

This episode was part of everyday life in Zena’s childcare centre and illustrated the following features:

- Zena initiated an interaction by asking a question, and the teacher listened to her carefully.
- The teacher recognised that the way to clarify this question was to call Zena’s attention to something she could “read” – the photo display of staff.
- The teacher continued the conversation, and Zena persisted with questions. “Why was Kirsty away?” “Was she sick?”
- The teacher responded to each of these questions and invited Zena to reflect further: “Are you missing her?”

In providing feedback to Zena, the teacher:

- indicated that she respected Zena’s interest;
- encouraged a discussion about belonging as a member of this community (as Zena noticed who was not here and asked why, Zena having already had a discussion with the researcher about what she, the researcher, was doing here);
- gave credit to Zena for a meaningful question as she made sense of the array of teachers and adults in the centre that day;
- provided Zena with a mode of “reading” that assisted the verbal exchange and ensured a two-way discussion between herself and Zena.

We can see that there were elements of well-being, belonging, exploration, communication, and collaboration in an interaction that took just one minute and twelve seconds.

Protecting and enhancing the motivation to learn

Assessment for learning will protect and enhance children’s motivation to learn. In 2002, Terry Crooks, one of New Zealand’s leading commentators on assessment, set out some requirements for effective learning. He emphasises motivation:

First, people gain motivation and are most likely to be learning effectively when they experience success or progress on something that they regard as worthwhile and significantly challenging. At its best, learning under these conditions occurs in the state Csikszentmihalyi calls “flow”: single-minded concentration on the task, accompanied by confidence and determination that it will be completed successfully.

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My second point about motivation is that personal desire to learn something is an incredibly powerful force, often able to carry learners through repeated disappointments and difficulties ...

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My final point about motivation is the importance of how students interpret their success or failure. It matters whether they attribute successes to ability, effort, or good luck or attribute failures to lack of effort, lack of ability, or bad luck ... Effort attributions, whether for success or failure, tend to lead to improvement of performance, whereas ability attributions and chance attributions do not.

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He cites Csikszentmihalyi:

The chief impediments to learning are not cognitive. It is not that students cannot learn; it is that they do not wish to. If educators invested a fraction of the energy they now spend on trying to transmit information in trying to stimulate the students’ enjoyment in learning, we could achieve much better results.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990), page 115

Crooks makes three other points about learning. He emphasises the importance of encouraging meaningful, deep learning, collaboration between students, and partnership between teachers, learners, and their families.

Learning with and from peers, whether in planned or unplanned ways, tends to lead to deeper and more enjoyable learning as well as to the development of communication skills and important social skills and attitudes.

The best teachers foster a sense of partnership between themselves and their students. They also build partnerships with parents to maximise the extent to which students' learning is guided and supported consistently by the students' teachers, parents, and peers. True partnership, based on trust, respect, and high-quality communication can create a very powerful learning synergy.

Acknowledging uncertainty

What does "assessment for learning" look like for the strands in which the outcomes of the curriculum are organised: well-being, belonging, contribution, communication, and exploration? Part of that question is: how do we decide "what next?". Margaret Donaldson (1992) says that education "is about suggesting new directions in which lives may go" (page 259). Assessment is part of that process. But the phrase "assessment for learning" suggests that we know what an appropriate next step might be, and for complex learning, we don't always know. Gordon Wells (1999) states:

[The] teacher always has to be responsive to the students' goals as these emerge in the course of activity, and by collaborating with them in the achievement of their individual goals, to enable them to extend their mastery and at the same time their potential for further development. From a teacher's perspective, therefore, one is always aiming at a moving target.

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Who knows?



Isaac is one of a group of children who have been reading a book about space with the teacher. Isaac decides to make an alien out of green card "cos aliens are green". In the What next? section of the assessment, the teacher has written the following, concluding with the question "who knows?".

Keep supporting and extending his interest in space, which is encouraging him to try new things (using the art area resources) and to practise exploring his imagination and communicating his ideas. We have downloaded pictures of planets off the Internet for him, bought new books, and been playing a CD about planets for the children to listen to. The term break may have some effect on the interest, so we will have to wait and see if this is still topical when he comes back. A little provocation (perhaps alien footprints in the family area or a trip to the Star Dome) may help trigger something ... who knows?

Listening to children

One way of responding to the inevitable uncertainty is to get to know the children well, to listen and observe carefully, and to respond appropriately. This enables us to stand higher up the mountain so that we can see more of the horizon in order to provide continuity in their learning. Book 4 includes exemplars in which children comment on their own learning, set their own targets, and do their own assessing.

Philippe Perrenoud (1991), writing on assessment in schools, warns that it:

would be absurd to proceed with formative assessment without first calling into question the teaching methods and without seeking, as a priority, to make the teaching situations more interactive and richer in spontaneous feedback.

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Tēnā kupu, āe, tuhia!

In this example, Hinepau is dictating text for a book. During the discussion, the kaiako introduces the word “hīnaki” and Hinepau responds that “hīnaki” is a good word, instructing the kaiako to write it down.

- Hinepau: Kei te tiki tuna mātou.
We are going to get some eels.
- Kaiako: Kei te tiki ...
Going to get ...
- Hinepau: Kei te harikoa nā te mea i pupuri ahau i ētahi tuna.
I am really happy because I held some eels.
- Kaiako: I pupuri koe i te hīnaki?
You held an eel trap?
- Hinepau: Āe, i pēnei au. E, kei ahau [nana i whakaatu].
Yes, like this. Oh, I have it [demonstrates].
- Kaiako: Nō reira ka taea e koe te kōrero, i pupuri ahau i te hīnaki?
Therefore, can you say, “I held the eel trap”?
- Hinepau: Āe, i pupuri au i te hīnaki. Āe, tēnā kupu, āe – tuhia!
Yes, I did hold an eel trap. Yes, that word, yes – write it!



This is a good example of reciprocal noticing, recognising, and responding, with Hinepau both motivated and empowered to have a say in what is written down about a collective event that involved all the children (catching an eel).

Another example from conversations between Hinepau and the kaiako illustrates the rich and complex learning of a bilingual child. It is an example of word invention that illustrates Hinepau's growing metalinguistic awareness that language is fluid and flexible enough to be creative with and, indeed, that "words" symbolically represent "things".

In response to a comment by the kaiako about the transliteration of the word "drawer" (toroa) being inappropriate because a "toroa" was a magnificent bird, the albatross, Hinepau made up the alternative word "toroapa".

Kaiako: Kāore e pai taua kupu "toroa" ki ahau, nā te mea ko te toroa he manuariki.
I don't like that word "toroa" [for "drawer"] because the albatross is a sacred bird.

Hinepau: Me kī "toroapa".
Then say "toroapa".

Kaiako: Āe, he rawe tēnā kupu "toroapa".
Yes, that is a good word, "toroapa".

The kaiako looked it up in the dictionary to check that it did not have another meaning, and then it became the word used in the centre for "drawer".

Collective assessments

In Hinepau's centre, the documented assessments are both collective and individual (and often dictated by the children). *Te Whāriki* includes the following statement:

This curriculum emphasises the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places, and things. Children learn through collaboration with adults and peers, through guided participation and observation of others, as well as through individual exploration and reflection.

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There is an argument that, for some desirable outcomes, an assessment of the learning environment and the learning opportunities it offers are an essential part of each assessment. Although such an assessment might also be described as "evaluation", holistic assessment includes the context. So the environment and the individual are closely woven together. Since the work of Lev Vygotsky, a number of writers have described classrooms and early childhood settings as "learning communities", arguing that belonging and participating in "what we all do here and what we value" is a prerequisite for individual learning. Book 5 emphasises this connection with community.

Learning opportunities are necessary, although they may not be sufficient, for learning to take place. So an analysis of the learning environment or experience (for example, a trip, a visitor, or a project) will frequently be supplemented by examples of the children's participation.

In this example, the children were asked for their comments about a trip to a Weird and Wonderful exhibition at the local museum.

Weird and wonderful

The teachers included a group story about the trip and its purpose in all the children's portfolios and asked the children for their own assessments of the trip. These illustrated that the children found very different things of interest in what was apparently the same experience for them all.



George

"My name is George.
I am wearing my dragon shirt.
The bees were going outside.
I liked the crabs.
I liked it when the bees went outside.
I sat next to my mum on the bus."



Rachael

"When I got on the bus, I was scared. My dad put on his sunglasses. I sat on the bus. I saw Jane on the bus. She had her butterfly wings on. Fuka's dad was driving the bus."



Teylati

"I liked the spiders in a glass cage. They were big. I liked looking at the spiders. I played in the sandpit. There were toys to play with."

Keeping a view of learning as complex

Vic Kelly (1992) comments:

Accuracy of assessment is related inversely to the complexity and the sophistication of what is being assessed. And, since education is a highly complex and sophisticated process, educational assessment can be regarded as measurement only in the remotest of metaphorical senses.

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Worthwhile educational outcomes are often complex, especially if they are about relationships and participation. *Te Whāriki* states that “the outcomes of a curriculum are knowledge, skills, and attitudes” and that they “combine together to form a child’s ‘working theory’ and help the child develop dispositions that encourage learning” (page 44).

In early childhood, children are developing more elaborate and useful working theories about themselves and about the people, places, and things in their lives. These working theories contain a combination of knowledge about the world, skills and strategies, attitudes, and expectations ... The second way in which knowledge, skills, and attitudes combine is as dispositions – “habits of mind” or “patterns of learning”. An example of a learning disposition is the disposition to be curious. It may be characterised by:

- an inclination to enjoy puzzling over events;
- the skills to ask questions about them in different ways; and
- an understanding of when is the most appropriate time to ask these questions.

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In *Te Whāriki*, therefore, the concept of “learning dispositions” includes learners’ inclinations, skills, and understandings. Margaret Carr (2001) describes learning dispositions as “situated learning strategies plus motivation – participation repertoires from which a learner recognises, selects, edits, responds to, resists, searches for and constructs learning opportunities” (page 21). Within the *Te Whāriki* framework, they involve reciprocal and responsive relationships with people, places, and things. A focus on learning dispositions, accompanied by the aspiration that children should be secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society, foregrounds children’s strengths and achievements. Assessment notes what children can do when they are “at their best”.

Patricia Broadfoot (2000) comments:

Increasingly now there is a need to harness the dynamic power of educational assessment to motivate and empower learners.

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Narrative assessment, which is often appropriate for complex outcomes, includes the surroundings: how the learning has occurred across people, places, and things. Sometimes, scaffolding can be progressively withdrawn so that children can achieve something by themselves. More often, however, the lesson in documenting the surroundings is to recognise that this is how learning occurs: in the context of interaction with people, places, and things. Children learn how to marshal this assistance for different occasions.

Book 6 of these exemplars adds a third cluster of outcomes: “social roles and culturally valued roles and literacies”, together with their associated competencies. That book includes the comment:

In any learning community, children will have the opportunity to try out a range of sociocultural roles and their associated competencies, for example, tuakana, teina, friend, measurer, jam maker, town builder, kaimahi, observer of insects, reader, citizen of the world, and member of hapū and iwi.

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Acknowledging the complexity of learning means understanding that noticing, recognising, and responding will include conjecture and intuition. Recognising complexity also means viewing assessment as something much more complex than assigning marks or ticking boxes. No one format is “right”, but the *Te Whāriki* principles provide four evaluative criteria:

- Is the identity of the child as a competent and confident learner protected and enhanced by the assessments?
- Do the assessment practices take account of the whole child?
- Do the assessment practices invite the involvement of family and whānau?
- Are the assessments embedded in reciprocal and responsive relationships?