



Sustaining friendships, relationships, and rights at school

Jude MacArthur

To cite this article: Jude MacArthur (2013) Sustaining friendships, relationships, and rights at school, International Journal of Inclusive Education, 17:8, 793-811, DOI: [10.1080/13603116.2011.602526](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2011.602526)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2011.602526>



Published online: 19 Jan 2012.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1454



Citing articles: 4 View citing articles [↗](#)

Sustaining friendships, relationships, and rights at school

Jude MacArthur*

School of Education, Massey University, Albany, New Zealand

(Received 16 September 2010; final version received 18 October 2010)

Research that highlights disabled students' perspectives often describes experiences of exclusion, isolation, loneliness, and bullying, and difficulties finding friends. Within this broader social context, students' rights are placed at risk. Using examples from New Zealand research, this paper explores the social experiences of disabled students at school within a rights-based framework, and with reference to the goals and guidance of the United Nations Convention on the Child; the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities; the *New Zealand Disability Strategy*; and the *New Zealand Curriculum*. The notions of 'freedom from discrimination' and 'participation and belonging' arising out of these documents are used to explore the contexts that shape disabled children's social experiences at school. Social exclusion is associated with children's experiences of discrimination and barriers to participation. It is suggested that social participation will be enhanced when schools challenge exclusion and develop socio-cultural contexts that are influenced by inclusive values and an appreciation of disabled students' experiences, views, and preferences to be included as part of the group of all students at school.

Keywords: disability; school; social relationships; children's rights; discrimination; participation

Introduction

Friendships and supportive social relationships are critical in the lives of all children and young people, contributing to their development, their learning, and their overall quality of life. They are cited as 'the essence of human existence' (Meyer and Bevan-Brown 2005, 168), and as essential foundations for all students' social and emotional development and learning (Alton-Lee 2003; George and Browne 2000; Heiman 2000). The 'vision' of the *New Zealand Curriculum* recognises the social nature of learning by stating that young people should be 'confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners' (Ministry of Education 2007, 7). 'Confidence' relates in part to a positive sense of self-identity, and to resilience; 'connectedness' emphasises being able to relate well to others, being effective users of communication tools, and being a member of local and international communities; and 'actively involved' refers to students' participation in a range of life contexts.

Children and young people themselves are quick to point out why friends are important. In Lyle's (2002) New Zealand study, a close friend of Amy, a 10-year-old with a disability, emphasised the mutual and reciprocal nature of their friendship at school and

*Email: teamaloo@xtra.co.nz

beyond the school gates: 'If we didn't have friends, we'd all be lonely... We like helping each other ... Amy helps me when I'm sad' (33).

Parents also acknowledge the broad positive effects of a good social life for their disabled sons and daughters, and the subsequent potential for positive long-term effects on societal attitudes (Koster et al. 2009). The opportunity to grow up in the community and to enjoy social participation with their peers is one of the main motives for parents choosing regular education (Kolb and Hanley-Maxwell 2003; Nakken and Pijl 2002).

Despite the need for all children to have positive social experiences, research in New Zealand and elsewhere notes difficulties in this area for disabled children and young people within regular education. Disabled students are often described as vulnerable to being ignored and rejected, bullied, and isolated at school (Davis and Watson 2001; Kearney 2009; Koster et al. 2009; MacArthur and Gaffney 2001; MacArthur et al. 2007b; Morina Diez 2010; Ward 2008), and as facing difficulties finding friends and developing personal relationships with their peers (Matheson, Olsen, and Weisner 2007). Paradoxically, exclusion is keenly felt in community schools, the very place where disabled students and their families are actively seeking a sense of belonging and inclusion. Segregation, barriers to inclusion, and discrimination are described as typical markers of disabled students' social experiences at school (Connor and Ferri 2007; Kearney 2009; MacArthur et al. 2007b; Morina Diez 2010). Thus the experience of having a place in 'an authentically inclusive social and academic community' where schools have changed so that all young people feel 'safe and welcome' remains elusive for too many students (Morina Diez 2010, 173).

In seeking to understand these challenges, one approach has been to target disabled students' 'social skills' as the focus for change, prioritising these over academic learning or contextual changes in the classroom. Yet a critique of this approach points to the inherent pathologising of disabled students, with its underlying assumptions that all disabled students are the same and have personal 'problems' which are attributed to their perceived 'differences' (Koster et al. 2009; MacArthur 2005). The emergence of the disability movement and the social model of disability have contributed to a more complex analysis of disabled students' lives at school, shifting the focus from 'fixing' disabled students so they can 'fit' into an unchanged school environment, to developing a better understanding of school contexts in which friendships develop (e.g. Davis and Watson 2001; Kearney 2009; Lyle 2002; MacArthur et al. 2007b; Morina Diez 2010; Shah and Priestley 2009; Singh and Ghai 2009; Ward 2008). Much of this research prioritises disabled students' own perspectives about school, and provides a starting point for informed discussion about how social exclusion might be understood, and how social participation can be nurtured in schools.

On the basis of research that focuses on disabled children's and young people's perspectives, Morris (2002) has suggested that schools may pay insufficient attention to friendships:

There is little recognition in current policy and practice that, from children's point of view, friendship is the main motivation for going to school and that difficulties with making and maintaining friendships are a key barrier to getting the most out of education. (13)

Morris (2002) stressed that a child and young person's social environment involves more than just a one-to-one relationship with parents, teachers or peers. It includes being an active and valued member of a group in settings that are inclusive and culturally relevant. Schools can become places where there are opportunities to experience

and participate in a variety of affirming social relationships, and where exclusion is recognised and denounced.

To understand how schools and school systems can work towards inclusion, there is an imperative to look closely at the social dimensions of disabled children's and young people's lives. Using examples from New Zealand research, this paper explores the social experiences of disabled students within a rights-based framework. It also explores these experiences from a contextual viewpoint that highlights the environments in which students seek to have friends and be included. To ensure that disabled students participate socially at school, the paper looks to a greater appreciation of the views and experiences of disabled students themselves as an essential starting point.

A rights context for understanding students' social experiences

The rights of children and young people are at the heart of advances towards inclusive education. Schools are places where children and young people spend much of their time, and as state institutions they have responsibilities to acknowledge children's rights to access all aspects of society; participation; citizenship; civil rights; social justice; empowerment; and self-determination (Connor and Ferri 2007; Gordon and Morton 2008; Higgins, MacArthur, and Kelly 2009). Education is 'critical to the development of human potential, to the enjoyment of the full range of human rights and to respect for the rights of others' (New Zealand Human Rights Commission 2004, 68), and can act as a protector of children's rights. The fostering of respectful, equitable and supportive relationships in schools is important because it is through these relationships with others that children's rights are exercised (Davis and Watson 2001).

In New Zealand, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) (United Nations General Assembly 1989); the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (United Nations 2006); the *New Zealand Disability Strategy* (Minister for Disability Issues 2001); and the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education 2007) provide a rights-based context for critiquing disabled students' social experiences, and for thinking about how schools can ensure that disabled students fully participate, both academically and socially. States that have ratified the United Nations Conventions (as New Zealand has) have agreed to ensure their current and future legislation and policies are consistent with the Conventions' articles.

Two key rights articulated across the Conventions, the *Disability Strategy* and the *New Zealand Curriculum* are used in this paper to critique disabled students' social experiences at school. These are (1) freedom from discrimination, and (2) participation and belonging. Consistent with the social model of disability's foundations within the *Disability Strategy* and UNCRPD, barriers to students' social participation are also highlighted in an effort to advance thinking about sustainable changes in education that promote disabled students' social participation.

Freedom from discrimination

The UNCROC establishes the provision, protection and participation rights of all children. Protection rights include being safe from abuse, discrimination and injustice. Under Article 2, State parties agree to respect and ensure children's rights without discrimination of any kind. Schools may consider the extent to which rights are respected for all children and young people; whether there is alertness to discrimination in the

classroom and school grounds; and whether values and practices protect students from discrimination and support them in their efforts to counter discrimination. The UNCRPD sets out the rights of disabled people and a code of implementation for governments (United Nations 2006). Ratifying governments agree to ensure that disabled people have opportunities, choices and rights on the same basis as non-disabled people, and do not experience any discrimination on the basis of their impairments.

The *New Zealand Disability Strategy* echoes the concerns of both Conventions, and emphasises non-discrimination and full community participation for disabled people. It aims for an inclusive society where ‘no child is denied access to their local regular school because of their impairment’ (16), and where quality education is provided in regular schools. The *New Zealand Curriculum* is also concerned with ensuring that that the curriculum is non-sexist, non-racist and *non-discriminatory*.

Participation and belonging

‘Participation’ is well established in the inclusive education literature as a key principle that involves being with and collaborating with others; being actively engaged and involved in making decisions; and accepting people for who they are by recognising and valuing a variety of identities (Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006). It is a central idea in discussions about the rights of children and disabled people and it is linked to important ideas about social justice. Using Fraser’s (1995, 2000) interpretation of social justice as comprising both a redistribution of resources and social recognition, Higgins, MacArthur and Kelly (2009) advance a recognitive justice framework for thinking about disability and inclusive education, noting the constructive emphasis on a positive regard for diversity; full participation by disabled children and young people in decision-making that affects them; and providing opportunities for disabled students to exercise their capability and agency. Within the context of inclusive education, Fraser’s (2001) notion of ‘parity of participation’ (29) means that justice is advanced when social arrangements in schools permit all students to interact with one another as peers. Resources are redistributed to ensure all students have a voice, and cultural values within schools promote equal respect and social esteem for all.

Both the UNCROC and UNCRPD highlight full participation in the community as a human right. Participation rights in the UNCROC are based on recognition of children as full human beings with rights, dignity and identities that should be respected. Children have the right to be consulted and taken account of; to physical integrity; to access information; to freedom of speech and opinion; and to participate in and challenge decisions made on their behalf (Smith 2007). It is important for schools to continually ask, ‘To what extent do disabled students contribute to processes and discussions about their experiences at school, and are their ideas and concerns heard and acted upon?’

Inclusive education is named in Article 24 of the UNCRPD as a goal in working towards an inclusive community. Governments agree to ensure that disabled children and young people can access an inclusive, quality, and free primary and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live. Support within regular education to facilitate access to the curriculum is included under this article, along with teacher education in the area of inclusion. Children and young people’s social participation at school is addressed as governments and schools agree to ensure that effective supports are provided in environments that maximise academic and social development and enhance a sense of belonging in the peer group.

The *New Zealand Disability Strategy* aspires for disabled children and youth to lead ‘full and active lives’, affirming their rights to ‘a good future and to participate in education, relationships, leisure, work, and political processes; facilitate their active participation in the community’ (11). The Strategy encourages schools to consider the extent to which diversity is valued; whether education enhances social and academic participation for all students; and whether barriers to the achievement of these goals are identified.

Children’s rights are also established in the set of underlying principles of the *New Zealand Curriculum*, which includes, for example, high expectations for all students, the Treaty of Waitangi, cultural diversity, inclusion, and community engagement. Equally, key values to be encouraged, modelled and explored through the curriculum are rights-based and include (amongst others) diversity; equity through fairness and social justice; community and participation for the common good; ecological sustainability; integrity; and respect for oneself, others and human rights. The curriculum aims to ensure that students’ identities, language, abilities, and talents are recognised and affirmed, and that their learning needs are addressed.

The term ‘social participation’ is used in the present paper to embrace the social dimension of inclusion, and is described by Koster et al. (2009) as the ‘...presence of positive social contact/interaction between (disabled) children and their classmates; acceptance of them by their classmates; social relationships/friendships between them and their classmates; and the pupils’ perception that they are accepted by their classmates’ (135).

Research reported in this paper

This paper explores data from four projects undertaken in New Zealand between 2001 and 2008. In a qualitative project with 11 students, ranging in age from 7 to 15, disabled students and their families talked about bullying and friendships at school (MacArthur and Gaffney 2001). A second project involved a series of case studies of the school experiences of students with physical disabilities at primary and secondary school (MacArthur et al. 2007a). An ethnographic project followed the school experiences of nine disabled students as they transitioned from primary to secondary school and focused on the impact of students’ school experiences on their identity and is referred to in this paper as ‘the identity study’ (MacArthur et al. 2007b). A fourth project involved an action research project with teachers in a rural Area School for 5- to 18-year-olds (MacArthur and Higgins 2007). This project examined the perspectives of students who moved school frequently, and used these as a framework to support responsive teaching practices.

The projects uphold a social model of disability that shifts the focus from changing disabled students to understanding the school contexts in which children and young people learn and have friends. In this regard, the spotlight is on the everyday practices of teachers and on students’ experiences of social exclusion and social participation in regular schools and classrooms. All projects underwent ethical review. No real names of people or places are used in this paper, and any potentially identifying features have been changed or removed.

Social participation and discrimination

Bullying

While the *New Zealand curriculum* aims to affirm student identities, disabled students and students in our research who moved school frequently identified bullying as one of

the things they most disliked about school. Students indicated that schools' bullying procedures were not always effective, with one child suggesting that more attention should be paid to bullying rather than to the 'little things' that concerned some teachers. In her view, school would be better if it had more people and 'kids were made to be nice and not bully people around' (MacArthur and Higgins 2007, 44).

Bullying is widely documented as an issue of concern for disabled students, who are estimated to be more than twice as likely to be bullied when compared with their peers who do not have disabilities (MacArthur 2005). Forty percent of parents in Kearney's (2009) New Zealand research, for example, said that bullying was one of the significant experiences that resulted in exclusion at school for their disabled sons and daughters. Disturbingly, Kearney's research also described bullying by some teachers, including humiliation, shouting, and encouraging other children to bully their disabled peers. Bullying is often focused on impairment and can impose an unwanted identity that leaves disabled children and young people feeling they are not part of the peer group. It is not surprising, then, that some students view impairment as a negative aspect of their sense of self-identity. Eight-year-old Tom, for example, described his worst experience at school as:

Getting picked on. . . the bullies (who) push me over and hit me in the head with a skipping rope. . . a girl threatened to hit me in the back if I didn't give her my fish and chips . . . I was kicked and punched in the back all assembly by girls . . . I ended up crying. (MacArthur and Gaffney 2001, 20)

Tom's mother explained that he had been tied up with skipping ropes and flax, and pushed and shoved. Tom was aware that his impairment made him a target, and appeared to take this on board as an aspect of his self-identity:

Interviewer: Have you got any ideas why some kids pick on other kids?

Tom: Probably it's because I'm a disability and probably because I don't know what really to do and that sort of situation because these kids are in big gangs. (21)

Scott, at the age of 15, described lunchtimes as 'an eternity', because other students '...continued teasing and harassing me. . . It's quite offensive, some of it. . .'. Scott found the bullying 'intolerable' and had tried to deal with it himself, but largely unsuccessfully. He felt that bullying was directed at people who were 'different', and he turned attention to his peer group as the source of the problem, saying, 'We've got an absence of tolerance'. (24).

The critical link between children's social relationships and their learning is illustrated by the secondary school experiences of 13-year-old Emma in the identity study. Emma was keen to participate in class like her peers, but speaking was difficult for her so she had opted out of class discussions because she was worried about being teased about her voice. She explained, 'I don't really want to (speak in class). People might make fun'. In the same study, Jack was teased at secondary school because of the high pitch of his voice. The teasing often occurred below the teacher's radar and was clearly an issue of concern for Jack because he had identified a learning goal for himself to 'speak like the other kids'.

Some teachers may overlook the challenges that are faced by children and young people as they try to participate and learn in class. Teachers are not always aware of bullying, and students themselves are not always equipped with strategies for dealing effectively with these difficult social situations. We observed 13-year-old Jack being teased in the corridor before class, then enter the classroom agitated and unable to focus on his

work. Occasionally Jack's behaviour would deteriorate to the point where he was asked by the teacher to leave the room under the watchful and often amused gaze of his peers, while the perpetrator of the bullying remained in class.

These examples demonstrate the need for teachers to be 'switched on' to students' social experiences and to appreciate that discrimination through bullying is a reality that requires effective adult intervention and support. Some teachers in our research recognised that certain students, like Emma for example, were reluctant to participate in class, and actively encouraged their participation by organising students into small discussion groups, or by seating disabled students alongside pro-social peers who were likely to include them. Where teachers demonstrated an awareness of students' social experiences, and modelled a valuing of diversity in this way, we observed other students interacting with, and taking an interest in their disabled peers.

Isolation

Social isolation at school, particularly during unstructured break times, was a common experience for disabled primary and secondary students in our research. Some sat alone at lunchtimes, while others played with much younger peers or favoured going to the library. At primary school, disabled students told us that the library was not a place where their peers chose to go, as they would most likely be playing games in the playground or playing sports. At secondary school we observed a much wider range of students using the library at lunchtimes, and disabled students in these contexts had more opportunities to socialise with their peers through shared activities relating to books, magazines, games and computers.

Some secondary students who attended regular classes, went to their school's 'Special Unit' or 'Learning Support Centre' (a separate classroom or building for disabled students) at lunchtime. Thirteen-year-old Emma in the identity study explained that this would give her friends (in class) a break from her, suggesting that she viewed herself as a burden to her classmates. Some disabled students described their school's unit as a 'safe' place, and teachers could also reinforce this idea through their comments and through structures that associated units with student safety. For example, Simon's new secondary school initially required him to eat his lunch in the school's Learning Support Unit. During our observations, Simon refused to sit next to Nick, another disabled student:

Researcher: Why do you have a problem sitting next to Nick?

Simon: 'Cos he's annoying

Researcher: Do you like having lunch in here?

Simon: No, it's boring and I'd rather be outside with the rest of the school. I feel isolated in here.

Simon did not identify with other disabled students, and he eschewed any disability-related labels. Teachers constructed the unit as 'a safe place' and, in doing so, placed the school grounds in the category of 'an unsafe place', leaving Simon to negotiate conflicting ideas about 'where he belonged' and where he wanted to be ('outside with the rest of the school'), and he resisted school structures, like this one, that discriminated against him and made him feel different.

Disabled children could also experience school playgrounds as dangerous places. Eleven-year-old Ian spent his morning tea break in the 'safe' space of the special

unit, away from his classmates in his regular year seven class, and at lunchtime he went to the library. He felt there was a good chance that he would be hit with balls or knocked over in the playground, and said it would make his life easier if other students had a better understanding of his physical impairment and the effects of this on his school life:

They need to know more, even if I am not in their classroom. They need to know what, like not in their faces, just a bit like, disabilities. . . the fact that I can't just walk through anything. (MacArthur et al. 2007a, 131)

These examples suggest that schools could enhance social participation through a critical audit of their environments to ensure that the spaces students value are pro-social and safe for everyone. Students have some good advice for their schools in this regard. Simon indicated that the approach taken by his teachers prevented opportunities for social participation by separating him from the peer group he wished to be part of. Ian, on the other hand, had a valuable perspective on the conditions that might improve his social participation at school, but these had yet to be shared with his teachers.

Article 2 of UNCROC points to schools' responsibilities to provide children and young people with protection from discrimination, but while teachers in our research were usually quick to notice students' isolation, this was not always followed up with considerate adult support. For example, Harry (aged 16) attended regular classes at his secondary school and studied academic subjects. He had just one friend (a boy who attended a different school), and spent his lunchtimes in the school's Special Unit with other disabled students. His teachers were aware of his isolation and acknowledged that sometimes friendships need to be supported and mediated by adults at school and not be left to chance. Nonetheless, no plans were put in place to improve his experience. Harry felt that his school sidelined disabled students because they rarely filled culturally valued positions of leadership and responsibility, and he suggested that a key to positive social participation for disabled students lay in the development of an inclusive and equitable school culture that recognised diversity:

They should have, like, people with disabilities in, like, prefect roles, like that, head girl or boy or something like that. You kind of feel left out, like all the popular students in that year get a role and we don't. (MacArthur et al. 2007a, 151)

Friendships were also a high priority for Harry's parents who were keenly aware of his need for an ordinary teenage life. His mother dreamed of the time when he would:

. . .leave on Friday afternoon and come back, you know, Sunday night, 3 o'clock in the morning, something like that. . . that would be great wouldn't it? (MacArthur et al. 2007a, 151)

Social participation and a sense of belonging

Participation and feeling different

Disabled students in our research have voiced a strong preference to be viewed as part of the group of all children and young people at school, yet many have commented that their sense of belonging is challenged by the negative reactions of others and by school structures that separate them from their peers and make them feel different in negative ways. In our research on the school experiences of students with physical disabilities, 11-year-old Ian said that he felt 'different' at primary school because he was the only

student to use a wheelchair and others treated him as having minority status. In contrast, his next school had a special unit, which he and other disabled students attended for physiotherapy and occupational therapy. He valued the sense of belonging experienced in this school, which he attributed in part to having peers with disabilities:

... at the other school I was the only one with a walker, even though everything was quite accessible for me, but I was the only one with wheelchairs or walkers or anything, and I know (at this school) I won't be looked at like I am completely from, from Planet Mars or something like that. (MacArthur et al. 2007a, 130)

Nonetheless, Ian described himself as participating on the edges of playground activities at both schools:

I am not a person that likes to play. I sort of like to hang around, maybe talk to a few people and sort of watch other people do whatever they want to do. (130)

Students also disliked any school structures that made them feel different, such as withdrawal from class for specialist support, and teacher aides who sit too close and do not provide them with the space they need to be part of the class and engage with peers. In the identity study, for example, Jacob at age 13 felt 'happy and unhappy' with his teacher aides, saying that '...they help me do my work, but they can get on my nerves'. His maths teacher noted that Jacob did not hang out with the other kids at lunchtime, '... but then again, he interacts so much with the teacher aide in class, so there is not the interaction with the other students in class really. I don't see him even talking to the other students in the class'. Joanne, at the same age, explained that while she felt equal with her peers, ability grouping and withdrawal from her regular class for specialist support threatened this view of herself and made her feel different:

Joanne: I feel like I am an equal, and that sets me down a bit like thinking, 'Oh well, I have to be in this group because I am different'.

Interviewer: Would you rather just be in the other class?

Joanne: Yeah, just in the normal homeroom and like in the other reading group.

Interviewer: Do you get any chances to say that to your teachers?

Joanne: No, not really.

Disabled children and young people's experiences of being separated over time can accumulate to establish their impairment as a negative aspect of their sense of self. In his first year at secondary school, Luke, for example, refused to participate in Special Olympics, saying, 'People will think I'm retarded' (MacArthur et al. 2007b, 28). His caregiver explained that Luke's comments came from a school history in which he had received very strong messages from adults and children that he was different and held a minority status within the peer group.

Feeling different is not an experience limited to disabled students. In our study with students who move frequently between schools, students said that it was difficult to be socially included because their small town was 'real tight knit and hard to get into sort of circles' (MacArthur and Higgins 2007, 6). A parent in this study observed that feeling different originated in a non-inclusive community, 'We are the locals. You are the outsider'. Like Scott above, she suggested that tolerance was needed, and that teachers could mediate exclusion by teaching and modelling inclusive values that encourage an understanding of diversity and of individual students' circumstances:

Teach tolerance. Teach acceptance, empathy, I don't think they are taught enough of that to be honest. (MacArthur and Higgins 2007, 76)

James (aged 12) had attended nine schools, and felt that he was an outsider at school because his interest in soccer (football) diverged from the school's strong rugby culture:

Interviewer: What you are telling me is you don't have any really close friends at school, would that be true?

James: Yeah. I am different.

Interviewer: Why are you different, what is it that makes you different.

James: I don't know.

Interviewer: You don't know but you feel different from the other kids do you?

James: Yeah, I try to fit in but ... it's not that easy ... I don't know, I find it hard to fit in because I don't like rugby. I find it hard to fit in because I am not like them.

Interviewer: It is just the way it is.

James: Yeah, it is just the way it is.

James conceded that his teacher was trying to do something to help him with his friendships, but there had been limited progress. In this study, we worked with teachers to prioritise friendships through a focus on children's strengths and interests. James' social life took a turn for the better when a teacher with an interest in soccer introduced a series of lunchtime soccer games, providing James with opportunities to participate in a context where he could share his expertise with his peers.

To participate, you have to be present

Students in our research projects have told us that they do not like the way 'special education' support requires them to associate with others on the basis of their impairment, and separates them from their peers in regular classes. These approaches are viewed as stigmatising, causing disabled students to miss out on challenging academic activities, and interfering with friendships. In the project that explored the school experiences of students with physical disabilities, for example, Ian was in a regular primary class learning academic subjects, but on one of the days we observed at his school he spent less than two hours with his class. His school day looked like this:

9.00–10.00: In class

Interval: Goes to the special unit

10.20–10.45: Physiotherapy out of class

10.45–11.30: The class is swimming but the pool is inaccessible. Ian goes to the special unit.

11.30–12.00: Reading with the class

Lunchtime: Goes to the library

1.00–2.15: 'Wheelchair Group' – for safety and awareness, problem solving, social skills

2.15: Back to class. The rest of the class are at assembly so Ian reads until they return

2.25–2.40: Works in a small group with classmates on a project

2.40: Leaves school early to catch a taxi home.

Presence is a necessary precursor to participation, and Ian's school could consider whether asking Ian to leave his class and peer group (where he wanted to be) in order to teach him 'social skills' in a specialist 'wheelchair group' would enhance his participation and belonging. Ian worried about missing important schoolwork, a concern reiterated by his teacher. Although Ian accepted that physiotherapy was part

of his school day, he felt it should be completely separate from his class time, and he declared that:

It's better to sit in a wheelchair and know your maths than to walk. (MacArthur et al. 2007a, 131)

Similarly, 10-year-old Alan in this study left his class periodically for reading, mobility, and therapy, and while he said he did not really mind going out of the class, there were times when he would rather stay, but, 'I have to put up with it':

Interviewer: What would you rather do?

Alan: Stay in the classroom.

Interviewer: If you were doing something fun in the classroom and you didn't really want to leave, would you say that?

Alan: Yes, but I would just have to do it. (246)

His class teacher initially described him as:

...quite happy to go out of class. . . the only time he complains. . . is when something quite exciting is happening, he's reluctant to leave. . . but he understands he has to do things. (246)

But on reflection she conceded that:

...if he is missing out on something that everyone else is doing. . . the kids see him missing out on something exciting, and I think he feels different. (246)

These examples raise questions about the extent to which the boys' rights to express their views and to have these considered are upheld at school. Both had difficulties building friendships, but issues of social isolation and a lack of friendships are difficult to address when students are constantly in and out of class for therapy and other 'specialist' approaches that take them away from the peer group they are working so hard to be part of.

In contrast, some schools in our research supported student participation by adopting approaches that focused on keeping students together; providing support for social participation and friendships; and enhancing a sense of belonging. In the study described above, primary school staff in eight-year-old Caitlin's school formed a 'playground team' to support any children who may be isolated. The team met regularly to discuss students' social experiences and share ideas for student support. Each day a member of the team sat in comfortable spaces where children could join them, and adults used this opportunity to include children in games and interactions with others. The school principal saw this as a deliberately pro-social option:

Kids can sit there and chat away if they want. And they (the staff) are free. It's a good place to be. It's a safe place anyone can go to. And from there they can be redirected to organised games. (212)

In the identity study, the Special Needs Coordinator in a secondary school emphasised that the school's approach was to actively encourage relationships between students and avoid any structures that could stigmatise and separate students:

I don't like special units. . . we've tried streaming for a top group and a bottom group and it was disastrous. . . it made the kids unhappy being identified. . . We try to keep kids in the (heart of the) school, it is a philosophy we have. . . if students require lunchtime support

we try to employ a senior student to look after them rather than an adult, because the senior student will introduce them to their own peer group.

Disabled students in this school were observed to spend their break times in the same places as other students, and to have friends.

Participation and access

Children and young people frequently describe poor physical access as a barrier to social participation at school because it prevents their involvement in student-centred spaces. In the study on the school experiences of students with physical disabilities, 10-year-old Sophie said the best thing about school was the new library:

Sophie: We've got a new library that's accessible... before it was a building that had steps. But I can't get into the hall at playtime and lunchtime without people pushing my chair.

Researcher: What would the best school in the world look like?

Sophie: Accessible. (MacArthur et al. 2007a, 205)

Access was a major issue for Sophie, who said she had to 'just watch other people in the playground' rather than participating because some parts of the playground were inaccessible. The issue was perhaps bigger than some adults in the school realised, because Sophie said she would have liked the newly built administration block and school office to be accessible for her, 'cos then you can do the same things as the other kids' (205). When Sophie won a medal in a sports competition, she had to pull up in her wheelchair next to the staffroom window to share her good news with her teachers.

Another family in this study decided reluctantly to enrol their son in a primary school with a special unit half an hour away from their home by taxi, because of both poor attitudes and restricted access at local schools. While they would have preferred their son Paul to remain with his peers in his local community, Paul's mother said:

... (I went to) all my local schools. Responses were very mixed as you can imagine, from reasonably welcoming, to 'This is a very small school and the cost of putting in a ramp for your child if he went to this school would be three or four hundred dollars more than we've got here'. (129)

Students with physical disabilities also described being unable to join in with games in the playground because the games were too fast, and involved too much running around. Parents worried about their children watching from the sidelines, but felt at a loss when it came to seeking solutions. Ten-year-old Alan, for example, was an active participant in his classroom at his rural school. His teacher was 'very aware of him being a member of class... having a chance to participate' (172), and she deliberately included him in class discussions and routines. Alan loved school and described it as:

...really good. I like learning stuff, I like all of it. It's fun... I do maths, reading, mobility, heaps of stuff... we're learning about war in Iraq just now, because they hate Sadam Hussein, and George Bush and Saddam Hussein must have had a falling out or something... (MacArthur et al. 2007a, 170)

He was involved in the school choir and kapa haka group, and the only things he really hated at school were 'when people are rude' and 'homework'. Alan had a

busy extra-curricular life as a member of the local under-11 rugby team. Although his physical impairment made it impossible for him to play the game, he attended after-school practices and travelled each weekend for up to one and a half hours to attend games where he was chief supporter, assisted with organisation, and distributed oranges to other team members. Yet at lunchtimes he ate alone then wandered off to the library to read books, or sought out the teacher aide of another disabled student. Alan told us that it was difficult to play with his peers at lunchtime because they usually played rugby and other games on the top field, which he could not access. Alan's parents were happy with his school experience but they worried about his lack of friends:

Mother: Schools been really good for him. The only thing we feel a bit sad about is his lunchtimes, isn't it? He spends a lot of time in the library. We think he is quite lonely a lot of the time. (171)

Alan's experience illustrates the contextual complexities that can be involved in supporting disabled students' social participation. Despite a positive academic experience, a teacher alert to his participation in class, and his active involvement in extra-curricular activities, Alan was still isolated at break times. The interactive effects of his physical impairment with a number of barriers to participation, including poor physical access; a lack of adult mediation at lunchtime; and a peer group that preferred games that Alan could not participate in, meant that he was frequently on his own during these unstructured times.

Teachers challenging barriers to participation

Some teachers in our research prioritised and supported students' social participation by challenging the barriers that excluded them and rejecting unequal power relations between students. Alan, for example, described some peers as giving him a 'hard time' at school:

They put me on the floor and then made me get up... they bully and stuff, they do heaps of stuff, nasty stuff, they pull me back and sometimes I fall over. It's kids in my class... people keep stealing my glasses, they steal them. (MacArthur et al. 2007a, 241)

Alan's teacher showed agency by backing his desire to be part of the group and challenging discriminatory behaviour by other students:

I don't see Alan as different other than needing some support. And I keep trying to reinforce that idea with the other kids... some of the boys are great in terms of supporting him... but some of the girls, one in particular... she looked cagey, and she stomped her foot down and tripped him... I sent her out and she wouldn't go, so I got a senior teacher to come and get her. We had to have a talk about this. A big talk about it. (241)

Luke's teacher at primary school also supported him to resist bullying by choosing to ignore the colourful language he fired back at a classmate who had verbally hassled him in class. The teacher's response that Luke's behaviour was 'great', and that she was 'so pleased he did that', reflected her agency, and her willingness to support Luke to stand up for himself in his peer group (MacArthur et al. 2007b, 106).

Sustainable changes to promote social participation at school

A rights-based framework can help to identify inclusive teacher values and approaches that sustain positive social relationships and friendships at school, and to uncover exclusionary approaches that undermine social participation. Our research suggests that the rights of disabled children and young people to be free from discrimination and to be full community participants, as outlined in the UNCROC and UNCRPD and in the *New Zealand Disability Strategy*, can be at risk at school. The vision of the *New Zealand Curriculum* for ‘confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners’ (Ministry of Education 2007, 7) seems distant for disabled children and young people who describe discrimination through bullying and isolation. Too many children and young people are also asking for their participation rights to be recognised by being allowed to stay in class alongside their classmates; to participate fully in class activities and not be separated out or ignored in class; to hold valued social roles at school; to feel able to participate with classmates in break times rather than seeking the ‘safety’ of special units; and to have their views on their school life heard and responded to. Where disabled students’ participation rights are breached and discrimination is experienced, there is a fragile sense of belonging, self-esteem and identity that can stand or fall depending on the quality of their relationships with both teachers and peers.

The examples of segregation and discrimination described in this paper are mirrored by those of other researchers (e.g. Connor and Ferri 2007; Kearney 2009; Morina Diez 2010; Singh and Ghai 2009; Shah and Priestley 2009; Ward 2008), and demonstrate slow progress when it comes to supporting disabled students’ own efforts to find their niche, have friends, and feel a sense of belonging as equals with their peers at school. Relationships are central to the process of teaching and learning, but it is also through relationships that disability is experienced (Davis and Watson 2001; Singh and Guy 2009). To achieve sustainable change towards social participation and inclusion it is important that schools and communities meet children’s and young people’s social needs more emphatically (Koster et al. 2009).

Challenging exclusion

In their explanation of Fraser’s deontological approach to justice and rights Jerlinder, Danermark and Gill (2009) stress that a right is not the same as its realisation:

The right to participate as full and worthy members of society should be a right in practice and not just in theory. Only when all necessary measures enabling a person to fully participate with his/her peers have been taken can we speak about a right being vindicated. (335)

It is not acceptable for schools to dispense with students’ rights by remaining on the sidelines and becoming accomplices to exclusive educational practices (Morina Diez 2010). Teachers in our research who supported students to resist discrimination illustrate how schools as a whole can be active in identifying, understanding and denouncing any discourses and practices that legitimise educational exclusion (Ainscow 2008; Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006; Petrou, Angelides, and Leigh 2009).

To achieve wider appreciation of these points, school-wide change needs to be regarded as a critical starting point. Commenting on Queensland’s progress towards inclusion, Bourke (2010) alludes to the unexamined personal theories and assumptions about difference, disability, schooling, and inclusion that continue to marginalise some

students and staff. School staff can be supported to transform the way they think about students, and about teaching and learning, so that all students are valued participants in the social, cultural and academic life of the school.

Listening and responding to students' views

Research that prioritises students' perspectives challenges hegemonic discourses of normality that represent disabled students as silent, voiceless and lacking agency (Singh and Ghai 2009). It vividly demonstrates the capacity of disabled children and young people to inform teachers and assist them to engage in more respectful and inclusive approaches. Children and young people have agency and are able to explain why they are not able to join in with peers or feel excluded. They also have ideas about how schools can help to make things better for them (Carrington, Bland, and Brady 2010; Connors and Stalker 2003, 2007; MacArthur et al. 2007b). But to challenge exclusionary barriers and enhance social participation our research highlights the need for teachers to be prepared and have opportunities to listen to these perspectives, and to act constructively upon them. Veck (2009) argues that to be included in a school is to have a voice within it. Teachers can learn to listen attentively to include. 'Crucially, to be listened to with attention is to be heard as an individual who is unique'. Through attentive listening teachers can also model an important value, '...we are all the same, that is, human...' (152). If attentive listening can offer opportunities for disabled students to be included as contributors to the school context, Veck suggests, then it does so by enriching relationships within those spaces. Teachers must listen to teach.

Focusing on school context

Contrary to the view that disabled students' social challenges stem from their own 'deficits' or 'problems', students in our research have associated their experiences of discrimination and isolation with aspects of the socio-cultural context of the classroom and school grounds that separate them from others, often against their will. In highlighting the barriers to friendships, they point to poor physical access to the spaces and activities that are culturally valued by children and young people at school, and to structures that remove them from the peer group they want to be part of, making them feel 'different' in negative ways. Ironically, when allowances are made for diversity, the approaches used can discriminate against them and undermine their participation. Overly close teacher aide support; ability grouping; and withdrawal for 'specialist' teaching and therapies are identified by disabled students as interfering with their participation alongside classmates. Students ask to be *present* in class alongside their classmates and friends; they want their teachers to understand the effects of their impairment and take these into consideration in their teaching; and they want to be valued and included as active participants in class, in the school grounds, and in extra-curricular activities.

We have observed children and young people confronting barriers to their social participation day after day at school, and Connors and Stalker's (2003) reference to 'barriers to being' and 'barriers to doing' (138) resonate with our findings. 'Barriers to doing' are material, structural and institutional, while 'barriers to being' come from the hostile attitudes and behaviour of others, and are often referred to by disabled children and young people. They have far-reaching effects on learning and identity, and

it is important for teachers to consider how it might feel to be bullied; to be afraid to speak; and to be separated out from the peer group that you want to be part of (MacArthur et al. 2007b). Providing professional development opportunities for teachers to critically engage with these ideas, and to explore inclusive values and practices (such as those specified in the *New Zealand Curriculum*), is one way that schools can challenge disabling barriers and move towards the development of a more inclusive school community (Ainscow 2008; Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006; Booth 2005; Booth and Ainscow 2011; Carrington and Robinson 2006).

Supporting student agency, competence and diversity

At the level of schools and classrooms, students' rights to be free from discrimination and to participate fully are likely to be supported when teachers adopt socially just approaches to teaching and learning. To this end, Higgins, MacArthur, and Kelly (2009) have proposed that sustainable change requires recognition of disabled students' agency and capability, as well as a positive regard for diversity in schools. Yet social recognition and a positive regard for diversity are not widely acknowledged, as disabled students typically describe being *unheard*, *unrecognised*, *uninvolved*, *unrepresented* in valued roles, viewed as *incapable*, and *excluded* from the group of all students. Kearney's (2009) research supports this conclusion, describing a majority culture in some New Zealand schools that devalues disability, and downplays disabled students' rights to access regular education. We have also encountered teachers who do have positive regard for diversity and rights, teaching alongside others who struggle with these ideas. The skill required by disabled students to carefully negotiate the effects of these variations and inconsistencies on a daily basis as they move between classrooms, is not always appreciated, and these contradictory values within the same school are further evidence that school-wide changes are needed for all students' rights to be upheld.

Inclusive policy and leadership to support social participation

Finally, the goal of socially just schools where all students interact with one another as peers seems unlikely to be met where margins remain between 'normal' and 'different' students, and 'regular' and 'special' education, simply because these are the very contexts in which ideas about 'difference' can be repeatedly and inappropriately emphasised (Bourke 2010; Connor and Ferri 2007; Petrou, Angelides, and Leigh 2009; Slee 2001). Such margins are not confined to the classroom, of course, as divisions between, and paradoxes inherent in ideas about 'special' and 'regular' education linger in our New Zealand education system. These ideas challenge developments towards inclusion and contribute to the exclusion of some children and young people at every level of the education system (Higgins, MacArthur, and Morton 2007; Higgins, MacArthur, and Rietveld 2006; MacArthur 2009).

Change does not happen in a vacuum, and Bourke (2010) urges policymakers to provide teachers and school communities with opportunities to examine their underlying assumptions about difference and inclusion as part of the process of reconstructing education for all. Inclusion is a complex project involving reform to support quality education for all; new meanings and practices in schools in the pursuit of community and diversity; and the challenging of racism, disablism and other forms of discrimination (Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006; Ballard 2004; Barton and Slee 1999;

Booth 2005). In seeking sustainable changes that enhance the social participation of disabled students at school, due consideration must be given to the importance of leadership and support for schools and teachers, and to a commitment to social justice in terms of social cooperation at all levels of the education system, from policy through to schools and classrooms.

Acknowledgements

Funding for these research projects is gratefully acknowledged, and was received from University of Otago Research Grants; The New Zealand Ministry of Education; The New Zealand Royal Society's Marsden Fund; and the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative. The research projects were collaborative and the valuable work of my research colleagues on these projects is appreciated and acknowledged: Michael Gaffney; Dr Berni Kelly; Sarah Sharp; Dr Trevor McDonald; Carolyn Simmons-Carlsson; Pat Caswell; Dr Phillipa Clark; and Dr Nancy Higgins.

Notes on contributor

Jude MacArthur is a senior lecturer in the School of Education at Massey University (Albany campus), and previously a Senior Researcher at the Donald Beasley Institute in Dunedin New Zealand. Her research focuses on disabled children's and young people's school experiences, inclusion and social justice in education. At the time of writing this paper she is co-convenor of The Inclusive Education Action Group.

References

- Ainscow, M. 2008. Teaching for diversity: The next big challenge. In *The Sage handbook of curriculum and instruction*, ed. F.M. Connelly, 240–58. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Ainscow, M., T. Booth, and A. Dyson. 2006. *Improving schools, developing inclusion*. London: Routledge.
- Alton-Lee, A. 2003. *Quality teaching for diverse students in schooling: Best evidence synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Ballard, K. 2004. Ideology and the origins of exclusion: A case study. In *Ideology and the politics of (in)exclusion*, ed. L. Ware, 89–107. New York: Peter Lang.
- Barton, L., and R. Slee. 1999. Competition, selection and inclusive education; some observations. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 3, no. 1: 3–12.
- Booth, T. 2005. Keeping the future alive: Putting inclusive values into action. *Forum* 47, nos. 2–3: 151–8.
- Booth, T., and M. Ainscow. 2011. *The index for inclusion. Developing learning and participation in schools*. Bristol: The Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education.
- Bourke, P. 2010. Inclusive education reform in Queensland: Implications for policy and practice. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 14, no. 2: 183–93.
- Carrington, S., D. Bland, and K. Brady. 2010. Training young people as researchers to investigate engagement and disengagement in the middle years. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 14, no. 5: 449–62.
- Carrington, S., and R. Robinson. 2006. Inclusive school community: Why is it so complex? *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 10, nos. 4–5: 323–34.
- Connor, D., and B. Ferri. 2007. The conflict within: Resistance to inclusion and other paradoxes in special education. *Disability and Society* 22, no. 1: 63–77.
- Connors, C., and K. Stalker. 2003. *The views and experiences of disabled children and their siblings – A positive outlook*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Connors, C., and K. Stalker. 2007. Children's experiences of disability: Pointers to a social model of childhood disability. *Disability and Society* 22, no. 1: 19–33.
- Davis, J., and N. Watson. 2001. Where are the children's experiences? Analysing social and cultural exclusion in 'special' and 'mainstream' schools. *Disability and Society* 16, no. 5: 671–87.

- Fraser, N. 1995. From redistribution to recognition: Dilemmas of justice in a 'post-socialist' society. *New Left Review* 21 (July–August): 68–93.
- Fraser, N. 2000. Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review* 3: 107–20.
- Fraser, N. 2001. Recognition without ethics? Special issue on: Recognition and difference. *Theory, Culture and Society* 18, nos. 2–3: 21–42.
- George, R., and N. Browne. 2000. 'Are you in or are you out?' An exploration of girl friendship groups in the primary phase of schooling. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 4, no. 4: 289–300.
- Gordon, L., and M. Morton. 2008. Inclusive education and school choice: Democratic rights in a devolved system. In *Disability and the politics of education: An international reader*, ed. S. Gabel and S. Danforth, 237–50. New York: Peter Lang.
- Heiman, T. 2000. Friendship quality among children in three educational settings. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability* 25, no. 1: 1–12.
- Higgins, N., J. MacArthur, and B. Kelly. 2009. Including disabled children at school: Is it really as simple as 'a, c, d'? *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 13, no. 5: 471–87.
- Higgins, N., J. MacArthur, and M. Morton. 2007. Winding back the clock: The retreat of New Zealand inclusive education policy through neo-liberal reforms and contradictory discourses about inclusive and special education. *New Zealand Annual Review of Education* 17: 145–67.
- Higgins, N., J. MacArthur, and C. Rietveld. 2006. Higgledy-piggledy policy: Confusion about inclusion. *Children's Issues* 10, no. 1: 30–6.
- Jerlinder, K., B. Danermark, and P. Gill. 2009. Normative approaches to justice in physical education for pupils with physical disabilities – Dilemmas of recognition and redistribution. *Disability and Society* 24, no. 3: 331–42.
- Kearney, A. 2009. Barriers to school inclusion: An investigation into the exclusion of disabled students from and within New Zealand schools. PhD thesis, Massey University.
- Kolb, S., and C. Hanley-Maxwell. 2003. Critical social skills for adolescents with high incidence disabilities; parental perspectives. *Exceptional Children* 69, no. 2: 163–79.
- Koster, M., H. Naaken, S. Pijl, and E. van Hooten. 2009. Being part of the peer group: A literature study focusing on the social dimension of inclusion in education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 13, no. 2: 117–40.
- Lyle, J. 2002. A friend indeed: Understanding the perspectives of non-disabled primary school children who have a friend with a significant disability. Postgraduate diploma in child advocacy diss., University of Otago.
- MacArthur, J. 2005. Children's and young people's social experiences at school. *Building capability in education for students with moderate and high needs*, ed. J. MacArthur, B. Kelly, N. Higgins, H. Phillips, T. McDonald, M. Morton and S. Jackman, 304–416. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- MacArthur, J. 2009. *Learning better together: Working towards inclusive education in New Zealand schools*. Wellington: IHC.
- MacArthur, J., and M. Gaffney. 2001. *Bullied and teased, or just another kid? The social experiences of students with disabilities at school*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- MacArthur, J., and N. Higgins. 2007. Addressing the needs of transient students: A collaborative approach to enhance teaching and learning in an area school. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research: Teaching and Learning Research Initiative. http://www.tlri.org.nz/assets/A_Project-PDFs/9243_finalreport.pdf (accessed May 2, 2010).
- MacArthur, J., T. McDonald, C. Simmons-Carlsson, and P. Caswell. 2007a. Part two: Case studies. In *Research project on integrated effective service provision for children and young people with physical disabilities: Two part research project*, ed. P. Clark, J. MacArthur, T. McDonald, C. Simmons-Carlsson and P. Caswell, 105–423. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- MacArthur, J., S. Sharp, B. Kelly, and M. Gaffney. 2007b. Disabled children negotiating school life: Agency, difference, and teaching practice. *International Journal of Children's Rights* 15, no. 1: 99–120.
- Matheson, C., R. Olsen, and T. Weisner. 2007. A good friend is hard to find: Friendship among adolescents with disabilities. *American Journal on Mental Retardation* 112, no. 5: 319–29.

- Meyer, L., and J. Bevan-Brown. 2005. Collaboration for social inclusion. In *Learners with special needs in Aotearoa New Zealand*. 3rd ed, ed. D. Fraser, R. Moltzen and K. Ryba, 168–92. Palmerston North, New Zealand: Thompson Dunmore Press.
- Minister for Disability Issues. 2001. *New Zealand Disability Strategy: Making a world of difference: Whakanui Oranga*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.
- Ministry of Education. 2007. *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Morina, Diez A. 2010. School memories of young people with disabilities: An analysis of barriers and aids to inclusion. *Disability and Society* 25, no. 2: 163–75.
- Morris, J. 2002. Inclusion: Too difficult, expensive or impractical- or a basic human right? *Special Children* 143(Summer): 12–14.
- Nakken, H., and S. Pijl. 2002. Getting along with classmates in regular schools: A review of the effects of integration on the development of social relationships. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 6, no. 1: 47–61.
- New Zealand Human Rights Commission. 2004. *Human rights in New Zealand today. Nga Tika Tangata O Te Motu: New Zealand action plan for human rights – Mana ki te Tangata*. www.hrc.co.nz/report/chapters/chapter15/education04.html#nee (accessed February 10, 2009).
- Petrou, A., P. Angelides, and J. Leigh. 2009. Beyond the difference: From the margins to inclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 13, no. 5: 439–48.
- Shah, S., and M. Priestley. 2009. Home and away: The changing impact of educational policies on disabled children's experiences of family and friendship. *Research Papers in Education* 25, no. 2: 155–75.
- Singh, V., and A. Ghai. 2009. Notions of self: Lived realities of children with disabilities. *Disability and Society* 24, no. 2: 129–45.
- Slee, R. 2001. Social justice and the changing directions in educational research: The case of inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 5, no. 2–3: 167–77.
- Smith, A.B. 2007. Children and young people's participation rights in education. *International Journal of Children's Rights* 15: 147–64.
- United Nations. 2006. *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities*. <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml> (accessed March 1, 2010).
- United Nations General Assembly. 1989. *The United Nations convention on the rights of the child*, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/44/a44r025.htm> (accessed March 1, 2010).
- Veck, W. 2009. Listening to include. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 13, no. 2: 141–55.
- Ward, A. 2008. Students with disabilities talk about their friendships: A narrative enquiry. PhD thesis, Massey University.