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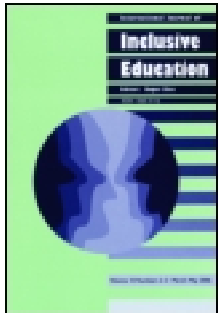

International Journal of Inclusive Education
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tied20

Kinds of participation: teacher and special education perceptions and practices of 'inclusion' in early childhood and primary school settings

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Available online: 24 Nov 2011

To cite this article: Bernadette Macartney & Missy Morton (2011): Kinds of participation: teacher and special education perceptions and practices of 'inclusion' in early childhood and primary school settings, International Journal of Inclusive Education, DOI:10.1080/13603116.2011.602529

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2011.602529

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International Journal of Inclusive Education
2011, 1–17, iFirst Article

Routledge
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Kinds of participation: teacher and special education perceptions and practices of 'inclusion' in early childhood and primary school settings

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(*Received 16 September 2009; final version received 3 June 2010*)

This paper presents narratives from two parents about the exclusion of their disabled children within early childhood and primary school settings. Interpretations of particular 'kinds of participation' that appear to be accepted as inclusive are explored. We argue that these interpretations have disabling effects on the children's learning and participation. We critique participation that is interpreted as 'presence', 'fitting in', and 'irrelevant or unimportant'. New Zealand curriculum documents [Ministry of Education. 1996. *Te Whäriki: Early childhood curriculum. Te Whäriki matauranga mo nga mokopuna o Aotearoa*. Wellington: Learning Media; Ministry of Education. 2007. *The New Zealand curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.] are briefly considered with regard to their socio-cultural views of learning, teaching, and participation and their positioning of disabled learners. A 'pedagogy of listening' (POL), based on a critical, ethical, and political approach to learning and teaching, is presented as an alternative to deficit approaches to learning and participation [Dalhberg, G., and P. Moss. 2005. *Ethics and politics in early childhood education*. London: Routledge; Rinaldi, C. 2006. In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and responding. In *Contesting early childhood series*, eds G. Dalhberg and P. Moss. London: Routledge]. POL and narrative approaches to assessment are considered in relation to their implications for inclusive New Zealand pedagogy.

Keywords: 'pedagogy of listening'; socio-cultural; narrative; curriculum

Introduction

In this paper, we argue that there is a disjuncture between the inclusive aspirations of New Zealand's early childhood and compulsory school curriculum documents (Ministry of Education 1996, 2007) and the lived experiences of many disabled children/students in their educational settings. We look at the possible reasons for continuing exclusionary thinking and practices in New Zealand education and suggest some possible ways forward for New Zealand teachers.

We begin by introducing the research project and families that form the basis of this paper and provide a brief background to New Zealand's early childhood and school system and our guiding curriculum documents (Ministry of Education 1996, 2007).

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ISSN 1360-3116 print/ISSN 1464-5173 online
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http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2011.602529
http://www.tandfonline.com

We then present and interpret the narratives of two parents about planning and assessment situations that involved their disabled children. We critique these situations with a focus on the underlying assumptions about disability that were evident and how the adults' practices and recommendations compared with the inclusive approaches and requirements of each relevant curriculum document. We then turn to a discussion of a 'pedagogy of listening' (POL) and consider how a POL might connect with our curriculum documents and advance narrative approaches to assessment, planning, and evaluation that are commonly used within the early childhood sector in New Zealand. We conclude with a brief critical examination of our curriculum documents in terms of how the exclusion of disabled children/students is insufficiently addressed within them. We recommend that the critical lens of a POL could be applied to narrative assessment and the socio-cultural emphases of our curriculum documents to the benefit of inclusive educational thinking and practice in New Zealand schools and early childhood centres.

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Methods and methodology

The article draws from Bernadette's interview-based PhD research, which used narrative inquiry and discourse theory and analysis to interpret the educational and life experiences of the two research families in relation to having a family member identified as 'disabled'. The data in this article come from two mothers who each have a child officially labelled as intellectually and physically disabled. Clare is Fran's daughter and Maggie Rose is Bernadette's daughter. Bernadette is one of the authors of this article. Apart from Bernadette and Maggie Rose, pseudonyms are given to all of the people and settings mentioned in the article. Bernadette and Maggie are named because the research is partly autobiographical and it is appropriate to disclose Bernadette as being the researcher as well as a participant in the research. Maggie is not given a pseudonym because her parents feel that without her story there would be no research or narrative and that naming Maggie acknowledges her contribution to the project. It would also be relatively easy for anyone to identify Maggie's name because of Bernadette's identity being disclosed. Therefore, using a pseudonym for Maggie would suggest a level of anonymity that is not possible given the circumstances. Fran's story centres on Clare's learning and participation in her early childhood centre and Maggie's to an early experience at primary school.

Early childhood and compulsory education in New Zealand

In Aotearoa-New Zealand, all children, disabled and non-disabled, have the legal right to attend the early childhood and school settings of their choice. New Zealand has a diverse range of early childhood education settings which include part and full day child care centres, home-based child care, parent-led and teacher-led services, not-for-profit and private centres, and centres developed to meet the needs and aspirations of particular cultural groups such as Mäori (New Zealand's indigenous population) and Pacific Island communities. There are no longer any full-day separate early childhood centres for disabled children in New Zealand. However, many pre-schoolers labelled as having 'special educational needs' are linked to a special education (SE) early intervention service (EIS). EIS staff work with the child, family, and early childhood centre staff where a child is enrolled. The EIS employs any education support workers (ESWs) to work within the early

childhood centre. If the child is not attending an early childhood centre, the EIS will work with the family and child at home and/or at the EIS. New Zealand children do not have to be enrolled at a school until they turn 6 years old. However, most children begin school at age 5. Schooling is compulsory from age 6 through to 16. Primary schooling comprises the first 8 years (5/6–12/13 years), and secondary school comprises the next 5 years (12/13–17/18 years). Most disabled children in New Zealand attend regular schools. Individual regular schools receive general and targeted SE funding depending on the particular children attending and their 'SE needs'. Individual schools employ teacher aides using SE funding. SE personnel work in an itinerant manner with individual schools and children. 'Special schools' remain an 'option' for families of disabled children in New Zealand. Some separate schools are organised for children with particular impairments such as schools for children with visual or hearing impairments, whereas other special schools work with children who have a wide range of labels.

New Zealand early childhood and school curriculum documents

Early childhood services and schools each have a mandated national curriculum document (Ministry of Education 1996, 2007). Both curriculum documents state that the curriculum as written is relevant for all children. Both these documents emphasise teacher, early childhood service, and school roles in recognising and valuing diversity and in empowering children and their families.

The principles and strands of Te Whäriki

The principles and strands of Te Whäriki – the early childhood curriculum – communicate the ethical obligations of early childhood educators towards *all* young children (0–6 years) and families participating within early childhood education settings (Ministry of Education 1996). The curriculum is underpinned by four 'principles', which require teachers to recognise and foster the *empowerment* of young children as they learn and grow; practice in ways that reflect a *holistic* understanding of children and their learning; acknowledge the integral place of the wider world, community, and *family* in children's learning and participation; and view learning as an inter-subjective process where children: '… learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things' (Ministry of Education 1996, 14). The curriculum 'strands' or goals focus on children experiencing a sense of belonging and well-being, as being engaged in active exploration, as possessing and developing diverse ways to communicate and express themselves, and as having their contributions valued and developing a sense of responsibility towards others. Over the past 15 years, much work and qualitative research has been carried out to explore and realise the implications of a Te Whäriki-based framework for assessing and planning for children's learning and teacher reflection on practice (Carr et al. 2000, 2003; Carr 2001; Ministry of Education 2005). Te Whäriki has stimulated a relational and 'narrative turn' within early childhood pedagogy and assessment in Aotearoa-New Zealand (Carr 2001). An implication of this turn to narrative pedagogies for assessment practices has been a focus on telling, documenting, discussing, and interpreting stories of learning 'in action' within the relational context/s in which learning and teaching are happening (Carr 1998, 2001).

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The New Zealand curriculum

The New Zealand curriculum (NZC, Ministry of Education 2007) covers English-medium primary and secondary schooling in New Zealand. The NZC provides the foundation, framework, and direction for teachers and schools in relation to what knowledge, skills, and attitudes are important; how learning and teaching are conceptualised; and the implications of this for teaching practices, content, and orientation. The NZC (Ministry of Education 2007) draws from 'credit'-based, social justice, and human rights discourses to describe and respond to children's learning and participation. The espoused vision for New Zealand school students is that they will develop into: '…confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners' (Ministry of Education 2007, 7). The NZC principles include an expectation that the 'curriculum has meaning for students, connects with their wider lives, and engages the support of their families, whänau [extended family] and communities… [and that] …students' identities, languages, abilities, and talents are recognised and affirmed…' (Ministry of Education 2007, 9). The curriculum includes expectations that schools will create environments in which students develop a shared sense of belonging, take responsibility for themselves and others, and develop an understanding of and respect for equity, diversity, and human rights (Ministry of Education 2007).

Rather than drawing from a narrow 'expert model', the NZC emphasises learning as a socio-cultural process of interrelationship involving the co-construction of knowledge. The NZC describes the orientation of the effective teacher as: 'cultivating the class as a learning community. In such a community, everyone, including the teacher, is a learner…' (Ministry of Education 2007, 34). The positioning of teachers as learners and students as teachers challenges the idea of teachers and SE personnel being the only 'experts' when it comes to understanding and making decisions about the teaching, learning, and participation of students. In this regard, the NZC (Ministry of Education 2007, 34) states that:

> Learning is inseparable from its social and cultural context. Students learn best when they feel accepted, when they enjoy positive relationships with their fellow students and teachers, and when they are able to be active, visible members of the learning community.

Socio-cultural approaches to pedagogy

Both Te Whäriki and the NZC draw from socio-cultural approaches to teaching and learning. Socio-cultural approaches recognise and privilege relationships, diversity, dialogue, multiple perspectives, divergent viewpoints, and negotiation as corner stones of an effective pedagogy and curriculum (Ministry of Education 1996, 2007; Rinaldi 2006). Rather than constructing children's learning and development as universal and children as passive recipients of knowledge, the NZC describes effective pedagogy as based on an understanding of 'teaching as inquiry' (Ministry of Education 2007, 35). 'Teaching as inquiry' conceptualises assessment as a process through which teachers notice and respond to students' learning within their specific context (Wansart 1995). It can be argued that approaches based on Te Whäriki and the NZC present a challenge to individualised, deficit discourses that explain the 'success' or 'failure' of children as being caused by factors within the individual student (Ballard 2004; MacArthur, Kelly, and Higgins 2005). On the contrary, the onus for students' 'success' or 'failure', and their levels or kinds of participation, must be on the social and cultural environments within which they are situated and a consideration of how

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the socio-cultural environment impacts on each child's learning, participation, inclusion, and/or exclusion.

Kinds of participation: Clare and Maggie's stories

The following excerpts are from interviews with Fran, an SE assessment document, and Bernadette's recall of the assessment situation from which the SE document was produced. Each of these narrative sections includes our interpretations of how Clare and Maggie were viewed and positioned. Following this section is a discussion of how the situations compare with the espoused intentions and pedagogical frameworks of the NZC documents (Ministry of Education 1996, 2007). Fran's narrative relates to Clare's placement, learning, and participation at her early childhood centre and Bernadette's to an assessment situation at Maggie's school.

Clare: participation as physical presence and fitting in to existing arrangements

When she was 3 years old, Clare started attending South Pre-school and Fran (Clare's mother) was mostly happy with Clare's experiences there. Clare attended for 2 full days a week when she was 3 years old and 3 days a week when she was 4. Apart from two half hour periods each day, Sandra, Clare's ESW, was with Clare in the centre.

Three- and four-year olds at South Pre-school eat and play together regularly, but they are also separated into the two age groupings for significant periods of each day. The 3- and 4-year-old groups have a separate main teacher and room within the centre. When it was time for the 3-year olds to move into the 4-year-old group and room, Clare's 3-year-old group teacher asked Fran whether she would like Clare to move on with her age group or to stay in the 3-year-old group. Fran wanted Clare to move on to the next group, especially as her friend's daughter, Emma, who spent a lot of time with Fran and Clare's family outside of the centre, was also due to move into the 4-year-old group. Fran recalled a discussion she had with Ruby, Clare's 3-year-old group teacher, about whether Clare should move on with her same age peers to the next group:

> Fran: She (the teacher) said, 'I'm quite happy to hold her back,' and I said 'Well, no, I'd like her to go on.' And I guess one of the main reasons for that is that she was with Emma once again, and Emma was going up, and I didn't see why we couldn't go up (I don't know what we'd be like if we didn't have Emma, actually), but she was going, so I said 'well, let's give it a go' and she has slotted in, it only took her a week, she slotted into all the routines, she was pretty quiet the first week, but all the routines – she does everything when everybody else does it. Some things aren't – she can't do, they're not appropriate, like when they're doing tracing, or things like that, but when she can't do that particular thing, Sandra will take her away and they'll work on her fine motor skills, or she's got her own things.

Fran's description of Clare's participation within the 3-year-old group suggested that Clare was expected to fit in with what the 'other children' were doing. When what the 'others' were doing wasn't seen as relevant to Clare's 'abilities' and 'needs', she was separated and removed. Although it is important for parents and whānau to be involved in decision-making regarding their child's placement in their early childhood centre, Ruby seemed to be asking Fran to make the decision about whether Clare would change groups. The teacher did not offer an explicit preference

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about whether Clare should be 'held back'. The fact that Ruby raised Clare's placement as an issue with Fran indicated that she was willing to consider an atypical decision to keep Clare with the younger children. Presumably, this decision was based on Clare's 'developmental delays' and an emphasis on her differences from her non-disabled peers. Other relevant issues such as Clare's relationships with particular children and adults in the centre and her participation, learning, and membership in the group did not seem to be important or relevant enough for Ruby to raise with Fran. Clare moved with her peers to the 4-year-old group:

> Fran: And they set goals for her – like Celia was her new teacher, she said to me, 'Now, to be honest, I don't know very much about Clare, because she's been in the other room. What would you like us to work on this year?' And I said, thinking, well, it's not like she can get her to print her name or any of those things, but I said I would like her to be more mobile and independent in the classroom so she ... I said, I would like her to get, say, to go and get a pencil, she's got to go and get it. And so, she was more than happy with that. So her role now is to make sure the other children don't go and get things for Clare. They've got this banging stick – Clare has to go and get it herself. And Clare will shuffle off, Sandra takes her to the toilet three times a day, and Clare will shuffle off to the toilet, Clare will do that – 'go' herself. As soon as she sees Sandra walk in after lunch, she heads toward the toilet. So she knows those routines...

Although Fran seemed pleased that the teachers set goals for Clare's learning, it appears that, once again, the teachers took their lead from Fran as to what those goals would be. Neither Ruby nor Celia shared their thinking, opinions, or observations with Fran about Clare's learning and participation within the centre and the particular groups for which they were responsible. From Celia's comment that she had little knowledge of Clare, it appears that the teachers had not spoken to each other about Clare and possible goals for her learning and participation. The agreed goals focused on Clare as an isolated individual, fitting in, and being more independent, in that other children were being discouraged from helping Clare. There was no mention of the teacher considering 'getting to know' Clare through developing a relationship with her, nor of how Clare's relationships and interactions with her peers could be supported.

Te Whäriki directs early childhood teachers to recognise and respond to each child's right to belong in the setting, to view learning holistically, to encourage responsive and reciprocal relationships, and to support children's active exploration, contribution, and self-expression (Ministry of Education 1996, 1998). This involves children being heard through having their interests and contributions recognised, encouraged, and valued (Ministry of Education 1996). The apparent lack of information sharing, reflection, and discussion among centre staff about Clare's learning and participation, coupled with their reliance on Fran's thoughts to guide them, conveys a missed opportunity to comprehensively respond to Clare as a person, a learner, and a valued member of the centre community. Fran was happy that Clare was 'fitting in' with her peers and the centre's routines and expectations for the 4-year-old group:

> Fran: So she has fitted in, into those four-year-olds and that's part of my reasoning on going on to school at five is because we've already given it a go, we've done three steps from the two-year-old with no structure, to the three-year-old with structure, to the four-year-old where it's even more structured, it's not quite all play...so and she's gone up into those four-year-olds and she's fitted in with them. And hasn't been out of place. She's given most of it a go. Which is all that we can ask. And she can now

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> do... draw a 'C', she can write a 'C', and she can do a circle for an 'a', so she's making progress in the direction that she's going, and she's gonna start school better than some kids because she can count to 20 and she can say the whole alphabet.

The focus of the centre's teachers, and of Fran, seemed to be about supporting Clare's capacity to fit into the existing programme. There appeared to be little acknowledgement or understanding of Clare as an active learner and contributor whose participation in the centre could influence the content, organisation, routines, and structure of the centre programme if there was a desire for, and an understanding of, how to make this happen.

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Maggie Rose: participation and context as irrelevant or unimportant

About 6 months after Maggie had started school, a speech language therapist came from the school's SE provider to carry out an 'assessment' with her. The specialist had visited Maggie's classroom once or twice before, so was a relatively unfamiliar person to Maggie. The specialist took Maggie out of her classroom for the assessment. In her report, the specialist referred to her assessment as a 'test'. The 'test' involved showing Maggie a series of illustrations and asking her questions about each picture in turn. The stated purpose of showing and asking questions about each picture was to:

> Determine Maggie's ability to maintain attention to task ... gain some knowledge of her expressive language abilities in connected speech, and gauge Maggie's ability to maintain the topic when asked a question.

In the 'test results' written after the completion of the assessment, the specialist wrote:

> Maggie-Rose's ability to maintain attention to task was limited. The test was abandoned after the 7th card as she became fixated and very amused by the previous card. (A picture of a girl who had fallen down some stairs and broken her glasses). (Brackets in the original)

Several weeks later, the specialist came back to school and re-presented the picture card 'test' that had previously been 'abandoned'. These were the/her 'results':

> Maggie demonstrated that she was able to maintain the topic when asked a question. However, this linked with her attention span. When presented with the remaining three pictures left over from the previous session, Maggie-Rose once again became fixated on the picture that she found amusing. Consequently the tenth picture card was abandoned.

Following this repeat assessment, the specialist wrote a plan for the classroom teacher recommending what she referred to as 'targets' for Maggie at school. These 'targets' included:

> To facilitate Maggie-Rose to remain on-task it is recommended that a visual schedule be implemented to support and enhance organisation, functional communication and attention skills.
>
> Further, that she will be expected to remain 'on-task' for a given amount of time e.g. 5 minutes, then she is allowed to choose an 'off-task' activity for a given period of time. Once this time is up she will be expected to return 'on-task', for a given period again...

> That Maggie learns to … Identify the days of the week; and to identify what day it is today, what day it was yesterday, what day comes after and what day comes before.

Tensions between deficit pedagogies and curriculum requirements

It is important to consider what assumptions about disabled children were circulating within these situations and how these assumptions influenced Clare and Maggie's learning and participation. All licensed early childhood services in New Zealand are required to use narrative assessment, planning, and evaluation based on the principles and goals of Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education 1996, 1998). Both Te Whāriki and the NZC guide teachers to base their thinking and practices on a responsive, holistic, and reflective pedagogy (Ministry of Education 1996, 1998, 2007). Both documents communicate an image of children/students as competent, capable, and active lifelong learners (Ministry of Education 1996, 2007). However, although the NZC documents state their support of inclusive pedagogies for all children's learning and participation, disabled children still commonly experience deficit-based assumptions, thinking, and practices within their early childhood and school settings (Dight and MacArthur 2000; Macartney 2002, 2007, 2008; Ballard 2003; Gunn et al. 2004; Purdue 2004; MacArthur, Kelly, and Higgins 2005; Rietveld 2005).

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Messages about teaching, participation, and learning

The approaches described in Clare's centre and Maggie's school revealed an image of the disabled child as passive and as 'other'. Their capacities and interests, their status as learners, and their commonalities with their non-disabled peers were not considered to be central within either situation. Maggie was positioned as incompetent, and teaching and learning were assumed to be a technical process involving the transfer of knowledge and skills from expert to novice (Carr 2001). Teaching content was interpreted as stemming not from the learner or context, but from predetermined beliefs and knowledge applied to the passive child. An assumption that adults can control and manipulate the learning process towards predictable 'results' seemed to justify and encourage Maggie's isolation from her relational (learning) context. Maggie and Clare's *contexts* in relation to their learning were not treated as important. Their participation in the settings with and alongside others was not considered in ways that indicated that *where they were* and *who they were with* were important or central to their experience and identities as learners, active participants, and members of those environments. The classroom or early childhood centre just happened to be where Clare and Maggie were placed.

Assessment, planning, and participation

Assessment can be viewed as a process for getting to know and learn about a child through an interest in understanding the child and their participation, learning, and relationships within their lived contexts (Wansart 1995; Ministry of Education 1996, 2007; Carr 2001). It is important for teachers to think critically about the context(s) in which assessments are carried out, who is involved, the assessment focus and methods, the goals stemming from assessment, and how these might foster inclusion and/or create barriers to participation and learning. A critical consideration of the assessment and planning situations described above raises questions about what

kinds of learning and knowledge are valued; who defines what is of value in the context; and what are the *effects* on the learners of these beliefs, goals, and practices?

The disabled child as a 'problem' that needs fixing

The knowledge underpinning Clare's and Maggie's assessments demonstrated a pathological view of difference and disability as an internal and individual deviation from the norm and as 'other'. Rather than being indicative of Maggie's abilities, the specialists 'results' and 'targets' can be interpreted as evidence of a predetermined and deficit knowledge base and assumptions about disabled children. For example, Maggie's enjoyment of what she considered to be a funny picture was interpreted and responded to as evidence of 'fixation' and 'limited' attention to task. An emphasis on the remediation of perceived deficits through a focus on maintaining 'functional' communication and attention to task, and on responding in a 'normal' way to someone else's topic or agenda, represented a view of Maggie as a passive object to be ignored and/or manipulated and shaped so as to fit expectations of 'normal' behaviour (Graham 2005).

Viewing a child's 'impairment/s' or 'deficits' as the *defining influence* on his/her behaviour, participation, and learning decontextualises learning and teaching and diverts attention from the multiple influences on a child within the socio-cultural environment. Thinking that situates 'problems' with participation and learning within the learner also detracts attention from teachers recognising and taking responsibility for the interactions between the child and his/her social, cultural, and physical environment. Decontextualised knowledge based on a view of the learner in isolation allows teachers to attribute 'problems' to the individual, without considering the limitations and effects of particular teacher practices and decisions.

Clare and Maggie as 'other'

Non-deficit interpretations of Maggie's behaviour and learning become available by looking at the situation from an orientation that views her as situated within a social and cultural context (Ministry of Education 2007). For example, another way of viewing Maggie's 'fixation' with the picture card would have been to recognise her developed sense of humour and its consistency with the Western cultural tendency to laugh at other people's misfortunes. Rather than 'limited attention to task', Maggie's lack of cooperation could be attributed to her communicating her discomfort about being taken out of her classroom by a stranger and expected to 'perform' tasks disconnected from her usual activities, which typically happened alongside familiar adults and children in her classroom. Maggie's ability to concentrate and engage with a topic when it is meaningful, relevant, and of interest to her (such as the picture of a girl falling down the stairs) became problematic within the assessment situation. Our interpretation is that the 'problem' lay with the specialist, situation, assessment document, and recommendations, not with Maggie as a learner. In fact, the situation seemed to have very little to do with Maggie as a learner in relation to how learning is approached in the NZC.

The teachers at Clare's centre expected Fran to take the lead in making decisions about Clare's placement and learning goals. This indicates that they primarily saw Clare as 'other'. They did not seem to take the same kinds and levels of responsibility for Clare's participation and learning, as they were likely to have for Clare's non-disabled peers. Their behaviour certainly did not reflect the image of *all* children as

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competent, capable learners, and contributors contained within their guiding curriculum document (Ministry of Education 1996). It appears that any 'problems' Clare experienced within the centre, for example, when she did not communicate, perform, or participate in the same ways as her peers were expected to, were assumed to be due to her individual 'impairments', rather than any socio-cultural barriers to her inclusion. A critique of both situations suggests that deficit views drew teachers' attention away from the context of learning and their responsibilities (Ministry of Education 1996, 2007), and that this restricted Maggie and Clare's equitable access to assessment, planning, learning, and full participation.

Te Whäriki and the NZC: what's the problem?

Deficit assumptions and pedagogy are drawn from the medical model (Barnes, Mercer, and Shakespeare 1999) and the traditional fields of educational psychology and behaviourism (Fleer 2005; Graham 2005). Although Te Whäriki (Ministry of Education 1996) and the NZC (Ministry of Education 2007) advocate for socio-cultural approaches to education, there are tensions within the documents between traditional individualised and socio-cultural conceptualisations of learning and teaching (Fleer 2003; Dunn 2004; Moore et al. 2008). At the same time as recognising and celebrating the fact that the NZC documents and their writers have risen to the challenge of responding positively to diversity among learners, there are still some problems with the structure and content of the curriculum texts and the messages that they convey about teaching, learning, and inclusive pedagogies (Millar and Morton 2007). For example, Moore et al. (2008) pointed out that while the 'key competencies' in the NZC emphasise competence and the on-going development of dispositions for lifelong learning, these are at odds with the fragmentation of 'learning areas' and the hierarchical 'levels of learning' outlined later in the document. Moore et al. (2008, 5) suggested that:

> Within the one document it is thus possible to identify policy statements supporting inclusion and approaches to curriculum, assessment and pedagogy that both work for and against inclusion.

We now discuss an approach to pedagogy that our curriculum documents go a significant way towards supporting. We suggest that a POL (Dalhberg and Moss 2005; Rinaldi 2006) with its critical focus could be used to strengthen New Zealand teachers' understandings and abilities to practice inclusive pedagogies within the broad ethical and pedagogical frameworks of our existing curriculum documents (Ministry of Education 1996, 2007).

A POL

Rather than viewing differences as problematic, a POL celebrates and invites difference, diversity, ambiguity, uncertainty, and engagement with the 'other' in the pursuit of an inclusive and democratic education and society (Dalhberg and Moss 2005).

An ethical and critical approach to pedagogy

Dahlberg and Moss (2005, 2) suggest that early childhood services, and, we add schools: '…can be understood, first and foremost as forums, spaces or sites for

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ethical and political practice – as "loci of ethical practices" and "minor politics"'. This view acknowledges the workings and reproduction of power relations within educational settings. Power relations, which are underpinned by dominant discourses, including deficit assumptions about difference, have significant exclusionary effects on disabled children's learning and participation in education (Ballard and Macdonald 1998; Alton-Lee et al. 2000; Gunn et al. 2004; MacNaughton 2005; Rietveld 2005; Macartney 2008).

In opposition to the assumption that educational settings function in a 'neutral' way, a POL argues that particular knowledge bases and arrangements reproduce and/or resist inequality and exclusion (Moss and Petrie 2002; MacNaughton 2005; Rinaldi 2006). Pedagogy, which is underpinned by teachers who believe that their practices and setting are power neutral, tends to unwittingly reproduce exclusion (MacNaughton 2005). Minority groups continue to be viewed and positioned as 'other' in relation to dominant expectations for acceptable behaviour, beliefs, appearance, and indicators or markers of what is 'normal' (Bishop, Mazawi, and Sheilds 2005; Macartney 2007). Underpinning a POL is an ethical and moral commitment to every child's right to fully participate, be valued and accepted, exercise agency, contribute, learn, and belong (Ministry of Education 1996, 2007; Dalhberg and Moss 2005).

A POL rejects fixed, universal images of 'the child' and argues for a view of pedagogy that recognises and is comfortable with diversity and the complexities of sociocultural environments as they are lived and experienced. In a POL, teachers consciously work from an ethic of care and obligation to the 'other', rather than repeating practices that privilege the status quo and place anything that does not fit at the margins (Dalhberg and Moss 2005; Rinaldi 2006). In a POL, the teacher expects, invites, encourages, and embraces diversity, difference, ambiguity, and uncertainty.

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Acknowledging our own social and cultural positioning in relation to 'others'

Dahlberg and Moss (2005) suggested that we have an ethical obligation to recognise, engage with, respect, and learn from difference and diversity in our work and lives. In a POL, a teacher develops alertness to voices, perspectives, and ways of being that are outside of his/her taken-for-granted ways of being in, understanding, and experiencing the world. This involves acknowledging the limits of our ability to fully understand the 'other', at the same time as fulfilling our obligations to listen and respond in ways that do not ignore and override the experiences, rights, and needs of people who we perceive to be different from ourselves. Practices based on an ethic of care and obligation to the other include actively resisting exclusion and dismantling barriers to other's learning, participation, and inclusion as a central role of teachers (Robinson and Jones Diaz 1999; Dalhberg and Moss 2005; MacNaughton 2005).

What might New Zealand teachers learn from a POL?

Rather than positioning learning and participation within the individual learner, a POL combines socio-cultural and critical approaches to education in ways that recognise the social construction of meaning about powerful concepts such as 'SE needs', 'ability', 'participation', 'teaching', and 'learning' (Valenzuela, Connery, and Musanti 2000). It is through our interrelationships and dialogue that we make meaning within the lived contexts of our work (Rinaldi 2006). The meanings that we apply to situations impact in concrete ways on the learning, participation, possibilities, and opportunities

available to others and ourselves. A central aspect of our role as teachers must be to develop an awareness of the lived effects of our meanings and practices so that we are in a position to recognise and remove barriers to the learning and participation of every child and family. It is dangerous to assume that teaching, learning, and developing 'inclusive environments' are straightforward and predictable processes.

'Listening' and inclusive pedagogy

Rinaldi (2006, 70), an early childhood theorist, researcher, and practitioner from Italy, describes 'listening' as a social and relational process in which the expectations and behaviours of teachers towards children are '*orientative*' and responsive, rather than predetermined and prescriptive. Rinaldi (2006) suggested that teachers must observe and interpret children's lived experiences from an open, curious, and questioning stance rather than perceiving themselves as the experts in regards to children's learning, aspirations, and participation.

Veck (2009, 141–2) described a close relationship between listening and inclusion and between not-listening and exclusion.

> First, labeling learners, in terms of what has been deemed deficient within them, can form a barrier to listening. Second, when learners are not listened to, they are denied the opportunity to contribute, to enrich or to challenge the culture, organization and character of educational institutions and are, as a consequence, excluded within these institutions: they are in but not of them.

There is more involved than educators listening to learners. Veck argued that educators and learners must listen to each other and listen to themselves. In this way, speakers can begin to catch themselves (and others) in the act of using particular discourses.

In the dominant discourse, where difference is framed as deficit, disabled students are no longer known as their own selves, but rather as representatives of their labels or diagnoses. Both successes and failures are not theirs; successes and failures merely confirm or challenge correct diagnostic processes, categories, and interventions. The application and circulation of deficit labels extend beyond the professional's ability to control its meaning and effects. The meanings of labels are constructed and re-constructed through everyday use, gaining exclusionary power in and through the everyday use.

There is an irony in this outcome. In the same act that renders a student invisible, they are also highly visible, though not as an individual. This constitutes a 'double burden' – being invisible as an individual, with everything that is heard or said interpreted and re-created through the lens of difference: 'It is not simply that others "refuse to see" or to listen to us for who we are, but that they insist on seeing us or hearing our words for what we and they are not, for "everything and anything except" who we are' (Veck 2009, 144).

The attentive looking and/or listening advocated by Veck is distinct from, and in contrast to, the surveillance described by Foucault (1977). In his conception of teachers' developing a listening orientation within their practice, Veck (2009) drew on Weil's (1951–73; cited in Veck 2009) and Murdoch's (1970–2003; cited in Veck 2009) notions of an 'attentive gaze.' This is a gaze that is just and loving (Veck 2009, 147):

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> Where a 'disciplinary gaze' is directed to 'what' someone is judged to be, an attentive gaze looks to what is not and perhaps cannot be known about them: who they are in and to themselves. The former seeks to control, the latter to understand. The casting of a 'disciplinary gaze' marks the end of listening, an attentive gaze its beginning. When a label of special educational need or learning difficulties comes to define who someone is, a sea of human possibility is veiled in a thick fog; only an attentive gaze can see past this fog, for this gaze is always directed towards, and always seeks to reveal, originality and mystery.

Veck claimed that it is not possible to simultaneously direct both a disciplinary gaze and an attentive gaze. Within attentive listening lies the possibility of transformation (2009, 147):

> In tenderness, a listener may move from thinking of a speaker's differences as deficiency and come to consider the ways in which these differences might make a difference to them. At this moment, the speaker becomes entirely and unalterably connected to the world, for they have influenced the ways others act within the world and have thereby – in however small a way – contributed to it.

In this view of listening and attending, teachers are learners and learners are teachers. Learning to listen in this way is possible, perhaps even required, within a socio-cultural view of learning and perspective on education. Smith and Barr (2008) suggested that particular ways of relating and communicating are embedded within professional discursive networks. SE can be viewed and described as a professional network with its own set of discursive practices (Skrtic 1991). Smith and Barr noted the significant impact of the 'ideology of the individual' within SE, and we would add developmentalist approaches to learning and teaching (Fleer 2005). Moreover, shifting from a disciplinary gaze to attentive listening requires the reconceptualising of learning as not always predictable and as more than merely what is taught (Smith and Barr 2008).

A POL and the transformation of participation

In a POL, the co-construction and transformative potential of education and learning are emphasised (Rinaldi 2006). Both research on narrative assessment and teacher evaluation in New Zealand (Carr 2001; Carr, May, and Podmore 2001; Carr et al. 2003; Ministry of Education 2005) and a POL (Dalhberg and Moss 2005; Rinaldi 2006) emphasise the central role of interactions and dialogue in the co-construction of meaning and action within educational settings. Rinaldi's (2006, 184) explanation of 'dialogue' involved all of the members within a learning community as: '…having a capacity for transformation… It is an idea of dialogue not as an exchange but as a process of transformation where you lose absolutely the possibility of controlling the final result'.

Learning through the co-construction of knowledge embedded within a relational context has the potential to transform meaning and action (Ministry of Education 1996, 2007; Carr 2001; Carr, May, and Podmore 2001; MacNaughton 2005; Rinaldi 2006). Dahlberg and Moss (2005, 101) suggested that a POL can open up a 'radical dialogue' among teachers, parents, and children who are connected through a shared learning space and community. They suggested that what makes dialogue 'radical' within a POL is the removal of the teacher, and other adults, as the 'expert knowers': 'In radical dialogue, based on listening, as a teacher you have to participate

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together with the child, entering a space together where both teacher and child are actively listening and trying to construct meaning out of the situation' (Dalhberg and Moss 2005, 101).

Narrative approaches to assessment have the potential to support teachers to understand and develop a pedagogy based on a listening and open orientation to the learning, participation, and contributions of their students (Ballard, Purdue, and MacArthur 2003; Lepper, Williamson, and Cullen 2003; Moore et al. 2008; Macartney 2009, 2010). Teachers' use of narrative approaches to learning, teaching, and assessment is widespread and commonly accepted practice in early childhood education in New Zealand (Carr 2001; Ministry of Education 2005). Narrative assessment encourages teachers to focus on children's learning and relationships within their relational setting, rather than applying decontextualised and pre-conceived criteria to measure and compare children's performance (Carr 2001). Narrative assessment also encourages and requires teachers to share, discuss, and negotiate their interpretations of a child's learning and participation with others such as colleagues, parents, and children. Moore et al. (2008) reported that teacher-writers who were trialling narrative assessment approaches in primary and secondary school classrooms with disabled students and their families felt excited and empowered by the change from deficit to credit-based approaches. Narrative approaches to assessment, and subsequently planning and teaching, supported those teachers to notice, recognise, and respond to their disabled students' learning, participation, and achievements with far greater insight, positivity, relevance, and depth than the norms referenced and criterion-based methods which they had previously used (Moore et al. 2008).

Placing a critical eye on NZC documents

The dominance of deficit assumptions about disability (Ministry of Health 2001; Millar and Morton 2007) makes it particularly problematic that neither Te Whāriki nor the NZC explicitly address the role that education plays in reproducing social inequalities and exclusion regarding disability. Each document is silent about disabled people and children as marginalised groups. Within the documents, disabled children are generally subsumed within the groups, 'students', 'children', 'infants', and 'toddlers'. This may have been intended so as not to separate disabled children and their rights to access the curriculum from the rights of non-disabled children. However, the effect of not addressing the commonplace exclusion and marginalisation of disabled children in education means that these are not important issues for teachers to consider and address in their relationships and work (Millar and Morton 2007). Few references that *are* made to disabled children in the curriculum documents draw from deficit beliefs about disability. Disabled children are referred to in both documents as having 'SE *needs*', whereas children (presumed not to be 'disabled') whose achievements are assessed as being above normal expectations are referred to in the school curriculum as having 'special *abilities*' (Ministry of Education 1996, 2007, 39). This assumes that, if you are 'disabled', your identity as a learner should be interpreted in terms of deficit, lack, and need. As we have argued in relation to Clare and Maggie, there were negative consequences for their learning and participation when a view of them was limited by deficit assumptions.

The absence of an explicit recognition, in both curriculum documents, of the teacher's role to identify and remove barriers to disabled students' learning, infers that a critical consideration of disabled children's participation is not necessary, relevant, or important. It is likely that many teachers, without being given information and

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direction about the exclusion of disabled children, will default to thinking and practices that maintain exclusion even when they have guiding curriculum documents that can, and do, support inclusive pedagogies (Purdue 2004; Macartney 2009).

Conclusion

In this article, we have looked at our NZC documents and have pointed out their general support for inclusive educational approaches and environments. However, we have also argued that dominant deficit views of disability still operate in ways that restrict many disabled children's learning, participation, and access to their curriculum, despite the documents' inclusive intentions. We have suggested that teachers need support to recognise the complex barriers to disabled children's learning and participation. Professional support around inclusive pedagogy should include on-going and critical reflection regarding teachers' own thinking, practices, and environments. As a way forward, we have suggested that there is transformative potential in developing pedagogies based on an ethical and political commitment to recognising and resisting inequality in our relationships, knowledge, and practices. We have emphasised the importance of teachers developing a listening, open, and responsive orientation to 'others' and have suggested that narrative approaches to assessment, planning, and teacher reflection can be used to help teachers, early childhood, and school environments to achieve this.

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