

Rahmat and the snakes



I noticed Rahmat was calling to me and gesturing for me to come over to his easel. He was painting on the far side of the easel and I couldn't see his creation from where I was.

I went over. "WOW! Snakes." "All have tongues and eyes," he said. "Beautiful snakes," I said. "Do you have snakes in Afghanistan?" I asked. "Yes, and in Pakistan too." I began to write about his snakes on the painting – my version.

Rahmat listened respectfully to me. I could sense he was not satisfied with my ideas. He called to Sadia. Sadia is a teacher from Afghanistan who speaks Dari, the same Afghani language as Rahmat. He had some discussion with her. She listened. She began to write his story in Dari as Rahmat dictated.

He asked her to explain to me. She then explained that Rahmat's story goes like this:

The little snake ate lots of food and grew bigger, and then he ate lots and lots more food and he grew bigger still, and then he ate lots and lots and lots more food and he grew huge.

It is so fortunate that Rahmat can access Sadia and through her clarify his thinking for me. He wants me to know what he is thinking. He is not prepared to accept a watered-down version of his thoughts and he knows there is a way in this centre for that not to happen. I definitely had it wrong. Sorry, Rahmat. But you know how to teach me and graciously remind me that we are friends and that I am a learner. We belong to a community of learners.

Robyn. June.

What's happening here?

Rahmat is painting, and the teacher begins to write an accompanying commentary. He is not satisfied with the teacher's interpretation of his work and calls to another teacher who speaks his home language. This second teacher translates Rahmat's commentary for him, revealing that his painting tells a story.

What does this assessment tell us about the learning (using a Communication/Mana Reo lens)?

For Rahmat, English is an additional language. He can communicate in English, but a complex story, like this one about snakes, can be told only in his home language. As the teacher comments, "It is so fortunate that Rahmat can access Sadia [the translator] and through her clarify his thinking for me." Robyn, the teacher, is aware that without this assistance to overcome language barriers, teachers run the risk of documenting "watered-down" versions of children's communications.

How might this documented assessment contribute to Communication/Mana Reo?

This assessment sends out a reminder to teachers to listen carefully and, where possible, to elicit interpretations or translations from speakers of the children's home languages.

However, there are practice and policy implications about the availability of home-language speakers in early childhood centres where there are families for whom English is an additional language. There can be no straightforward solution to this issue, since the communities of some early childhood centres include fifteen or more different home languages.

What other strands of Te Whāriki are exemplified here?

This exemplar is also about a child's sense of *well-being* and *belonging*. In this early childhood centre, Rahmat can tell stories to the teacher in his home language – an opportunity that makes it clear that home culture and cultural identity are valued, respected, and connected to this place.