Teachers' narratives surrounding challenging behaviour in inclusive classroom settings

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Abstract

Special education has undergone significant restructuring in New Zealand in recent years and the majority of students presenting with challenging behaviour are now in inclusive educational settings. This study investigates how teachers use narrative to make sense of challenging behaviours in their professional lives; in doing so it focuses attention on the importance of listening to teachers' voice. I argue that key episodes and epiphanal experiences inform teachers' practice when working with challenging behaviour and that narrative inquiry and the illumination of life experiences, encourages a sense of interconnectedness, through the sharing of stories.
Introduction: Background and context of the study

As a Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour, I work in a range of school settings with students who have specific learning and behaviour needs. The majority of students presenting with challenging behaviour are now in inclusive settings, but this has not always been the case. At one time, many of these students were in segregated settings, special schools and attached units. A turning point was the Education Act of 1989 in which all schools were instructed to accept students with disabilities, regardless of the type or degree of impairment. Although this legislation gave parents the impetus needed to lobby for integrated schooling for their children, the system was not at first adequately funded or geared for their admission (Beatson, 2000). The Ministry of Education’s (MOE) Special Education Policy Guidelines (MOE, 1995) and Special Education 2000 (1996) attempted to address these issues by restructuring the special education system, including the provision of significant additional funding. Schools have also been provided with itinerant specialist resource teachers whose role is to assist the classroom teacher in meeting the individual needs of each student identified as requiring extra assistance. One such new service established under Special Education 2000 is that of the Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour (RTLB).

Students with challenging behaviour are often referred to the RTLB Service by their classroom teacher or school principal and are identified as needing extra support in order to maintain them in an inclusive classroom setting. My role is a consultative one. I spend approximately 80% of my time liaising with classroom teachers, support staff, school principals and government agencies such as
Children, Young Persons and their Families Service (CYPFS), in an effort to find ways to meet the individual needs of the students I work with. Of the twenty two students currently on my caseload, eighteen have been referred for challenging behaviour. It is usually the case that students with challenging behaviour also have academic needs as their behaviour impacts on all aspects of their schooling, including the ability to form and keep friendships, to be part of a team, to feel a sense of belonging and to relate to teaching staff.

The purpose of this research project is to gain insight, understanding and appreciation of the issues surrounding challenging behaviour through teachers’ narratives, that will encourage us as educators, to respond. The use of narrative is a relevant approach for this study because narratives present us with “real people struggling with real problems” (Noddings & Witherall, 1991) and in doing so, provide us with the challenge to consider how we might react to their stories, perspectives and experiences (p.280). Middleton & May (1997) use life history methodology to examine how teachers develop their professional knowledge over time and in particular places and Donmoyer (1990) proposes that the value of stories and narratives make complex issues meaningful in a way that individuals can use. Indeed storying and narratives can be “truly tools of enchantment” (Noddings & Witherall, 1991) which we are able to critically reflect upon, but at the same time can touch our inner core and be all enveloping (p.279).

For the purposes of this study, I am interested in what teachers consider is challenging behaviour, how confident they feel in the management of such behaviour and how they respond to challenging behaviours in inclusive settings.
In the literature review that follows, I look at current special education policy in New Zealand, the meanings of inclusion, varying approaches to challenging behaviour and to those students who present with such behaviour and the effects of teacher characteristics on behaviour management.

**Literature review**

Special education has undergone major restructuring in recent years (Ballard, 1995; Biklen, 1995; Heshusius & Ballard, 1996; Lewis, Chard & Scott, 1994; Skrtic, 1995a). Guidelines introduced in 1995 and designed specifically to meet the special education needs of learners, state that learners with a disability, learning or behavioural difficulty may receive special education when they have been reliably identified as needing alternative or additional resources to those usually provided in regular education settings (*Special Education Policy Guidelines*, 1995, 1996).

There are currently two paradigms operating in special education in New Zealand. The 'traditional' *functional limitations* paradigm is based on a medical model and places emphasis on classification and individual remediation. Viewing disabled students as pathologically different through the use of this medical model labelling can be seen as maintaining segregationist thinking (Ainscow, 1997).

The emerging ecological, *inclusive* paradigm acknowledges the part environment plays in issues relating to learning and behaviour (Ballard, 1991; Biklen, 1995; Rigby, 1997; Skrtic, 1991). Within the inclusive paradigm, the primary problems facing people with special education needs are seen to be external rather than internal and adaptation of the environment is seen to be a necessary pre-condition...
for the successful inclusion of all students in mainstream education (Udvari-Solnar, 1995). This suggests that it is the responsibility of the school to bring about the necessary change in the learning environment in order to meet the needs of the student. Yet the term ‘special educational needs’ implies deficit and failure within students (Fulcher, 1989) and in doing so fails to address school organisational or teaching problems.

Both those that support and those who oppose inclusion would seem to be in agreement that there is nothing about ‘special’ education that is not already an integral part of regular classroom practice (Audette & Algozzine 1997; Skrtic, 1995a, 1995b). Special education is supported by a political framework that ensures students who fit pre-determined categories do not have their needs ignored, but rather, receive additional resourcing in an attempt to have these needs met (Abberly, 1987; Skrtic, 1995a, 1995b). However, there is a tendency to construct discourse around resources and ‘needs’ rather than student preferences and rights (Ballard, 1999). Recognition of these rights and preferences would require teachers to acknowledge the experiences, culture and differences, including that of impairment, that shape the individual (Booth & Ainscow, 1998) and in doing so, accept the responsibility of attending to the individual requirements of each student.

Inclusive education requires the organisational structures of schools to change to meet the needs of diverse groups of learners, including those students with challenging behaviours (Ballard, 1995; Prochnow, Kearney & Carroll-Lind, 2000;
Sktic, 1995a; 1995b). In saying this, students with challenging behaviours are by far the most heavily represented group in Canterbury’s exclusion and stand down statistics (Church, Ewing, McCombe & York, 1996), and the need for effective intervention and management of these students within schools continues to increase. There is evidence to suggest that disruptive behaviour disorders are the most prevalent of childhood adjustment problems (Bennett, DeLuca & Bruns, 1997; Ewing & Ruth, 1997; Lewis, Chard & Scott, 1994; Sanders & Markie-Dadds, 1996). Associated difficulties such as academic deficit, low self-esteem and low levels of tolerance often go hand in hand with challenging behaviour, as do poor social skills and difficulties forming interpersonal relationships. The presentation of behaviour difficulties in childhood can also be the precursor for adult personality disorder and the development of substance abuse (Erikson, 1997; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1993; Robins, 1991).

Students with challenging behaviour can be described as those that tend to engage in demanding, manipulative or anti-social behaviours which may have been developmentally appropriate at an early age, but are now no longer acceptable to teachers or peers (Church, Ewing, McCombe & York, 1996). Students exhibiting these anti-social traits are often lacking in the skills necessary for effective learning and can become the recipients of inappropriate attention from teachers and classmates (Prinz & Miller, 1991). Ritchie & Ritchie (1993) posit that comprehensive programmes in interpersonal skills should be made available at intermediate and secondary school levels in an effort to better equip young people to deal with the social, economic, racial and gender inequalities which currently lie behind much of the anti-social behaviour in society.
Bell & Harper’s study (as cited in Carr, Taylor & Robinson, 1991), maintains adult responses to the problematic behaviours of students play a vital role in the continuation of the problematic misbehaviour, that is to say, certain teacher responses may be reinforcing negative patterns of behaviour. This concept is referred to as ‘child effects’ (Patterson, 1982) and may be seen in classrooms where the student with a behaviour disorder and the teacher seem to have reached a ‘stand off.’ This usually involves the teacher refraining from making any kind of academic demands on the student and ‘turning a blind eye’ to other negative aspects of behaviour. In return the student will refrain from allowing their behaviour to escalate. In effect, the teacher learns to avoid interacting with the student with challenging behaviour in order to avoid being punished by further outbursts. On reaching secondary school, behaviours have often become increasingly deviant, the ensuing result often being exclusion from the school setting.

In contrast, Skrtic (1995a) proposes that schools could respond to students’ behavioural needs by reflective collaboration within the school community, with an emphasis on quality interactions between teachers and students and on the role of students in maintaining an inclusive culture. Through the use of collaborative problem solving, schools that value diversity embrace the need to include all students in a way that engenders creativity and flexibility, through culturally valued activities and educational goals (Ballard, 1999).
Examples of school wide intervention plans that have been designed to encourage positive patterns of behaviour, can be found in the literature (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Macfarlane, 1997; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Such interventions appear to reduce the likelihood of escalations in inappropriate behaviour. Research suggests however, that even when such intervention plans are in place and operating successfully, students exhibiting challenging behaviour still need individualised behaviour management programmes in order to experience success in the inclusive classroom setting. Moore et al (1998) state that flexibility, individualisation, building on strengths, and ability to work across settings are key components of inclusive education. Ewing and Ruth (1997) used similar behaviour management procedures with success, including the provision of a high level of structure and routine in the student's day.

Changes in teacher attitudes can result in positive outcomes for students with challenging behaviour. Cook, Tankersley, Cook & Landrum (2000), in their paper on teacher attitudes toward students in inclusive settings, report that teachers noted they rejected those students who displayed negative patterns of behaviour. Given that students with challenging behaviour can display aggressive, defiant and self injurious behaviour (Carr, Taylor & Robinson, 1991), it is difficult to know how much of what the teacher does is driven by attitude, how much by child effects (Patterson, 1982), and how much by other variables, such as lack of instructional skill. Conversely, Booth & Ainscow (1998) suggest that the acknowledgement of individual characteristics such as disability and disorder is to accept responsibility for meeting individual need. Skrtic (1995a) proposes that such thinking amongst teachers is the basis for making better schools. These teachers discriminate in a
sense, in that they attend to the particular requirements of individual students, but in the context of accepting responsibility for the education of all young people in the school community.

One of the key objectives of the Ministry of Education’s directive for an inclusive philosophy in schools, is to provide all students with opportunities relevant to individual need, thereby increasing social competence and fostering positive relationships with their peer group and with teaching staff. By definition, these are the very areas in which students with challenging behaviour have the greatest difficulty (Lewis, Chard & Scott, 1994). Examples can be found in the literature that point to negative outcomes following inclusion of students with challenging behaviours in mainstream education settings (Braaten, Kauffman, Braaten, Polsgrove & Nelson, 1998; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994) and arguments abound for and against the inclusive education of such students. Few people claim that the special education sector as it functions today is flawless (Beatson, 2000). Beatson questions whether the philosophy of inclusion may have gone too far and argues that although it has been wholeheartedly embraced for the last ten years, it may not be the universal cure all for the special education problem it was once believed. In New Zealand the argument has been settled at policy level, as the Government “aims to achieve a world class inclusive education system over the next decade, providing learning opportunities of equal quality to all students” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p.7). Fuchs & Fuchs (1994) argue that a system based on individual need will see mainstream education become more responsive, resourceful and humane.
Evidence suggests that teachers with a strong sense of their own capability are more successful with students with challenging behaviours (Munk & Repp, 1994; Prinz & Miller, 1991; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). These teachers demonstrate a number of similar characteristics; they implement a number of interventions before making referrals, work with specialist teachers in a collaborative manner, are competent and thorough in methods of assessment and have positive and frequent liaison with the home environment (Ballard, 1999; Fraser, Molten & Ryba, 2000; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998).

The issue of inclusion can be considered a human rights issue (Thomas & Loxley, 2001). Teachers need a strong sense of social justice if students with challenging behaviours are not to be alienated from the mainstream classroom setting, as was the tendency of the, now dis-established, segregated attached units. Skrtic (1995) argues that adequate understanding of the concept of inclusion involves a paradigm shift. More than just a different model for special education delivery, inclusion is a new paradigm for thinking and acting about the education of students with special educational needs, including those with challenging behaviour (Ballard, 1999; Beatson, 2000; Heshusius & Ballard, 1996). It would appear that effective management of challenging behaviour in inclusive education settings requires a multi-disciplinary approach where teachers who demonstrate a strong sense of self-efficacy are likely to be more successful (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). The inclusive paradigm necessitates making provision for the needs of the individual and the changing knowledge and understanding of all teachers, parents and communities (Power-deFur & Orelone, 1997). This would be facilitated by teacher development that focussed on inclusive practice, adaptation of teaching
strategies to meet individual need and the ability of educators to work across settings in a pro-active and collaborative manner (Ballard, 1999; Fraser, Moltzen & Ryba, 2000; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Skrtic, 1991; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998).

The philosophy, practices and expectations associated with inclusive schooling practices continue to evolve as experience with this approach to education increases (MacGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998). *Special Education 2000* is a policy that has as a basis, the allocation of resources, but the philosophy upon which the policy is based is about belonging, acceptance and support (Ballard, 1996; Fraser, Moltzen & Ryba, 1996; Stainback & Stainback, 1992). Teachers have experienced limited access to professional development that addresses the management of mainstreamed students presenting with challenging behaviour (Booth & Ainscow, 1998; Fraser et al, 1996; Munk & Repp, 1994). Indeed it would seem that teachers draw heavily on aspects of their life stories as a rich training ground in learning how best to manage behaviour. In her narrative account, cited in Heshusius & Ballard (1996), Gallagher argues that teacher training which encouraged her to learn “to think and act reductively” (p. 38) is flawed, and the behaviourist approach was “not necessarily helping my students, or me for that matter” (p.39). Teachers rely on classroom experiences such as this to build their practice and to guide them.

The research question for this study is:

How do teachers use narrative to make sense of the issues surrounding challenging behaviour in inclusive classroom settings?

Within this question, I have investigated:
1. What teachers say about having students with challenging behaviours in their classrooms and what they see as patterns and trends.

2. What they consider are satisfactions and what they find frustrating when managing challenging behaviour.

3. What additional support and strategies they perceive as useful when working with challenging behaviour.

Methodology

Ballard (1999) argues that research and education are social activities embedded in historical and cultural contexts, indeed understanding the life experience of others assumes our willingness and capacity to be touched by another’s life (Nussbaum, 1990). This study is about teachers’ voices and consists of narratives of professional practice where teachers are building their practice from life. It is about teachers making sense of the issues surrounding students with challenging behaviour in their inclusive classroom settings.

In this section I set out the rationale for a narrative approach including examples of narrative in educational research. I describe how I collected and analysed data for this study, and the ethical procedures I followed.

I have chosen narrative inquiry (Reissman, 1993) as the methodology for this study; it has a strong affinity with education, with teaching and with learning (Plummer, 2001). As human beings, we are curious about one another. Our curiosity reflects a desire to know about other peoples’ experiences, decisions, motives, their joys and sorrows. Were there particular people, events or
experiences that were an influence? Had these experiences altered perspectives over time? How had thinking and practices changed (Middleton & May, 1997)? The writing of previously hidden experiences is a way of supporting discussion about embodied knowing in research (Ballard, 1999), as we expand our notion of who we might be, as we “conceive, construct and reconstruct ourselves” (Heshusius & Ballard, 1996, p.100). It is within the spirit of wanting to understand the ongoing processes through which humans subjectively construct their social world, that this study sits in the context of other narratives of teachers’ lives and practices.

In recent years there have been significant methodological developments in the study of schools and particularly in the development of autobiographical (Erben 1998) and life history methodologies (Goodson and Sikes 2001; Hatch and Wisniewski 1998; Middleton & May, 1997). Indeed Goodson (1991, as cited in Convery, 1999) suggests that “sponsoring the teacher’s voice” and encouraging teachers to talk about their lives broadens our knowledge base for studying teaching and also leads to personal and professional teacher development through the provision of reflective opportunities (p.131). As such, narrative can portray intensely personal accounts of human experience. Heshusius & Ballard (1996) argue the telling of stories signals the return of the inquirer as a morally and emotionally engaged knower, the multitude of fragmenting experiences that make up our lives becoming patterned into a semblance of order.

Middleton & May (1997) used life history methodology to discover how teachers develop professional knowledge over a period of time and in different locations,
focussing on individual teachers’ accounts and perspectives on education over the course of their life times. This wide angled lens approach affords the reader the view of teachers “not as invisible puppets whose strings are pulled by politicians, academics and parents” but as creative strategists charting their own course within the constraints of their profession (p.10).

In her study on inclusion in one classroom, Ware (cited in Booth & Ainscow, 1998) makes use of narrative to provide a rich source of information on which readers can place their own interpretation; in doing so she creates research that is accessible. This narrative approach, grounded in the interpretivist tradition, is in stark contrast to the positivist approach on which many behavioural studies are based, requiring much of the information to be hidden from view in “assumptions about categorisation, procedures or concepts” (p.49). Gallagher (cited in Heshusius & Ballard, 1996) argues that positivism assumes exclusivity in that “one can impose order without permission, a move away from this requires relinquishing precision and control” (p.41). This relinquishing of control is illustrated in a narrative account of her journey from a positivist approach to an interpretivist one. Gallagher discovered, when dealing with behaviour issues within her classroom, “the way that I ‘managed’ behaviour changed too. I found myself asking questions instead of passing edicts or dishing out rewards and penalties” (p. 40). Thus, the methodology chosen for this project was driven by the need for experience of “real people, real lives, real knowledge” (Heshusius & Ballard, 1996, p.103) and a desire to understand the way people create and share meaning through the social construction of reality. Narrative is indeed, a powerful and different way of knowing (Bell, 1999).
Data collection and analysis

For the purposes of this project I employed convenience sampling methods (Burns, 1997), identifying three teachers employed at the school in which I was based and who were willing to take part. The participants consisted of a teacher with nine years teaching experience, a teacher with fifteen years teaching experience and a teacher with thirty years teaching experience. At the time of the study, each teacher had in his or her room, at least one student whose behaviour required specialist support. Ethical considerations were addressed in a letter outlining the principle of informed consent and emphasising the participants’ right to pull out of the project at any stage. This was distributed to the participants prior to commencement and guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. Written permission to conduct the research was sought from the School Principal and Board of Trustees (information and consent forms are included in Appendix A). A one hour interview with each teacher was conducted, during which their accounts were recorded on tape and later transcribed. Once completed, the transcripts were taken back to the participants; recognition by them that the narratives were recognisable reconstructions increased the credibility of the project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This does not however, guarantee validity as the meanings of experiences shift with changing consciousness (Reissman, 1993); in the final analysis, the work is that of the researcher who must take responsibility for its truths (ibid).

The interviews allowed considerable freedom to both participant and myself as researcher, to develop meaning together and to open up the topic. I looked at the
structure of the narrative, how it was organised and I asked why the narrative developed in this way with this listener. I looked for themes and within them I looked also for recognisable beginnings and endings (coda), epiphanal experiences, characters and plot structures. I chose Labov’s structural framework (as cited in Reissman, 1993) as a useful starting point for analysing text and to see how simple narratives are organised. This framework acknowledges that each story has a recognisable beginning and ending and consists of linked categories known as episodes (Bell, 1988). Within these episodes I looked for abstracts and orientations, for action, meaning and resolution (Reissman, 1993) in an attempt to uncover the structure of the narrative.

There are at least four ways of approaching validation in narrative work (Reissman, 1993). I chose the criterion of global, local and themal coherence (Agar & Hobbs 1982, cited in Reissman, 1993) as a form of validation for this project. I looked to establish the overall goals that the participants were trying to accomplish throughout their narratives and I took interest in the way they related one particular event in their life to another and, at the same time, were weaving recurring themes throughout their stories.

**The teachers and their narratives**

While there is no single method of narrative analysis, insights into meaning can be imbedded in the way the story is told, and the unpacking of structure that is essential to interpretation, will often uncover categories for analysis. In the first part of this section I argue that key episodes and epiphanal experiences within
teachers’ narratives have influenced the way they feel about challenging behaviour in inclusive settings. Epiphanal experiences are defined by Denzin (1989) as “the notion that lives are turned around by the occurrence of significant events” (p.23). Bell (1988, as cited in Reissman) refers to key episodes as “linked categories connected to each other temporally or causally” (p. 101).

In the second part of this report, I discuss aspects of managing challenging behaviour that teachers referred to often throughout their narratives; frustrations, satisfactions and the additional support and strategies they considered useful in the management of challenging behaviour.

These are the voices of three teachers who are building professional teaching practice from life experience. Recognition that their voices should be heard is widely held (Stainback & Stainback, 1992, Ainscow, 1997, Fraser, Moltzen & Ryba, 2000). Indeed, their narratives will add to our understanding of the lives and experiences of teachers and of managing students with challenging behaviour and in doing so, will provide insight into the classrooms, schools and communities they create.

Key Episodes

‘Wanda’

Wanda is a Senior Teacher with fifteen years primary teaching experience. Wanda describes how her attitude towards inclusion and the management of difficult behaviours has been shaped by key episodes and epiphanal experiences, while travelling and teaching overseas.
Wanda began by reflecting on negative attitudes amongst staff towards cultural diversity, during her first year of teaching:

When I started teaching fifteen years ago there were some teachers at my school who had been teaching for a long time, who refused to have Maori or Pacific Island children in their classrooms. After I left there and started teaching in London I had all races, all ethnicities, heaps of differences, all interesting, all of them unique. I was pretty scared at first, I have to admit that. It really opened my eyes. That’s what I came to value actually, the differences. I can remember sitting in the staffroom in my school in the East End of London, thinking about those teachers back at my old school and thinking how narrow minded they were. Gosh, not that it was easy though, but I did value the differences. It made me more confident, getting that experience with different types of children.

Within the structure of this plot, Wanda provides us with an orientation while linking episodes to each other, both temporally and causally. There is a recognisable beginning and ending, the structure clearly bounded by entrance and exit talk (Jefferson, 1979) and a sense of resolution brought about by growing levels of confidence.

Although many teachers are initially reluctant about inclusive classrooms, they become confident in their abilities, with experience. Bennett, DeLuca & Bruns (1997) found a positive relationship between teacher confidence and experience with inclusive settings. Similarly, Wanda’s experience with culturally diverse groups of children in London brought about a transformation, from initial feelings of uncertainty and fear, to feelings of wanting to celebrate diversity and difference. Wanda’s feelings are echoed by Beatson (2000), who considers the notion of culture to be “the very heart of the human condition” and given the
capacity to construct meaning, “an immensely potent weapon in the power struggles which go on in society.” (p. 88).

Wanda’s initial feelings of uncertainty and fear were understandable. Many risk factors affecting school safety were present in the surrounding community in which she taught. Poverty, family distress, crime, drugs and criminal activity were part of everyday life for many of the students she taught:

Can you imagine what it was like for me when I first got there? Just try. I thought I was on another planet! I had to force myself out of bed in the morning just to get there, and getting there at times was scary enough. But the lessons I learned, I probably learnt more than the students did. I mean, everyday things like how to survive, how to de-escalate a situation when a kid presents a knife at you, and I’m talking young kids, twelve year olds.

Arriving in a new city, feeling as if her safety was under threat and faced with having to learn lessons in everyday survival was a critical incident in Wanda’s life.

We talked about the levels of violence within the community, attempting to construct meaning together through interaction, and by drawing on our not dissimilar experiences of working in schools where high levels of disruptive and anti-social behaviour are prevalent. I was reminded of Rex, a six year old boy whose fingernails had been systematically removed as a form of punishment by his parents and whose legs bore many burns, the result of cigarettes having been extinguished on them. Rex had been part of my past, when as a trainee teacher in South Auckland I had come to know him and had marvelled at his ability to maintain a cheerful grin throughout the school day. Wanda and I had both experienced growing levels of anti-social and disruptive behaviour amongst
students and we acknowledged that levels of aggressive and violent behaviour within schools is on the increase (Fraser, Moltzen & Ryba, 2000; Power-deFur & Orelove, 1997; Rigby, 1996; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1993). Indeed, Fraser et al (2000) argue that beginning teachers frequently cite the management of children’s behaviour as the issue that causes them the greatest concern.

Wanda experienced this level of verbal and physical aggression first hand. She witnessed a self perpetuating cycle of violence, where the abusers were also the abused:

> Put me back in the East End where kids brought switch blades and “you can’t touch me white woman.” I was a teacher in charge of so many cases of child abuse really.

This key episode orients us by taking us to the scene and in doing so, signifies how Wanda’s perception of challenging behaviour was defined by the very nature of the students and situations she faced on a daily basis during her teaching experience in the East End:

> I mean, how could you find anything hard after that? Sure, things are more difficult now than they were when I first started teaching. But after London I felt I could cope with anything. And by and large, I still do.

Within this vignette Wanda neatly demonstrates that London has become the yardstick by which she measures behaviour.

Wanda’s teaching experience in London also exposed her to powerful characters, one of whom was a teacher whose ability to manage difficult behaviour made a lasting impression:

> I met an amazing Caribbean woman, African Carribean woman, Shirley, whom I taught next to in London. She
became a second DP. She lived a life, she was a salt of the earth sort, but she was also a fantastic teacher and role model, she was tough with the kids, tough but fair, and very fair and consistent with me. I liked the way she spoke to the kids, in a strong but sympathetic way. We were doing a display once, I remember it was crooked, untidy, and she said to the kids: “We’re going to get it right. We’re going to take it down and fix it up and get it right. And we won’t put it back till it is right. So let’s get started.” She was firm, but fair, Shirley was.

Within the plot of this narrative we are introduced to Shirley and Wanda displays a sense of coherence and insightfulness in her description, allowing the development of a complete and meaningful picture. Wanda’s emphasis throughout on fairness, refers to the notion which Ryan (1993) terms ‘the hidden curriculum.’ Many of education’s most positive teachings, such as a sense of fairness, can be conveyed in the hidden curriculum. This echoes the sentiments of Kohn (1991), that teaching should stimulate not only good learning but encourage students to also be good people. Buber (1965) calls this education of character.

Wanda’s encounters of teaching in London also exposed her to students with severe emotional disturbance. An epiphonal experience involved a young boy called Lucky:

This boy Lucky would come to school, he was named after his mother, she was always high, she used to communicate regularly with Bob Marley even though he was dead, he was speaking to her, you know. Her boy Lucky, well he just had cigarette burns all over him and sometimes when I’d come back from lunch he would be lying down outside the boss’s office in a wee foetal position and gosh, you wouldn’t know where to start. He was my training ground in behaviour, this is where I learnt what I know.
We meet Lucky, named after his mother, whose apparent ability to communicate with the dead allows us an insight into her drug induced surreal world. We sense a horrible level of physical abuse and a broken child who has sought refuge outside the office of a person in authority, a safe haven perhaps. I wondered whether Lucky felt isolated and devoid of the notion of belonging.

Wanda's comment about not knowing where to start implies an overwhelming sense of helplessness and yet in spite of, or because of this, Lucky “was my training ground in behaviour.” This signifies that Lucky has become another of Wanda’s yardsticks by which she measures challenging behaviour.

Teachers are at the practical edge of an inclusive education system (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996) and as such, teacher attitude and perspectives are critical (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). Teachers need to feel supported when working with children with challenging and diverse needs, in order for successful inclusion to take place (Beatson, 2000; Heshusius & Ballard, 1997; Ballard, 1999; Fraser et al, 1996; Booth & Ainscow, 1998; Skrtic, 1995).

Wanda’s epiphanal experiences teaching in London have framed her philosophy and practice with regard to the management of challenging behaviour in inclusive classroom settings. Balson (1993) acknowledges that “students have in common with all other individuals a need to belong, to feel significant, to count for something and to be somebody” (p.20). Wanda is clear in her understanding of what it means to include students with challenging behaviour in her classroom:

To me, it means that the school, and particularly the classroom teacher, does as much for that child as
possible, putting as many systems in place, as many new ideas in place, regular meetings, IEP’s, whatever it takes, to the point that the safety of the student and other students in the class is not a concern.

Wanda’s narrative resonates with the voice of Pignatelli (1993) when he argues that teachers must also “avoid discourse-practices that essentialise categories of deviance in the minds of students and themselves; discourse-practices that cause students to internalise and monitor their deviant status – in effect blaming themselves for their own marginality” (p. 420).

Wanda continues:

I think we need to look at each of the children’s needs. I’ve got a boy who’s come in, he’s been directed by the Ministry, and we’ve put in place for him a specific plan. He was only coming half days, but now he’s coming three full days and two half days. So I think there has to be movement for the teacher to have that overall say, to say “this is what I think will meet this child’s needs.”

In a parallel with Wanda’s narrative, Allan (as cited in Ballard, 1999) argues that students need to be helped to cope with the real situations in which they find themselves and shown ways to overcome the barriers they often face when reintegrating back into inclusive settings. Allan considers that the challenge for teachers is to listen to students and to ensure that the student voice is not then silenced by the teachers’ professional discourse of needs. Helping students to explore their sense of self while at the same time assisting them to analyse and identify both enabling and constraining factors, may encourage them to avoid engaging in behaviour which alienates them; instead it offers students the opportunity to engage in alternative forms of conduct.
Amy

Amy is a primary school teacher with thirty years experience. Through the use of narrative inquiry we established a degree of rapport, as demonstrated by her talking about a traumatic incident that was later to become a powerful influence in her life and her teaching.

As an eight year old child, Amy suffered an horrendous accident which was to alter her life forever. This critical incident left her physically disfigured and proved to be an epiphanal experience that influenced her feelings about difference and diversity. It has determined the way she feels about students whose individual needs set them apart from their peers.

Amy lived in a small South Island town where everyone knew each other. She describes the accident that almost claimed her life, when her bicycle and a car collided:

My face went right down the side of the glass like it was butter, so the whole one side of my face, the right hand side, was actually pushed right back. The doctor, who was our family doctor said, when I was bought in to the hospital, “Well, who’s this then?” and they said, “Well, it’s Amy”, and he said, “Well, she’s got Amy’s hair, but that’s all.” My grandparents had to get a photo of me and they stitched me up, according to the photo.

Amy’s narrative shed light for me as researcher, on what she knew about herself, her situation and her place in the world. Within the structure of this plot, she recounts her accident by taking us into a past time, albeit a past time fraught with
intimate and painful associations. She goes on to make a moral point about
differences:

And so I have got a huge thing about differences and
people being different and I really am fiercely
protective. I really don't handle very well, people not
treating other people well because of their physical or
mental differences. I find that really hard to come to
grips with.

In later conversations, Amy and I agreed that throughout the interview we had
established both a level of rapport and of inter-subjectivity. This involved careful
listening on my part, indeed, the process of ‘listening beyond,’ that is to say,
listening for more than what was being said on the surface (Measor & Sikes,
1992). Listening beyond Amy’s narrative enabled me to unpack the structure of
her story (essential to interpretation) and in doing so, I was provided with clues
about meaning:

And the really good thing that came out of this was that
I was never teased, because I was in a small community
and I was looked after. I was never badly treated,
everybody just said they cared and they loved me.

Amy and Wanda present two quite distinct narratives of community. Beatson
(2000) defines community as “intimate and emotionally charged networks of inter-
personal relationships, with a keen sense of us, the insiders, as opposed to them,
the outsiders” (p.84). Amy’s reference to a small community, where everybody
knew each other, cared for and loved her, led me to wonder if her feelings
concerning difference were linked to her feelings of community and the provision
of a sheltered and protective environment. Amy’s narrative suggests she felt fully
supported by this small community where members regarded one another as
family; conversely, Wanda’s narrative of Lucky suggests that he did not enjoy the
same sense of belonging.
Amy continued, by stating her view on colleagues’ insensitivity to students who are in some way different from their peers:

I just can’t tolerate the way some people act, particularly some teachers act, around children that are different. I was different and I know how it feels. It doesn’t matter what the difference is, whether you look different, act differently, are in a minority culture, are intellectually handicapped, I believe that every human being is unique and they have a right to be valued, no matter how they look or what they do, they’ve got to be given a chance.

This is in agreement with Barth’s (1990) argument that what is important about schools is difference rather than sameness; furthermore, differences hold great opportunities for learning. Amy is fiercely protective of students with differences, to the point where she favours the protective nature of the segregated setting:

Now to talk about what’s happening with inclusion, with putting these challenging behaviours in schools, I believe that special classes should be re-established again. I believe they were far superior to what I’m seeing now. I don’t believe our special needs kids ever felt excluded or different from the others. I don’t think they get the best end of the deal in classrooms now. I think people that are specially trained for these children do so much better.

The juxtaposition of Wanda’s comments relating to inclusion with Amy’s narrative favouring special classes, portrays an interesting dichotomy between approaches. I wondered if Amy considered special classes as being able to provide students with a ‘sense of community’, the sheltered and protective environment which she had found so supportive herself, as a child. Having taught in both inclusive and segregated settings, I was aware also, of a parallel with part of my own life story.
'Alan'

Alan has been teaching primary school aged students for the last nine years, two of which were spent overseas, like Wanda, in London. Alan grew up in a rural South Island town, in an area that he described as 'rough.' We commenced the interview by constructing together what was meant by this term, as we both felt that we came from similar backgrounds but possibly had different interpretations. I began by asking Alan if he could describe his background in more depth as it sounded very similar to mine which I had described to him, as 'lower socio economic.'

Alan began:

There were families that were quite transient, they were always in and out of town, it used to be an old coal mining town and once they were finished with mining it was just a freezing works place. So a lot of people came in and out, single parent families, that type of thing. Kids would be at school for half a year and then gone. I guess you would call it lower socio economic when I think about it. It was known as a rough area but I like to think of it as quite different. My family was always quite tight and supportive and quite strict actually when I was younger.

This initial interaction between Alan and myself was important for us both as it highlighted the part that I, as researcher, was playing in the construction of the narrative. There is a mounting body of theory which indicates there is both an ethical and a methodological failure involved in not recognising the researcher in the process of the constructing of narratives and text (Measor & Sikes, 1992). Blackman (1992) refers to this as interactive research.
Having completed his training, Alan disliked intensely his first teaching experience, which was at a small country school close to where he lived. He opted to travel and spent two years teaching in London. Alan reflects on this experience:

I went overseas for two years and taught in London. That was probably my behaviour training. I would say in London I learnt about behaviour. I had some really tough schools. Classes of forty four kids, all ethnic backgrounds, it was an eye opener, but I had to develop some really keen strategies straight away. And confrontation, I tried that, that was my first approach. "Sit down, do as you’re told, or this is going to happen.” And I realised straight away that wasn’t the way to do it because I got nowhere.

Throughout our interview Alan talked a lot about confrontation and how he had witnessed unpleasant episodes of confrontational behaviour while staying at a friend’s house when he was young. He talked about the impact that one particular critical incident had on him:

It was very negative, my parents never yelled at me and I wasn’t used to it. I hated shouting and I felt scared, I can remember that. I wanted to go home, but Andy wouldn’t let me. He said if I did, he’d never ask me back. And I liked him, he was my best friend. But I can remember hiding under the bed in his room while he took the yelling and the caning for us pinching biscuits out of the kitchen cupboard. I remember him coming back into the room crying, with big red marks all over his legs. I hated his parents after that.

Interestingly, it was a confrontational approach that Alan initially used as a strategy when working with students with challenging behaviour but he was quick to recognise its ineffectiveness:

If you start getting confrontational with children with behaviour problems it’s just a downward spiral and you don’t get anywhere.
Within this narrative, I recognised my own embeddedness (Middleton & May, 1997), having lived the same experience and perspective that Alan alluded to.

Alan’s attitude towards the Ministry of Education’s policy of inclusion is one of acceptance of diversity and is supported by his view that schools are mini communities feeding into larger communities:

I think inclusion is necessary because sooner or later when someone leaves school they’re going to have to work in society, that’s the door that I have to open for them, that door to society. I look at school here as a community, at the classroom as a learning community, which will in turn develop into further notions of community.

Alan’s acceptance of diversity is mirrored by Booth & Ainscow (1998) who argue that student diversity remains largely an under utilised resource. Opportunities abound for a diverse population of school students to be drawn on in a number of ways in “mentoring, peer tutoring, collaborative group work, problem solving, creative writing, drama and so on” (p.216).

In the first section of this report, the interviews illustrate the power of narrative inquiry to make connections through insights (Convery, 1999) and in doing so, they capture the teacher’s “voice,” enabling us to access “unique and personal” explanations of private practitioner experience (p.132). Narrative inquiry is oriented towards understanding the processes through which we as humans subjectively construct our social world. As such, it is concerned with understanding the essence of the everyday world as an emergent social process (Skrtic,1991) and it affords us the opportunity to understand the social construction of reality, that is the way people create and share meaning. The
second half of this section looks at the satisfactions, frustrations and additional support and strategies that the participants considered useful when managing challenging behaviour.

Aspects of managing challenging behaviours

'Wanda'

During the course of the interviews, all three participants talked candidly of the level of frustration they felt while attempting to meet the demands that students with challenging behaviours often brought with them to the inclusive school setting. Wanda experienced frustration at the lack of trust that students with challenging behaviour had toward her, using multi-voiced narrative (Blackman, 1992) to accentuate her point:

I think the learned behaviour that comes from mistrust, of the kids mistrusting me as teacher. "Oh I have had so many other teachers before you, what makes you different?" So it's breaking down those barriers.

Wanda's narrative led me to wonder about the role of communication between teacher and student. Allan (cited in Ballard, 1999) advocates the importance of teachers helping students to explore their sense of self, to listen to students and to ensure the student voice is not then silenced by the teachers' professional discourse of needs. In my own practice, I was aware of the importance of dialogue between teachers and students and the emerging analysis of factors that both enable and constrain.

Wanda identified a further frustration, that of oppositional forces (Denzin, 1989) as an influencing factor against which teachers, as practitioners, struggle:
I have a real frustration with when we have an interchange situation, that different teachers have different expectations of the kids and perhaps they don’t understand their needs as well, so every child is treated the same, and you just can’t do that.

In this vignette, Wanda identifies differences in teacher expectation of students and a lack of understanding by teachers of student need as oppositional forces, defined by Denzin (1989) as hostilities, working against her.

Wanda notes also, a variation in attitude amongst teachers, with regard to their tolerance for student misbehaviour and their general classroom management skills. Her use of the ‘generalised other’ (Nias, 1985, p.105) and of negative reference groups, in this case other teachers, is apparent:

Yeah, and some teachers are not willing to know how to handle the kids, or they haven’t got the skills.

Classroom management skills, as an integral and ongoing part of teachers’ professional growth, are embedded in contexts, in particular people, places, artefacts and cultures of schools. Indeed, critical self-reflection, as an essential tool of professional growth (Brookfield, 1995) encourages teachers to rigorously challenge motivations, ideas and assumptions from alternative perspectives. Wanda’s narrative becomes a tool for reflection and invites further discussion and debate:

I’m thinking of a girl Jane I taught. When I first met her she used to just come in, slam the door and sit down. Where maybe five weeks later she was coming in and just sitting. Okay, she may not have had a book out or may not have been on task, but she had made the first step, she had come in and then she sat down, she came into the room and she sat down. So those are the satisfying moments, that and becoming independent, making choices, positive choices for themselves. So when their behaviour changes from this learned
behaviour, that they can come in quietly and sit down, simple things like that without having to come in and make a show of “here I am”, slamming doors and sitting down and then going to annoy someone. So when they eliminate that and you look back it seems to have come about so quickly.

Within Wanda’s vignette we have the traditional story elements of setting, plot, characters and theme, but it also moves beyond those basic elements and into the realm of reflecting on teaching:

So those are the satisfying moments, that and becoming independent, making choices, positive choices for themselves.

Wanda’s use of narrative as a tool for reflection shows insight and understanding and is a useful contribution to Skrtic’s (1995a) notion of “reflective discourse within a community of interests”, founded on the principle of “innovation through voice, participation and inclusion” (p. 265). This is in agreement with Convery (1999) who claims, that in the process of retrieving and disclosing such rich seams of data, teachers develop new understandings of their behaviour that improve levels of confidence and, implicitly, their practice.

‘Amy’

Amy experienced high levels of frustration brought about by a lack of consistency amongst staff in their attitude towards students with challenging behaviour:

It can also be sometimes from other teachers because some other teachers will get certain opinions of these children and they actually can’t lose that tag. And they don’t actually give them the benefit of the doubt, just label them, from day one.

Amy hints at a lack of caring from teachers, again I am reminded of Ryan’s (1993) hidden curriculum. Her narrative led me to wonder if her perception of a lack of
caring is linked, once again, to aspects of belonging and to a sense of community. Reciprocal caring and giving, the valuing of diversity and a commitment to the notion of community are considered critical components of a community that nurtures the individual (Booth & Ainscow, 1998).

In describing her experiences, Amy illustrates her struggle against forces beyond her control:

   But what really disappoints me is when they hit the wall because of circumstances outside of my control completely, and its like every thing that you ever built up has just been smashed to pieces.

Amy’s powerful vignette elicits emotion, its meaning linked to temporal experience and the actions of others and again makes reference to the oppositional forces which Wanda alludes to; those of lack of understanding by teachers of student need and differences in teacher expectation of students.

Narratives can be used to help teachers think more about the meaning of teaching and learning and their professional growth and change (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995). Gallagher’s narrative (cited in Heshusius & Ballard, 1996) recounts a period of several years and an increasing awareness over time, of flaws in the reductive approach she had employed to manage the students in her classroom. Gallagher’s story traces her journey towards becoming an interpretivist and the subsequent relinquishing of power and control which became an integral part of the process. This professional growth and change which took place over a significant period of time indicates the importance of lived experiences in providing the catalyst for such growth and change.
It was teacher training programmes which encouraged Gallagher into the positivist model that eventually led to her frustrations at not meeting student need. Amy experienced a different type of frustration, having attended a professional development workshop:

Frustrating, not having the time to put strategies that you’ve learned at a course, into practice. Its transferring the ideas back to the classroom, that’s the hard bit, making it fit.

Professional development opportunities have often ignored the critical importance of the context within which teachers are attempting on a daily basis to manage behaviour (Fraser, Moltzen & Ryba, 1995; Biklen, 1995; Skrtic, 1991). Through reflection on underlying issues and with insight, Amy continues in her attempt to construct meaning:

The thing is, you never get the time to really develop them because you come back into your room and you’re teaching, and you just don’t get a chance to try out all those strategies that you’ve been taught. So then, you read them and you think, well I’m going to do this and you might do it for a couple of days and then you go back to what you’re used to.

I could sense the level of frustration felt by Amy and could relate to her experience, having attended many courses on managing behaviour where the focus has been on a classroom culture of authority and control. Balson (cited in Fraser, Moltzen & Ryba, 1995) concurs:

While training courses have equipped teachers to cope with students who want to learn, they have generally been less than adequate in relation to the child who does not wish to learn, who creates problems in the classroom, and who is generally regarded as a poor or difficult student. (1993, p.19).

I was reminded of Israelite (cited in Heshusius & Ballard, 1996) and her work with hearing impaired students whose behaviour was often challenging, a result no
doubt of the frustrations they lived with daily when deaf education was based on
the deficit driven medical model and spoken language was considered the only
acceptable mode of communication. Relinquishing authority and control is
difficult given that change is often a gradual process; in the words of Israelite,
“growing up and being educated within a reductionistic world view has baked me
into a mould” (p.58). In the following vignette, Amy stories an evolving
awareness that schools have a responsibility to encourage students to be good
people (Kohn, 1991) and at the same time provide good learning opportunities,
while developing education of character (Buber, 1965).

Well, it gives me satisfaction when I see them beginning to respect and treat other people properly,
not just doing it for their own ends and to get attention
but that they are showing more mature behaviours, if
that makes sense.

Amy’s narrative echoes the views of Buber (1965) who espouses the importance of
educating the whole person.

‘Alan’

As Alan stories his frustrations at managing challenging behaviour he makes
connections through these insights:

Getting somewhere with a child and seeing them go
back to inappropriate behaviour, or slip backwards
again. I’ve got a case at the moment where he’s just
decided that he’s had enough. He’s not prepared to put
the effort in himself and I’ve said to him “Look, I’ve
done this for you, I’ve had meetings with you, I’ve tried
all these things and you’re not prepared to do anything
are you?” and he just came back with ‘No’ so that’s
really disappointing, very, very frustrating.

In this vignette Alan captures the teacher’s voice, enabling me to gain access to his
own unique and personal explanations of teaching experience (Convery, 1999).
There is an acknowledgement of the satisfaction he gains through managing students with challenging behaviour:

If I go through my checklist at the end of the year and he’s done two out of a hundred things, then as long as I’ve made a change in him that’s going to help him later on in life to make better choices, I’ll be happy.

Alan’s narrative is clearly bounded by entrance and exit talk and he portrays the way in which educators know their situations in general, social and shared ways.

In the following vignette, Alan offers an insight into the relationship between teacher and student:

Another girl in the class who’s quite aggressive, quite defiant and she’s making changes in herself, you can see her thinking about what she’s doing, how she’s speaking to others and how she’s approaching things now, so, there are satisfactions and you feel really good about that.

I am reminded of Wanda and Amy’s stories of community and belonging and Kohn’s (1991) notion that schools have an obligation to support students to develop worthy, morally sound qualities.

Alan’s insights contribute to his overall wisdom of practice:

One wee guy in my class at the moment, I’m just focussing on influencing this individual socially and trying to help him make appropriate choices about what he does and when he does it, how he does it and why he’s doing it. That’s what I’m focussing on at the moment and he, you can see him thinking about what he’s doing and that’s really good.

As with Wanda and Amy and in another parallel with my own teaching practice, Alan reconstructs an aspect of his daily teaching experience as if he is looking through a mirror, learning something more meaningful about himself through close examination. In my role as researcher, I also viewed Alan’s narrative as if I
was looking through a window, allowing me the opportunity to examine the beliefs, behaviours and insights of a fellow teacher, in a context with which I was very familiar.

*Inclusion – policy and practice*

Throughout the interviews, Wanda, Amy and Alan discussed aspects of policy and practice they found useful when working with challenging behaviour. As Wanda noted, the philosophy of inclusive education has not always been as successful in practice as it has been in theory (Beatson, 2000) and teachers generally do not seem to have completely embraced the notion that full inclusion means children should take part in all classroom activities (Kohn, 1991; Power-deFur & Orelove, 1997). Teachers often ask how much time a child can spend in the classroom. Better promotion of the inclusive philosophy would be to ask whether it is absolutely necessary to remove the child from the class to work (Beatson, 2000).

‘*Wanda*’

Wanda acknowledges the use of partial inclusion as a useful strategy for a student who has been excluded from his previous school. She can see positive aspects in this attempt to integrate the student back into the education system:

> The benefits are that he is starting again after 6 months absence from school to function again within a normal classroom setting and he is having access to the curriculum, but at the same time we’re looking after the safety of the rest of the children in the class…. I believe he couldn’t cope with a full day at this stage.

However, she is quick also, to find negative aspects:

> He’s perhaps not taking part in a full school programme although we’ve tried to make sure that there are options. The negatives for the rest of the class, well,
there was a lot of anger, a lot of withdrawal, a lot of anti-social behaviour that perhaps children, I felt, didn’t need to see.

Within these vignettes, Wanda presents and then represents aspects of her practice in an attempt to explain, illustrate and connect (Convery, 1999). She continues, allowing the narrative to become a tool for reflection and the basis for further discussion and debate:

I think learning and the work you’re giving kids has a huge bearing on whether they’re having success. If I had more time I would probably spend more time differentiating the work, more individualised work, making sure it was marked, that sort of thing.

I interpreted Wanda’s narrative to mean she viewed adaptation of the curriculum as a critical component of inclusive practice.

As the following vignette illustrates, teachers can know something in a variety of ways. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986) argue that there are different ways of knowing, including that of intuition. Wanda said:

My sister’s a very good friend of Tafele the rugby player and a boy I taught called Chris always used to throw a ball around at lunchtime, really keen footballer, this boy. He could be a little rascal! So I got this poster made up with Tafele’s signature on it, and a slogan saying ‘There’s no “I” in team’ and I put it on our wall in the classroom and that was our motto and I used it all year, with a particularly difficult class really. And it was really successful. Chris unfortunately died of an asthma attack at the end of the year and this poster was put in his coffin, it sort of bought closure. So that was one of those wonderful things, because he used to always say ‘There’s no “I” ‘in team’ and he really meant it. So for those children who knew Chris, they’ve learnt a lot about team work.

Wanda’s narrative graphically portrays the context of this key episode in her teaching career. I wondered whether as a result of this incident, Wanda had
introduced anything new into her teaching practice or if it had served to cement or reinforce attitudes, beliefs and values that she had more or less consciously held up to that point. In a parallel with aspects of my own life story, Wanda makes explicit her own values, priorities and story, knowing that these things will impact on teaching practice. Denzin (1989; cited in Convery, 1999) claims the notion that lives are turned around by significant events. These epiphanal transformations are a central part of autobiographical and biographical form. Wanda’s narrative is clearly bounded by entrance and exit talk and also present, is a pervasive sense of resolution. This critical incident in Wanda’s teaching career is located in a personal historical context (Denzin, 1989). Its authenticity, reflective qualities, and reinterpretation or reconstruction are the features that elevate it. Although Wanda’s narrative has a contemporary here and now quality (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995), it also captures and preserves the past.

Many teachers feel unprepared to be the first and foremost source of support for students with diverse behaviour needs in inclusive settings (Prochnow, Kearney & Carroll-Lind, 2000). Support for teachers in schools can have a positive effect upon their ability and desire to meet the individual needs of students, indeed, support for teachers could be considered essential if inclusive education approaches are to be implemented wholeheartedly and effectively (Loucks-Horsley & Roody, 1990). Commitment to inclusive school practices can be broad based, drawing on the effort of the entire school family in a bid to be successful. Planning, rationale, scope, pace and use of resources can be developed through the collaboration of a broad spectrum of school personnel (Power-deFur & Orelove, 1997).
Wanda emphasises the importance of hands on practical support from the principal and from her teaching colleagues, when managing challenging behaviour:

My principal is really supportive and that’s really great because at the end of the day if the principal won’t do anything about the behaviour, then you’re lost.

Wanda offers a professional voice within this vignette, in so doing she provides the opportunity for ongoing professional dialogue. Together we discussed the development of self-confidence, a direct result we both felt, of the empowering nature of collegial support. Wanda continues, touching on professional practice issues:

There is really good support if the children know the barriers, the boundaries here, there are systems in place.

Levels of concern regarding challenging behaviour in students is increasing (Fraser, Moltzen & Ryba, 1995) and teachers cite management of students with behaviour difficulties as one of the most stressful parts of the job. Beginning teachers are particularly vulnerable, acknowledging that dealing with difficult behaviour is “their most pressing concern” and expressing how inadequately prepared they feel for dealing with behaviour problems (Fraser et al. 1995, p.304).

Wanda’s narrative indicates she is in agreement:

So, really important. I can send difficult kids to John if I need to, and him to me, but I wouldn’t think of sending a child to a scale A teacher. The type of child I’m sending, and the type of situation, I don’t think they have always got the skills and I don’t think they should have to deal with it at that level.

I found myself thinking back to the way the three participants had storied their narratives in relation to ‘a sense of belonging’ and it led me to wonder if difficult
behaviour is a need on the part of students to belong, however constructive or destructive that may be. This is in accordance with Balson (1993) who argues that whatever the teacher may think, students will behave in a manner that will afford them acceptance.

Effective strategies in the management of challenging behaviour for Wanda includes maximising positive personal attributes:

I suppose I have a presence of sorts, I'm not a shouter, but I certainly used to be. I use my facial expressions a lot now, I think. That quiet approach, stepping back, thinking before talking, before reacting. That's something I've learnt over time. I think that's a strength now that I have. And a fairness, I like kids and I think they know that they are liked. I'm also willing to listen.

I interpreted Wanda’s narrative to be an exploration of Convery’s (1999) notion of desirable identity. Her story suggests the “transformative” nature of her teaching career and allows her to present and then to represent herself, in essence creating a “preferred identity” (p.135). Wanda continues:

I would hope they see me as fair, a fair teacher, willing to listen to them. I hope they think I care for them, because I do. No favourites... get away from that old word of the sixeties.....but all very special.

I am reminded of Heshusius (cited in Heshusius & Ballard, 1995) who argues that what we record as our story is “rarely where we are, but rather what we long for and struggle with” (p.130). This is in accordance with Convery’s belief (1999) that identity is “created rather than revealed” through narrative (p. 139).

‘Amy’

In a parallel with Wanda, Amy’s narrative led me to consider the notion of triumph over adversity and the construction of the principled self:
I just think I care about them. And I believe they’ve got to be given a chance and at the end of the day they can be somebody if they put their mind to it, that it is up to them at the end of the day. And there’s going to be barbed wire on the way but you’ve just gotta kinda learn how to cope with that.

Her narrative indicates to me, the depth of her inner strength (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995) and the potential of that strength to affect children’s lives profoundly. She continues, enabling me to explore the principles that underpin her practice through “presenting a refined and principled self” Convery, 1999, p. 135):

I am very fair and very just. And I listen to all sides of the story and I don’t just jump in. I think laughs are really important with children, getting them to be able to laugh and see a humorous side to things, that you should always try and bring some levity and happiness or smiles into the situation, so they don’t think that its all doom and gloom. I think kids must have laughter and happiness and caring and feel like they’re cared about because otherwise you’re not going to get anywhere working their behaviours at all.

‘Alan’

Students who are exposed to polite, friendly interaction learn to interact with others in polite, friendly and prosocial ways (Church, 1997). As it is in my own teaching practice, Alan’s provision of positive role modelling through the use of peer support, is an effective strategy for him:

But other children in the class too, I find if you can show them what you’re trying to achieve, get them to buy into what you’re trying to do with the difficult ones, then they can help, they can influence in a positive way. Working through other children, now that’s a good strategy.

It is claimed that eight to twelve year olds learn much from their peers (Power-deFur & Orelve, 1997). If this is so, then it is clear that normally developing peers have an extremely important role to play in halting and reversing antisocial
development at this age. Conversely, the behaviour of antisocial young people placed with antisocial peers tends to deteriorate further (ibid). This is interesting, given Amy’s earlier claims regarding the advantages of special class settings.

Alan also views his ability to communicate effectively and to relate to troubled students as a useful strategy in managing challenging behaviour:

The principal said once before that I know how to talk to children... I can understand them, because of the area in New Zealand that I come from. You know it wasn’t that flash I suppose, and there was a lot of children that had a lot of problems and I’ve probably got a bit of affinity with them, not because I’m from that sort of family myself because I came from a very supportive family, but I like working with children that don’t have everything sweet.

The juxtaposition of Alan’s narrative with those of Wanda and Amy shows all three exploring Convery’s (1999) notion of preferred identity. Heshusius (cited in Heshusius & Ballard, 1996) argues that we “write ourselves into being” (p.130) and I interpreted Alan’s positioning within this narrative to be in accordance with Convery (1999) who espouses that “our present gives our past a sense of intention and purpose” (p.132). Alan has contextualised himself by relating to his past and he endorses this past through restorying, allowing his narrative to develop into a more desirable present. I understood Alan’s story to be one that speaks of personal and educational refinement and as Wanda and Amy have done, Alan has used his narrative to “describe himself and to reconstruct himself”, in effect, to become that which he describes (p.137).

Narrative is one of the principal ways in which we absorb knowledge (Morrison, 1993). The narratives contained within this report are three teachers’ stories of
professional practice. These brief glimpses are an attempt to contribute to a deeper understanding of teachers’ lives, in which a sense of work is closely tied to a sense of self.

**Conclusion**

Within this project I have attempted to demonstrate that teachers use narrative to make sense of the issues surrounding challenging behaviour in inclusive classroom settings. Within their stories, the participants identified epiphanal experiences and key episodes which have influenced the way they feel about challenging behaviour. My goal has been to develop a meaningful narrative text that describes and links together influences, events, people and experiences in the lives of these three classroom teachers. Ballard (cited in Heshusius and Ballard, 1996) argues that “the power of stories is the ability to communicate complex experiences, emotions and ideas in a way that is commonly accessible” (p.106), and for myself as researcher, this incorporates focussing attention on the importance of listening to teachers’ voice, at the same time considering the complexities of the relationships we develop in a particular community of practice. I have also made explicit my own voice as researcher, bringing my own constructions, concepts and beliefs to the interpretation of the narratives (Ballard, 1999).

Within this project I argue that personal narratives are ideally suited to the essential task of educators everywhere who want to understand not only the subject matter and the methodology of teaching, but also the why and the when (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995). The manner in which the participants have storied and restored their lives through the use of narrative, affords the reader the honour of
being part of a deeply personal journey, where epiphanal experiences and critical incidents are deeply embedded in each teacher’s sense of self.

We do not of course end up with truth (what is truth?) but with an intuitive sense of meaning and knowing that is grounded in real teachers and concrete practices, in effect the ‘insider perspective.’ It is this ‘insider perspective’ which Heshusius & Ballard (1996) regard as the most critical issue in interpretive work.

This study is important because it also challenges the appropriateness of the positivist, reductionist world view (Heshusius & Ballard, 1996) and its “lifeless, thoughtless clamour”, when working with students whose behaviour is considered challenging (p.135). Instead, it resonates with notions of the importance of community, acceptance and belonging within the construction, interpretation and reconstruction of dialogue.

Reflecting on the participants’ narratives within this project made me also reflect on my own story, and I came to the realisation that this reflectivity had unlocked important episodes in my life which I can now see have shaped my feelings and attitudes towards behaviour, just as it has for my colleagues. Rather than continue down the road espousing authority and control by telling teachers how best to manage challenging behaviour, I will instead encourage them to engage in reflective practice, to listen to their inner voice and to draw on their own life stories, in which is embedded a rich training ground uniquely their own.
I have loved the road I have travelled while involved in this project. It has been an epiphanal experience for me. I had for several years, been immersed in the “deficit driven medical model” (Israelite, cited in Heshusius & Ballard, 1996, p.56) in which the foundations of special education lay firmly entrenched, but I had felt uneasy for a long time. Yet I seemed unable to identify exactly what was causing the unease. Hence my own positioning prior to entering the study was one of a sense of discomfort at my indoctrination into a positivist, behaviourist world view, where the emphasis was firmly grounded in authority and control (Balson, 1993, cited in Fraser, Moltzen & Ryba, 2000). The journey I have undertaken has succeeded in crystallising my thinking and I have now reached a point in my teaching career where the behaviourist world view no longer suffices for me. Perhaps my new found clarity of vision is best summed up in the words of Kitzinger (1990, cited in Heshusius & Ballard, 1996, p. 27), for I am, “ready now, to take the leap beyond the walls of the positivist paradigm.”
Bibliography


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Appendix A

Letter to Principals and Board of Trustees ......................... 56-57
Consent Form – Principal ................................................. 58
Letter to Participants .......................................................... 59-60
Consent Form – Participants ............................................... 61
Letter to Principal and Board of Trustees

34 Oxley Ave.,
St Albans,
Christchurch.

21 May 2003

Dear

As part of my studies for a Master of Teaching and Learning degree at the Christchurch College of Education, I am conducting a research project which will examine teachers’ discourses surrounding the management of challenging behaviours in inclusive classroom settings.

In order to gather data for my project, I am planning to interview three staff members individually. Each staff member participating in the study will presently have, or will have had during the last twelve months, a student with challenging behaviours in their class.

I intend to conduct two half hour interviews with each participant. I am particularly interested in aspects that teachers find frustrating, things they find satisfying and strategies and support that they find useful when working with these students.

I am hoping my research project will provide information that will encourage continuing discourse that could possibly contribute at a later date to the development of a school wide policy for the management of challenging behaviour in inclusive classroom settings.

Participants’ names will not appear in the research report, nor will the name of the school. I will be seeking the consent of research participants prior to the interviews and anonymity and confidentiality will be guaranteed. Participation will be voluntary and the participant may discontinue participation at any time without providing an explanation. Refusal to participate in the study will involve no penalty or loss of benefit. On completion of the study participants will be provided with a summary of the overall outcomes of the research.

My supervisor for this project is Elaine Mayo, Principal Lecturer, Master of Teaching and Learning Degree, Christchurch College of Education. Any queries or concerns regarding the research can be directed to Elaine by email: elaine.mayo@ccc.ac.nz or by telephone: ph 348 2059.
The Christchurch College of Education Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study. The College requires that all participants be informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to:

The Chair  
Ethical Clearance Committee  
Christchurch College of Education  
P O Box 31 – 065  
Christchurch  
Phone: (03) 348 2059

I would very much appreciate your support for this project. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely

Brenda Cameron  
(03) 3770036  
Email: bcameron1@xtra.co.nz
Consent Form: Principal

Title of Research
Teachers' discourses surrounding challenging behaviour in inclusive classroom settings.

Consent to interview staff members
I have read and understood the information supplied with respect to the above research project.

I give my consent for staff to participate in this project with the understanding that participation is voluntary and anonymity will be preserved. I understand that any information or opinions that they may provide, or any themes, trends or conclusions reached by the researcher during the course of the research, will be shared only with the course marker at the Christchurch College of Education.

I understand that written consent will be obtained from the teacher participants before any interviewing takes place. I understand that you are intending to conduct two half hour interviews with each participant.

I understand that I may withdraw my consent for the interviews at any time.

YES  NO (tick one)

Signed: ____________________________

Name: ________________________________

Dated: _____/_____/03
Letter to Participants

34 Oxley Ave,  
St Albans,  
Christchurch.  

21 May 2003  

Dear  

As part of my studies for a Master of Teaching and Learning degree at the Christchurch College of Education, I am conducting a research project which will examine teachers’ discourses surrounding the management of challenging behaviours in inclusive classroom settings.  

In order to gather data for my project, I am planning to interview three staff members individually. Each staff member will presently have, or will have had during the last twelve months, a student with challenging behaviours in their class. I intend to conduct two half hour interviews with each participant. I am particularly interested in aspects that teachers find frustrating, things they find satisfying and strategies and support that they find useful when working with these students.  

I am requesting your participation in my research project.  

I am hoping my research will provide information that will encourage continuing discourse that could possibly contribute at a later date to the development of a school wide policy for the management of challenging behaviour in inclusive classroom settings.  

Your name will not appear in the research report, nor will the name of the school. I will be seeking written consent from you prior to the interviews and anonymity and confidentiality will be guaranteed. Participation will be voluntary and you may discontinue participation at any time without providing an explanation. Refusal to participate in the study will involve no penalty or loss of benefit. On completion of the study you will be provided with a summary of the overall outcomes of the research.  

My supervisor for this project is Elaine Mayo, Principal Lecturer, Master of Teaching and Learning Degree, Christchurch College of Education. Any queries or concerns regarding the research can be directed to Elaine by email: elaine.mayo@ccce.ac.nz or by telephone: ph 348 2059.  

The Christchurch College of Education Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study. The College requires that all participants be informed that if they have any
complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to:

The Chair  
Ethical Clearance Committee  
Christchurch College of Education  
P O Box 31 – 065  
Christchurch  
Phone: ( 03 ) 348 2059

I would very much appreciate your support for this project. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely

Brenda Cameron  
(03) 3770036  
Email: bcameron1@xtra.co.nz
Consent Form: Teacher Participants

**Title of Research**
Teachers' discourses surrounding challenging behaviour in inclusive classroom settings.

**Consent to interview research participants**
I have read and understood the information supplied with respect to the above research project.

I give my consent to participate in this project with the understanding that my participation is voluntary and that my anonymity will be preserved. I understand that any information or opinions that I may provide, or any themes, trends or conclusions reached by the researcher during the course of the research, will be shared only with the course marker at the Christchurch College of Education.

I understand that I may withdraw my consent to participate in the project at any time.

**YES**  **NO**  *(tick one)*

Signed:  

Name:  

Dated: __/__/03