Shannon Bentley

The picture on the cover was painted by Shannon Bentley who is an 8 year-old from Pinehaven School in Upper Hutt. She is a very keen artist and is identified as gifted and talented in this curriculum area. Shannon gets a lot of encouragement from home and at school she is given every opportunity to develop this gift. This year she has worked as part of a group that put together an art display for the Upper Hutt City 40th birthday celebrations. Shannon has also attended a week long art workshop run by the Upper Hutt Schools Gifted and Talented programme (GATEWAY).

The cover picture was one of Shannon’s works for the Upper Hutt City birthday celebrations. The theme was the history of Upper Hutt and Shannon’s picture was inspired by some photos of Pinehaven in the early days. It shows the pine trees planted by Sir Francis Chichester and the baches that sprung up in the hills around the Pinehaven area in the 1920s.

Pinehaven School is part of the short history of the valley and was built in 1954. It is currently a contributing (years 0 – 6) decile 10 school, with a roll of 207 students. The school appreciates its peaceful surroundings and supportive community.
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For all the rhetoric about “labelling” we need to examine introducing learners to knowledge as a means of reframing and labelling the role of culture in written by Angus Macfarlane promotes the term ‘educultural’ demands on practice in educational psychology. The article (tools) and language (labels) to recognise the ecological educational psychology is based on providing new concepts for these learners. The article on narrative approaches to talented.

No doubt there is discussion and learning for anyone who is interested or involved in education at any level. May we enjoy reading and reflecting on the content. Later this year Kairaranga subscribers will also receive a special edition of the journal, focusing on the Enhancing Effective Practice in Special Education (EEPSE) project.

Michael and Vanesse
In the Beginning ...

An interview with Cath Steeghs, Carol Watts, Graeme Nobilo and Paul Mitchell

Judith Hickman
Student Support Development Officer, Ministry of Education, Hamilton

An interview with Cath Steeghs, Carol Watts, Graeme Nobilo and Paul Mitchell, who first identified a need to disseminate examples of effective practitioner work in education. They then worked as a group to initiate and sustain the publication Kairaranga.

WHAT GENERATED THE NEED FOR THE JOURNAL?
As the national pilot for Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) training progressed in the Waikato district, many RTLB began to consider stretching the boundaries of the training into higher qualifications. Thus many RTLB generated research into practice, and research on our practice, which we considered would provide a valuable source of professional research for dissemination among colleagues. We also wanted to provide a forum to discuss educational issues that were important to us as practitioners. The question then arose of how these could be assembled and published to create an identity for RTLB and support their professional learning and research.

WHY WAS KAIRARANGA ORIGINALLY BASED IN THE WAIKATO?
Waikato was where the RTLB national prototype occurred. The first seventy RTLB positions in New Zealand were created in the Waikato district. On the one hand we were labelled the storm troopers of Special Education 2000 – out of “broom cupboards” and into classrooms and on the other hand at university undertaking requisite study. Kairaranga grew out of the need for a journal that could integrate field work and the university studies of RTLB. We considered that sharing our work experiences would be a way to support our colleagues as the RTLB initiative was implemented throughout the rest of New Zealand. It was always our intention to involve many more people from all over the country in Kairaranga but for ease of communication in getting it up and running, we started it locally.

WHO WERE THE OTHER PEOPLE WHO SUPPORTED YOUR TEAM BEHIND THE SCENES AND HELPED TO MAKE THE JOURNAL A REALITY?
There are a myriad of people who have supported Kairaranga on its journey. Key people were ourselves plus Grant Ackerman (RTLB) and Christine Mills (RTLB), Ted Glynn and Angus Macfarlane (Waikato University), Judith Hickman (Ministry of Education), Anthony Fisher (Specialist Education Services), Jan Pratt (Principal Adviser), and particularly Lewis Rivers (Specialist Education Services, national office).

Lewis had the inspiration and skills to gain support for the vision financially and also contributed advice for sustainability of the project. More recently, the invaluable input, support and guidance from Roseanna Bourke (Ministry of Education, Special Education) and from the university representatives contributed to the progression of the journal.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN CHALLENGES IN PRODUCING KAIRARANGA?
The major challenge was to establish Kairaranga as a known journal about professional practice where first RTLB, then GSE and universities, may share examples of evidence-based practice. We now realise that the Kairaranga journey is likely to be a long one, and its evolution and progression will occur over a much longer period than the single year foci of the early days. The sustainability of the journal is now dependent on the partnership between RTLB, GSE, and tertiary institutions rather than on a small editorial committee.

Another challenge that we faced and have overcome was retaining the relevance to RTLB whilst encompassing the other stakeholders and ensuring those groups had as much ownership of the journal as its original RTLB group envisaged. As we enter into the third year of this partnership we are delighted that identity for RTLB and the other stakeholders has been achieved. This journal has retained the original intent and integrity, because it has evolved to embrace broader perspectives with relevance to a wider audience of those involved in supporting all learners.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE HIGHLIGHTS?
We have been pleased with the growth and expansion the journal’s readership and the inclusion of other partners in the compilation and editing of the journal. The regular and positive anecdotal feedback we receive from subscribers is always reassuring. The gifting of the title, Kairaranga, and receiving the cover art for each issue and the regular feedback from RTLB colleagues are also very real highlights for us.
HOW DID YOU MANAGE THE WORK ASSOCIATED WITH THE INITIATION, DEVELOPMENT AND SUBSEQUENT REGULAR PUBLICATION OF KAIRARANGA ALONGSIDE YOUR REGULAR WORK AS RTLB?

Initially all work associated with the journal was undertaken during evenings, weekends and school holidays, and the support that we have received from our employing schools and clusters over the eight years has been pivotal to us maintaining our commitment to the journal. We would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their support:

- Huntly/Te Kauwhata Cluster (Huntly West School) for Paul Mitchell;
- Fairfield Cluster (Fairfield Primary School) for Graeme Nobilo;
- Fairfield Cluster (Hukanui Primary School) for Cath Steeghs; and
- Ngaruawahia Cluster (Glen Massey School) for Carol Watts.

The driving force that has kept us on task in this endeavour has been the fun and enduring sense of shared humour. The camaraderie and laughter have certainly been highlights for the four of us, as well as meeting many new friends through the inclusion of GSE and the universities in the partnership that forms Kairaranga.

WHERE TO FROM HERE – HOW DO YOU SEE THE JOURNAL EVOLVING FROM HERE?

It is awesome to look at the ever increasing depth and breadth of the research and the writings published in Kairaranga. Our ambition is to see more practitioners with their names in print because it is our fervent belief that by sharing the stories of our fieldwork, we will lift each other’s practice by reflecting on and celebrating successful practice. Finding the most appropriate balance between research articles and practice papers as well as the other writing categories that we publish will continue to evolve through the feedback of our readers. It is our commitment to be proactive to the needs of subscribers and responsive to requests received as we select material and prepare each edition.

INTERVIEWEE PROFILE

Cath Steeghs, Carol Watts, Graeme Nobilo and Paul Mitchell are RTLB practising in the Waikato district. They founded Kairaranga in 1999 and have contributed to its development to the present day.

INTERVIEWER PROFILE

Judith Hickman has worked for the Ministry of Education since its inception in 1989 and is the Student Support Development Officer (Special Education) for the Central North Region. She managed the Waikato prototype and the development of the RTLB service during 1998 and has been involved with RTLB and cluster management both regionally and nationally ever since.

Judith came to the Ministry of Education in Hamilton from Gisborne after many years teaching in various primary schools, followed by employment in the Department of Education as an advisor on junior classes and primary inspector until the advent of Tomorrow’s Schools.

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In the Eye of the Beholder:

Parent, teacher and researcher assessment in a study of precocious readers

Valerie Margrain
Senior Advisor, Assessment, Ministry of Education, Special Education national office

ABSTRACT
This article reports some of the findings of a study involving 11 New Zealand 4-year-old precocious readers (Margrain, 2005). The children, aged between 4:01 and 4:10, had reading ages three to nine years above their chronological age. Assessment of precocious reading abilities is discussed, including how assessment findings are influenced by the beliefs of the assessor, and choices of assessment tools. The study found that there were differences between the practices and beliefs of the researcher and parents compared to early childhood and new entrant teachers. This article provides recommendations for practice, relating to assessment practices and beliefs. These recommendations are pertinent to support working with precocious readers, but also more widely to other gifted learners.

Research Paper
Keywords
Assessment, early childhood education, gifted, parental attitudes, precocious readers, reading comprehension, teacher attitudes, teaching strategies.

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND
Precocious readers have been referred to as young fluent readers (Clark, 1982), young early readers (Stainthorp & Hughes, 1998, 1999) young able readers (Margrain 1998) and precocious readers (Jackson, 1988, 1992; Jackson & Biemiller, 1985; Jackson, Donaldson & Cleland, 1988; Jackson, Donaldson & Mills, 1993; Jackson & Kearney, 2005; Jackson & Lu, 1992; Jackson & Myers, 1982; Fletcher-Flinn & Thompson, 2000; Stainthorp & Hughes, 2004). Precocious readers can be identified because they have made substantial progress in reading comprehension before entering first grade; and their achievement is important because these children have had little or no exposure to standard reading instruction (Jackson, Donaldson, & Cleland, 1988, p. 234). A striking feature of precocious readers is their ability to read very rapidly (Jackson & Klein, 1997; Jackson & Roller, 1993) with voracious appetites for reading (Anderson, Tollefson & Gilbert, 1985). Precocious reading is a gifted behaviour and the child demonstrates gifted performance. The performance perspective can, however, mean that children who have potential or ability, but who choose not to "perform" are not identified.

Stainthorp and Hughes (2004) define precocious readers as "children who are able to read fluently and with understanding at an unusually young age before attending school and without having received any direct instruction in reading. Precocious readers appear to have taught themselves to read" (p. 107). This means that precocious readers differ from early readers who have been formally taught by such methods as Doman word flashcards or reading kits. Parents and early childhood teachers of precocious readers may have used informal teaching support, for example reading to children, but without the express intention of teaching early reading.

Parents of precocious readers assert that precocious reading appears 'spontaneously' and is led by the child. Research by Thompson and Fletcher-Flinn (1993; Fletcher–Flinn & Thompson, 2000) points to induced or implicit understandings gained as a result of earlier book experiences. Jackson and Roller (1993) note, "No formula for creating a precocious reader has been identified by researchers" (p. xviii). What has been consistently noted in the literature is that precocious readers play an active role in initiating and extending their literacy learning (Teale & Jeffries, 1982). According to Jackson and Roller (1993), "the most sophisticated precocious readers are children who have driven their parents and teachers to keep up with them" (p. 32). Anbar (1986) affirms that children are the critical "success factors", with parents responding to their children’s interest in reading rather than deliberately teaching. In Clark’s (1982) study, parents repeatedly asserted that the children created the conditions for their own success; the children were insistent on reading activities, not the parents. Although formally "taught" early readers tend to even out by the age of 8 years (Hendy-Harris, 1990; Jackson & Klein, 1997), "naturally occurring" precocious readers appear to maintain their advantage (Durkin, 1966, 1976; Jackson, 1988; Jackson & Klein, 1997; Juel, 1991).

The main research question for the study was: How are social scaffolding and self-scaffolding demonstrated within the learning of precocious readers? Understanding the experience of being a precocious reader was as important to the study as data that identified reading level and strategies. Beliefs and practices of parents and teachers, and how they impacted on the children, were critical aspects of the study. Some of these findings are considered in this article, with specific reference to assessment.

1 Four years, one month and four years, ten months of age.
METHOD

Participants and Recruitment

The study was conducted between 2000 and 2005, in children’s homes, early childhood centres and new entrant classrooms. The 11 children attended 10 different early childhood centres, including 2 Montessori centres, 6 kindergartens and 2 centres that describe themselves as ‘private preschools’. Four of the children continued within the study for several months after beginning school, each child attending a different school.

Children were recruited as a result of personal contacts within the early childhood education sector. Flyers inviting contact were also sent to local early childhood centres, kindergarten and playcentre associations, and home based early childhood education networks. It was estimated that these services have 3500 three to four-year-old children on their combined rolls. Flyers were also left at public libraries inviting contact. From this recruitment process, 16 children were referred to the study. While all 16 children could read beyond the age of 6 years, only 11 children were reading close to or beyond the age of 7 years, as assessed by the researcher, and these 11 children were all accepted into the study.

Instruments and Materials

Research methods included interviews with parents and teachers, observations of children’s play, and standardised tests of reading. Research data was gathered from parents and teachers, as each of these groups are critically influential on young children’s lives. Children’s voices are also important, and have been reported within a separate article (Margrain, in press). Two of the reading tests used with children in the study were the Neale Analysis of Reading (Neale, 1999) and the Burt Word Reading Test (Gilmore, Croft & Reid, 1981). The Neale provides measures of reading accuracy, comprehension and fluency levels. The Burt test measures context free word reading abilities. Testing was generally conducted in the children’s own homes, at times to suit the families. Other tests included the Coloured Progressive Matrices (Raven, Raven & Court, 1998), and the British Picture Vocabulary Scale (Dunn, Dunn, Whetton & Burley, 1997); although these test results are not discussed within this paper.

In addition to standardised testing, it was important that other activities occurred as part of the relationship between the children and researcher. This focus on building rapport was especially important given the children’s young age. Some of the ways this occurred was when children showed me their bedrooms, toys, gardens, and photos, or drew me pictures and maps. Flexibility regarding test conditions was also important for this age group. For example, one child read to me while sitting inside a packing box. In most cases, I sat with the children on the floors of their homes while they read.

RESULTS

Results are reported within three sections, according to researcher, parent, and teacher perspectives. The three sections exemplify differences in assessment perspective among the groups.

Assessment Viewpoint One: Researcher

This section reports the results of two standardised reading tests with which children were assessed; the Neale Analysis of Reading, and the Burt Word Reading Test. The purpose of conducting these assessments related to eligibility for the study and also to learn more about the upper range of the children’s reading ability, and their comprehension and fluency.

The children participating in this study all had reading ability levels well in advance of their chronological age. Reading accuracy levels on the Neale Analysis of Reading ranged from 6:08 age equivalency for a child aged 4:07, to 10:08 for a child aged 4:09. Results for four of the children are provided in Table 1 as an example of the range of test scores.

TABLE 1

Reading ability levels of four precocious readers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Alistair</th>
<th>Erin</th>
<th>Henry</th>
<th>Julia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neale: Accuracy</td>
<td>8:01</td>
<td>8:10</td>
<td>10:08</td>
<td>7:05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neale: Comprehension</td>
<td>6:11</td>
<td>7:02</td>
<td>8:03</td>
<td>6:04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neale: Rate (fluency)</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>13:0+</td>
<td>12.02</td>
<td>12:03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Henry read the following Level 5 passage from the Neale Analysis of Reading in 89 seconds, with 110 words read correctly out of the 117 total words. The seven errors are shown in bold, with the correct word in brackets afterward. Henry’s reading of this passage illustrates his competency in reading; he had an accuracy rate of 94% on this passage (optimal instructional level according to Clay, 1993, is 90-94%). There were many words in the passage that are not usually able to be read competently by a 4-year-old, including: ‘extraordinary’, ‘responsibilities’, ‘expeditions’, ‘knowledge’, ‘surroundings’, ‘illustrated’, ‘circular’, ‘apparently’, ‘territory’ and ‘subsequently’.

Among animals the fox has no rival for cunning. Aspychus (suspicious) of man, who is its only natural enemy, it will, when pursuved (pursued), perform extraordinary feats, even alighting on the backs of sheep to divert its scent. Parent foxes share the responsibilities of cub-rearing. Through their hunting expeditions they acquire an uncanny knowledge of their surroundings which they use (Repeated: which they use) in an emergency. This is well illustrated by the story of a hunted fox which led its pusers (pursuers) to a negivated (neglected) mine-shaft enclosed by a circular hedge. It appeared to surmount the barrier. The hounds followed headlong, only to fall into the indirectly (accumulated) water below. The fox, however, apparently on familiar (familiar) territory, had skirted the hedge and subsequently escaped. (H: Test Results)
Word reading levels on the Burt Word Reading Test were consistent with the reading accuracy levels on the Neale Analysis of Reading. For example, Gillian, aged 4:03, obtained a reading accuracy age of 6:10 on the first form on the Neale, and 6:11 on the parallel form of the Neale two weeks later. She completed the Burt between each form of the Neale, with an equivalent age band of 6:08 to 7:02 years.

Age-equivalent band scores on the Burt Word Reading Test ranged from 6:10 to 10:06 years of age. Examples of words that children could read from the Burt include: ‘explorer,’ ‘tongue,’ ‘terror,’ ‘emergency,’ ‘overwhelmed,’ ‘universal,’ ‘encyclopaedia,’ ‘trudging,’ ‘destiny,’ ‘urge,’ ‘binocular’ and ‘economy.’ When I asked Lewis (aged 4:08) if he knew any other words (as the manual directs) he carefully searched then said, ‘Yes, New Zealand’, pointing to the fine print ‘New Zealand Council for Educational Research’ at the foot of the form.

Comprehension was assessed using standardised questions within the Neale Analysis of Reading. Children’s reading comprehension ranged between 6:03 and 8:03. Comprehension scores were slightly below the reading ability ages for the children, but were still well above their chronological age. For example, Erin, aged 4:07, had a reading accuracy level of 8:01 on the first version of the Neale, and a comprehension level of 7:01. Although her comprehension was a year below her reading ability, it was still 2½ years above her chronological age.

A key finding of the study was confirmation of the children’s reading fluency, as measured by the Neale Analysis of Reading. Every child who participated in the study had a fluency rate well above their chronological age, and most of the children also had fluency rates well above their reading accuracy rates. For example, Isla had a chronological age of 4:09, a reading accuracy level of 7:07 on the Neale, and a fluency rate of 10:03.

Assessment Viewpoint Two: Parents
Parents were less concerned about measuring reading. They focused on understanding and supporting their children. Parents observed the way that children engaged with books, and the books that they read. However, despite their knowledge about their children, they often encountered negativity or disbelief when they described their children’s ability, including from teachers and principals.

Parents affirmed that the children read with fervour, enthusiasm and delight. Many families referred to the children’s ‘love of reading’ and ‘devouring books.’ Parents wanted me to clearly understand that reading was the children’s interest, and not something that had been imposed from parents. They described children ‘demanding’ to be read to from a young age, their ‘spontaneous’ ability to read appearing around the age of three years, and their ‘thirst’ for reading and learning. Matthew’s family, for example, were astonished when the pretext for Star Wars rolled onto the screen and he began to read them aloud, ‘in a galaxy far, far away …;’ Matthew was aged three and had not seen Star Wars before. She loves it, really enjoys it. By wanting to read, by doing it. We see her laughing in bed. (G: Parent interview, p. 9).

He enjoys it a heck of a lot. There is no way he’d do this much if he didn’t enjoy it. It’s just something he does. (A: Parent interview, p. 10)

Isla revealed she could read just before 3 years when she took a cereal packet out of the cupboard and began to perfectly read what was written on the side – I couldn’t believe my ears. (The packet text) included the word ‘fantastic.’ (I: Parent interview)

All of the children had a plentiful supply of books in their home, and books were part of their lives from an early age. Parents regularly read to their children, provided books, visited the library and modelled reading. These behaviours indicate that parents were constantly informally assessing their children’s interests and ability in reading. However, the parents in this study did not appear to do anything exceptional, or different to what many other parents also do.

We have a bookcase full of books we have been given – we’re lucky. He likes ‘fresh meat’ so we also use the school library and [city] public library. (A: Parent interview, p. 8)

When he was interested in the solar system, I got him books and a poster for his room. (N: Parent interview, B5)

The variety of books that parents saw their 4-year-olds reading included storybooks, non-fiction, cookery books, school journals, dictionaries, telephone books, atlases, map books, maze and puzzle books. Henry’s favourite book was The house at Pooh Corner by A. A. Milne.

Assessment Viewpoint Three: Teachers
In this section, feedback from early childhood teachers and new entrant school teachers are presented. Despite the differences in early childhood and school learning environments, there were some shared beliefs and expectations amongst teachers concerning age related expectations and perceived needs.

Perspectives of how a 4-year-old or 5-year-old “should” act repeatedly emerged within this study. Early childhood and new entrant teachers made several comments reinforcing chronological age rather than individual ability or potential capability levels, using statements such as, ‘just a little 4-year old’ (ECE teacher) or ‘still a little boy’ (new entrant teacher).

The focus on age-related expectations meant that some early childhood teachers were unaware of the children’s reading abilities. Alistair had been at his early childhood centre for 6 months before the teachers realised he could read. Many other teachers, in both early childhood and school settings, knew of the children’s reading abilities, but chose instead to focus on “normal, age-appropriate” behaviour. For example, a new entrant teacher said that she was not impressed by a child’s reading ability when, ‘he can’t tie his shoe laces and he takes forever to eat his lunch’.

All of the new entrant school teachers were aware that the children could read well, but none of their testing had assessed the upper limits of the children’s reading abilities.
The new entrant teachers expressed concern about the appropriateness of "allowing" children to read significantly in advance of their chronological age. Instead, they encouraged precocious readers to focus on broadening out, ‘settling in’, ‘being rounded’, ‘contributing’, ‘acting appropriately’ and ‘learning what is expected’ of them. Some precocious readers were observed to minimise their reading ability by pretending to practice early reading concepts such as one-to-one pointing to please their teachers and thus become assimilated with their age peers.

Some of the new entrant teachers focused on children’s difficulties rather than their strengths. One reason provided by teachers for why reading levels should be ‘held back’ was so that the children ‘evened out’ or ‘caught up’ in other areas such as writing. The teachers expressed concern that the children might not understand reading material that was beyond their chronological age. No evidence to.

DISCUSSION
The selection of assessment tools influence assessment data, and are informed by expectations about learners. Within the study, tools were used that had sufficient challenge and a high enough ceiling that the children could show the range of their abilities. Because parents wanted to support their children with resources, they were interested to know the books and materials that their children most enjoyed, and were less concerned with reading ‘ages’. Teachers were interested in providing ‘help’ and support and they focused on areas in which the children were less advanced than they were at reading. However, because teachers had not assessed the children’s areas of strength to capacity, the teachers were unaware of the full extent of the children’s reading ability.

The comprehension data are important because many teachers have expressed their concern about “allowing” young children to read beyond their chronological age in case the children do not “really” understand what they are reading. The results from this study, however, clearly show that all of the children had comprehension levels well above their chronological age. They could read, understood what they read, and wanted to read. There is no evidence to explain why they should be “held back” or denied access to literature that at least matches their comprehension level, provided the content is socially suitable (Hartley, 1996).

Julia, aged 4:01, was reading plays and novels in her free time. Her mother knew that her daughter had understood them because of the way she could discuss issues from the characters’ perspectives. If Julia had been restricted to age-level reading material, she would have had to wait another year before even being allowed to read emergent texts.

Another important consideration is the connection between assessment and programme provision. This study has illustrated that without appropriate assessment, it is more difficult to identify and provide for children’s learning. However, it would also be unsatisfactory if assessment and identification were thorough but there was no subsequent connection to support and programme differentiation for children.

Finally, assessment should not provide a justification for a deficit model of teaching. Rather than focusing on children’s “needs”, teaching can build from the credit models which view children as “ready, willing and able” to learn (Carr, 2001) and “rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent” (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 10).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE
- Be aware that children may come to early childhood centres and new entrant classrooms already able to read.
- Build on children’s strengths, interests and abilities rather than needs or problems.
- Include ecological assessments, for example interviewing parents and observing children’s strengths and interests.
- When consulting children and families about children’s abilities, ensure that they feel that it is safe to discuss giftedness.
- Indicators of precocious reading ability include fluency (rate or speed of reading) and children’s passionate engagement with reading material.
- Use assessment tools and approaches that have a sufficiently high ceiling that gifted children can show their potential.
- Don’t assume that young children cannot comprehend material at advanced levels.
- Remember that assessment results can vary – just because a child didn’t read a particular level to you on one day doesn’t mean that they can’t read it.
- Don’t expect that children need to have the same level of achievement in all areas in order to be considered gifted.
- Encourage diversity and celebrate difference. Avoid practices that encourage children to “dumb down”.
- Think about what “normal” means to you, your setting and community – is there room to challenge this and broaden your ideas?

CONCLUSION
Research studies, such as this one with precocious readers, provide an opportunity for reflection on what the findings mean for children, families and teachers. This study found differences between the assessment approaches and findings of the researcher, parents and teachers. The choice of assessment approach influenced what was discovered, and was influenced by prior expectations, values and beliefs. Effective practice should recognise and celebrate this diversity and acknowledge the limitations of any one approach. A consultative approach between teachers, parents and researchers can richly inform practice.

Focusing on strengths, abilities and interests is more powerful than a deficit view. The acceptance of diversity that is a tenet of special education must also be applied to assessing and teaching children with special abilities. Appreciation of diverse perspectives requires us to take off our blinkers and open the shutters so that we can appreciate the broadest vista possible.
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AUTHOR PROFILE
Valerie Margrain joined the Ministry of Education, Special Education national office in April 2006, to work on the special education exemplar project and Kairaranga. Her teaching experiences include primary, early childhood, Reading Recovery, ORRS, itinerant special education, tertiary and teacher education. Valerie graduated with her PhD in May 2006, and lives with her busy family in a bushclad suburb of Upper Hutt.

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Three Models for Understanding Gifted Education

Angela Page

Keywords

Cognitive ability, cultural differences, gifted, inclusive education, intelligence, student achievement.

INTRODUCTION

Gifted and talented education has come to the forefront of New Zealand education in recent years since the release of the Ministry of Education handbook, Gifted and talented students: Meeting their needs in New Zealand Schools (2000), and Initiatives for gifted and talented learners (Ministry of Education, 2002). The handbook provides guidelines for meeting the needs of gifted and talented students and is supported by a change to the national administration guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2005) which require all schools to be able to actively demonstrate how they are catering for these needs from Term 1, 2005.

The Ministry of Education handbook (2000) suggests a range of definitions and strategies relevant to gifted and talented education, but clearly states that “each school must develop a set of characteristics that reflects its own definitions of, and approach to, the concept of giftedness and talent” (p. 17). Developing these concepts and strategies can be a difficult and somewhat daunting task for schools to undertake in isolation. While each school is best able to incorporate ideas and strategies relevant to their own unique culture and community, the process of identifying, analysing and adopting these concepts will ultimately require a significant investment of time and effort. In order to successfully meet the needs of gifted and talented students, it is imperative for teachers to gain a sound understanding of the theories and principles underpinning gifted education.

This article will review research relevant to the education of gifted and talented students. It will review a range of literature with the intention of seeking to clarify some of the terminology encountered and concepts underpinning gifted and talented education. It will then present an overview of the characteristics of gifted and talented students, as defined by different researchers. Following this, a critical analysis of the concepts from three theoretical models underpinning gifted and talented education will be made. To conclude, implications and considerations for catering for needs of gifted and talented students in New Zealand schools will be discussed.

Documents such as the Marland report (1972) and the more recent Ministry of Education commissioned research (Riley, Bevan-Brown, Bicknell, Carroll-Lind, & Kearney, 2004), refer to giftedness as encompassing a wide range of abilities, found across domains such as specific academic, creative, cultural, psychomotor, social, and so forth. The three theories of giftedness and talent development to be examined include a concept of giftedness and talent (Renzulli, 1986), a theory of intelligence (Gardner, 1983) and a conceptualisation of the talent development process (Gagné, 1992). These theories have been selected for examination due to the Ministry of Education (2000) suggesting they be adopted or adapted in establishing school-based definitions of giftedness and talent. This is supported by research carried out by Riley et al. (2004), which reports that these theories are prevalent in New Zealand schools.

TERMINOLOGY

Many documents, including the Ministry of Education (2000) handbook, use the terms ‘gifted’ and ‘talented’ interchangeably, implying a single-concept approach. Frequently, the terms are joined together and referred to as ‘gifted and talented’, yet others would argue that the terms are not synonymous (see Gagné, 1992). Throughout this paper, the terms ‘gifted’ and ‘talented’ will be used in accordance with the models or approaches being discussed.
CHARACTERISTICS OF GIFTEDNESS

The Ministry of Education (2000) handbook acknowledges that gifted and talented students are not part of a homogenous group. That is, each individual student presents particular strengths to combine as a unique blend of traits. While a high IQ might have traditionally been a fundamental indicator of giftedness, this is no longer accepted as a sole characteristic, or even sought after by many New Zealand schools. However, it is recognised that there are some common clusters of characteristics pertaining to most gifted students. Highly gifted students may present more marked or intense indicators of these traits.

Generally, identified characteristics of gifted students appear to be positive by nature. That is, indicators mostly show positive facets of a student’s aptitude, such as explaining their ability to produce original ideas, be self-directed, pose original ideas and questions, and so forth. However, sometimes extreme examples of characteristics can be viewed less favourably in different social or educational situations. For example, if a gifted student has a strong preference to work alone they may find it difficult to work collaboratively with others.

Cathcart (2005) has adapted a list of characteristics of exceptionally able children as distributed by the US Office of Education. The list includes a wide range of behaviours and abilities, each beginning with the phrase “exceptionally able children often: …” (p. 17). Many of the skills are comparative with students who are not gifted, for example, gifted students learn basic skills better and with less practice; they are better able to handle abstract ideas; or are better at working independently and sustaining concentration for longer periods.

Moltzen (2004) states that a school’s own definition of giftedness will determine the set of characteristics deemed to indicate gifted behaviour. He has compiled lists of characteristics according to six major domains, including general intellectual, creative, leadership, specific academic, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor abilities. The general intellectual abilities list is divided into two domains, reflecting both cognitive and affective characteristics. Gifted students may demonstrate outstanding cognitive or affective abilities, or a combination of the two.

The Ministry of Education (2000), together with the work of Moltzen (2004), suggests that schools use a list compiled by McAlpine and Reid (1996) as a starting point for defining characteristics of gifted children. The document clearly states that “no one gifted student is likely to possess all the following characteristics. It would be possible for a student to show clear evidence of all, or nearly all, the behaviours in one category but few in another” (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 18). This trend to move away from defining giftedness in terms of a single category acknowledges a more diverse range of special abilities. The five factor scales are:

• learning characteristics
• social leadership characteristics
• creative thinking characteristics
• self-determination characteristics
• motivational characteristics (McAlpine & Reid, 1996).

The characteristics listed within these factor scales refer to behaviours which may be demonstrated by gifted students, rather than abilities they may possess.

DEFINITIONS AND THEORETICAL MODELS OF GIFTEDNESS

Various academics and educators have devised their own models and definitions of giftedness and talent. McAlpine (2004) reports of research which has identified 213 definitions of giftedness. Many are based on longitudinal or quantitative studies of gifted children; some have been carried out retrospectively, seeking to identify and compile a list of characteristics demonstrated by high-achieving adults in various fields.

The following sections contain descriptions of three theoretical models of giftedness and talent development. Many characteristics and distinctions overlap between the theories and some appear to be the development of ideas from other sources. It should be remembered that concepts of giftedness and talent are sensitive to time, place and cultural contexts, while being underpinned by social values (McAlpine, 2004).

Renzulli’s Three Ring Conception of Giftedness

Renzulli’s (1986) Three ring conception of giftedness has been widely used in schools and educational institutions around the world since its inception. It is based on the interaction between three basic clusters of three human traits, being above average ability, a high level of task commitment, and a high level of creativity. The model was developed from studies examining the traits of highly successful adults in different fields of achievement. Each was shown to possess the above-mentioned traits to various degrees. It should be noted that the degree of manifestation and combinations of these traits are not necessarily equal or static. While various compositions of these traits can usually be applied to one or two performance areas, there is no ‘ideal’ combination.

‘General’ performance areas include mathematics, music, languages, and so on, whereas ‘specific’ performance areas may include film making, electronics, sculpture, and so on. Ultimately, Renzulli (1986, 1998) views giftedness as a behaviour, rather than an attribute.

Renzulli’s (1986) conception of giftedness allows students to be identified according to areas not solely relying on formal academic testing. This model has found support amongst teachers whose ‘gut instinct’ leads them to believe that a particular student is gifted, despite them not necessarily scoring well on formal tests and assessments. Children who appear to be intrinsically motivated and with highly developed special interests and ability in particular areas typify those gifted students encompassed by Renzulli’s model. It is also particularly applicable to cultural models of giftedness as it acknowledges the integral and interwoven roles that creativity and task commitment play in addition to above average ability in culturally valued activities.

Where this model falls short is in its ability to identify students who have above average ability and creativity, but are yet to find a context or area of interest in which they excel. That is, their level of task commitment may appear to be lacking, but the reasons for this absence could be that the student...
has not been exposed to the necessary motivations or stimuli to inspire their gifts. Therefore, it is recommended that Renzulli (1986) model is used in conjunction with other models of giftedness to develop a synthesis of information about a child’s ability, with data gathered from a range of sources (Chaffey, 2004). An example of such a model supporting identification could include the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Renzulli & Reis, 1994).

**Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences**

Gardner’s (1983, 1993, 1999) theory of multiple intelligences moves the focus of identifying giftedness from a single-faceted approach to a multi-category concept. The term ‘intelligence’ refers to a special ability, talent, or skill which allows a person to maximise their potential by building on the particular strength they demonstrate. The multiple intelligences strongly parallel preferred learning styles or proclivities and, therefore, do not exclusively relate to those who have been identified as gifted and talented.

Armstrong (1987) explains Gardner’s multipes intelligences theory by stating that every child possesses aspects of all eight intelligences and can develop them to a fairly high level of competence. By the time a child begins school, they will have established ways of learning which tend to favour some intelligences more than others.

The identification of which intelligences a child has favoured is not a simple process. Anecdotal evidence often comprises much diagnostic and formative assessment for teachers seeking to find out which intelligences their students demonstrate. Close observation of how students choose to spend their free time, or even “misbehave” in class can indicate their preference for learning. For example, a highly linguistic student may frequently choose to read for pleasure, or a spatially-gifted student may draw and ‘doodle’ while they are thinking (Armstrong, 1987).

Rather than being considered a deficit model for learning, Gardner’s (1983) multiple intelligences seek the benefit of working from and developing a child’s areas of strength. This philosophy aligns well with principles for gifted and talented education. It is not suggested that students need to master all eight intelligences or focus on gaps in their learning.

As Gardner’s (1983) multiple intelligences are applicable, to some degree, to all students, it could be argued that this model is not especially suitable for meeting the needs of gifted students. Le Sueur (2002) strongly states that the unique needs of gifted students must be recognised, valued and catered for. She challenges the teaching strategies and approaches to learning that seem suitable for all students, are not actually meeting the needs of gifted students. If a teacher is using the multiple intelligences as a means for catering for all students in a classroom, then additional approaches and strategies must introduced to truly differentiate the curriculum for those identified as gifted. For example, providing rich learning experiences for all students who demonstrate linguistic intelligence cannot necessarily guarantee assurance for teachers that the needs of their students who are linguistically gifted are being met.

Therefore, it is insufficient to say that the needs of gifted students can be adequately met by using the multiple intelligences model alone. As with Renzulli’s (1986) model of giftedness, the multiple intelligences must form a part of an educator’s overall understanding about the principles of gifted education and is best used in conjunction with other models.

**Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent**

Gagné (1992, n.d.) proposes a model which differentiates between giftedness and talent. The differentiated model of giftedness and talent assumes that the terms ‘gifted’ and ‘talented’ are not synonymous and cannot be used interchangeably. Analyses of this model, including dialogue by Smith (2004), suggest that it is more a theory of talent development than a definition of giftedness.

Sometimes considered as an extension or development of Renzulli’s (1986) Three ring model of giftedness, Gagné (1992) argues that a child’s natural abilities in a range of domains constitutes giftedness. ‘Talent’ is the realisation of a child’s giftedness and is enhanced through the intervention of catalysts and other influences. The distinct differentiation between the terms ‘giftedness’ and ‘talent’ allows for children who may possess high levels of ability but are yet to use or manifest them to still be identified as gifted. This differentiation addresses a distinct limitation in Renzulli’s model, which includes task commitment as a necessary characteristic of giftedness.

Building on a child’s natural abilities, a part of the learner’s developmental process involves being exposed to a number of catalysts. These include the elements in a child’s life which can shape the emergence of and the development of their innate abilities. With the intervention of intrapersonal and environmental catalysts, a gifted student may enhance and enrich their natural aptitudes to acquire systematically developed skills, or ‘talent’. Therefore, it can be assumed that Gagné (1992) views ‘giftedness’ as being natural ability or potential, and ‘talent’ as the product of intervention, or achieving a student’s potential through experience.

Gagné’s (1992) model formally acknowledges the effect that chance has on natural abilities and catalysts; not all students have sufficient access or the ability to partake in intervention strategies. Also, some gifted children may require lesser degrees or different forms of intervention from intrapersonal and environmental catalysts to be able to fully achieve their potential, or attain ‘talented’ status. This is a definite strength of the differentiated model, which acknowledges that the presence of developmental processes and catalysts can promote movement between the domains of giftedness and talent.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS**

The Ministry of Education (2000), based on the research of Moltzen, McAlpine and others, acknowledges that each community will have their own unique ideas about what constitutes giftedness and talent. Recognising skills and abilities is contextualised in a particular culture, ethnic group, time, or place. For this reason, all New Zealand schools must form their own definition of giftedness and develop strategies to meet identified needs.
While it is expected that definitions, approaches and strategies will vary between schools and communities, it is important for teachers to base programmes of learning on a sound understanding of the theories and principles underpinning gifted education. It is recommended that schools gather a range of research and educational theories, determine what is most relevant and appropriate to their particular community, then implement programmes of learning based on this information. All schools should regularly evaluate and review their approaches to gifted education in order to ensure the principles of gifted education are being addressed, and to keep up to date with current best-practice models and other relevant theories and research.

For New Zealand schools, it is particularly important to examine concepts and principles of Māori special abilities. Research carried out by Bevan-Brown (2004) and as discussed by Macfarlane and Moltzen (2005) has found that while there are a multitude of apparent similarities with mainstream education, there are a number of Māori-specific concepts on special abilities which need to be considered. These concepts may be broader and wider-ranging than traditional Western views of giftedness, favouring a more holistic approach and including values and qualities linked with spiritual, cognitive, affective, aesthetic, artistic, psychomotor, social, intuitive, creative, leadership and cultural domains. It is recommended that educators consult with Māori and work in partnership to identify and develop the potential of students with special abilities. Also, close links between home and school are especially critical to ensure success for gifted Māori students.

SUMMARY
This article has examined literature in the field of gifted and talented education. It has explored and analysed three major theories of giftedness and talent development utilised in New Zealand, that of Renzulli’s (1986) Three ring conception of giftedness, Gardner’s (1983) Multiple intelligences, and Gagné’s (1992) Differentiated model of giftedness and talent. Specific terminology relating to each model was discussed, as well as exploration into the most appropriate use of the terms ‘gifted’ and ‘talented’. Finally, some considerations and implications for catering for gifted and talented students in New Zealand schools were established.

As New Zealand schools work to meet the recommendations set by the Ministry of Education’s (2000, 2002, 2005) gifted and talented guidelines, it is important that sound theories and principles underpin any programmes of learning developed by teachers. By exploring and utilising the plethora of quality research available, New Zealand schools have a strong base from which to begin developing their own principles and practices for gifted education. The challenge is for all schools to effectively meet the needs and raise the potential of all their gifted and talented students.

REFERENCES


**AUTHOR PROFILE**

Angela Page is a primary teacher who specialises in e-learning and teaching gifted and talented students. She has recently completed a Master of Education focusing on the teaching of higher order thinking and is currently an e-teacher at The Correspondence School.

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Storied Experience

Keywords
Asperger syndrome, autism spectrum disorders, social interactions, social skills.

Born in 1955, I was raised in rural South Auckland. I loved our cosy little house, kept warm by the Aga coke-burning stove. I spent a lot of time playing on the linoleum floor with my plastic dinosaurs. As a baby, I propelled myself around the floor on my stomach, using my limbs as flippers, instead of crawling in the usual way. The Plunket nurse's concern about “possible cerebral palsy” was cast aside when I finally began walking at twenty-two months.

When Mum had to take me shopping, the bright, flashing advertising displays then in fashion would cause me to scream non-stop in terror. Mum had to park my push-chair advertising displays then in fashion would cause me to scream non-stop in terror. Mum had to park my push-chair in such a way that I could see nothing, as anything I saw in shops seemed to set me off.

Mum took me regularly to playcentre, but I couldn’t mix in with the other children, nor would I do finger painting. Sticky substances on my skin are still distasteful to me. Mum took me regularly to playcentre, but I couldn’t mix in with the other children, nor would I do finger painting. Sticky substances on my skin are still distasteful to me.

I couldn’t catch a ball, and had trouble with dressing myself, climbing steps, bike-riding, swimming, dancing, and all sports.

Starting school was a frightening time for me; I sometimes hid behind the piano. At least six months later, my teacher told my parents that I was awkward and timid about climbing up and down the (few) steps into the classroom. It seems there were no “developmental alert” protocols in use 50 years ago.

A very shy child, I could sometimes form a one-to-one friendship, but functioning in a larger circle was often beyond my social skills. I found my earliest school friends amongst a group of children who were playing a rough-and-tumble game which involved me frequently having to fall down “dead.” This playtime activity required compliance with the rules of the game – something I found relatively easy – rather than engaging in social chit-chat or the other nuances which I failed to understand. This game solved my problem of what to do at playtime, until the teachers came over and put a stop to it, telling me that I had to play with the little girls, not the little boys.

It was exactly playing with the little girls which was one of my difficulties. I often found the little girls’ interests and conversation topics boring, and their relating style inexplicable. My little boy companions’ games had at least made sense to me.

A subsequent playtime activity which seemed to cause puzleuss in some teachers was my solitary, repetitive digging in the garden-boxes with a stick.

This pastime provided the satisfaction that I could still enjoy, to this day, in repetitive movements. Several times I was asked if I would like some seeds to plant, but, although at home I was a keen gardener, horticulture was not my aim where these plant boxes were concerned.

I was soon well above my age level in literacy skills, voraciously reading non-fiction books on animals, dinosaurs and prehistoric humans. At seven years old I asked my teacher for books on anthropology. Then a new teacher arrived. I could not speak to her at all, and could not utter the required words, ‘Good Night, Miss Andrews’. For that, I was kept in after school, in a state of panic, still unable to get the words out, until the teacher finally allowed me to write them down instead.

Required by school policy to play basketball, I could not catch the ball, and had no idea of how the game worked, or of the concept of team play. On the rare occasion that the ball landed in my arms, this meant terror for me, as both teams would then descend upon me for the ball. In fear and bewilderment, I would get rid of the ball as quickly as possible, not realising that I was supposed to pass it to my own team members and in the direction of our goalpost.

At 12 years old came the transition from my tiny country school to the (then) second-largest school in New Zealand – Papakura High School. My academic prowess had put me up a year, so that I was at high school whilst my age-mates were still back at the country school. Therefore, I was on my own in a totally strange environment (which I can still find difficult), confused, and in a state of high anxiety. The concept of changing classrooms when the bell rang was also new to me, and, as I could not navigate my way around the enormous school grounds, I could not find my classes for a few weeks.

My startle response was always very keen: dogs barking, fireworks banging, balloons bursting, brakes squealing, and even soft unexpected noises could severely jangle me, and I could see that other people did not react so strongly to these things. Changes to routine and anything unexpected would (and still can) upset me very much. I found it hard to make friends, and having a conversation was challenging due to my slower processing speeds, different thought patterns, and lack of a sense of social understanding.
Although I could write excellent essays, I could not talk on the phone, or tie my shoelaces. My difficulties were increasing with age, but I was unable to get any recognition of this, due to the fact that my academic ability was well above average in most subjects.

Reaching the age when my peers and I were entering the working world, I was still very under-prepared to function in this milieu. I managed to hold down jobs for a time, but found social relating, learning new tasks, multi-tasking, and making errors, very stressful. Eventually, I suffered a series of nervous breakdowns, three times ending up in a psychiatric hospital. The second stay was for eight months, and included issues of institutional abuse. My diagnoses included “schizophrenia”, “borderline personality disorder”, “manic depression”, “anxiety disorder”, and “the beginning stages of multiple personality disorder.”

Far from being helped by these experiences, I continued to struggle on with anxiety, depression and confusion during my thirties. My inability to read facial expressions and body language, and whether people were joking or not, meant that I often made incorrect judgement calls. I told my Mum that I felt like “an alien from outer space.” I drew some comfort from my passions of reading and poultry keeping. I knew that I was still good at studying, so in my late thirties, I decided to take a Bachelor of Arts paper at the University of Auckland. I became hooked, eventually enrolling for full-time study, supported by the adult student allowance. At the age of 39 I also met a man who was able to love me in spite of my oddities. We live far apart but still have our special long-distance friendship.

On campus, I attended every lecture in my own subjects (German, Comparative Literature, Linguistics, Anthropology, English), and any extra seminars I could fit in. Reveiling in the intellectual stimulation, I soon discovered that I could attain high marks in coursework. My essays for German Literature and Comparative Literature always achieved an A or an A+. The magic ingredient, for me, was that coursework essays allowed me months in which to write them: I could think about the essay topic, research it, and write it over a long period, perfecting it as I went.

The exact opposite is the case for exam essays. One has, for example, two hours in which to write two separate essays, or three hours for three essays. This puts a completely different time-frame, and a lot of urgency, on to the task. As well as that was the considerable stress I experienced in finding the correct exam room at short notice (deliberately arranged to be short notice by the university, as an anti-cheating strategy). This often meant that I was already very anxious by the time I had found the room. Added to all of that was the difficulty of having to switch my brain, suddenly and completely, from writing essay number one to essay number two (and, sometimes, essay number three) – all within a short time-frame. In other words, I was not allowed to keep concentrating on the topic in hand, but, just when I was getting deeply into it, I would be forced to switch to a new topic – otherwise, of course, one would attempt only a proportion of the questions, and would fail the exam as a result.

The factors which are noteworthy in the exam context – familiarisation with the environment beforehand, performance anxiety, difficulty with sudden new requirements, transition, and switching one’s concentration to a new stimulus – are amongst the factors which have been significant for me in all areas throughout my life, and still are.

This situation caused such a wide split in my coursework performance versus my exam performance that at least one teacher had difficulty understanding what was going on. This also caused me great frustration and anguish, when I had a coursework grade of A+ and was top of the class, only then to fall several grades in my final assessment, because of my inability to cope with the exam requirements. The same can be said for any environment, including the workplace, in which my work on a continuous project might well be excellent, but when I am quickly changed from one task to another in an atmosphere of urgency, I may not be able to function at all. I have tried to improve in this area, but I can still have considerable difficulties when such situations occur.

With one semester of my B.A. to go, I attended a seminar by Dr. Angela Arnold of the Department of Psychology, having no idea of what I was about to hear. Dr. Arnold described a particular developmental disorder which affects one in every 300 persons, world-wide, and listed its characteristics.

Shock waves hit me and I started shaking. Afterwards, I managed to detain Dr. Arnold before she left the room. We arranged a formal appointment and it became official: I have Asperger syndrome, (a condition on the higher-functioning end of autism spectrum disorders: ASD), diagnosed at the age of 43. A lifetime burden of inadequacy, guilt, confusion and fear was lifted from me.

I graduated with my B.A. in 1999 and then began voluntary work for Autism New Zealand (Auckland Branch), which also caters for people with Asperger syndrome. Having Asperger suddenly became a plus, because my insider perspective meant that I could now give reassurance, advice and authentic knowledge to families who contacted Autism NZ.

Finding out the reason why I had always had certain differences and difficulties felt like a blessing straight from heaven. When one grows up feeling increasingly different from other people - no matter how hard one tries to be "normal" - one can easily come to believe that one is inadequate in some way - that one must be "mad or bad." Once having reached that conclusion, a person can easily fall prey to anxiety, depression, and/or other mental illnesses. At the same time as this is going on, there is the interweaving of, and reinforcement by, frequent negative everyday events, such as disastrous social interactions inadvertently caused by the undiagnosed ASD traits – thus creating a real downward spiral from which there is no escape, without the proper explanation of what is happening and why. This happened not only to me, but, as I now know (due to having since met many other Asperger adults), this is a frequent outcome of late diagnosis.
Children who are diagnosed with Asperger syndrome or autism, and who receive the appropriate support thereafter, should not then feel the need to blame themselves for their differences ... thus avoiding a huge amount of needless psychological suffering (not to mention inappropriate mental illness treatments).

Feeling passionately that the same scenario should not keep happening to others, I wrote my book Congratulations! It’s Asperger syndrome.

The title was chosen to accentuate the positives, and celebrate the uniqueness, of individuals with Asperger and autism: vive la difference! ‘Congratulations!’ also conveys agreement with Dr. Tony Attwood, world expert on Asperger syndrome, who has been known to deliver the diagnosis with the words “Congratulations! Your child has Asperger syndrome!”

I wrote down all of the difficulties and “oddities” that I could remember, along with the reasons that I did things, and the outcomes that resulted, as I was trying to produce a “cause and effect” explanation. Some of my insights were new information to the autism world, hitherto unpublished. I was not to know, until my book was in the public arena, that many, many readers would respond with great enthusiasm to what I had described: parents and other family members said that my book helped them to understand their child with Asperger or autism. Many adults with Asperger themselves (including adults who would later follow up with their own official diagnosis) identified very strongly with my account.

As in my own case, the majority of adult Asperger individuals – as well as the parents of most individuals with Asperger of any age – welcome the diagnosis of Asperger syndrome, when this is the explanation which most obviously fits the case. This is because with the correct diagnosis comes understanding, and access to whatever resources are available for the condition. Parents, teachers, caregivers, and the affected persons themselves, can obtain helpful strategies which improve the likelihood of the individual with Asperger or autism – once the correct diagnosis of ASD is supplied. Without the right explanation of why the person is different, he or she is likely to be labelled ‘wildly disobedient’, ‘lazy’, ‘not trying hard enough’, and a host of other mis-explanations, along with a range of mis-treatments to fit the mis-explanations. Being treated unfairly and inappropriately is likely to distress the individual with ASD further, making further autistic behaviours more likely, followed by further mis-explanations and mis-treatments ... thus creating a negative cycle and unhappiness all round ... unless the correct explanation of the person’s differences comes to light, enabling the correct interventions to be made.

Many families have found that as soon as they began interacting with their family member with ASD in a way that is appropriate for ASD, the family member began functioning better and the problems became fewer or easier to deal with. For example, the vast majority of individuals with ASD process information more effectively through the visual sense. Having established that the person in question is in this majority group, it is then better to communicate with the person as much as possible via the visual sense.

This can be done by using wall charts to show the day’s routine and the week’s routine; using picture checklists to show how tasks are done step by step; and using pen and paper (or email) for communication, or at least as a visual back-up for what was said in a verbal communication. The use of visual aids in ASD is now a recognised strategy, and interested persons can learn more about it via Autism NZ or other practitioners in the autism field.

A person with an undiagnosed ASD is probably not receiving the strategy of visual aids, or any other interventions which help persons on the spectrum. Improved quality of life is a prime reason why individuals with ASD should be identified as early as possible.

“Empowering” is a concept that I, as an adult of late diagnosis, use to describe what the explanation feels like. Instead of continuing to feel “mad or bad”, I now know that I was merely born with slightly different brain wiring, and knowing what that entails, I can live my life far more effectively. With this relatively new information, I can now plan, organise and strategise to maximise my efficiency and to minimise failures. For instance, now that I know why I had big problems working in a café – due to the ASD deficit in multi-tasking ability – I have placed café work at the very bottom of my future careers list! Rather than continue to experience unnecessary failure, I now concentrate my efforts on the activities I can do, and the activities I have to do – not the activities which cause me needless stress. Nowadays, I can often work my way around challenges, due to my new understanding of what I find easiest and what I find most difficult. Without the knowledge of why I sometimes need to do things differently from other people, I would still be “banging my head against a brick wall” trying to force myself to do it their way at all costs. I am now empowered to work smarter.

During the seven years since my diagnosis, I have given talks, training sessions and classes, including a Keynote Speech for Autism New Zealand’s national conference in 2002, and have participated in several television documentaries on autism.

Whether they know it or not, people in all of the professions are working with individuals who have ASD. Autism NZ now estimates that one in every hundred persons is on the autism spectrum – so it is impossible to go through life without meeting some of us! Because many of these individuals are still undiagnosed and are therefore not receiving the appropriate support, it is essential for all professional people to become aware of the features of ASD. They can then assist by getting the individual referred for assessment, or at least by relating to the individual in the most helpful way.

Congratulations! It’s Asperger syndrome, by Jen Birch, (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2003), 270 pages, is available world-wide, as well as available from myself, and is in many libraries.
AUTHOR PROFILE

Jen Birch grew up in rural New Zealand knowing something was different about her. None of the professional services could help.

Jen began university study in her forties, one day attending a psychology lecture on Asperger syndrome. Recognising the traits, Jen arranged for an assessment, thus obtaining the diagnosis at 43 years of age.

Wishing to address the low awareness of ASD in New Zealand, Jen then wrote a book: Congratulations! It’s Asperger syndrome (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2003). Jen also speaks at conferences and in the community on this subject.

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Narrative Psychology:
A tool for ecological practice

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ABSTRACT
This article suggests that while educational psychology espouses an ecological view of human development, the implementation of practices that reflect this perspective has often been obstructed. In many circumstances, practices that attribute problems to individuals, or groups of individuals, continue. These contrast with ecological practices that position problems in the interaction between people with various needs and their particular worlds. The article suggests that many educational and community systems operate to maintain individual-centred practices and that many tools currently available to educational psychologists were developed for more traditional approaches. Narrative inquiry is recommended in this article as one available tool that supports ecological practice. The article, presented in two parts, discusses the shared theoretical foundations of ecological practice and narrative inquiry. It illustrates one way in which narrative inquiry integrates with familiar patterns of practice in educational psychology. The narrative approach to psychology is presented here as a way of thinking and talking about practice rather than as a therapy or a method of scientific research.

Research/Practice Paper
Keywords
Ecological perspective, educational psychology, narrative therapy, professional practice, social constructivism, storytelling

This paper discusses educational psychology’s challenge to select and develop tools that support practitioners to work ecologically. It suggests one method, narrative inquiry, as a means of relocating problems from within individuals to the interaction between people and their environments. Part A discusses the background to the application of narrative principles. Part B provides an illustration of the way in which narrative psychology integrates with regular ecological practice. Although the article focuses largely on the example of educational psychology, the integration of narrative approaches is relevant also to practitioners in other professions that embrace the ecological perspective.

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Part A: New tools for new approaches

Urie Bronfenbrenner, architect of ecological psychology, provided a powerful argument for changing the direction of educational psychology (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1979). Since the introduction of his ecological theory, educational psychology has looked beyond static characteristics, such as traits and abilities within individual children, to view behaviour and learning in relation to the dynamic social and historical contexts in which they occur. Educational psychology has been receptive to ecological approaches, as at the time of the introduction of Bronfenbrenner’s theory, the limitations of traditional psychology practice were becoming apparent (Cronbach in Berliner, 1993). The works of writers who had offered theories that considered the complexity of society and human development were finding favour within the profession. For example, in the early twentieth century Lev Vygotsky (1978) had proposed a cultural-historical theory of human development; John Dewey (1938) had suggested that individuals interacted and cooperated with one another in ways that could only be explained with reference to the entire social context; and, Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) proffered more specific knowledge about the complex processes involved in the development of knowledge and skill.

With a wealth of academic literature espousing the value of ecological practice (Pianta, 2005; Ryba, Annan & Mentis, 2001; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000), educational psychologists are now positioned to appreciate the complexity of human development and the dynamic, interactive nature of learning contexts. They are encouraged to see problematic social situations as unhelpful mismatches of the actions of various groups of people and individuals with unique agendas; they are asked to discern the dynamic and reciprocal relations in referral situations; and, to take a snapshot in time of this ever-changing environment. They work alongside people to collaboratively construct alternative solutions, founded on the supportive aspects of their social situations.

Such ecological understandings are now commonplace in educational psychology (Moore, 1998; Pianta, 2005). However, working ecologically is not always straightforward. On one hand, the profession of educational psychology espouses an ecological view. On the other hand, field practitioners frequently find they are applying dominantly deficit-focused methods in their practice (see examples in Dwyer, 2001).
While much headway has been made in the application of ecological theory, educational psychologists have encountered barriers from within and outside of their profession. Popular public notions of psychology often depict a discipline concerned solely with the workings of the mind, independent of the context. Frequently, employers, teachers and parents adhere strongly to traditional expectations of psychology and educational psychologists themselves have sometimes been reluctant to put individual-focused practices behind them. Indeed, there are many institutional systems that educational psychologists consider serve to maintain traditional practice, including special education funding schemes, organisational policies and the sufficiency of professional development. These barriers are not insurmountable but their conquest may require some innovation and openness to develop new ways of working. As Dwyer (2001) commented, despite the numerous publications that support more constructive practice, many educational (school) psychologists are stuck in traditional models of service, repeating practices that have proven ineffective.

In the words of Vygotsky, “Any fundamentally new approach to a scientific problem leads to new methods of investigation and analysis” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 58). To a large extent, educational psychologists are locked into continuing their traditional practice because many psychological tools, the artefacts of practice, have been developed for traditional individual-focused practice. To understand the ways that traditional practices are maintained in the face of strong challenges, we can usefully consider Vygotsky’s work. He described the way that children used language to solve problems when their solutions were physically out of reach. He suggested that language had an organising function that permeated the process of “tool” use that, in turn, facilitated the construction of new solutions. In this way, he saw speaking and acting as ‘part of one and the same complex psychological function’ (p. 23). Speech and tools were not parallel but inseparable. To some extent, the language accepted in the practice settings of educational psychology continues to reflect individual-centred rather than ecological views, for example, the ADHD child, unmotivated children, special needs children.

Ecological analysis of social contexts in educational psychology requires tools to facilitate this process. Tools used for individual-centred psychology may not always support this process. However, the cost of relinquishing traditional tools is the vacuum created in the absence of those that are new and more applicable. Educational psychology must discover or create applicable tools. This does not mean that psychologists must discard every historical item but such development may require substantial modification of methods designed for previous practice.

Educational psychologists discover or create tools that can guide the construction of ecological solutions. One tool available to educational psychologists is narrative inquiry. This way of thinking and talking about practice leads educational psychologists to the unique stories of individuals and groups involved in the ecology of practice and fosters the creation of a mutual focus or purpose for their participation. It supports participants to take charge of overwhelming and complex situations and to re-script existing stories, constructing better alternatives.

Narrative inquiry is a means of co-researching the contexts of participants’ lives within the metaphors to which they subscribe (see Clandinin & Connolly, 2000). Although we talk in this article about narrative inquiry as a research method, it is probably best known as a therapy in which co-researching is an integral element. There is ample evidence to suggest that narrative approaches make valuable contributions (Bird, 2004; Durrant & White, 1990; Epston, 1989; Epston & White, 1989; Freeman, Epston & Lobovits, 1997; White & Epston, 1990). This article suggests that the principles of narrative inquiry and the methods used to discern, explore and re-script stories in complex situations can integrate with regular educational psychology practice provided that frameworks of practice accommodate ecological construction of meaning. The compatibility of narrative inquiry and ecological educational psychology practice can be attributed to the sharing of some fundamental theoretical understandings, most notably, the arbitrary construction of meaning for events in an interactive and dynamic social world. Integrating narrative inquiry and ecological educational psychology practice is not merely a matter of applying a method, or a therapy. The principles of the narrative approach permeate the entire consultation process. The integration reflects the way educational psychologists think and talk about situations and consequently, the way they feel and act when they are working.

It is now 15 years since David Epston introduced New Zealand educational psychologists to narrative approaches. While other methods and tools have come and gone over this period, narrative understandings have been maintained within the practice of those for whom they had appeal. These educational psychologists have retained the metaphor of the story, albeit complex and multi-systemic, as an overarching frame. The principles derived from narrative therapy have been integrated into their regular practice (Ryba, Annan & Mentis, 2001) and their supervision (Annan, 2005a).

This article describes and illustrates ways in which principles derived from narrative inquiry can be integrated within an ecological practice framework. In order to explain this integration, we present an overview of the most fundamental understandings associated with narrative processes and discuss the place of these in the analysis of dynamic, interactive ecological systems. We also identify some critical interpersonal skills required to support the authentic inclusion of participant views.

**ELEMENTS OF NARRATIVE PRACTICE**

Practitioners who take a narrative approach to their work are guided by some key understandings. The social world is viewed as a socially constructed, negotiated system that does not assume any particular “correct” or “ideal” path. It does not hold an elusive, universal truth but comprises collective subjective realities at any moment in time. Taking a narrative approach, as in ecological psychology, does not mean that educational psychologists diminish the experience of those who have undergone extreme hardship.
It simply means that educational psychologists try to understand others’ worlds, and accept that only individuals themselves can authentically describe their own experience of events. An individual’s experience of an experience, is his/her experience. People’s lives are embedded in the stories that they hold about themselves at any one time; stories that are influenced by both the individuals’ observations of their own actions and their interpretations of the stories that others hold about them.

Educational psychologists usually encounter, at the point of referral, problem-saturated stories that tend to dominate the referral situation. Although each person has their own story, or stories, about a situation, it is more difficult to discern those that are less dominant and conversations with participants might divert attention from these stories. For example, when talking with a teacher who is experiencing difficulty as a result of his interaction with a student, he may freely discuss the times when interactions were negative but may be less willing to identify times when interactions were effective or constructive. In such situations, it may be that what is not in the story may be of much interest to the educational psychologist as what is in the story. However, unless we are able to hear multiple stories, dominant or otherwise, we are not well positioned to create meaningful alternative circumstances.

The assignment of useful meaning to referral circumstances is a crucial aspect of any educational psychology practice. Educational psychologists who take ecological approaches are concerned with the development of constructive meaning for complex situations through examining the connections between events, people and theories. This meaning is created as participants create “new or better connection between hitherto disparate ideas” (Bayler, 2005, p. 1). The theoretical knowledge contained in the new stories guides the actions of the individuals. Therefore, changes in social behaviour and learning can only occur when these theories are examined and modified. The ecological perspective taken by current educational psychologists implies that changes occurring in one part of the social ecology will necessarily affect another. Ecological practice cannot occur, therefore, when only one person’s story is considered. All participants must be active, contributing their unique views.

Narrative methods in field work involve listening to and retelling stories (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits, 1997). The stories that represent the subjective realities of participants are examined and reconstructed to provide an alternative reality. New stories are reached by means of languaging, a process in which participants’ language is modified to change the power differential between a person, or people, and a problem. Narrative inquiry assumes that existing language reflects current ways of thinking about events and can serve to maintain unhelpful stories in problematic situations (Bird, 2004). Language frequently internalises problems, locating them within the person, rendering them non-negotiable. Through languaging, the problem can be named and relocated to an external position between the person and the world. From this position of distance, the person, or people, are liberated from the control of the problem and develop power to address it.

Through positioning a named “problem” (e.g. hitting, overeating, worrying) externally to the young person, exploration can begin around the nature of the problem, the extent of the “problem”, the time when the “problem” is more or less likely to appear. Other avenues of inquiry in narrative exploration may include the impact of the problem on a young person’s home and school life. In this way, the focus moves away from the ‘problem’ itself, and toward the young persons’ relationship with the problem (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits, 1997). This relationship with the problem is not necessarily severed or adversarial as, in some cases, for example eating, a continuing but constructive relationship is required. It is through exploration of the relationship between the person and the problem that a possible new story, involving a constructive relationship, begins to emerge. No one story is the right story. Some stories will just work better for people than others.

As a tool for practice, narrative inquiry is well suited to ecological fieldwork that requires educational psychologists to focus on the relationships between people, events and ideas. By relocating problems through use of externalising language, people not only gain authority over undesirable occurrences, but they are immediately positioned to move from the problem to the solution. Through externalising problems by use of languaging, people can move from an original, often problem-saturated situation, to one in which they can make use of their resources to construct better alternatives. Externalising language allows people to review their own experience with reference to the perspectives of others on their story through a process that Epston described as ‘regradation’ rather than ‘degradation’ (Epston in Durrant, 1990).

Narrative inquiry is concerned with supporting people to access knowledge through the construction of language. Language is developed to support educational psychologists to focus on participants’ stories and to prevent the dominant stories from blocking the view of those that are less dominant. The relationship between knowledge and power, much deliberated by philosophers such as Barnes, Foucault, and Weber, is an important aspect of narrative methods. Inherent in the language selected to discuss referral circumstances is the extent to which one perspective on this situation is privileged over another (Billington, 2002; Bird, 2004). The meanings and power attached to words influence the narrative lens through which the world is perceived as evidenced by communities’ propensity for dominant discourses at all levels of the social ecology. For example, dominant discourses within a group of teachers may cloud their view of solutions or lead them to act in ways that maintain this discourse. Similarly, societal discourses may encourage community members to view all problems through a medical-model lens which suggest that problems be addressed by repairing parts of people. The narrative view allows us to appreciate that language aligns with such discourses but also suggests that both language and discourse are negotiable.

Ecological practice is supported by narrative understandings because they allow new solutions to be constructed on the supportive aspects of existing situations.
Participants can make use of the resources that are available to them and that have meaning for them. Unhelpful dominant stories in existing situations are challenged through the identification of unique outcomes, aspects of the story that are outliers in relation to the overwhelming problem saturated narratives. Unique outcomes are pivotal in the re-scripting process. They indicate instances in which the problem is not present and signal the potential strength of existing and projected means to keep undesirable occurrences at bay. Alternative meanings can be assigned to situations with new solutions embedded in familiar metaphors.

Initially, language that places concerns in the interaction between people and the world may be experienced as uncomfortable. People are accustomed to conventional language in which events are frequently attributed to inherent qualities of people. The rearrangement of familiar language may be at first experienced as awkward or corny, detracting from the task of making new meaning. However, an individual’s experience of this re-languaging process may be largely a matter of being committed to developing new solutions and believing in the efficacy of the narrative approach. Reflecting on this point, Bird (2004) suggested that the development of a new language requires patience, determination, struggle and a desire to learn something new (p. 4).

Part A of this article has discussed the theoretical background to narrative psychology and educational psychology in relation to some of the challenges practitioners currently face. Part B will illustrate the way in which narrative principles integrate with familiar educational psychology processes.

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**Part B: An illustration of the application of narrative principles in educational psychology**

In Part B of the article, we explain how narrative inquiry can inform each stage of educational psychologists’ regular field practice. We provide examples of some of the questions that educational psychologists seek to answer during the course of their fieldwork. These questions illustrate the way that the processes of ecological practice are enhanced by narrative inquiry, integrating with consultation processes rather than replacing them as a micro-environment therapy.

The sample presented here illustrates the integration of narrative understandings and methods into a framework designed to support ecological practice, situational analysis (Annan, 2005b). Situational analysis focuses on the co-construction of new solutions developed upon existing supportive aspects of the situations under review rather than on problems within a problem as has been the case with much traditional psychology practice. While educational psychologists continue to acknowledge the learning needs of children and the factors that obstruct solutions, they actively seek to discern the departures from the dominant problematic stories. Without such information, there would be no platform for intervention and no knowledge of useful solutions that serve to support the creation of a new, alternative story.

While this illustration is presented in a linear form, the application of the situational analysis is not always straightforward. For example, when negotiating consultation processes, educational psychologists are already collecting data and beginning to form tentative analyses. At any one time, an educational psychologist may be assessing, analysing and will necessarily be intervening by virtue of their very presence in the situation. However, in this article we have presented the integration of narrative inquiry into situational analysis to help educational psychologists discern important patterns in this process.

**ILLUSTRATION OF THE INTEGRATION OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS**

This illustration makes use of general rather than specific questions to allow readers to consider how they might apply narrative processes to a wide range of situations in their varied field work. In practice, these general questions would guide psychologists’ practice and give rise to specific questions that locate the problem within the social interaction of the ecosystem. For example, an educational psychologist might want to know about creating a supportive context for a new story (general concern) and might ask the specific question, “How could the teacher help turning up [at class] (named problem) isn’t around as much?”

1. **Negotiation of the Solution Construction Process**

The process of negotiating the procedures for constructing alternative situations begins at the time of the first communication between the referrer and the educational psychologist. This is the time that educational psychologists ask those associated with the particular concern about events that precipitated the referral, their tentative analyses of the situation and the referrer’s expectations regarding possible procedures. It is also the time when educational psychologists begin to learn who will be the participants in the work. While some questions of negotiation are explicitly answered by participants, the answers to others may be implied in the language participants use to describe events. For example, when a problem is discussed in terms of a “disordered child”, an “incompetent teacher” or a “negligent parent”, there is a strong indication that the participants locate the problem inherently within these people, making changes to the situation a major challenge.
It is important that those participating in the fieldwork develop understandings of the way educational psychologists work, the events that they might expect to occur and the rationale for the methods that these practitioners select. In order to ensure that participants consent to the professional relationship in an informed way, educational psychologists can explain their processes and the underlying principles of their approaches. That is, educational psychologists can tell their story of constructing solutions.

2. Clarification of the Problem
The clarification of the problem is a critical stage of the process and one in which narrative methods can be most apparent. Language that locates problematic issues in the interaction between people is used from the outset. The main tasks of this stage are to clarify the nature of the problem and to “name” it. Once named, the problem is then located in the interaction between people and the world. The naming process can be a collaborative process that promotes a shared focus and mutual understanding of the procedures for the ensuing fieldwork among participants.

The process of repositioning the problem takes place in conversation about the nature and extent of the problem. The educational psychologist does not collect simply the dominant problematic story but the story of each participant. At this stage, each participant provides their unique description of the problem and examines the impact it has on their life.

How can we describe the problem?
What is the problem doing to the lives of each person?
Are there any times when this problem is not present?
What is happening when the problem is not present?
What do you do that keeps the problem away?
Are there any other things that keep the problem away?
Why do we want to be in charge of this problem?
What can we call this problem?
Does this name for the problem fit with all participants’ views of it?
What ways can we explore this problem further?

3. Exploration
At this stage of the situational analysis the educational psychologist conducts the assessment, an exploration that includes the continuing development of participants’ stories and the collection of information through methods that may include observation, review of documents and the administration of applicable tests. Evidence based main influences (dimensions) are proposed. Participants move away from the initial emphasis on the problem, setting their sights on a new solution. The solution becomes the focus of participation.

What is the history of the story?
What supports are there in this situation to help people take charge of the problem?
What metaphors would support an applicable new story?

What happens when the problem is not around?
What resources are available to allow participants to manage this problem?
What are the strongest current influences on this problem?

4. Analysis
The educational psychologist proposes an analysis, a story of the situation based on the exploration of multiple stories. Information is collected through observation, formal assessment and review of history. It is reviewed by participants.

Does this story (analysis/theory of meaning) reflect the findings of the assessment?
Were there sufficient challenges to the problem-saturated story to build a strong new story?

5. Development of Principles for Intervention
From the analysis, the participants derive principles for intervention. These principles indicate important aspects of the new story (desired outcome) and the intervention (strategy to achieve the new story).

What does the analysis mean for intervention?
What understandings will underpin the new story?
What will be the essential features of the new story?
Do we need to give priority to the review of any particular story?

6. Planning the Intervention
During collaborative intervention planning, the participants consider how to reduce or take charge of the problem in ways that address the impact of the problem on each person. They consider the departures from the dominant story and build the solution from these. The planned actions of the participants become the intervention.

What will be the nature of the new story?
What is a suitable name for this new story?
What are the specific objectives of our plan?
What actions will people have to take in order to create and maintain a new story?
How will we know that the new story is helpful?

7. Implementing the Intervention
To move toward the new story, participants begin to make changes in the way they think about and act on situations. This process of intervention is often supported by oral or written communication between some or all of the participants, for example, sharing records of behaviour, writing letters, making visits to discuss progress. It is not unusual to make adjustments to the new story or to continue to develop the story over this period. Depending on the particular circumstances of the new story and the participants’ plans to realise this, the form of educational psychologist involvement may be either direct or indirect.

Do we still remember the new story?
Are we making progress toward the new story?
Is there evidence that the plan will be suitable?
8. Reviewing the Intervention
The review process allows all participants, including educational psychologists, to reflect on the process and to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention to date. Outcomes are measured and considered in relation to the match with the new story and movement away from the original referral situation. Demonstrating effectiveness remains an essential part of educational psychology practice regardless of the approach practitioners take to select. At the time of review, participants might celebrate their new helpful stories, or they may choose to adjust them in order to make them work better for them.

Is the new story operating?
How strong is the plan?
Where is the problem now?
Do we need to continue to strengthen the plan?
How can we sustain the story?
What would we do if the problem ever tried to overcome us?

HEARING THE NARRATIVES IN ECOLOGICAL PRACTICE
As with any practice, narrative approaches within an ecological framework do not operate independently of the interpersonal style of the practitioner. Using narrative tools within an ecological approach to practice is not a matter of going through the motions. The practitioner must connect with the process. The effectiveness of the practice will be affected by a range of factors, some quite apparent, others far more difficult to distinguish, but all related to the subtle indicators of appropriateness for the particular contexts in which practice occurs. Effective practice reflects not only what educational psychologists do, but how they do it. Factors that can influence participant interaction include practitioner beliefs, communication styles and the context in which practice occurs. These are discussed briefly below.

Practitioner Beliefs
Fundamental to ecological practice are some important practitioner understandings that necessarily effect the actions practitioners take in their work. Ecologically oriented educational psychologists view their practice not as a quest for truth and remediation but as a means to create meaning and to co-construct alternative stories. They perceive their work to lie in the construction of new relationships between people and problems that are located in social interaction. Furthermore, they hold an optimistic view with regard to the possibility of change in difficult and complex situations. They genuinely hope and trust that situations can change.

Communication Styles
Irrespective of the methods educational psychologists select for their work, the effectiveness of their consultation will be influenced by the subtle messages that they communicate about their beliefs, attitudes, values and intentions. Powerful messages are communicated not only through the spoken word but through other non-verbal actions.

This was clearly illustrated in the classic study of inconsistent messages of feelings and attitudes by Mehrbadian (1971) who concluded that there were three elements in any face to face communication; words, tone of voice and body language. Words accounted for only a small proportion of the messages received, while tone of voice made more of an impact. However, it was the non-verbal gestures that accounted for most of the meaning assigned to communications. In effective conversation, Mehrbadian considered that these three elements must demonstrate high levels of congruence and that the messages communicated through each mode were consistent.

Effective listening can create a platform for individuals to consider the complexity of situations and to examine and modify their own stories (Cronan, 1992). It is through listening to and hearing the stories of each participant that educational psychologists can locate the hopes and concerns of each person within a meaningful context (Laslett, 1999). Listening to stories, in this professional sense, requires extensive knowledge, skill and commitment. Educational psychologists must understand the theoretical rationale for collecting the stories in the first place and know how to elicit authentic accounts. They must know what to do with the stories and how to care for them respectfully. Taking time to slow down sufficiently to consider the perspectives of others may require deliberate effort and adjustment of educational psychologists’ busy schedules.

The Story-Telling Context
Listening to stories requires the creation of favourable environments for dialogue and the acknowledgement that such interactive experiences could take all parties into their emotional worlds. In order to operate effectively in this area, educational psychologists must be aware of their own perspectives and the impact that they have on their interpretations of events and relationships. Every practitioner will necessarily perceive stories through their own filters on the presenting situation and will interpret these in relation to their own worldview (Schön, 1983). Narrative inquiry does provide a degree of safety in this regard, however, as it embraces the story as the object of inquiry rather than the person, or the event that precipitated the referral. The objectification of the problem may free educational psychologists to make connections between stories and the beliefs and the emotions of narrators (Atkinson, 2002).

Listening involves hearing, but not judging or colluding with, individuals’ unique stories. This fine line can present a challenge for educational psychologists, including both newcomers and experienced practitioners. Participants are not restricted in the number of stories they hold regarding one situation and may have multiple stories from which they can select in response to varying contexts. The authenticity of the stories shared with educational psychologists could be affected by the level and mutuality of trust in the sincerity of the professional relationship and the perceived credibility of the educational psychologist.
SUMMARY

Ecological understandings that imply socially constructed, multi-systemic realities are now commonplace in educational psychology literature. However, in practice, educational psychologists are often locked into traditional service models as they continue to use tools that reflect previous ways of understanding human development. Although there is a clear need to develop new tools, some compatible tools are available to educational psychologists. One of these is narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry integrates with ecological frameworks of practice, supporting educational psychologists at each stage of their work to appreciate that they are working with the individual subjective realities of multiple participants. This interactive way of thinking about and talking about practice fosters the development of a shared focus for educational psychologists’ work and the establishment of collaborative working relationships.

The integration of narrative methods into the ecological approach to educational psychology rests on the strong relationship between thought and language. Narrative inquiry, through its concern with stories that are located in social interaction, rather than existing as inherent characteristics within people, allows practitioners to think ecologically about their work. This method implies that individuals’ lives are embedded in the stories that they hold about themselves and that these stories are negotiable. It supports the development of alternative solutions that have meaning to participants and applicability for their particular contexts.

This paper has illustrated the way that narrative inquiry informs each stage of the situational analysis, a framework developed for ecological educational psychology. It has provided samples of the infinite range of questions that educational psychologists might ask about their work in order to maintain their ecological, interactive perspective. Educational psychologists who wish to become proficient at integrating narrative inquiry would first need to prepare by becoming familiar with this method and the language that places concerns externally to individuals as this way of talking about events contrasts strongly with traditional language use. This paper has also suggested that the interpersonal styles educational psychologists select to approach their work influence the effectiveness of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is not a recipe; it does not have prescribed questions but a set of principles to guide the creation of unique journeys. This way of working requires that educational psychologists connect with participants, hear the stories of participants and develop shared language and ways of thinking about situations.

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To Smack or Not to Smack?

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Position Paper

Keywords
Children's rights, discipline, family violence, laws, parenting, punishment.

The issue of physical punishment is a particularly controversial one at the moment as child advocates are engaged in a struggle to persuade the New Zealand government to repeal a defence in law (section 59 of the 1961 Crimes Act) which justifies parents hitting their children provided the force used is 'reasonable in the circumstances.'

Debate about physical punishment of children became very public in New Zealand in 2000, when attention was again drawn to the issue by a number of very public child abuse cases, and by media attention which accompanied the second government report to the United Nations (UN) committee that monitors countries' compliance with the Convention on the rights of the child (United Nations, 1989).

Currently, a persuasive voice from a more conservative generation clamours to be heard: "But it didn't do me any harm – or my kids". The "spare the rod, and spoil the child" contingent is powerful and persuasive. 'Why should the state intervene in something as personal as the way I bring up my children?', argues this collective voice.

The use of physical punishment is deeply embedded in our culture and history. Russell and Wood (2001) state, 'physical punishment has been a long-standing tradition in European and other cultures, and is not readily abandoned. It is still popular in New Zealand, although attitudes are changing.' (p. 1).

The most persuasive argument to support anti-smacking law changes to section 59 of the Crimes Act (1961) is that research shows that while smacking might reduce unwanted behaviours in the immediate or short term, as a long term strategy for positive and permanent behaviour change it is simply not effective, and more importantly, it can be harmful (Gershoff, 2002; Holden, 2002).

There is substantial research showing that both moderate and severe physical punishment is damaging, and can lead to an increase in violent behaviours, criminality and mental illness (Leach, 1999).

Particularly concerning in New Zealand is the high child abuse and death from abuse statistics: high youth suicide rates, and high reported rates of bullying in schools compared with other countries. Smith (2005) states that the use of corporal punishment as a method of family discipline is a definite health risk for children. 'The more children experience corporal punishment and the more frequent and severe it is, the more they are at risk of problems such as aggression or depression' (Smith, 2005, p. 14).

Smacking is not a good teaching technique; it merely suppresses the problem behaviour (for the purpose of avoiding pain or fear), often breeds resentment, fear or anger in the child, and does not replace the problem behaviour with an appropriate alternative (Holden, 2002; Holden, Miller & Harris 1999). Ritchie and Ritchie (1981) in their book Spare the Rod, an in-depth study of New Zealand parenting attitudes and practices at that time, argue, 'The punisher is offering the child both the motive to punish someone else (to displace the anger), and a model for doing so' (p. 54). They add that adults justify hitting children by saying it will teach them a lesson, but it actually teaches them the lesson that parents are powerful and can hurt you, which may not be the lesson the parents intended. They believe that although people often assert that aroused emotional states may increase the desire to learn or make children more anxious to please, anger and fear actually interfere with learning, making it less efficient, and reducing the chances of remembering or establishing behaviour patterns.

In response to the assertion that 'it never did me any harm', we have an increasingly violent society which tolerates – and even sanctions – many forms of violence. Research suggests that there is a definite link between the frequency of physical discipline received as a child and later aggressive acts, and this violence certainly harms many innocent people. Evidence shows that one of the most common predictors of severe behaviour problems in school children is a history of "good hidings" in the home (Roguski, 2004).

In answer to the argument that 'spanking works'; I would argue that what "works" is not the smack, but the displeasure and disapproval conveyed loud and clear – usually both verbally and via body language – by the person the child usually reveres most in life. Possibly in a loving home where a smack was a rare response to serious misdemeanour, and there were explanations and forgiveness following, not much lasting personal harm was done. However, the practice demonstrates double standards and conveys mixed messages.
Weaving educational threads. Weaving educational practice.

Smacking implies that it is legitimate for big people (‘grown-ups’) to hit smaller people (children), but not vice versa. Employers cannot hit their employees when they are displeased with them, teachers cannot hit pupils, or husbands their wives, without possibly going to court. Somehow, however it is considered valid for caregivers to hit their children because, supposedly, ‘it’s good for them’ (Saunders & Goddess, 1999). This attitude is a throwback to a bygone era when children were regarded as chattels, not as people with rights.

Today an increasing number of New Zealand parents express disquiet about hitting their children, whom they vehemently protect in all other spheres of life. Russell and Wood (2001) conducted a study of parents who had chosen not to smack, and investigated factors which influenced their decision. These factors included: personal childhood experiences, lack of fairness or effectiveness, not wanting their children to be afraid of them, a belief that alternatives were more efficacious and more acceptable, and a concern about trusting themselves not to injure when angry.

Gough and Reavey (1997) found that despite its popularity, many parents report that smacking is ineffective, and that they smack more to relieve their stress and frustration than to influence a child’s behaviour. While many smack are impulsive reactions made in anger, and later regretted, sadly there are also a few who derive pleasure from venting their frustration or anger on a child because of the immediate release of tension, and the satisfying sense of power and control. A very small number go on to cause injury or worse to their protegé. Ritchie and Ritchie (1981) argue that, ‘physical punishment is really very addictive – the more you use it the more it will be necessary to use it’ (p. 50).

The state has a responsibility to protect these vulnerable children. Increasingly, the media is reporting cases of babies and children being hospitalised and sometimes killed following physical abuse. However, as mentioned above, the law as it stands legitimises physical force against young people.

Two years ago a woman who hit her son with a horse whip and a bamboo cane was acquitted of assault when she appeared in a Timaru court (New Zealand Herald, 2005). Four years ago, a Ngāruawāhia man who beat his 12-year-old daughter with a hose-pipe, raising a lump on her back, was acquitted of the same offence in Hamilton (New Zealand Herald, 2001). Earlier the same year, a Havelock North father who hit his 8-year-old son so hard with a piece of kindling that bruises were still visible on his buttocks days later was acquitted of assault (The Dominion, 2001).

It is that section of the act that Green MP Sue Bradford is trying to repeal with a members’ bill that cleared its first parliamentary hurdle by 65 votes to 54 last July. If passed into law, the Crimes Amendment Bill will remove reasonable force as a legitimate defence for caregivers charged with assault.

What will we be left with that works if smacking is outlawed? Anxious caregivers ask. The most effective discipline package is like a house of bricks, rather than one of straw or sticks.

The foundations are a mix of love and respect (as opposed to fear, power and control). This naturally develops as a result of unconditional love (selfless love which demands nothing in return); consistent nurturing care, and personal integrity. Role-modelling, and teaching children strategies such as problem-solving and communication skills are far more constructive and conducive to love and respect than smacking.

To develop the analogy, the brick walls of the house are an amalgam of responsible parental authority and consistency. Caregivers need to take charge and learn to “wear the pants”. Children who soon learn to sense the resolve that means ‘I mean what I say, and I’ll take no nonsense’. If built on a foundation of love and respect, children will not lightly challenge just authority, or incur displeasure. However, without that base of love, an unremitting authoritarian approach can breed resentment, rebellion and anger (Graziano, Hamblen & Plante, 1996; Holden, 2002). A thick layer of positive regard must underlie the “firm and fair” bricks.

A rich schedule of positive reinforcement for desirable behaviour cements the bricks. Sometimes caregivers, like school teachers, have to actively search for positive behaviour (particularly when tired or stressed), as biologically genetically humans are programmed to ignore positives and attend to negatives (for purposes of survival). Positive reinforcement can take many forms: praise, hugs, privileges, treats, responsibilities, celebrations. One of the most precious positive reinforcers is quality parental time spent with a child (especially in play and through fun times).

The roof of the parenting discipline structure is comprised of consistent, predictable, appropriate negative consequences, enforced without shouting or physical force. Such consequences are an integral part of the teaching process which is central to pro-active discipline. These can include withdrawal of attention (the time-honoured time-out procedure falls into this category), reduced privileges (for example, limits on TV time or going out to play with friends), and allowing natural or logical consequences to follow inappropriate behaviour. For example, no pudding is given if the excuse for not eating one’s meat and vegetables is, ‘I’m too full’. In an ideal world, as parents, teachers or employers, it would be preferable to not employ any aversive or coercive strategies, but practicality – and common sense – suggests that a mixture of many positive and some reasonable negative consequences (that is, age-appropriate and time-limited) is realistic.

Teaching is the key, and role-modelling, and helping children learn strategies such as problem-solving and communication skills are far more constructive and conducive to love and respect than smacking. Offering choices to children (for example, ‘bath before or after tea – you choose’) allows them some control, and a chance to develop responsibility in day to day affairs. The root of the word “discipline”, in fact, means “to teach”.

Caregivers, who sometimes forget that they have the ultimate authority in shaping their children’s development, do not always realise that they hold most of the resources: wisdom and experience, material possessions, money and power.
They must exercise the right to use these wisely in the loving discipline of their children. Certainly caregivers are not left powerless by the possible removal of smacking as an acceptable disciplinary strategy. Confidence in being a caregiver who is in charge, and possesses a range of respectful parenting strategies, in turn develops security and contentment in children.

Russell and Wood (2001) believe that changing attitudes and behaviour about the use of smacking has three dimensions. These are legal reform to acknowledge children’s rights and set a clear standard of parent behaviour in law; parent education about effective child rearing practices, and available supportive social services, particularly for parents under stress. I believe that educational professionals who interface with parents have a special opportunity and responsibility to be an integral part of this process of support and re-education.

REFERENCES


AUTHOR PROFILE

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An Evaluation of the Discovery Time Programme

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ABSTRACT
This article describes the Discovery Time programme, a largely child-directed developmental programme, and discusses it in relation to the sociocultural approach to learning. It considers the effects of the programme on the development of children’s oral language and cooperative social skills in a Year 1 classroom. Survey information gathered by the teacher indicated that the language and social skills of the children increased over a 10 week period. The review of the discovery time programme also considered information through interviews with key participants, observations of the programme in action and review of the child participants’ stories and pictures. This additional information indicated that discovery time provided a positive learning environment and enjoyable experiences for the children, teacher and school community. The article concludes with suggestions for further developments of the programme within the school.

Practice Paper
Keywords
Learning activities, new entrants, oral language, play based curriculum, programme evaluation, social skills.

Play is the natural way in which children go about the business of learning. It enables them to integrate and consolidate a wealth of experiences that enhance their cognitive, physical, social and emotional development. (Fisher, 2002, p. 128)

WHAT IS DISCOVERY TIME?
Discovery time is a sessional, action packed, activity based programme founded on the “developmental” or “choosing time” concept of the 1970’s. Regularly scheduled, it provides opportunities for teachers to meet a wide range of student needs through well planned, structured, activity based experiences. Discovery time advocates for “play” as a legitimate learning activity for children at school.

A typical session would see the teacher planning and preparing a range of activities such as skipping, construction, puppetry, cooking, Lego, painting, craft activities, cooperative games or jigsaw puzzles. The teacher would begin by introducing the focus for the day that generally targets an essential skill (for example, sharing, including others, communicating, solving problems, persevering, and completing tasks). There might be a discussion about what this skill would look like and sound like, and how one would know if it was happening.

The activities for the day would be explained with many of these linking to the current curriculum work. The children then select and participate in activities. During the session the teacher takes the role of facilitator; observing, providing feedback, asking questions and encouraging the students. At the end of the session the class would come together to share what they had done and what they had learned.

The concept of Discovery Time began as a collaborative project between the resource teacher: learning and behaviour (RTLB) and junior syndicate teachers in a low decile, multicultural school. Teachers considered that the strong focus on literacy and numeracy in junior classes left little time for a more holistic approach to education and opportunities for children to learn through play. They believed that observed behaviour problems were occurring because students found it difficult to work independently, communicate effectively, take turns or share equipment and did not always have the physical skills to complete a task. They also identified that there were few opportunities for student directed learning or for ‘hands on’ experiential learning. They wanted to meet not only the cognitive but also the social, emotional and physical needs of students. Discovery Time was initiated to meet these identified needs.

The teachers developed their ideas about the programme from a theoretical base incorporating the following key elements from the literature:
• A sociocultural approach to learning
• Child directed, experiential learning opportunities
• Opportunities for peer collaboration in the learning process
• Teacher facilitation of learning that incorporates observation and reflection
• Teacher / student communication based on open-ended questions and reflective dialogue.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THE DISCOVERY TIME PROGRAMME
Sociocultural Approach to Learning
Early theories of child development focused on individuals mastering linear stages of cognitive development, as in Piaget’s stages of cognitive development (Shaffer, 1996). However, sociocultural theorists have placed far greater emphasis on the social context of children’s learning where surrounding adults and peers have a shared role in the co-construction of learning (Cullen, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978).
Our understanding of how children learn and develop has moved away from viewing this process as a journey of individual mastery to a journey that is a collective process. The child is viewed as an active participant in this process; shaping, and being shaped, by the shared culture in which they live (Greenfield, 2002; Nixon & Aldwinckle, 2002). Māori perspectives on learning and development are similarly embedded in social interactions. Learning as a dynamic, socially interactive process is captured by the metaphor of a ‘weaving staircase’ or Poutama (Dyson, 1990; Royal-Tangaere, 1997). This view recognises the various experiences children bring to any given task and incorporate the collaboration of peers as well as adults in the learning process.

**Child-Directed Learning**

In New Zealand, recognition of the benefits of the sociocultural approach to learning can be seen in the early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996). Discovery Time has been developed from sociocultural theories of learning and links learning outcomes with essential skills outlined in The New Zealand curriculum framework (Ministry of Education, 1993) and key competencies in the New Zealand curriculum draft for consultation (Ministry of Education, 2006). These documents highlight that interactions between adults and peers play an important role in cognitive development (Hopkins, 2005). Two of the Best Evidence syntheses (Alton-Lee, 2003; Farquhar, 2003), found that peer collaboration is central to the learning process and opportunities for child directed learning are related to positive educational outcomes for all students. However, despite the positive outcomes reported in the literature, opportunities to co-construct knowledge through play and social interactions with peers are substantially reduced when children begin school (Coolahan & Mendez, 2000; Fisher, 2002). Fisher suggests that the curriculum should start from the child rather than expecting the child to start from the curriculum. This approach encourages children to become actively engaged in the learning process rather than being passive recipients of someone else’s decision making and control, usually the teachers.

**Peer Collaboration**

Opportunities for social interactions are recommended as a core part of the curriculum rather than “extra-curricula” activities. Positive interactive play behaviour in young children is associated with active engagement in classroom learning activities. During interactive play it is also common for conflicts to arise among children as they learn to problem solve. They must consider differing points of view, new ideas and experience the possibilities of co-constructing shared understandings (Coolahan & Mendez, 2000; Greenfield, 2002). There are long term benefits of social play for children’s learning. For example, Marcon (2002) found significantly higher grades for students at the end of their sixth year at school when they had participated in child-initiated early learning experiences.

**Teacher Facilitated Learning**

While research clearly indicates the benefits of peer collaboration in the learning process, it also highlights the valuable role of the teacher in facilitating learning through a range of educational experiences (Alton-Lee, 2003).

Farquhar (2003) summarises quality teaching as practices which focus on children as learners and on their learning. Quality teaching facilitates children’s dialogue, encourages cooperative as well as independent work and is concerned with the motivation and learning dispositions of young learners (Farquhar). A further recommendation is that teachers learn about children through observation and a sharing of common experiences that can be expressed through conversation and activities.

**Reflective Dialogue**

Taking time to talk with children and young people not only informs teachers about their current level of knowledge but it also has been demonstrated to be an effective strategy for learning. Allowing children and young people to use their own words to make sense of their experiences, their thoughts and ideas gives clear evidence on which to build the next stages of learning (Fisher, 2002). The use of open-ended questions as a way of scaffolding children’s thinking is associated with better cognitive outcomes for students (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylvia, Muttock, Gilden & Bell, 2002). It enables teachers to enhance children’s understanding of what they are doing, to express their ideas and to develop vocabulary through reflective dialogue and conversations (Williams, 1994). Encouraging reflective dialogue between peers and with teachers has been shown to promote meta-cognition (an awareness and control of their thinking processes) in young learners (Cullen, 1998; Cullen & St George, 1996). Observations of children are also valuable ways of seeing what children know and can do in a range of both child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities (Drummond, 2003; Fisher, 2002).

The Discovery Time programme aims to incorporate the above key aspects of teaching and learning theory into practice. While the programme was developed from a theoretical base, the learning outcomes for students and teachers had not, until this point, been formally evaluated. This led to the collaborative evaluation project.

**PROGRAMME EVALUATION**

Evaluating education programmes within the context of current literature is one way to ensure that practice is informed by relevant theory. The aim of this evaluation was to document some of the predicted learning outcomes of the discovery time programme, facilitated in this instance for one 90-minute session per week, by applying principles of education research within the classroom context. The two essential skills chosen by the teacher in this setting were oral language and cooperative social skills. While the school had developed some means of measuring the effects of the programme on students learning, project staff considered that collaboration with an external evaluator could add value to the programme and provide direction for further development.

The programme was evaluated in a decile one, multicultural school, with predominantly Pasifika students. The evaluation focused on the Year 1 class (average age 5 years, 4 months). The teacher gathered survey information for each child, rating their oral language and cooperative social skills on a scale of 1-5 based on their observations at the start of the term and again 10 weeks later.
Further information about the programme was collected through classroom observations, an interview with the teacher and recording of the “student voice” through pictures and stories.

Survey Information
The survey information indicated an increase in both target skills for all of the students as rated by the class teacher. Observable skills demonstrating social and cooperative competence included the ability to share, take turns, look after equipment and help to tidy up.

The rated social and cooperative skills increased on average for all students from ‘sometimes demonstrating the skill’ to ‘mostly demonstrating the skill’.

Observable skills for oral language development included the ability to report back clearly, report back in sentences and the ability to reflect on what they did or achieved. Oral language skills also increased over the 10-week period from ‘rarely demonstrating the skill’ to ‘sometimes demonstrating the skill’.

Teacher Interview
The interview data reflected a positive experience of discovery time since being implemented at the beginning of Term 3, 2005. It was described as, ‘a time to stand back and see what they [students] can do. With the new students it’s a good opportunity to pick up information about them.’ Benefits for student learning were reported as turntaking skills, developing social language to enter games, some problem solving skills, learning to play games and oral language development. From a teaching perspective the benefits from the discovery time programme included, ‘having time to sit down and interact with the children, to allow students to be the ‘teacher’, having time to spend with individuals’.

Observations
The students were observed taking turns, with and without adult support, during board games and with popular activities outside. They were observed engaging in cooperative play when tidying up together or building a shared construction like the train track. There were also examples of scaffolded learning between peers. This was observed when one child modelled or helped another child complete a task. The students demonstrated pride in their accomplishments during the discovery time session. They would frequently share their creations with each other and their teacher. The students were observed demonstrating emergent numeracy and literacy skills, counting and naming shapes as they played games, forming letters or words with play dough and writing their names on art work.

Children’s Information Sheets
Information sheets filled in with the children reflected a range of skills and favourite activities during Discovery Time. Examples of how children talked about concepts like sharing included:

I shared with Jayden. Jayden gave the moon hopper to me.
I share things when I was playing with my friends, with the game.

DISCUSSION
The results indicated a positive increase in social skills for all students as rated by the class teacher, moving from ‘sometimes’ demonstrating these skills to ‘mostly’ demonstrating these skills. Observations of the students during discovery time supported the teacher rating of ‘mostly’ demonstrating the target social and cooperative skills. The students engaged in turntaking during board games and when playing with equipment outside. The class teacher and the teacher aide were observed modeling turntaking skills and prompted the students to tidy up after playing with an activity. The teacher also reported preparing her students to practice sharing and turntaking during discovery time. This appeared to help prompt the students when reporting back about what they had learned throughout the session.

The discovery time programme provided opportunities for not only social skill development but oral language development. Research has identified positive links between reflective dialogues with children and improved learning outcomes (Cullen, 1998; Fisher, 2002). The results also indicated a positive increase in oral language skills after 10 weeks of the discovery time programme, moving from ‘sometimes able to report back clearly’ to ‘reporting back in sentences’. Observations of the reporting back supported these findings. Children were observed reporting the following statements:

I learnt to draw, I drew Pinocchio.
I liked the teddy bear game.
Be nice to people.

The teacher was observed interacting with the students, modeling social interactions like sharing and turntaking. She extended oral language through the use of open-ended questions, comments and positive reinforcement when these skills were demonstrated. The teacher also reported the benefits during this time to be able to step back and observe the students or interact with individuals or a small group. This was also supported by the observations. The involvement of the RTLB during the discovery time session appeared to work well. The RTLB was able to model different ways to promote problem solving with the children when conflict arose over sharing or compromising with construction ideas. She was also able to support the teachers in ways to encourage reporting back by involving herself in this process and prompting the students with questions.

The outcomes of the Discovery Time programme were hard to isolate through this type of evaluation due to the difficulty in controlling for other factors impacting on both social skill development and oral language development. With this evaluation design there was no way to accurately isolate the learning outcomes of the programme.
A variety of other influences such as family expectations, maturation, modeling from peers, interactions with teachers or parents at other times of the day, could well have contributed to their skill development. A further area to evaluate could have been shifts in teaching and learning practices during the rest of the week that might be attributed to the teachers increased awareness of socio-cultural approaches to learning.

The perceived benefits from the teachers’ and the students’ obvious enjoyment of their Wednesday mornings, suggests the discovery time programme has added a valuable learning experience for teachers and students alike. The survey information suggests that both social skills and oral language skills can be developed through the programme.

**FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS**

Based on readings associated with the theory of the programme and the results of the evaluation, the teacher, RTLB and evaluator believed that discovery time could be further enhanced by making the following adjustments.

*Increase the use of multicultural activities.*
Sociocultural theories of learning acknowledge the importance of cultural experiences and contexts for learning (Podmore, Sauvao & Mapa, 2003; Royal-Tangaere, 1997). There is scope for incorporating more culturally relevant experiences and activities in the discovery time programme.

*Incorporate parent/community support.*

The discovery time programme advocates for community and parental involvement (Martin & Hay, 2004). Once the programme has been well established within the school it would lend itself to strengthening the home school partnership by including parents in sessions.

*Increase links to the curriculum.*

One of the potential strengths of the programme is the flexibility to include activities that are closely related to current curriculum work within the class. The teacher involved was already working towards strengthening such links in the coming term.

*Utilise the information gathered for individualised programme adaptations.*

The survey information based on teacher observation could have used beyond the tracking of skill development. It could also be a useful way of identifying and meeting the individual needs of all students.

In summary, the discovery time programme presented as a useful context for enhancing learning opportunities within the class and for meeting the diverse needs of students. In addition, this project illustrated the efficacy of different educational professionals engaging in collaborative, systemic planning and evaluation to support quality, theoretically supported education.

**REFERENCES**


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A Case Against the Categorisation of Children and Youth

Part 2: Professional perspectives

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We don't need no categorisation
We don't need no thought control
No dark sarcasm in the classroom
Teacher, leave them kids alone
(Pink Floyd, Another brick in the wall, modified)

ABSTRACT
This is the second of two papers providing a critique of categorisation and of the biomedical interpretation of personal adjustment issues experienced by children and youth. Whereas the first paper (Stanley, 2006; published in Kairaranga earlier this year) appraised this approach from an array of theoretical vantage points, this paper extends the critique by the author reporting on his professional practice experiences. The reporting on the work experiences is aligned with findings and theorising from the current literature.

Position Paper
Keywords
Adjustment disorders, behaviour problems, clinical diagnosis, mental disorders, professional problems, school counselling.

LESSONS FROM EXPERIENCE
Our professional perspectives and frames of reference are the products of pivotal events and experiences and as I look back over my work as a counsellor and a psychologist I can discern involvements which have shaped my viewpoint and which may resonate with others. As a guidance counsellor in a secondary school I was alerted to the extent of adjustment issues in adolescent lives, the importance of context and connections to young people, and the discontinuities of teenage development that are represented in pathways and trajectories. Work as a psychologist with Specialist Education Services showed the significance of gender and socioeconomic status to referrals and the etiological patterns amongst referrals. As well, psychological work emphasised the importance of maximising the adaptive capacities of students with special education needs. These varied experiences called into question biomedical interpretations of human conduct and the relevance of categorisation.

As I drove around the zone of the decile 9 secondary school where I worked as a counsellor I would occasionally count the homes that I had visited in a professional capacity. As time passed the number rose spectacularly and the exercise became cause for reflection.

Wicks-Nelson and Israel (2000) say that it is generally accepted that there is a 15-20% prevalence of clinic-level problems among children and youth while Dryloos (1998) contends that 35-60% of 14 year-olds are at moderate to high risk. These North American figures have some parallels with the findings of our first national survey of teenage wellbeing, Youth2000 (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003), which showed, amongst other things, that 33.9% of 15 year old female students think about killing themselves and 13.9% actually attempt to do so, and almost 40% of Year 9 students report recent incidences of bullying. When we read the various indicators of personal difficulties and distress in Youth2000 we need to remember that a quarter of the students who were asked to participate in the survey declined to do so and that the investigation did not extend to those young children who had already left school (Stanley, 2005).

The number and the nature of the various problems in young lives represent a series of challenges to medical interpretations of adjustment. Firstly, there are just too many of them to be readily accommodated by allegations of defective genes, faulty neurology, and aberrant biochemistry. Secondly, there is considerable overlap amongst the types of problems that teenagers experience. For instance, suicidal young people frequently abuse substances as well as often being depressed (Forman & Kalafat, 1998). The co-occurrence of psychosocial problems is typically referred to as comorbidity in the medical/psychiatric framework and it is equivalent in the physical realm to the one person having diabetes, cancer, and muscular dystrophy at the same time. In my opinion, the extension of the disease concept of premorbidity, or being prodromal for a condition, is even more suspect and untenable. A third point is that adolescents have assets and protective factors in their circumstances as well as risk factors. However, as Glantz and Sloboda (1999) say, the medical model ignores or minimises positive influences. It is a binary system, in which health is an assumed standard, illness is a deviation, and mixed profiles are not really possible.

When I was first appointed as a guidance counsellor I encountered various myths about the role. For instance, there was a belief amongst some of the teaching staff that counsellors sat in offices and waited for students to come and see them about their problems. However, teenagers do not readily refer themselves for professional help and there are various reasons for this, such as not being bothered and not wanting to make a fuss (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003).
Another major issue with psychosocial problems, in particular, is that there is usually more than one person involved and the student who voluntarily comes to the counsellor's door is effectively dragging a matrix of relationships behind them. The self-referral approach is an adult conception of the medical model and of individual dysfunction and distress. By contrast, contemporary developmental perspectives tend to emphasise the importance of context, and specifically, the impact of the young person's relationships with significant others. For instance, Sameroff says 'If a parent or teacher is unresponsive or unadaptive to the unique needs of the child, this should result in a diagnosis of deviancy aimed at the parent or teacher as well as the child' (2000, p. 309).

A contextual viewpoint has all sorts of implications and occasionally this approach attracts allegations of family or teacher blaming. This is mistaken because the significant adults are also seen as enmeshed in situational influences (for example, impoverished neighbourhood), and in the case of parents the influences often cross generations.

The location of guidance counsellors on school sites, like resource teachers: learning and behaviour (RTLB) and some social workers, may reinforce an appreciation that children develop and change from year to year. Human service workers respond to crises and in the press of demands it can be easy to lose sight of the fact that 'behavioural effects are cumulative, even though their products appear episodically', as Gordon and Song put it (1994, p. 34). The young client represents a life in progress and the presenting problem will have been preceded by events and it will condition subsequent occurrences. This developmental perspective conflicts with psychiatric categorisations, which are static determinations. The reliance on an illness analogy, with its insistence that personal problems are no different from other diseases, means that they are essentially part of the lottery of life and, while they may be activated or aggravated by stressors, they represent an internal malfunction that acts in some way which is fundamentally disconnected from circumstance. However, as novice caseworkers soon discover, life goes on for a young person and his or her family after the attainment of a medical label (Stanley, 2003a). The client who is referred on for some specialist assistance (for example, drug counselling) often comes back, and the critical social and educational issues continue to need to be addressed.

Social service agencies receive large numbers of referrals for boys, and especially for boys with behavioural challenges (Wicks-Nelson & Israel, 2000). In the psychiatric lexicon difficult behaviour constitutes conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder and the preponderance of males in these categories is a challenge for the medical approach. It may be that these problems are really gender-specific, like undescended testicles, but the more obvious explanation is that CD, ODD, and AD/HD are social constructions or inventions, as postmodern theorists suggest, and these relate much more to the expectations of parenting and of the classroom than they do to something inherent in boys. Similarly, children from economically disadvantaged homes are much more likely to be given a psychiatric classification.

For instance, Read (2004) reports research showing that young people from deprived backgrounds are seven or eight times more likely to receive a diagnosis of schizophrenia. As a psychologist, I worked with a high decile school that had a rented house in its catchment area. The children from this home came from contrasting and less affluent families and I typically received a new referral from the school with each change of tenants. Luthar and Burak (2000) demonstrate what many people already know, and it is that having different goals and values is not the same as being dysfunctional.

I found that the longer I worked with children and youth with behavioural challenges the clearer it became about the cause and course of these difficulties. My experience increasingly aligned with the Oregon Model (Reid, Patterson & Synder, 2002; http://www.oslc.org) which describes a pattern and sequence of negative exchanges between parent and child, that transfers to school, and that progressively results in social rejection, academic failure and antisocial conduct, and that can lead ultimately to adult criminality. This is a powerful conceptualisation, which suggests that stressors such as poverty and divorce have indirect effects by disrupting caregiving practices. It also indicates that sadness and poor self-esteem amongst these young people is a consequence, or by-product, of their plight rather than a cause. Informed and research-based perspectives inevitably conflict with the array of popular viewpoints that are available to account for behavioural issues in children. I developed something akin to a phobic response to the repetitive invocation of AD/HD but other simplistic interpretations and misattributions abound including claims that the challenging student is gifted, has a food allergy, or must have been abused.

Medicalising and categorising behavioural problems mean important opportunities can be lost. For instance, it is possible that the act of diagnosis, with its accompanying appearances of authority and expertise, actually distances and disempowers caregivers at a time that parent-child relations need to be strengthened rather than diminished. A second point is that the psychiatric labels do not easily distinguish between shorter-term behaviour problems and more serious, persistent situations, and this distinction has important implications for the kinds of interventions that are provided. Based on research with New Zealand males, Terrie Moffitt (Moffitt, 1993; Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington & Milne, 2002) differentiates between antisocial individuals whose conduct is life-course-persistent and those whose delinquency is confined to adolescence, although adolescence is admittedly now a fairly extensive period of time. The short-terms are more amenable to turning point experiences and brief professional involvements whereas the children who appear destined to a career characterised by multiple problem behaviours can require intensive, individualised programmes (Stanley, 2003b). The third related matter is that the developmental perspective, which traces the antecedents and pathways associated with personal difficulties, emphasises the need for preventive actions and services. The biomedical approach, by contrast, endeavours to treat one case at a time (Albee, 1999). Hence there are long waiting lists and calls for more of the same services without any serious consideration of the inherent limitations of a reactive approach (Cowen, Hightower, Pedro-Carroll, Work, Wyman & Haffey, 1996).
Down syndrome, low vision, and brain damage caused by anoxia contrast with AD/HD and other constructions because they are statements of fact. There are important reasons for retaining the organic syndromes. A proportion of those that result from prenatal, perinatal and postnatal insults can be prevented and the conditions often have particular problems associated with them (e.g. Down syndrome and health issues). However, in terms of a young person’s education, the presence of a syndrome is not especially significant, and it can function as a distraction. There is a danger that students with a specific syndrome are seen as similar when they may differ as much or more from each other as they do from other children (Foreman, 2005). As well, this stereotypic thinking can extend to popular postulates about the principal difficulty associated with all special needs. For instance, when intellectual difficulties were the favoured explanation in special education this was the consuming emphasis in any assessment (Zigler & Hodapp, 1986). Fashions change, and with the rise in the popularity of autism and autism spectrum disorders, deficits in social cognition and communication are a current preoccupation. For all children it is presumably the quality of adaptive functioning that is critical, and this includes both cognitive and socioemotional competencies.

 Syndromes, organic or otherwise, tell us very little about a student’s learning and teaching requirements. Effective instruction is dependent on appropriate assessment, useful adaptations, and the will to make it happen. As Ysseldyke, Algozzine & Thurlow (2000) say, there is no magic here; good teaching is good teaching. Sometimes, in another appropriation of the medical model, special educators may mistakenly see placement (whether a special or regular class) as an intervention of itself. Doctors see people in clinics and they send them to hospitals but it is what actually happens in these settings that makes the difference. In a review of special classes, Kavale and Forness (2000) found that the type of class was less important than the instructional and social dynamics that transpired. Deschenes, Cuban, and Iyack (2001) trace the history of students who have failed in American education and they show that while the names for these children have changed, the continuing expectation has been that the student adjusts to the school system in preference to any significant modifications being made to educational provisions. Deschenes et al. (2001) consider the ceaseless categorisations to have functioned as alibis and pretexts for professional failure. It is, of course, a fundamental change from seeing the problem within the child to regarding it as requiring a matching of student to environmental characteristics. A colloquium of New Zealand commentators have identified this change as a paradigm shift and, more familiarly, as representing markedly contrasting “stories” in special education (Moore, et al., 1999).

The primary function of categorisation may be to provide an admission ticket, or passport, to additional assistance as some suggest (for example, Moore et al., 1999). Human service workers can know that there will be costs to the young person and their family but they may believe that these are outweighed by the advantages. This is the administrative or system justification for categorisation and a number of countermanding comments can be made in regard to it.

Firstly, the process of identifying and classifying young people with special needs is expensive and it uses time and money that could be used to work with them directly. Secondly, diagnosis or verification procedures can be highly negative experiences for children and caregivers because workers can emphasise the worst features to ensure a successful application. A third point is that systems encourage categorisation with incentives. There can be direct pay-offs in terms of extra staff and resources and there can be the less obvious reinforcement of having a difficult case allocated elsewhere. The fourth concern is that categorisation, of itself, does not ensure better instruction or treatment. As has been suggested above, labels can be used as excuses for not providing useful services. A fifth matter is that practitioners are increasingly being caught between imperatives to categorise and to deliver outcomes, and typically there is little connection between diagnoses and interventions with psychosocial issues. Finally, a system’s favoured categories become the focus of professional attention and other problems and issues are ignored. It is possible that this has happened in New Zealand and there could be several client groups (for example, primary school students with emotional difficulties) who do not have ready access to appropriately skilled services.

There are some intriguing, but rarely considered, questions associated with categorisation and these include how unidentified and unlabelled “mentally ill” young people cope in the community and by what combination of circumstance do a percentage of problem children and youth come to official notice. The Mental Defectives Act of 1911 contained an interesting provision and it was that if an escaped mental patient could remain at large for three months they were deemed to be discharged, presumably because they had proven that they could manage. As discussed above, problem behaviours are common in the child population but only some children are categorised. RTLB and other special educators may be called upon by some schools far more than by others and some teachers can provide inordinate numbers of referrals. Clearly, a range of considerations apply to categorisation events and such ‘clinical’ components as response frequency, intensity, and chronicity probably take second place to adult tolerance levels, knowledge of child development, and interpersonal skills. Nevertheless, the presence of large numbers of troubled and troublesome young people in the community without labels, and the selective nature of referrals and categorisations, represent important conceptual challenges to those who favour medical interpretations of human conduct.

PROFESSIONAL AUTHORITY AND CHILDREN’S REALITY

It can be instructive to reflect on how professional authority actually functions in the life of a child. Consider the average student who is evidencing behavioural difficulties and who is at risk for an antisocial career. When he is about 6-7 years of age, according to research, this child is probably experiencing rejection at home and it is likely that there is ostracism by age mates (Reid et al., 2002). Studies that are available of this student’s classroom experience also suggest that his teacher will treat him markedly differently.
Weaving educational threads. Weaving educational practice.  

For instance, Lago-Delello (1998) found that an ethnically diverse group of teachers evidenced negative attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours towards students at risk for serious emotional problems, and this included making limited accommodations for them. In effect, the child is participating in a comprehensive punitive experience and, until adolescence ushers in the antisocial peer group, there is unlikely to be any source of solace for him. Nonetheless, it is during early childhood that an adult expert may provide a psychiatric diagnosis and it is formally established that the problem resides within the youngster's brain and biochemistry. The preceding, and surrounding, psychosocial events can be largely ignored and this includes the possibility that the "system" in the form of teachers, therapists with their labels, and other adults could be contributing (if inadvertently) to the young person's adjustment difficulties and unhappiness. 

There is a risk associated with critiquing categorisation and it is that some people may see this as confirmation that children and youth do not have serious personal issues. Viewed in this way, my analysis would be in keeping with several other positions that have the capacity to trivialise the circumstances of young people with special needs and that could ultimately deny them services.Kauffman (2002) would include postmodernism and radical deconstructivist philosophy here, which he describes as "a bad cognitive tumble" (p. 17), and which he says has nothing practical or positive to contribute to special education. Worse perhaps is the fact that postmodernism, in its denial of scientific methods of proof, leaves children and parents particularly vulnerable to charlatanism. Another position with adverse potential has the ingenuous notion that all children have special needs. The pupil who is anxious when doing mathematics or who is lonely warrants attention but these problems are not on the same plain as the youngster with spina bifida or who is threatening suicide, and we currently distinguish the latter students by their needs for extra support and specialist assistance. It is important to remember that whether we classify, deconstruct, or even "democratise" human problems, events remain the same and young people with significant personal difficulties and distress are part of reality.

CONCLUSION

The central points of this paper and of my preceding paper are that categorisation and the illness ideology are, in my belief, neither an accurate nor a helpful way of interpreting human problems and the issues encountered by young people in particular. When we lift our vision above provincial professional viewpoints we can see a much fuller vista of the forces that shape human development. In effect, what has transpired is both an elaboration and a demystification of important influences and this expanded purview makes clear that we can do more for children and youth, and our efforts need to be addressed at multiple social settings and they need to come early in the life course. Significantly, with respect to professional practice, there are much more beneficial appropriations that might be made from physical medicine rather than some unsubstantiated system of categorisation.

Included here would be the strengthening of assessment strategies (Meyer, 2002; Stanley, Rodeka & Laurence, 2000), the wider utilisation of empirically-supported interventions (Chambless & Holon, 1998; Evans, 1997), and enhanced awareness of the ethical dimensions of work with children and youth (Bentall, 2004; Corey, Carey & Callanan, 2003). Specifically, with respect to ethics, Bentall (2004) says that any medical system has obligations to improve quality of life, to avoid causing harm, to respect autonomy, and to allocate resources justly. These moral imperatives, like the theoretical viewpoints that were previously discussed, combined with the lessons of casework, severely challenge the categorisation of problems of living and the practices that are referenced to it.

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AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION GUIDELINES FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE: IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL SYSTEMS

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Becoming Educultural:
Te whakawhitinga o ngā mātauranga

Interfacing the knowledge traditions

Angus H Macfarlane
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ABSTRACT
In every profession, there comes a time when it is important to stop and evaluate the progress that has been made and to determine the changes that will be necessary to engage in new times and to meet new demands. The profession of tertiary education is no exception. In a period of rapid change many solutions are offered about what it takes to sustain effort in order to achieve success. Some of these solutions – for the acquisition of quality in education – insist on precision, rigour, consistency, and replicability. This paper purports that such qualities are of high value, solutions.–.for.the.acquisition.of.quality.in.education.–.sustain.effort.in.order.to.achieve.success..Some.of.these.

INTRODUCTION
Next to families, schools and tertiary organisations are primary institutions charged with socialising young people, and not-so-young people, to become active participants in, as well as contributors to, contemporary societies. Tertiary educational environments are arenas where people extend the meanings of a society’s social and academic domains. This implies that tertiary organisations have a social, as well as an academic function. These, it would appear, could be broken down into the disciplines of education that include history, philosophy, sociology and psychology. While culture might not be seen as a discipline in its own right, it can claim a real presence, a place, in each of the disciplines of education. A fundamental pathway to success, therefore, is to encourage citizens of New Zealand, and indeed the world, to become ‘educultural’. The term educultural refers to a foundation for learning that includes building upon students’ cultural and experiential strengths to help them acquire new skills and knowledge.

Becoming educultural is to seek a pathway of knowledge and understanding – te huarahi rapa ai te mōhiotanga me te mātauranga. According to Māori tradition the essence of knowledge is embodied in “te ira tangata” or the life principle of the people. It contains the knowledge to “the how and why” of the universe and explains the role and place of the people in it. This knowledge was made available through Tāne-nui-a-Rangi who ascended to the uppermost of the twelfth heavens to gain the three kete, or baskets of knowledge. Implicit in the ascent of Tāne-nui-a-Rangi for the three kete, is that higher learning is essential for the development of strong understanding that will enhance knowledge, skills and attitudes amongst individuals, whānau, hapū, iwi, and te ao whānui. The inclusion of te ao whānui in this ecological framework is significant.

We are in a time of great change in the cultures of the world. The degree and frequencies of intercultural contact continues to grow and accelerate. Our daily thoughts more and more come to involve interactions with people situated at distant locations throughout the world. If we were to link back to the past and recount some of the deeds of tipuna, we will see that all iwi can put forward excellent role models from the past for those of us who are engaged in the pursuit of new knowledge in the present. The contention that I wish to make in this instance is that educultural sustenance can be derived from a combination of the following qualities: boldness, curiosity, balance, scholarship and vision. Let me deal with each of these qualities in turn and to associate each with an icon from my tribe, Te Arawa. These leaders from the past (who will be mentioned in chronological order) made an outstanding contribution to the society of their era, and their feats can continue to guide the pathways to success in contemporary times.

BOLDNESS
The achievement of new and higher qualifications may require boldness and a strong will. Remember, the renowned commander of the Te Arawa canoe, Tamatekapua, had strength of character, strength of personality, and a tendency to take risks - which won him the admiration of his people.

CURIOSITY
The great Ihenga, because of his extensive travels and explorations, must have had an enquiring mind as well as an impressive physical stature. Like an adroit scholar he probed and exploited, he drew conclusions and made associations. Ihenga had an exploratory orientation.
BALANCE

Balance was the hallmark of the illustrious Ngāti Rangiwewehi leader, Hikairo. His was a balance of assertiveness and warmth, so aptly displayed when a dispute was settled between two mighty tribes on Mokoia Island as far back as 1823. As scholars, we often have to take an assertive approach to our studies and this has often demanded long hours, short weekends, and considerable sacrifice. But like Hikairo, we have to retain a warmth, a manaaki, as it is this characteristic that provides sustenance for the inner person, and ihi and manaaki are central to whānau and whānaua. Hikairo was a balanced individual.

SCHOLARSHIP

The aristocratic Makereti, Maggie Papakura, finished writing her book shortly before her death in 1930. It was presented for a degree at Oxford University and was eventually published posthumously in 1938, being the first comprehensive ethnographic account of Māori life by a Māori scholar. A contemporary of internationally renowned theorists Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, Makereti recorded the knowledge passed on to her in her youth. It was a massive task, as everything had to be checked with her old people in New Zealand, a sign also of a true researcher and scholar. That Makereti possessed a raw, innate sense of scholarship, there is no doubt.

VISION

The trait, or characteristic referred to as ‘Vision’, I associate with Kepa Ehau, who died at his home in Ohinemutu on 10 February 1970 at the age of 84. Best remembered for his power of oratory, his presentations in Māori and English were always stately and ornamented. Another local identity, Sir Howard Morrison, often recounts an excerpt from one of Kepa Ehau’s kōrero – Whaia ko te mātauranga, hai whitiki ki te iwi, kia toa ai. This statement attested Kepa Ehau as a visionary in that he saw knowledge as an invaluable entity, worthy of pursuing. Knowledge, Kepa Ehau contended, was the orchestrating factor that could bind the tribe and give it strength and direction.

THE INTERFACE OF THE KNOWLEDGE TRADITIONS

In today’s world, we are at the interface of the knowledge traditions, what I refer to here as te whakawhitanga o ngā mātauranga. Education is often described as an introduction to worthwhile learning. If we take cognisance of the title of this paper, becoming educultural – interfacing the knowledge traditions, then education is more than an introduction to worthwhile learning; it is the key to worthwhile learning in a globalised world.

It is important that educators be aware of the value of research because of its function and impact on education and society. By learning about research we can be positioned to critique published material and we will be more prepared to undertake well-designed learning assignments that can generate evidence about a range of issues and conditions. Qualitative and quantitative research methodologies are the two major research traditions and both have importance in their respective fields. Another significant research methodology is that of kaupapa Māori research.

Kaupapa Māori research is an approach that validates indigenous ways of knowing and being. Linda Smith (1999) asserts that to hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges.

Leading literature about research refers to sources of knowledge as being experience, expert opinion, and reason (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). Kaupapa Māori research, while recognising these sources, would propose that it is important to measure Māori phenomena in its own terms. This is likely to involve a value system incorporating criteria such as whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, kotahitanga, rangatiratanga, and wairuatanga. Kana and Tamatea (2004) propound a framework for kaupapa Māori research as one that encapsulates the following dimensions: whenua, whakapapa, whanaungatanga, kanohi-ki-te-kanohi, kanohi kīte, and ahi kā. There appears to be merit in a contention for holding fast to such traditional values while simultaneously appreciating the tools of the modern era. This dualistic approach, it is argued, is more effective than either one on its own.

In the globalised world, it is certain that most of the contents in the Internet will focus on western knowledge, ideas, and culture. However, if too little is done to promote the learning of indigenous knowledge or of Māori epistemology, our future generations will definitely have a lesser understanding of where we are in the world, and the root of their culture will be jeopardised. This is where educational enterprises such as universities and tertiary colleges have a pivotal role to play. They should and they must recognise that a balanced integration between global knowledge and indigenous knowledge is imperative. The institutes in which many of us work and study more often than not have the word college, or university, or wānanga, or technology, in their respective titles. That cannot be mere coincidence. When I think of wānanga I think of the compelling traditions of the great canoes, instead of māta waka. When I think of technology or university, I think of the awesome shifting of global paradigms. All of this suggests that modern science and technology must go hand in hand with indigenous knowledge in order for sustainable development, international understanding, and intercultural communication to occur.

Having stated that position, I am reminded of the respective philosophies, and similar philosophies I might add, of Kepa Ehau and one of Māoridom’s most noted leaders, Sir Apirana Ngata. Both of these icons of the knowledge society argued for a humanism based on ancient values, but versed in contemporary idiom (see Sászy, in Henare, 1999). Both argued that the pursuit of knowledge would open the way for congruent intercultural communication. Both saw knowledge as the tool for people understanding people – as the pathway to progress. The root of the word “science” is the Latin “scientia”, which means “knowledge”, and this refers to any systematically or carefully done actions carried out to answer questions or meet other needs of a research domain (e.g., describing things, exploring, experimenting, explaining). All the time, we have to be open to new ideas and theories that show promise.
Each of us may approach our scholastic endeavours differently, and we may often describe, explain, and interpret things in different, but perhaps complementary, ways. Overall, we can say that research is a never-ending process that includes rational thinking, the reliance on empirical observation, constant critique, creativity, and discovery.

**CONCLUSION**

Today, tertiary institutions and their respective populations will reap the rewards of their labour by the seeds that they sow. This requires taking a serious view of the notion of perseverance, aptly summed up in the following whakatauki, *He moana pukepuke, e ekengia e te waka – A choppy sea can be navigated*. It is not uncommon for those engaged in tertiary education to have experienced, metaphorically, the choppy seas and current changes of Tangaroa, and the wind changes and paradigm shifts of Tawhirimatae. This is the cut and thrust and the to and fro of academic rigour. There are also times of calmness – e marino ana e – wherein the realm of Rongo-mā-Tāne, prevails. These are moments to savour, moments to relish as the design of scientific exploration takes on deeper meaning. Regardless of whether the encounters are upon stormy seas or tranquil waters, the journey, in some shape or form, will continue. As we move forward we can draw sustenance from Tamatekapua’s boldness, Ihenga’s curiosity, Hikairo’s balance, Makereti’s scholarship, and Kepa Ehau’s vision. The collective wisdom of these great tipuna is the quintessence of “educultural” potential, and their legacy may be our inspiration. These are the qualities that can be taken on board to offer scholastic fortitude in the pathways to success. Being at the interface of the knowledge traditions – *te whakawhitinga o nga mātauranga* – has the potential to become a truly educultural experience.

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**AUTHOR PROFILE**

Dr Angus Macfarlane is of the Te Arawa tribe. The thrust of his research is concerned with the exploration of culturally responsive pedagogies. In 2003 he was the inaugural Senior Research Fellow for NZCER. In 2004 he was a recipient of Te Kohu Kairangi, presented at the National Māori Academic Excellence Awards. He holds advisory positions on the government’s steering committee for Special Education and on the National Coordination Contract for Gifted Education.

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Assessment in Early Childhood Education: Keeping it Complex, Keeping it Connected, Keeping it Credible

Margaret Carr

I was really looking forward to reading this book and I have not been disappointed. The content of the book is made up from keynote presentations that Margaret Carr has made to three Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/NZ Childcare Association national conferences (2001, 2002, 2004). I was fortunate to be at the first one of these, and like all Margaret’s presentations you come away laughing at the amount of humour she finds in children’s learning. But going back to the text there is still more of value to be found in the actual ideas she is working with. At that same 2001 conference Margaret had a book launch for Assessment in early childhood settings: Learning stories (2001), which was an elaboration of learning stories as a means of documenting dispositions, whereas these three keynotes add to the ideas in the book rather than a repeat of material.

The notion of keeping assessment complex, connected and credible provides a basis for exploring assessment in early childhood settings, as well as for schools who will now be trying to make connections with the key competencies that form the basis of the new curriculum just released.

In the first chapter the challenge is set to develop assessments that retain the complexity of learning so that the social, emotional, cognitive and physical are not separated out, the relationships between people, places and things are not lost and assessment acknowledges the learner is developing a sense of identity as a competent and confident learner.

The author reviews how Te Whāriki retains complexity and compares it with other early childhood and school frameworks for assessment from overseas. The link is made between assessment and two concepts becoming popular in child development, they are identity and resilience. These terms are used to remind us that assessment can be used to show children that they are valued in their learning places.

The second chapter builds on the ideas of the first to show how formative assessment is providing the information (understandings based on assessment data) to connect children with further learning, especially in terms of ‘community, competence and continuity.’ The notion of using narrative assessments to invite families to be involved in curriculum and assessment is important.

Examples of how families build on interests initiated in education are provided, as are those that show the value of recognising competence to increase confidence. Lastly, the idea of continuity suggests that what went before is important to understanding what must come next creating pathways that the teacher, child and parents can follow.

In the last chapter the talk of credible assessment is about establishing powerful learning. We are presented with four identifying factors of powerful learning. The first is empowerment, as demonstrated by children becoming involved in their own assessment. To do this they must understand the learning goals of a particular task to establish deeper learning. If they do not then the focus shifts to performance goals and to the less powerful surface learning. The second factor is making sure there are responsive and reciprocal relationships established with people, places and things. This makes learning more interactive and distributed. Thirdly, the judgements of others are important in identity formation, understanding what we judge ourselves to be competent in and consider worthwhile striving to improve on. Lastly, we are introduced to Guy Claxton’s idea of being ‘learning fit’ – knowing what’s worth learning, knowing what you are good at learning, knowing who can help, knowing which tools to use, and lastly knowing how to face confusion.

Credibility is established through the assessment process. How does it support learning in the early childhood education centre or school, does it connect with parents and whānau, and broader national/community concerns? It was in this section that I found a quote from an Education Review Office (ERO) report that expresses the quandary of how to set up classroom experiences (and assessment) for learning. “It is clearly not useful to learn skills if, in the process of acquiring them, the disposition to use them is lost” (ERO cited in Carr, 2004, p.39). While this was in reference to teaching skills ‘too early’, having observed students who are clearly advantaged by knowing things like their ‘times tables’ (presumably learned from drill and practice) and those who dislike maths (some because of the drill and practice approach to teaching it) there is still the challenge of finding a balance through a child’s time in education settings. In the end children are taught about things they do not necessarily find meaningful to themselves, but others are saying they will become or should be meaningful.
Assessment is an opportunity for children (and their parents) to come to understand their own learning better, but it is also about seeing whether children are learning what society deems important. I would suggest that in early childhood settings there is quite a good overlap, with respect to assessment, between these two purposes, schooling is less so. From reading this book I understand that Margaret is providing the rationale for increasing the use of narrative assessment (learning stories) in early childhood and schools, what I am not so sure about is to what extent in schools this would be to replace other forms of assessment or complement them. A question for the future is how will teachers assess key competencies?

None of the three chapters are particularly long and many of the sections could have benefited from further elaboration or examples, but this is compensated for by having many references provided to key assessment theorists and research. I also wonder to what extent that I may have been advantageous in understanding the content much better having read Assessment in early childhood settings earlier (Carr, 2001). On that basis if you want to gain an understanding of narrative assessment of learning then both books are an excellent starting point.

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THE BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT TOOLKIT
Margaret Sutherland and Colin Sutherland
Planning a new intervention and can’t put your hands on a series of resources for the child or children? Try the Toolkit. The Toolkit lives up to its name as a dipping resource organised around five main themes – Anger Management, Conflict Resolution, Peer Relationships, Mood Management and Changing Classroom Behaviour. This British text has been extensively trialled in the UK and has proved itself to be useful in interventions in my own fieldwork this year especially the section on Mood Management.

The Toolkit is based on the work of two psychologists Albert Ellis and Aaron T. Beck who began to explore how patients thinking affected their behaviour and state of mind – cognitive psychology. This whole text draws on the ideas of ‘how we think influences how we feel and act’. There are self awareness tools, mind-body tools and imagination tools, all of which combine to allow young people to explore how they can learn to manage themselves more positively and affect their learning and behaviour for more success.

Each theme is prepared with tutor notes and a series of worksheets that support it. Each of the worksheets allows the young person opportunities to think about their concerns, for example How do you feel about school on a rating scale; Life planning looking forward to hopes and dreams you have for your life; Thinking about consequences as an analogy to a stone falling into a pond and causing a ripple effect; and, Exploring the people and things that make up my quality world.

The Mood Management theme was particularly useful in supporting young people to listen to their inner voice and explore how they were feeling in situations of pressure, stress or frustration. The worksheets in the theme gave alternative strategies for dealing with these moments and optimistically moving through them to give new things a go, take some risks with your learning, friendships or sports activities.

The whole organisation of the text lends itself to being part of a multidisciplined intervention plan where ideas and strategies are pieced together over time to enhance young people’s ability to take more responsibility for their own learning and behaviour. The worksheets can be photocopied as they are and may often lead to the development of other ideas for specific students. The tutor notes at the beginning of each theme provide background information, links to theorists and pointers of how they might be utilised with young people, there is also an extensive bibliography should you wish to pursue more professional reading.

I liked the variety of strategies offered through the worksheets so that if you were to run a programme from this Toolkit it would be varied for the young person and also provide a platform to begin an intervention plan without having to write all the material yourself.

REVIEWER PROFILE:
Catherine Steeghs
Catherine is an RTLB in the Fairfield Cluster, she has worked in Brunei, The United Kingdom and New Zealand. Catherine is currently a member of the Editorial Board of Kairaranga.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DATA
Title: The Behaviour Management Toolkit
Authors: Margaret Sutherland & Colin Sutherland
Publisher: Hodder & Stoughton, Abingdon
Date of publication: 2004
ISBN: 0-340-81464-0
RRP: $168.99
CATCHING THE WAVES: INNOVATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Edited by Anne Meade

Catching the Waves is the title of a collection of stories from six early childhood education centres located throughout New Zealand, chosen as Centres of Innovation in the first round of a project which is part of the New Zealand Government’s ten-year plan for early childhood education (ECE): Pathways to the Future/Nga Huarahi Arataki (Ministry of Education 2002). In this plan, under the strategy 'Establishment of, and reflection on, quality practices in teaching and learning', comes the action: 'Establish six Centres of Innovation on a three-year cycle to showcase excellence and innovation in ECE'. Early childhood centres were invited to submit applications describing practices which they considered to be innovative and different in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum in their centres. A selection process followed, which took into account the quality of the programmes being offered, and the willingness and ability of the applicants to take part in action research and the sharing of their experiences with the early childhood education community. The successful centres were awarded additional funding for three years by the Ministry of Education for these research and dissemination activities.

The first six Centres of Innovation were selected in 2003; three in Auckland, and one each in Napier, Wellington and Christchurch. Each of the centres had its own unique character and was responsive to the needs and interests of its community, while working within the Early Childhood Curriculum—Te Whäriki (Ministry of Education, 1996). Each had its particular model of practice to further develop and research, with support from a range of professional and cultural sources. All the centres which were selected had many of their children coming from diverse cultural backgrounds and speaking languages other than English at home. This fact alone, and the practices and reflections of the educators around the topic, give this book an up-to-the-minute relevance, especially when supported by references to a range of research evidence in the areas of bilingualism, second language acquisition, and cultural identity. It was fascinating to follow the links between the above, and the dawning and building of strong relationships amongst the teachers, children, families, whänau and wider communities. These relationships are forged in many ways, with an emphasis on sharing the achievements and learning of children. The centres reported using an imaginative range of media, such as photographs, artwork and video, enabling all families to be included and contribute to the assessment and celebration of their children’s progress, regardless of language or cultural differences.

Anne Meade is the editor of this booklet, and has provided an excellent introduction describing the intent and process of the Centres of Innovation programme, and the conception of this publication. She has also contributed a concluding summary, drawing out some common themes from the programmes, and discussing possible implications for the wider world of ECE, as well as educational leadership. I found this most helpful as my interest in each new narrative had the effect of blotting out the one before, and the links were not always immediately obvious.

This booklet is likely to be read worldwide by followers of New Zealand’s forward-looking ECE system, and I wonder whether some difficulties may be encountered with the language, both jargon and New Zealand/Mäori words, and also the naming of people who would not necessarily be known to readers.

Do read this book. There is learning here for anyone who is involved or interested in education at any level. The commitment and energy of the adults shines through on every page, along with their honesty in reflection on their day-to-day practice, and openness to new learning. Shared learning experiences are woven throughout, along with an explicit respect for children as competent and active participants in their own learning. As with Te Whäriki itself, much of the content could be related to all stages of life. The principles of respect, reflection, support, leadership, responsiveness, and courage to change and improve are relevant to everyone. The writers of these narratives are to be congratulated on ‘doing it all’ alongside their regular work programmes. They have put a great deal of thought into their narratives and used apt examples where relevant.

I will be re-reading this booklet to make sure I didn’t miss anything.

REFERENCES


REVIEWER PROFILE

Beryl Overall

Beryl has been in the special education field for fifteen years. Her usual job is Service Manager: Early Intervention in the Northwest district of GSE, and this year she has been seconded as Practice Advisor: Early Intervention with the national office Professional Practice team. Prior to gaining her Diploma of Early Intervention in 1990, Beryl worked in early childhood education.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Title: Catching the Waves: Innovation in early childhood education.

Editor: Anne Meade

Publisher: NZCER Press

Date of Publication: 2005


RRP: $16.00
INCLUSION IN THE EARLY YEARS
Cathy Nutbrown and Peter Clough

The very first chapter of this book challenged me to consider the tension between two different discourses: *raising achievement* and *promoting inclusion*. The *raising achievement* discourse focuses on identification, planning and teaching for learning, whereas the *promoting inclusion* discourse highlights rules, procedures and routines that exclude, and philosophical commitment to accepting *all* learners. In chapter two, the tension is extended through consideration of three intersecting themes: inclusion, special educational needs, and early childhood education and care. Within each of these fields professionals work toward the wellbeing of children, however important philosophical differences exist. For example, defining special education needs requires labelling whereas inclusion focuses on settings and social participation. These ideas, tensions and debates supersede any particular age group, so while the book is a “must read” for early childhood and early intervention teachers, it is also very thought-provoking for other educators.

There are many interesting and useful discussion points within the book, including: play; views of childhood; parent roles and involvement in education; inclusive practice for children with learning difficulties, children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, babies and toddlers; citizenship for children; curriculum; assessment; and professional development for teachers. These, and other, discussions are connected with constant reflection on what inclusion means for children, teachers, and families. There is no single answer, and this is illustrated by reflections of five teachers participating in focus group research woven throughout the book.

The authors also skillfully cite other relevant research, maintaining an effective balance between discussion, research and practical examples which acknowledge the real challenges. At the end of each chapter are relevant exercises that could be used to support staff professional development discussions. There are many references to policy and research initiatives from the UK context that I was less familiar with (Common Assessment Framework, Children Act, Sure Start, The Rumbold Report, Green Paper, and many others). I found these references to be somewhat of a distraction from the key messages of the book, although other readers may not agree.

The cover of the book shows children in the United Kingdom contributing to a shared weaving inspired by New Zealand’s early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). *Te Whāriki* and Reggio Emilia (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998) are highlighted within this book as worthy inclusive approaches – after all, *Te Whāriki* is described as “a woven mat for all to stand on” (Carr & May, 2000). However, although the authors had a clear understanding of *Te Whāriki*’s principles, strands and philosophy, the citations and references were out of date. The 1996 curriculum or 1993 draft were not cited, but instead only 1995 *Guidelines for developmentally appropriate programmes*, the title of which now sits less comfortably within New Zealand early childhood education.

I found myself reflecting on the draft *New Zealand curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2006) recently released, and the opportunities for inclusive practice through an emphasis on key competencies. The Reggio Emilia approach reinforces the importance of viewing children as powerful and competent learners, and this would be a fundamental element of any bridge that might connect the discourses of *raising achievement* and *promoting inclusion*.

The most powerful thinking for me, however, was the emphasis on children’s citizenship and rights within the book. Practitioners in Reggio Emilia have reportedly “ceased to talk of special educational needs but have, instead, chosen to include discussion of special educational rights in their dialogue about meeting young children’s needs and access to the curriculum” (p. 8). This has certainly given me useful reflection for my current work.

Inclusion is not simply another word in the politically correct jargon. Inclusion is a deeply political response – a moral response – to the movement for social justice (pp. 137-8).

REFERENCES


REVIEWER PROFILE
Valerie Margrain

Valerie is Senior Advisor, Assessment, with Ministry of Education, Special Education national office, working on special education exemplars and Kairaranga. Prior to this role she was a Senior Lecturer in early childhood education at The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand.

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

**Title:** Inclusion in the Early Years: Critical analyses and enabling narratives

**Author:** Cathy Nutbrown and Peter Clough

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**Date of publication:** 2006

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