

Running Head: VALUE OF SELF AS LEARNER

Value as Self as Learner as Understood Through the Individual Education Plan Process

by

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Bachelor of Education, The University of Victoria, 2000

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract**Supervisory Committee**

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This project investigates student understanding of self as learner and the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process in British Columbia. It considers the questions: (1) How do students come to understand their value? (2) What school policies and environments allow students to understand themselves as valuable learners and individuals of worth? Through a synthesis of current literature regarding: (1) First Nations and struggling learners; (2) First Nations education and pedagogy; (3) school environments that support the idea of ‘becoming’; (4) special education and classroom practices that foster awareness of self as learner; and (5) policies that value all students, it was determined the IEP process helps students come to understand their value as learners. With intentional relationship building, collaborative planning, inclusive implementation practices, and formative assessment practices like goal setting and reflection on team process, schools can use the IEP process to help each student discover their infinite capacity and value.

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Acknowledgements

The growth of any craft depends on shared practice
and honest dialogue among the people who do it.

We grow by private trial and error, to be sure –
but our willingness to try, and fail, as individuals is severely limited
when we are not supported by a community that encourages such risks.

- Parker Palmer, “The Courage to Teach”

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To my students, you have taught me. You have made me believe in myself. May you find your value, your voice and believe in your ability to learn and grow.

Dedication

To my past, present and future teachers, it is with humble gratitude that I salute your imprint on my becoming.

Patricia and Lyle Marsh, for laying the groundwork on the curriculum that has become my life. Thomas Coon, for giving me an understanding of my purpose. Liam Lyle Patrick, for reminding me that joy is so easily found in discovering.

Chapter 1: Introduction: The Value My Journey Adds

Knowing My Self As Learner

As long as I can remember, I have wanted to be a teacher. Often I have contemplated why this was. Maybe it was the power and control that I thought teachers had. However, I think it had more to do with my comfort level at school. School was a familiar environment where I was successful, and I loved it. I loved being good at something. I loved knowing and trying, but I also feared not knowing and failing. Despite my fears I remained curious and I continued to love learning. I thought this was the case for everyone when I was young. I remember that changed for me when in Grade two, one of my classmates "failed". I had never thought anyone could fail at learning; the term shattered my belief that everyone loved learning and was good at it.

Soon I began to realize what made me good at school. I worked the way schools expected people to work. I had a good memory, learned new skills and information quickly, and I loved to please people, especially adults. There was value attached to how I acted within the learning community or school system. What I also realized was that if I was not good at something, I developed strategies that helped me reach success, that made me look competent or that helped me avoid failure in the eyes of others. I also was able to work well in groups, to ask for and receive assistance when needed and share when necessary. These strategies made my participation in the community more valuable; I was viewed as a valuable contributor. This is not the case for all students who have been through the education system in Canada; many students have been made to feel like they have "failed" and are not able to understand their value as learners.

My Educational Purpose

I have been contemplating my educational purpose for many years now, and I keep coming back to the concepts of “value” and “worth”. I believe that it is part of my purpose in life to show my students their innate significance; that they have worth, regardless of their life situation, regardless of their track record, or regardless of their needs. As a special education teacher, I strive to make my practice and the system better at building such understanding of capacity in all children. This capacity can be defined by three Lil’wat concepts about learning from an Indigenous perspective, celhcelh, emhaka7, and a7xekcal. Celhcelh is described as

each person [being] responsible for their learning, finding and taking advantage of all opportunities to learn, and maintaining openness to learning. Each person must take the initiative to become part of the learning community by finding their place and fitting themselves into the community. This includes offering what knowledge and expertise you have to benefit the communal work being carried out. (p. 15, Halbert & Kaser, 2013)

Emhaka7 requires “each person does the best they can at whatever the task, and keeps an eye on others to be helpful” (p. 16). The last idea, a7xekcal, is dependent on “the ways teachers help to locate the infinite capacity in each learner. It involves developing each person’s individual gifts and expertise in a holistic manner” (p. 16). This capacity: the ability to do, the suitability for learning, the potential for growing and becoming, is inside every person, every child.

Throughout my teaching career and when helping others in different learning environments, I have been concerned with the individual and their needs, abilities and

potential. My interest has always been focused on the individual, especially in the area of special education. My belief that any person can learn anything has always driven me to want to help those students that did not seem to fit into school's institutional norm. I want all students to know they can be successful no matter their barriers. To achieve this I believe that they need to better understand themselves as learners. How can I help them to achieve this understanding?

Special education delivery has changed over the course of my career. Inclusion was just beginning to be part of the milieu when I was working on my Bachelor of Education, but it made so much sense to me. The idea that all students could be successful in the classroom with the right set of strategies and supports was something I had always thought was an option, but it was a new idea in the evolution of schooling. With this expectation that inclusion needs to happen, the role of the special education teacher changed as well. My role went from being a tertiary teacher who pulled students out of the classroom because they were not at grade level, to being a support for the classroom teacher to help students be more successful in their classrooms. Being part of a learning community, having a place to belong was a beginning for these students that seemed to not fit in the old norm of schooling.

Now all students need to understand how they fit in that learning community called the classroom. Combined with the myriad psychoeducational assessments that were stating many students have problems with executive functioning, and recommending that demystifying the brain be part of a student's education, my experiences with students and teachers made me realize that we need to be helping students to understand themselves as learners. One of my first students helped me realize the need for, and practice of this approach to teaching. This Grade Four student was very

creative with many gifts and talents. However, he had always struggled with reading and did not play sports very much, which really set him apart from the rest of the student population. He did not place a very high value on his learning abilities and was prone to quickly shutting down if things seemed too difficult. He is one of the main reasons why I strongly believe it is so important for teachers to help students understand themselves better, to see themselves more fully, and to value the things of which they are capable. Once he saw his abilities and potential and discovered some useful strategies and he understood himself without comparison to others, he valued who he was much more. As teachers, I believe that we need to help our students recognize both their challenges and strengths, and find strategies that make learning deeper, richer and more meaningful, with the goal that students understand their personal value and contribution to community. This is a worthwhile endeavor for schools and for my Masters project.

The Purpose of My Masters Project

Having lived in different cultures, such as in Japan and in First Nations communities in Canada, and having worked with people across the lifespan from age 2 to 100, it is clear to me that, as a teacher, getting to know the individual learner is paramount in achieving my goal of building capacity. Although not the focus of my project, I believe that my understanding of each learner needs to be coupled with building relationships, community involvement and individual engagement. In order for students to find how they fit into a community, they need to know the community and have competent others from whom to learn in that community. The communities in which students find themselves go beyond the classroom at school. They, with help, will need to explore relationships in the larger community that will enhance their understanding of self as worthy. It will also require students to be open to learning of all kinds in those

communities and within those relationships. The relationships, involvement and engagement will further enhance the students' understanding of their capacity. However for this project, I will explore what kind of teacher I can become, and what kind of system we can create that will allow children to know they are able to participate meaningfully in their community because they have inherent value. I believe that to achieve change in teaching and the educational system we need to not only help our students understand themselves better through relationship building, community involvement and individual engagement, but more importantly we as teachers need to really get to know our students and foster an awareness of their value as learners. Predominantly, this includes creating an understanding their strengths, challenges, and learning strategies as well as how they can use these to navigate through the various learning environments that they will encounter inside and outside of the classroom.

I believe that to answer the question of how to help my students value themselves as learners, I have to ask myself the same question. I am attracted to the concept of phenomenology in education or the idea of becoming. It is being and doing. There is never an arrival; rather there is always a going out of something and into something, such as different life situations and learning contexts. I think that learning about myself, as a learner, has been the journey of learning about who I am as a person; my self value. This has involved recognizing my strengths and challenges, understanding strategies I employ and maintaining my self-value even if I made mistakes. I had to apply the belief that mistakes are possibly the most important part of the learning process, to myself. Being aware means understanding my personal strengths and weaknesses along with accompanying preferences, abilities, character traits and inclinations that affect my learning. As a teacher, a learner and person of value, I had to know and accept myself

and begin to use that understanding and acceptance to move through life in a meaningful and purposeful way.

To be successful learners, students of all ages must know themselves well, be able to have conversations with teachers regarding what they know about themselves, as well as discover and use strategies that will help make their learning more meaningful and successful. To achieve this, students of all ages need supportive classroom environments where they can try, make mistakes, evaluate, try again and hopefully achieve success. They need teachers that help them to explore not only a subject discipline and content, but also themselves in a phenomenological manner – to support students in their becoming as learners and people.

For my Masters project, then, I will: (1) explore who learners are as situated in the curriculum and literature, (2) examine frameworks of learning that address the value of students' abilities; and (3) suggest an Individual Education Plan (IEP) process embedded in school and learning environments which allows students, parents and teachers to better understand themselves as both valuable learners and individuals of worth.

My hope is that this project will provide insights for other educators into how to grow this valuing and knowing in their communities, students and self; that the IEP process can be an important tool in building capacity, the concepts of *celhcelh*, *emhaka7*, and *a7xekcal*, in the learning communities in which we find ourselves.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: The Voices That Add Value To My Journey

Introduction

As a special education teacher my desire is to make education special for all children by encouraging their understanding of self as a learner and a person of value. To understand how to grow this valuing with my current student population, I examine the research related to: (1) learners, with a focus on First Nations children and students struggling in school, (2) school and classroom environments that support the idea of ‘becoming’, (3) teacher practices that foster awareness of self as learner; and (4) school policies that value all students. Specifically, I seek to understand how the IEP planning and implementation process can build capacity in students and teachers. For this investigation then, I have read and reviewed literature relating to First Nations education and pedagogy, special education, student engagement, motivation, achievement, and self-efficacy, as well as self-regulated learning.

In *My Pedagogic Creed*, Dewey (1929), states that “to prepare [the child] for the future life means to give him command of himself [sic] ... it is impossible to reach this sort of adjustment save as constant regard it had to the individual’s own powers, tastes, and interests” (p. 35). The goal of fostering in children an understanding of ‘self’ is foundational to modern educational thought. Dewey’s words set the stage for a century of educational philosophy and research inquiry on how to build a progressive system of education that acknowledges the powers, tastes, and interests of individual children. Children need to understand and feel a sense of control over their own lives to be able to participate positively in learning, in relationships, and in life. Krishnamurti (1964) writes, “so the function of education, surely, is to eradicate, inwardly as well as outwardly, this fear that destroys human thought, human relationship and love” (p. 5). Individuals who

do not question, grow, learn, nor become create the fear he speaks of. This is a fear that creates compliance rather than self-awareness that in turn produces a fear of the new and different for an individual. Children should feel free to explore who they are and want to become without fear of judgment, comparison to others, failure, or diversity in schooling. The purpose of education is to help them to understand their worth so that they may explore their purpose in life, and contribute to the community in which they live. Miller (2000) asks:

Should not education help you to find what you really love to do so that from the beginning to the end of your life you are working at something which you feel is worth while [sic] and which for you has deep significance? (p. 7)

Children can be encouraged and guided to investigate their passions along with their individual strengths and innate desire for growth. In schools, this means providing spaces where students and teachers can explore, challenge and grow individually and together. Smith (2003) states, “privilege must be given to [the classroom] being a place where people can find themselves through their inquiries and through their relations with one another” (p. 382). For an education system, a community, a school, or a teacher to do that, Eisner (1988) encourages us “to reaffirm our commitment to making teaching personally relevant to students” (p. 26). While Halbert and Kaser (2013) suggest, “inquiry teams need to ask about the extent to which learners are developing an understanding of themselves as learners” (p. 50). This is no small or easy task. As Lantieri and Nambiar (2012) point out, “schools are expected to not only promote academic success, but also enhance health, prevent problem behaviours, and prepare young people better for the world of work and engaged citizenship” (p. 28-29). To create environments where learning is personally relevant and each learner is increasing his or

her own understanding of self, their communities, schools and teachers need to understand each student as well as practice and teach strategies that help learning in any setting and content area. As Lantieri and Nambiar further write:

All children can have a school experience that helps them to be not just academically competent but supports them in being engaged life-long learners who are self-aware, caring and connected to others, and active contributors to a more just, peaceful, productive, and sustainable world. (p. 29)

To accomplish this task, educators must understand the individual learners in schools as well as their practices in addition to understanding the ever-changing world outside of formal learning environments. An examination of classroom environments and school policies is also necessary for achieving the goal of developing children who see themselves as self-aware learners and people of value.

The Learners

As the Special Education Coordinator of student services in a First Nations school, I encounter many unique students with vastly differing learner profiles. Many factors influence who these students are and who they become. Historical experiences in First Nations communities have great impact on the children in these communities today. Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski (2004), in a study of Canadian First Nations' trauma, argue "that the historical experiences of First Nations people, which disrupted the process of Aboriginal cultural identity formation, continue to resonate in the present and that the harm done in the past continues to manifest intergenerationally into the present" (p. 5). Although it has its own characteristics "the 'present' Aboriginal community [in which I work] is a direct legacy of their traumatic 'past'" (p. 7). In planning educational experiences and helping children in this community become self-aware learners, I must

acknowledge the experiences of their ancestors; not forgetting how this cycle has eroded, for many, their sense of self, not just as learners but as people of worth. Cole and O'Reilly (2010) express how it may feel to be Aboriginal in Canada and in schools; “we are ruts in the road of western progress blemishes in the conscience of the Canadian state where there is precious little and little precious Aboriginal history Aboriginal environmentalism Aboriginal anything taught in public school” (p. 31).

Historical trauma influences the students in this community and how they see themselves. This understanding of Aboriginal history and its effects on today's First Nations communities is paramount in understanding the learners in these communities.

Considering history and its effects on the present is important in today's cultural context. However, considering the present situation of our students is also very important. Lantieri and Nambiar (2012) cite:

The National Kids Poll surveyed 875 children, ages nine through thirteen, about what caused their stress and what coping strategies they used. The leading sources of stress were school related (36%); stress in the family (32%); and peer-related stress including friends, gossip, and teasing (21%). (p. 28)

Children are stressed before they enter schools as well as while they are in our schools. They have many issues occupying their thoughts. Although the percentages may be different, the issues and stresses listed above are the same for many of the students with whom I work in my school community. To help students become aware of self as a learner, educators must consider the context in which the students live and learn as well as the individual circumstances, relationships and personalities of each student.

Another consideration for educators is the patterns of struggling students. Many students with special educational needs – physical, social, emotional, behavioural, and academic – often receive interventions outside of the classroom setting. This removal may have a detrimental effect over time. Smyth and McInerney (2013) suggest that for many students, especially in their teen years:

[T]he process of disengagement and exclusion is thus made to seem transparent because the young people concerned are portrayed as deviant and not conforming to mainstream or majority perspectives – it is them who are ‘the problem’, not the social institution of schooling or the middle-class values that underpin it. (p. 44)

Whether this is the purpose of segregated intervention programs at schools or not, it is also about perceptions – both by the school community and the students themselves.

With exclusion from classroom or school-wide activities, the student may begin to see themselves as less than others. The practice of some special education pull-out models may contribute to this perception and be a causal factor in long-term problems. Zuffiano et al., (2013) cite several studies that indicate academic difficulties may lead to long-term patterns of school drop-out, academic failure, and problems entering a successful career in adulthood as well as externalizing problems and mental health problems. Academic difficulty is not the only cause of these problems, but it has been widely studied as being a significant contributor. The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (2013) states:

Adolescents with LD [learning disability] often do not do as well as their peers in traditional classroom settings, finding less success in retaining information or achieving proficiency levels on high-stakes assessments. Adding to these

challenges, these youth often experience social and lowered self-expectations. (p. 1)

Students requiring special education interventions for academic purposes perceive themselves as having less capability to be adept to learn the skills and perform the tasks that are being asked of them. Menzies and Lane (2011) refer to several studies that indicate:

Students with chronic behavioural deficits and excesses are at the greatest risk for negative outcomes. In addition to academic failure, they also experience difficulty with establishing the positive relationships with teachers and peers that are so vital to school success. (p. 182)

Behavioural and academic difficulties are intricately connected. One cannot always determine which is the beginning of the cycle. No matter how it begins, the cycle has negative effects on the *self-efficacy* of students within it. Self-efficacy can be described as a belief in one's ability to succeed at a given task or in a specific situation. Margolis and McCabe (2006) state:

According to self-efficacy theorists, low self-efficacy causes motivational problems. If students believe they cannot succeed on specific tasks (low self-efficacy), they will superficially attempt them, give up quickly, or avoid or resist them. Low self-efficacy beliefs, unfortunately, impede academic achievement and, in the long run, create self-fulfilling prophecies of failure and learned helplessness that can devastate psychological well-being. (p. 219)

This cycle is evident in many of the students who require ongoing special education services within a segregated, pull-out model of intervention. This type of intervention is often part of many schools' policies.

School Policy

Although there are several policies I could focus on, my area of experience and interest lie within the IEP process: from planning through implementation to follow-up. Planning and implementing IEPs is a mandated step in complying with the British Columbia Ministry of Education legislation as outlined in *Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines* (2011). It states that schools must plan for inclusion of a student with special needs, ensure that an IEP is designed for a student with special needs as soon as practical after the school identifies the student as having special needs. A school must offer the parent of the student and the student the opportunity to be consulted about the preparation of the IEP. However, in my experience, the process undertaken is not useful to teachers and families, let alone the students it is meant to serve. Zeitlin and Curcic (2013) report, “a number of researchers argue that parents and educators are not equal partners in the process” (p. 2). In a template Special Education Policy provided to schools by the First Nations Schools Association, it states the school-based team will be responsible for assessing student need, developing an IEP for students to ensure the needs of the learner will be met and treating the parents and students with dignity and respect. However, it provides no guidance as to who should be on the school-based team, how the process should proceed after assessment or what constitutes dignity and respect. Frequently, in my experience, this vagueness leaves the development of the IEP in the hands of a special education teacher or classroom teacher. As a result, many of the strategies are not implemented, with the document being filed, produced as a requirement of governmental policy rather than as a proactive response to the learning needs and goals of the individual students. For the IEP process to become both a document and enacted process that will help to foster students’ success as self-

aware learners and as people of value, the process for creating IEPs needs to be inclusive of parents and students and meaningful for each school's unique context to implement.

Research has shown that although there are barriers to involvement, parents and students would prefer greater participation in IEP development (Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger 2010; Childre & Chambers 2005; Wilson Hawbaker 2007; Zeitlin & Curcic 2013). One important benefit to including students in their IEP development is the promotion of self-determination skills (Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger 2010; Wilson Hawbaker 2007). Self-determination skills are key to developing learners that can take control of their educational life and advocate for their needs and wants. Wehmeyer (2005), as cited in Barnard-Brak and Lechtenberger, says, "self-determination refers to those actions that are volitional and intentional on the part of an individual with express and conscious purpose of acting as a causal agent in one's own life" (2010, p. 344). Many students requiring intervention through special education programming need to be taught and given the opportunity to exercise choice and purposeful advocacy skills. Barnard-Brak and Lechtenberger, also paraphrase Zickel & Arnold (2001) as saying, "if students with disabilities are to be successful in navigating postschool environments, they need to learn to advocate for the accommodations and modifications they need" (p. 348). Every student, not just those with differing abilities, will need this skill. However, students with disabilities will need more practice with this skill, even to advocate with their own parents. As Childre and Chambers (2005) discovered, some families find being involved in a student-centered IEP process allows them to consider their child's perspective and interests, reconsider expectations for student responsibilities not only in educational planning, but home environments, and allows their child to develop skills that will help shape their future. Not only does the IEP process change how parents view

their children, it can utilize the already existing influence that parents have on their children's self-concept and achievement. Yeung et al. (2013) cite research that states, "by involving parents in intervention programs, it is possible to change students' self-concept, task value beliefs [sic], and subsequently improve their achievement" (p. 420). In addition to self-determination and other benefits realized through involvement in the IEP process, Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger (2010) found that, "encouraging the participation of students with disabilities in the IEP process is not just a matter of lip service to self-determination skills but is associated with measurable academic outcomes" (p. 346-347). As has already been stated, increasing academic outcomes can help increase self-efficacy toward learning thereby improving outcomes.

Wilson Hawbaker (2007) encourages an even deeper student involvement, through student-led IEP meetings. Along with evidence from other studies, the author's own research shows many positive outcomes from incorporating student-led IEP meetings into special education practice, including increased understanding of needs, goals and strategies, improved confidence and advocacy skills together with increased parental participation in the process. In the Government of Alberta publication, *Making a Difference*, it states:

Effective differentiated instruction also helps students understand what they are expected to learn, evaluate their own progress, and articulate their learning strengths, challenges and interests. Starting where students are at, providing meaningful choice, and creating opportunities for students to demonstrate their interests and skills increases students' motivation, self-confidence and willingness to assume responsibility for their learning. (2010, p. 3)

The student-led IEP process can be the start of differentiating instruction for students with exceptional learning and behavioural needs, and maybe even all students. There are many benefits to personalizing the IEP process from start to finish; ensuring it is inclusive, student centered and accountable to students and their goals. An inclusive policy on special education, defining the IEP process, is an important factor in helping students' understanding of themselves as learners and people of value.

Classroom Environments, Teacher Practices, and Learner Success

It is important for children to have the opportunity to understand themselves better as learners in order for them to grow as individuals and members of their communities. For all learners, regardless of age, gender, race, or learning profile, understanding of self can come through the use of self-regulated learning strategies. Bandura (1991) presents a Social Cognitive Theory of Self Regulated Learning. He states, "self-regulatory systems...not only mediate the effects of most external influences, but provide the very basis for purposeful action" (p. 248). Learning is, on many occasions, a purposeful act; it is often necessary to do it with intent to bring about a future that a learner has imagined. Many educational researchers build their understanding of self-regulated learning on Bandura's work and include it in their studies (Bussey, 2011; Schunk & Usher, 2011; Stoeger & Ziegler, 2011; Zimmerman, 2011). Built into Bandura's theory is the belief or self-efficacy of the learner toward learning. Bandura (1991) states:

People's beliefs in their efficacy influence the choices they make, their aspirations, how much effort they mobilize in a given endeavor, how long they persevere in the face of difficulties and setbacks, whether their thought patterns are self-

hindering or self-aiding, the amount of stress they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and their vulnerability to depression. (p. 257)

The learner's belief in ability to succeed at a given task is paramount in their path to that success. Margolis and McCabe (2006) cite several researchers who concluded that belief, especially for struggling learners, is the key to motivating, engaging and transforming those learners. Although there are various definitions of self-regulated learning that have developed from Bandura's work, Zimmerman's is the most widely cited (Davis & Swarts Gray, 2007; Leidinger and Perels, 2012; Menzies & Lane, 2011; Paris & Paris, 2001; Zumbrunn, Tadlock, & Roberts, 2011). According to Zimmerman, self-regulated learning involves a progression of considering tasks, planning actions that will help meet goals, monitoring strategies and performance throughout the process of enactment, as well as reflecting on and evaluating strategies and outcomes. This sequence is part of the self-efficacy cycle referred to earlier. Sungur and Tekkaya (2006) suggest, "self-regulated learners appear to be self-efficacious about their ability to master a learning task" (p. 307). Encouraging students to set goals, analyze useful strategies and reflect on performance helps students understand their abilities and capacity to learn, especially when the task is within the child's just right learning zone.

Like other skills, self-regulation develops over time, with learning happening at a level, or in the zone of, that which is just outside their current level or zone of ability. Florez (2011) notes that, "Vygotsky called the range of developmentally appropriate expectations the zone of proximal development" (p. 48), and reminds us that both expecting a child to perform beyond this zone and not challenging children enough hinders their learning. In order to challenge learners in the just right zone, learners and

teachers need to be attuned to and be able to articulate strengths and areas of need. The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (2013) reports:

Successful adults with LD attribute their success to two factors. The first is knowledge of their own strengths and weaknesses; the other is a change in their perception of themselves and their learning characteristics from one of failure to a more positive and balanced perception of a person with both strengths and weaknesses. (p. 2)

For this attribution to take place, students need to be given the opportunity to participate in processes that help them become more aware of their strengths, weaknesses and perceptions of self.

Many researchers suggest that explicit instruction of self-regulated learning strategies and demystifying the learning process benefits all students, especially those with learning and behavioral difficulties (Butler, Schnellert, & Cartier, 2013; Leidinger & Perels, 2012; Menzies & Lane, 2011; Moos & Ringdall, 2012; Palmer & Wehmeyer, 2003; Paris & Paris, 2001; Zumbrunn, Tadlock, & Roberts, 2011). Palmer and Wehmeyer (2003) suggest, “that young children *can* benefit from instruction that incorporates opportunities to self-regulate problem solving and to self-direct learning” (p. 125). Strategies of self-regulated learners include, among others, setting goals, planning, making appropriate choices, monitoring, managing strategies, seeking help, evaluating, and reflecting (Askill-Williams, Lawson, & Skrzypiec, 2012; Davis & Swarts Gray, 2007; Leidinger & Perels, 2012; Zimmerman, 2011; Zumbrunn, Tadlock, & Roberts, 2011). Including this type of learning and direct teaching in schools helps students to understand their own learning profile and plan for success.

Other types of environments and practices that help students achieve success in knowing and valuing themselves better include creating a sense of belonging, providing culturally relevant and respectful atmospheres. Baydala et al. (2009) state, “a school that increases children’s sense of belonging, by incorporating their language and cultural beliefs, may ... support academic achievement” (p. 30). Specifically for Aboriginal populations, this is important and possible in British Columbia’s First Nations operated schools. Toulouse (n.d.) writes, “Aboriginal students require schools in all aspects to honour ‘who they are’ and ‘where they have come from’ (e.g., Antone, 2003; Gamlin, 2003; van der Wey, 2001)” (p. 1). Regardless of location, it is important to remember that students need to feel connected and part of a learning community. Smyth et al., cited in Smyth and McInerney (2013), argue that “keeping young people connected to ‘learning’ has a lot to do with what ‘sense they make of themselves, their community and their futures’” (p. 52). Belonging and relationship are important for student success. It helps them to feel safe to explore who they are as learners.

Conclusion

This literature review examined articles that explored themes and issues that impact a student’s sense of value as learner. It is apparent that communities, schools, teachers and students are all important players in developing this awareness in children – especially in the context of the IEP process. In my community school, the Statement of Philosophy (2013) includes the goal to “focus equally on each individual child’s strengths and needs, develop the whole child and help them see their role in the community.” Toulouse (n.d.) reminds us that, “a growing body of research demonstrates that Aboriginal students’ self-esteem is a key factor in their school success (e.g., Hilberg & Tharp, 2002; Kanu, 2002; Swanson, 2003)” (p. 1). Including students in this focus on

their strengths and needs can help to develop their self-worth. As seen in the literature, with the direct teaching of goal setting and reflection, as well as providing opportunities for choice and challenging activities, students can become self-regulated learners. These learners in turn believe that they are more capable of success in various learning activities. The IEP process can be used to facilitate this growth. Sumara, Davis, and Laidlaw (2001) remind us that, “ways of organizing and interpreting curriculum are always rooted in local needs, worries, desires, and imaginings” (p. 159). Together, as educators, parents and community members, we can help students to understand their individual value and support their self-awareness as learners and members of the community. Together, we can realize the impact that will have on the future, their own futures and the future of First Nation communities. Battiste, a member of the Mi’kmaq Nation and a professor at the University of Saskatchewan, as cited in Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski (2004) relates that:

In order for the “new Aboriginal story” to unfold, people’s fully actualized selves must be: [R]ecognized as the foundation for their future. But we are not whole yet, having been diminished by our past, and we do not know who will articulate that future, that new story. Aboriginal government? Aboriginal politicians? Elders? Educators? The responsibility ultimately rests with Aboriginal people themselves in a continuing journey of collaboration and negotiation, healing and rebuilding, creating and experimenting, and visioning and celebrating. (p. 92)

Building a capacity in students for recognizing their value, as learners and people in their communities, is clearly a step in the direction that Aboriginal educational theorists and elders, such as Battiste, envision.

Chapter Three: The Value of an IEP Process for All

Introduction

Imagine how much people can accomplish by valuing themselves, knowing their innate capacity and practicing the skills they have discovered for setting and meeting goals. In order for anyone to enter into “a continuing journey of collaboration and negotiation, healing and rebuilding, creating and experimenting, and visioning and celebrating” (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004, p. 92), they must be willing to investigate who they are, take risks, take advantage of opportunities to learn and use their voice and actions to unsettle the status quo. This begins with valuing self and understanding the capacity within that can be developed and applied to achieve goals. In my experience, if one doesn’t understand that growth, learning, or becoming include knowledge of strengths, weaknesses, and strategies that enable movement along the path, the journey seems impossible because one doesn’t value themselves, all of themselves.

The journey to understand this valuing of self is very personal for me. In my school days, I would not have been deemed someone with special educational needs. My school life was relatively easy and without much hard work needed in order to achieve success. However, I came to expect that with little effort I was going to accomplish near perfection. What an erroneous expectation! I didn’t learn that mistakes are a necessary part of the learning process, not an indication that I wasn’t good enough or valuable. Fear became my driving motivator instead of my curiosity to discover something about the world and myself; there was no process for understanding my strengths, weaknesses and capacity for growth, let alone understanding my value. What I needed to understand is that learning is volitional and my sense of agency and efficacy increase with such knowledge and proper motivation.

In my experience, many students struggle because they have a perception that everything is difficult and nothing is meaningful. As a result, they give up. Margolis and McCabe (2006) state that, “low self-efficacy beliefs, unfortunately, impede academic achievement and, in the long run, create self-fulfilling prophecies of failure and learned helplessness that can devastate psychological well-being” (p. 219). When this happens, learners do not value the strengths they have or the potential that is within them to achieve any goal, let alone one that is the desire of their heart. Students must understand that school is more than trying to attain something that seems unattainable or achieve goals that aren't personally meaningful; that an aim of education is to help students understand the process of learning within and significant to themselves. Reeve (2012) states:

Engaged involvement includes not only reacting to the learning task one has been given by showing more or less persistence, enjoyment, and strategic thinking, but it also means initiating a process in which the student generates options that expand his or her freedom of action and increase the chance for that student to experience both strong motivation and meaningful learning. (p. 162)

Education is meant to be about the student being engrossed in all types of learning activities that prepare them for the world and help them explore their place within it. This type of education echoes the ideas of Dewey (1929), Eisner (1988), Halbert and Kaser (2013), Krishnamurti (1964), Miller (2000), and Smith (2003) as supporting learner goals as well as goals that benefit society.

In order to achieve education that is supporting both individual and global goals, schools must implement processes that encourage collaboration, experimenting, visioning and celebrating. The IEP process can do this and help schools build capacity in learners

for recognizing their value. In consideration of the literature reviewed and experiences of the IEP process, and in order to create environments that enable the development of a healthy learning process and a growing understanding of self as valuable learner, this project offers analysis of the intention of the IEP in schools, identifies four problems that disconnect this intention from practical application and suggests some ideas that might help move the process more toward its intended spirit.

Intended Spirit

As we grow older in our society, more independence is expected. Growth, maturing, and change are expected outcomes for all students in a school system. The BC MOE curriculum documents highlight this growth expectation. For example, in the *English Language Arts K-9 Curriculum* draft, one of the curricular competencies related to creating and communicating pertains to oral language. In the Kindergarten to Grade two band, the expectation is that students will be able to “express thoughts, feelings, opinions, and ideas through oral, written, and visual presentations and contribute as a member of a classroom community” (BC MOE, 2013a, p. 1). In contrast, the Grade eight and nine band states it is expected students will “use oral language to explore and express ideas, communicate clearly, and evoke emotion as well as apply the conventions of language to clarify meaning in written and oral communication” (p. 6). In order to be independent, individuals must really know themselves, they must understand their unique needs for support as well as strengths and strategies that help achieve success.

Also in our society we are expected to be committed, productive members. The BC MOE states that, “BC’s Education Plan is based on a simple principle: every learner will realize his or her full potential and contribute to the well-being of our province (2013b, p. 5). For this to occur, learners must understand how their uniqueness fits into

their community, what they have to offer and in what ways they can support others while still getting what they need. The Lil’wat concepts of celhcelh, a7xekcal, and emhaka7 support these expectations. Figure 1 provides a brief description of these three principles along with an aspect of the IEP process that supports this principle.

Lil'wat Principle	Description	IEP Process
Celhcelh	each person is responsible for their own learning and the learning of others, always being open to learning opportunities, seeking to find and fit into a learning community, and offering their knowledge to benefit that community and their collective purpose	Planning: Collaborative Consultation
A7xekcal	accepting help from others to find the capacity within each learner in order to develop each person’s individual gifts and expertise in a holistic manner	Program Support and Implementation
Emhaka7	encouraging each learner to do the best he or she can at each task given to him or her, while also keeping watch on other learners to help them do the same	Identification, Assessment, and Evaluation

Figure 1. Three Lil’wat principles for learning and teaching.

Schools are meant to facilitate this understanding and success. The school in which I work has included in its Statement of Philosophy this intention.

Our school and community will aim to guide students' learning in a way that includes our language, culture and traditions. Our educational program will give our students the tools to understand themselves and the world around them and enable them to live successful lives within their chosen community and reach personal goals. (Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw School, 2013)

In order to accomplish this mission, we, as educators, need to utilize a process that helps us locate and cultivate the capacity inside each learner. Special Education is meant to support this mission and vision. The British Columbia Ministry of Education (BC MOE)

states in its *Special Educational Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines*, “All students should have equitable access to learning, opportunities for achievement and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their educational programs” (2011, p. 1). Every person has value in learning, in education, in life. This is echoed in other parts of the world as well. For example, in *Collaboration for Success: Individual Education Plans*, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in New Zealand (2011) states:

Success for All – Every School, Every Child [from] 2010 sets out the government’s vision of a fully inclusive education system by 2014. Confident schools, students, parents/caregivers, whānau, and communities are at the heart of this vision. The IEP process needs to support this goal. The strategy states that all schools should be ready for all children, whatever their needs. School learning should be a positive experience for every young person, including those with special education needs. (p. 4)

If we truly believe that every child can learn and grow and that schools can support every child in their pursuits, then we must have a system that is prepared to make that happen. At the heart of the IEP process is this belief, all children can learn, all children can grow, all children can use support to achieve goals, support from schools, each other, families and communities. All children have value and the IEP process is meant to help realize that concept. However, intentions set out in visions, missions and policies aren’t always accomplished in practical application.

Gaps Between Policy and Practical Process

Governments attempt to assist in the application of policy, through documents such as *Special Educational Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines*, where it states, “the purpose of this manual is to provide a single point of reference

regarding legislation, ministry policy and guidelines to assist school boards in developing programs and services that enable students with special needs to meet the goals of education (MOE, 2011, p. III). However, in my experience and in the research (see Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger, 2010; Childre & Chamber, 2005; Yeung, Craven, & Ali, 2013; and Zeitlin & Curcic, 2013), this still isn't always accomplished. Many problems exist in making the policy come to life. Ongoing collaborative consultation is necessary to produce a well-documented, flexible plan, in which the student takes an active role.

Collaborative consultation. The IEP process is meant to be collaborative. Both the British Columbia (BC) and New Zealand Ministries of Education recognize the benefit of this and it is supported by research. The BC MOE defines:

Collaborative consultation is a process in which people work together to solve a common problem or address a common concern. A successful collaborative process is characterized by the following features: it is voluntary; there is mutual trust and open communication among the people involved; identification/clarification of the problem to be addressed is a shared task; the goal is shared by all participants; each participant's contribution is valued equally; all participants' skills are employed in identifying and selecting problem-solving strategies; and there is shared responsibility for the program or strategy initiated. (2011, p. v)

When I began my career in special education as a new teacher, I wrote many IEPs. In other schools, I witnessed classroom teachers writing them. This is a huge burden to bear; a students' entire educational program depends on this document you are preparing. The expectation was that IEPs were written for students that classroom teachers referred to the Special Education Teacher for extra assistance and the Special Education Teacher

was the sole person responsible for making the plan happen. The classroom teacher, the administrator and the parent, when possible, then signed these IEPs. Mitchell et al. (as cited by the New Zealand MOE, 2011), identified that, “there is extensive evidence for the effectiveness of active parent involvement in improving children’s academic and social outcomes ... To the maximum extent possible, students should be involved in developing their own IEPs” (p. 8). The following three characteristics of collaborative consultation contribute to the difficulty of shifting policy into practice.

Mutual trust and open communication. Building relationships between people is what needs to happen in order to have mutual trust and open communication.

Relationship building takes time. I have been in my current position for seven years and building relationships has always been important to me, but I hadn’t realized how long some might take to form. Just this year, I have understood this more clearly. The first year and a half in this position, I rarely saw a parent, let alone discussed their child’s educational needs and goals with them. Although there are many contributing factors, my idea was that parents would approach me because I am open and trustworthy and interested in the success of my students. This of course was naïve. There is a woman who has had two sons attend the school in my time there. I have had the privilege of working with both boys. Her second son was in Grade one when I was hired; he is now in Grade seven. Over the years, I made attempts to engage with her via typical means, by telephone and through letters home. In the beginning, if I were able to connect by phone with her, she would commit to coming to a meeting but would never attend. After a couple of attempts and a few face-to-face conversations at more informal school or community events, I explained to her the process in which I was hoping she would participate. Her son would be there, we would talk with the teacher about the year and

discuss transition to high school for her oldest son. This time she attended. However, she didn't participate or give much input. This was the trend for the next few years. This year, when I called to invite her to the meeting, I informed her that her nephew, who was now working at the school and whose children had attended the school, would also attend the meeting. His presence seemed to put her at ease; she asked more questions, including my name and my role. I was unbelievably surprised. I had been attempting to engage with her for almost seven years and I hadn't even been able to register with her who I was let alone my purpose. Her nephew was able to explain the process, give examples from his experience with the process, and explain why it was important for her to give input and talk about what she knew of her son. He helped her see the usefulness of having this type of meeting. Her connection to her nephew was the bridge I needed to make a connection with her. Her nephew's experience and willingness to share is the beginning of forming a trusting and open relationship, even if it took seven years to establish. In the research conducted by Zeitlin and Curcic (2013), a parent echoes this experience, "Better communication between special education and regular education is my desire. I don't even know all the names of the people that work with our daughter. True parent collaboration can better serve the student. (Terri)" (p. 12).

Participant's contribution is valued equally. Part of establishing trusting relationships is valuing the individual and their relationship to the process, including their understanding of it and their contribution to it. Since the early years when I wrote IEPs by myself in isolation, collaboration has been the means and the intended end of the IEP development process. Towards this end, parent, student and teacher involvement became paramount in my IEP development. Many attempts were made to accommodate every participant in attending the meeting. Getting people to the meeting, as stated above, isn't

the goal, getting people to contribute is the second and more important step. Regardless of opinions of what is suggested, there must be space for everyone to feel heard. The Lil'wat concept of emhaka7 is as applicable in this process as it is in classroom learning environments. As Sanford, Williams, Hopper and McGregor (2012) remind us, "Emhaka7 encourages each of us to do the best we can at each task given to us, and to be aware of how we can be helpful to others in our community. Emhaka7 reminds us to work respectfully and with good thoughts and good hands in all we do" (p. 25). Many teachers and assistants want the IEP document partially filled in before meetings begin, in order to speed up the process. This is not a practice that allows us to work respectfully together or show that contributions are equally valued. The research by Zeitlin and Curcic (2013) shares the idea that, "overall, the key parents' messages were: more collaboration, better communication, and recognition of parents as equal and knowledgeable partners in the decision-making process during the IEP meetings" (p. 12). Students of all ages want to feel like their voice is being heard as well. Wilson Hawbaker states, "if the IEP is developed without the student, or with only token involvement, the student learns that his or her voice really doesn't matter and that important decisions are best made for them" (2007, p. 3). Care must be taken to allow equal participation, ensure everyone feels heard and valued, and be certain students have a voice in the meetings and entire process of their education.

Goal is shared. Once you have established a connection and ensured all voices are given space to be heard, it is necessary for everyone involved to remain open to communicating honestly about the desired outcomes of educational programming. Zeitlin and Curcic (2013) reported:

Parents shared that IEP goals were limiting and positioned their children as an

object of remediation, with deficits, rather than a student who learned differently. Parents were interested in a broader goal for their children, one that spoke not to the deficit but to support and inclusion. These parents worried about the socially exclusive and linear nature of goals, hoping for real choices and authentic curriculum. (p. 11)

Coming to consensus is important for implementation to be successful. There is a student in our school with high physical and intellectual needs. She is very dependent upon others to help meet her daily physical needs as well as her learning needs. In the beginning of her school career, it was evident she would require much support to achieve her personal goals, which included physical, safety, personal hygiene, speech, language, and academic goals. She had many needs, none of which were going to be met if we tried to focus on all of them. The Speech Pathologists perception was that her speech goals were most important, the education assistant was certain her toileting goals were paramount, the parents wanted her safety and well-being to be the highest priority, her teacher wanted her participation in classroom activities to be first on the list. We have had many meetings with this family over the years, as she is now in grade five, to discuss her program. Although we seemed to have consensus in the meetings, practically there was always tension when it came to implementing the intended plan. Over the years, the struggle has been to focus on the student's strengths and needs as well as growth in all areas while honouring the desired outcomes of all participants and the best interest of the student.

Documented plan developed for a student. In an effort to ensure all students are receiving access to high quality, relevant education, the BC MOE defines an IEP as, “a documented plan developed for a student with special needs that describes

individualized goals, adaptations, modifications, the services to be provided, and includes measures for tracking achievement” (2011, p. v). The wording of this statement may be its inherent flaw. First, “a *documented plan*” can often become “a well-planned document”. This can be for many reasons, but usually is due to lengthy goal statements, inadequate services, and long review timelines. Reviewing many goals once per year, as recommended by the BC MOE, can lead to poor follow through and loss of vision for the student. The document becomes a task instead of the process becoming a tool. Mitchell et al (2010), (as cited by the New Zealand MOE, 2011), found that “teachers [in New Zealand] often viewed IEPs as an administrative task, rather than as a tool to develop more effective instruction and learning (p. 6). Many teachers with whom I work find differentiating and individual programs daunting. One teacher remarked recently that she doesn’t have the time or the support to make sure all students are getting all the services and adaptations they require to be more successful. The IEP goals, like psychoeducational assessment recommendations, become one more thing we as teachers can’t possibly fulfill. The well-documented plan becomes a well-planned document that gets filed away in a cabinet and serves no real purpose, except to fulfill MOE requirements. Once again Mitchell et al. are cited by the New Zealand MOE (2011), state, “IEPs suffer from having multiple purposes ascribed to them, the same IEP document frequently being expected to serve educational, legal, planning, accountability, placement, and resource allocation purposes (p. 6). It is understandable, yet unacceptable, that the primary purpose being served is one that doesn’t actually benefit the student. The second wording issue, “a documented plan developed *for* a student”, gives the impression that this plan is not inclusive of the student’s thoughts and ideas, goals and desires or participation in enacting the plan. Smyth and McInerney (2013)

suggest, “whether young people ‘succeed’ at school has much to do with how they understand and accommodate to ‘relational power’ within the spaces provided, and to what extent they are active players in creating those spaces” (p. 44).

Active role in design of IEP. As has already been cited, students can benefit from participating in the IEP meeting to develop their plan. The BC MOE states, “it is important that students with special needs take an active role in the design of their IEPs to the maximum extent that their developmental level and ability permit” (2011, p. 15). Although this is true and important, taking an active responsibility in implementing the plan is equally important. Designing the IEP is only one step in the process where students learn about their value and understand their strengths, areas of need and strategies that help lead to their success. This gap between policy and practice is evident in the thinking of several students with whom I work. They can express their desires for what they want out of life, for example to be a professional hockey player or to read without assistance, but they cannot make connection between the goal and the steps they need to take to reach it. Plan into action is very difficult for many of my students because they don’t have an active role and responsibility in making things happen; they see that as external to themselves. Being active in the IEP process from design through implementation to evaluation will help these students understand and see their value as learners validated.

IEP Process. The IEP is a plan, written in a document, which is intended to be a fluid process. The BC MOE Special Education Policy Manual (2011) states:

For purposes of discussion, the planning process is divided into five phases:

- identification/assessment;
- planning;

- program support/implementation;
- evaluation; and
- reporting.

Together, they constitute a process that is continuous and flexible, rather than a series of five separate and discontinuous phases. Wherever possible, the process should be incorporated into the regular routines of planning, evaluation and reporting that occur for all students. (p. 12)

As stated previously, often times the IEP becomes a well-planned document that serves too many purposes and the process isn't used or useful. Many phases of the process can become stumbling blocks to success because each phase constitutes a smaller process that needs doing in order for the whole process to work well. Identification and assessment is often rigid, having very narrow criteria for qualifying for special education services. Because of volume and time, some students are missed and others are categorized for life. There is a gap between designated special education students and students in the regular classroom. What process is in place for students who don't qualify for funding but who are struggling learners within the regular classroom? There is a misuse of designations that limits a student's potential. What process is in place for a designated special education student to break free from the confines of his or her disabilities and weaknesses? It is my belief that all children should have access to a process whereby they come to understand their needs and strengths and areas of growth regardless of services they may require. We want to build capacity in all children, not just the ones that are eligible for funding, not just those that function "normally" on their own in any learning environment, and not just the ones that don't seem to fit either category. Each child is entitled to understand what he/she needs in order to accomplish educational and

personal goals. Implementation and evaluation are the largest phases, as they are the action that comes from the planning. As has been discussed, this can be a very overwhelming part of the process because it takes time and commitment by all collaborators to achieve. How do those involved in the process make these phases more manageable, continuous and cyclical?

These problems that prevent the IEP process from reaching its potential exist in many educational settings. Collaboration, marked by trust, open communication, contributions that are valued and goals that are shared along with including the student as an active partner in the flexible and cyclical process present problem areas for certain. However, they are not insurmountable problems. How do we move from IEP policy to IEP process and achieve what is intended: a process that values each learner and increases their own capacity to value themselves as a learner and person of worth? Maybe something of a transition here. After identifying some of the weaknesses and concerns with the current process, I now turn to ways to potentially address some of these identified problems within the current educational system in my school district?

Toward Better Collaboration, Planning, Implementation and Process

Value is not easily measured. Giving people opportunities to learn about themselves is one way I suggest we can plant the seed and nurture its growth. In order to answer the question of how the IEP process can do this, I aim to address each problem identified herein with possible solutions.

Collaborative consultation. This “process in which people work together to solve a common problem or address a common concern” (BC MOE, 2011, p. v), is characterized by many features, three of which I have identified as being possible areas of concern. Collaborative consultation needs people in order to take place. People have

existing personalities, pre-existing notions and ideas, as well as ways of being that contribute to how they interact with others in a process as well as how they interact with the process itself.

Mutual trust and open communication. Time is my solution to building relationships, with parents, colleagues, and students. Although agendas and deadlines are important, the relationship must be the utmost. This takes careful understanding, planning and patience, especially in First Nations or culturally diverse locations. Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski (2004), found in their research:

All these persistent changes in the social structure of Aboriginal societies had profound psychological effects on the social psyche of the people, which included social fatalism (the world was approached with distrust) and impoverishment of communication (there was no connection between Aboriginal people and the world outside). (p. 48)

With this understanding, teachers, schools and governments can be more open to a process that may take more time. Zeitlin and Curcic (2013) found, “parents desired the IEP process to be open and trusting with exploratory dialogue...” (p. 9). This desire reflects the way governments intend the process to be. If the relational space is not established and participants aren’t feeling comfortable there, true collaboration will not happen. Smyth and McInerney (2013) indicate the importance of making this space, not just for the sake of parents but the students as well:

It could be argued that when young people prematurely terminate, exit or leave school – or, more accurately, are eased out, pushed out, or shoved out – it is largely because of the way the relational space within schools and educational

policies is being constructed (or foreclosed) for them in ways that young people feel are inconsistent with the identities they are pursuing for themselves. (p. 44)

Where can we find time and opportunity to create this relational space? The First Nations Schools Association (FNSEA) suggests:

Reach out to parents as much as you can. Ask other school staff for suggestions about how to best communicate, such as phone calls home, informal meals, and/or celebrations. You might also want to make home visits, although new teachers may find parents more receptive to visits if a community member comes along. Work to make parents feel comfortable and confident that you are interested in their input. And be patient ... while building relationships may take time, it will be worthwhile. (2011, p. 9)

Be patient. This is some of the best advice we can take. Take opportunities that come to you from the community but create your own as well. Being part of the community is a two way street. Attend feasts, soccer tournaments, funerals, etc. in the community as well as invite community members to attend field trips, class activities, or afternoon tea with the express purpose of forming relationships, with no other agenda. This is difficult, as we want to be purposeful in our interactions, but the purpose here must be interacting to get to know each other, without expectation or guarantee it will lead to greater trust and openness. It seems counter to what is necessary for the process to be successful, but entering into community without expectation allows everyone to reap rewards spontaneously. Russell Bishop (as cited in Hattie, 2009) thru his work with Māori students in New Zealand suggests:

Building relations with students implies agency, efficacy, respect by the teacher [school] for what the child brings to the class (from home, culture, peers), and

allowing the experiences of the child to be recognized in the classroom. Further, developing relationships requires skill by the teacher – such as the skills of listening, empathy, caring, and having positive regard for others. (p. 118)

Hopefully, for the benefit of all involved, most especially the student whose identity is being formed, taking time to intentionally cultivate relationships with empathy and caring will result in those identified as trusting and open.

Participant's contribution is valued equally. In order to value equity in this process, there must be opportunity for participants to contribute in a way that is comfortable to them. It can happen verbally, in written form, electronically or in picture form. Having input into the IEP planning can happen even if someone can't attend a meeting. The website www.imdetermined.org has several IEP document templates that make it possible for pre-school to high school students to lead their own meetings. Figure 2 shows a one-page template that allows students to contribute basic information about their understanding of self.

Name: _____ Date _____

DOB: _____

**i'm
determined**

My Strengths My Interests

My Preferences My Needs

Figure 2. One-page Student-Led IEP template. Virginia Department of Education

Gregory, Cameron and Davies (2011) suggest having parents and students give information prior to and after meetings. Figures 3, 4 and 5 show templates that give all participants the opportunity to think about what they consider most important for the learner prior to attending meetings. This type of think time is important for all members of a team; it can increase the quality of responses and if reviewed individually, gives greater value to each contributor’s ideas. These can be adapted for participants and completed electronically, with pictures, or adapted to reflect language of the local culture.

Student _____ Term _____	
Subject _____ Date _____	
Strengths/Accomplishments	Work samples to show
Areas needing improvement	A goal for next term
My closing statement: The most important thing I want you to know is...	

Figure 3. One-page Student Summary Sheet.

<p>Teacher Summary Sheet</p> <p>Student: _____ Term: _____</p> <p>Subject(s): _____ Date: _____</p>	
<p>Areas of strength</p>	<p>Areas needing improvement</p>
<p>Possible goal(s)</p>	<p>Additional notes:</p>

Figure 4. One-page Teacher Summary Sheet.

Please note your conference is:

Date: _____

Time: _____

Date: _____

Dear Parents/Guardians,

In preparation for our upcoming conference, please take a few minutes and jot down some ideas about your son or daughter. You might want to include

Any areas of strength, growth, accomplishments:	One or two areas you'd like to see improvement in:	One specific goal:

accomplishments that take place outside of school as well as in school.

Yours truly, (TEACHER SIGNATURE)

P.S. Please bring these notes to the conference for your own use. Please do not send this form back to the school.

Figure 5. One-page Parent Summary Sheet.

These templates coincide with the feedback I received this year from parents that a blank document is extremely welcomed, especially if it is the first meeting in the student's school career. The other strategy that can be utilized is that all information is posted in the room so all eyes can see it. No one is working on a computer taking notes, unless of course a projector is being used to show the notes to all participants. That way everyone can see his or her ideas being put into the document. It is important to note that all ideas are honored and nothing is cast aside. The only selection happens when choosing goals to be implemented first. This procedure, as opposed to the practice where the parent, teacher or other participant reads the document and signs it, shows everyone that their input has equal standing within the process as all other ideas.

Goal is shared. Trying to value input from many participants is one reason why coming to consensus on goals is a difficult part of the process. Ensuring there will be shared vision means getting a clear picture of what type future is desired for the learner. This need not be specific but needs to direct the conversation. Understanding that the student is on a path and that learning happens along this path in many different settings is a helpful construct within which to set and meet goals. Remembering the principles that learning emerges for each person in a different way also is helpful for setting and monitoring goals. In Figure 6, an excerpt from the FNSA IEP template shows how the document provides a place for thinking in just this way. Long-term goals are considered first, then goals for the year are brainstormed. Finally, prioritizing occurs for area of need before any specific goals are determined. With this path in mind, participants can more easily determine greatest area of need and have faith that all goals will be eventually worked towards through continued collaboration, planning and learning

The image shows a template for an Individualized Education Program (IEP) goal. It is enclosed in a large rectangular border. At the top, there is a decorative header box with a scroll effect on the left and a corner tab on the right. The header text reads: "Long Term Goals and Dreams" followed by "Senior School Years and Beyond" in a bold, sans-serif font. Below the header, the main text is centered and reads: "Goals for the Year" followed by "(group brainstorm activity)" and "What do we want (*student name*) to accomplish this year?". At the bottom of the template, there is a paragraph of instructions: "As a team, prioritize no more than 3-5 areas from the Areas of Need and Support that will be targeted this year in your SMART Goal Chart." Below this paragraph is a list of ten categories, each preceded by a small square checkbox: Academic Achievement, Behavioural, Independence, Language/Communication, Motor Skills, Physical, Cultural, Safety/Life Skills, Sensory/Physical, and Social/Emotional. The last item, "Transition", is also preceded by a checkbox.

Long Term Goals and Dreams
Senior School Years and Beyond

Goals for the Year
(group brainstorm activity)
What do we want (*student name*) to accomplish this year?

As a team, prioritize no more than 3-5 areas from the Areas of Need and Support that will be targeted this year in your SMART Goal Chart.

- Academic Achievement
- Behavioural
- Independence
- Language/Communication
- Motor Skills
- Physical
- Cultural
- Safety/Life Skills
- Sensory/Physical
- Social/Emotional
- Transition

Figure 6. FNSA IEP Goal template used for brainstorming general goals.

Documented Plan Developed For a Student. This continued collaboration, planning and learning is the path to safeguarding against the well-documented plan becoming a well-planned document. We need to remember that the goal isn't the document itself, but the process that produces it. According to the Ministry of Education

in New Zealand (2011), setting a team process is useful in allowing the filed document to become a living document and suggest that, “at the first IEP meeting, the IEP team decides on team processes, including: communication between all members, the frequency of meetings, member responsibilities” (p. 13). Setting up team process ahead of the planning will help everyone take ownership of and be accountable to keeping the IEP’s necessary ongoing nature.

Being reflective in evaluating the process and effectiveness toward meeting its intended target will help keep the document from becoming the focus, by keeping all thoughts on the process. Common Formative Assessment, although typically used to gather evidence about student learning, can also be used to provide feedback to IEP participants about the effectiveness of the process. This again takes time. Rushing process to product will be counter to what is necessary to keeping the IEP document useful and the process continuous for the learner to achieve success and discover their value as a learner.

Active role in design of IEP. Learners who participate in the design and implementation of their IEPs are learning valuable self-determination and regulation skills that are part of the cycle that can increase self-efficacy towards learning. Along with the research from Barnard-Brak and Lechtenberger (2010), Sungur and Tekkaya (2006), Hawbaker (2007), and others, many resources exist to assist students in becoming volitional and purposeful in enacting the goals set out in the IEP. Figure 7 shows the goal setting and assessment process in which students and teachers, along with other team members, engage. Students practice the process and begin to understand that meeting

goals and realizing dreams takes planning, practice, reflection and revision. It opens students to seeing what works, what doesn't and learning happens on a continuum.

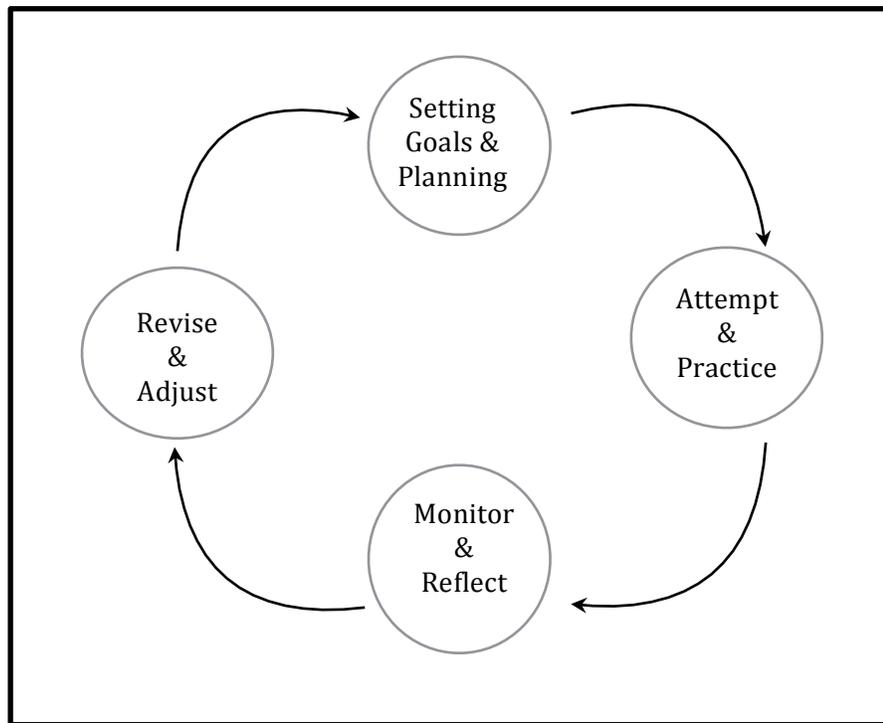


Figure 7. Formative Assessment Cycle for setting and evaluating goals.

The Virginia Department of Education has developed a website to assist schools in building self-determination skills in students through the IEP and goal setting process. It provides templates of various levels that might enable learners to be involved in the formative assessment cycle. Figure 8 shows one such way students can participate in the setting of goals. It simply lays out the goal, the purpose, the action and the sources of support. It doesn't overwhelm with text or too many goals to work towards. These types of graphic organizers provide easy access into the process for students at all levels of functioning. These can be paper or electronically based, designed with individual students in mind to ensure all students can grow and learn as determined by their needs.

My goal is...
It is important to me because...

Main Idea

Steps at school I need to take to reach my goal

Details

Step

Who can help me?

Step

Who can help me?

Main Idea

Steps at home I need to take to reach my goal

Details

Step

Who can help me?

Step

Who can help me?

Adapted from the 2 Main-Idea Footprints and 2 Main Idea Box Frame (© 2004 Edwin Ellis) free downloads located at: www.graphicorganizers.com/downloads.htm. VDOE I'm Determined

Developed by VDOE T/TAC @ Radford University

Figure 8. Action Planning Graphic Organizer. Virginia Department of Education

Setting a few challenging goals within a well-planned process, instead of many easily attainable ones, can increase the likelihood of success, thereby increasing student efficacy toward learning. Hattie (2009) suggests that “goals provide an individual with normative information on the expected level of performance, such goals have major effects on the development of self-efficacy and confidence, which in turn affects the choice of difficulty of goals” (p. 165). Increasing a learner’s efficacy and confidence in attaining goals is part of the process of building capacity and assisting students in finding meaning in learning and their innate value.

IEP Process. Helping the process become more manageable, continuous and cyclical isn't a one-time problem. Like the process, the problem is ongoing. As suggested developing team process will help to alleviate these complications. The one area of concern for me in the process is around identification and assessment. Although the processes for identification and designation in BC and other jurisdictions is meant to help students receive services, as pointed out, it can exclude some and ensnare others. Embedding the process into classroom settings, working collaboratively with classroom teachers and parents to directly teach metacognitive skills and including contact with personal goals on a regular basis for all students will help all students reap the benefits and understand their value as learners. The BC MOE (2011) defines students with special needs as follows: "A student who has a disability of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional or behavioural nature, has a learning disability or has special gifts or talents, as defined in the Manual of Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines, Section E." (p. 1). Quite frankly, being deemed special by government or other set standards should not be the only reason you receive this type of service. Every learner fits this definition if you remove the last phrase "as defined in...".

Conclusion

Based on the review of the literature and experiences in schools, it can be said that the IEP process is often times an unwelcomed reality in schools. However, it can also be said that for schools to achieve success in meeting the goals of educating every learner and helping learners understand their value, they must embrace such processes. Developing the concepts of celhcelh, emhaka7, and a7xekcal in our learning environments requires an IEP process that can be accessed by all students, regardless of

their interests, strengths and needs. Cultivating understanding of self as valuable learner is a result of being part of a process that shows the learner he or she has the capacity to direct and enact his or her own growth, using his or her strengths and various strategies to meet his or her goals. This project critically looked at the intention of the IEP in schools, identified four disparities between intention and application of the IEP process and suggested solutions that will help return the process to its original intent in schools and classrooms. These solutions included: being patient and taking time to build trusting relationships, being reflective about process, including parents and students as often as possible in the planning and implementation of goals and embedding goal setting for all students into classroom practice. It is my hope that the IEP process can be returned to its intended purpose, to help students achieve; achieve an understanding of their value as learners by knowing their capacity for learning and understanding their whole self well. Meyer (2001) sums up the concepts of *celhcelh*, *emhaka7*, and *a7xekcal* well:

There it is. How do we educate our youth for the challenges of the next millennium? We surround them with our community, we give them meaningful experiences that highlight their ability to be responsible, intelligent, and kind. We watch for their gifts, we shape assessment to reflect mastery that is accomplished in real time, not false. We laugh more, plant everything, and harvest the hope of aloha. We help each other, we listen more, we trust in one another again. We find our Hawaiian essence reflected in both process and product of our efforts. That is Hawaiian education, and understanding our Hawaiian epistemology is our foundation, our *kumupa‘a*. So, let it be said and let it be known: We have what we need. We are who we need. (p. 146)

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Running Head: VALUE OF SELF AS LEARNER

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