

Whakatupuhia te reo, whakatupuhia te tamaiti

Student Voice

Learning Story 2 – Understanding and responding to students with special education needs

Overview

Katrina Sneath speaks from the perspective of a student with Down Syndrome. She believes that with faith in themselves and the right support, people with disabilities can do anything. Katrina is living evidence of this. Her achievements include gaining NCEA Level 2 (for which she received the Down Syndrome Association National Achievement Award) and participating in the 2016 Youth Parliament.

This learning story provides an opportunity to hear what Katrina has to say about how teachers can help her learn. Katrina's succinct and practical advice is a reminder of the value of listening and responding to students' suggestions about teacher practice.

The learning story also features the voices of Katrina's father, Greg, and John Robinson, Head of Learning Support at Onslow College, which Katrina attended. Katrina is clearly at the centre of a community of people who have all contributed to her success.

Primary sources

[Developing inclusive practice at Onslow College](#)

[Katrina: How teachers can help me learn](#)

[Parenting with Katrina and Greg Sneath](#), Radio New Zealand, Nine to Noon, 27 March 2014

Further information

Video

[Having dyslexia – how teachers can help](#)

In this video, Tate, also an Onslow College student, talks about how teachers can support the learning of students with dyslexia. After viewing this video clip or the one with Katrina, what would you ask a student with special needs about what might help them with their learning?

[Newshub – Story: The inspiring story of Katrina Sneath](#) The current events programme, Story, ran a feature on Katrina’s selection as a Youth Member of Parliament. Katrina used this as another opportunity to advocate for people with disabilities.

Websites

[Inclusive Education Guides for Schools](#)

See especially the section on “Developing an inclusive classroom culture”.

[Onslow College: Community, Parent Support group](#)

This section of the Onslow College website explains the purpose of the school’s Learning Support Parent Support Group.

Supporting literature

MacArthur, J. (2009). Learning better together: Working towards inclusive education in New Zealand schools. Wellington: IHC New Zealand.

[<http://www.ihc.org.nz/dvd/learning-better-together-research/> or www.ihc.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/learning-better-together.pdf]

Jude McArthur incorporates student voice in her report on what inclusive education really means and what we need to do to achieve it.

Rees, K. (2010). “[Beyond inclusive education: How to get there and why it matters](#)”. From Whakarongo mai, Listening in – stories from the inside.

Katherine Rees describes her experiences as a disabled student at school, and especially at secondary school. She calls for greater collaboration that includes the voice of the student in decisions affecting their schooling experience.

Example	Student voice rubric indicator
<p>In the video clip “How teachers can help me learn”, Katrina offers practical advice about how teachers can support her learning. Suggestions include writing instructions in clear, logical steps and using homework as an opportunity to ‘pre-load’ learning at home.</p> <p><i>Having viewed this footage, you may like to do an exercise where you imagine that Katrina is your student. How would this information from Katrina inform your planning?</i></p>	<p>Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • foster the expectation that all students will learn and achieve • understand and respond to the needs of all students
<p>In the video clip “Developing inclusive practice at Onslow College”, John Robinson shares his opinions about what an inclusive classroom looks like and what it takes to create such a classroom. He discusses the challenges that can come from both teachers and parents. A Learning Support Parent Support Group at the college provides a forum for parents and educators to build an effective working partnership. John says</p>	<p>The school has systems, guidelines, and procedures that support open, respectful, and supportive relationships between all stakeholders</p> <p>Members of the wider school community:</p>

that the parents keep the teachers 'honest'. They have high goals for their sons and daughters and expect the teachers to share those aspirations and help ensure they are met.

All young people need and deserve a network of support to help them achieve excellence, but this is especially so for students with special education needs. A Radio New Zealand [interview with Katrina and Greg Sneath](#) richly demonstrates this. It includes an account by Greg of the nervousness he and his wife felt when Katrina began primary school, a nervousness that was shared by the teachers. Good communication, aided by the use of video recordings to show the teachers what Katrina's parents had been doing to prepare her for learning at school, aided the construction of a real partnership. Importantly, the teachers were able to recognise what they saw as 'normal' teaching practice, what they might have to do differently to support Katrina, and how some of those things might help other students.

- are informed partners who actively engage in supporting their children's learning at school
- have a voice in developing learning outcomes and the curriculum