

A story about unlocking potential: Jean

Jean's story

Jean is the cherished oldest daughter of Niwa and Jackson and the oldest of three siblings. A gentle, easygoing child, her more vigorous and less biddable younger brothers came as rather a surprise to her parents. Jean and her whānau live in a small community that is well set up with educational and childcare facilities. These physical resources mean that Jean, her brothers and their peers can experience all their early learning experiences within their neighbourhood, through until Year 8. More importantly, there are formal and informal connections between the teachers and children in each of these settings and with others in nearby communities. People know each other and enjoy doing and learning things together.

Jean is happy at home and playing and learning in other environments, especially when one of her parents is present. She has one or two close friends and some older girls in the street think she's sweet and sometimes include her in their games. Physically, she's clumsy. At nearly five, she can't get the hang of skipping and is afraid to slide down the playground pole.

Jean's favourite activity is reading – she loves nothing better than to snuggle up next to a parent or grandparent with a book. Favourite books are read repeatedly and Jean soon joins in with repeated phrases and identifies key letters and words. Given the appeal of the written word, Jean's parents and teachers anticipate that she will be interested in creating text herself. To their surprise, she resists. As they support Jean in her transition to school, this is a subject of conversation during a conference session at her kōhanga reo.

***New entrant teacher:** I see what you mean about Jean's love of books. I watched her face as you were reading to her, Niwa ... so expressive! Does this translate into an interest in writing?*

***Kaiako:** Jean can write her own name, but the letters aren't as well formed as I would expect for a child of her age.*

***Jackson:** I've tried getting her to trace the outlines of letters, but she only tries for a few minutes and then she stops and won't do it. It's not like her – a real stubborn streak!*

***New entrant teacher:** I noticed comments in Jean's learning record about her being physically awkward. I wonder whether that affects her writing. Should we follow it up?*

The group agree that Jean should be referred for specialist assessment. A diagnosis of dyspraxia is made, along with an auditory processing delay. Jean begins therapy with an occupational therapist, physiotherapist and speech language therapist. Niwa and Jackson make the decision to have the records of Jean's progress with the therapists incorporated in her record of learning to allow the school to access those records. The school responds by adapting the environment and programme to accommodate Jean's needs.

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Connections to the emerging ideas about a system that learns

Learning partnerships with parents and whānau

Assessment, inquiry, and evaluative capability

Rich records of student learning

Responsive local curriculum

Institute of Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment (ICPA)

A system that learns

Jean's story

Connections to the emerging ideas about a system that learns

New Entrant Teacher 1: *I'm loving the audio system we installed in our building. It's easier on us as teachers – we don't have to raise our voices to be heard. The place feels more peaceful.*

New Entrant Teacher 2: *Yes, the great thing about the changes we've made for Jean is that they've helped all our students. A lot of the movement activities fit brilliantly into the PE programme. I'm noticing other kids improving their balance and ability to cross the midline.*

The group around Jean are intrigued by what they've noticed. Together with others in their Community of Learning, they start an inquiry into how techniques that support learning for students with special education needs can help other students. They ask the Institute of Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment for advice on any research and to put them in touch with other schools and researchers who are exploring this idea. In time, their inquiry report is added to the national record.

Nine years have gone by and Jean is now attending high school at a nearby town. While not a great sportswoman, she enjoys expressing herself in dance and although her writing is not at the same level as her reading, she is able to write a coherent sentence and has strategies for checking for sense and spelling. Jean remains a quiet and diligent presence in the classroom. She has few friends but is intensely loyal to those she has. She's generally very quiet but her teachers and parents admire her strong sense of social justice and willingness to speak up when she thinks something is unfair or steps in to show kindness to someone in distress. Recently, her teachers have noticed a change:

Grow learning partnerships with parents and whānau

Teacher: *I don't think Jean is herself. She didn't hand in her homework the other day and her current assignment isn't up to her usual standard.*

Teacher: *She seems withdrawn. In fact, I think she nearly fell asleep in class the other day.*

Jean's whānau teacher takes her aside and gently encourages her to open up. Jean reveals that Jackson is terribly unwell. Normally, this is something he and Niwa would reveal to their children's teachers, but in this instance the couple has found the circumstances overwhelming and not had the energy to reach out, even to close whānau. Loving, responsible Jean has been stepping in to help care for her younger brothers and keep things ticking over. It's no wonder she is weary and unable to prioritise her schoolwork.

Whānau teacher: *I'm so thankful you've told me this, Jean. You don't need to carry this by yourself. How would you feel if we set up a meeting with your parents and some of the pastoral staff? I'm sure there are ways we can help lift the burden for you and your whānau.*

After discussion with the school guidance counsellor and with Niwa and Jackson's agreement, Jean's whānau teacher sets up a meeting to which she invites the counsellor, representatives of social service agencies and teachers from the boys' school. Niwa and Jackson also invite whānau members and Jean brings along her good friends. There are tears as Jean and her parents reveal what they are going through and admit that they need help. Those who care for them express their sympathy and offer their support. While Jackson's recovery is slow and difficult, the burden on Jean's whānau is eased and Jean is able to re-focus on her school work.

Jean's story

Jean's school has unpacked the curriculum notion of citizenship in relation to the qualities that are valued in the local community. Jean's compassion and empathy are valued parts of her identity as a citizen of her school community. So too, is her commitment to social justice. To some degree, she is a role model to her peers. They notice when she shows kindness and forgiveness to someone who has demonstrated bullying behaviour and some of them admire her for that. Peers and teachers have had opportunities to contribute to her record of learning, demonstrating her development as a quiet but active contributor.

Teacher: Jean has a lot to offer. But she's quite shy and holds herself back. How could we help develop her confidence?

Teacher: We need her to understand that the qualities she takes for granted are valuable. They're what we're looking for in a good citizen.

Teacher: I'd like to see Jean take on a leadership role. She might not be an 'out-in-front' kind of leader, but other people admire her. I think we should challenge her to extend herself and find out what kind of leader she could be.

Over the next term, learners in Jean's hub focus on taking action as citizens in their local community. Jean's teachers explain to her that they want her to lead one of the projects and they explain why. They tell her that they will give her every support, but they want her to push herself. She'll need to start by focusing the project on an area she really cares about.

Jean: When I was little, I used to watch other kids on the playground. I was so envious of how easy it was for them to climb and swing off things ... that just wasn't me. Now I know that it's because of my vestibular processing delay, but then, I just felt bad about myself. I'd really like our community to have a new playground that met everyone's needs ... including the kids like me who feel a bit scared.

Jean's idea touches off a nerve for others in her learning hub and with students in some of the other schools in her CoL. With teacher support, Jean and her group survey needs from different perspectives, research playground ideas, develop plans, lobby local government representatives, apply for grants ... They don't get quite what they want, but they do get modifications to a local playground that are a source of joy for a group of children who were previously on the outer.

Jean leaves school a confident young woman with a clear sense of

her own capabilities. She has a rich record of learning that showcases her strengths and the contributions she has made to her community. Jean knows that she has overcome barriers to get where she is and that this was made possible by the support and encouragement of all the people who care about her. This awareness only reinforces the aspiration, true to her nature, that she would like to become an occupational therapist.

Connections to the emerging ideas about a system that learns

National Curriculum

Clarify pathways for ākonga (student, learner) progress

Rich records of learning

Responsive local curriculum

Rich records of student learning