This book explores thinking about teaching and learning as an educative process. It is about creating a positive learning environment for all students and is different from most other books on such a topic. It is written by three experienced teachers who as academics, in the pursuit of evidence-based practice, have progressed research and teaching in special education, educational psychology and leadership. To breathe life into what is too often presented as dry theory, they share a narrative of their working experiences. This narrative takes us on a journey where we will meet different characters. It aims to empower the reader by illustrating a range of research driven strategies through the voices of the characters. The reader will hear the lived experiences of students, parents, new and experienced teachers, teacher assistants and school leaders. In their stories the authors seek to share helpful understandings of realistic ways that can address everyday challenges conducive to positive relationships, environments and learning.
A Guide to Promoting a Positive Classroom Environment
A Guide to Promoting a Positive Classroom Environment

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This book is different. It is not a run of the mill educational text. It deliberately aims not only to provide information, but also by using a narrative that explores experience, develops knowledge and understanding that helps put 'theory' into 'practice'. Our thanks therefore go to a vast number of colleagues, characters, friends and students we have worked with in various educational settings. We think there is a great deal to learn from this story, but we also hope you will enjoy considering the many issues related to teaching, learning and professional development from what we would claim to be a new angle and a different perspective. We do hope the reading will prompt positive thinking, intelligent inclusion, and potential new practices.
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We would like to acknowledge a number of colleagues and family members who assisted us with various aspects of the book. The idea for the content and style was germinated by discussions with a number of our graduate students who said that they liked the stories we tell about different characters when teaching about challenging behaviour, asking for a book of such stories. Thank you all for igniting the idea: real life stories to bring theory to life.

We thank the many real people who shared their life experiences with us; who in so doing have helped our personal and professional formation, and now provide material to ground our writing. It is their challenges that made us think of ways such challenges could be effectively addressed by sound theory and understanding. It is their success stories that confirmed the benefits of evidence-based theories working in practice to give us a fuller picture. We thank them all, not least for enriching our lives.

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CHAPTER 1

THE JOURNEY

Learning Teaching on the Road

OVERVIEW AND KEY CONCEPTS

• Introduction: Reading this book
• Understanding and experience: Stories, perspectives and practice
• Principles into practice: Creating positive learning environments
• Why contribute to creating a positive learning environment?

INTRODUCTION: WHY READ THIS BOOK?

This book explores thinking about teaching and learning as an educative process. It is about creating a positive learning environment for positive learning, teaching, personal, and professional growth. The book is not about developing subject-based expertise as a teacher in a specific area of knowledge content. The need for work in subject-based development is for another book. Instead, we focus here on the premise that teaching is not only the transmission of knowledge. It is a process that also encompasses experiences, skills, understanding, attitudes and participation as a teacher engages in teaching people.

Questions for reflection

Having browsed the title, the table of contents and the overview above, list your expectations—what do you most hope to gain from reading it?
Reading this book might usefully be likened to taking a journey. We hope the reader – you – will find the experience of reading this book one that is both enjoyable and worthwhile. The guess is you are an educational practitioner: a newly qualified teacher; perhaps a senior teacher; or maybe a school leader; or even a university or college student or lecturer involved in an educational programme of study.

We certainly expect you to be interested in learning. What we hope to do is to convince you that learning, teaching and education are all a process that is much like a journey. It is a ‘never ending’ journey that offers a great deal in terms of hope, aspiration, affirmation and fulfilment. The satisfaction of playing a lead role in facilitating the growth and development of individuals and their community during this journey is widely acknowledged by educationists as one of the greatest feelings experienced and a reward that makes the job so very worthwhile.

Usually a planned journey, let us say, an ‘east to west coast’ road trip, has a distinct beginning and end, but then a different journey may not be such a straightforward ‘get on and get off’ experience. It may also involve seeing new places, meeting new people, hearing new voices, discovering new ideas and well, all in all, taking detours, deciding on new directions, making choices that like it or not will involve learning! We would like to suggest that you might approach reading this book like an unplanned road trip, open to new challenges and learning experiences.

Please do not expect to get a ‘how to do it’ manual with lots of bulleted lists, steps, ingredients, and claims for a one stop teaching handbook. Instead, we hope to help you think through what it means to teach; to reflect upon the ways in which we share and collaborate to learn; and, also to help you realize how important individual contributions are to the success of a learning community. And in all of this, we believe, much depends upon how you personally approach the journey.

A career in education is arguably very much like a longer version of this same kind of journey or perhaps we can call it a road trip. It is to some extent reflected in a set of themes described by Pirsig as a way of learning and knowing in ‘Zen and The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance’. Pirsig (1974) writes,

The classical mode proceeds by reason and by laws. The classic style is straightforward, unadorned, unemotional, economical and carefully proportioned. Its purpose is to bring order out of chaos. The romantic mode is primarily inspirational, imaginative, creative, and intuitive. Feelings rather than facts predominate. Motorcycle riding is romantic while motorcycle maintenance is purely classic. (pp. 70–71)

But this is where the analogy stops: we believe there are more modes than two in our approach to ‘learning teaching on the road’. The taking of this journey is complex by its nature, frustrating at times, yet full of the potential for deep and intense rewards in the form of personal satisfaction and fulfilment. The message we wish to share with you in this book is therefore the importance of being positive, and using this aspect of personal psychology as a key resource in making the trip work well for you and for everyone else you involve in the experience.
To bring what is often presented as dry theory to life, and to illustrate practice, the book is presented as a narrative involving several characters in different stages of the teaching trip. The cast for this story is listed at the beginning of each chapter, so for example includes Fred, a school Principal taking on a new school in his first term. Then there is Kate, a newly qualified teacher starting out in her teaching career. And there are others, including teachers with specific posts of responsibility, and other ‘stakeholders’ in the school community, such as an Educational Psychologist, teaching assistants, parents, and a member of the school council.

These characters, drawn from real life, offer a way for us to present a continuing series of perspectives, voices expressing points of view, and in so doing tell a story that reflects individual contributions to the work of the school community. These form part of what we mean to show is a complex and continuing activity in growing and maintaining a positive learning environment. Call-out boxed allow for focus and reflection.

Let us get back to the idea of a journey. The first thing to realize is the trip is going to involve arrival in a new place, getting to know people, and establishing what goes on in the daily routines of the organization. Then there are the hidden aspects of community life, less easily perceived yet equally important. These include aspects of the organizational culture in the school community, reflecting values, beliefs and attitudes; many of which will be deeply embedded in the ethos of the school, and some may not accurately reflect the more formal rules, regulations and official policy of the institution.

Every stop off along the road trip requires moving through this process of making a start. A great deal of it will draw upon tacit knowledge. This involves finding out about people; where is the best place to get X and to whom do you go to get Y; and most importantly when you have an issue, where you can find some help in sorting it out. Beneath this surface level of tacit knowledge is a second level of human interpersonal knowledge. Here the work takes on more complexity as you learn who you agree with, who you can trust or work well with, and to know those you need to tread with more carefully. And then there is the all-important management of classroom and staff-student relationships running through the school week and academic year. It is the kind of knowledge that is rarely documented in the ring-binder manual on how to do teaching. But it actually forms the most important, sometimes stressful, and oft most rewarding part of the on the road teaching trip.

To sum up: the idea behind the narrative structure of this book is in part to access some of this hidden area of the ‘learning community’. We therefore aim in some sense to create a learning experience in the telling of the story. It is all about moving toward a greater level of understanding and experience, and we think this can be achieved by paying attention to a series of accounts that describe different
perspectives and practices, all drawn from the real experiences of the authors. To this end, we include prompts, sign-posts and indicators high-lighting key issues, concepts and aspects of the theory under-pinning the practice related in the story. We then set out to introduce the context within which practitioner development remains a continuing process: this involves structure, knowledge, expertise and professional learning. This work or ‘agency’ reflects the synthesis and use of theory in developing practice, producing a new knowledge that we recognise as praxis. The sum total of this synthesis of professional learning and knowledge, that is the running balance of these actions and outcomes, is praxis. Put simply, praxis is both process and knowledge that is a combination of theory and practice. And of course such theory relies upon well-validated evidence-based theory, blended appropriately in a professional context, reflecting experience, and thereby contributes to ensuring efficacy in practice.

We should add that Bernstein, a leading sociologist and educationist, once stated that in praxis there can be no prior knowledge of the right means by which we can realize the end in a particular situation, since this is only finally specified in deliberating about the means appropriate to a particular situation (Bernstein, 1983: 147). In other words, we are always learning in teaching, and as a professional practitioner, each year brings with it a different student cohort(s), with new challenges and a fresh start; each week a new set of priorities, and each lesson, the great unknown. We also learn a great deal of this expertise by either listening to peers or noticing how something is actually practiced. More complexity unfolds however, as we think about what we want to achieve, we reconsider the best way we might reach that desired objective. Teaching and learning for different individuals, and when considered within a community, are not straightforward concepts easily converted to metrics or even to a goals-based approach in managing a programme of study. Moreover, the effect of the context within which we find ourselves will add to the complexity of the work involved in teaching and learning. This is reflected in the way in which a wide range of differences and diversity form the basis of the school community, and so mirrors the way in which learning is at the same time always deeply personal, mostly social, and invariably organizational in its implications for the journey.

PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE: CREATING POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

The theory behind our approach to learning and teaching in this book is largely drawn from several areas of educational psychology. These include humanistic psychology (Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1969); positive psychology (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Robbins, 2008); individual differences and dispositional psychology (Galton, 1865; Riding & Rayner, 2000; Zhang, Sternberg & Rayner, 2012); educational leadership (Rayner 2009; Shields, 2011); pedagogy (Zeichner & Liston, 1996), inclusive education (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2010;
Humanistic psychology includes a set of ideas about motivation and the need to maintain a healthy approach to life as an individual. To be mentally healthy, individuals must take personal responsibility for their actions, regardless of whether those actions are positive or negative. An individual’s potential and the importance of growth and self-actualization form part of a person-centered explanation for human behaviour that is grounded in the notion of a natural desire for growth and development. One fundamental belief of humanistic psychology held by some is that people are innately good, with mental and social problems resulting from deviations from this natural tendency, though some would disagree with this philosophical position, while holding other humanistic values of individual worth.

The second and major psychological influence in the approach to learning and teaching in this book is the area of positive psychology. This is an approach that seeks to understand positive emotions such as joy, optimism and contentment. Positive psychology is interested in the conditions that allow individuals, groups and organizations to flourish. There are several key constructs in this theory that are immediately relevant to the task of building a positive learning environment. These include well-being, fulfillment, happiness, affirmation, engagement, mindfulness, and perhaps most importantly, the ability to find meaning in everyday life, work and play. For our purposes here, so much of this recently developing branch of psychology can be applied to the stories of ‘travelers’ journeying on the learning-teaching road trip.

The psychology of Individual Differences also provides a range of theories and assessments which can be used to tell us how a student or indeed how any colleague will typically approach a task, or tackle a learning problem, each having a set of preferences for thinking, socializing and interpreting the world around them. This approach includes key variables and constructs drawn from the domains of personality, intelligence, sex, ability, as well as other constructs more closely linked to performance in learning, such as cognitive style, learning styles, meta-cognition, motivation and self-perception as a learner. The theory is particularly relevant as a major contributor to shaping tacit (most often unspoken) knowledge and related ways in which a school community will manage its educational diversity – personal, social and organizational.

A theory of educational leadership is extremely diverse and for our purposes here, we draw upon some particular theories of inclusive, transformative and distributed leadership. These in turn are used to introduce new ideas for organizing practice, clustered around the concepts of ‘intelligent inclusion’, ‘positive behaviour’, and an ‘integrative form of educational management’. Similarly, and implicitly, a theory of pedagogy is adopted to establish a pragmatic approach, describing the part played by action-based participatory professional development in leading to the idea of combining reflective practice with research-led and evidence-based information.
CHAPTER 1

This approach presumes that theory can inform practice (and indeed the reverse) in ways that support, enable, and ensure continuing professional learning.

For those who like to dig a little deeper, the idea of journeying on a road trip in this book is also influenced by an understanding of a constructivist basis to learning, subject in turn to epistemic beliefs that more generally influence approaches to thinking and learning, for example the Epistemological Reflection Model (see Baxter Magolda, 2004). This framework pre-supposes several levels of learning, moving from an initial stage of passively receiving and conceiving knowledge in an absolute way as right or wrong, along a progression toward a relative perception of knowledge as a point of view, and then on to beginning to perceive knowledge as correct relative to various contexts. Finally, at the highest level, the learner begins to realize multiple possibilities for knowledge and the need for knowledge claims to be evaluated, set against the quality of the argument and evidence provided. The design of curricula and construction of study programmes of represent an important aspect of pedagogy and mirror the way in which we propose what theories of learning and thinking should be applied to the continuing development of professional learning and applied practice. Crucially, personal and professional values and/or beliefs reflect a moral basis for this development over time.

The over-riding intention throughout our book is therefore to draw upon notions of resilience, well-being, transformative leadership, and inclusive education, to inform evolving conceptions, explanations and the management of practitioner development contributing to positive learning in a school community. We aim to further shape the idea of a ‘reflective practitioner’ evolving into a ‘thinking practitioner’. Such practitioners are conceived to be professionals who will be engaged in leading the learning, while managing a continuing and worthwhile contribution to the educational community to which they belong.

Some of the key features in this approach, involve a number of different ideas and applications of theory such as Positive Behaviour Support including:

- Reflective teaching.
- Well being and self-confidence.
- Personal motivation.
- Intelligent inclusion.
- Transformative leadership.

Chapters 2 to 4 deal with the underlying psychology for developing positive school cultures. The section introduces the narrative approach of the book: real life experiences told through fictional practitioners telling their story of improving practice while continuing to contribute to the learning organization or community in which they work. The characters provide exemplars of teachers at the coalface humanizing education in finding ways of effectively building positive inclusive relationships marked by trust, collaboration, self-efficacy, independence, and engagement.
Chapters 5 to 7 of the book deal with ideas and ideals, recognizing the role of beliefs, and putting evidence-based theory into practice for developing a positive school community. This section deals with the wider issues relevant to managing the whole school. It provides an account of leadership distributed throughout the learning community. It also gives consideration to the nature of the benefits that a positive approach to learning and teaching can bring to everyone in the school community. This includes the students, the work force and the wider community. The focus for the reader, however, remains on the individual’s personal contribution to all of these areas as an important member of the learning community. The recurring theme running through this story and our main message for the reader is to emphasize the place of reflection and thinking about practice. To put it more theoretically, this takes us to the highest level of epistemic development identified earlier in a description of the ‘Epistemological Reflection Model’: that is, evaluativism/objectivism–subjectivism (see Muis, 2007). If we refer again to the idea of journeying along the road trip, it is like learning how to drive and quite crucially, remembering to use the rear view mirror. The driver makes full use of the reflection, aware of what has passed, in order to take decisions about the present, so that the journey may continue, and a destination at some point in the near future, be safely reached.

As expected in any journey, we sincerely hope this book will not be boring, but rather that you will actually enjoy the trip. For most of us the trip is the most enjoyable where we can watch, socialize and learn from others. By using a narrative approach in this book, we hope that dry theory still comes along, but in the back seat.
CHAPTER 2

ENABLING INCLUSIVE LEARNING INTERVENTIONS

OVERVIEW AND KEY CONCEPTS

• Wellbeing
• Stress and Individual Differences
• Problem Ownership
• Intelligent Inclusion
• Diagnostics beyond classification and labelling

Meet the Cast

Main Characters:

Kate – Teacher, newly appointed as principal of rural three-teacher school
Mary – An experienced teacher, working at Kate’s school for a long time.
Nick – School Psychologist

Minor Characters:

Robert – Junior teacher at Kate’s school
Stan – Teacher at a neighbourhood school

WELLBEING

As Kate rounded the corner in her small car, wipers working furiously, she braked hard so as not to plough into the herd of jerseys that were lazily crossing the road from milking. She watched the dairy farmer in the sleet following close behind the herd on his four-wheel motorbike. As she waited she pondered how different this was from the previous 10 years, travelling to her western suburbs school through busy and impatient traffic. Here, now in a lush valley with snow-capped mountains in the distance, time or rather timelessness and community seemed to be worlds apart from her previous experience. At first the 23 km distance from the house she rented in the town to the three teacher rural school seemed a long way, but then, she didn’t want to live by herself in a house down a lonely country lane, and she soon realised that it took her half the time to travel the 23 km than it had taken her to travel half the distance to her previous school in the city.
There had been lots of adjustments in the last six months: new social networks in town, the new community surrounding the school, the role of principal of a small school, composite classes, and yes, finding herself the one to make the final decisions. Why, only last week when the school toilets all failed, the regional office had told her it was her decision as to whether she needed to close the school! In a new context with so many changes, she was also wrestling with the notion of leadership and management. It felt as though no one had prepared her for it. All of this was on top of a full-time teaching load and an empty house to go home to. The pace of country life might seem to be easy-going and slow, but with school council meetings, parent meetings, mid year reports, well, she had hardly had any time to go back to Melbourne and relax with friends.

As the last cow cleared the road and the farmer waved, Kate recalled the excitement she had felt when she had received news of her appointment. She recalled how easy the first few days had seemed. The kids all settled down so quickly. The older ones looked after the younger ones. The parents had been so welcoming. The only initial reservation she had felt was about the other two teachers. Mary had been at the school at 27 years and her territory was well staked out: having taught grades 3 and 4 for most of this time, she remained with this level. Robert was on a one-year contract fresh from university, and although enthusiastic, he made it quite clear he really wanted to be back in the city. Come Friday 3.30pm and he was on the road, only to drive back on Monday mornings. Kate had never taught classes below grade 4, but on hearing from the school council members that they were very excited to have a man to teach their footballing boys in grade five, she thought it only sensible to allocate herself the junior grades. It didn’t take long to realise that with ten of her class being prep children, it wasn’t easy to leave the classroom to attend to principal’s duties, but at least there were no behaviour problems.

Questions for reflection

1. Identify stressors in your professional and personal life – and how do you handle them?
2. Would others describe you as authoritarian or consultative, or somewhere in between?
3. Do you share your dilemmas with friends or keep silent?
There were some clear advantages in driving the beautiful country road to school. It gave Kate time to think. She seemed to be more easily irritated than she ever had been with the more difficult children of the western suburbs. Yes, she was increasingly more organised, more directive, and perhaps more authoritarian. But as she drew up at the school, a couple were waiting for her, giving her only enough time to squelch the minor pang of guilt that such a dictatorial management was warranted by a need to cope with so much that was expected of her.

THE STRESS OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

The couple seemed a little uncomfortable and it soon became clear why. They had moved up to an inexpensive rental house on one of the local farms. They hoped to pick up local seasonal farm labouring and domestic work. They had three children they were wanting to enrol, a boy in grade six who suffered from Asperger’s, and twins in grade 1 who both had learning difficulties: Kate only later found out these were associated with foetal alcohol syndrome. As Kate completed the enrolment formalities the next day, she made a decision: it was time to stop being the self-effacing idealist. Inclusion was all fair and well, but if she were to survive she would need to morph into a Sergeant Major, which left her wondering about her decision to enrol the kids. Over lunch, Robert chewed her ear about the new boy in his class. What could be done to get more help, and how long would it take to get someone to support him? After all he’d had a teacher’s aide at the previous school! He said he was only just surviving, and as for a kid with a mental condition, well, he didn’t have a clue. With the thought that she didn’t need any more drain on her time, having already had to provide more support for this problem than she really had time for, and pondering what Rob had learnt in his course at university, Kate decided to telephone the regional office.

She now started to wonder about the twins in her class; they appeared, well, fairly docile now, but what was she in for? Why on earth weren’t these kids properly assessed and placed in facilities where they would get the help they needed, she pondered. “Realism,” she thought, “get real Kate,” she told herself: “just a silly romantic dream, a stress free life under the shadow of snow peaked mountains, oh yea? Not such worlds apart after all.”

The regional office put her through to the school psychologist. Nick would be out in two weeks.

PROBLEM OWNERSHIP

“Two weeks…surely next week at least? Is there no earlier time?” She tried to keep the distress out of her voice. “This is really urgent. I may have a teacher going off on stress leave. Besides, we have a duty of care and there may be things we need
to know that we currently don’t. And the two in my room, well I need to know fast, before other parents start to complain…."

Nick asked her to send the children’s details so he could check if there were any files. He asked a series of questions, and on assessing the situation, the best he could do was give some interim pointers. While he could not manage to come out for a couple of weeks, he also offered to talk with Rob over the phone. Finally, they set up for Rob to go in to talk with Nick the next evening around six.

Kate felt some relief, but frustrated that even with Nick’s support, she would probably have to wait quite a few months if not a year before she could expect any real assistance. She found herself rather hoping that the two kids with learning difficulties in her class could be identified as having an identifiable condition sufficient to warrant a teacher aide. Yes, she thought, come what may, she was determined to get a teacher aide!

That evening she rang Stan at the school up the road. Stan had some fragile X kids, and seemed to know how to get resources. The discussion was very useful. Stan had managed to get quite a few resources and pointed her to a number of ways of getting them.

“But,” he warned, “you must get an assessment and be careful, they will do anything to find an excuse to cut your entitlements. Last year the Ed Psychs told me they thought the disabled kids in my school were over-resourced and that too much individual attention was detrimental for them! They have no idea.” Kate appreciated the discussion: to be forewarned was to be prepared, and now she was ready for a fight.

Despite having given Rob some materials, and the promised follow up phone calls from Nick, Kate was relieved when the day finally arrived for Nick’s visit. She was well rehearsed with every possible argument as to why they needed a teacher’s aide, and urgently. She had organised for her class to be distributed across the other two rooms so that she had the morning free to talk with Nick. After brief pleasantries and some coffee, Kate sat down with Nick in the small staffroom. Nick looked out of the window that framed the mountains, still snow capped in the distance, and commented on the beauty of the drive down the valley to the school. But Kate was in no mood for the positive talk. With three weeks full of cogitating concern, she was ready to get on with business. Arms folded she asked:

“So, what extra help do you have to offer us for ensuring we can meet the needs of these three at-risk disabled children?”

Nick sensed that he was being handed the problem, but he wanted to work together, so he acknowledged Kate’s stress.

“Yea, such kids can be really stressful – eating up our time. Before we move on, I would like to know how you have been going with them.”

In the process of Nick’s attentive listening and seeming understanding, Kate found herself outlining her concerns of the last three weeks. Nick was a good listener. Trying to appear professional, she carefully tried to make the most of various frustrations and incidents, while working hard to sound caring, competent and conscientious.
“It sounds like you are doing all the right things.”

Kate’s heart sank. She wanted extra resources. Had she sounded too competent? Had he not heard the frustrations?

“Look, well may we be coping, but only just, and it isn’t without a considerable cost in time and effort, taking away valuable time from other kids. And I have to spend a lot of time with Rob. And even now, here I am away from all the other kids having to take time out talking here because of them.” Kate’s voice had risen and there was clear frustration in her voice. “The bottom line really is: What can you do to help us get a teacher’s aid?” There. She had him. She had come to the point, no soft talking.

But Nick still did not engage with her challenge. “This is very frustrating for you. I do understand.”

Kate wanted to challenge him about how someone from a comfortable office who could choose his time in coming out had any idea, but she kept her cool to hear him continue:

“Believe you me, I know how tough it can be. It throws me back to my days as a rural school head teacher when freshly out of Uni. I had twenty seven kids including a hearing impaired kid all on my own! and it was twelve months before they appointed a rural school aide, who came in for three days a week.”

That was him then, Kate thought, but this is about me now! Nevertheless, here she was talking to a colleague. She was curious.

“So, you are a teacher – you taught in a rural school – where was that?” There ensued a frank exchange and sharing of the joys and frustrations of teaching in a rural community and at a small school. Nick knew intuitively how sharing feelings associated with common experiences facilitates trust. Trust was slowly taking over from all the mistrust that had been generated in the discussions with Stan. Nick sensed that Kate’s veiled hostility was ebbing. But, he knew, returning to the point of stress would require sensitivity and an unconditional appreciation for Kate’s dilemmas.

He recognised and reminded himself of the underlying issue of problem ownership. He recognised the potentially destructive scenario: if he accepted responsibility for the problem, the next step would carry considerable pressure to capitulate to her pre-determined solution of a teacher’s aide. He needed to establish genuine trust, at least enough to allow for an introduction of cooperative problem solving. It required genuineness in the context of what Carl Rogers had established as unconditional positive regard and understanding: only then could they move from what Nick perceived as a somewhat adversarial position to cooperate in “ganging up” on what he regarded was really Kate’s problem. Only then, if she felt ownership and Nick’s genuine concern and support, was there any hope for getting Kate to think in a broader context beyond immediate practical wants and/or solutions. To do this meant talking about inclusion in the broader sense before he did any assessment work with the students. It was, he believed, such an important part of getting effective professional development: on the job coaching.
CHAPTER 2

Questions for reflection

What resources are available to you for professional mentoring or coaching, and what use do you make of them?

INTELLIGENT INCLUSION

But Nick also knew that the field was ever changing, and he hoped this change meant effective advancement. Having gone through the integration initiatives, on to the inclusion imperatives articulated over the last two decades, he was now old enough to realise an enduring dilemma: in practicality, no clearly established point of arrival had been achieved, though for some this had been resolved by declaring that inclusion is about process, the journey, and that’s it. But so what? Journeys go places!

A recent discussion with a visiting scholar, Steve Rayner from the UK, to the University in Melbourne, now came to mind. Steve, in conversation, had suggested that essentially, the academic debate over inclusion remains locked in an argument over ideals (albeit generally accepted as laudable) and imperfect or impossible practice. Some practitioners, he’d pointed out, claim to practice inclusive education, others social inclusion, yet when closely examined, such practice still reflect the very powerful tensions, contradictions and dilemmas posed by implementing an ideal.

Nick had enjoyed the intellectual stimulation of the academic debate Rayner had pointed to: less public, however, and yet still equally relevant to this attempt at revising and refining our ideas of what is inclusive education, Nick thought, was the theoretical debate reflecting differences people adopted in terms of ontology (what one knows) and epistemology (how one knows). Much of this surrounded notions of equity, fair play, discrimination and say, positions held by some who argue any affirmative intervention is unfair. Rayner had suggested that the underpinning argument in this debate is both ideological and moral: it involves asking fundamental questions about education, its purpose, its implementation, and a belief in what it is to be human. And behind this debate again lie yet deeper questions about the nature of the human being and the worlds s/he inhabits as an individual and also as a member of any social group(s). These issues needed to be considered in terms of
pedagogic, philosophical, sociological and psychological aspects of practice. A lot of necessary debate and integrative work yet to be done, but how could he hope to begin to share this with Kate who simply wanted answers to what she perceived as her immediate needs? How, pondered Nick, could he get her to see these within the perspectives of a broader educational, interdisciplinary context?

As Nick understood it, Steve Rayner had suggested making a start with ‘intelligent inclusion’ as an idea. This was perhaps best imagined as a conceptual framework: it strives for a pragmatic approach to the learner and learning in an integrative way, synthesising new and old ideas. It posits the notion of an educative process that reflects a seasonal cycle of growth essentially transformative in nature. It anticipates education as an outcome that reflects an enabling and empowering experience that provides the individual and society with ways to engage in managing knowledge, for both a personal and a public ‘good’. This means taking more seriously the implications of schooling and its limited resources, as located within the locale, and as a part of the wider social community. The school holds a central position in the life beat of the community.

Nick paused, recalling the following notes he’d been checking the previous evening in preparation for teaching a doctorate class due in a fortnight’s time. Nick was planning to talk to the following key points about implementing what he wanted to call an ‘intelligent’ way of practising inclusive education. These considerations required thinking about making basic changes, that is, taking decisions and showing leadership in key aspects of re-shaping pedagogy and re-balancing the curriculum (intended and experienced), together with a new consideration of relevant aspects of educational sociology and psychology. Such change meant professional and sometimes personal movement. It would include:

1. **Pedagogic changes**
   - Movement away from recent or current understandings of
     - Categories (SEN / Disability).
     - IQ based discriminatory setting / streaming classes.
     - Comprehensive mixed multi-mix classes.
     - Easy one-size fits all curricular frameworks.
   - Movement toward new understandings of
     - Renewal of integration / inclusion models.
     - Learning needs.
     - Learning performance.
     - New forms of assessment & assessment-led pedagogy.

2. **Sociological changes**
   - Movement away from recent or current understandings of
     - Multi-cultural models of community for social inclusion.
• Human Rights without Responsibilities.
• A common culture specific to the learning community.
• A new identity / culture specific to the evolving diversity in the local community.

• Movement toward
• Inter-cultural models of community for social inclusion.
• New conceptions of integrative / transformative culture.
• Revisionist exploration of assents / artefacts / affiliation.
• Revisionist exploration of accommodation / assimilation / acculturation.
• New forms of cultural accommodation, assimilation and values clarification.

3. Psychological changes

• Movement away from outdated understandings of
• Intelligence deficit and giftedness models.
• Motivation and/or affective resilience.
• Unitary/categorical models of personal and social diversity / differences.
• Unitary/categorical models of deficit diagnostics.

• Movement toward
• Models of individuality and personal cognition.
• Recognising individuality – Individual Differences in predispositions.
• Current models of differential abilities.
• Models of personality trait.
• Positive “strengths” psychology.

• Models of situated cognition and social diversity.
• Learning differences.
• Use of capability theory.
• Integrated forms of psycho-educational assessment (authentic, ipsative and gnostic).
• New forms of assessment-led pedagogy.

This was all too much to impart to Kate at this point in time, but for Nick it was a good foundation to work from.

Nick turned to Kate and said, “You know Kate, in the ‘good old days’ Ed Psychs were called in to classify kids: the familiar story of labelling so we know where to put people. It came out of an age where we thought understanding meant finding the right classification for every flora and fauna. Such classification required discrimination, which gave credence to differences according to race in ways we now recognise as racism. In more subtle ways such classificatory misconceptions attracted people to pseudoscientific intellectual pursuits like phrenology and eugenics. In this way, differences are considered as deviation from the norm, and so
classed as deviant, and any such deviance as ‘disabilities’ and ‘illnesses’ requiring specialist treatment. To this day, we have assessment-based processes of confirming eligibility for funding [resources] that are still based on that deficiency model, where with the best intentions, funding and resources reward and reinforce discrimination.”

Intuitively, and as a result to her Education courses, Kate understood that theoretically and ideally there was something wrong with labelling, but her frustration was in translating that to the practical world.

“I know what you are getting at, Nick, but don’t you think we need to be practical here: what we really need here is some resources for these kids, and I think it is discrimination if we disadvantage them by not recognising their problems and appropriately giving them a label. So, while it is all very well to be so idealistic, isn’t it a matter of compromise?”

Questions for reflection

In practicality, is inclusive educational practice just too hard?

What is the difference between labelling and diagnostics?

This gave Nick an opening to talk about issues he had tried to think through a lot. “As a psychologist, I’ve become deeply interested in an area called Individual Differences. This area principally concerns the study of abilities and personality. Many people who are worried about labelling see the study of individual differences as “the problem” – the basis on which we classify people, thereby creating the very basis of what leads to discriminating against groups of people. What I’ve come to realize over a period of time is that denying that we are all different in some way can be as equally harmful as classifying people. We are each unique, and the product of a remarkable interplay of a whole lot of predispositions, traits, and notions of self in relation to one another, with our environment, and with our experiences. In that sense, the study of individual differences is really the study of predispositions, and that’s why it is sometimes called a dispositional psychology. If we understand our
individual differences, and we accept that there really is a broad range of individual differences, and that some of these individual differences make it more difficult for some of us to adjust to the demands of the world (known as maladaptive) while other individual differences are highly adaptive, well then, we are well on the way to diagnostics rather than classification!"

Kate shrugged. “I don’t really see any difference.”

Nick smiled. “Well, there’s a world of difference, really. In ascertainment we are simply concerned with a categorical classification of a condition, and the condition is a matter of the fact: you have it or you don’t have it. If you have it, then you warrant extra resources. These resources have little relationship to the actual impact of what you have, nor do they take into account understanding the diagnostics as a basis for intervention or specifically tailoring any assistance or help. Simply having a recognized categorical disability makes you eligible. The term ‘idiot’ for example has its origins in 20th century medicine and psychology, as a classification indicating severe mental retardation. While we might pride ourselves on being better informed, and not using such a term as it has become a pejorative, in reality we nonetheless carry on the same thing by simply substituting specific IQs score ranges that can be less easily used as insulting discrimination. It’s a little less appealing to call someone you want to insult as ‘You below 70 IQ person!’

“The point is, though, that simply classifying someone like that doesn’t tell us how we can support such individuals, not least because with every individual scoring 70 or below on an ability test, there are a multiplicity of other factors that come into play to help ensure their well-being and capacity for adaptation and adjustment and learning.”

Nick paused before continuing. “In fact, take for example the area of intelligence research: research has been shown to have advanced more in the last decade than the preceding 100 years, so that the notion of any usefulness in a global IQ score is now seriously challenged. Kevin McGrew (2009), one of the leaders in the field has made the point that, building on a lifelong work of 3 giants in the field, R. B. Cattell, John Horn and John Carroll, the most recent developments in ability research has given us what has become known as the CHC model. In that model we now have a table of differential abilities that is equivalent to the periodic table in chemistry.”

Kate in spite of herself, and somewhat irritated, interrupted. “So how is that any different from classification – just sounds to me as though it is a finer grained way of labelling” interjected Kate.

“Well, no, it’s not because it helps us to understand how the brain is handling or not handling information: things such as working memory as distinct from say Gf: fluid abilities (general sequential reasoning, deduction and induction), Gc: crystallised abilities, (breadth of knowledge developed through learning) or say Ga: auditory processing (ability to analyse and synthesise auditory stimuli.) Understanding exactly how these abilities differ one from another within the individual (intra-individual differences) as well as in comparison to other individuals (inter-individual
differences) makes for diagnostic conclusions, with direct implications for how we can accommodate such individual differences in learning.”

“You mean, these accommodations involve direct advice as to how to teach or to provide appropriate allowances?”

“Yes, exactly! What’s more, because we now have a decent model of abilities, there is an explosion of research around relating these to effective strategies. But ability research isn’t the only area; in personality research we now better understand how different traits work. We have defined these a lot better in the last decade or so, and there are researchers looking at these neurodevelopmental predispositions in children and ways of building personal resilience to counter maladaptive traits. So, you see that far from being a sentence, by acknowledging and understanding how we are all different, we are empowered rather than sentenced. In this way, good psycho-educational assessment looks at the individual and offers a firm basis for tailoring accommodation. In an ideal world, and hopefully in the future, the allocation of extra resources would be based on resourcing with appropriate and targeted support programs, rather than being for a specific classification.

“Even now, I can use those models to help us understand your challenging kids better, and work with you to devise specific strategies and accommodations for their own personal (special) needs. This means that the diagnostics are program focused rather than resource focused. This is what we mean by assessment led pedagogy.”

“Does that mean I won’t get any extra resources? Where does that leave us now, because we don’t live in an ideal world!” asked Kate, not sure if she really wanted to grasp what was being said, if it would lead to her being denied resources she had been looking forward to.

“No. We still need to live in the real world that suffers from the research-practice gap, and I do feel that this gap is ever widening as research is speeding up. It might mean that for the sake of social justice we play the old classificatory game. If we

“Questions for reflection

Was Nick’s advice to Kate effective/useful?

Why do you think so?

Would you do something different from what Nick suggested? If yes, why?
can meet some criteria for resourcing that will enable us to better implement clearly indicated strategies and accommodations, well, then we may need to do that. The danger however will be that in accepting such classifications; we need to ensure that it does not become a life sentence. That means a pedagogical focus with a constant review of how the kids are adapting. And that makes for a far more positive classroom culture.”

Kate sighed. She waited to hear what Nick wanted. There clearly was going to be a need for give and take on the part of the school, as well as the education department.