchell et al., 2010). This meant us rethinking curriculum as we focused on teaching Kirsty the goal setting, participation and self determination skills that Mitchell et al., (2010) recommended. We often caught ourselves out as we reverted to historical ways of working where adults rescued Kirsty from decision making and learning conversations. It was much easier to tell Kirsty she was a learner than to discuss learning with her in a reciprocal manner.

The narratives we had developed sometimes showed us how our well intentioned actions were not always supportive of Kirsty's learning. We were challenged to think differently about what learning looked like for Kirsty, what achievement looked like, how curriculum could support relevant learning, and how pedagogy could be enacted. An example is Kirsty's growing use of texting literacy to communicate across people and contexts. The adults within the project began to reimagine some of their ideas about literacy and the skills Kirsty needed to demonstrate to be considered literate. Teachers who had formerly considered texting to be a poorer level of literacy acknowledged the positive impact of Kirsty's texting knowledge on her ability to communicate in more ways with people.

Within the research learning community we began to identify some of our own actions as barriers to Kirsty's learning. There was not always agreement about what could be a barrier

and what could be a supportive teaching strategy. At times what one participant recognized as inclusive practice another participant may have recognized as instilling dependency on an adult. One example is adults wanting to rewrite work that Kirsty had completed. At times adults may have ignored or rejected Kirsty’s attempts at learning stories as writing that was grammatically incorrect. When Kirsty needed extra time to think adults may have thought they were helping her by copying down notes so her work appeared to be complete, but Kirsty may have wanted to write something different to what was in her book. Adults had to step back and allow Kirsty to work in her shared learning groups allowing her peers in those groups to make sense of her communications and their ideas together. Adults could support this work as well, but we all found it much harder to step back than to step in. What was becoming evident to us were the many ways that Kirsty did not need our support or that we needed to change our ways of working with her.

Outcomes for Kirsty as a participant in her learning over the school year

Over the school year many aspects of learning and participation changed for Kirsty. Our use of narrative assessment supported these changes. This study recognizes these changes as supporting better outcomes for Kirsty as she was recognized as a learner who had something to say about what teaching and learning could be for her. At the end of the study Kirsty was recognized as being able to participate more fully in decision making around her learning.

Table 6 summarises these changes in roles and responsibilities over the duration of the study.

Table 6: Changes in Kirsty’s experience of, and participation in assessment and learning over the school year

| From | To |
|--|---|
| Kirsty as a passive learner. | Kirsty is an active participant in learning. She takes the initiative in goal setting. |
| Kirsty refuses to complete some work. There is little or no conversation about it. | Kirsty questions staff why work is relevant or important, needs to be done. |
| Assessment and learning has little relevance to Kirsty. | Assessment and learning are transparent to Kirsty. Assessment supports Kirsty to make sense of and participate in learning. She can make links between her IEP goals, her aspirations and her classroom work. |
| Learning goals are adult driven. | Learning goals are adult/family and Kirsty- driven. Kirsty is supported by adults to set goals. |

| | |
|---|---|
| No evidence of Kirsty participating in learning and assessment dialogues. | Kirsty dialogues through the whiteboard, learning stories, electronic books, verbal conversations. |
| Teachers and professionals lead assessments. | Kirsty, teachers and professionals lead assessments. Kirsty and her peers are learning to self and peer assess as part of learning conversations. Adults support Kirsty to make sense of these roles. |
| Assessment is sporadic and dependent on adult needs e.g. funding, IEP deadlines. | Assessment is a daily activity. Kirsty can access narratives independently in a readable format. |
| Kirsty is a disabled student with specific impairments that can make her appear too difficult to teach. | Kirsty is a reader, writer, communicator, texter, swimmer, learner who can work within the NZC. |
| Adults decide what can and needs to be done to support Kirsty's learning. | Adults support Kirsty to actively participate in decisions about her learning. |
| Adults tell Kirsty what and how she is learning. | Kirsty tells adults what and how she is learning. These are shared conversations between Kirsty and adults supporting her. |
| Assessments are largely summative and diagnostic, being completed by teachers and specialists. | Assessments are largely narrative and formative. Some are diagnostic. Assessments draw on a wealth of people providing information in school, home and community contexts. |
| No or very little linking between IEP goals, NZC and what Kirsty wants to learn. | Strong connections between IEP goals, NZC and what Kirsty wants to learn. |

These changes can inform more inclusive ways of working together in teaching and learning conversations.

Summary

This chapter has discussed student agency and participation. It has considered ways that narrative assessment supported Kirsty's evolving role as a participant in her own learning over the school year. A number of changes in Kirsty's learning outcomes have been identified. The use of the narratives about the IEP meetings in this chapter has allowed us to make visible some of the considerations and ways that educators and families working together can support student agency and participation. As participants with a learning community focussed on a strengths based and democratic approach to assessment we were guided in our work by the following questions:

- How do we work to create learning communities for and with our students?
- How do we support family and student participation and engagement?
- How do I share the roles of teacher and learner with my students? This includes establishing and supporting ways of co-constructing knowledge with my students.

- How do I recognize the uniqueness and potential of all students?
- How do I support open dialogues, even if they may challenge my practices?

This chapter has recognized the use of narrative assessment as a strengths based approach that can centre students within learning dialogues. Chapter 7 discusses ways that specialists responded to the narrative assessment we shared with them. The roles and responses of specialist assessors to the narrative assessment approach are critiqued with a focus on the Treaty of Waitangi principle of protection.

Chapter 7

Constructions of (in)competence

Introduction

This chapter discusses the research participants' perceptions of their experiences of using narrative assessment within the project. The assessment information was shared with the range of specialists completing work with Kirsty and Woody. Three narratives detail the specialists' responses to, and use of, the narrative assessment data within their work with Kirsty and Woody. The principle of protection inherent in the Treaty of Waitangi is used to critically examine the specialists' actions and their impact on the students and those supporting them. Possible ways of working together in the future are suggested. The chapter concludes with a set of questions that could guide educators, families/whānau and specialists in assessment processes that are both valid and valued by the students and those supporting them.

Discourse of Inclusion

This project was undertaken with a commitment to a discourse of inclusion (Skidmore, 2002). Adult research participants agreed that all students are learners with potential to engage in further learning within the New Zealand Curriculum. Pivotal to this work was a belief that learning is constructed through interactions within social contexts (Cowie & Carr, 2004; Paugh & Dudley-Marling, 2011), and that issues and challenges in learning and assessment would be investigated through curriculum and its responsiveness to student and community contexts. Student participation would be valued as pivotal to teaching and learning, with a long term focus on citizens who are “confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 8).

Throughout the project adult participants ensured narrative assessment was shared with all those who had an interest in the health and wellbeing of Kirsty and Woody. This included specialists who were based in the rural community and those who travelled from other districts. This information was strengths based, focusing on the skills and competencies both Kirsty and Woody were demonstrating in a range of contexts. We saw this sharing of the narrative

assessments as providing opportunities for us to reconstruct student identities with those adults who also shared responsibility for supporting Woody and Kirsty in advisory and assessment roles.

Adult research participants' views of their experiences of narrative assessment

At the end of the study the adult research participants had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences of narrative assessment and their perceptions of its use with the students at the school. The research participants described narrative assessment as *meaningful, valid, genuine, academic, collaborative, open, shared, positive, credible, functional, valuable, fabulous, evidenced, powerful, accountable, motivating* and *treasured*. The most common term participants used to describe narrative assessment was *valid*. As I collated data on the participants' comments I recognized the participants' perceptions could be grouped under the umbrella terms "*valid and valued*."

Adult research participants' perceptions about what makes narrative assessment a valid and valued approach

Participants were asked to explain why they perceived narrative assessment to be a valid and valued approach. They stated that narrative assessment

- shows you really know a student,
- demands people take the time to work at the students' level,
- challenges the sameness of inappropriate assessment choices,
- works best when people share information,
- reveals intelligence in different ways,
- is strengthened with the voices of peers, family, school staff, and specialists,
- shows constant (but not usually instant) progress over time,
- is linked and sits within the New Zealand Curriculum,
- is superior to rigid grade driven forms of assessment,
- linked to the real world of the students,
- builds cumulative knowledge over time,
- recognizes achievement, not failure,
- supports adults' understanding of assessment,

- reflects goals that are student driven,
- supports student and family participation,
- supports the student to recognize themselves as a learner,
- is in a language students can understand, and
- is part of a learning conversation with home and school.

Participants recognized the benefit of having a person who already knew about narrative assessment facilitating its introduction in the school. They saw that without this support they may not have felt as confident about using it within their work. They recognized that it took some time to make sense of how to use the narratives alongside curriculum and IEP goals to support learning decisions.

Sharing narrative assessment

As a group we, the adult research participants, were excited about the ways that narrative assessment revealed student competence. We made a commitment throughout the project to share all narrative assessment data with the adults who supported Kirsty and Woody. This included all IEP team members, the students' classroom teachers, and all specialists who worked with us as we focussed on Woody's and Kirsty's needs throughout the school year. We shared this information in the belief that relationships are at the core of learning and that the assessments carried out with and on the students could be enhanced by this new information. We embraced the concept of whanaungatanga, recognizing the value of sharing of information through collaboration (Macfarlane et al., 2012; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2011; Wearmouth, Berryman & Glynn, 2009). We also recognized specialists and other professionals as having information and knowledge that could support our work.

Intimacy is an important determinant for how we construct student competence and identity (Biklen & Bourke, 2006; Goode, 1984, 1992; Wansart, 1995). Specialists often meet and assess students within limited time constraints. This can compromise relationship building and the recognition of the student as a partner in the assessment process (Bogdan & Taylor, 1989; Macartney, 2009). The research participants recognized the sharing of narrative assessment information as one way to support specialists to gain a more intimate knowledge of Kirsty and

Woody. The narratives detailed information from those closest to the students. They revealed skills and competencies that may not be evident to an assessor who had never met the students before undertaking testing. Perhaps the narrative assessment information could provide specialists with a greater understanding of the students that their limited time could not realize.

There was a wealth of medical, academic and specialist documentation about Woody and Kirsty to tell us about deficits, but narrative assessment offered a focus on strengths and future learning. It is fair to say that the adult research participants made the assumption that the specialists who received the information would be equally excited to see examples of student competence and progress.

The use of specialists in New Zealand schools

Teachers in New Zealand working with disabled students are often challenged to make sense of multi agency relationships as support services are provided from a range of contexts (Saggers, Macartney, & Guerin, 2012). The delivery of support from specialists varies from one to one tuition with the specialist and student possibly withdrawing to an isolated area, to the wider ranging focus on developing more inclusive practice within the school community (Patterson, 2011). The inclusion of specialists in education decision making for disabled students can be recognized as an opportunity to share ideas about more inclusive ways of working (Booth & Ainscow, 2000). It can also be recognized as a continuing perpetuation of the medical model of disability where individual impairment requires remediation and schools are absolved of a responsibility for developing inclusive practices (Macartney, 2009; Rubin et al., 2001; Thomas & Loxley, 2001). These conflicting approaches can be recognized as situating specialist roles in the historical medical model or the more recent social / relational models of disability.

In New Zealand specialists are frequently involved in assessment processes with disabled students, their families and educators. Tensions may exist in ways that these individual people think the assessment should be undertaken, what its purpose is, how the assessment information is used and what the consequences are for those involved (Goldbart & Marshall, 2004; Saggers et al., 2012; Van Hove et al., 2009). While the medical and social/ relational

models all use assessment to focus on the uniqueness of the child being assessed, the purposes and consequences of the assessment differ markedly depending on the approach being used. The medical model approach values a diagnosis, possible label of disability, and remediation. Assessments are carried out by ‘experts’, rather than classroom teachers. The focus is strongly on the deficits of the individual child, rather than the impact of context. There are concerns that this may lead to a self fulfilling prophecy where impairment determines learning opportunities for the student (Ferguson, 2002; Valle & Connor, 2011). A further concern is the positioning of classroom teachers as not capable of assessing (and by implication, teaching) some students (Kearney, 2013, 2014; Patterson, 2011).

This project valued a sociocultural approach to assessment where information could be gained from many contexts (Cowie & Carr, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2011a; 2014a, 2014b). The assessment approach considers student participation, partnerships that contribute information from a range of sources, and critical reflection of the outcomes of the assessment for the student and those supporting them. It values the knowledge and skills of students, their families, educators and other professionals. Within this approach the teacher is valued as someone who has developed a relationship with the child and knows them well. The teacher is recognized as the central professional within the team supporting the child and their family (Macartney, 2009). Student and family knowledge is recognised as being pivotal to the assessment process. This challenges traditional roles and expectations in assessment approaches where the views of specialists have been valued above others (Ferguson, 2002; Macartney, 2009).

This study recognizes the potential for specialists’ knowledge, skills and understandings to support a collaborative approach to inclusive practice (Thomson, 2013). Specialist knowledge is understood as a resource that can support developing effective pedagogy and curriculum. Specialist knowledge is recognized as an opportunity to support teacher confidence and capability (Patterson, 2011). This can be realized through ongoing dialogue between teachers and specialists.

Specialist roles and input within this research study

Throughout the year numerous specialists visited the school to work with Kirsty, Woody and the adult research participants. The professionals were specialists from outside of the school who were paid through education or health contracts to provide services to Woody and Kirsty within their school setting. Some of these specialists were from government funded agencies. Some were contractors. Some specialists were employees of fundholder groups. This meant their employer was responsible for funding decisions made in relation to support for Kirsty and Woody. Some specialists were based in the rural area. Others visited from regions outside of the school's geographical area. Although one specialist visited termly most specialists visited once or twice a year. Some specialists made one off visits where no follow up was planned.

Specialists' responses to the narrative assessment information

There were a range of responses from specialists in respect to the narrative assessment information presented to them. Our assumptions about the enthusiasm of specialists were both realised and challenged. The following three narratives reflect ways in which specialists demonstrated whether they recognized any value or validity in using narrative assessment information within their roles. They also provide opportunities to identify and consider tensions in assessment practices for disabled students.

Narrative One: "Yes, but..."

During term four a specialist visited the school to ask for the latest assessment data completed with Kirsty. The specialist, Kim, had supported school staff working with a range of students with sensory needs over the previous two years. She was held in high regard by school staff. They recognized her as a professional who was focused on working collaboratively. They saw her as skilled, compassionate, and realistic about the day to day tensions inherent in inclusive practice.

The aim of Kim's visit was to secure the most recent information as an application for funding for the following year was to be made for Kirsty. All funding applications would be sent to Kim's employers as they were the fundholder for a group of students with specific impairments. Kim asked school staff to complete Progressive Achievement Test and Astle test

data. These tests focus on literacy skills. They are normative assessments that compare students with each other. Throughout her schooling Kirsty had been identified as an emergent reader and writer. This meant she would not be able to read the questions in these tests or be able to write the vocabulary required to answer any questions. These tests would identify Kirsty as gaining the lowest score possible. Kim had worked with Kirsty over a number of years and was aware of this.

The specialist teacher Jane, and ORS teacher Isabel were employed at the school to work alongside Kirsty. They had written three learning story strings based on goals around literacy and communication during the school year. These narrative assessment strings were passed on to Kim to use with the funding agency. Kim shared Jane and Isabel's enthusiasm for narrative assessment as she saw evidence of Kirsty's functional use of communication skills across many people and settings. She was positive in her reflections of the narratives and keen to include them as part of her data gathering for her employers. Kim reflected that the strings detailed a range of skills Kirsty had not demonstrated before. She also acknowledged that they described how Kirsty was using these skills in both home and school settings. She was able to identify levels of competence that Kirsty had not demonstrated prior to this school year. Kim recognised that the strings demonstrated that Kirsty understood her writing had a purpose – that she could convey a range of messages through words.

Kim was enthusiastic about the strings, but challenged by the system of data collection she had to follow. She was keen to use the narrative assessment data. However, her employers did not share her enthusiasm. They restated their request for national assessment data, specifically the tests Kim had originally requested from the school. Kim was torn between her belief in the strengths based narrative assessment and the request for what would be a deficit based normative approach. Although Kim recognised Kirsty's learning through the use of the strings she stated she would not be using narrative assessment in any application for funding. She said the funding agency (her employer) wished to draw all information from the narrow band of tests they had selected as meaningful.

Kim appeared to be unhappy about being put in a position where she could recognize Kirsty's progress, but she had been directed by her employers to request alternative data. She discussed the challenges and tensions she recognized in this situation with Isabel. She was trying to do her job well and felt conflicted about the position she found herself in. Isabel was sympathetic to Kim, but she was angry that the fundholder had adhered to what she saw as rigid, outdated and unethical assessment approaches.

Isabel recognized the confidence and belief she had in narrative assessment as giving her the strength to challenge Kim's employers about their assessment choices. She refused to complete any tests that would once again show Kirsty as a student who could not learn. She emailed the learning story strings to the fundholder agency. School staff were clear to Kim that they saw the PAT and Astle assessment exercise they were requested to complete as deficit based for Kirsty. Both Isabel and Jane recognized assessing Kirsty with these tests as unethical. They did not regard the assessment tools as equitable or fair. The school chose to submit narrative assessments rather than have Kirsty sit the tests.

Jane recognized that although she was confident using narrative assessment the request for normative assessment data had panicked her. She had started to question her work. She recognized that she had inadvertently placed the specialists' knowledge and request above her own understandings of teaching and learning with Kirsty. Although she was a confident and competent teacher she had felt less able and knowledgeable when the fundholder agency challenged her to revert to historical ways of gathering assessment data. She stated,

“Cos initially when I got the email that we've talked about, about wanting the assessment for Kirsty, I initially panicked and thought, I don't have that, you know, and then I kind of looked at it and thought god I haven't done this and I haven't done that, and then it wasn't until I kind of reread it and went, but I've got more specialised data, I've got more data that's more relevant to Kirsty than scoring a zero on the PAT test...we've got these learning strings that have gone along with her IEP goals ...I've actually got better data, than what you're actually, you know, asking for. But then also I kind of turned it around and thought, how ridiculous is it that you're asking me for this data where you clearly don't know the child, or her needs, or where she is actually at...they're requesting this data, and what are they actually using it for? And is it relevant, and is it purposeful?”

Isabel was adamant that the scenario the school found itself in was a further example of the wide gap between

“outdated specialist beliefs about being experts, relying on deficit based assessments” and “the real world of teaching and learning.” She admired Kim, stating that *“she was in a hell of a position, especially when she had to come and tell us her employer wouldn’t accept our assessments.”* However, Isabel was resolute that the fundholder agency needed to be *“dragged into the modern world, to be open to more inclusive ways of working.”*

Isabel suggested that the use of normative assessments could reinforce student deficits, and thus support and justify the continuation of the funding agency’s existence, stating

“the (normative) testing doesn’t say anything about Kirsty. Maybe that’s what they wanted because they weren’t open to looking at the stuff telling what Kirsty could do. The irony is that with the great resourcing and teaching, with the means to show progress over time we had a great thing going – and they didn’t value it.” ” She stated, *“It’s not hard to find an assessment that says I can’t do this. What is more challenging is to learn to look another way, to look for a different way of assessment that is better for the student and their learning. It may require a deeper responsive way of working from the teacher. If the tests don’t show what a student can do how can you measure progress? Cos that is what teaching is based on. What can they do now? What could be the next steps? How can we get there? kinda deal.”*

Narrative Two: “In and out.”

Late in the school year a team of three specialists visited the rural community we lived in to assess Woody. Woody’s family added my name to an email conversation with the specialist team so they would be aware of the work we had undertaken with Woody. I offered to share the resources we had made, including adjustments from previous assessments and the newly written narrative assessments. The team accepted this offer and our updated material was sent to them.

When the team of specialists came to the community the study took place in they also offered the opportunity for educators to attend courses focused on their area of expertise. This offered Margaret an opportunity to attend a course that would be beneficial for her, as a teacher’s aide and a relative supporting Woody. Two of the specialists were responsible for professional development courses while the third specialist would spend time completing diagnostic assessments with individual students. Unfortunately the course coincided with the time of Woody’s assessment appointment with the third specialist. Margaret wanted to attend the course, but was stressed by knowing that her intimate knowledge of Woody’s communications

and gestures would not be able to be utilized in the formal assessments undertaken with him. Woody had never met the specialist who would be assessing him. There was no planned pre assessment visit so Woody would be assessed by a specialist during their first point of contact. Margaret voiced a concern that Woody may be deemed as less capable because the specialist did not have any intimate knowledge of him or the ways he communicated. Margaret chose to attend the workshop for most of the day and then to excuse herself from it to attend the assessment appointment with Woody.

Following the assessment appointment Margaret came to see me. Margaret and Woody had met the specialist, Nick, and an assessment with Woody had been undertaken over a period of approximately two hours. Margaret was present for the duration of the assessment session. She had the opportunity to share her knowledge of Woody with Nick. She stated that she and Nick had discussed Woody's skills and challenges during the assessment. However, she expressed her anger that, at no point during the assessment did she observe Nick speaking directly to Woody. Woody had not been greeted by Nick. During the assessment Nick worked in close physical proximity to Woody, yet he did not speak to him once. Upon completing his assessment he did not farewell or thank Woody for allowing him the opportunity to work with him. Margaret stated that she felt insulted that Woody had been treated as if he was an object, not a person who was capable of understanding that he was being assessed.

Nick demonstrated to Margaret some of the actions that would need to occur for Woody to be able to access a resource in his wheelchair. Margaret expressed her outrage as she recalled watching Nick physically move Woody's body without his permission. Neither Margaret nor Woody had been advised that Nick was going to touch Woody. When Nick took hold of Woody's arms he was standing behind his wheelchair so Woody did not have any visual or verbal warning that his arms were going to be lifted.

Margaret expressed her anger that the assessment process did not place any responsibility on the assessor to explain to Woody what he was doing, why he was doing it, or to have to seek his permission to complete any aspect of the assessment. Margaret's words spoke of the violation she felt as she watched her family member treated in this way, "*I will never forget*

the way Woody was treated. I was so angry with the way Nick interacted with him. He didn't talk to him as if he was a person, as if he could understand what was happening. He was so condescending. Yet another person making an uninformed decision about Woody. To move his body without asking permission. That is insulting."

Margaret's comments reflected the anger she felt, but she did not challenge Nick about the process of the assessment. Over the next few weeks she revisited this assessment many times in conversations with research participants. At the end of the project she simply said that Nick would not be working with Woody again. Her family would not allow it. I asked her if she would bring up the issue with Nick. She was very clear that this was not the first time her family had felt violated by a professional's actions. She was adamant that for her family there was a balancing act between putting up with unacceptable professional behavior and getting the resources the assessment data could generate. Therefore she and they would not be talking to Nick. She did not want to jeopardise Woody's access to resources Nick's assessment could provide.

Within a month of the assessment appointment a follow up meeting was held to discuss the outcomes of the specialist team's assessment. The meeting was attended by a range of specialists, school staff, myself and Woody. I attended the meeting as a research participant.

Isabel introduced the meeting. Woody's presence was acknowledged by some participants. The first ten minutes of the meeting involved specialists talking and directing comments to each other about the referral request from Woody's family. Abbreviations unfamiliar to a number of participants were used in this conversation. The referral was discussed in terms of the criteria and roles of the specialists. Isabel walked over to Woody and talked to him about the meeting, explaining the agenda and the roles of the various people attending. She remained next to Woody for the duration of the meeting.

After ten minutes Isabel entered the conversation with the specialists and opened the discussion to others by asking for their points of view. The discussion continued to focus on terms and abbreviations that I was unsure all participants could understand. I sought

clarification of some of the language being used as I was unsure my interpretations matched those of others. One of the specialists responded immediately to my requests, taking the time to clarify and answer any queries. This supported all participants to make sense of the language being used. I requested an email be sent to all participants. I asked that plain English be used to explain strategies that could be utilised in response to questions from school staff about Woody's posture in his wheelchair and the best positioning of the resources that would be available.

The meeting conversation moved to a focus on various scenarios and challenges in working with Woody at school and in local community environments. School based staff were interested in how the recent diagnostic information could be used in the context of functional skills. A tension was immediately visible. Participants on the school staff (Isabel, Margaret) wanted to discuss Woody's strengths and challenges in the context of accessing learning opportunities. This became problematic. Some of the specialists did not consider these questions to be related to the assessment contract criteria. Instead the questions were perceived to be related to curriculum. In contrast to this view school staff saw the purpose of the assessment as relevant to all contexts, curriculum included.

The terms of the original referral for the specialist team's support had a focus on a specific area of skill. During the meeting any other issue other than this skill was deemed to be outside the scope of the referral. Some of the issues that were raised were identified as being curriculum issues and therefore outside the scope of the referral. The rejection or acceptance of the discussion was determined by the team of specialists who had undertaken the assessment, not by how the school staff or family envisaged curriculum or the specific area being assessed. If something was deemed a curriculum issue by the specialist the question was answered with the statement, "That is a curriculum issue." If it was deemed an issue relevant to the assessment contract by the specialist then a point of view was given. Although participants may have recognized their specific roles in assessing Woody there appeared to be little recognition of the value of listening and responding to information collaboratively. The inflexibility of the conversation boundaries made it difficult to sustain any meaningful inquiry into ways to support Woody across learning contexts.

During the meeting I asked what the specialist team thought of the narrative assessment information that had been provided. The information had been sent to all of the specialists attending the meeting. What did the specialists think about the ways in which Woody's skills were visible through this assessment approach? One of the specialists, Nick, had looked at the material. He made a positive comment about the narratives. However no link to its use and the work being completed by the contracted team was made. Another specialist commented that she hadn't seen anything about narrative assessment from the school. The meeting finished with a comment of thanks from the visiting specialists to the school staff and family, for the opportunity to brainstorm ways together.

Narrative Three: "I'll spread the word."

In term three a specialist, Lucy, travelled to the school to see Woody. Lucy was to assess a specific aspect of Woody's needs and then to meet with both school staff and Woody's family. Lucy had worked with Woody during the previous three years. There were times when she had worked with Woody with little success or evidence of competency. At the time of this narrative Lucy observed that she was beginning to know Woody well enough to challenge him in his work with her. Research participants acknowledged that Lucy had found it difficult to assess Woody, but she had remained committed to finding a way to work better with him. She had taken the time to work with family and to find out how they communicated with Woody. Lucy spent two days at school and some of this time was with Woody carrying out diagnostic assessments.

Lucy carried out diagnostic testing with Woody on the first day. After school she met with some of the research participants to discuss possible ways of working with Woody. At this meeting participants were able to share some of the narratives being collected for a learning story string based on Woody's use of communication in school and community settings. The recommendations Lucy made about the resources to use with Woody were not supported by the learning stories. Lucy recommended that Woody communicate choice through two large symbols. In the learning stories Woody was able to demonstrate an ability to make choices between four smaller sized symbols. This skill was evident both within the swimming pool

where Woody completed hydrotherapy twice weekly and in the school settings. Lucy was intrigued by this difference in observed competence. School staff invited her to join Woody and them in the pool the next day. She accepted this offer.

The next day Lucy was able to be in the community pool with Woody and observed him using those skills evident in the learning stories, but not evident in her diagnostic assessment. She worked with school staff and Woody using the symbols. Lucy was thrilled to see evidence of these skills and discussed ways of working to support Woody's new communication book. She offered to keep a conversation going between home and school to see how effective these new strategies could be.

The following week Lucy emailed to say that she wished to suggest to her employing body that they include examples of narrative assessment on their website so that educators, families and specialists could see another way of recognising students' strengths when traditional assessment may not. She asked if we would be prepared to share our narratives and Woody's family agreed to this. The national body replied that although it was interested its website could only be accessed by a small group of people – its members who were primarily family members of students with a specific disability. Lucy wished to provide examples to educators as well as family members. Lucy decided that she would “spread the word” as she moved around various schools and facilities supporting disabled students, and in her work with other specialists.

Approximately a month after visiting the school Lucy emailed a string of narratives about her observations of Woody working within school and at the aquatic centre. The narratives contained information from both her diagnostic testing and her work with Woody at the pool. Lucy asked Isabel, Margaret, Kate and I for feedback on the string and offered it to the school and family as part of Woody's assessment profile. The learning story string contained photos and text. It concluded with the following summary: “The collaboration between home and school (Isabel, Margaret, Jane, Kate, Annie) is giving Woody a purpose to learn to use his skills.”

Margaret and Kate recognised the actions of Lucy as contributing to a more robust and authentic view of Woody as a competent learner. This included their acceptance of her assessment as valid and trustworthy. They recognised the importance of an assessor taking time to work in different contexts with Woody. They saw Lucy's actions were valued by Woody, that she had gained his trust and therefore he would reveal his skills to her. They also recognized that this process had taken nearly three years (approximately nine visits) to reach this stage. Margaret stated,

“Well, (narrative assessment) it's just like another piece of the jigsaw isn't it in how other people are seeing him, and when they put their thoughts on paper it makes it specially valuable I think. We've known Lucy over these last two years and see it's taken her a wee while to get to know him and how he works and the way that she could work best with him, and it really gelled this last session... She's tried to other times and because she didn't get the response she was requiring for the test that she was doing, I'm thinking she perhaps thought that was a failure, but she persisted this time and she meant business. And for Woody too, he sees her differently I'm sure. A person that's prepared to get in the pool with him and hoon around when he knows her, he's learned her ways and prepared to work with her in the classroom.”

Kate reinforced these views, “...you've got to probably gain his trust like any person, before he will 'perform' for you I guess, I don't know whether that's the right word, but, before he'll show his ability, you know ... she's obviously found a way to break down that barrier that she was having problems assessing Woody, she's broken that down by getting into, down to his level and doing things that he's comfortable, like with the pool and that, and so he's obviously decided that she's alright.”

As an educator I recognized Lucy's report as an example of summative and formative information being used together within a narrative context. (Bourke & Mentis, 2014). It represented a new way forward for the research participants as both school and specialist used their knowledge of Woody to develop a stronger learner profile.

Considering the principle of protection within assessment

The Treaty of Waitangi is based on the three principles of partnership, participation and protection (Macfarlane, 2012; Orange, 2013). Within this chapter the use of narrative assessment and specialists' responses to this approach are considered within the principle of protection. The concept of protection can be related to rights and the Maori concept of mana. Mana is about integrity, respect, dignity and status (Macfarlane et al., 2012; Ministry of Education, 2011). The concept of mauri is important here. Mauri relates to the unique essence and potential of a person (Macfarlane, 2012). Both Woody and Kirsty had unique strengths and challenges. Assessment could recognize the value of their uniqueness, enhancing their well being and mana. This is not to say that challenges were ignored. They were identified and ways to support Woody and Kirsty were investigated. In this way it was their strengths at the fore, not the deficits in their learning.

The concept of protection in this work can also be understood in the relationship between the assessor and the student being assessed (Biklen, 2000a, 200b; Macartney, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2011a, 2014b). Manaakitanga demands reciprocity and respect – a belief in the humanness of us all. It demands us to question how we know our assessments are ethical, informed and support wellbeing (Macfarlane, 2012). If assessment is about better outcomes for students who is affected by unethical assessment? What happens to access to learning opportunities when unethical assessment denies competence? How assessors treat those people they are assessing is central to the quality of their work and the recommendations they make to those supporting all students.

The three narratives are critically examined in light of the following questions that focus on the impact of assessment within the Treaty of Waitangi's principle of protection:

- How is the mana of the students protected within the described scenarios?
- How is the mana of their family/ whānau protected within the described scenarios?
- How did these interactions strengthen or weaken the mana of all the people involved?
- How were the students' communication needs protected within these scenarios?
- How was advocacy for the voice of the child enabled within these scenarios?

Each of the narratives is discussed in relation to these questions.

How did Kim support the wellbeing of Kirsty and her family through her approach to assessment?

Kim struggled between the demands of her employer and the school. She identified narrative assessment as supporting Kirsty's mana – as recognizing her as a unique and valued person. Kim felt compromised and conflicted as she chose to follow her employer's instructions. Not only was Kirsty's mana ignored in the process of this choice. Her family's contribution to her assessment information was also ignored. The school staff's contribution was similarly negated. Within this situation the views of the specialist, the family, the school staff and the student were all ignored in deference to instructions from a funding agency situated in a different geographical area. Research participants saw this as decision making by an institution that did not have any interest in knowing, or understanding the consequences of its funding actions on Kirsty, her family or the school. As the institution was not in their geographical area adult research participants commented that decision making appeared detached and the funding agency disinterested in local initiatives that improved Kirsty's access to learning.

Isabel recognised this situation as an outdated funding agency justifying its existence by using normative data that would reinforce its student population as one that was incompetent and that continually required its input to improve. In this scenario the institution would view student competency as a reason to withdraw funding. However the choice of normative assessment would validate the student numbers needed for the institution to continue to exist. She struggled to identify any consideration of student wellbeing or the consequences of the assessment for students and their families.

Jane's mana was threatened when Kirsty's employers requested data that she had not seen as valid. She caught herself falling in to a trap of doubting herself as a skilled educator in response to requests from a specialist institution that had little knowledge of Kirsty in day to day learning. When Jane took the time to reflect on her work she recognized the request as "ridiculous", but not before spending considerable time stressing out about whether she had done her job well. Jane's original response reflects an historical expectation that specialist

knowledge is more valuable than the knowledge of those working and living most closely with Kirsty. It is a tension evident in the stories of parents (Bacon & Causton- Theoharis, 2013; Berryman & Woller, 2013; Macartney, 2009; Murray, 2000) working with professionals who assess their children.

School staff were incensed that their roles as advocates for Kirsty were ignored within the assessment process set up by the funding agency. They knew Kirsty. They valued her potential. They recognized challenges for her and they planned future learning goals with her. The adult research participants identified Kirsty as an active participant in her learning. They recognized her as someone who had something to say. The narrative assessment data reflected their holistic view of Kirsty as an engaged and motivated learner at home and school. Although Kirsty was not aware of it her voice, which was prominent in the learning stories, was also silenced in this process.

Research participants were strong advocates for Kirsty. Kim was regarded as a fellow advocate for Kirsty by school staff. This narrative revealed the tensions some specialists face in advocacy roles where their belief in social justice is challenged by the politics of their workplace. The actions inherent in this situation weakened the mana or wellbeing of all participants, including Kim. No-one at a local level appeared to gain any benefit from this scenario. If assessment is strongly linked to student outcomes this example demonstrates the impact of unethical and unfair assessment practices. There was no positive outcome for Kirsty, her family or school staff. Ironically Kirsty lost funding in this assessment process.

How did Nick and the team support the wellbeing of Woody and his family through their assessment practices?

As a researcher investigating inclusive practice it was difficult to observe the impact of some assessment approaches on the mana of family members and the student themselves. It was challenging to identify links between the enactment of a principle of protection and the assessment practices Margaret had described. Discussion of the assessment scenario offered an opportunity for educators, specialists disabled people and their families to be aware of and

rethink ways of working together that recognize the importance of the mana of all involved. Within this study that conversation did not occur. This thesis offers a starting point for further discussion in the hope that more equitable practices will emerge in future assessment practice. The assessment processes Margaret described devalued Woody as a human being. He was not recognised as a potential partner in the assessment process (Ministry of Education, 2011a, 2011b). There was no expectation of reciprocity or dialogue. Biklen (2000b) advocates for a changing role of a specialist as an all knowing expert to a person who is “a listener in dialogue with the other” (p. 351). He identifies the importance of recognizing competence through the context of communication methods and situations, and the student’s sense of agency. The narrative assessment strings demonstrated Woody’s communication skills across people and places. They provided valuable information for recognizing ways that Woody preferred to communicate. The team of specialists chose to ignore this information. In doing so the opportunities to use this information to make sense of ways they could work and connect with Woody were lost.

Woody’s wellbeing, his mauri was disregarded in actions (no matter how well-intentioned) that included not speaking to him, not greeting him, and taking his body and moving it around in space without asking for permission to do so. In the process his family’s mauri could also be recognized as diminished or violated. Woody’s family had to constantly trust professionals, school staff included, to respect Woody in their work with him. It was challenging to identify strategies within this assessment scenario that demonstrated ways Woody was respected as a partner in learning. I failed to see how his unique communication needs were recognized and protected within this scenario.

The use of language played a significant part in diminishing the mana of participants within this narrative. Within the meeting described in this narrative the continual use of abbreviations and specialized terms by some participants completely cut other participants out of any conversation. At times it felt like some participants did not need to be in the meeting – that it was about the work of some participants, and not about Woody or the wider group supporting him. The use of language rendered some participants as powerless and others as powerful, or more ‘expert’.

The language of the referral criteria and some professionals' interpretations of their responsibilities within the contract further diminished opportunities to support the wellbeing of participants and to recognize Woody's potential. This separation of curriculum from the assessment criteria within the meeting conversation was a barrier to opportunities for the meeting participants to use the collaborative knowledge of a wide range of skilled people to problem solve. Sociocultural approaches to learning recognize the interrelational nature of curriculum, communication and learning. A medical model approach to assessment did not. A disjuncture was evident between the two very different approaches to, and purposes of assessment.

Research participants were strong advocates for Woody. We had worked hard to recognize his unique ways of communicating and learning, and to support him in new learning. The narrative assessment strings were evidence of his progress over the school year. We had proudly shared this evidence of learning with the specialist team. The lack of acknowledgement or sighting of the narrative assessment work that had been undertaken and passed on to all people supporting Woody's learning sent a message to research participants that this work was not as valued by the specialists as the diagnostic assessments that they had undertaken. It appeared that narrative assessment was relegated by the specialists to a positive, but unscientific or unclinical understanding of Woody. There was no recognition of the clear links between curriculum and communication that were so important to research participants. As advocates for Woody we felt the learning opportunities we had described were dismissed as irrelevant, yet they could have supported a much deeper understanding of Woody's skills.

This narrative demonstrates the power that specialists and teachers can wield over families, intentionally or not (Kearney, 2014; Macartney, 2008; McLean, Andraschko, Elsworth, Harris, Selvaraj & Webster, 2014; Murray, 2000). Woody's family made the decision that they would not give permission for Woody to work with Nick again. Yet no discussion had taken place so that Nick was aware of this. Margaret perceived the consequences of such a discussion were too great as she considered the fallout for Woody. His family wanted him to receive resourcing. The assessment could possibly gain that resourcing. Margaret commented that this

was not the first time the family had to deal with unethical practice. She was picking her battles. The damage to both mana and mauri were irreparable. I struggled that there was no feedback to the service providers in this scenario. This meant the specialist was none the wiser about his behavior. The potential for developing more ethical ways of working together was not realized. Mara (2014) discusses similar scenarios where she recognizes that, regardless of being an assertive advocate for her disabled son she finds herself “emotionally involved and easily confounded into silence’ (p.126) when specialists ignore her and her knowledge of her son. In both scenarios specialists (working with good intent) are none the wiser about the effects of their ways of working on the student and those supporting them. Within this study the ‘challenge of silence’ is recognized as the family protecting Woody. It is also recognized as supporting the status quo. It does not provide an opportunity to confront or challenge disrespectful ways of working.

It was not clear to me whether some of the specialists in the meeting were aware of the impact of their actions on the wellbeing of Woody and those supporting him. The closing statement made by one specialist to thank everyone for taking the time to brainstorm together reflected a gulf in understandings of the meeting itself or its outcomes. Ministry of Education documents (2007, 2009, 2011a, 2011b) recognize the importance of student centered learning and assessment. These documents are strongly linked to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi - protection, partnership and participation This narrative demonstrates a lack of any understanding of the principles inherent in the Treaty of Waitangi, the New Zealand Curriculum, the Assessment position paper, and the Educultural Wheel – documents that inform this study. It is difficult to identify any positive outcomes for Woody or his family.

How did Lucy support the wellbeing of Woody and his family through her assessment practices?

Lucy was a specialist who was able to think about creating and finding contexts for experiencing competence (Biklen, 2000a, 2000b) despite ongoing issues in her attempts to engage with Woody. She demonstrated an openness to learn with and from us all. She was willing to problem solve and share information with us. Lucy recognized the power of narratives to honour Woody’s unique styles of communicating and learning. She considered

the information she had brought to our original meeting. When we challenged this information and showed examples of Woody's work through the narratives she was intrigued. She made herself available to join us in the swimming pool. She watched us in the swimming pool and then she participated in some of the activities herself. Woody was using the symbols board in the pool and we worked together with him. Lucy asked questions and we did too. We shared understandings of Woody's impairments and possible impacts on access to learning. Lucy's knowledge about specific impairments and our knowledge of Woody, the learning opportunities we were trying to create, and effective pedagogy were combined as we problem solved our ways through day to day issues in learning.

Lucy demonstrated a presumption of competence, believing that although Woody's communication could be challenging, he could think and learn. In this way she honoured his mauri, his unique potential. Lucy was respectful of Woody, asking permission before handling his body. She prewarned him when she was going to ask him to move a limb or if she would need to do this. She asked him questions and gave him time to respond. Lucy was also respectful of us as a team who had been working with Woody during the year. She added stories to those we had made and sent them for feedback. We were thrilled when she offered her stories for Woody's portfolio. Her actions made us think about new ways of using summative and formative data within narrative. In this way our work was strengthened. Our mana was too.

Lucy's attitudes and work reflected a level of respect, considerations of partnership and protection. She was happy to work in a partnership and was not affronted when we challenged her original work. Similarly we were happy to have our work challenged by her. The dialogue that ensued focused on strengthening each other's work with Woody and a commitment to joint problem solving. She respected Woody's communication needs and her final assessment data reflected a much more accurate picture of him as a learner. Family and school staff were clear they valued Lucy's input. She was appreciated as a specialist who could add much to our work together. Lucy's assessments were respected by research participants as meaningful and valid.

Lucy's work with us reflected a student centered approach that valued collaboration and a shared commitment to inclusive practice. Her actions reflected the principles of participation, protection and partnership espoused in the plethora of legislation and education policies. Research participants noted that they felt relaxed enough to talk about the mistakes they had made with Lucy and that their work was recognized for the complexity and unpredictable nature that learning with Woody could be. Lucy supported the mana and wellbeing of all the participants and we believed that we also strengthened her mana. It felt as though we were advocates together for better outcomes for Woody. It is fair to say that we considered ourselves as a team supporting Woody rather than a "them and us" context. The team offered us opportunities to challenge work and to imagine better ways of working in the future. It also supported a collaborative understanding and commitment to advocacy for Woody's voice to be heard in his learning.

Lucy's use of our narrative assessment information and her subsequent story string sent a strong message to us that she valued our work and that she endorsed a sociocultural approach to assessment. She was able to combine both her diagnostic information and the use of narrative to reflect on Woody's current strengths and future learning. In this way Lucy honoured our work and Woody's continuing learning. She also demonstrated how a range of assessment approaches can be used together to plan for future learning.

Tensions in practice that supports strengths based assessment

Over the course of the year a number of tensions became apparent as specialists, school staff and family worked with students. One of the first issues we recognized was the contrast in the language we were using to describe the students. As we considered the principle of protection the use of language became an important consideration in the impact of our work with Kirsty, Woody and their peers. A second challenge was the ways in which some specialists and other educators rejected or ignored the information we shared with them.

Language used to support beliefs in learning potential

Paugh and Dudley-Marling (2011) discuss the way disabled students are talked about as being critical in supporting the separation of curriculum and instruction for them and their

nondisabled peers. Within narrative assessment work in this project at various times Kirsty and Woody were identified in a number of learner roles. These included writer, thinker, choice maker, swimmer, reader, learner, communicator, joker, problem solver, debater, friend, looking, searching, self managing, decision maker and texter. Student accessible copies of learning stories used statements such as “I can solve problems on my own,” “I can make choices,” “Now I am learning to...,” “When I take a symbol I am making a choice” and “I can...”. Kirsty was able to write her own book where sentences started with “I can...”, “I am...” and “I want...”. The terms recognized learning as a social activity within contexts, with many of the roles being reciprocal. The terms also reflected educator and family understandings of the students’ perspectives and ways of experiencing the world (Biklen, 2000a, 2000b).

The use of language by specialists and teachers within this project both supported and challenged discourses of deficit. Neither specialists nor teachers were a generic group that responded in a united way to the use of narrative assessment and the language used to describe learning. Teachers and support staff within this project used words that framed Kirsty, Woody and their peers as learners. A number of specialists also chose to use these terms. Examples are Sam (who attended Kirsty’s second IEP meeting) and Lucy and Kim who appear in the narratives in this chapter. Not all teachers or specialists recognized Woody and Kirsty as intelligent or capable of thinking. The language some of the school’s teachers and the specialists working with them chose to use when discussing Kirsty and Woody’s learning was a clear indicator of beliefs and assumptions about learner competence. Sometimes these beliefs contradicted actions. For example, Kim spoke about Kirsty as a successful learner, but she requested information that would label Kirsty as incompetent and illiterate. Classroom teachers may have responded positively to Kirsty reading a book about their work together, yet view her as too difficult to assess or teach alongside her peers.

The language used by some professionals was medical and developmental in nature. Some of these terms meant nothing to participants who had not encountered them before. The language was strongly focused on Woody’s impairments rather than Woody’s use of skills. In this way the focus was on who Woody was in terms of impairment, and what perhaps he could expect to

be, rather than thinking about the ways his life, and learning, could be (Biklen, 2000a, 2000b; Bogdan & Taylor, 1989).

The lack of language used between the specialist and Woody during the assessment that was undertaken is recognized as a barrier to inclusive ways of working. At no time was Nick observed to speak to Woody. This could be interpreted as the specialist believing that Woody was not capable of understanding language or not having to know about language. In contrast Lucy worked with a belief that Woody could understand the language she was using. She framed his actions in terms of positive statements such as “Great looking, Woody” when he was observed to look at the symbol before choosing it. She observed how Woody reacted to her statements before making decisions about his competence. She also framed future goals in positive language with an expectation that Woody could achieve. Lucy’s report contained diagnostic terms. It also contained statements that identified current strengths and possible future goals.

The rejection of narrative assessment by professionals

In two of the three narratives described in this chapter the strengths based approach the school undertook was rejected by professionals who continued to work within deficit based approaches. Similarly there were some teachers in the school who endorsed narrative assessment and included it in their assessment processes while others ignored it. Like Paugh and Dudley-Marling (2011) participants found that it wasn’t the difficulty of teaching and working with Woody and Kirsty that was challenging - it was convincing specialists (some of whom were also fundholders) and some peers to focus on student success and capability rather than deficit.

This challenge was not always evident as a confrontational conversation or disagreement. Some specialists and teachers acknowledged the progress and achievement evident within the narrative assessment. They commented on specific skills the students were demonstrating that were not evident in previous assessments. However, they also chose to ignore this assessment data in preference to historical practices that constructed both Woody and Kirsty as learners requiring support to fix their intellectual, physical, sensory, and biological deficiencies (Paugh

& Dudley-Marling, 2011). For specialists this work was often cloaked in clinical or medical terms. For teachers this work was framed within a subject rather than student focused report and the wider National Certificate in Educational Achievement criteria. The broader school reporting system supported this historical way of working. What was also evident was the impact of teacher beliefs and assumptions around traditional assessment and a reluctance for some departments to want to change (Hill, 2011). Some teachers were challenged by the idea that they were responsible for the wellbeing of all students. Future research could focus on these two issues - ways to introduce narrative assessment with a wider range of students across subjects at secondary school level and how teachers make sense of their responsibilities for all students. These issues could help us recognise how our assessment practices impact on the wellbeing of students, further enhancing understandings of the consequences of what we assess and how we assess.

The narratives in this chapter demonstrate the precarious balance between the valuing and use of specialist, family and teacher knowledge in the assessment of disabled students. It could be argued that it is often the assessment or assessor that is more disabling than the impairment. This is particularly important when we focus on the outcomes of assessment for students. I would suggest that students' rights to a responsive education and the learning opportunities they deserve are supported or limited through the assessment we undertake and how we do it.

How can schools and specialists work better together?

There are some lessons that can be learned from the narratives presented in this chapter. While it is acknowledged that within this project some specific individuals had a positive impact on student outcomes through their assessments, many did not. A huge amount of resourcing goes into assessments undertaken with disabled students. This project would question the ethics of some of this work, especially in consideration of honouring the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. While assessment contracts may meet specific criteria these narratives raise concerns about micro level practices that can be considered harmful to student outcomes. As a team with intimate knowledge of Kirsty and Woody we offered specialists and teachers a range of learning stories with clear links to curriculum and IEP goals. These stories focused on a range of goals including sensory, communication, and literacy needs. These stories detailed

progress over time in many of the contexts where the students worked and lived. We recognized these narratives as providing an opportunity for assessors to understand Woody and Kirsty in many ways that may not be evident in their short time working with them.

This project has raised a number of questions that require further investigation. If getting to know a student is so valued in assessment processes (Ministry of Education, 2011a) why would specialists and teachers reject narrative assessment data that could help them understand the student better? Why would specialists reject information that could give them an insight that a one off visit could not? How can fly in – fly out approaches to assessment be justified as supporting learner needs when an assessor may not even recognize the unique communication strategies of the person being assessed? If families and school staff are ignoring these reports (that have been funded) because they do not reflect the contexts a child lives and works in what is the point of doing them? What makes an assessment valid and valued? By whom? If family do not value an assessment why is it being done? Considering the cost of undertaking assessments with disabled students where is the opportunity for family and students to provide feedback about the experience of assessment for them? If schools are working within a sociocultural approach to assessment how can one off assessments be justified in planning and decision making that ignores the strength of multiple voices and contexts? These questions raise concerns that require investigation at the macro level of education policymaking if changes that reflect a commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi are to be seriously considered in everyday education practice.

When Lucy shared in problem solving with school members everyone ended up with a better understanding of the impact of Woody's impairment, his current strengths and possible ways forward. A learning conversation had begun. In this scenario everyone's information was valued, but no one person's information was more important than another's. Why is it so difficult for some assessors to accept that their information is not to be valued above others, but rather it is a contribution towards a bigger pool of shared information? Collaboration respects partnership, participation and protection. Do we need to think about teaching these skills as people prepare for careers where they are working within assessment processes?

Many of these questions demand a rethink about the ways specialists, teachers and families work together. They also reflect the huge gulf between the aspirations of Ministry policy (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2011a, 2014a, 2014b) and the day to day practices in New Zealand schools. Assessments may fulfill contractual obligations, but where is the consideration of ethics, wellbeing and student identity? I would argue that in 2015 we can do much better.

Summary

This chapter has considered how the adult research participants valued their use of narrative assessment to support student identity, wellbeing and participation. It details the sharing of narrative assessment data with specialists and teachers. Three narratives present varying responses from specialists to the school's use of this assessment approach. The use of narratives in this chapter has allowed us to make visible some of tensions inherent in the ways that specialists, families and school staff work together. They also celebrate and recognise strong, collaborative relationships between schools and specialists as supporting inclusive practice. The following questions that guided our work may support more inclusive considerations within assessment processes with disabled students.

- How do we share information together, respecting and valuing each others' knowledges and practice?
- How do we pay attention to the language being used within assessment and its impact on students and their families?
- How do we support open dialogues, even if they may challenge our practices?
- How do we consider student and family wellbeing in our decision making around assessment?
- How do we develop shared understandings of what is valid, and valued assessment data? How does this understanding shape the way that assessments are carried out and the data is used?

Chapter 8 summarises the key points of this thesis, drawing on the discussions presented in the findings chapters. It makes recommendations for future assessment practices to support inclusive ways of working.

Chapter 8

The Inside View

Knowing how to address or support a student in class requires learning about the students' own perspective and ways of experiencing the world...The requested role of educators then is not to define who people are and aren't or, for that matter, what they can be expected to be, but to be supportive in seeking strategies that could foster an unfolding life. (Biklen, 2000b, p. 351)

Introduction

Biklen reminds educators to recognize the diversity of student capability, learning and possible life outcomes as they plan to teach all students. This includes recognizing the purposes and consequences of the assessment practices they undertake. Like Biklen (2000b), the adult participants valued knowing disabled students well as the most important strategy to support authentic assessment and learning. Adult participants took the time to know a student, to understand their experiences, aspirations and knowledges, and to use this information to strengthen learning. Biklen's challenge to educators is reiterated in this study.

Adult research participants in this study supported an investigation into ways that the unique potential of students could be recognized and nurtured through the formative use of narrative assessment. This is a critical inquiry into the ways that educators can support disabled students in secondary schools to realize their right to assessment that informs learning and development. Adult participants in this study valued knowing a student well, making knowledge accessible to all, working together, supporting the students and each other to be assessment capable, and the inclusion of multiple voices in assessment data. They identified the importance of being able to recognize and interpret student dialogue and agency in the many unique ways that Woody and Kirsty communicated and demonstrated competence. Student participation was shaped in response to adults' knowledges of the students. In this way the ability of adults to notice, recognize, and respond (Cowie & Bell, 1999) to the students'

ways of being and learning was critical to informing effective teaching, learning and assessment.

The principles of protection, partnership and participation inherent in New Zealand's founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi provided a framework to investigate the outcomes of our use of narrative assessment for the students and adults participating within the study.

In chapter 5 Carr and Lee's (2012) dimensions of progress supported participants to make sense of ways that narrative assessment can construct learner identity. Positioning Woody at the centre of the assessment process challenged participants to rethink notions of agency and dialogue. Understanding Woody's communications was pivotal in this process. Sharing information between home, school and community contexts was critical to making sense of Woody's competence as skills were often revealed in one setting, but not another.

A significant factor in this work was accessibility. Accessibility related to using the language of learning so that adult and student participants could make sense of learning conversations. Goals were explicit and communicated across participants with a shared understanding of terms being used. Accessibility also related to ensuring Woody had information presented in modes that he could make sense of, and read as many times as possible. Woody was able to demonstrate engagement in his own learning through his frequent revisiting of favourite learning stories. Symbols and learning stories were recognized as boundary objects that could be used and understood in many contexts to further support this work.

The participants' views of Woody as a student who was interested in his learning were reinforced by the observations of Lucy, a visiting specialist who was able to observe that the collaborative efforts of the adults supporting Woody were giving him a purpose to reveal his skills. This observation was further reinforced through the comments of Woody's peers who recognised the ways Woody understood the world and who noticed many examples of his new learning. Their comments often supported adults to notice, recognize and respond to spontaneous acts of learning.

Chapter 6 focussed strongly on Kirsty's participation in learning conversations and decision making. It provided examples of the many ways Kirsty was supported to make sense of participation. Supporting the development of Kirsty's assessment capability skills was pivotal. We needed to teach, model and provide many opportunities for Kirsty to practice self and peer assessment skills. Like Woody, Kirsty revisited her learning stories continually. She made sense of the terms that described learning. She began using them to comment on her own and others' work. Kirsty began to write her own stories and present them to adults for further discussion about her learning. When her efforts were recognized as participatory she repaid educators with a passion for new learning and opportunities to talk about what she wanted to know. Sometimes her efforts were ignored or not recognized as dialogue or competence. At these times it was the assessment capability of educators that required attention. Some educators were open to this new learning. Some were not.

Chapter 6 contrasted narratives of Kirsty's participation in her IEP meetings during the school year. The strength of relationships between participants was evident in the trust Kirsty placed in the adults supporting her as she made her aspirations clear. She trusted adults to listen to what she had to say and to respond in a way that acknowledged her learning goals. Her narrative assessment strings had been shared across people and contexts and Kirsty had messages from many people in her life that celebrated her current skills and future learning. It was crucial in this work that Kirsty's enthusiasm for texting was recognized as a valuable and functional means of communication that was not evident when conventional literacy assessments were used. The use of narrative assessment made these skills visible and reframed our conceptions of Kirsty's understanding of literacy and communication.

The adult participants recognized narrative assessment as student centered and focused on better learning outcomes for the students. At the end of the project the use of narrative assessment had extended beyond this project's participants to the wider group of students funded through ORS at the school. The participants were enthusiastic about their use of narrative assessment and shared information with specialists throughout the school year. It was hoped that the strengths based approach of narrative assessment could support specialists to recognize competence that may not be evident in the shorter times they spent with students.

Chapter 7 investigated specialists' responses to the school's use of narrative assessment with Woody and Kirsty. The principle of protection was used to consider these responses and their impact on student and family mana. This study supports Biklen's (2000b) assertion that specialist roles need to change from one of expert to one of assessment partner. This role change has assessor responsibilities for creating and finding contexts for experiencing and demonstrating competence. Within this study these are recognized as purposeful assessment strategies in contrast to historical deficit based assessment models.

When specialists, educators and families worked with students collaboratively the assessment data was more likely to be valued and recognized by participants as valid. Narrative assessment recognised competence as a relational process, valuing many voices and contexts. The relationship between the assessor and the assessed was recognized as determining constructions of (in) competence. When specialists valued single sources of diagnostic assessment data above the formative use of narratives, opportunities to recognize competence were lost. The unpredictable and unique ways that learning occurred in everyday practice were ignored in favour of assessments that may have had little or no link to curriculum. The narratives in chapter 7 acknowledge a variety of ways specialists work and respond to assessing disabled students. This study suggests that assessments that meet agency and department contract criteria, but ignore the principles of protection, partnership and participation perpetuate exclusive ways of working that do not honour the diversity of student learning. It argues that the purpose and consequence of assessment should be determined with consideration for the mana of the child (and their family) being assessed.

Our use of narrative assessment in this study was able to influence constructions of student identity and wellbeing through a high level of responsiveness to unique learner contexts (Ministry of Education, 2011a). This included paying attention to effective pedagogy and broader teaching practice as some of our (unintended) exclusive ways of working became visible. It was important that we paid attention to what the learning stories were telling us about our behavior and how we were constructing learner identities for ourselves and the students. Analysis of the stories helped us to shape future practice, including how to support the students to participate in meetings and decision making. We recognized the impact of

understanding literacy in many contexts and forms as essential to making sense of how Kirsty and Woody experienced the world. We used this information to make links to their IEP goals and the New Zealand Curriculum. This helped classroom teachers to make sense of what competency could look like at secondary school for students accessing literacy in unconventional ways.

When asked about their experience of using narrative assessment adult participants were adamant that it was crucial for them to have a facilitator who knew about narrative assessment. They recognized this as a strength of the project. Participants identified the collaborative learning community as an opportunity to share ideas and strengthen their understandings of narrative assessment. This helped them to make sense of the creation and analysis of assessment data, and links to pedagogy and the use of curriculum to support learning.

Questions that could support a way forward for families, educators and specialists working together to assess disabled students

In chapter one I identified key documents that informed this study. They were the Treaty of Waitangi, the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), the Educultural Wheel (Macfarlane, 2004) and the Ministry of Education's position paper: Assessment (2011a). Each of the findings chapters has concluded with a list of questions to guide educators and others working through learning and assessment processes with disabled students. The questions are recognized as being relevant in the teaching and assessment of all students. The questions have been identified as critical to our investigations of using narrative assessment to support student identity, wellbeing and participation. Table 7 lists the principles inherent in the key documents and the discussions within the findings chapters. The questions identified within the chapter summaries are linked to the key documents. They are intended to provide a guide that links considerations of partnership, protection and participation in assessment work.

Table 7: Questions to guide assessment processes and practices for all students

| Treaty of Waitangi principles | New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) Ministry of Education position paper: Assessment (2011a) | Educultural Wheel (Macfarlane,2004) | Questions to guide families, educators and professionals |
|--|---|---|--|
| Principle 1: Partnership Creating communities that value diversity. | Community engagement Recognising the potential of all community members. Sharing narratives and lived experiences. Quality interaction and relationships | Whanaungatanga Building respectful relationships with high expectations. Facilitating engagement How do we share responsibilities? | How do we work to create learning communities for and with our students? How do we support family and student participation and engagement? How do we share information together, respecting and valuing each-others knowledge and practices? |
| Principle 1: Partnership Principle 3: Participation Supporting student/family voice and engagement Shared responsibility for teaching and learning. | Future focus, Coherence Teaching with a focus on lifelong learning. Developing critical consciousness in ourselves and students. Student at the centre of assessment. | Rangatiratanga Advocacy Accountability Determination What are our shared commitments? | How do we support open dialogues even if they challenge our practices? Do we recognize and understand the purposes and consequences of the assessments we undertake with our students? How do we teach with a focus on preparing students for lifelong participation in the community? |
| Principle 2: Protection Supporting all students to access learning opportunities. | Cultural diversity, Learning to learn Experiencing the joy of learning. Giving voice to lived experiences and connecting them to curriculum. Building assessment capability. | Pumanawatanga Enabling potential Honouring uniqueness How do we recognize strengths and potential? | How do we provide multiple opportunities for students to show what they know and can do across contexts? How do we provide all students with access to learning opportunities? |
| Principle 2: Protection Considering student wellbeing in decision making around teaching, learning and assessment. | High Expectations Valuing intellectual and emotional ways of knowing. High (and reasonable) expectations supported by quality teaching. A range of evidence from multiple sources. | Manaakitanga Caring about learning and learners. Doing no harm. Using the head, the heart and the hand. How do we ensure that evidence based practice is ethical, informed and safe? | How do we develop shared understandings of what is valid and valued assessment? How does this understanding shape the ways assessment is carried out and data is used? How do we get to know and understand the skills and aspirations of the students we work with? |
| Principle 1: Partnership Principle 2: Protection Principle 3: Participation Participation and belonging | Inclusion Imagining personal and educative transformation. Being able to “walk in another’s shoes.” Curriculum underpins assessment. | Kotahitanga Enabling belonging, Achieving unity. How are we working together to enable belonging? Presence , participation, learning, achievement | How do we share the roles of teacher and learner with our students? How do we recognize the uniqueness and potential of all students? How do we pay attention to the language being used in assessment and its impact on students and their families? |

Issues for future research

As a participatory action research project the focus has been one of enhancing practice rather than providing answers. The narratives within this work have provided a platform for possible future investigations. This study has investigated the use of narrative assessment with students funded through ORS in one secondary school. The impact of its use on the students' participation in learning and the construction of learner identity has been detailed. The wider influence of its use for middle and senior management and possible school systems restructuring has not been investigated. This could be the focus of future research.

Research participants identified a number of barriers to the use of narrative assessment in the secondary school. These barriers are also identified as possible areas for future research.

Participants raised concerns about the impact of classroom teachers' attitudes and beliefs about assessment for all students. This was reinforced in the study through some departments being open to investigating narrative assessment while others were not.

At times participants were frustrated by a lack of educator understanding of communication as a basic right, not a privilege. The use of symbols was critical in some of our work. Some teachers saw them as babyish. Other teachers embraced their use. The teachers' actions impacted on opportunities for Kirsty and Woody to participate in learning.

Participants' perceptions of the variable responses from professionals contracted to support the students' learning is a possible issue for future investigation. This included a lack of attendance at meetings, unethical assessment procedures and a lack of collaboration. Some participants recognized this as "the norm" while others expressed anger at what they perceived to be a lack of care. Research participants felt let down by specialists and teachers who ignored narrative assessment information in preference to deficit based assessments. They recognized this as a lost opportunity for specialists to gain a more intimate knowledge of the students they were contracted to provide assessments for. Future work could focus on gaining the views of specialists who attend school meetings and undertake assessments with disabled students. Their perspectives could have added another layer of understanding to this project.

Implications of this research

This study indicates that narrative assessment can support the construction of learner identity for disabled students at secondary school. It can also support the active and authentic participation of disabled students within learning dialogues and assessment processes. This study suggests that assessments and assessors that do not value the student as a participant, a partner in learning are unethical and invalid. Family and school staff chose to ignore assessments when the assessor had not taken the time to get to know the student being assessed. Both students were recognised as having numerous impairments and were exposed to a wide range of specialists in any given year. Yet no attention appeared to be given to how these assessments were valued or used by those living and working with the students. When partnership was valued by assessors, school and family valued the work undertaken by those assessors. Given the amount of money spent on assessments over the years for both Woody and Kirsty this raises an ethical dilemma for professionals working with disabled students. What is the point of assessments that fulfill contractual agreements, but that do not reflect a knowledge of the learner other than in single contexts? What are the purposes and consequences of such assessments for students, their families and educators supporting them? Within the study we recognized how powerful it was for all participants when specialists, educators and family shared information and developed deeper understandings of Woody and Kirsty across the many contexts where they live and works.

As with all students Woody did not just leave it up to adults to decide what would happen in assessment contexts. He was able to demonstrate that when an assessor did not take the time to get to know him he was capable of making the choice not to engage in the assessment process at all. This begs the question of assessor competence – and its impact on how disabled students can be viewed through the assessor's practices. In this example the power of the assessor is unquestioned. The competency of the student is unrecognized, limiting opportunities for future learning.

We, the participants, focused on working with a belief in the competence of Kirsty and Woody to engage in learning with us. We acknowledged their impairments and set expectations that, with our support, both Woody and Kirsty could participate in learning conversations. Some

professionals supported us in this work. Some did not. There were tensions between professionals who worked within a medical discourse focused on individual deficit and those that worked within a sociocultural discourse focused on learning across contexts. These tensions were a barrier to collaborative working and problem solving. They require further examination if the principles of participation, partnership and protection are to have any impact on day to day education practice.

At the conclusion of the study the adult participants endorsed narrative assessment as a way forward in their work with Kirsty and Woody. They had no desire to return to normative and diagnostic tests that identified students as incompetent. This is not to say that these assessments do not have their place in schools. Participants recognized the value in a range of assessments, but they questioned what the purposes and outcomes of such assessment were for the students and themselves.

As well as having benefits for us as we examined our own practices this study can offer a starting point for those professionals and families thinking about how assessment can recognize the unique strengths of their disabled children/ students. It may offer insights on inclusive practice, assessment and learning conversations that support student identity and participation. It makes clear links between the IEP process and wider assessment practice. It may offer specialists the opportunity to think about the consequences of their actions for students they are working with. It may offer educators within secondary schools a means to recognize disabled students in their schools as the learners they are and can be.

For us this study has taught us how to reframe assessment, and in the process, reframe student competency. It has taught us to reframe our competency as assessors. It has opened our eyes to considerations of ethical assessment that will determine our future ways of working. In doing so we have drawn on the wisdom of others who have understood and valued the richness of diversity.

“Korerotia atu painga kia ngaro aku mahi koretake.”

“Highlight my strengths and my weaknesses will disappear.”

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Glossary

Ako: teaching and learning as reciprocal. We are all teachers and learners.

Collaboration: Working together to achieve a common goal (Carrington & MacArthur, 2012).

Deficit: a view that the problem is within the student rather than considering the role of the instructional practices at school or the organizational structures of the school system (Carrington & MacArthur, 2012).

Equity: Ideas and practices relating to justness, fairness, impartiality and evenhandedness (Carrington & MacArthur, 2012).

Key competencies: Capabilities for living and lifelong learning (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Māori: The indigenous people of Aotearoa, New Zealand.

NZC: New Zealand Curriculum.

Pākehā: New Zealander of European descent.

Pedagogy: Interaction between teaching and learning.

Professional: refers to relationships in a disabled student's life which involve payment by an education authority (Murray, 2000).

Secondary school: High school. Students commonly attend New Zealand secondary schools from the age of 13 – 18 years. Classes range from Year 9- 13 for most students. Some students may opt to stay for extra years.

SENCO: Special Education Needs Coordinator employed within schools.

Teacher's aide: paraprofessional. A teacher's aide supports a child's classroom teacher to include a child in everyday classroom learning and activities (Ministry of Education, 2014b).

Te Whāriki: The New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum.

Turangawaewae: The place where people walk, are connected to, their place of belonging.

Whānāu: Families/ family

Appendices

- 1 Learning Story Format
- 2 Interview Question Guide – beginning interviews
- 3 Interview Question Guide – final interviews
- 4 Research Timetable
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- 16 Woody’s Learning Story String – “What do I want?”
- 17 Framework for the use of narrative assessment in the school

Appendix 1: Adapted Learning Story format for use at Ivory Lake High School

| | |
|--|--|
| Section | Contains: |
| Goals | <p>IEP Goal/s</p> <p>Observations of prior learning</p> <p>Goals focussed on key competencies across learning areas</p> |
| Narratives | Narratives that demonstrate learning over time |
| The perspectives of people working and living with the student | What do family/ peers/ teachers/ specialists working and living with the student think about this learning? |
| Analysis | <p>Analysis – what learning is happening here?</p> <p>(Links to Key competencies across learning areas).</p> <p>What is the student teaching us?</p> <p>Where to next?</p> <p>Teaching and Learning (effective pedagogy)</p> |

Appendix 2: Interview Question Guide: First interviews

Thank you for taking the time to let me interview you for your thoughts about inclusion and assessment for people with special education needs. The following guide presents questions that will be asked during the interview. Some of the questions relate specifically to school staff or to family, but you are welcome to add thoughts about any of the questions raised. You are also welcome to add any additional information you would like during the interview.

Regards
Annie Guerin

What does inclusion mean for you ?
How does inclusion work for you and your family/ students?
What does assessment mean for you?
How does the New Zealand curriculum support your child's/ student's learning ?
When you think of the person you live with/ work with at school what do you think is important when we consider assessing that person's successes and needs?
What is your experience of assessment for your child / students with disabilities?
What does assessment within an inclusive environment look like for you?
What types of assessment do you use in your work?
What types of assessment do you find most useful in your work with students / as a parent ?
Do you think the IEP plays any role in the assessment process? If yes, how? If no, what purpose does it serve?
What, if any, professional development have you undertaken where the focus is on inclusion / assessment/ learning?
What motivated you to join this project?

In keeping with confidentiality and ethics issues within this research all participants will require a pseudonym. Can you please provide a name that you would prefer me to use in my work when I am referring to you and your participation?

Appendix 3: Interview Question Guide: Final Interview - November

Thank you for taking the time to let me interview you for your thoughts about various aspects of this project. After reading meeting minutes, your previous interview, and working with you this year I have compiled a list of questions that are a guide for all participants. You are welcome to raise any additional information you would like during the interview.

Regards
Annie Guerin

With your experience of participating in this project please comment on the following goals and issues that were discussed at various times during this project.

- Participants wished to use an assessment approach that recognises students who participate at level one of the NZ curriculum as learners.
- They wished to work together to develop reports and assessments that are of value to both school and family. Participants agreed that it was important that everyone working / living with the student contributes to the assessment process. Participants wished to use an assessment and reporting approach that did not rely on comparing students against each other, but on recognising individual challenges and strengths. Participants wished to develop assessment formats that linked the data of stories, photos and video to the NZ curriculum.
- How can we gather data and analyse it to show learning is occurring for students who do not read and write beyond level one of the curriculum?
- How IEPs can support learning?
- How do you think all students can be recognised as learners?
- How can we support students to see themselves or others as learners?
- With the experience of working with others to develop narrative assessments please comment on what you have found challenging about this way of working. What do you think are its strengths? How do you think it can work to support learning and teaching?
- How can assessment support the development of relationships between home and school / between school staff / within IEP teams?
- You have contributed to learning stories about individual students this year. Please comment on your role in this process.
- How do you see assessment practices can change to support the inclusion of all students in the future?

Appendix 4: Research Timetable

PhD Research Timetable: Annie Guerin

| | | | |
|-------------|---|--|--|
| 2010 | Terms 2,3: 1 June: Enrolled in PhD programme at Canterbury University. Preliminary Reading. Proposal submitted by 20 July 2010. References catalogued on Endnote by 31 August. | | Term 4: Research proposal accepted. Permission gained from possible participants. Interviews undertaken and transcribed. Data analysis undertaken. |
| 2011 | Term 1: Negotiation of model of all participants working together as a learning community. Provision of professional development focussing on narrative assessment with all participants. Time spent in school, home, community with students and their families, school staff working together to identify student strengths, possible learning priorities and assessment needs. Observations of students with peers, in class, in community, in family settings, | Term 2: Working in school, home, community with significant others as we support the students. Collaboration in developing some learning story strings. Two learning community meetings undertaken. July: Interviews undertaken and transcribed. | Term 3: Working in school, home, community with significant others as we support the students. Collaboration in developing some learning story strings. Two learning community meetings undertaken. Term 4: Researcher to withdraw weekly support. Observations undertaken in school, home, community settings. Attendance at two learning community meetings. November: Interviews undertaken and transcribed. December: Research diaries and other data collected for analysis. |
| 2012 | Ongoing data analysis, Writing up of thesis | | |

Annie Guerin
PhD Research

Appendix 5: Themes – Coding Chart

| Coding | Themes for Data Analysis |
|--|---|
| Student participation in learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising different ways of communicating • Recognising and supporting dialogue • Stepping back • Placing student at the centre of assessment |
| Partnership Working together | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and student driven goals • Teacher aide roles – teacher roles • Regular communication • Sharing language and goals |
| Wellbeing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valuing unique learning strengths and potential (mauri) • Being included with peers • Teachers who share information with students • Curriculum that supports/responds to student needs • Manaakitanga |
| Student identity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency and voice • Peer assessment and feedback • Using learning language • Changing environments to support student learning |
| Inclusive ways of working | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance and reluctance • Role of special teacher in classes • Resilience and commitment • Challenging school structures |
| Accessibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student accessible formats • Clarifying language for students • Sharing different modes for assessment |
| Student competence -Knowing the learner | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value of taking time to know the student • Drawing on family knowledge • Recognising |
| Curriculum | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsive ways of working (community, student context) • Teachers and curriculum • Curriculum underpinning assessment |
| Assessor competence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers' responsibilities • Specialists' conflicts • Narrow criteria for assessment work • Assessment practices that support special education traditions • Family and school historical experiences of assessment |
| Individual educational plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong links between goals and student's work • Everyday assessment • Clear links to learning • Respecting student aspirations |
| Understanding narrative assessment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of facilitation • Research learning community • Re-imagining reporting formats • Valuing information from a variety of people and contexts • Outcomes for students • Learning dispositions |
| Teacher competence -Inclusive pedagogy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpreting assessment information • Relationships between teacher and student (ako) • Formative assessment • Sociocultural approach |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responsibility for all learners• Understanding affective pedagogy• Re-imagining student capability• Recognising teacher assumptions and beliefs |
|--|--|

Appendix 6: Adult Participant Information Sheet

Telephone: 0xxxxxxx

apguerin@slingshot.co.nz

Date

The impact of narrative assessment on student identity for two ORRS funded students and those supporting their inclusion within a New Zealand high school.

Information Sheet for Adult Participants

Kia ora, my name is Annie Guerin. I am a teacher working in classrooms supporting students who currently receive ORRS funding. I am also a PhD student at the University of Canterbury. Previously I have conducted research into supporting a student with ASD in their local school and I have participated in the Ministry of Education's project Curriculum Exemplars for Students with Special Education Needs. That project introduced narrative assessment as a way of supporting the learning of ORRS funded students. I am currently interested in introducing the use of narrative assessment to those people supporting two ORRS funded students in their local secondary school. I would like to invite those adults supporting the two students to participate in a *community of practice* where we can investigate how this change in assessment affects the participants. The study will be carried out as part of the Doctor of Philosophy programme and my work will be supervised by Dr Missy Morton and Dr Alex Gunn who work at the University of Canterbury College of Education. I would like to invite you to participate in my study.

This project will take place over one school year and if you agree to take part you will be asked to do the following:

- * Be available for three interviews (approx. 45 mins each).
- * Attend a workshop on narrative assessment (approx. 1 day).
- * Attend five x 1 hour meetings.
- * Work with other participants to gather and comment on assessment data. This may include working with the researcher in school, community and/or family settings.
- * Use data collection tools promoted in the narrative assessment model.

During the project I would like to ask you to keep a journal which can record any thoughts, ideas, examples of successes/failures and any other information you think is relevant to the project. This journal can be kept on cassette tape, electronically or handwritten in a notebook.

Participation in this study will provide you with the opportunity to:

- Use new education resources and strategies.
- Receive professional development on narrative assessment.
- Meet regularly with other participants to identify success/challenges in using this

assessment model and to solve problems within a team.

- Share your experiences as a team member supporting the use of a new assessment model to address the learning needs of two students with ORRS funding.
- Work alongside the researcher in class/community settings to identify learning opportunities, construct narratives and link to curriculum and planning.

Please note that participation in this study is voluntary. If you do participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable.

I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for this study. I will also take care to ensure your anonymity in publications of the findings. All the data will be securely stored in password protected facilities and locked storage at my house and the University of Canterbury for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed.

The results of this research may be used to support secondary schools as they identify meaningful ways to support the assessment and learning of ORRS funded students. The results will also be reported internationally at conferences and in research journals. All participants will receive a report on the study.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me or my supervisors (email details given). If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the envelope provided by [Day/Month].

I am looking forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your contributions.

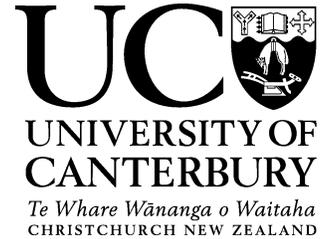
Annie Guerin

Appendix 7: Adult Participant Consent Form

Telephone: 0xxxxxxx

apguerin@slingshot.co.nz

Date



The impact of narrative assessment on student identity for two ORRS funded students and those supporting their inclusion within a New Zealand high school.

Consent Form: Adult Participants

I have been given a full explanation of this project and have been given an opportunity to ask questions.

I understand what will be required of me if I agree to take part in this project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any stage without penalty.

I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and that any published or reported results will not identify me.

I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the researcher's house and/or the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years.

I understand that I will receive a report on the findings of this study. I have provided my email details below for this.

I understand that if I require further information I can contact the researcher, Annie Guerin. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature _____ Email: _____

Please return this consent form to Annie Guerin in the envelope provided by (date/month).

Appendix 8: Board of Trustees Information Sheet

Telephone: 0xxxxxxx

apguerin@slingshot.co.nz



Date

The impact of narrative assessment on student identity for two ORRS funded students and those supporting their inclusion within a New Zealand high school.

Information Sheet for Principal / Board of Trustees

I am a teacher working in classrooms supporting students who currently receive ORRS funding. I have conducted research into supporting a student with ASD in their local school and I have participated in the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Exemplars for Students with Special Education Needs project. This project introduced narrative assessment as a way of supporting the learning of ORRS funded students. I am currently interested in introducing the use of narrative assessment to those adults supporting two ORRS funded students in your secondary school. I would like to invite those adults supporting the two students to participate in a community of practice where we can investigate how this change in assessment affects the participants. It is envisaged that the participants' reflections of the process may help to identify barriers to learning and/or successful strategies that promote active learning for students who receive ORRS funding. This study will be carried out as part of my PhD programme and my work will be supervised by Dr Missy Morton and Dr Alex Gunn who work at the College of Education at the University of Canterbury.

I would like to invite staff supporting the two ORRS students in your school to participate in my present study.

This study will take place over one school year (2011) and if the approached staff agree to take part they will be asked to do the following:

- Be available for three interviews (approx. 45 mins each).
- Attend a workshop on narrative assessment (approx. 1 day).
- Attend five x 1 hour meetings.
- Work with other participants to gather and comment on assessment data. This may include working with the researcher in school and community settings.
- Use the data collection tools promoted in the narrative assessment model.

Participation in this study will provide participants with the opportunity to:

- Use new education resources and strategies.
- Receive professional development on narrative assessment.
- Meet regularly with other participants to identify success/challenges in using this

assessment model and to solve problems within a team.

- Share their experiences as team members supporting the use of a new assessment model to address the learning needs of two students with ORRS funding.
- Work alongside the researcher in class/community settings to identify learning opportunities, construct narratives and link to curriculum and planning.

During the project I would like to ask participants to keep a journal that can record any thoughts, ideas, examples of successes/failures and any other information they think is relevant to the project. This journal can be kept on cassette tape, electronically or in a book.

Please note that participation in this study is voluntary. If staff do participate, they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If they withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to them, provided this is practically achievable.

I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for this study. I will also take care to ensure participants' anonymity in publications of the findings. The school and staff will not be identified in the study. All the data will be securely stored in password protected facilities and locked storage at my house, and possibly the University of Canterbury, for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed.

The results of this research may be used to support secondary schools as they identify meaningful ways to support the assessment and learning of ORRS funded students. The results will also be reported internationally at conferences and in research journals. All participants will receive a report on the study.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me or my supervisors (details above). If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to school staff participating in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the envelope provided by [Day/Month].

I am looking forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your contributions.

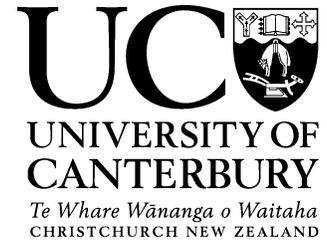
Annie Guerin

Appendix 9: Board of Trustees Consent Form

Telephone: 0xxxxxxx

apguerin@slingshot.co.nz

Date



The Chairperson,

Board of Trustees

_____ School,

Board of Trustees Consent Form

The impact of narrative assessment on student identity for two ORRS funded students and those supporting their inclusion within a New Zealand high school.

Researcher: Annie Guerin

We give our consent for the above project to be carried out in our school.

We understand that participation in this research project will be over one school year and that the project will not identify any participants or our school.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Appendix 10: Principal's Consent Form

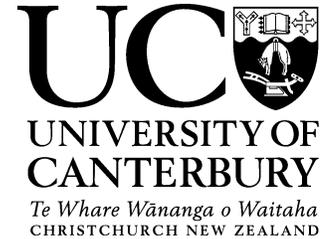
Telephone: xxxxxxxxx

apguerin@slingshot.co.nz

Date

The Principal,

_____ School,



Principal Consent Form

The impact of narrative assessment on student identity for two ORRS funded students and those supporting their inclusion within a New Zealand high school.

Researcher: Annie Guerin

I give my consent for the above project to be carried out in our school.

I understand that participation in this research project will be over one school year and that the project will not identify any participants or our school.

Signed:

Name:

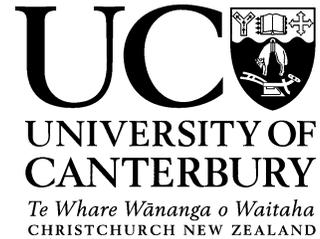
Date:

Appendix 11: Student Information Sheet

Telephone: xxxxxxxx

apguerin@slingshot.co.nz

Date



Student Information Sheet

Note this information will be converted to a visual programme with auditory feedback using Clicker 5 software or similar visual resources in negotiation with family. This information is shared with the student on many occasions during Term 1. The adapted book is presented in Appendix 15.

Dear _____

This is to tell you about some of the work your teachers, aides, family and I are doing to help us learn about how to help you.

Your parents, teachers, aides and I are going to be talking to each other and to you about some stories we will write about your work at high school. We will use photos and symbols in the stories. We will put them on your computer. The adults will be writing down information about what you do in school, at the Aquatic centre, at the supermarket and when you are with your family. This will help them understand about your learning.

We think your ideas are important.

You or your parents will sign a form to say that you/they think you know what we want to do and that this is okay with you. We will use symbols or cards to find out if you want to do this.

You can change your mind later if you do not want to talk (or point to cards/photos/symbols) about your work.

If you are worried and would like to ask a question you can talk to your parents, your teachers or aides. They will keep this private if that is what you want.

When we talk to other people about your work we will not use your name or your parents' names or teachers'/aides' names.

If you want to know more about this you can talk to your parents, teachers, aides at _____ School.

Thank you for listening to this information.

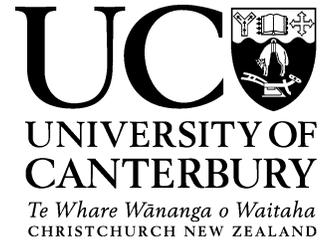
Annie

Appendix 12: Student Consent Form

Telephone: 0xxxxxxx

apguerin@slingshot.co.nz

Student Consent Form



This information will be converted to Boardmaker symbols and text or Clicker 5 programme with visual and audio feedback. The form will be dependent on family knowledge and the preferred communication tools for each student. The book is presented in Appendix 15.

I have watched the Clicker 5 book and listened to the story about Annie's work.

I know that:

I don't have to be in the project unless I want to.

Later on I can change my mind if I don't want to be on the project anymore.

If something is written about me it will not have my name on it, and no one will know it is about me.

If I ever have any questions I can ask Annie about them or get Mum or Dad to phone one of the project bosses to ask her.

No bad things will happen to me if I change my mind about anything to do with the project.

If I cannot sign this form, but want to be in the project Mum or Dad can sign for me.

I would like to be part of the project.

_____ **My signature**

_____ **Date**

I don't want to be part of this project.

_____ **My signature**

_____ **Date**

_____ **Parent Signature**

_____ **Date**

Appendix 13: Parental Consent Form

Telephone: xxxxxxxx

apguerin@slingshot.co.nz

Date

The impact of narrative assessment on student identity for two ORRS funded students and those supporting their inclusion within a New Zealand high school.

Parent Consent Form

My son/daughter and I have been given a full explanation of this project and both of us have been given an opportunity to ask questions.

I understand what will be required of my son/daughter if I agree that he/she can take part in this project.

I understand that my son's/daughter's voluntary participation is sought and that I am representing him/her through this consent form. I may withdraw my support for my son/daughter's participation in this project at any stage without penalty.

I understand that any information or opinions my son/daughter provides will be kept confidential to the researcher and that any published or reported results will not identify them.

I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the researcher's home and/or the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years.

I understand that I will receive a report on the findings of this study. I have provided my email details below for this.

I understand that if I require further information I can contact the researcher, Annie Guerin or her supervisors.

If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

By signing below, I agree to my son/daughter being able to participate in this research project.

I agree to my son/daughter _____ being able to participate in this project.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Email: _____

Appendix 14: Powerpoint for Narrative Assessment presentation to school staff

1/01/2015

Narrative Assessment

Making sense of assessment for all learners

Why?

- Traditional assessments have not shown all students working at Level one of the curriculum as learners.
- We have recognised those students as learners, but have not had any way of proving this.
- We wished to trial a different way of assessing these students.

1

What?

- We used narratives about the students working in different environments.
- The narratives were put together in a string of stories.
- The string is focussed on a current IEP goal.
- The string is linked to New Zealand Curriculum goals at level one of academic areas and/or key competencies.
- The string shows progress over time.
- No set time limit for the string to be completed.
- The string includes an analysis of skills evident in narratives and possible teaching goals for the future.

How?

- Adults in home and school use diary to record moments of learning.
- Use of video, photos, written samples of work.
- Adults email to key person so all accounts together.
- Team work together to link narratives to the curriculum and reflect on future learning needs of the student and the staff.
- Team produce learning story string together (1 hour together).

Student Voice

- We chose to make a version of the assessment in to student accessible form.
- We used symbols and simple text that can be read back to the student at the press of a button. Some books included video.
- We included the opinions of peers about skills the student is using.
- We included a new learning goal.

Where to next?

- We are using these narratives to inform IEP goals and teaching and learning practice. Information is shared with all IEP members including specialists not familiar with the student.
- To introduce this type of assessment to those teachers working in classes with these students.
- The parents working in this project have requested these narratives become part of a desired reporting format that makes sense to their families and shows progress over time.

What have we learned?

- Goals need to be simple and achievable.
- Clarify language so that everyone understands the learning and teaching being undertaken.
- Data is valid from home, school and community environments.
- Data is contributed by a range of people supporting the student and where possible the student themselves.
- Assessment can be a collaborative process where the responsibility is shared.
- We observe with a stronger sense of purpose, reflecting on our own practice in the process.
- Learning is not restricted to classroom situations. Generalisation of skills is essential for the maintenance of knowledge.
- Time used for completing the assessment is not any longer than traditional formats. However the information is more relevant than the not achieved status these students are often identified by.

Appendix 15: Adapted book for student participant

Annie comes to high school

Photo of Kirsty's high school

A book for Kirsty

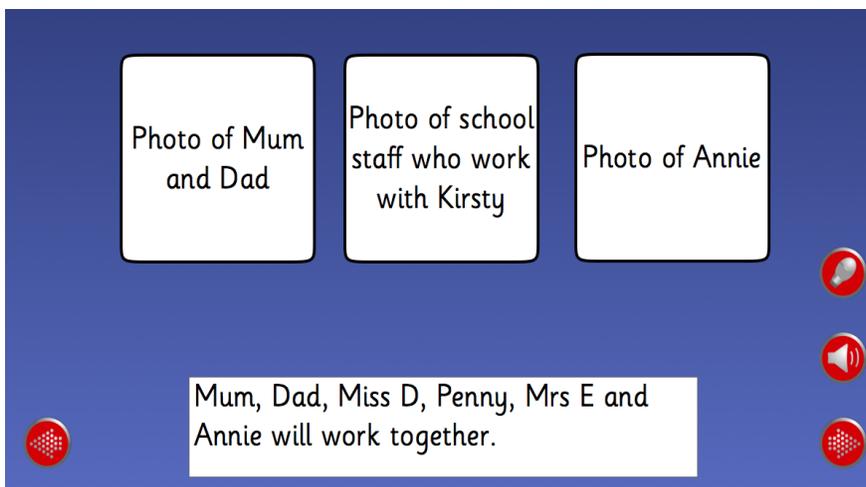


Photo of Mum and Dad

Photo of school staff who work with Kirsty

Photo of Annie

Mum, Dad, Miss D, Penny, Mrs E and Annie will work together.



Symbol of pen and paper

Photo of Kirsty's house

Symbol of camera

Symbol of camera

We will write some stories about you at home and school. We will take your photo and put the stories on your computer.

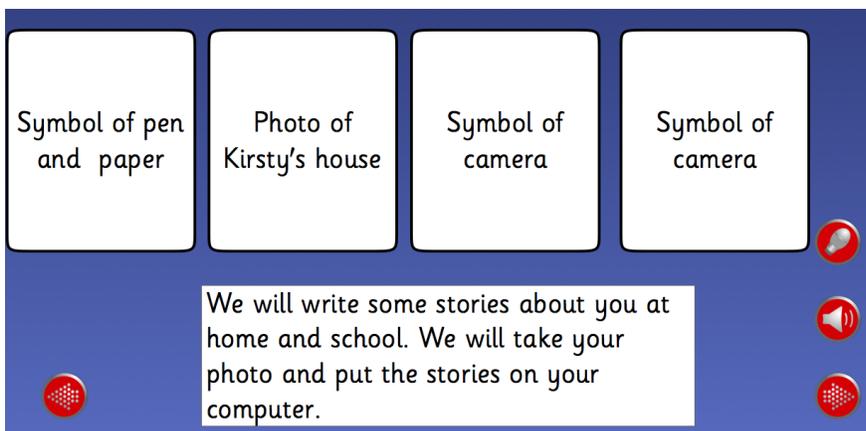


Photo of Kirsty working in class

Photo of Kirsty at the pool

Photo of supermarket

Photo of Mum and Dad

We will write stories about school, the aquatic centre, the supermarket and when you are with your family.



Photo of Annie

Photo of Kirsty

Annie would like to work with you.



Symbol of question mark and person thinking

You have a choice. You do not have to work with Annie. She thinks you are important and your work is important. She hopes you will work with her.

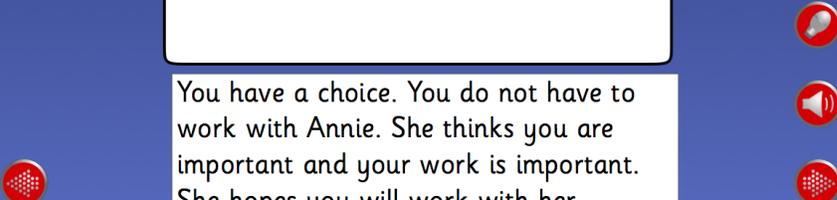


Photo of Annie

Yes symbol

No symbol

Do you want to work with Annie?

Symbol of two people working together

You can change your mind later if you do not want to work with Annie. No bad things will happen to you if you change your mind.

Kirsty

When we talk to other people about your work we will not use your name. What name would you like us to call you?

Symbols of person talking, one listening
and a person smiling.

Thank you Kirsty for listening to my
story.

Photo of Annie

From Annie

Appendix 16: Learning story string Woody: What do I want?

Woody: What do I want?

IEP Goal:

Woody will indicate choices using his hands to either point or give a visual to another person. Adults not familiar with Woody will be able to understand the choice he has made.

Prior Learning:

Prior to this work commencing observations show that Woody is eye pointing and gazing for choice making. This is recognised and responded to immediately by those familiar with Woody. It is a family request that choice making be more obvious to unfamiliar adults with a long term goal of independence/interdependence for Woody.

Key Competencies across Learning Areas:

Understanding language, symbols and text: Using visuals is one means that Woody can use to communicate his needs and wants.

Relating to Others: Woody is relating to others as communication partners, rather than a means or vehicle for supplying his needs or wants.

Level One English: Woody is learning to use symbols to communicate different messages across different audiences. This involves identifying the purposes of simple text across a range of places.

June

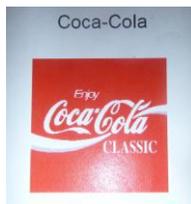
We have introduced two cards on a floatboard at the hydrotherapy sessions in the pool. The cards are symbols known to Woody. The cards relate to activities we do within the routine of being at the pool. When we are at the pool we ask Woody what he would like. We have the Spa card (the most reinforcing) and one of the exercise cards (not reinforcing). I am asking Woody to make a choice. At this time he is allowing me to put my hand on his as I model touching and grabbing a card from the floatboard. When we have made a choice we do that activity immediately so that Woody can see that communication is responded to quickly. Woody is looking at the cards for brief periods of time. (Isabel, teacher).

July

What a day! I was in the classroom at break and Woody was in his wheelchair near the table. I went to the fridge to grab my Coke. Woody looked at the drink as I poured it into a glass. I looked at him and said, "If you want some come and get it." He put his hands on the wheels of his chair and wheeled over to the bench where the coke was. He used his upper body to help move his chair. The students and adults could not believe it. For the first time, and after years of us trying, we saw Woody move himself in his chair. You must love Coke Woody! (Penny, teacher's aide)

August

Woody, Margaret and I were sitting at the table. We had a bottle of coke and a bottle of water. I asked Woody to look at me and he did. I picked up the Coke visual in my left hand, placed it in front of Woody's face and said, "Coke". Woody looked intently at the visual. I picked up the water visual in my right hand, raised it to be level with Woody's eyes and said "water". Woody moved his head to look closely at the visual. I interpreted this to mean that Woody could see both visuals clearly and that he understood what they represented. Woody looked at me. I said, "What do you want, coke (put visual close to his face) or water (put visual close to his face)?" Woody looked at both visuals and he eye gazed at the coke visual for at least 30 seconds. He did not raise his hands. After approx 45 seconds Margaret placed her hand underneath Woody's right wrist and he touched the coke visual. I gave Woody a sip of coke. We repeated this routine. Woody chose coke three times and water twice. When he was given water he pushed the bottle away. He laughed at us. We don't know if he was tricking us or not!



Everyone was eating morning tea. Woody had eaten his ham sandwiches. Woody's friend, Duncan came over to see Woody and he offered to help me with physical prompts when we offered Woody a choice of drinks. We got the symbols visuals out. I asked Woody what he wanted as I put the two visuals (coke / water) in front of his face, one on the left, one on the right. Woody looked intently at the coke symbol and then looked intently at the water visual.

His nose almost touched the visuals. He did not move his arm. After approximately one minute I asked Duncan to put his hand under Woody's wrist and he did so. Woody's hand immediately went to grab the Coke visual. I gave him a sip of Coke. I repeated the task changing the position of the cards. Duncan stood behind Woody. I said, "What do you want Woody?" Woody's hand shot up straight away and he grabbed the Coke card from my hand. Woody did not need Duncan's physical support after all! I was so surprised. Great choice making Woody! Woody got his sip of Coke as he had requested. We are amazed at your thinking and choice making Woody. Duncan and I think we might need to make more visuals so you can choose more things in your day. (Annie)

September

We introduced a page with three symbols on it. Woody scanned the page looking very closely at the symbols (Coke/ water/ milk). He gazed at each symbol for at least 10 seconds. Woody pointed to the Coke symbol and was given a drink as he requested. Great to see you reading and choosing from three symbols on the page. (Isabel, teacher)

At art, period 5 I showed Woody a palette containing six blocks of tempera paint. He first pointed to the yellow block using his right hand (his preferred hand when making choices). Yellow is his favourite colour. I got brushes, paper and water organised and asked what colour

he would like to start with, offering him the palette. He chose BLACK! This was on the bottom right of the palette. What a temperamental artist!
(Margaret, teacher's aide)

28 September

Although Woody has had quite a bit of time away from school today he was able to demonstrate some new skills in the aquatic centre pool. Woody was making clear choices from the three symbols on the board. He looked directly at the float symbol, and later the ball symbol before pulling them off the board. We did the activities that Woody requested in the order he had determined. (Isabel, teacher)



October

It was the school holidays. Woody and two his two brothers went to the pool with me. It was great for Woody's brothers to see him making choices about what he wanted to do. They loved that he wanted to do some of the same things that they did. They were so proud of him.
(Margaret as a relative).

What do Woody's peers think?

"Woody's favourite drink is Coke. He is good at choosing Coke, not water." (Hillary)

"It's a good thing that Woody can use visuals because he can choose what he wants. When he uses the visuals we can understand him. I think that is cool." (Katy)

"It is really easy for Woody to use symbols and to point to them. It lets us know what he wants." (Tina)

"It's going to be a good thing for Woody as he gets older because he won't need a trained person looking after him. Anyone will be able to understand what he wants."
(Duncan)

What do Woody's family think?

"It's good to see him (Woody) making progress. I think that sticking to the pointing and not worrying about (Woody) handing the card over is a good idea."

Kate (mother).

Analysis

Woody is using symbols to clearly make choices about his drink. He is also making clear choices about which exercise he will do using his hands to take a symbol off the board in the pool (Understanding language, symbols, text / Thinking). We believe that Woody is using symbols to communicate with others as he often laughs at us before he makes a choice we think he doesn't want (Level One English, purposes and audience). He also responds differently to various communication partners. He always laughs when his friend Duncan has the symbols. Woody was recently able to show Lisa (specialist teacher from outside of the school) his skills at selecting a choice from a visual menu and taking the symbol off the board.

For the first time since entering high school Woody is able to convey a choice using a symbol, to someone other than his immediate family. The choice of card is interpreted as a preference for Woody. Recently we have extended the choice of cards from two to four. This means we can offer more choices on one page. Woody appears to be coping with this extra menu.

What is Woody teaching us?

Woody is showing us that he is thinking. He can make choices using both his eye gaze and his hands for highly reinforcing activities and objects. We have learned to wait as sometimes he may gaze at both symbols for a long time before he actually uses his hand to choose a card. He does not always choose the card that he has gazed the longest at. We believe by giving him a longer period of time to choose he is showing us he is thinking about what he wants before he takes the card. As we have spent more time presenting choices to Woody he has got quicker at choosing. He has recently shown us he can give a card to someone else, although most times once he has chosen a card he drops it.

Woody is teaching us that he is comfortable in the swimming environment. We interpret his risk taking as him having a sense of freedom in the water. He is making definite choices and he doesn't always choose the easiest option. We interpret Woody's choice making as him understanding the symbols and communicating to us what he would like to do next.



We were in a meeting discussing Woody's progress in the pool. Isabel said, "I can't believe that we are discussing these goals when I think of how difficult it was for Woody last year. Last year he couldn't even sit on the side of the pool." Our goals are now focussing on the exercises Woody can complete and on him making choices about the exercises he wishes to do first.

Where to next?

Widen the range of communication options throughout the day and the different environments Woody lives and works in. Practise these choosing skills anywhere.

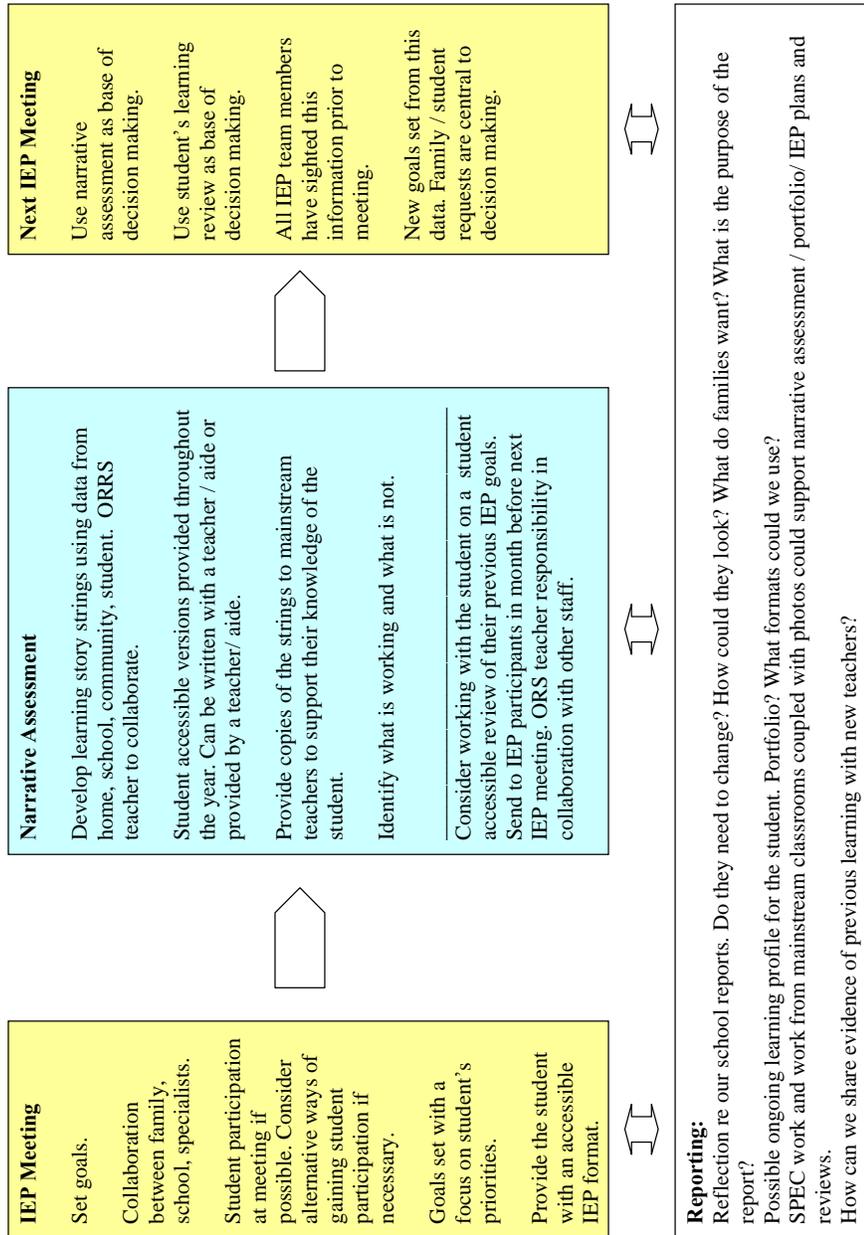
We (school staff and family members) are designing a communication book that we want to trial in school, home and any other environments Woody is in. We agree we think it is better to concentrate on pointing than having to give a card to someone. A further consideration is a *Yes / Stop / No* visual card that could be placed at any activity so that Woody can choose yes/ no responses or indicate to us he wants to stop and have a break. We would like to introduce this resource to Woody's peers and teachers and to those specialists who visit to support us at home and school.

Teaching and Learning:

Woody is encouraged by peers and adults to make choices, to let us know what he wants, and he is shown ways to use the symbols to communicate this. The learning environment is supportive and Woody is encouraged to communicate his needs at every opportunity. Adults and peers offer many opportunities for Woody to make choices as part of his daily routines.

Many opportunities are given for Woody to use his voice through symbols. We have continued to reinforce this learning by presenting stories about these skills in Clicker 5 format so that Woody can read them on his Toughbook. Woody is identified as a learner who has something to say.

Appendix 17: Framework for using Narrative Assessment at Ivory Lake High School



What does Narrative Assessment look like at Ivory Lake High School?

Formats:

* Assessment is presented in learning story strings that include:

- * A clearly stated IEP Goal
- * Prior Learning
- * Links to NZ curriculum
- * Narratives from different environments, people
- * Student perspectives if possible
- * Analysis
- * Reflection: What is ...teaching us?
- * Possible next steps in teaching and learning.
- * Assessment is provided in a format that is accessible to the student. Examples may be Clicker 5 books, portfolios, video.

What can we see and hear?

- Teaching and learning strategies that are working.
- Strong links to curriculum (academic, key competencies, pedagogy).
- Evidence of learning over time.
- Reflection: Are we proving a barrier to learning, inclusion, teaching? How are we supporting learning over time, generalisation of skills, family and student priorities? Are our IEP goals relevant?
- The voices of students, teachers, aides, specialists, family.
- A presumption of learner competence.

Beliefs that underpin this work:

- The learner is situated at the centre of decision making about his/her learning.
- Students should be encouraged to participate as fully as possible in their learning.
- As educators we need to reflect on our roles in supporting and interacting with all students.
- All people are learners.

Meeting notes: Annie and Isabel