Inclusive practice within the lived cultures of school communities: research case studies in teaching, learning and inclusion

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This paper provides an account of a teacher’s use of theory as a tool to develop inclusive practice through a social studies programme in a new entrant class. The account illustrates the ways in which the teacher drew on research to assist in the facilitation of an inclusive educational environment. Presented are research case studies the teacher encountered in an in-service teacher education programme, and the ‘social constructionist’ and ‘personal tragedy’ models that were used as theoretical tools to assist the teacher’s planning and teaching practice. Mounted cameras, broadcast microphones and pre- and post-unit interviews with the teacher and students were used to explore the lived culture of the classroom, and the nature and effectiveness of the strategies the teacher used. An ‘interrupted narrative’ methodology engages the reader in the interplay between research and theory in the research case studies. Four major strategies used by the teacher have been identified and these are presented as theoretical tools for other teachers and teacher educators to use, critique and develop to support inclusive practice in their own contexts.

Introduction

The research case studies presented here have been designed to assist educators to reflect upon ways in which education can be inclusive in classrooms and school communities. Evidence from interviews with new entrant students in the ERUDITE Roadrunner study revealed the effectiveness of strategies used to educate the younger peers of a...
student with spina bifida at Roadrunner School. The teacher, Ms Nikora, devised her strategies in response to research Christine Rietveld carried out as part of her doctoral thesis (1993, 1994, 1998, 1999b) on the participation of children with Down’s syndrome (DS) in new entrant classes. Ms Nikora encountered this research in a teacher education course that included training in action research. Our account highlights the potential of interplay between research, teacher education and educational practice to inform teacher professional development.

Here we enable the reader to consider Rietveld’s case study excerpts that were influential in Ms Nikora’s approach. We describe Ms Nikora’s strategies and then trace the responses of new entrant students to the strategies using a case study approach. In particular, we focus on the theoretical tools that Rietveld offers educators and the potential role of these tools to assist teachers in developing inclusive educational practice.

In presenting two of the research case studies we use a technique that has been entitled the ‘interrupted narrative’. We present the reader with a

Hospital, Christchurch) into their local preschools. Christine Rietveld’s research and publications have been influential in teacher education in New Zealand. Lena Klenner is a primary school teacher at Te Rapa Primary School, Hamilton, New Zealand. Lena Klenner is an experienced teacher and educational administrator who has taught mainly at the new entrant level in New Zealand primary schools. In 1996 she did the teacher education courses at Victoria University to upgrade her diploma to a degree. Through these courses Lena Klenner focussed on the use of action research to facilitate children’s metacognitive processing in the science programme and then she adapted the approach for use in the social studies programme. Her inspirational teaching reported under her self-chosen pseudonym, Ms Nikora, is the focus of a series of articles generated out of the Roadrunner study in the ERUDITE Programme. Ngaio Dalton is a primary school teacher at Parkvale School in Napier. She was a senior research assistant in the ERUDITE Programme at Victoria University and subsequently in the Understanding Learning and Teaching Institute Trust. Ngaio Dalton brought her own experience and insight as a junior teacher at Mokoia School in Hawera to her transcription of the Roadrunner data. Ngaio Dalton’s technical expertise assisted with the incorporation of visual images of children’s work and experiences in the reporting of the ERUDITE research. Ngaio Dalton graduated from Massey University with a BEd in 1995 and she holds a Diploma of Teaching. Cathy Diggins is a researcher in the ERUDITE Programme and a member and Trustee of the Understanding Learning and Teaching Institute. In 1999 Cathy Diggins took up the position of academic co-leader of the Diploma of Teaching (ECE) at the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand. In her doctoral study Cathy Diggins draws upon proxemics to explore the interface between the visual and spatial dynamics of classroom activity and the learning of diverse students. In particular she focusses on the significance of the non-verbal in teacher management of the learning of diverse students and issues of identity, gender and sexuality. Cathy Diggins has broad experience in teacher education, community education and the educational inclusion of diverse students. She has taught in the early childhood, primary and secondary sectors and has taught in bilingual programmes. Cathy Diggins was awarded a McKenzie Scholarship in 1989 and a Merit Award for outstanding university teaching in 1998. Dr Shane Town was a researcher in the ERUDITE Programme and a member of the Understanding Learning and Teaching Institute. Dr Town was leading the expansion of the ERUDITE research in secondary schools through the Kereru study. When the ERUDITE Programme was discontinued by Victoria University of Wellington, Dr Town took up a position as Senior Lecturer in Education at Massey University, Wellington. His PhD thesis focussed on the secondary school experiences of young gay men. He was formerly assistant head of English and senior dean at Heretaunga College, Upper Hutt. His main areas of research interest focussed on issues surrounding learning such as difference and diversity in learning, masculinity, sexuality and education. Dr Shane Town died on 13 February 2000. The loss to New Zealand education of Dr Town, his contribution as an outstanding and revered educator, and his ground-breaking research, is immeasureable. Correspondence should be addressed to Adrienne Alton-Lee, Understanding Learning and Teaching Institute, PO Box 7049, Wellington South, Wellington, New Zealand.
critical decision faced by a teacher and ask the reader to reflect upon what they might have done in that situation or what they think would have been an effective response and why, before we go on to present what the teachers actually did. Our purpose is threefold. First, we use prediction to engage the reader more directly in reflection upon the interplay between theory and practice. Second, the interpolation of an interrupted narrative highlights the use of theoretical tools in equipping teachers to draw upon a range of creative strategies appropriate to particular contexts. Third, the interrupted narrative technique encourages and focuses debate about the nature of effective teacher intervention. While we have selected these case studies because of the evidence that the strategies used were effective and for their power to illuminate effective practice for educators, we wish to avoid the trap of prescription. Rather, we wish to emphasize the theoretical tools that enabled Ms Nikora to adapt what she had learned for her own quite different context. The intention is that those same tools will in turn enable other educators to develop creative and effective strategies for supporting inclusion within the peer culture of other classrooms and schools.

In a recent review of research on special needs in education prepared for the New Zealand Ministry of Education, Moore et al. (1998) emphasized the need for professional development for schools and regular class teachers. The authors recommended professional development to assist educators to understand ‘the principles and values of the ecological paradigm’. In this paper we attempt to demonstrate that research case studies have a valuable role to play in professional development that informs educational change. We suggest that research case studies can play a unique role in making apparent and challenging deficit discourses. Research case studies can illuminate educational exclusions and the cruelty of hidden peer cultures that deficit perspectives on difference generate in communities. Research case studies can also illuminate the effects of educational exclusions in interfering with children’s socio-emotional and academic development. More critically research case studies can provide actual examples of alternative and educational ways of managing the needs of diverse students in learning communities.

Specifically, in this paper we use research case studies to illustrate the ways in which two alternative theoretical models of disability influence practice: the ‘social constructionist’ and the ‘personal tragedy’ models. Ms Nikora’s experience illustrates the potential of these models to assist educators.

‘Social Constructionist’ and ‘Personal Tragedy’ models

While there have been many influences historically on the ways in which educators and communities think of disability, and a range of terminologies used to represent the views held, we have found the terms ‘social constructionist’ and ‘personal tragedy’ to be useful for teachers. ‘Personal tragedy’ is a term applied to the model that posits disability as a problem or deficit located within the individual that requires ‘fixing’. The ‘personal tragedy’
model has its origins in the medical model in which disability is a pathology to be remediated through a focus on the individual (Fulcher 1988, 1995, Ballard 1992, Rietveld 1993, 1996, Oliver 1996a, b, Allan 1999). The term ‘personal tragedy’ is used to describe this model because the term conveys also the element of well-intentioned pity or charity that can lead educators to respond to an individual with disabilities in a compensatory rather than an educational way. The personal tragedy model can support responses in children that are not well-intentioned or those that are well-intentioned, but where one child plays a more dominant/superior, but benign role in relation to the other. No matter how well-intentioned, such unequal interactions characterize a subtle denial of dignity and respect. Unequal peer interactions cannot lead to some of the more desirable outcomes, involvement in mutually supportive reciprocal participation offers. For example: the development of friendships. Reciprocal participation requires equality, not charity as a foundation.

The ‘social constructionist’ model rejects a focus on remediating the individual through a focus on the individual (Slee 1997, Ballard and MacDonald 1998). The social constructionist model sees disability not so much the result of a person’s impairment, but as a product of social factors in the contexts in which s/he participates that create barriers and limit opportunities for equal participation. From this perspective, the main focus is on the social, economic and political systems preventing the full inclusion of people with disabilities. In terms of this model’s application to the chalk face or whiteboard of the classroom, the emphasis is on the teacher in managing the context and environment to provide appropriate educational experiences for all students including those with identified disabilities. The social constructionist model fits in with ecological theory that is based on the transactional relationship between a person and her/his contexts including the relationships between contexts and wider systems impacting on more immediate contexts. Moore et al. (1998) characterize this position as follows:

posit(ing) that the primary problems facing people with disabilities are external rather than internal. The task of educators working within this paradigm is to alter, adapt and improve educational organizations and environments to meet the needs of all students. (p. 58)

From our perspective the social constructionist model rejects a distinction between the ‘mainstream’ and the ‘included disabled’. Rather the model requires a shift to a universalizing discourse of difference within which a programme is designed to meet the diverse and fluid educational needs of all students (Town 1996, 1998).

Using the ‘Social Constructionist’ and ‘Personal Tragedy’ models to understand educational practice

Ms Nikora encountered these two models when Rietveld’s research was used as the focus of a lecture and tutorial in a university programme for teachers seeking to upgrade their Diploma qualifications. The presenta-
tion was based on an earlier presentation given by Christine Rietveld to pre-service students in 1993. Observational data from Rietveld’s doctoral study in progress provided vivid illustrations of educational practice underpinned by the two models. Rietveld undertook continuous narrative observations of three children with DS from pre-entry visits to each child’s school through five consecutive days from the time the child arrived at school. A further 18 hours of observation of each child was carried out subsequently, spread at different times of the day over the next month and at the end of the school term. Rietveld set out to collect as much information as possible about what each focus child did, verbal and non-verbal language used, the behaviour of teachers or other adults, the type of activity engaged in, the setting, involvement with peers, and peer reactions to behaviour of the focus child.

Rietveld recorded the following account of 6-year-old Mark’s experience in the playground during an interval break:

[Mark is in the playground standing and looking around. James comes up to Mark.]
James: Hello, hello, hello. [James gets very close to Mark’s face.]
[Mark backs off a little.]
Mark: No
[James goes off to a nearby friend in the adventure playground.]
James: Look at that boy there. He said ‘No’. Come and have a look. He goes like this with his tongue.

[James imitates putting his tongue in and out of his mouth. James pokes his tongue out at Mark. Mark walks off a little and watches children playing on the adventure playground. James returns with another two boys as well as the first boy.]
Boys: Hello, hello, hello.
[The boys say hello to him over and over and laugh at him. One of the boys throws his lunch paper at Mark after screwing it up first. Mark looks at the ground and shakes his head. Peter squeals at him and pats his cheeks. The others make growling noises at him then laugh.

The boys leave for a minute and then return and continue saying ‘Hello’ to Mark over and over. Mark pokes his tongue out at the boys.
[a teacher-aide walks by.]
TA: I hope you boys are being nice.
James: We’re just saying ‘Hello’ to him ...
[The teacher-aide introduces Mark to the boys and suggests that they play with Mark. They ask Mark if he wants a swing. Mark does not respond. The boys leave and Mark stands on the path looking around.]
TA: Come on. [The teacher-aide is holding out her hand to Mark.]
We’ll find William. [William is another child with a disability the teacher-aide is there to support.]
Let’s go to the adventure playground.
[Mark follows the teacher-aide.]

In this case Mark’s isolation within the school playground was evident at the outset of the observation. Mark’s difference became the focus of James’s attention. Mark’s actions at the outset of the incident were not socially inappropriate towards James. Rather, James’s actions towards Mark such as the overly close proximity were socially inappropriate. It is
clear from the observation that Mark did not welcome James’s attention and found it to be disconcerting and undesirable. The incident escalated when James brought other boys over to join in taunting Mark. Mark was then subject to inappropriate physical contact and the mocking behaviour of the other boys who growled as if he were an animal, object or not fully human. If such interactions form the basis of a child’s peer relationships they will inevitably affect his development of self-worth (Hatch 1988). He is likely to internalize the view that he is of inferior status and an undesirable playmate, without knowing why. Developmental processes such as self-agency, advancement of language and other skill development will be negatively affected.

The teacher-aide’s response to the situation she encountered was to challenge the boys. They readily justified their behaviour as friendly greeting behaviour. The teacher-aide directed the other boys to behave in a friendly way. They apparently complied but Mark understandably did not want to play with the boys and rejected their prompted invitation. The teacher-aide resolved the problem by providing physical comfort or compensation to Mark, when she held out her hand, and suggested that he play with another disabled student.

When we have used this observational excerpt in teacher education, it has had a powerful impact on teachers. The case highlights the cruel isolation and suffering students can experience within the peer culture in a school playground. Hahn (1997) put forward an argument for rejecting a paternalistic policy of protecting disabled children from the negative responses of peers: ‘The insults of the playground can be cruel, but learning to cope with offensive comments there probably represents indispensable preparation in acquiring the social skills they may need in later years’ (p. 321). Repeated experiences of peer abuse may, however, undermine rather than support the developmental processes that would enable such learning of social skills.

The compensatory behaviour that marks a personal tragedy approach was exemplified in the teacher-aide’s hand holding behaviour that typically in our culture would have been socially appropriate only for a much younger child. The personal tragedy perspective is apparent also in her complicity in the social marginalization of Mark within a peer group of difference and disability. We have found that for teachers, this case vividly conveys a sense of the enormity of the challenges confronting educators seeking to support effective inclusive practices.

We have used a second case from Christine Rietveld’s doctoral research to show a teacher’s approach to inclusion that exemplifies the social constructionist model. The context was a junior school class where a small group of children were engaged in block play during ‘Choosing Time’. Ian added some more cars to the block building in progress and broke the structure the group of children were building together.

Alan: Ian! No, Ian.
Brent: [To Alan] Tell the teacher.
[Alan tells the teacher]
The teacher arrives at the scene and . . .
We interrupt the narrative at this point as we did in the teacher education programme Ms Nikora experienced. We use the interruption of the narrative to invite the reader/audience to generate and reflect upon possible effective actions that the teacher might take.

Here, we take up the case study again.

[The teacher arrives at the scene and looks.]

Teacher: [To Alan]. If there’s a problem, tell Ian what it is. Tell Ian if there’s too many cars, it’ll [the structure they have built] break. Tell him where he can put the cars and blocks.

[Alan and Ian sit down on the mat. Ian picks up a car.]

Alan: [To Ian]. In there. In there. [Alan shows Ian where to put the car.]

Ian: No. [Ian says ‘No’ but does put the car where Alan showed him and drives it around. Brent, Alan and Kate also drive their cars around each on their own part of the block structure.]

[The children continue to drive their cars around for 2 minutes.]

In our discussion of this case study with teachers we emphasize the teacher’s careful assessment of the situation and her decision to focus on Ian’s peers. The teacher rejected Brent and Alan’s framing that Ian was the problem because of his less developed block building skills. The teacher intervened to assist Ian’s peers in problem solving and using a communication strategy to help Ian learn why his action caused a problem in the building task. She explained to them how they should interact with Ian appropriately to give him feedback and help him to learn and use appropriate building skills. In our experience, teachers consider the strategy to have been remarkably successful. For educators who have worked with junior children, 2 minutes of ongoing, amicable and productive cooperative play is compelling evidence of a successful teacher intervention! As a consequence of the teacher’s intervention all the children in the block play group have had an opportunity to learn a problem-solving skill from the teacher that can be transferable across contexts.

Ms Nikora and the collaborative research endeavour

The two case studies vividly illustrate the contrast between a personal tragedy and social constructionist model in action in educational practice. Ms Nikora was a new entrant teacher who had encountered these two cases from Rietveld’s research in an in-service teacher education course. She was one of a group of teachers who stated that they were deeply challenged and affected by the research. Ms Nikora later specifically identified Rietveld’s theoretical framework as influential in her planning and decision-making about her class programme. We have been fortunate to be able to carry out a collaborative classroom research study to explore the interplay between research, theory and practice in Ms Nikora’s class programme. Clearly, there are many interrelated influences on a teacher’s philosophy, agency and approach. We highlight the impact of Ms Nikora’s theoretical framework in this paper; not to suggest that such influence was exclusive, but to
identify authentic links between research, teacher education and effective educational practice that can provide useful insights for other teachers.

Ms Nikora was planning her social studies programme for her new entrant class (Year 0/1 level) in November. She had just completed two university teacher education courses ‘Social Contexts of Learning’ and ‘Theory into Practice’ to upgrade her teaching diploma. As part of the ‘Theory into Practice’ course Ms Nikora had been required to use Swan and White’s (1994) ‘Thinking Book’ approach to facilitate the students’ use of metacognitive strategies in science curriculum. Swan taught students to record what they had learnt and their questions about what they were learning in individual ‘Thinking Books’. She encouraged children to make explicit links to prior experience and knowledge through her written responses to student entries. The teachers in this course were also asked to address issues of inclusion and the management of diversity in their action research. Ms Nikora had adapted the ‘Thinking Book’ approach to be particularly effective for her new entrants class in science and at the end of her course she decided to repeat the action research cycle using the ‘Thinking Book’ approach in social studies. Ms Nikora was particularly attentive to issues of inclusion in her planning for the unit.

When Ms Nikora indicated she was considering repeating the action research cycle subsequent to her university course the first author approached her and asked her to participate in a collaborative research endeavour in the ERUDITE Programme. The proposal was to carry out an in-depth classroom research study of student learning during a unit of work in conjunction with Ms Nikora’s use of the ‘Thinking Books’ approach in social studies. The original development of the ERUDITE Programme was designed to generate an interplay between theory, research and practice through our teacher education programme, classroom research programme and teacher action research (Alton-Lee 1998). Ms Nikora agreed and has subsequently co-authored (under her own name) a series of articles about student learning in the Roadrunner studies within the ERUDITE Programme.

In the subsequent section we provide a description of the wider methodology used in the Roadrunner study within the ERUDITE Programme before proceeding to take up the issues of inclusion in the Roadrunner context.

Research design and methodology in the Roadrunner study

The Roadrunner case study reported here is one of several series of case studies embedded in a larger study of student learning from an instructional unit of work in social studies, the Roadrunner study. The generative methodology of the larger study replicates that of the series of Understanding Learning and Teaching Project studies (Alton-Lee 1984, Alton-Lee and Nuthall 1992, Nuthall and Alton-Lee 1993). A further development has been an expansion of focus to capture more information about the links between student experience of curriculum, teacher planning
and pedagogy. The larger study has been designed to provide as much information about student experience of an instructional unit in social studies as possible and to obtain a continuous audio and video record of teacher actions. The data-gathering procedures were designed to provide information not only about the public classroom activities, but also about the lived culture of classroom participation of individual students. We obtained detailed individual audio and video records focussed on the teacher and four students during a social studies curriculum unit, and video and public audio records of the participation of the whole class of students.

The Roadrunner context

Roadrunner School (a pseudonym) is a small state primary school located on the rural/suburban margin of one of the satellite cities in the greater Wellington region. At the time of the study there were 125 students in the school. The school was assessed according to the Ministry of Education’s socio-economic indicator for schools as a decile 3 school. On the 1–10 scale a decile 1 school is judged to draw upon a community of the lowest socio-economic mix and deciles 1–3 are classified in the low socio-economic band. The ethnic mix of the school comprised 26% Maori, 64% Pakeha/European, 6% Samoan, 2% Tokolauan and 2% Rarotongan students.

The case study was set in the reception or Years 0 and 1 class that took in new entrants to the school and comprised 18 children at the time of the study. The teacher of the reception class, Ms Nikora, was the Deputy Principal of the school. There were seven cross-age tutors from the Year 5 class in Roadrunner School who worked with the new entrant students from time to time.

Data gathering

Five Ikegamicameras, four with Fujinon TV zoom lenses and one with a wide angle lens, were mounted in the classroom to provide an ongoing video record encompassing the classroom space used. A mobile Panasonic VHS movie camera was also used to maintain a sequential visual and audio record of the teacher’s activity. Avid cinema software created still images from the continuous video recordings from the six cameras for any particular second in the unit. The teacher and four selected students wore live Azden wireless microphones (while other students in the class wore identical non-active microphones) received by multitrack audio-recording equipment located in an adjoining empty classroom. An Evertz time code master synchronized the recordings chronologically. The children were instructed about the use of the ‘on’ and ‘off’ switches on the microphones and could choose to turn the microphones off when they wished what they said to be strictly private. The researchers maintained a running observational record focussed on case study students during the unit. The comprehensive nature of the Roadrunner data and the microphone on the
teacher have enabled us to develop case studies involving children who were not wearing the live wireless microphones but whose utterances were recorded.

A portable tape recorder was used after teaching sessions to maintain an ongoing debriefing record with the teacher and to capture each observer’s perspectives upon what was happening. The teacher’s reflections were also recorded from time to time when she wished to make a comment upon the progress of the unit.

Both the visual and audio data were used to construct a continuous record of the audio transcript and a detailed descriptive record of the student involvement. Copies of student drawings and writing have been scanned into the record. The transcription protocols were developed collaboratively with the researchers and three research assistants. Two research assistants are experienced teachers and one was a pre-service student teacher. The overall transcription allowed us to trace student opportunities to interact with curriculum content related to the teacher’s aims. These records have been supplemented with the transcripts of individual interviews with students, before and after the unit, about the unit content. Pre- and post-unit interviews that focussed on the teacher’s intended learning outcomes were carried out with 15 students in the class and 13 of these students remaining at Roadrunner School were interviewed again a year later.

Interviews have been and continue to be carried out from time to time with the teacher around the case study development process supplemented on occasion by her written reflections on her intentions and perspectives.

**Ethics**

After negotiating entry to the school and receiving the support of the teacher, principal and Board of Trustees for the study we sought written permission from the parents for their children to participate in the study. We explained that we would be using both audio and video recording equipment and asked for permission to use the findings and data for teacher education. Only one child’s caregivers did not return the form and we have subsequently omitted the child’s utterances from the transcripts. A discussion and question-and-answer session was held with the children to seek their permission (after their parents had agreed to their participation). The first author informed them about the reasons for the study and nature of the data-gathering procedures. The children asked questions and checked their understandings about the study and its purpose for teacher education. The school principal who also took the role as relief teacher for the class, and was familiar to the children, sat in the corner of the classroom to witness the discussion. She reflected that she was impressed by the process and very happy with the children’s level of understanding about and response to the study.

As is evident in the availability to children of an ‘off’ switch on the wireless microphones, we have balanced our methodological concern with obtaining data that will give us insight into the lived culture of the class-
room with our ethical commitment to the children’s rights to maintain privacy. Throughout the study the principle guiding data-gathering procedures with the children was that the children should have as much agency as possible in the process and our access to data was subject to their choice. For example, although the children had agreed to wear microphones and participate, they could choose to turn off their wireless microphones and/or decline an interview. We taught the children to use the portable tape recorders and they controlled the ‘on’, ‘off’ and ‘pause’ buttons during the interviews deciding when the interview would or would not proceed. The children actively took up these opportunities.

A contract was drawn up with the teacher explaining her rights to be involved at each stage of the research process. Permission was sought from other adults or students working in the class from time to time if their interaction with the students occurred during the unit.

We have taken our underlying ethical principle about the construction of case studies from the development focus of the project. The guiding ERUDITE (Educational Research Underpinning Development in Teacher Education) principle is that the criterion for selection will be that the focus is on pedagogical strategies that facilitated students’ opportunities to learn and the professional development that such insights enable.

**Retrospective data analysis**

Our observational and interview data revealed that Ms Nikora had been effective in her approach to supporting inclusion and challenging personal tragedy perspectives for the new entrants at Roadrunner School. The detailed reconstruction of the class programme that the ERUDITE methodology enabled, allowed us to trace retrospectively the strategies that Ms Nikora used. The purpose in the analysis has been to identify and make explicit the theoretical principles underlying the specific strategies used by Ms Nikora so that those principles can be adapted by other teachers to other contexts to support effective and inclusive educational practice. While we have focussed on the evidence that Ms Nikora’s approach was effective, we have attempted to identify and present evidence of contestation or exceptions to the pattern of influence better to understand the processes at work. In particular, we have focussed on the data for Caitlin, the only child in Ms Nikora’s class whose recorded verbal interactions revealed taunting behaviour towards Zack. We have used the interrupted narrative technique with this case study to highlight a critical issue in teacher management and unanswered questions that we consider should guide further research and reflection.

**Zack and the playground incident**

Zack, a student in a Year 5 class at Roadrunner school had spina bifida. Some weeks before Ms Nikora’s unit planning Zack had had a seizure in
the playground and collapsed. Some of the new entrant children had witnessed the incident and the arrival of an ambulance to take Zack to hospital. Ms Nikora was concerned that children thought that Zack had died when he went into a deep sleep after his seizure.

I think it was Ellis; it was either Ellis or Campbell. I just can’t remember off hand. Um, there was Caitlin . . . just a group of them. . . . I can’t remember who was the one who said he had died. It happened at lunchtime and they came back and [they] had questions. Huhana, she was out standing up yelling, ‘The ambulance is here!’ They were all concerned . . . once one person had brought up the word ‘dead’.

At the time of the incident Ms Nikora attempted to reassure the students: ‘We had to do some reassurances that Zack was actually OK. We . . . made cards for him and talked about [him being] at hospital but . . .’. Ms Nikora remained concerned about the incident and the children’s fear; their lack of understanding and their misunderstandings. She explained that she was concerned both for them and for their attitudes towards Zack in the future. Ms Nikora reflected also that Rietveld’s research and the personal tragedy model had raised questions for her about the absence of an explicit whole school approach to supporting inclusion at Roadrunner School. She reflected upon her previous implicit assumption that effective inclusion in Zack’s case, had been primarily an issue for Zack’s own teacher.

In response to her reflections on this incident and its consequences Ms Nikora decided to educate her new entrants about Zack and about spina bifida. In addressing this issue directly, Ms Nikora aimed to assist the effective inclusion of Zack in the school.

Interrupted narrative

Before we proceed in reporting what Ms Nikora did, we invite readers to identify strategies that they might use in such a situation. From Ms Nikora’s perspective the new entrants’ witnessing of Zack’s collapse has created attitudes of fear and misinformation. The event has contributed to a situation where the personal tragedy perspective has been evident in the attitudes of younger children in the school. Ms Nikora determined to use the two models, social constructionist and personal tragedy, as tools to guide her planning to educate the new entrants about Zack. We invite readers to consider how should she proceed, what strategies might be effective in this situation and why?

Before proceeding with our account of Ms Nikora’s approach we wish to take the reader into the new entrant class 25 minutes after Zack had been invited to join the class for an afternoon session to explain about spina bifida. The students were asked to record (through drawing and writing) what they had learned about spina bifida in their ‘Thinking books’. New entrant Caitlin who was sitting alongside Zack at a table had not recorded anything in her book, ostensibly because there were no pencils in the container at the table. When Caitlin announced earlier that there were not enough pencils at the table Holly gave hers to Zack and retrieved an extra one from a container at another table. Caitlin made no perceptible
effort to find a pencil. Zack had turned away from Caitlin, demonstrating parts of his wheelchair for another new entrant student, Fa’afetai, at Ms Nikora’s instigation. Ms Nikora has focused Fa’afetai’s attention on the wheelchair and Caitlin who had overheard the conversation called out.

Day 1, Task 19, 13. 58’00’’
Caitlin to Zack gets around in a wheelchair! [giggles]
[Caitlin takes the handle of the wheelchair and starts pushing. Zack puts the brake on and re-orienties the wheelchair away from Caitlin as he returns to a conversation he is engaged in with Fa’afetai and Ms Nikora.]

Day 1, Task 20, 14.01’45’’
[Caitlin has not worked on Task 19 so has not yet begun her task. Other students have finished and are now moving to play with blocks or read books.]
Caitlin to Zack I said ‘Where’s the pencil?’ I’m getting angry.
Caitlin to Zack Hurry up! I’m getting angry [laughs].

Day 1, Task 20, 14.03’00’’
Caitlin to Zack I know why you’re a bit smaller
Zack to Caitlin ‘Cause I’m in a chair.
Caitlin to Zack No, because you’re in a wheelchair.
Zack to Caitlin That’s what I meant.

Day 1, Task 20, 14.03’45’’
Caitlin to Zack [whispers in Zack’s ear with her hand across her mouth]
Spina bifida boy. Hee hee.

Day 1, Task 20, 14.03’45’’
Caitlin to Zack [calls out softly]
Hey, spina bifida boy.

At this point Ms Nikora overhears Caitlin and . . .

Again we invite readers to consider how Ms Nikora might respond to Caitlin’s comment and why (figure 1)?

Ms Nikora’s approach

Ms Nikora chose to use a curriculum-focused approach to inform the students about spina bifida and to enable them to interact appropriately with Zack within the school community. We have identified the four major strategies Ms Nikora used in her overall approach as:

(1) Social studies curriculum integration.
(2) ‘Personal tragedy’ critique.
(3) Multiple positionings.
(4) Curriculum application in the school community.

Each of these is described below, and then considered in depth drawing upon evidence of the students’ experiences in class and interview data. In the course of presenting our analysis we take up issues relating to Caitlin’s comments and the questions they raise.
Social studies curriculum integration

Ms Nikora used the ongoing social studies programme to educate her students about spina bifida in order to inform the students, to enable them to act appropriately and supportively to Zack, and to support effective inclusive practice within the wider school community. Spina bifida was not the focus of the unit but rather a context used to help the students better understand the diversity of experiences of Christmas and the concept of people in the community who help us.

Curriculum integration

Ms Nikora integrated her objectives for the students’ learning about spina bifida and Zack into the ongoing programme rather than making it a special mention or isolated topic. This approach is similar to that identified by Banks (1994) as a key dimension in the construction of effective multicultural curriculum: content integration. In the content integration approach to transforming mainstream curriculum, content reflecting diversity is integrated into key instructional points.

The social studies strategy

The vehicle for Ms Nikora’s approach was a social studies unit ‘Christmas in Hospital’, that she taught to the class of new entrant students over a 3 day period. Ms Nikora decided to combine a focus on spina bifida with a focus on the celebration of Christmas. Because the unit was timed to occur
in late November, Ms Nikora decided to use the children's growing excitement about Christmas as an impetus for her social studies programme. However, she planned her unit to avoid stereotyped portrayals of Christmas. Rather, Ms Nikora intended that the social studies curriculum should provide a consideration of the Christmas festival that reflected the diversity of experiences the new entrant students might have at Christmas. To achieve her purpose Ms Nikora selected as a key resource a New Zealand social studies resource kit. The kit prepared by Kelvin Smythe (1996) contained a story and a set of 22 large pictures about Tyler, a 4-year-old boy with spina bifida. Tyler had spent Christmas in hospital having an operation. Her planning focussed on the key objective for the unit: Achievement Objective 2 in the second draft of the New Zealand social studies curriculum statement Culture and Heritage Strand: ‘Children will describe how they celebrate Christmas and compare it with (the way Tyler spent his Christmas when he was four years old)’. Ms Nikora used this story about a boy’s experience of having an operation in hospital at Christmas both to exemplify a different kind of Christmas experience and to inform the children about spina bifida.

Ms Nikora’s intention to inform the students about spina bifida was evident throughout the unit as she provided a range of tasks and contexts for the class to learn specific facts about spina bifida:

Day 3 13.47’30’’
Ms Nikora: What can you remember, Kim?
Kim: The bones don’t join up together.

Day 3 13.39’30’’
Ms Nikora: Can anyone tell me what spina bifida is?
Holly: Your, it’s the thing that makes, ‘cause some of the bones at the back of your spine are gone so something has to squeeze out the other side.
Ms Nikora: You’re so right.
Holly: And you’re born with it and you can’t walk.
Ms Nikora: Just like Holly said a cyst grows through a split in their spine.

Day 3 14.26’00’’
Ms Nikora: And this word, ‘drip’? Does anyone know what a drip is?
Huhana: It’s a drip that you put in your hand, and like an injection...

The information that you are born with spina bifida appeared to alleviate fears that Caitlin harboured for her own susceptibility to the condition.

Day 1, Task 19 13.57’00’’
[The new entrants are talking while recording their individual Thinking Book entries.]
Caitlin: Eight year olds don’t have spina bifida maybe?
Holly: Because you’re borned [sic.] with it.
Caitlin: I wasn’t borned [sic.] ...
Holly to Huhana: [spelling spina bifida] - I- N- A-

Day 1, Task 19, 13.57’15’’
Caitlin to Zack: I wasn’t born with spina bifida (inaudible) never!

Ms Nikora was constantly reflecting throughout the unit on the extent to which her focus on specific content information was successful with the students. She struggled with moderating a balance between introducing
new information and consolidating what the students had learned. On reflection she would not have attempted to teach the concept of hydrocephalus which she initially included because both Zack and Tyler had the condition.

Because the context of hospital was central to Tyler’s story Ms Nikora planned also to develop the children’s understandings of the nature of ‘hospital’ from a social studies perspective. Accordingly, Ms Nikora selected Achievement Objective 1 in the Social Organisation and Processes strand: ‘Children will collect and present information about people in the community that help us when we go to the hospital.’ One of the students in Ms Nikora’s class, Huhana, had recently had an accident on the slide in the school playground, broken her arm and been admitted to hospital to have her arm set. Ms Nikora’s use of Huhana’s actual experience of hospital as a key resource for the unit has been the focus of another Roadrunner case study (Alton-Lee et al. forthcoming).

Ms Nikora used the Social Studies curriculum as a vehicle to address an issue of diversity within the Roadrunner school community. This approach met Brophy and Alleman’s (1992) assumptions that ideal social studies curricula should be relevant to long-term goals and life applications outside of school. The approach also drew upon the social studies curriculum to help the students participate in informed and responsible ways within their own school community contemporaneously. What they were learning about in social studies was directly linked to their own experiences and community. Ms Nikora emphasized, as central to her planning, the role of the national Social Studies Curriculum aim to enable children’s ‘participation in a changing society as confident, informed and responsible citizens’. She perceived the valuing of community and interdependence as integral not only to social studies curriculum but also to the cultural values of Maori: ‘Social studies should promote the community sense. The idea of working together rather than in isolation has implications for a lot of children in my class because from the Maori cultural side of it, you do work in together. It's not the individual that's emphasized ... the whole community thing is important’.

‘Personal Tragedy’ critique: reflective and responsive management of personal tragedy positionings in enacted curriculum

Throughout the interviews and debriefings about her planning and day-to-day progress during the unit, Ms Nikora mentioned the influence of her critique of the personal tragedy model on her approach. She described that influence as affecting decisions she made to exclude resources and to adapt resources. She also used the personal tragedy model as a tool to aid her reflections on the children’s responses to Zack. While the ‘personal tragedy’ model was a useful tool for classroom practice, the model is a blunt instrument when trying to interpret how children do perceive people with disabilities and why they respond in the ways they do. A useful area of further
research would be to identify the kinds of, and the origins of, perspectives and views that students do hold that influence their ‘othering’ of peers.

Ms Nikora explained that she wished to distinguish in the new entrants’ thinking the person, Zack, from the disability, spina bifida: ‘The person needs to be seen before the disability . . . I was wanting to get across to them that, you know, Zack does have this condition, but that 95 per cent of the time he’s all right. It’s just something he has to live with, just like Barry has asthma and he has to go off to hospital like that’.

Throughout her planning for the unit, Ms Nikora used the personal tragedy model as a tool to assist her resource selection and usage. The model was influential to the extent that Ms Nikora rejected a video resource she had initially planned to use. The video had been made about Zack’s use of a parapodium to assist his mobility. Ms Nikora revised her initial decision to use the video after hearing Caitlin’s name-calling:

The major change that I’ve made today . . . Zack’s video—when I viewed it I could see it from an adult’s perspective . . . it was great that Zack was so independent and he could use his parapodium. However, the other day when Caitlin . . . said ‘Spina bifida boy!’ I thought that she was going into the personal tragedy . . . you know, ‘Poor little thing—you’ve got it and I haven’t’. And so when I viewed the video again last night I asked my husband to sit in on it and see what he thought. He thought it was definitely, ‘Look at this poor kid. He’s down there rolling on the ground trying to get into his parapodium . . . It does make him look as if he’s totally different’. So, I thought ‘Well, he doesn’t know, Zack . . . and if that’s his sort of view, then I could see from there that my five year olds may not be mature enough to see that it’s the independence you know, that’s being highlighted; not the poor little kid rolling around on the ground trying to get into it’. So I’ve decided to cut that out because I don’t want that to come across.

Ms Nikora did not exclude, but was selective in her use of, the ‘Christmas in Hospital’ resource kit about Tyler because she perceived the kit to reinforce a personal tragedy perspective on spina bifida:

Kelvin Smythe’s resource had something about developing a sympathetic relevant understanding of the boy who had spina bifida. I remembered the readings that I had done in EDUC 352 Theory into practice and your lecture about the personal tragedy side of it and that word ‘sympathy’ just didn’t work for me . . . I thought that the children would relate it straight back to the personal tragedy—‘Oh, you poor little thing! . . . I sympathize with you’. That’s totally [contrary] to what I wanted to create. So my aim was to stimulate the children into thinking about their Christmas experiences . . . and compare these to a boy who spends Christmas in hospital. I don’t want them to feel sad for him, although I don’t want them to have a heart of stone. I just want them to realize that other people have different experiences that are different to theirs.

The phrase ‘poor little thing’ that Ms Nikora used illustrates both the attitudes of sympathy and diminution that Ms Nikora attempted to counter. However, the audio microphone data we have for Caitlin, that we included in the interrupted narrative sequence, suggests that she brought a personal tragedy perspective to her behaviour towards Zack. Her comments and name-calling reflect a sense of celebration and superiority as she established that she was not affected by spina bifida as he was. Ms Nikora attempted to influence the personal tragedy approach played out by Caitlin on Day 1, and exemplified in the interrupted narrative we pre-
sented earlier. We return to that incident to explore Ms Nikora’s response to Caitlin’s taunts.

Ms Nikora chose not directly to challenge the nature of Caitlin’s comments. This choice reflects her commitment to using an educational rather than a disciplinary process. Her approach is congruent with the views of many students interviewed in the Understanding Learning and Teaching Studies whom, when asked about teacher interventions in peer abuse, commented that direct teacher interventions generally make the consequences in the peer culture much worse for them, not better. However, we have selected this issue for our interrupted narrative focus because we consider it a complex and crucial issue for teachers and students. Research approaches that address the complexity of the contextual processes involved are needed to help inform educational practice that can facilitate student safety and well-being in our schools and communities.

When Ms Nikora heard Caitlin’s comment to Zack she moved over to Caitlin apparently using physical proximity and a very firm intonation to halt Caitlin’s comments. Ms Nikora refocussed Caitlin on the task at hand through a series of questions after eliciting an admission from Caitlin that she had done nothing for the set task:

Day 1 14.04’00”
Ms Nikora to Caitlin: Right. What have you drawn your picture about? What did you learn about spina bifida?
Ms Nikora: What did you learn about spina bifida?
Caitlin: Oh. [Looking at her blank Thinking Book page] Nothing there.
Ms Nikora: No.
Ms Nikora: Well, what are you going to draw your picture about? What did you learn about it? What did you learn? What part of your body does it affect?
Caitlin: Your spine.
Ms Nikora Right. You could draw your— a spine.

Ms Nikora left Caitlin to continue with a specific task and turned her attention to Zack:

Ms Nikora to Zack: What have you learnt about spina bifida since you’ve had it? What has been the most important thing for you?
Zack: That it’s sore.
Ms Nikora: That it’s sore, is it? What’s the most painful part? In your head?
Zack: Mmm.
Ms Nikora: Your head aches and that.
Zack: Yes.

Ms Nikora did not acknowledge directly Caitlin’s hurtful comments to Zack either to Caitlin or to Zack. However, our reading of Ms Nikora’s interaction with Zack suggests that she used the opportunity to acknowledge the pain he experienced and to provide reassurance for him that may have been intended to address more than just his physical pain.

Because we did not have an active microphone continuously recording Caitlin’s interactions during the unit we cannot be sure of what else happened. Our other microphones recorded no more gleeful taunts from Caitlin to Zack by Day 2. However, the attitude of diminution was
apparent in Caitlin’s interactions with Zack when she used a diminutive name in addressing him during the morning of Day 2.

Day 2 11.15’30”

Questions of intersections between gender and disability arise out of these data. The data provide evidence of a 5-year-old girl using diminutives and taunting towards a boy who was 4 years older than her.

It is likely that Zack would not have been subject to Caitlin’s taunts had he not been part of Ms Nikora’s programme. Our presumption is that the evidence from the study indicates that the overall effect of the programme would have been to generate a more knowledgeable and respectful peer community for Zack within the school. There was evidence to support this view. As the first author of this paper was accompanying Zack and his peer wheelchair assistant across the school playground after the study, Zack explained that the adventure playground in the school had been under threat but was going to be retained. As he spoke he used the wording ‘our adventure playground’ and gave the impression of being firmly embedded in the ‘us’ of the school community. Also there is some evidence in the research literature that the helper role can be beneficial to the learning of the helper (Webb 1982). However, Hahn’s (1997) assumption that exposure to the cruel insults of the playground will help students to develop social skills is problematic. Critical questions about the well-being of Zack and other students within abusive peer subcultures should remain at the forefront of research and practice.

Ms Nikora used her critique of the ‘personal tragedy’ model when interacting with the new entrants as she elaborated upon their ideas in their Thinking Books:

Day 2 11.12’30”
[Huhana is drawing a wheelchair and Ms Nikora stops to talk to her]
Ms Nikora/Huhana: Because people with disabilities ... we need to treat them?
Huhana/Ms Nikora: Kindly.
Ms Nikora/Huhana: Yes, with respect.

Ms Nikora’s reframing of personal tragedy portrayals of people with disabilities was reflected in Barry’s self-correction as he reported back to the class what he had learnt on the second day of the unit:

Day 2 11.21’15”
Ms Nikora/Class: What did you learn?
Barry to class: Someone helps Zack in a— just ask Zack if I could push him and I could.
Ms Nikora: Right, then. You ask, and that’s the most important thing. Well done. Thank you.

In summary, while Ms Nikora was proactive in excluding personal tragedy portrayals from curricular resources or in adapting and transforming such portrayals, she rejected the approach of being directly critical or challenging when she encountered evidence of such an attitude in the new entrants. Ms Nikora’s primary approach to the presentation of Zack in enacted curriculum was to make apparent to the children evidence of the
range of Zack’s competencies and to model informed, respectful and appropriate ways of behaving with Zack.

**Multiple positionings**

the problem of curriculum becomes one of proliferating identifications, not closing them down. ... But ... more is required than simply a plea to add marginalized voices to an already overpopulated site.’ (Britzman 1995: 158)

The multiple positionings approach provides an implicit counteraction to the narrow personal tragedy positioning. Alton-Lee *et al.* (1997) reported the use of a multiple positionings strategy in the proliferation of gender positionings for both men and women in a study of life and work in Antarctica. Ms Nikora used multiple positionings to re/present, in this case, people with a disability through varied positionings. We have identified four distinct multiple positionings strategies she used below.

**The older peer helper positioning**

Ms Nikora’s strategy of using Zack as older peer helper was designed to generate a context wherein Zack’s abilities and strengths were self-evident to the new entrant children and directly helpful to them. Zack’s provision of help for the younger children ensured that in the first direct contact they had with Zack, Zack’s capabilities were featured. Zack was initially directly introduced to the new entrants in the roles of older student and helper rather than being positioned as different and/or disabled. His positioning as helper, mentor and older student was integrated into an ongoing cross-age tutor programme rather than established as an isolated or one-off intervention.

The timing of this strategy was also critical to Ms Nikora’s approach. She intended to influence the new entrant students’ initial perceptions of Zack so that they would think of him as a person with a range of abilities and strengths before they learnt about or focussed upon his specific disability. Through establishing in the children a substantial personal experience of Zack as someone with abilities, Ms Nikora aimed to pre-empt or overcome a deficit perspective about or personal tragedy perspective on Zack in the new entrants.

To evaluate Ms Nikora’s strategy we included in our pre-unit interviews with the new entrants an open question about Zack. Each student was asked: ‘Who is Zack?’ Of 15 students interviewed before the unit, 13 identified Zack in some way. We were particularly interested in their initial
The 'One of Many' positioning: multiple stories of children with spina bifida and/or hospital experience

In addition to using Zack as a resource person, Ms Nikora used the stories of four different children with spina bifida in the unit. As indicated earlier, 4-year-old Tyler who featured in the unit was the subject of a commercial New Zealand social studies resource package (Smythe 1996). Twelve-year-
old David was the subject of a picture book entitled ‘I have spina bifida’ (Pettenuzzo and Purcell 1987). Two other picture book stories focussed on the experiences at school of two junior class students with spina bifida: Janet and Paul (White and Findlay 1978, Laurence 1983). Zack and Tyler were the key resources for the unit focus on spina bifida. There were 137 mentions of Zack in public discussion and 106 mentions of Tyler. There were 18 mentions of Paul because the children participated in two shared readings with the Ready-to-Read story about Paul. David received nine verbal mentions in a story that was read to the class by Ms Nikora on the first day of the unit and there were 18 mentions of Janet when her story was read to the class on the final afternoon of the unit.

Through including Zack’s story as one of several stories of spina bifida, Ms Nikora achieved several pedagogical purposes. The use of multiple stories provided an effective way to scaffold the children’s learning. Ms Nikora provided the children with access to similar information using a variety of contexts, thereby achieving both novelty and repetition. The repetition is likely to have helped the children to construct new knowledge through repeated opportunities to encounter new curriculum content (Nuthall and Alton-Lee 1993). The use of pictures, written vocabulary and real-life demonstration was interwoven within the unit to provide rich learning opportunities for the children.

Over and above the effectiveness of the strategy for supporting children’s knowledge development, we wish to highlight the importance of the strategy in the positioning of Zack. Zack was not singled out as the only example of a child with spina bifida. Rather he was one of at least five different children that were presented to the class as examples of children managing their lives with spina bifida. While the stories addressed the disability they also provided information about a range of capabilities of the children with spina bifida. The use of multiple stories may be critical in the design of curriculum. If Ms Nikora had focussed only on Zack, then not only would the wealth of rich educational resources apparent in her programme have been lost to the students, but also Zack would have been presented as a special, different and individual case. From our perspective the use of multiple stories mitigates against the ‘freak’ positioning that can occur inadvertently when a curriculum intervention focuses just on the disability or difference in one individual.

The sequencing of Zack’s story within the multiple stories was also a critical dimension of the strategy. An analysis of the way Ms Nikora structured the curriculum sequence revealed that although Zack was the major focus of the curriculum content he was not the first encounter the children had with curriculum content about spina bifida.

Ms Nikora did not use Zack’s actual experience to introduce spina bifida. Rather, she used the teaching resource developed by Smythe depicting the story of 4-year-old Tyler, a Christchurch boy with spina bifida. The story focuses on Tyler’s experiences in hospital at Christmas to when he had an urgent operation to drain the fluid that had build up around his brainstem.

Through focussing initially on Tyler’s story, Ms Nikora used the experiences of a real New Zealand child without that child being present.
when the new entrant students grappled with the nature of the disability. Nine of the 67 unit tasks over the 3-day unit directly focussed on Tyler’s story. Ms Nikora wrote key vocabulary including the term ‘spina bifida’ on the whiteboard and then introduced Tyler to the new entrants using a photograph of him in his hospital bed. The students were asked to explain the picture and guess what was happening. Other tasks included a review of the key vocabulary and ideas, a teacher-read story with the pictures of Tyler’s experience, paired discussion of the pictures and what the children had learnt from Tyler’s story, a map activity to identify Tyler’s geographic location at his home in Christchurch, and opportunities for the new entrant children to record what they had learnt in their Thinking Books. The children’s knowledge of Tyler and his condition of spina bifida became a shared class knowledge base that was often reviewed and linked by both teacher and students to new information. Every session during the unit included at least one mention of Tyler.

By the time Zack became the lesson focus on the late afternoon session of the first day of the unit, the class had been introduced to the term and meaning of ‘spina bifida’ in the discussions about Tyler. This pattern continued throughout the unit. Zack’s second major involvement as a resource person occurred on the second day of the unit after the class had heard Tyler’s story read aloud, discussed what they learnt and made an entry in their Thinking Books. Zack’s greatest involvement as a curriculum resource occurred in the final session of the unit as the children learned about wheelchair etiquette.

Ms Nikora’s strategy of using Tyler to introduce the topic of spina bifida enabled the children to explore their ideas, fears and misunderstandings freely. This strategy may have enabled the children to be more sensitive to Zack because they already had some knowledge and understanding to bring to their encounter with Zack in his role as a curriculum resource.

By using hospital as another focus context in the unit and including the hospital stories of children within the class and of children in stories read to the class, Ms Nikora structured a wider focus on shared experiences in community. For example, she emphasized the links between Zack’s story of having an operation and Huhana’s account of her operation:

Day 2 11.28’30”
Zack: And when you wake up sometimes your eye [Zack brings his hands up to his eyes] you can’t see nothing properly.
Ms Nikora/class: When you come out from the anaesthetic [Ms Nikora looks at Huhana] that’s what Huhana was saying. She said she woke up and you had a bit of a headache didn’t you, Huhana? And she was actually sick. The anaesthetic made her sick after her operation.

Consequently, although the children learnt that people are born with spina bifida and that they would not develop spina bifida they also learnt that children go to hospital for many different conditions. The multiple stories depicting a range of shared and overlapping contexts illustrated similarities as well as differences in the experiences of children the new entrants learned about, including children in their own class community.
**Zack as authoritative informant**

Ms Nikora’s avoidance of a personal tragedy positioning for Zack was evident also in the way in which she introduced him as a direct curriculum resource. While Ms Nikora used Zack as a key curriculum resource, he was not positioned by Ms Nikora as a passive object of study or example. Rather, Zack was presented to the class by Ms Nikora as an expert authority on spina bifida who could take the teacher’s role in some part:

Day 1, Task 17/18 Transition, 1.42’15’’
Ms N  Thanks for sharing that with us, Zack. That was really good to have someone who knows all about it because Ms Nikora didn’t.

Day 1, Task 18, 1.43’15’’
Ms N  This boy’s name is David [looks at the book and points to the picture] and he’s twelve years old. And he was born with spina bifida. [Looks at the class and then at Zack and smiles] Just like Zack told us.

Day 1, Task 19, 13. 51’30’’
Ms N  I want you to write down what you’ve learnt—maybe from the book or something Zack has taught you.

Zack explained and demonstrated spina bifida to the new entrant class. He told the children that a person is born with spina bifida and showed them the curve in his spine (figure 3). He explained about the need for an operation and the headaches he had because of his hydrocephalus. Then Zack discussed the implications for his mobility of having spina bifida.

The outcome of Ms Nikora’s strategy of positioning Zack as an authoritative expert about spina bifida and teacher was evident in post-unit interviews with many of the children. For example, Huhana explained that ‘Zack told the children why he ended up in a wheelchair’ and Brian said that ‘Zack showed us how his wheelchair worked’. Both students’ responses positioned Zack as an active and knowledgeable informant.

![Figure 3. Zack joins the class as an authoritative informant on spina bifida.](image-url)
For the new entrant children, Zack’s presence had substantial impact. In particular, his wheelchair provided a concrete example and a direct experience to support the students’ learning. The impact of the presence of Zack’s wheelchair is evident in the contrast between Brian’s picture of a wheelchair in response to Tyler’s story and Brian’s picture of a wheelchair after Zack’s story (figures 4 and 5).

While the direct experience of the concrete example of the wheelchair was important for all the new entrant children, it was particularly significant for Fa’a’afetai, a new immigrant from Western Samoa, who was learning English as a second language (Vine 1998, Vine and Alton-Lee 1999).

**The ‘One of Us’ positioning: Zack the cricketer**

Ms Nikora’s view of community was inclusive and she identified this perspective as a key understanding she aimed to develop in the ‘Christmas in Hospital Unit’: ‘A second key understanding (to the nature of community) is that people with disabilities are a part of our diverse community. They are just part of us’. Ms Nikora, in reflecting upon Zack’s collapse in the playground, was concerned ‘that they would see him [Zack] as out there’. Ms Nikora’s designed her programme to counter the emphasis on the differences of spina bifida and the position of Zack as ‘other’.

Ms Nikora’s view that students with disabilities are part of us and not ‘other’ influenced her pedagogy and her use of language in the classroom.
For example, after Ms Nikora had brought Zack into the classroom as a peer helper and expert on spina bifida for the afternoon session on the first day of the unit, she introduced a new task apparently unrelated to the unit. She asked each child including the cross-age tutors to draw a picture showing what they were good at.

‘You may have wondered why, after Zack had ... came up in the first day, why I got them to do the picture of the things they were good at. It was to include Zack, you know, so that they could see that Zack was just like one of them. He was good at things as well. I don’t know why I thought about that last night, but I just had a feeling that nobody had questioned why I put that in my planning because it didn’t seem to relate to the ‘Christmas in hospital’ [topic]. But it was just that inclusion sort of thing.

In subsequent class discussion of individual responses, Ms Nikora focussed on Zack’s strength as a cricketer. Cricket is not only a sport that many of the children would have experienced directly, but also a highly valued activity in New Zealand culture and a highly valued traditionally masculine cultural practice. Among the frequent opportunities Ms Nikora took to emphasize Zack’s cricketing prowess to the class, the following teacher comment reflects her inclusion of two boys, Zack and William, in a sporting strengths category.

Day 1: 14.28‘15"
Ms Nikora/class: I have learnt today that Zack [is] good at playing cricket and William [is] good at playing soccer.

Ms Nikora also used the ‘people who help us’ aspect of the social studies curriculum achievement objective to position children with spina bifida as
like all of us in needing help at some time or other. Not all the new entrant students agreed!

Day 1 13.48’30”
Ms Nikora/class: We all need friends to help us, don’t we? Sometimes? [context—a story about David needing help to get his lunch.]
Unidentified child [apparently Campbell]: I don’t.

A visiting expert that Ms Nikora invited from the Crippled Children’s Society directly focussed on diversity as a characteristic of ‘us’ within community.

Day 2 11.01’30”
Rachel: What it [disability] means is that there might be different ways that people need to do things. Because we’re all different aren’t we?
Class: Yes.
Rachel What are some of the ways that we’re different from each other?

The children subsequently identified shared differences in names, clothes and shoes. While Campbell (or the unidentified child) contested the view that we all need help, Barry had the clear view that Zack was a ‘normal person’.

Day 2 11.04’00”
Rachel: [Reading a story to the class]. ‘Do treat me like I’m one of you and don’t treat me as special’. People who use wheelchairs are just normal people.
Barry [calls out]: Like Zack is.

In a study of the enacted curriculum of a social studies unit designed to support racial tolerance Alton-Lee et al. (1993) uncovered a teacher’s unintended exclusion of a Maori student and its effect in the peer culture. After hearing the teacher say to the class ‘When white people, Europeans we were . . .’, Pakeha (European) Joe turned and whispered ‘Nigger’ to Ricky. In that paper an analysis of pronouns was used to explore the ways in which students were positioned by gender and race in relation to the official ‘we’ of the enacted curriculum. The paper was used in the university teacher education courses taken by Ms Nikora to assist students to develop a language of inclusion wherein the ‘we’ of an educational community is larger than the we of a particular dominant group.

The challenge for teachers is to develop a language frame that is sufficiently inclusive of the diversity of those of us who make up our particular educational communities. There is a substantial shift in language and thinking embedded in the larger ‘us’. The shift from exclusive terms such as ‘mainstreaming’ and ‘integration’ to the (for now) more universalizing terminology of ‘inclusion’ is a struggle for educators and researchers who carry the inescapable legacy of the social construction of exclusion (Allan 1999). Ms Nikora struggled with pronouns in the class discussions during the Roadrunner ‘Christmas in Hospital’ unit as she commented upon the stories of children with spina bifida. For example, she moved from the ‘he’ of David when she discussed the problem of kidney infection to the generalized ‘your’ in ‘it keeps your kidneys clean’ to the ‘we’ and ‘our’ of ‘we should all drink lots of water. It flushes our body and keeps us nice and healthy’ (Day 1, task 18, 13.49’45”). Locating difference within
rather than outside of community requires of teachers constant vigilance as resources are reframed and language use is reflective.

**Social studies curriculum application: new entrant students as knowledgeable and skilled participants within a community of mutual support**

Ms Nikora designed her unit not only to make the students more knowledgeable but also to provide them with appropriate applied strategies and skills. The students were taught wheelchair protocol so that they would have the knowledge and skills to assist people in wheelchairs in appropriate ways. The skills were introduced by Rachel, the expert from the Crippled Children’s Society and demonstrated by Zack using his wheelchair as a key resource.

Day 2 11.02’45”
Rachel . . . This might give you some hints about assisting someone who uses a wheelchair. . . . Things to say and things to do.

Day 2 11.05’15”
Rachel: Do ask me if I want to be pushed. That’s really important.

Both Rachel and Ms Nikora emphasized the importance of asking someone in a wheelchair whether they want to be pushed before providing any assistance. This message had a profound impact on the students. Brian and Simon engaged in an extended discussion about the appropriate way to negotiate pushing a wheelchair.

Day 2 11.08’00”
[Private conversation between Brian and Simon]
Brian/Simon: If you push them too fast they might fall out and the seat might . . . if you push them too fast the seat belt will come away and they’ll fall out.
Simon/Brian: If you don’t put the seat belt on and then. . . .

Day 2 11.10’15”
Simon/Brian: Don’t push. You have to ask if they push . . . ask push.

Huhana rehearsed the message about asking and then decided to focus on that issue in her Thinking Book entry depicted in figure 6.

Day 2 11.18’00”
Huhana talking to self as she works in her Thinking book: Do ask me if you want to push me.

Ms Nikora made provision for two children to actually go out into the school grounds and practise wheelchair protocol under the supervision of a student teacher: Fa’aafetai and Ellis. It appeared that she made this decision because she considered the in-class opportunity insufficient for Fa’aafetai who had little English language and Ellis who had difficulties with hearing and sight and did not have either his glasses or his hearing aid at school that day.

Day 2 11.09’00”
Ms N: Would you mind, Zack? I know Fa’aafetai would like to help you out in the playground but he’s not quite sure how to push you safely. Would it
Mr Kitson: OK. Fa'afetai and Ellis, you come here. Zack is going to show us, right? What's the first thing we have to do when, if we want to push, Zack? We have to say, to ask?

Mr Kitson/Fa'afetai: You ask. You say: 'Can I push you Zack?'

Fa'afetai/Zack: [Zack puts his hand up] Ahhhh I pushh [sic.] you, Zack?

Mr Kitson: Does Zack mind if he pushes? Is that all right, Zack?

Zack: Yeah.

Day 2: 11.13'00"

[Observer notes that Fa'afetai pushes Zack very carefully.]

Ms Nikora’s combined strategies described hitherto had a striking impact on Zack’s physical positioning within the class. Whereas Zack had previously sat on the edge of the class grouping to talk to the children, by the second morning of the unit programme his wheelchair was noticeably situated within the midst of a group of new entrant children. Zack literally moved from the margins of the class to the centre as the ‘Christmas in Hospital ‘ unit progressed (figure 7).

Our visual images provide vivid evidence of the success of Ms Nikora’s strategies to create a genuinely inclusive school community in action within her new entrant class. It is difficult to ascertain the impact of Ms Nikora’s approach on Caitlin’s attitudes and behaviours. However, a year after the study, in her long-term interview, Caitlin revealed that she perceived Ms Nikora’s efforts to help the children share with and help each other to be distinguishing qualities in making her the ‘bestest [sic.] teacher’:

Interviewer: What else do you like about Ms Nikora?
Caitlin: She’s the bestest[sic.] teacher because she does a lot of things (other teachers) doesn’t do.
Interviewer: What are those sorts of things?
Caitlin: Like helping us to read . . . helping us to do story writing sometimes and helping us be sharing a lot and helping other people.

Summary and reflection

We have identified the links between Ms Nikora’s encounter with Rietveld’s research and its power to illuminate a theoretical framework that had a profound impact on Ms Nikora’s own practice. We have considered in-depth, strategies Ms Nikora used in her social constructionist approach to supporting inclusive educational practice at Roadrunner School: Social studies curriculum integration, ‘Personal tragedy’ critique, multiple positionings and curriculum application in the school community. We have made transparent four of the multiple positionings Ms Nikora used to position Zack: as an older peer helper, as one of many people (including us) who have shared experiences, as authoritative informant and as one of a community of us that is inclusive of diversity. By making transparent such strategies, we intend that they provide tools for other teachers to use, critique, develop and adapt to support effective inclusive programmes and practices in their own contexts.

Notes

1. Educational Research Underpinning Development in Teacher Education Programme funded by Pub Charity, Inc.
2. After 2 years only of implementation, and a three-fold increase in teachers electing to do the course, the teacher education programmes at Victoria University were dis-established in response to a Ministry of Education initiative to shorten to 3 years pre-service primary teacher preparation in New Zealand. Victoria University made the decision to discontinue in-service courses also.

3. The actual statement in the resource kit was 'Criteria for particular attention. The children’s willingness and ability to 'develop a sympathetic and valid understanding of a boy with a disability'.

UNIT CIH-1 Smythe (1996).

4. His operation was a post fossa craniectomy and laminectomy (Smythe 1996).

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References


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