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Learner Identities in Early Education: An Introduction to Four Themes

> **Box 1.1**
>
> In the Learning Story *Design Inspiration* we can see Kyah's willingness to be flexible with the goals she sets herself. Kyah could see that the picture [in a book] of wearable art was made up of old pairs of jeans and recognised that in order to make her own rendition she was not going to be able to use the same materials as the original artist but instead had to make alternative choices with the resources that she had available to her. … Kyah's view of herself as a learner comes directly from her family's and her teachers' attitudes to learning and intelligence. A paper entitled *Learning is Learnable* (Claxton, 2004: 3) documents how much people unintentionally '*pick up*' not just their physical but mental habits and values from those around them. We are deeply immersed in a community of learners, and teachers have a vital role, particularly for children who spend large parts of their days in an early learning, group setting. (Karen H., early childhood teacher, commenting on a Learning Story during a research project)

This quote from a teacher, writing about an episode of learning for 4-year-old Kyah, introduces four themes about the ways that Kyah views herself as a learner. These themes are about young learners who construct their own opportunities to learn, make learning connections from one place to another, recognise the learning journey that they are on, and explore their understandings in a range of increasingly complex ways.

This book will also consider these themes as *consequences for assessment practice*. Assessment for learning plays a powerful role in this early construction of a learner identity. It is the Learning Story and its portfolio – revisited with others – that enables Kyah to recognise the learning journey that is valued

here. We are particularly interested in the role of narrative assessments: adults and children telling and re-telling stories of learning and competence, reflecting on the past and planning for the future. As Kyah's teacher points out, significant numbers of young people now spend substantial periods of time each week in early years education group settings – early childhood and school. So we must pay close attention to these themes and consequences.

The teacher's comment at the beginning of this chapter highlights the way in which the valued adults in Kyah's life view learning and how this makes a difference to Kyah's view of herself as a learner. It also points out that early childhood settings and families can be described as 'communities of learners' in which habits and values to do with learning (as well as many other domains of life) are intentionally, and unintentionally, 'picked up' by participants. Pierre Bourdieu (1990) has had much to say about this, arguing that these values and ways of being are handed down from generation to generation as *habitus*: 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions' that inscribe 'things to do or not to do, things to say or not to say, in relation to a "probable" upcoming future' (p. 53). In the twenty-first century this intergenerational or *vertical* development has become complicated by the growth of early childhood provision and by the international migration of people and ideas. Learning communities extend across the globe now, and the World Wide Web and its social and information networking has a powerful influence on our views about a 'probable' upcoming future. One of our responses to this is to argue that we must now, as well, do more to strengthen the *horizontal* and intersecting circles of influence on learner identity in early childhood provision: connecting the cultures' values, goals and visions across early years educational communities – families, early childhood settings outside the home and schools. Martin Packer and David Greco-Brooks (1999) are two of many writers who have argued that school classrooms are not just places where knowledge and skills are taught (an *epistemological* project); they include *ontological work* (p. 135). Ontological work includes the construction and editing of learner identities and the offering of new possibilities for durable, relocatable dispositions that inscribe things to do or not to do, things to say or not to say and our expectations for the future.

This is true, too, of any places that provide early childhood care and education outside the home. Analysing narratives of three recently arrived immigrant mothers attending child care centres in Belgium during the weeks prior to their young children's entry to school, Michel Vandenbroeck, Griet Roets and Aïsji Snoeck (2009) have commented that 'the child care centre may be considered as a place where a shared repertoire of cultural patterns is constructed and jointly reconfigured' (p. 209) and one that can challenge the idea of fixed national identities and unitary selves. They acknowledge the writing of Rosi Braidotti (1994) to refer to 'the nomadic subject' (p. 158), 'a hybrid and interconnected identity that occupies a variety of possible subject positions' (Vandenbroeck et al., 2009: 211). Kyah's story, too, implies at least two possible subject positions: a learner who improvises and a fabric designer. Jenelle, a teacher at this centre, had written a Learning Story

about Kyah's design work on this occasion. The centre had been given a book on 'wearable art' from a recent exhibition, and one of the designs was created using 10 metres of denim: it looked like a ball gown made out of children's denim jeans. Kyah constructed her own version, bringing some old clothes from home.

Many of the ideas in this book are encapsulated in the following quote from Jerome Bruner (2002):

> It is through narrative that we create and re-create selfhood, and self is a product of our telling and re-telling. We are, from the start, expressions of our culture. Culture is replete with alternative narratives about what self is or might be. (p. 86)

The notion that culture is replete with 'alternative narratives about what self is or might be' is exactly the place where we would like this book to be heading: that children develop repertoires of shared cultural patterns and valued possible learner selves, a product, in part, of learning-story telling and retelling. We argue that teachers, children and families can become co-authors of this telling and re-telling, and that these repertoires are made up of a complex intermingling of stores of knowledge with stores of disposition.

We highlight the teachers' views here, and we have long admired the ways in which teachers of young children are prepared to struggle with and puzzle over the dilemmas and the tensions of the profession. Perhaps because the

impetus for much of our thinking has been our work with teachers implementing a bicultural and bilingual curriculum, our ideas resonate with the notion of learning as a cultural process. A chapter in the *Handbook of the learning sciences* by Na'ilah Suad Nasir, Ann Rosebery, Beth Warren and Carol Lee (2006) entitled 'Learning as a cultural process: Achieving equity through diversity' discusses the ways in which culture is central to learning:

> By 'culture', we mean the constellation of practices historically developed and dynamically shaped by communities in order to accomplish the purposes they value. Such practices are constituted by the tools they use, the social networks with which they are connected, the ways they organize joint activity, the discourses they use and value (i.e., specific ways of conceptualizing, representing, evaluating and engaging with the world). On this view, learning and development can be seen as the acquisition throughout the life course of diverse repertoires of overlapping, complementary, or even conflicting cultural practices. (p. 489)

Our aim in the book is to explore the contribution that narrative assessment as Learning Stories can make towards the construction of a repertoire of cultural practices and learner identities. Our perspective on learner identity and this construction process centrally includes: agency and dialogue (the ways in which joint activity is organised), making connections across boundaries between places (the social networks with which the practice is connected), recognising and re-cognising learning continuities, and appropriating knowledges and learning dispositions in a range of increasingly complex ways (the discourses that are used and valued). Nasir et al. (2006) wrote that cultural practices are constituted, in part, by the tools that communities use. The tools that we will primarily focus on here are the assessment practices, and we will conclude that the tools that assess the learning can also sustain the learning by influencing the other parts of the cultural constellation – the social networks, the way that 'joint activity' is organised and the discourses that are used and valued.

Agency and Dialogue

In Karen's account of Kyah's sense of self that introduced this chapter she comments on the role of 'her family's and her teachers' attitudes to learning and intelligence'. Kyah is positioned in the early childhood centre as a powerful learner, a participant with agency, someone who is disposed to take on an authoring role. Karen was reminded of Guy Claxton's insistence that 'learning is learnable' (Claxton, 2004) and James Greeno (2006) has argued that learning will be more likely to be sustained if learners are positioned as authoritative and accountable. Finding opportunities for this can be a challenge for teachers. In Iram Siraj-Blatchford's (2010: 157) discussion of case studies of effective practice from the longitudinal Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) project in England she comments that the 'excellent' settings were found to encourage 'sustained shared thinking'. She describes sustained shared thinking as 'any episode in which two or more individuals "worked together" in an intellectual way to solve

a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative etc.', and she added that 'The research found that this did not happen very frequently'.

Genuine dialogue requires the deliberate creation of opportunity for initiative-sharing and collaboration, and, as Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) commentary on social roles as contexts of human development suggests:

> The greater the degree of power socially sanctioned for a given role, the greater the tendency for the role occupant to exercise and exploit the power and for those in a subordinate position to respond by increased submission, dependency, and lack of initiative. (p. 92)

Here is Naomi, a teacher who has been revisiting the stories of their learning with three- and four-year-old children, reflecting on the quality of her conversations with Rose:

> I have instigated many of these revisiting conversations and sometimes I have not chosen my timing well and the conversation has reflected this; the child doesn't seem too interested and so I am having to lead the discussion; this often leads to my asking too many questions and the child does not say much. Today my timing was different in that I could see Rose was looking for someone to share her portfolio with and I seized the moment, offering to be that person for her. What a difference between this conversation and the first one I initiated with Rose. For the most part she led the conversation and I followed; I think this shows in comparing the length of my first conversation with Rose [18 verbal turns] and this one [six weeks later: 74 verbal turns]. (Naomi, teacher)

Naomi comments that 'for the most part she led the conversation and I followed'; this describes a dialogue in which Rose has a degree of power or agency.

Learning 'in the Middle'

The references to 'self' in the quote from Jerome Bruner earlier in this chapter, and elsewhere in this chapter to 'identities' and to 'possible selves' provide a glimpse into the contested theoretical territory inhabited by 'selves', 'identities', possible selves and 'subject positions'. We have settled on 'identity', a common word in the sociocultural literature. There is a strong resonance between Nasir's view of learning as a cultural process and James Gee's sociocultural notion of a Discourse, interesting to us here because he goes on to write about 'a sociocultural perspective on opportunities to learn' in a book about assessment. Gee (2008) compares a traditional view with a *situated/sociocultural* viewpoint:

> A situated/sociocultural viewpoint looks at knowledge and learning not primarily in terms of representation in the head, although there is no need to deny that such representations exist and play an important role. Rather, it looks at knowledge and learning in terms of a *relationship* between an individual with both a mind and a body and an environment in which the individual thinks, feels and interacts. Both the body and the environment tend to be backgrounded in traditional views of knowledge and learning. (p. 81)

The term 'sociocultural' is also used by James Wertsch (1991) because, he writes, he wanted to 'understand how mental action is situated in cultural, historical and institutional settings' (p. 15). His ideas will contribute to this chapter in other ways as well. He writes that, rather than speaking of 'individual(s)', he prefers to speak of 'individual(s)-acting-with-mediational-means' (p. 12). He later writes (1998: 65) that 'a focus on mediated action and the cultural tools employed in it makes it possible to "live in the middle" and to address the cultural situatedness of action, power and authority'. Guiding our analysis, too, is the view that a learning activity is distributed over social and cultural practices; Peggy Miller and Jacqueline Goodnow (1995) say that the learner is a 'person-participating-in-a-practice' (p. 8). We are interested in what goes on in this space 'in the middle', in the reciprocal relationship between an educational environment and the learning individual. Assessment sits in this space, so these discussions by James Gee, James Wertsch, Peggy Miller and Jacqueline Goodnow have been helpful.

Ideas about agency and identity have influenced curriculum documents in the South Pacific. The 2009 Early Years Framework for Australia is entitled, 'Belonging, Being and Becoming' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). One of the five Learning Outcomes is a 'strong sense of identity' and three other outcomes are about connection, involvement and communication: children are connected with and contribute to their world; children are confident and involved learners; children are effective communicators. These outcomes are *learning in the middle*. The other Learning Outcome in this Framework is 'children have a strong sense of well-being'. In this document a strong sense of well-being includes confidence and optimism, a 'sense of agency and a desire to interact with responsive others' (p. 30). The foundation curriculum document for Learning Stories was the New Zealand national early childhood curriculum document, Te Whāriki, with its five strands of integrated knowledges and dispositional outcomes (Ministry of Education, 1996). In Māori these strands are: mana tangata, mana atua, mana aotūroa, mana reo, mana whenua. There is no easy translation into English of *mana*: it is about authority, prestige, empowerment. The Māori curriculum strands are domains of *mana*, and might be described as five sources of authority and empowerment: people; spiritual, mental and physical well-being; knowledge of the world in the widest sense; language; and place. The English equivalents (but not direct translations) in the curriculum document are: contribution, well-being, exploration, communication and belonging.[2]

Writing that the formation of identities in education includes students needing 'ways of having an effect on the world and making their actions matter' Etienne Wenger (1998) elaborates:

> Talking about learning in terms of these modes of belonging makes it possible to consider educational designs not just in terms of the delivery of a curriculum, but more generally in terms of their effects on the formation of identities. Students need:
>
> 1 places of engagement
> 2 materials and experiences with which to build an image of the world and themselves
> 3 ways of having an effect on the world and making their actions matter. (p. 270)

Peter Johnston (2004) writes that 'the spark of agency is simply the perception that the environment is responsive to our actions' (p. 9). Kyah's teacher, in her commentary, has described just such a place, or community, of engagement in which Kyah's actions are deemed to matter and are documented because they are important.

Making Connections Across Boundaries Between Places

The second foundational idea in this book is that children's capability to recognise opportunity and to use their learning in new contexts is enhanced if there is communication about their education between the home and school or early childhood setting. Writing about identity again, Wenger (1998) has also commented that coordinating multiple perspectives 'is one of the most critical aspects of education for the kind of world we live in', and that this is a matter of 'straddling across boundaries':

> To be able to have effects on the world, students must learn to find ways of coordinating multiple perspectives. This observation is rather commonplace. What is not so widely understood is that this ability is not just a matter of information and skill. It is not an abstract technical question, not merely learning the repertoire of multiple practices. Rather, it is a matter of identity – of straddling across boundaries and finding ways of being in the world that can encompass multiple, conflicting perspectives in the course of addressing significant issues. Exercising this sort of identity is a result of participation in a learning community challenged by issues of alignment. It is one of the most critical aspects of education for the kind of world we live in. (p. 274)

Family Expectations

Different expectations in intersecting places is one aspect of this alignment. A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to educational achievement by John Hattie (2009) found that parental expectations are far more powerful than many of the structural features of the home (single or two-parent families, families with resident or non-resident fathers, divorced parents, adopted or non-adopted children, or only children and non-only children):

> Parents have major effects in terms of the encouragement and expectations that they transmit to their children. Many parents, however, struggle to comprehend the language of learning and thus are disadvantaged in the methods they use to encourage their children to attain their expectations. Across all home variables, parental aspirations and expectations for children's educational achievement has the strongest relationship with achievement. (p. 70)

The research in England by Liz Brooker (2002) has provided powerful examples of parents who struggled to comprehend the language of learning. Andrew Pollard and Ann Filer's (Pollard and Filer, 1999; Filer and Pollard, 2000) research on patterns of learning orientation concluded that parents of young children played a significant role in discussing, mediating and interpreting school experiences and new challenges.

In one of our studies, we traced the development over 18 months from early childhood into school for Ofeina. Her mother, the fifth of seven children, had migrated to New Zealand from Tonga when she was a teenager and when she left school she held down two jobs for a number of years to help support the family. Ofeina, her older brother and a cousin were looked after by their grandmother during the day and after preschool and school, while their parents worked. The grandmother spoke mostly in Tongan to the children, and both Tongan and English were spoken in Ofeina's home. Here is Ofeina's mother talking about her ambitions for her children:

> I told them, you go to University, 'cos I didn't, I know I should have but I didn't. I worked part-time when I was at school; when I was (in the) sixth form I had to get a part-time job to help out … I keep saying to my son 'even if they say you can't, you have to do your best'. (Carr, Smith, Duncan, Jones, Lee and Marshall, 2010: 63–72)

Ofeina, at age five, knew that this was a possible future for her.

Assessments as Boundary Objects

A number of researchers, in a range of contexts, write about the role of *boundary* objects in the coordinating of multiple and conflicting viewpoints. Susan Star and James Griesemer (1989) conclude that, 'The creation and management of boundary objects is a key process in developing and maintaining coherence across intersecting social worlds' (p. 393). Dana Walker and Honorine Nocon (2007) researched a 'hip-hop' dance activity in an after-school programme and described boundary-crossing competence as 'the ability to function competently in multiple contexts'. They write about 'recontextualisation' and 'boundary processes that involve cultural brokers and boundary objects' (p. 179). Writing about assessments, and acknowledging

this earlier work on boundary objects, Pamela Moss, Brian Girard and James Greeno (2008) include documented assessments as boundary objects. They comment that the concept of 'boundary object':

> provides additional theoretical resources for the analysis of documentary assessments. A boundary object is an object that inhabits multiple heterogeneous social worlds [or activity systems] and enables communication and cooperation across these worlds. (p. 300, bracketed words in the original)

Learning Stories are boundary objects, with their boundary status and value considerably enhanced when they add another boundary object: the home language. Chapter 4 includes examples of this powerful combination.

Recognising and Re-cognising Learning Continuities

We will be looking closely at the opportunities for children to recognise that they are on a learning journey, and to identify some of the steps along the way. This is the third theme of the book. We will be highlighting learning as a journey and in Chapter 5 we look at Learning Stories as 'chains of learning episodes that bear on some facet of learning or identity development' (Lemke, 2001: 25), but there is a prior requirement for recognising (or re-cognising, changing) continuities, and that is to have an appreciation of the longer-term goal. This goal will be articulated differently in different communities.

Here we introduce the notion of 'possible selves', also introduced in the 2001 Learning Story book (Carr, 2001a: 26). This is an identity description from Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius (1986) that resonates with Bruner's 'alternative narratives about what self is or might be' and Bourdieu's 'things to do or not to do, things to say or not to say, in relation to a "probable" upcoming future'. Markus and Nurius pointed out that 'possible selves derive from representations of the self in the past and they include representations of the self in the future' (p. 954). The 'pool of possible selves derives from the categories made salient by the individual's particular sociocultural and historical context and from the models, images and symbols provided by the media and by the individual's immediate social experiences' (p. 954).

Caroline Gipps (2002), who has written extensively on assessment, has commented on the role of assessment in this. She says:

> Because of the public nature of much questioning and feedback in the classroom, and the power dynamic in the student–teacher relationship, assessment plays a key role in identity formation. The language of assessment and evaluation is one of the routes

> by which the social process has to be acknowledged in this sphere: identity is socially bestowed, socially sustained and socially transformed … If identity is conceived as concerned with persuading others and oneself about who one is, and what one is able to do, the judgement of others is crucial. (p. 80)

For Markus and Nurius possible selves are affective-cognitive structures about the self; they 'determine which stimuli are selected for attention' (1986: 955). They can determine what is noticed and recognised. At a primary school using Learning Stories for assessment, for instance, four aims were set out for the school's pupils: resilient learner, thinker, caring citizen, thinker and communicator. These provided cues for analysing the stories of the children's learning.

Robyn G., an early childhood teacher, noticed an episode in which looking at her assessment folder provoked an identity comment from Sela; she recognised it as a significant event.

Box 1.2

I'm a Library Girl

A commentary by Robyn G.

Today I was quietly surrounded by three children. We were revisiting their folders together. Children were exclaiming over the photos of themselves and their friends and recalling what was happening. Sela was leaning on the sofa behind us revisiting her folder alone carefully turning the pages and talking to herself. I was very aware of her and I hadn't seen her show this level of interest in her folder before. She was looking at some photos of herself where she is sitting with one of the school librarians in the school library. Then I heard her say to herself 'I'm a library girl, I'm a library girl' in a sweet sing-songy chant. She said this in a very proud way smiling and to herself. I was astonished as I had never heard Sela speaking in English apart from the odd single word.

I was thrilled to have been so privileged to have had this experience. Going out to the library every week has been an ongoing part of our centre programme for two years now and it is difficult to actually pinpoint children's short-term progress. Sela is now three years old and she had been coming with us for around six months when this happened. She has had first language support from her Burmese teacher Htwe Htwe and I think has a deep understanding and value of her library experience because of this support.

In another example from our research, Kiri, a teacher, is revisiting Andrew's portfolio with him. Andrew asks: 'Is that me doing my book?' (a new Learning Story he hasn't seen about his writing and making a book). Kiri: 'Yes, when you were becoming an author.' Cory, a four-year-old in the same kindergarten, became absorbed by problem-solving experiences with water play and pipes, and Prue, one of the teachers, reflected: 'I was amazed at his concentration for such a long period of time.' Almost a year later she commented on his continued interest in water flow and pipes, as he became more ambitious. She noted in a Learning Story that, 'Further experiments were carried out. Some of them worked and some didn't work so well.' She wrote in the Story: 'This is what happens when we do experiments … I think scientists make discoveries like this too.' Helen, another teacher, notes in a Learning Story that Kamalpreet is using her portfolio as both a numeracy tool *and* a tool that nurtures her well-being and sense of belonging (see Learning Story 1.1).

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Kamalpreet enjoys her portfolio

Term 3 - By Helen

I have noticed that you have become very involved in using your portfolio. At first you used to carry it around a lot with you, and then I started to see you looking at it more often. It has now become a regular thing for you to sit down and read your portfolio to yourself, just as if you were reading a book to yourself. One day, when we were looking at your portfolio together, you paused and counted the pieces of card on your collage picture on one of the pages. I was impressed with your counting skills. I hadn't thought of a portfolio as being a numeracy tool before, so thank you for making me aware of this, Kamalpreet.

What learning am I seeing here:

Kamalpreet, what an amazing sense of ownership you have of your portfolio. For you it is like owning a favourite toy or book that brings you a lot of joy and happiness.

Kamalpreet's interactions with her portfolio appear to nurture her wellbeing and sense of belonging in this kindergarten, her special 'place of play'.

Learning Story 1.1 Kamalpreet Enjoys her Portfolio

Appropriating Knowledges and Learning Dispositions in a Range of Increasingly Complex Ways

This is the fourth theme. A curriculum document may set out a mandated pathway for the appropriation of subject-based knowledge, but for teachers *and* children, the acquisition of that knowledge includes more than 'mastery'. It includes making personal sense of it, making it one's own. We have found James Wertsch's (1997) definition of 'appropriation' useful in this context:

> Since I trace my understanding of appropriation to Bakhtin's writings, it is worth examining the term he employed in Russian: *prisvoenie*. The root of *prisvoenie* and the related verb *prisvoit'* is related to the possessive adjective svoi, which means 'one's own'. *Prisvoit'* means something like to bring something into oneself or to make something one's own, and the noun *prisvoenie* means something like the process of making something one's own … For my present purposes the point is that making words, including narratives, one's own may be quite distinct from mastering them. (p. 16)

For an extended discussion of 'mutual appropriation', see Brown, Ash, Rutherford, Nakagawa, Gordon and Campione (1993). The 'process of making

something one's own' is a process of personalisation. At an early childhood centre that personalisation occurs in a number of ways that include: (i) aligning and adapting the knowledge from home and building on a prior interest; (ii) telling one's story to others and dialoguing about it; and (iii) representing ideas in a range of modes and languages.

Aligning and Adapting the Knowledge from Home and Building on a Prior Interest

Kyah brought resources from home to personalise this concept. We might say that she sees herself as someone whose work can mirror the work of adult fabric designers; in dispositional terms, this story documents what might be an emerging disposition to improvise with materials at hand and to experiment with processes and ideas. Teachers value this and notice, recognise and respond to[3] other examples of it. Kyah brings a constellation of learning dispositions and interests to this task.

Telling One's Story to Others and Dialoguing About it

Marianne was a teacher researcher in the same project as Naomi; here she comments on developing a 'shared history of knowledge' with one of the children:

> I think what happened through the conversations was that, through the funds of knowledge shared in conversations, the funds of disposition were revealed, and became more robust as we had our conversations … he was actually quite a quiet boy to start with and it was really only through the revisiting that a lot of his stories were revealed. So this kind of left an impression of the power of revisiting for me. … Through this ritual of revisiting and conversations [over a year], as well as the learning stories perhaps forming the foundations of revisiting, a shared history of knowledge was found.

Representing Ideas in a Range of Modes and Languages

Kyah's story is an example of three of these: the text (read to her) and images from a wearable arts exhibition book provided the inspiration, and a collage. She had already experimented with collage as a medium, cutting out fashion pictures from magazines, and she adapted the idea with a different material, fabric and clothing. In the analysis of the learning, Jenelle commented on the disposition: 'You seem to be of a character that thinks "outside the square", looking for different ways to express an idea and find answers to the questions you have set yourself.' Another Learning Story written by Joanna for Kyah, *The Artists Among Us!*, illustrates her work with another 'language': mosaics (see Learning Story 1.2).

The Artists Among Us!

Teacher: Joanna

To be inspired by an artist! What an incredible privilege and exciting opportunity. For some time we pondered the idea of bringing an expert artist into the centre to work with and alongside the children. [...]

Inspired by our art expert Julie's work and the group mosaic, Kyah embraced the idea of creating her own piece of art. Kyah researched an idea, gazing intently through a library book on mosaic design, before deciding on an idea that she intended to create. After gathering the tools she needed to create her design she was off. She began by making a template. Firstly, she drew her design and then she set to work cutting it out as close to the lines as she possibly could. Some time later, Kyah traced her design onto a plaster-board. She analysed her design, adding finishing touches before beginning her mosaic work with coloured tiles. This is very much a work in progress for Kyah, who began this journey several weeks ago. She revisits her work when the desire arises. Watch this space for updates and further photographs!

We don't believe in restricting children's creativity, rather we allow children to set their own tasks and goals. At times when this may be a challenge, we responsively support and encourage children's endeavours. This process of mosaic-making gave Kyah the opportunity to examine the work of artists in mosaic books, plan her own design, make a template of the ideas that were of most interest to her and take responsibility for all aspects of this process [such as] active research and creative artwork, like tracing her original design onto the surface, selecting the coloured tiles to form her picture and grouting.

Working alongside Kyah during this process has been such a privilege. Kyah is a passionate, motivated learner who is eager to challenge herself. She is decisive, inspired and works methodically with very clear thoughts and ideas. Kyah's sense of herself as a 'competent and capable learner' has given her the confidence to explore new concepts, challenge her thoughts and ideas and those of others. I believe that learning dispositions (such as getting involved, expressing a thought or idea, taking responsibility, persisting with difficulty and taking an interest) are embedded in the way that Kyah interacts within her environment and in the open and reciprocal relationships she shares.

Learning Story 1.2 The Artists Among Us!

Knowledges and Learning Dispositions

We have described learning as a complex intermingling of *stores* of knowledge[4] with *stores* of disposition. Something similar to this intermingling has been described as *adaptive expertise*: 'that is, the development of flexible knowledge and dispositions that facilitate effective navigation across varied settings and tasks' (Nasir, Rosebery, Warren and Lee, 2006: 490). We look to storying to reflect this complexity.

Dispositions act as an affective and cultural filter for the development of increasingly complex knowledges and skills. They can adhere to a place beyond the home, as a *dispositional milieu*, encouraging or constraining the exploration and construction of new knowledge or ideas. Participating in a new place – an early childhood centre or a school – will usually include taking up that community's perspectives on: the relevance of the knowledge to the world of the child; the opportunity to risk being wrong; the positioning of the learner as one who initiates or one who follows; the enthusiasm with which new ideas and questions are received and explored; and the opportunity to discuss what might be.

Learning dispositions were included as outcomes in the 1996 New Zealand early childhood curriculum. By late 2007, a new New Zealand school curriculum included 'key competencies', influenced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) work in this area (Rychen and Salganik, 2001, 2003). The key competencies are: thinking, using language, symbols and texts; managing self; relating to others; and participating and contributing. Their definition indicates that these are dispositional outcomes:

> More complex than skills, the competencies draw also on knowledge, attitudes, and values in ways that lead to action. They are not separate or stand-alone. They are the key to learning in every learning area …
>
> The competencies continue to develop over time, shaped by interactions with people, places, ideas and things. Students need to be challenged and supported to develop them in contexts that are increasingly wide-ranging and complex. (Ministry of Education, 2007: 12)

School teachers began to reflect on what these might look like and how they might teach and assess them. Rose Hipkins (2009) writes about the way in which key competencies have introduced new dimensions to learning outcomes and environments: 'meta' knowing; fostering a disposition to learn; empowering students to become experts on their own learning; and rich learning contexts. She adds:

> Over time, students develop personal stories about themselves as learners. Assessment needs to help them build coherent narratives about their identities as people who can practise, persist, and overcome obstacles to immediate learning success. (p. 5)

She suggests that as schools explore ways to teach dispositional outcomes they will need to rethink familiar assessment strategies, and consider newer assessment strategies such as the following: learning logs or journals, learning

stories, portfolios and rich tasks. Yvonne S., a teacher writing some reflective comments during a research project exploring how to teach these dispositional outcomes, commented that she wanted to:

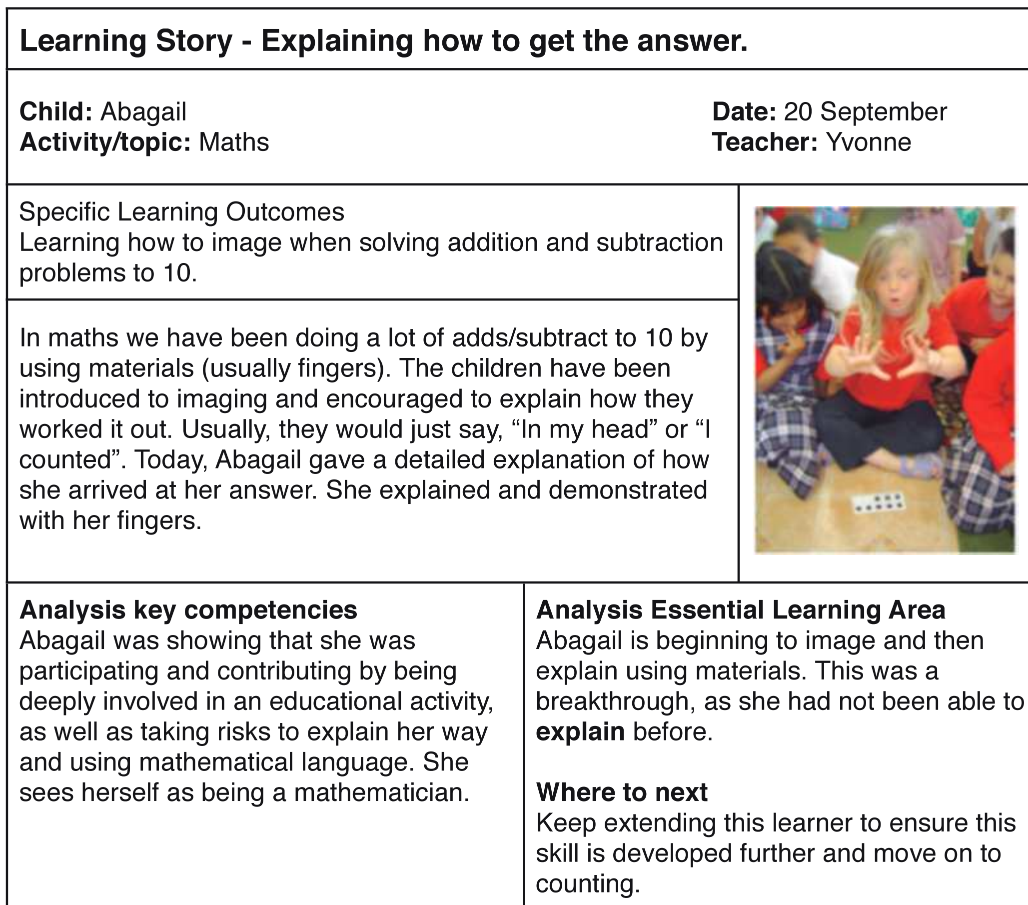
> explore how the draft Key Competencies could be integrated into the daily programme, and assessed, without creating extra workload for teachers already struggling with an overloaded curriculum.

In her classroom, portfolios or folders included the children's reading and writing and mathematics progress, and also included Learning Stories that illustrate their progress with the key competencies. The portfolios (sometimes called 'folders' or 'files') for these children included Group Stories, Personalised Group Stories and Individual Stories. Yvonne's Individual Stories, true to the dispositional nature of the Key Competencies, often recorded an event when the learner *chose* their activity. For instance, an Individual Story was written about Abby who initiated a role-playing game in which she was a librarian, issuing books to a small group of willing participants. Yvonne writes: 'This is the first time Abby has instigated an activity and taken a lead role.' A self-comment by Abby soon after this reads, 'I was shy when I started school … [now] I put my hand up ….' In a Personalised Group Story in which the class were invited to see what they could find out about clouds (entitled *Budding Researchers*), there is a photo of Abby presenting back to the class, with the photo caption 'I did a Google search'.

Another individual story is included as Learning Story 1.3. In Yvonne's and a number of other school classrooms, the Learning Stories are analysed in a 'split-screen' manner (Claxton, Chambers, Powell and Lucas, 2011: 92–96), noting both the knowledge (in this case the school curriculum 'Learning Area': mathematics) and the disposition (in this case the school curriculum key competency: participating and contributing). There are a number of aspects to this short story. Yvonne notes the specific outcome in the curriculum that this story refers to, and she reports that Abagail gave a *detailed explanation* of how she arrived at the answer: explaining and demonstrating with her fingers. She points out why this is a significant episode: Abagail had not been able to explain before. The analysis of the dispositional key competency includes pointing out that she was 'taking risks' to explain. She suggests at the end that Abagail 'sees herself as a mathematician'.

The Chapters of the Book

This chapter has introduced four themes of learner identity and aligned to these themes were four processes in which learner identities in early education are constructed. These themes will weave their way through this book. They provide some of the theoretical assumptions that lead us to the topic of Chapter 2: Why story? That chapter will set out an argument for stories as assessments: consequences of assessment for learning; assessment practice as narrative research, and the development of Learning Stories. Each of the



Learning Story - Explaining how to get the answer.

Child: Abagail
Activity/topic: Maths

Date: 20 September
Teacher: Yvonne

Specific Learning Outcomes
Learning how to image when solving addition and subtraction problems to 10.

In maths we have been doing a lot of adds/subtract to 10 by using materials (usually fingers). The children have been introduced to imaging and encouraged to explain how they worked it out. Usually, they would just say, "In my head" or "I counted". Today, Abagail gave a detailed explanation of how she arrived at her answer. She explained and demonstrated with her fingers.

Analysis key competencies
Abagail was showing that she was participating and contributing by being deeply involved in an educational activity, as well as taking risks to explain her way and using mathematical language. She sees herself as being a mathematician.

Analysis Essential Learning Area
Abagail is beginning to image and then explain using materials. This was a breakthrough, as she had not been able to **explain** before.

Where to next
Keep extending this learner to ensure this skill is developed further and move on to counting.

Learning Story 1.3 Explaining How to Get the Answer

following four chapters focuses on one of the four themes, examines the ways in which narrative assessment can contribute to this, and illustrates the ways in which, over the last ten years, Learning Stories have responded to the demands and challenges of: dialogue (Chapter 3), connection (Chapter 4), recognising (Chapter 5) and appropriating (Chapter 6). Chapter 7 considers each of these themes as a balancing and privileging task that will continue to characterise the ongoing quest by the teaching profession to develop assessment practices that work in the interest of education for all.

Notes

1 This frame of 'ready, willing and able' is a key feature of the 2001 book on Learning Stories, introduced there on p. 9 and used as a framework for analysing the learning (generally on p. 24 and for a specific project on p. 124). This book suggests that any one of the ready–willing–able triad can be foregrounded in a particular story. It is a version of the framework for critical thinking by Lauren Resnick (1987: 40–42) and for 'thinking dispositions' by David Perkins, Eileen Jay and Shari Tishman (1993) at Harvard's Project Zero. Also from Project Zero, Ron Ritchhart (2002) has further

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expanded on these ideas in a book entitled *Intellectual character: What it is, why it matters, and how to get it*. Ritchhart's book translated 'being able' into knowledge and skills. In this book we have written about the close intermingling of disposition (being ready and willing: the inclination and the attunement to opportunity) and knowledge, thinking of the knowledge as knowing-how as well as knowing-what, both *subject-based* as well as *disposition-based* (for instance, knowing ways to invite others to join in is central to the disposition to work with others). This follows from a project where, with other researchers, we followed case study children from early childhood into school: *Learning in the making: Disposition and design in early education* (Carr, Smith, Duncan, Jones, Lee and Marshall 2010). This book includes a chapter entitled 'Dispositions and positions'. This combination has enabled us to write about split-screen analysis, useful for teachers in school who must clearly assess subject-based knowledge. The notion of 'split-screen' pedagogy has been introduced to teachers at professional development workshops by Guy Claxton, and we have extended it here to refer to assessment. See Claxton, Chambers, Powell and Lucas (2011) for a discussion in detail.

2 New Zealand, Ministry of Education (1996). Other sources of information about this curriculum include a 2003 edited book by Joce Nuttall, *Weaving Te Whāriki*, and a chapter on Te Whāriki by Anne B. Smith (2011) in a book entitled *Theories and approaches to learning in the early years*, edited by Linda Miller and Linda Pound.

3 Noticing, recognising and responding has been used as a definition of assessment in the first of the 20 books in the series *Kei Tua o te Pae Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars*. Together with Carolyn Jones, we compiled these books and wrote the text: Carr, Lee and Jones (2004, 2007, 2009). In Book One (2004: 6) we say:

> In this project, assessment for learning is described as 'noticing, recognising and responding'. This description comes from Bronwen Cowie's work on assessment in science classrooms (2000). It was useful to teachers in her study, and we have found it useful as well.

We have described these three processes as progressive filters: teachers notice a great deal as they work with children, and they recognise some of what they notice as 'learning'. They will respond to a selection of what they recognise. Since then we have added two more filters: recording and re-visiting. We will refer to this series of booklets on several occasions in this book. Books 1 to 9 were published in 2004; Books 10 to 15 in 2007, and Books 16 to 20 in 2009. These are available on the New Zealand Ministry of Education website at: http://www.lead.ece.govt.nz/EducateHome/learning/curriculumAndLearning/Assessmentforlearning/KeiTuaotePae.aspx. More details on the development of Kei Tua o te Pae and Te Whāriki are in the first issue of the journal *Assessment matters* (Carr, 2009), and an interesting book on noticing is John Mason's *Researching your own practice: The discipline of noticing* (2002).

4 In this book we have used the expression 'stores' of knowledge and 'stores' of dispositions in preference to 'funds'. In the 2001 book on Learning Stories, the 'being able' part of the dispositional triad 'being ready, willing and able' was described as 'skills and funds of knowledge' (see especially pp. 123–4), and in a project where we researched the children's views about their own learning with teachers in nine early childhood centres, the expression 'funds of disposition' was suggested to parallel 'funds of knowledge'. However, 'funds of knowledge' has a special meaning in the literature: 'We use the term "funds of knowledge" to refer to these historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being' (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 1992: 133; also in González, Moll and Amanti, 2005: 169); this expression has come to refer to the knowledge and skills that children bring from home to school (and by extrapolation, to pre-school as well).