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Cover design: Representation of a tukutuku showing the stepped poutama pattern symbolising growth or achievement - like climbing a staircase. The MTchgLn poutama (Te Poutama: Ngā Pou te Ako) is organised around the four core values of the programme and represents pre-service teachers’ development and growth of adaptive expertise and action competence.
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Contemporary Teaching and Learning Issues

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Chris Astall, Murray Fastier, Trish Lewis and James Graham 1

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Editorial

Welcome to the second issue of the *Journal of Initial Teacher Inquiry*. This journal celebrates inquiry based research as conducted by Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students completing the intensive, one year Master of Teaching and Learning (MTchgLn) course at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. Our MTchgLn programme whakatauki emphasises the value we place on our ITE students and their learning; *Ahakoa he tii, he pounuma* - Although it is small, it is greenstone.

This programme has an emphasis on professional inquiry with a specific focus on developing the skills of critical analysis and reflection on practice experiences to support akonga achievement. The result of this process leads our MTchgLn students to exploring their own ‘puzzles of practice.’ Part of this process is for them to practice the skills required to explore, understand and critique research as they develop an inquiry approach to support their learning. Our MTchgLn students were also required to conduct a critical literature review based on a contemporary issue in education that resonated with ‘puzzles of practice’ emerging from their developing contexts.

Articles submitted to the journal underwent a robust peer-review process. In this volume, ten literature reviews were chosen, which relate to Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary school contexts organised under the following themes;

- Professional relationships
- Partnerships for learning
- Changing pedagogies
- Assessment

Professional relationships

The first article explores the importance of the early teacher-child relationships in supporting progress and achievement, both within the academic and affective domains. Ariana Pavelka explores the nature of teacher-child relationships and their implications on the relational and academic aspects of school adjustment. The quality of teacher-child relationships are also discussed in relation to supporting children and encouraging greater positive behaviour outcomes. Relationships between learners (peer groups) is the focus of the second article by Dan Wilson. In his literature review Dan focuses on the influence of peer groups on individual (personal) achievement and explores some of those factors that may be influencing these effects. The importance of developing positive relationships to support learner well-being, particularly through innovative positive behaviour support programmes, is highlighted in the article by Emma Reveley. Emma reviews the implementation of two behavioural support programmes, Positive Behaviour Supports (PBS) and Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L). The final article in this first section looks at another key professional relationship, that of the mentor teacher and pre-service student. Glenn Bodger highlights how key the mentor-mentee relationship is and identifies some strategies that have been successful in navigating the complexity of this relationship.

Partnerships for Learning

The two articles that are within this theme identify and define the type and nature of the relationship between school and home. They then explore some barriers that may influence parental involvement and strategies that have proven successful in engaging parents. The first article by Julie Thomas examines the relationship between both home-based and school-based parental involvement and literacy development. The review presents a New Zealand case study highlighting a home-school partnership programme which addresses these barriers with the goal of raising student literacy achievement. The second article by Karen van Gelder-Horgan explores how parental involvement can have a crucial influence on the development and achievement of students. The article also emphasises how teachers can facilitate parental involvement as a means of increasing the achievement of their students. In the final article, Madeline Dickson examines the homework debate in a secondary school setting. Madeline discusses some of the key variables that have significant influence on the impact of student learning.

Changing pedagogies

Interdisciplinary team teaching (ITT) has been positioned as an important pedagogy to support 21st century education. In her article, Danielle Buick explores why ITT is considered so important and identifies benefits for both learners and teachers. She considers some barriers that may hinder the implementation of ITT pedagogy and then considers those dispositions that will support such an approach. In the second article, the growth of digital technologies in the classroom has resulted in its use as an important pedagogical approach for connected learners. In this article, Annabelle White explores the Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework as a mechanism for teachers to help understand and evaluate the use of digital technology to support their teaching pedagogies. In the last article in this section, Catherine Edmunds provides discussion around three challenges facing educators as they strive to support inclusion of Gender and Sexuality Diverse (GSD) students in the school environment.

Assessment

The two articles in the last theme explore challenges of assessment practices. The article by Jessica Compton explores the challenge of assessment practices in an educational landscape that is being shaped more by the globalised nature of skills and knowledge than that beyond traditional core subjects. The challenges associated with shifting both formative and ‘high stakes’ summative assessment from a ‘test taking’ process to one in which prepares learners with the skills and knowledge to operate within a more connected, globalised society that supports a broader, holistic understanding of the learner. The second article by Bethan FitzGerald explores the use of narrative assessment, a learning stories approach, within a New Zealand early childhood context. The affordances of this type of assessment practice are discussed.

The articles selected for this journal reflect the high quality of our ITE graduates and provide an intrinsic value to those engaged in exploring practice through a teaching as inquiry approach.

Chris Astall, Murray Fastier, Trish Lewis and James Graham
Associate Editors

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The Impact of Teacher-Child Relationships on Social Adjustment and Behaviour in Schools

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Abstract
This literature review examines the significance of teacher-child relationships on social adjustment and behaviour in school contexts. It draws on a range of research to explore the impact of the quality of teacher-child relationships. It identifies factors that enhance positive outcomes, such as high quality professional relationships, closeness (for girls in particular) and courteous behaviour. In addition it considers factors that detract from positive outcomes for both teacher and children. These include problem behaviour, conflict (especially for boys) and dependency. Suggestions for future research identified in the studies reviewed were included with an emphasis on the contributions of both teacher and child.

Keywords: Teacher-Child Relationships, Teacher-Child Interactions, Relationship Quality, Closeness, Conflict, Dependency, Gender

Introduction
Professional relationships are important in education because children develop in relational contexts. Professional relationships have a positive impact on children. Considerable research has been conducted on the topic of the relationship between the teacher and child. The relationship between the teacher and child is a special one that is similar to, but also different from, that of a child and parent or caregiver (Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). Research on teacher-child relationships was mainly prompted by Robert Pianta’s (1992) work, which focused on the relationships between children and adults who were not their parents (as cited in Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). It is important that these relationships are built on trust and respect. Teacher-child relationships have been shown to correlate with many constructs, such as school adjustment and behaviour outcomes, in particular problem behaviour. School adjustment is commonly defined in terms of children’s academic progress and performance in school (Birch & Ladd, 1997).

However, several researchers have sought to use a broader definition, one which incorporates children’s affective experiences associated with school, as well as how involved or engaged they are with the school environment (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Murray, Murray & Waas, 2008). Behaviour outcomes are frequently linked to, or researched alongside, school adjustment. Problem behaviour is defined in terms of externalizing behaviour, such as aggressive or hyperactive behaviour, and internalizing behaviour, such as asocial or anxious-fearful behaviour (Buyse, Verschueren, Doumen, Damme, & Maes, 2008; O'Connor, Dearing, & Collins, 2011). If fākanga exhibit problem behaviours, this creates conflict in their relationships with their peers and their kaikō, thus leading to a decrease in the quality of their relationships.

It has been established that teacher-child relationships are important, thus it is necessary to understand how to develop high-quality relationships that will benefit the child (Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009). Gaining a greater understanding of the effect that the quality of these relationships has in children’s lives can be a useful way to begin establishing high-quality relationships. Therefore, the aim of this review is to examine the effect that the quality of teacher-child relationships in early years has on school adjustment and behaviour outcomes, by reviewing the existing literature.

Quality of teacher-child relationships
Developing and maintaining ongoing professional teacher-child relationships is important for providing positive outcomes for children. In the existing literature, the quality of these teacher-child relationships is often correlated with attachment theory. Several studies use the aspects of closeness, conflict and dependency to characterise the relationship quality (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Koomen & Jellesma, 2015; Schuengel, 2012). Closeness is defined as the degree of security, warmth and openness that is present between the teacher and child. Dependency can be described as an unhealthy degree of overreliance on the teacher for support. This can be observed when a child displays clingy or possessive behaviours. Conflict is another construct which can act as a stressor for children and may impair their school adjustment and exacerbate problem...
behaviours. Conflict consists of discord, and lack of trust and respect between the child and teacher (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Koomen & Jellesma, 2015). A complex longitudinal study conducted by O’Connor et al. (2011), which explored teacher-child relations, followed children from birth through to adolescence across a number of American states. This study supported the notion that high quality teacher-child relationships prevented children from developing both externalising and internalising behaviours in later schooling, thus demonstrating the significance of positive teacher-child relationships on school adjustment and behaviour outcomes.

Several studies have defined high-quality, or positive teacher-child relationships, as having high levels of closeness and low levels of conflict and dependency (Birch & Ladd, 1997; O’Connor, 2010). Consequently, low-quality teacher-child relationships consist of low levels of closeness and high levels of conflict and dependency. High-quality relationships between the teacher and child are desirable because they have beneficial effects (Koomen & Jellesma, 2015). For example, they have been shown to support school adjustment and may serve as a protective factor for children at risk of developing problem behaviour (Buyse et al., 2008; Rudasill, 2011). This is because children are provided with emotional support and security in high-quality relationships but low-quality relationships end up as stressors for children. However, a longitudinal study conducted across various locations within the United States of America with children from first to third grade identified gender bias, in that girls had closer relationships with teachers in both first and third grades (Rudasill, 2011). Significantly, Rudasill (2011) also found that earlier relationship quality influences later relationship quality. One example shows how boys that are more conflictual in first grade are more likely to have conflict with teachers in third grade. Interestingly, a further extensive study (Koomen & Jellesma, 2015) in the Netherlands that focussed on 586 children from 26 classrooms, detected an unforeseen gender bias, which was identified as a methodological limitation in the research, possibly due to an uneven distribution of sample children across grade levels but which may have been a significant factor that required further research.

Teacher reports were often used to gain data about the quality of relationships and the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) developed by Pianta was used as a measure of teachers’ perceptions of closeness, conflict and dependency with a particular child in several studies (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Cadima, Doumen, Verschuuren & Leal, 2015; Koomen & Jellesma, 2015) with similar results. While STRS and other teacher reports are helpful and reliable, they only provide one perspective. The perspectives of both teacher and child are important for gaining a better understanding about teacher-child relationships and their quality (Koomen & Jellesma, 2015). As a result, Koomen and Jellesma (2015) and Mantzicopoulos (2005) sought to gain the child’s perspective, discovering that teachers and children had different observations regarding relationship quality and school adjustment status. Although limited studies have integrated both teacher and child perspectives, several researchers (Koomen & Jellesma, 2015; Mantzicopoulos, 2005; Murray et al., 2008), have conducted studies that investigated both perspectives that serve to extend the literature and fill the gap. They examined relationship quality and school adjustment using both perspectives. Two of the studies examined gender and ethnicity in order to discover whether these factors impacted teachers’ and children’s perception of the relationship. Koomen and Jellesma (2015) discovered that girls generally had closer and less conflictual relationships with the teacher than boys. Also, while teachers’ observations were influenced by racial match, children were not. These results have implications for positive teacher-child relationships and the influence of social adjustment and behaviour in schools.

School adjustment

The transition from early childhood to primary school is dependent on numerous contextual factors and the development of positive relationships, or not, can have a substantial impact on school adjustment. Birch and Ladd (1997) explored how school adjustment is frequently defined by measuring variables such as academic performance and progress. Murray et al., (2008), sought to extend the research in this area stating that these variables often led to the focus being on the acquisition of cognitive skills rather than relational factors. They therefore altered the definition of school adjustment to become more encompassing, by including children’s engagement and involvement in school, along with their attitude regarding school. Furthermore, they suggested that one main factor that can facilitate these transitions and school adjustment, is the quality of the relationships between the teacher and children.

School adjustment is also contingent on whether closeness or conflict are initially established. Cadima et al., (2015) explored conflict and closeness in teacher-child relationships across both a collectivist (Portugal) and individualist (Belgium) country through the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS). They found differences in teachers’ perceptions of closeness and conflict between countries and argue that it is critical to children’s future school success that the factors related to their early behavioural and academic abilities are understood as they impact children’s developmental trajectories.

Acknowledgement of the significance of the quality of teacher-child relationships and their effect on school adjustment (Mantzicopoulos, 2005; Murray et al., 2008) changed the focus of research in this area from a reliance on academic performance and progress in isolation, as assessed by Birch and Ladd (1997) to a greater emphasis on the relational aspects of teaching and learning, based on conflict and closeness. For example, it is now clear that relationships between the teacher and child that are characterised by high levels of conflict and dependency are correlated with poor school adjustment, negative attitudes, and reduced academic performance and involvement (Murray et al., 2008), whereas high-quality relationships were found to foster and provide a context for children to feel secure socially and emotionally with corresponding improvement in academic areas (Cadima et al., 2015). This security enables children to have a sense of belonging, thus increasing their exploration and risk-taking, which, in turn, is beneficial for their learning. These relationships provide support for children’s experiences at school and influences their perceptions and attitudes towards school. This can be observed when the children are more engaged and involved in their learning, which frequently leads to better academic progress. Therefore, high-quality teacher-child relationships are correlated to positive school adjustment.

Behaviour Outcomes

Our behaviour impacts the way we socialise and relate to one another. The way other people behave affects our perceptions of them. The way we interpret other people’s behaviour may lead us
to make assumptions about them. This occurs within education. Children can be labelled as challenging or well-behaved. This may occur either consciously or subconsciously by the teacher, and predicts how they will interact with the children. Challenging children become priority learners, which may result in more conflict in the teacher-child relationship. Often closer relationships are formed with well-behaved children (Buyse et al., 2008). In concurrence, O’Connor et al. (2011) found that behaviour also impacts and correlates with school adjustment. For example it was discovered that problem behaviour manifested through externalising behaviour can increase children’s negative perceptions and experiences of school. This in turn means that they are less likely to achieve well academically and are more disengaged in school (O’Connor et al., 2011). Externalising behaviours, such as hyperactivity and aggression, and internalising behaviours, such as anti-social or anxious-fearful behaviour were used by both Buyse et al. (2008) and O’Connor et al. (2011) as measures of problem behaviour.

In addition, the quality of the relationship between teacher and child has an effect on, and is affected by, the behaviour of the child (Mantzicopoulos, 2005; O’Connor et al., 2011). If a child has externalising problem behaviours, for example, if they are aggressive or hyperactive, this can prove challenging for their teachers. Consequently, this increases the difficulty of forming a close, high-quality (Mantzicopoulos, 2005) and these kinds of behaviours can lead to conflicting and undesirable interactions. Thus, the importance of identifying children who are at risk for enhanced levels of problem behaviour is highlighted. O’Connor et al. (2011) took this further in their national longitudinal study of Early Child Care and Youth Development that explored 1,364 children from birth through to adolescence. They identified that early identification of these children greatly increases the likelihood of developing preventative interventions. Again, high-quality positive relationships between teacher and child were proven to be crucial to the success of such interventions. Conversely, teachers who have low-quality relationships with children tend to focus on controlling children’s behaviour, therefore limiting their ability to develop an environment that is supportive for children and hence children’s learning (O’Connor et al., 2011). There is evidence too that high-quality relationships correlate to lower levels of internalising and externalising behaviours. This is because they promote and support the development of children’s self-regulatory and social skills (O’Connor et al., 2011) thus impacting on social adjustment and behaviour in a school context.

Strengths and Limitations

A three-dimensional student measure Student Perception of Affective Relationship with Teacher Scale (SPARTS) was created and validated by Koomen and Jellesma (2015). The three factors were closeness, conflict and negative expectations of the student. The negative expectations factor was a new and unexpected factor that replaced dependency. This measure is noteworthy because there is a lack of evidence from child reports on teacher-child relationships and it is similar to the popular STRS teacher report. Also, Koomen and Jellesma (2015) assert that it is the only SPARTS that does not solely comprise of items that have been directly adapted from the STRS. Several studies demonstrated the importance of increasing awareness and understanding of the role that teacher-child relationships play as well as the importance of providing information on how to develop and support high-quality relationships (O’Connor et al., 2011).

A limitation was that there was no research accessed that was specific to the New Zealand context. As Cadima et al. (2015) discuss, some measures and results may be transferable across cultures, such as the STRS. However, as their research showed differences across cultures it is not possible to generalise with certainty about how effectively the STRS will perform. What occurs in one context may not necessarily generalise to other contexts because context specific factors will influence the findings. Sample characteristics in several of the studies contributed to the limitations; examples included small or varied group sizes, difficulties pertaining to recruitment techniques and under-representation of demographics of participants (Koomen & Jellesma, 2015).

Future research

There is a need to gain a better understanding of the factors associated with the contexts in which children experience positive social adjustment and behaviour outcomes (Mantzicopoulos, 2005). This would enable teachers to develop and maintain contexts that support positive social adjustment and behaviour outcomes. There is also a need for further research to explore the contributions of both teacher-child relationships and peer relationships to children’s school adjustment, as there is a possibility that the relationships contribute to different aspects. Cadima et al. (2015) initiated exploration into the role of culture on relationship quality. However, they suggest further research is necessary to study the cross-cultural variations and similarities of the STRS. This would be beneficial because the STRS is a widely used and popular teacher report, thus further research may determine how reliable and applicable it is in multiple contexts. O’Connor et al. (2011) suggest that the use of observational measures, in relation to problem behaviours and teacher-child relationship quality, may provide further research opportunities because the majority of the measures used were comprised of teacher and parent reports.

Conclusion

This review of literature has sought to find connections between, and summarise, the existing literature on the quality of teacher-child relationships. There has been a particular focus on their effect on school adjustment and behaviour outcomes. Relationships between the teacher and child that have high levels of closeness, and low levels of conflict and dependency, provide many benefits. High-quality relationships supported positive school adjustment and was characterised in terms of children’s engagement with the school environment, their academic performance and progress, and attitude towards school. High-quality relationships may also act as an intervening influence for children who display problem behaviours early on, because they support the development of children’s self-regulatory and social skills. Thus, they can facilitate the redirection of children’s developmental paths towards more positive outcomes which highlights the importance of identifying children who are at risk for increased levels of behaviour problems as early as possible. It is important to increase the awareness and understanding of the role of teacher-child relationships. Informing teachers on how to develop and support high-quality relationships is equally important.
References


Peer Group Influences on Learning Outcomes

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Abstract

The present study reviews the available literature concerning the ways in which peer groups (within and beyond the classroom) influence personal academic achievement for primary and secondary school students. Owing in part to the lack of literature identified, a focus is taken on contextualising the findings of the relevant studies within New Zealand educational practice guidelines. Total variation of peer group academic achievement, level of intrinsic reward gained from academic activities, cultural affiliation, group norms, peer acceptance and friend attachment are explored as possible mediating variables for the commonly observed causal (potentially non-linear) relationship between peer and personal academic performance. Suggestions for future research and suggestions for changing classroom practice including extra-curricular activities, reciprocal learning, collaborative reasoning and particularly fostering a community of learners are provided.

Keywords: Peer Group, Academic Achievement, Primary, Secondary, Education, Aotearoa, New Zealand, Intrinsic Reward, Cultural Affiliation, Group Norms, Peer Acceptance, Friend Attachment

Introduction

Children and adolescents spend a great deal of their time associating with peers, both within and outside of formal educational settings (Johnson, 2000). These peer group interactions represent a key process through which young people are influenced, both directly by their peers and indirectly through peer norms, opinions and experiences of wider society (Biddulph, Biddulph & Biddulph, 2003; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). While schools’ use of streaming or tracking, formal peer tutoring and co-operative learning strategies have prompted a great deal of research on peer effects within the classroom (Berndt, 2004; Levy-Tossman, Kaplan, & Assor, 2007; Wilkinson & Fung, 2002; see Hattie, 2009 for an overview), there is still limited research literature on the extent to which peer relationships in general, within and beyond the classroom, influence ākonga learning outcomes.

The present literature review addresses this topic, asking: What do we know about the ways in which wider peer groups influence individual achievement? And how can this information be used by beginning teachers in New Zealand to improve ākonga outcomes? The present work follows existing conventions, defining peer groups broadly as including friends, small cliques, as well as wider in-groups and out-groups (Wilkinson et al., 2000). In order to investigate the topic, a literature search was conducted using The University of Canterbury’s multi-search function using the key words “peer”, “effects OR influences” and “education”. To avoid complications with composition effects and within classroom measurement (Nash, 2002), only studies that included measurements of broad peer groups were included. Studies not relating to primary, secondary or early childhood education context were also excluded.

Review of Existing Literature

Now more than a decade old, the most recent best evidence synthesis available to New Zealand teachers that specifically addresses peer influences is the Ministry of Education’s (2003) report titled ‘The Complexity of Community and Family Influences on Children’s Achievement in New Zealand’, which provides a robust and relevant starting point for interrogating the literature (Biddulph et al., 2003). The report focused specifically on New Zealand schooling contexts, concluding that peer groups, within and beyond the classroom, can have a significant impact on ākonga achievement. The report suggests that in many cases peer groups are the direct source of ākonga learning, rather than parents or educators. The complexities of peer group influence are also highlighted: peer group influences frequently act in combination with other social influences, are often contextually and temporally dynamic, and now commonly involve advanced communication technologies such as social media (Biddulph et al., 2003). The basic underlying mechanism of action of peer influences endorsed by the Ministry of Education’s (2003) report is that peer groups create norms that either role-model or discourage academic success and engagement (Wilkinson et al., 2000). While this norms based understanding is a compellingly simple, and undoubtedly important mechanism of action for peer influences on individual achievement, it is worth noting that causal mechanisms for peer effects are likely very complex and challenging to quantify (Nash, 2002).
More recent research has shown that ākonga tend to associate with peers who exhibit a level of academic achievement approximately equal to their own (Burack et al., 2013; Ding & Lehrer, 2007; Masland & Lease, 2013). While the breadth of evidence across time and settings suggests that this is a reliable finding, here one must be reminded of the old statistical mantra: correlation does not equal causation. While personal and peer achievement are highly positively correlated, there is a need to investigate the causal direction of this relationship, and in order to be able to use this knowledge fruitfully within a classroom setting, to interrogate the mechanisms underlying this correlation as well as possible moderating factors. The following literature review aims to address these questions to the extent that available published evidence allows, first by examining the issue of direction of causality (i.e. does having high achieving peers lead to improved academic performance, or does improved academic performance lead to associating with high achieving peers), then by examining the available evidence for potential mechanisms for this relationship.

A recent study conducted by Ding and Lehrer (2007) provides insights into the causality of the correlation between personal and peer achievement, as well as highlighting the complexities of this relationship in a large (n = 1,300) sample of Chinese secondary school students. Their research analyses historical academic achievement records, comparing earlier peer performance with current student performance.

While Ding and Lehrer’s (2007) data was collected solely within the classroom and so could be considered unrepresentative of wider peer influences, they make specific mention to the fact that within the study population, learners within the schools of China’s Jiangsu Province, peer groups are typically entirely comprised from classroom peers. In this way their data is considered to be representative of wider peer-groups. By using data from two time points Ding and Lehrer (2007) were able to examine the predictive value of peer achievement on personal achievement. Their findings suggest that peer performance leads to changes in personal performance. In other words, learners who have peers who achieve at a higher level than themselves are likely to improve their own academic performance to match that of their peers. Ding and Lehrer’s (2007) results also suggest that the relationship between personal and peer group achievement is non-linear, i.e. for some levels of personal achievement, having peers who achieve higher than you is not likely to improve performance, as shown in figure 1.

Ding and Lehrer (2007) also found that increased variance in peer group achievement typically leads to a reduction in personal achievement. This is particularly interesting as it suggests that the more homogenous one’s peer group, the more that individual’s academic performance benefits. Conversely, it is detrimental to individual performance to have a diversely achieving peer group. This interesting finding certainly warrants further study, however, even if the finding was to be replicated in future research, the narrow outcome variable (individual academic achievement) does not necessarily override importance of other positive effects of having a diverse peer group.

While Ding and Lehrer’s (2007) findings represent interesting and cutting-edge developments on our understanding of peer effects in relation to academic achievement, a number of limitations to their study must be considered. Their study is conducted using historical data (late 1990s) from within China’s secondary education system in an affluent area of coastal mainland China. Given that the Chinese schooling system differs significantly from a western approach (Ding & Lehrer, 2007) and the age of the data, it is not known how generalisable their results may be to other current contexts. Additionally, Ding and Lehrer’s (2007), statistical modelling approach, although benefiting from a huge data set, potentially fails to capture the subtleties of peer relations which may be more valuably interrogated using qualitative and self report measure.

Some evidence for a potential moderating effect on the relationship between personal and peer achievement is provided by Masland and Lease (2013) from their empirical self-report research with American middle school students. Along with supporting the general trend of peer achievement correlating predicting personal achievement, their findings suggested that the positive and negative effects of peer group academic norms are greater for ākonga who do not enjoy academic work, compared to ākonga who find academic work intrinsically rewarding. This interesting finding suggests that for ākonga who don’t enjoy academic work, having high achieving peers can make a bigger difference.

Results from a small Canadian study provide some insight into possible mechanisms through which peers may influence academic performance (Burack et al., 2013). Participants in the study were youth of a first nations community (n = 81) in northern Québec. Using a combination of grades and self-report data, Burack et al. (2013) found peer acceptance (how much a learner is liked by others) and friend attachment, although uncorrelated to each other, both predicted academic achievement, positioning them as potentially important variables in the relationship between peer and personal achievement. Importantly, affiliation with white mainstream culture or native culture did not predict academic achievement in Burack et al’s (2013) regression model, suggesting that peer influences act independently of cultural affiliation. While the scale of the study was small, its context within a remote first nations community gives it the unique advantage of being able to include nearly the whole community, rather than a specific segment. It is also relevant that first nations communities in Canada have many similarities to New Zealand Māori, in that both groups have experienced colonisation, forced assimilation, discrimination and at times, reduced educational resources (Burack et al., 2013; King, 2003). If Burack et al.’s (2013) results were to be replicated within a New Zealand context, they could reinforce peer influences as an important mechanism for supporting the academic achievement.
of priority as well as other learners (Ministry of Education, 2007), given the cultural independence of the positive effects of peer influence.

**Limitations and Future Research**

While limitations of individual studies are discussed above, it is important to consider overall limitations of the available evidence. The search strategy in the present study revealed alarmingly few studies that considered the influences of wider peer groups, within and beyond the classroom. This absence of literature may relate to the difficulties involved in collecting and verifying data beyond the classroom, or may be a result of an insufficiently broad search strategy in the present review. In all the reviewed literature, academic achievement was used as the key outcome variable. While academic achievement is important, the holistic nature of the key competencies in the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) warrants further research focused on peer influences examining a broader range of outcomes. Aside from Burack et al.’s (2013) work with first nation communities, the studies reviewed are of unknown generalisability to a New Zealand context. Future New Zealand studies examining peer effects within and beyond the classroom would be beneficial to the field in general and particularly for New Zealand educators. All the available literature used quantitative research methods to investigate peer effects, as Nash (2002) points out, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods likely provides the most effective approach to understanding wider peer influences. Again, more research using different approaches would be beneficial to the field, particularly in promoting the understanding of mechanisms underlying peer influences.

**Supporting Outcomes for Ākonga**

Given what we know about peer influences on personal achievement, how can educators, particularly beginning teachers, adjust their practices to achieve better ākonga outcomes? This section looks at ways knowledge of peer influences might affect teaching practice through extra-curricular activities, reciprocal learning, collaborative reasoning and by fostering a community of learners. Beyond the classroom, parents, communities, and importantly teachers can provide settings for healthy peer group interactions by providing the opportunity for constructive engagement in peer groups through settings such as dances, youth-groups, community organisations and sports clubs. All of which have been shown to enhance academic and other outcomes for ākonga (Alton-Lee, 2003).

Reciprocal learning (Palinscar & Brown, 1984), an instructional technique where ākonga take on the teacher’s role during reading comprehension activities, has been recommended as a valuable strategy for maximising peer influences within the classroom (Wilkinson et al., 2000). It is proposed that reciprocal learning activities not only have a direct positive impact on ākonga achievement, but also promote and strengthen peer bonds within (and potentially beyond) the classroom (Wilkinson et al., 2000). Ross and Cousins (1995) stress the importance of the role of the teacher as facilitator during such activities, in order to ensure that all ākonga are given opportunities, and to avoid the reliance on fixed helper/helper peer relations.

Collaborative reasoning, an instructional approach designed to enrich classroom discussion by utilising critical features of dialogue amongst peers, is also promoted as a way to promote peer influences within the classroom (Wilkinson et al., 2000). Collaborative reasoning aims to enable greater ākonga self-directedness, by giving ākonga control of discussions. Collaborative reasoning, when implemented effectively provides teachers an opportunity to observe peer interactions without unduly influencing them, yielding greater teacher insight and understanding of peer influences.

While reciprocal learning and collaborative reasoning are both typically employed within linguistic subject areas such as English and the Social Sciences (Wilkinson & Fung, 2002), the broader approach of fostering a community of learners has been proposed as a more all-encompassing (both at the classroom and school level) approach to leveraging on positive peer influences (Fraser & Hill, 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2000). A community of learners constructs the classroom as a grouping of people with shared beliefs and values who learn from each other. The approach relies on peer interactions to achieve learning goals, seeing knowledge as being generated within the activities the community engages in (Wilkinson et al., 2000). A community of learners incorporates the Māori concepts of ako and tuakana-teina in that ākonga learn from one another as well as from the teacher, while the teacher guides and monitors the learning process, they also participate both as a teacher and as a learner (Berryman & Bishop, 2016). Developing a community of learners aims to strengthen intellectual, social, and emotional connections within the classroom. Such an approach relies upon and aims to strengthen peer bonds within the classroom, so potentially raising the achievement of all learners in line with the predictive normalisation peer influence found by Ding and Lehrer (2007).

Importantly for extending partnerships for learning, fostering a community of learners also involves bringing events outside of the classroom into classroom dialogue through activities such as sharing circles (Berryman & Bishop, 2016), allowing teachers to leverage on peer success outside of the classroom. It is hypothesised that by acknowledging and engaging with peers beyond the classroom while strengthening peer bonds within the classroom, developing a community of learners maximises peer effects (Wilkinson et al., 2000). Though at present, this hypothesis is purely speculative, as while the efficacy of fostering a community of learners has been proven (Sewell & St George, 2016), its connection with peer influences within and beyond the classroom remain more speculative.

**Conclusion**

Research including peer influences beyond the classroom is still limited, probably owing to the difficulties involved in collecting and verifying data beyond the classroom environment. The available evidence suggests that the academic performance of wider peer groups tends to pull any given member of that peer group towards the group mean level of academic performance (Burack et al., 2013; Ding & Lehrer, 2007; Masland & Lease, 2013). This process is likely driven by individuals moving towards group norms (Wilkinson et al., 2000), but this may not operate linearly across all levels of achievement (Ding & Lehrer, 2007). Other mechanisms underlying the causal relationship between peer academic achievement and personal achievement are only beginning to be explored, however it appears that total variation of peer group academic achievement (Ding & Lehrer, 2007), level of intrinsic reward gained from academic activities (Masland & Lease, 2013), peer acceptance and friend attachment (Burack et al., 2013) are all possible mediating factors.
Particularly relevant to a New Zealand context, there is preliminary evidence to suggest that peer influences operate independently of cultural affiliations. Further research across different educational contexts, using broader outcome variables and particularly using qualitative methods is required to further our understanding of wider peer influences. Extra-curricular activities, reciprocal learning, collaborative reasoning and particularly fostering a community of learners have all been identified as practical ways for beginning teachers to leverage upon the positive effects of peer influences in their practice.

References


Positive Behaviour Management: A Critique of Literature

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Abstract

The current paper reviews literature surrounding Positive Behaviour Supports (PBS) and Positive Behaviour for learning (PB4L) with reference to the findings in a number of research papers. The aim of the current critique was to review the literature, report the findings, and identify limitations to provide contexts for future research in New Zealand. The results of the review indicated that the influence of positive behaviour management strategies was mostly positive, for instance student achievement, behaviour and school outcomes were all shown to increase when positive behaviour management strategies were implemented in a range of studies. There was a number of factors identified as fundamental to the implementation of positive management strategies, such as the necessity of the whole school being involved, and accurate data gathering in order to foster efficacy of these programs. Although the findings were mostly positive, there were gaps identified in the literature. There was a lack of gender identification as reported in the results of the studies, and there was also a lack in ethnicity data provided which is important in a New Zealand context. More research is needed in the New Zealand context in order to take into account the unique culture of Aotearoa, as the results may differ from the findings of studies overseas.

Keywords: Positive Behaviour For Learning, Positive Behaviour Support, PB4L, PBS, New Zealand, Behaviour Management

Introduction

Teaching in New Zealand has a strong foundation based on relationships: those built within the classroom, between teachers and their students as well as between teachers and the wider school community. Professional relationships, as outlined by the Practicing Teacher Criteria, state that teachers need to build relationships that have a focus on positive well-being of ākonga (Education Council [EC], 2015). Teachers also need to show commitment to the profession by promotion of those positive relationships that support the well-being of ākonga. Teachers should be committed to the fact that New Zealand is a bicultural society and this should be promoted and acknowledged. Teachers have a commitment to ongoing practice and personal development, in order for them to develop and demonstrate professional relationships (EC, 2015). An area of influence on professional relationships around the world and in New Zealand is the adoption of positive behaviour support strategies in the classroom (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2015). Behaviour management in New Zealand over the past decades has seen a strong focus on the punishment of negative behaviour, but in recent years the MoE has begun to roll out a new behaviour management strategy called Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) (Boyd, Dingle & Herdina, 2014; Boyd & Felgate, 2015; Savage, Lewis & Colless, 2011). The purpose of this literature review is to examine some research of behaviour support programs, both inside and outside of New Zealand, and identify future research in the New Zealand context that may be needed to support the program and successful implementation. The review will first outline what Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) and Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) frameworks are and how they work. The review will then summarize the research conducted and the final section will outline limitations and directions for future research specific to the New Zealand context.

Positive Behaviour Management

PBS originated in the USA when teachers began to see that punitive approaches to behaviour management were not working and were seen to exclude troublesome children from the classrooms (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Research conducted has compared punitive approaches to positive behaviour approaches and has shown a significant increase in many outcomes for children with the abolition of punitive approaches to behaviour management in schools (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Punitive approaches in prior research have shown increases in antisocial behaviour and intensity, which is the opposite of the results shown in PBS (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Positive Behaviour Supports (PBS)

Lewis, Jones, Horner and Sugai (2010) define PBS as a multi-tiered behaviour support system that increases the support for students to encourage positive social behaviour. Tier one, or...
primary support intervention, has been seen to have very high fidelity when implemented effectively as outlined in Horner et al. (2009) research study, where 80% of the schools showed improvements in positive behaviour. Tier two, or secondary intervention, has resulted in improvements for specific children that still have behavioural needs after the implementation of the primary intervention. These are children that may take significant one on one support to ensure that they benefit from positive behaviour support. Examples of intervention strategies that may aid these children include daily report cards where the child can check how they are doing and to discuss any aspects that may be of concern. There are also coaches such as Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) that provide strategies for self-management of behaviour in order to aid self-regulation. Tier three, or tertiary intervention, requires that a specific behaviour intervention plan be developed for specific children in order to monitor their behaviour and provide them with significant support in order to increase positive behaviour over time. Children in tier three are usually not responsive in tier one or two (Gage, Sugai, Lewis & Brzozowy, 2015; Horner et al., 2009; Horner, Sugai & Anderson, 2010; Lewis et al., 2010; Scott, Park, Swain-Bradway & Landers, 2007; Sugai & Horner, 2002; Warren, et al., 2006). Consistency of behaviour management strategies is important and this is reinforced when PBS uses the support of all staff and families to keep behaviour management as consistent as possible for the children and has shown some promising results (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L)

PB4L is a newly implemented framework that focuses on the promotion of positive behaviour and inclusive learning which allows teachers to foster well-being and aspects of achievement for all children (MoE, 2015). PB4L has been adopted from Positive Behaviour Intervention Support (PBIS) and PBS which have been implemented in the United States of America (USA), and in other parts of the world. As well as being implemented in NZ, Australia has also adopted the Positive Behaviour for Learning framework in many of their schools (Yeung, Mooney, Barker & Dobia, 2009; Yeung, Barker, Tracey & Mooney, 2013). PB4L is funded primarily by the MoE in New Zealand and, similarly, is a three tier framework of core features as seen in PBS (Boyd et al., 2014; Boyd & Felgate, 2015). However, unlike PBS, this framework offers core features which allows the schools that are implementing it freedom to use it in a way that caters to the needs of the school within the constraints of the core features (Boyd et al., 2014; Boyd & Felgate, 2015). This framework also consists of three tiers, however to move to tier two and tier three the schools must first show that they are implementing tier one at 70-80% fidelity (Boyd et al., 2014; Boyd & Felgate, 2015). In contrast PBS just allows schools to implement the tiers as they require without a compulsory need for proven fidelity (Sugai & Horner, 2002). PB4L, in contrast to PBS, emphasises a positive culture of support and outlines expectations that schools can have in relation to the changes over time with implementation of this framework (Boyd et al., 2014; Boyd & Felgate, 2015). The short term changes are in school processes and seen as surface changes, the long term changes are of outcomes such as achievement outcomes, school outcomes and whānau outcomes, in a positive direction (Boyd et al., 2014; Boyd & Felgate, 2015).

Review of Findings

General findings have shown that there are a number of positive outcomes for children and teachers with reference to PBS and PB4L. The most important findings show that in almost all of the studies there were significant reductions in negative behaviour and an increase in positive behaviour. There are significant outcomes at both the school and individual levels with the correct support from staff and families (Horner, et al., 2010). Results have shown improvement in academic outcomes for the children in most studies as well as improvement in positive behaviour, with the literature showing that most schools implementing PB4L and PBS have moderate to high fidelity in the early years of implementation (Boyd et al., 2014; Boyd & Felgate, 2015; Horner et al., 2010; McIntosh, Bennett & Price, 2011; Sugai & Horner, 2002). The literature explored for this review was both qualitative and quantitative, in order to have a range of outcomes addressed. The qualitative studies were only as reliable as the data that was gathered by the teachers, which was a major limitation in many of the studies. The qualitative data consisted of teacher and student self-reports. McIntosh et al. (2011) found that the accurate gathering of data was one aspect that gave the strongest reliability and noted that inaccurate data was one of the downfalls to the implementation findings. McIntosh et al. (2011) also noted that one of the strengths in reporting results was that most of the schools data was recorded accurately, which made the results more reliable than other studies that were looked at. One such study was conducted by Savage et al. (2011) who examined two New Zealand primary schools that had been implementing whole school PBS for a number of years. They concluded that tracking behaviour with a robust data management system was seen as essential in establishing a high fidelity of implementation.

School Outcomes

A number of studies found that the overall outcomes for the school were more positive, with reference to the number of referrals that children were having to higher management, and this was identified through reported data and student teacher self-reported evaluations (Boyd et al., 2014; Boyd and Felgate, 2015; Horner et al., 2010; McIntosh et al., 2011; Savage et al., 2011; Scott et al., 2007; Warren et al., 2006). In contrast, there were two studies that found no significant results between PBS, PB4L and the behaviour of the children (Gage et al., 2015; Yeung et al., 2013). The self-reported teacher data showed that teachers generally had positive responses to the implementation of the positive behaviour programs and this was most strongly felt by teachers where everyone, including whānau, teachers and support staff were on board (Fergusson, Horwood & Stanley, 2013; Savage et al., 2011). The self-reported student data from Yeung et al. (2009) and Yeung et al. (2013) showed that after implementation, students had higher opinions of the school, and were able to recall and represent the school values better than before the implementation. Student reports also showed that the children wanted to come to school, and they had higher levels of motivation in the classroom when this intervention framework was implemented (Yeung et al., 2009; Yeung et al., 2013).

Academic Outcomes

Most of the literature reviewed showed positive academic outcomes over time when comparing previous years to those with
the implementation of PBS and PB4L. Horner et al. (2010) found results showing improved academic outcomes for children, but did not state the academic areas that were improved or whether this was all areas of the curriculum. In addition to these findings a number of other studies reported positive academic outcomes, for example Yeung et al. (2009) who found significant increases in motivation of children which mitigated academic success in the students. General stated improvement in academic outcomes were addressed by a number of other studies (Lewis et al., 2010; McIntosh et al., 2011; Warren et al., 2006). One study also noted that there were no significant positive academic outcomes from the implementation of PBS (Gage et al., 2015). But this same study also noted that much of the other research has found significant results in relation to positive academic outcomes, and while they stated this did have an effect, it should not solely be put down to the program (Gage et al., 2015).

Limitations

The findings showed a number of limitations, with reference to gender, ethnicity and data. These limitations will be outlined in more detail below with reference to the literature that was reviewed.

Gender

Out of majority of the studies that this review explored, there was only one that mentioned significant gender differences. Yeung et al. (2013) found that there was a weak but significant correlation between boys and negative behaviour before implementation of a PB4L program in Australia. Yeung et al. (2013) also noted that the difference between boys and girls after implementation was significant, and boys showed more improvement than girls using this initiative. Only one study mentioned the significance of gender, therefore it is a limitation that may need addressed as future research. The rest of the studies addressed did not specify gender as an important factor to consider and/or did not find any significant correlations between gender and behaviour.

Ethnicity

The MoE (2015) have a number of Māori initiatives in place that are outlined in the PB4L overview. MoE (2015) outlined that Huakina mai, is a kaupapa Māori behaviour initiative that promotes whānau, schools and iwi working together to build a positive school culture. This initiative is based on kaumātua Huakina Māori world view where five cultural principles are represented, they are; Whanaungatanga, Manaakitanga, Pūmanawatanga, rangatiratanga, and kotahitanga (MoE, 2015). Results of Huakina mai were not published in the MoE (2015) final report, which leaves a data gap in the evaluation in the effect of PB4L on Māori learners and from a Māori perspective. As well as Huakina mai, PB4L outlines the initiative Te Mana Tikitiki, a programme for students in Years 4 to 8 that uses tikanga and te reo Māori and works on building resilience, mana, self-esteem, learning, and achievement. Also, Te Mana Tikitiki framework and its effectiveness was not mentioned in the final MOE (2015) report. Other studies that this review looked at did not specifically address ethnicity as an important factor to consider and did not find any significant correlations between ethnicity and behaviour.

Data

The review of research has shown that while there was high fidelity in most of the schools implementing PBS and PB4L, more accurate data collection methods these results may have been higher (Gage et al., 2015; Lewis et al., 2010; McIntosh et al., 2011; McIntosh et al., 2014; Savage et al., 2011; Sugai & Horner, 2002). All of the studies above mentioned the importance that data collection had on the accuracy of the results and stressed that this would always limit the results of fidelity and could be the difference between a school implementing with moderate fidelity, to a school implementing the initiative with high fidelity (Gage et al., 2015; Lewis et al., 2010; McIntosh et al., 2011; McIntosh et al., 2014; Savage et al., 2011; Sugai & Horner, 2002).

Future Research

This literature review has outlined a number of limitations and recognises many areas for future research. Savage et al. (2011) stated a need for ethnicity data in New Zealand, due to its unique culture. The many studies that were reviewed appeared to ignore ethnicity, which is something that in future could be beneficial to look at. As well as ethnicity, another aspect of the literature that could require further research is gender. As mentioned above, only one study found notable differences between genders. The study that found this difference, noted the limitation of research into this aspect and recognised that there needed to be further research (Yeung et al., 2013). The literature reviewed showed these gaps, and future research into these two aspects will be beneficial for more accurate and New Zealand specific research in the future with regard to PB4L.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this literature review show that while PBS and PB4L appear to have a significant impact of the positive behaviour of students, there are a number of significant gaps in the literature. For instance, in a New Zealand context there is a need to take into account our unique culture and the influence that ethnicity and culture may have on the implementation and results of such interventions. There is also a need for more research into the gender influence on these type of programs as research has shown significant differences between male and female students.

References


Factors Influencing Mentor and Student Teacher Relationships During Placement Experiences

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Abstract

This article discusses findings from research concerning the expectations and perceptions of mentor teachers and student teachers (mentees), and how communication may affect this mentor-mentee relationship. The research points to the mentor-mentee relationships as pivotal in the development of student teachers. Findings show that expectations and perceptions of the roles require clarity from both mentor teacher and student teacher perspectives, and with more explicit communication there is an increased likelihood of building positive relationships. It is crucial that communication occurs from the beginning of the mentor-mentee relationship. The research examined also identified significant differences in the messages being communicated between the partners in the mentor-mentee relationship when student teachers are mentored in pairs, as opposed to one on one mentoring. The change in dynamics with paired placements may also lead to a more teaching focussed experience with reduced pressure on the individual student teacher.

Keywords: Mentor, Mentee, Relationship, Expectation, Communication, Positive, Student Teacher, Paired, Placement

Introduction

The explicitness of mentoring interactions between the mentor teacher and student teacher will have a positive impact on the teacher-learning conversations for the student, and will make a difference to the overall placement experience (Margolis, 2007). The mentor-student teacher relationship is a crucial cog in the machine of school education. Outside of schools or education training provider programs, factors pertaining to mentor and student teacher relationship during student teacher placement are for the most part, a mystery. Feiman-Nemser (as cited in Butler & Cuenca, 2012) explained that this formal arrangement has unique dynamics, such as the selection of mentor teachers based on the notion that any teacher can successfully teach student teachers. Whilst examining literature about mentor-student teacher relationships, the search mostly yielded articles based on studies from outside of New Zealand. Journal articles containing relevant information to the topic of mentor-student teacher relationships that were reviewed, based their research methodologies almost exclusively in the qualitative realm. This literature review will explore the factors of expectations, building positive relationships and paired placements within the context of mentor-student teacher relationships.

Communicating Expectations

Whether communicated explicitly, or not at all, expectations and perceptions of the placement experience of the student teacher and their mentor is often the starting point of the mentor-student teacher relationship. Perceptions about teaching on the part of the student teacher at the beginning of placement can quickly clash with the realities of school life. Baker and Milner (2006) deliberate that some student teachers start placement with strong pre-conceived ideas about teaching and soon find that their ideals may differ from that of their mentor teachers and the realities of the classroom environment. This indicates that clear communication, notably from the mentor is vital at the beginning stage of the student teacher placement. Similarly, Izadina’s research on the matching and clashing of perceptions and expectations of the mentoring relationship discusses that mentor teachers can establish a positive experience for the student teacher if they first inquire about the student teacher’s perceptions and expectations, as it will better prepare them to deal with any possible relational strains during placement (Izadinia, 2016). In addition to this, mentor teachers should define the professional mentoring relationship and what expectations they have of the student teacher (Izadinia, 2016). This suggests that transparent communication about expectations at the beginning of the student teacher placement can set a healthy tone upon which to develop a professional relationship.

In discussing findings of the multi-case qualitative study of more than 200 Australian teachers from the Mentor for Effective Teaching Program, Hudson (2016) stated that 33 respondents wrote that articulating expectations from a mentor perspective would lead to the development of a professional relationship. This type of relationship would foster objectives, ideas and well-
defined parameters for student teachers to engage in their practice. Further to this, nine of those mentors stipulated that expectations must be articulated in an open two-way conversation as this gives an opportunity for the student teacher to state their own expectations. This then gives rise to collegial collaboration that aids the production of a positive professional relationship (Hudson, 2016): The difference as stated through these particular results are when expectations are openly discussed in a two-way dialogue between mentor and mentee, a positive relationship is founded on mutual understanding, leading to a shared partnership rather than a relationship derived from goal setting and distinct boundaries. An interesting contrast is noted by Rajuan, Beijaard & Verloop (2010) in their study of 20 mentoring pairs in an Israeli teacher training program. They found that in more than 50% of the cases the pairing was mismatched, they reported that in these cases expectations between mentors and student teachers are seldom conveyed in an open manner. In these situations of non-explicit expectations, a positive beginning to the mentor-student teacher relationship may be hindered.

Communicating expectations seems to play a crucial part in creating an environment where student teachers can develop their craft. Research findings by Sudzina, Giebelhaus & Coolican (1997), regarding three student teacher failure cases highlighted the lack of communication in relation to expectations. In each instance, mentoring as a construct was never communicated. Instead there were assumptions from both the mentors and the student teachers that each would have an understanding of what to do and how to do it (Sudzina, et al., 1997). This type of assumption leaves too much to chance and rapidly increases the likelihood of negative issues occurring. In these failure cases, improved and ongoing communication would play an important part in clearly demarcating roles and solidifying the mentoring relationship between the mentor and student teacher (Aderibigbe, 2013).

This lack of communication leaves expectations unclear and there can be a number of factors as to why this type of situation eventuates. One such factor was posited by Bradbury & Koballa (2008) when they identified that sources of tension in the mentor-student teacher relationship may occur when unequal power resides with the mentor. This places the student teacher in a position whereby they may be reluctant to question or enquire on the practices of the mentor because of apprehension toward damaging the relationship or negatively influencing the mentor’s evaluation of their placement progress. Situations such as this are the antithesis to a healthy rapport between the mentor and student teacher where both parties need to bring to light and clarify expectations and to nurture fruitful communication to build positive relationships (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008; Hudson, 2016).

The research studies described make it clear that expectations, if expressed openly between mentors and student teachers, heavily increase the likelihood of building positive relationships. The inverse would also appear to be valid. However, it may be that most of the respondents in these types of studies that explore communicating of expectations in two-way conversations, perhaps voice their opinion more from an ideological standpoint rather than reality.

Building Positive Relationships

For student teacher placement to be deemed successful, one factor to consider is the positive relationship between mentor and the student teacher. Hudson (2016) discussed how mentors in his multi-case study from the Mentor for Effective Teaching Program suggest that one way to begin building positive relationship between mentors and student teachers is to have a meeting arranged prior to the placement commencing. This would perhaps alleviate the pressure of the formal introduction to the respective school and create opportunity for more informal dialogue. This is a suggested idea from mentors, which perhaps would be useful for schools and teacher education providers to consider pursuing. Gaining feedback from all stakeholders involved in such a process would likely be simple to obtain.

Mentors from Hudson’s (2016) study endorsed attributes of focused listening, showing a sense of humour, empathy and the ability to converse and ask questions as a two-way exchange of building positive relationships between mentors and student teachers. Further to this, mentors recommend that;

...they share experiences by divulging their pedagogical weaknesses with tangible solutions to mentees as a method of modelling open self-reflection and that as experienced teachers they are not infallible but rather on a continued learning journey about teaching, particularly in relation to individual classes and students. (Hudson, 2016, p.41)

This shows the human side of mentors and student teachers and, according to Hudson (2016), would aid the building of trust and respect for the student teacher to advance teaching techniques. From a student teacher perspective, support as an important component of positive relationship was reported widely in a number of studies (Izadnia, 2016; John & Gilchrist, 1999; Sudzina, et al., 1997). Reports that detail an effective mentor identify characteristics such as: being able to listen well, notice and act intuitively to their student teacher, give supportive discourse to help raise confidence, and foster open conversation that then allows the student teacher to reflect (John & Gilchrist, 1999). This is similar to Izadnia (2016) where support, feedback and relationship were repeatedly reported as characteristics of positive mentoring; however, in this study these characteristics were significant to all respondents including mentors. Because people are complex, attitudinal and relational qualities such as support in a mentor-student teacher relationship can be deemed subjective. After all, what is support? How is it enacted? The research alludes it to be mainly conversational support.

Paired placement

The building of positive relationships in the mentor-student teacher setting is often referred to as a one to one situation. Research into pairing students with a mentor is emerging but does claim to be as successful. Baker and Milner (2006) studied mentors responses to paired student placements and they “...found that paired secondary student teacher candidates developed a more intense and effective relationship with their mentor than did student teachers that worked alone under the guidance of a mentor teacher” (p.61, 2006). They explained that this relationship had a powerful dynamic and that its base was founded more on pedagogy rather than on the individual (Baker & Milner, 2006). This would seem to remove pressure on the students’ involved because as Murgolis (2007) ascertain, the pressure on this mentor-student teacher relationship is massive, therefore some argue for collaborative placements.
Baker and Milner’s (2006) qualitative study centered around four paired student teachers and five single student teachers placed with single mentors in a secondary school context. An intriguing result emerged whereby mentors working with the paired student teachers found the experience more complex and demanding but they supported this new style of mentoring. Perhaps somewhat unclear is what specifically was complex and demanding? It could be connected to student teachers spending more time discussing vital teaching issues but perhaps it is unwise to make that assumption. Baker and Milner (2006) identified that paired placements create a more effective way of preparing teachers but again, the quantification of this is uncertain. However, according to data from the study, paired student teachers learned more on their placements than single student teachers (Baker & Milner, 2006). Paired student teachers also reported feeling more positive about the placement than single student teachers (Baker & Milner, 2006). Whilst these results are interesting, the isolation of research using a small sample size does lend to outcomes leaning more toward the anecdotal. It would be useful for ongoing research into paired student teacher placement to continue, as it is potentially a positive step forward for initial teacher training that maintains professional relationships, whilst lowering the risks for personality issues that can sometimes hinder the mentor-student teacher process.

Margolis (2007) explored the impact of mentor teachers using specific pedagogies with their student teachers. He suggested that paired placements and placements involving multiple mentors and student teachers seemed to show encouraging signs in the formation of collaborative learning and the formation of a more teacher-learning centered environment. Margolis (2007) indicated that a more teacher focused, collaborative learning space developed due to the new dynamics of placement and with less emphasis on the one to one relationship, this was similar to the findings of Baker and Milner (2006). Margolis (2007) used the example of paired placements or placements involving multiple mentors that operate in education and other industries as reasoning for future research. The merits of paired placement could be explored with a focus on other industries and comparative data. Both single and paired placements will have advantages and disadvantages, but there are possible strengths that may emerge with future research using paired placements. One of these could be that student teachers and mentors would be better positioned to have more opportunity of gaining multiple perspectives.

Butler and Cuenca (2012) defined the mentor teacher as a social agent and that “socializing effect can have either a positive or negative effect on the student teacher’s educational views” (p.301, 2012). Even in a paired placement situation where one to one relational intensity may be lessened, the mentor still has a potentially large influence on student teachers in the shaping of teacher identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the mentor-student teacher relationship is complex and can have positive or negative influences on student teacher learning depending on various factors. Expectations between mentors and student teachers need to be well defined from the very beginning of placement to ensure the best possible building of a positive relationship that contains a supportive environment with on-going two-way communication. Paired student teacher placement trials could offer another way to train pre-service teachers and further research could prove beneficial.

Limitations of this literature review are that some of the qualitative research had small sample bases and none of the articles investigated were set in a New Zealand context.

References


Presenting a United Front: Parental Involvement Facilitating Children’s Literacy Development

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Abstract

Literacy development is recognised across both education policy and research literature as essential for educational success. Historically, literacy has mainly been a focus for teachers within the classroom, however a growing body of research has established correlations between parental involvement and students’ literacy achievement. This literature review critiques the body of research examining the relationship between both home-based and school-based parental involvement and literacy development. Studies have consistently found positive associations between parental involvement in literacy practices and students’ literacy achievement. Research indicates that despite these positive correlations, many parents do not engage in literacy practices with their children. This review discusses the barriers which prevent some families from engaging in these literacy practices with their children and presents a New Zealand case study highlighting a home-school partnership programme which addresses these barriers with the goal of raising student literacy achievement. Through the conclusions drawn from the critique of the research and case study presented, this literature review establishes best practice for parents and teachers and suggests relevant direction for future research into home-school partnership programmes aimed at increasing parental involvement.

Keywords: Parental Involvement, Literacy Development, School-Based Involvement, Home-Based Involvement, Home-School Partnerships, Literacy Practices, Literacy Achievement, Educational Barriers

Introduction

In New Zealand and around the world, the importance of literacy education for both academic and professional success within a given culture or society appears as a consistent theme across policy and literature (Biddulph, Biddulph & Biddulph, 2005; Levy, 2011). Over the course of the twenty and twenty-first centuries, understandings of literacy have been reconceptualised from being solely understood as the ability to read and write, to encompassing socio-cultural awareness and reflective thinking (Bailey 2009; Knobel & Lankshear 2014; Limbrick & Aikman, 2005). However, all children do not develop literacy abilities equally. The challenge for educators and policymakers is to understand how literacy develops and implement strategies which foster its development. Parental involvement here is defined as both home-based and school-based activities. Research reports that parental involvement, which includes parental aspirations and communication with their children about school, is one of the most important variables for enriching children’s literacy development (Jeynes, 2012). However, studies show that families are not equally involved in practices which support their children’s education (Biddulph et al., 2003; Gonzalez, 2013).

With such variation in practices reported, it raises the question as to how families’ can be supported to engage in literacy practices. In evaluating the research which denotes how parental involvement facilitates literacy development, this literature review will attempt to shed light on the barriers inhibiting some families from engaging in literacy practices, present possible implications for research and practice moving forward and examine a case study from New Zealand presenting a Home-School Partnership programme attempting to raise parental involvement levels.

Facilitating Literacy Development

According to the meta-analysis completed by Jeynes (2012), the large body of research examining parental involvement in literacy development documents positive associations between family literacy practices and children’s literacy outcomes across all levels of education. Findings from several studies support the notion that parental literacy practices impact upon children’s emergent literacy development. Research conducted by Weigel, Martin and Bennett (2006) which examined mothers’ beliefs about literacy development, suggests that activities including storytelling, shared-book reading, drawing, singing and game playing, all positively correlate with children’s interest in reading, print and letter-sound knowledge, oral language and word decoding skills. Similarly, Levy, Gong, Hessels, Evans and Jared (2006) explored children’s early development of orthographic and visual understanding of print in relation to reading acquisition. The participants included 474 children between the
ages of 48-83 months who completed standardised measures of reading skills and phonological awareness, whilst their parents completed a questionnaire providing data on their home literacy practices. The study found that parents’ encouragement and direction toward participation in literacy activities most reliably predicted the development of their children’s literacy abilities. In their review of the literature concerned with children’s emergent literacy skills, Evans and Shaw (2008) reported that, in addition to encouragement, children who experience enjoyment in combination with direction are more likely to adopt the literacy skills their parents teach them. Although this research indicates that the literacy practices which parents engage in are in themselves influential, the influence of the home environment and the children’s agency in literacy development cannot be overlooked. Weigel et al. (2006) categorised the total sum of book reading, television watching and magazine or newspaper subscriptions as elements of the home environment which positively related to emergent literacy skills in kindergarten children. Correspondingly, Levy et al. (2006) noted that literacy activities which children involve themselves in correlate with print knowledge.

Several longitudinal studies support the correlations Weigel et al. (2006) and Levy et al. (2006) found between parental involvement and literacy development. The study conducted by Dearing, Simpkins, Krieder and Weiss (2006) examined a sample of ethnically diverse, low-income families to investigate whether correlations existed between literacy development and family involvement, with a moderating effect of maternal education. Dearing et al. (2006) reported that mothers’ education levels were associated with an achievement gap in average literacy performance between primary aged students, however, for high parent involvement levels, this gap was eliminated. Extending upon these findings, Deckner, Adamson and Bakeman (2006) examined the effect of mothers’ home literacy practices on their children’s interest in reading and development of language from the age of 18 months until 42 months and found that it was not solely the existence of parental involvement in literacy practices that had an influence, rather, the frequency and length of time mothers spent reading to children and the age of the child when the mother began the reading to them were predictive of children’s language development.

Although the foundations for literacy development are set in early childhood and primary years, parental involvement remains important in the secondary school years. According to Singh, Bickley, Trivette, Keith, Keith & Anderson (1995) parental involvement in the form of parental aspirations have the strongest positive effect on raising student achievement at secondary school level. Singh et al. (1995) suggests that parental aspirations lead to positive communication between children and parents about school. This finding is reinforced by Clinton and Hattie (2013) who explored high school students’ perceptions of their achievement and parental involvement through questionnaires measuring parental involvement, efficacy, liking of and achievement in reading and maths, completed by 1554 students across 59 New Zealand schools. The student responses indicated that they are supportive of their parents engaging in conversations about learning and holding high expectations of them. While the design of this study does not allow the authors to infer causation between parental involvement and student achievement, it adds value to the body of research by capturing student perspective on aspects of parental involvement which could form a relevant basis for further research.

**How Beneficial Is Parental Involvement?**

Within the literature on parental involvement, a minor selection of studies challenge the significance of the role of parental involvement in literacy development. The cross-national analysis of parental involvement and student literacy by Hampton-Thompson, Guzman and Lippman (2013) established that the association between parental involvement and student literacy exists across international contexts. However, Hampton-Thompson et al. (2013) question whether parental involvement always improves educational outcomes. The study found a distinction between home-based and school-based parental involvement, in that school-based involvement is linked to children’s involvement in school, however, some home-based involvement, such as assistance or supervision of homework is associated with poorer academic performance because it often happens as an attempt to remedy a student’s poor academic performance. The cross-sectional design and high school specific sample which make up this study mean that the authors cannot make causal inferences or generalisations to other age groups. However, the correlations reported resemble the results reported in Clinton and Hattie’s (2013) secondary school study which found, that teacher-parent interactions had a negative effect on achievement. In line with Hampton-Thompson et al. (2013), Clinton and Hattie (2013) suggest that the parents of lower achieving students may be more likely to have interactions with teachers and in turn students may interpret this negatively as being controlling.

Rather than calling into question the beneficial elements of parental involvement altogether, these studies work to highlight elements of parental involvement that appear to have detrimental effects under certain conditions. These findings appear noteworthy for researchers to investigate in larger longitudinal experimental studies where stronger effects could be established.

**Barriers to Parental Involvement**

Although prior research indicates that parental involvement positively influences children’s literacy development, there is substantial variance between the levels of literacy practices parents engage in. This raises the question as to what factors prevent parents from being involved in their children’s literacy education. The Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) by Biddulph et al. (2003) addressing the complexity of community and family influence on children’s achievement in New Zealand identified socio-economic status and ethnicity as family attributes which were associated with children’s achievement. Parents from minority ethnic groups, with a lower socio-economic status had less access to resources to support their children’s learning. Other parental attributes, including weak knowledge of appropriate teaching pedagogies, low levels of parental education and absence of English as a home language were associated with lower achievement. Additionally, instabilities in the home environment such as a change to the family structure, health problems or regular relocation of the family unit were negatively associated with children’s achievement (Biddulph et al., 2003). These theories are reinforced by Gonzalez (2013) who investigated whether parents’ socioeconomic status, level of education, employment, culture, and language influenced involvement in their children’s literacy development in the home. Gonzalez (2013) examined interview and demographic data collected from 17 parents with a child in kindergarten to identify
trends. The analysis found that long working hours impacted on how much time parents were able to spend engaging with their child in literacy activities, low-income impacted on parents’ ability to purchase literacy resources for their children, parents’ own English language fluency impacted on the number of strategies they were able to utilise to assist their children with literacy activities and a lack of multicultural literature in kindergartens impacted on parents’ sense of value (Gonzalez, 2013). While the sample size in this study and the age-specific demographic of the participants means the findings cannot be generalised, they do suggest that factors in the home environment impact the quality and amount of literacy activities which parents provide for their children.

Building on this idea, Levy (2011) suggests that because each child’s literacy development is a unique and multifaceted process embedded in socio-cultural structures, children and their parents often face challenges entering formal education as their home literacy practices differ from school practices. This idea is examined in the study by Marsh and Thompson (2001) which drew on parents’ cultural capital through developing literacy resources for parents to support home literacy practices based on children’s interests. The study reported that the books available in nurseries were not congruent with their interests and the resources available in their homes. Data was collected from the children’s parents and of the 15 that were surveyed, 14 reported that the incorporation of children’s television interests to build literacy practices was valuable. While it is recognised that a limitation of this study is that it relies on the accuracy of participants self-reporting, the design allowed researchers to examine the use of home knowledge for literacy education and highlighted the potential importance of exploiting children’s sociocultural knowledge for effective facilitation of their learning. Further research into this area with a larger and more diverse sample size would work to strengthen these conclusions.

**Case Study**

Traditionally, New Zealand schools have worked independently from homes and families (Brooking, 2007). However, since the 1990s, New Zealand’s educators and policymakers have been concerned by the disparity between the literacy levels of the highest and lowest achieving students, many of whom are of Maori or Pasifika decent (Tunmer, Chapman, Greany, Prochnow & Arrow, 2013). In their BES, Biddulph et al. (2003) advocate for the implementation of programmes which foster genuine collaboration between the school and home and incorporate resources and information which add to family literacy practices rather than undermining them.

In an effort to improve literacy outcomes for students, the Ministry of Education developed the Home-School Partnership Literacy Programme in 2001, which focused on building stronger relationships between schools and their culturally diverse parents through raising levels of parental involvement in both primary and secondary schools. The programme involved the selection of parent leaders to represent wider cultural groups within the community to train alongside teachers with the aim of becoming facilitators for discussion between school representatives and parents at regularly held parent sessions. These parent sessions were set up to teach parents about the curriculum and ways to support learning at home. Parents were encouraged to share their home learning practices, which would then be communicated to the teaching staff who could incorporate them into their practice. NZCER researchers evaluated the programme by examining six case studies from schools through focus groups over the course 2006–2007 (Brooking & Roberts, 2007). The researchers found that 85 percent of the participating schools were positive about the relationships they had established with families. Furthermore, 80 percent reported the programme had a positive effect on opportunities to learn and 75 percent reported a minor positive effect on engagement attitudes, confidence and literacy achievement.

Despite the two-way design of the programme, 70 percent of teachers reported that it was very important that parents learnt about children’s literacy from teachers (Brooking, 2007). In line with Back (2010), this finding suggests that knowledge was not shared equally between parents and teachers, which may impact on teachers’ views and willingness to incorporate home literacy practices into their teaching practice. It appears this initiative is lacking clear boundaries and responsibilities between teachers and parents which, as Ludicke and Kortman (2012) suggest, are important. This is an element that would be relevant for future programme designs to address. However, creating equal and trusting partnerships takes time. Therefore, designing implementing a sequential research study which combines cross-sectional and longitudinal methods could simultaneously dispel some of extraneous variables which make the current research associative as opposed to causal and more adequately measure impacts on literacy achievement in the long-term.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the research reviewed largely supports the notion that children’s literacy development is enriched through parental involvement. While further research is needed to establish the causal directions of the relationship between parental involvement and literacy development due to the associative nature of the body of research as a whole, it does suggest involvement is better conducted though parental beliefs, aspirations, encouragement, and communication, than by engaging in teacher-parent interactions in response to poor performance and implementing controlling practices. Families from minority ethnic groups and those of lower socio-economic status face greater barriers to parental involvement, however, it appears that inconsistency across parent and teacher perceptions of parental involve have the greatest impact on parental involvement. Home-School Partnership programmes present an opportunity to break down the barriers which inhibit parental involvement in their children’s literacy development. However, their long-term success relies equal partnerships formed on an agreement of joint responsibility between teachers and parents and a shift in thinking from teachers to be genuinely open to learning from parents; an element that was missing from the Home-School Partnership Programme (Brooking, 2007; Biddulph et al. 2003). Relevant future direction for research could expand upon the research by Ludicke and Kortman (2012) by exploring the ways in which responsibilities and boundaries could be effectively established between parents and teachers.

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Parental Involvement in Home-Based Education

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Abstract

Decades of research have shown that parental involvement in education can have a crucial influence on the development and achievement of students. This involvement can present itself both within and outside of school hours. The current literature review explores parental involvement in a home-based context, briefly looking at the ways in which involvement can be shown. The scope of Parental involvement is then covered, identifying trends which occur in achievement when parents are involved and support their child in their education. This review then looks at the barriers which hinder parental involvement and in turn identifies strategies that can be implemented to foster increased involvement. Barriers covered include: parental beliefs, the nature and quality of the parent-teacher partnership and the ethnic diversity of students and families within the school. In summary, this review emphasises how teachers can facilitate parental involvement as a means of increasing the achievement of their students.

Keywords: Parental Involvement, Home-Based, Education, Achievement, Barriers, Academic, New Zealand, Students

Introduction

Parental involvement (PI) has long been considered a crucial force in the learning, development and success of children throughout their education and life (Patrikakou, 2008; Clinton & Hattie, 2013). Decades of research across many countries and by different researchers in the field of family involvement have supported the premise that children with involved parents are more likely to develop into knowledgeable, healthy, responsible, confident and caring adults (Avvisati, Besbas & Guyon, 2010; Patrikakou, 2008). The effectiveness of PI in terms of the progress and achievement of learners is undisputed, however the development and implementation of PI throughout schools presents many barriers. These barriers are manifesting themselves as gaps between rhetoric, theory and reality, or what is actually happening (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

This review provides a brief outline of home-based PI, its scope and how PI can be used to improve academic achievement. Barriers will then be discussed, including factors that can possibly inhibit or alternatively facilitate PI in the education of children. This review will particularly focus on the critique of literature that encompasses PI that occurs outside of schooling hours (home-based PI).

Parental Involvement: What is it?

PI can occur within a school context during school hours, or it may be home-based and therefore occur outside of school contact hours. There are a number of definitions regarding PI in the home, but for the purpose of this review PI will be defined as the expectations, actions or activities that parents actively take outside of school hours which support their child’s development and academic achievement (Barge & Loges, 2003; Clinton & Hattie, 2013; Patrikakou, 2008). However, even within this definition, what constitutes PI may be interpreted differently depending on the perspective being explored: according to Barge & Loges (2003) parents, schools and students will all differ in their interpretation of what PI looks like in education.

Studies that explored the relationship between PI and educational achievement tend to report from the perspective of either the parents or the teacher; however Clinton & Hattie (2013) focused on collecting students’ opinions on PI and how it impacted on their academic achievement. A key finding within this study was that students who perceived their parents as setting high expectations and engaging in school talk were more likely to have higher academic achievement and self-efficacy in reading (Clinton & Hattie, 2013). From these findings, they concluded that schools and parents need to collaborate to create mutual understanding and cohesion between the school and the home environment.

Similarly, Bull, Brooking & Campbell’s (2008) research drew upon seven New Zealand case studies of initiatives that supported home-school partnerships, with their findings aligning with Clinton & Hattie (2013), Bull et al. (2008) suggested that parents need to share, understand and form a partnership with schools in order to develop a “shared language of learning” (p.6). This shared language for learning enables academic communication between a student and parent in the home. Clinton & Hattie (2013) found the school-parent partnership to be particularly important in low socio-economic families, where it is less likely that there be a shared language of learning. This is because in these families the parents may not have the knowledge or understanding of schooling terminology. The findings from Clinton & Hattie (2013) and Bull et al. (2008) suggest that schools, especially those in low socio-economic areas, could improve student achievement through engaging and teaching parents the language of learning so that they can support their child from home.
Scope of PI

When PI is utilised in education, it can have a positive impact on student achievement. Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler’s (1995) theoretical review determined that learner success is not dependent on PI, but that in most circumstances PI is a powerful enabler and enhancer of educational success. The absence of PI was found to eliminate opportunities for students to augment their learning whereas its presence created opportunities. In utilising PI it is important to understand the scope of influence that PI can have on achievement. Jeynes (2005) completed a meta-analysis of 41 studies that examined the relationship of PI with urban elementary school academic achievement. A key finding in this research was a significant relationship between PI and academic achievement. Within this study a pattern emerged where parental expectations and the style of parenting (the extent to which a parenting approach is helpful and supportive), were found to be two aspects of PI that have a particularly strong relationship with positive academic outcomes for students. Jeynes (2005) found that the effect size for parental expectation (d=0.38) was a far more potent predictor of achievement than school-based PI (effect size, d=0.21). This finding extended across both dominant and minority ethnic groups in the study. The findings within Jeynes’ meta-analysis align with those of Henderson & Mapps’ (2002) which concluded that a whole, the relationship between PI and improved academic achievement is consistent across all economic, ethnic and educational backgrounds.

Bandura’s social learning theory predicts that students will emulate the behaviour of their parents; when parents devote time and show interest in activities that are related to school, they are providing an opportunity for children to augment their learning (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). This notion is supported through Avvisati et al.’s (2010) in their literature review, which found that parents who showed an interest and gave attention to their child’s learning, or praised and rewarded behaviours that were associated with school success, increased the effort exerted by their child and in turn the child experienced greater academic achievement. These children were also more likely to have stronger self-efficacy than those who had parents who were not involved (Avvisati et al., 2010).

Overcoming barriers to PI

Parental Beliefs

There is an abundance of research into the barriers to PI (Bull et al., 2008; Graham-Clay, 2005; Trinick, 2015). These barriers are addressed in Hornby & Laface’s (2011) review which highlights the discrepancy between PI theory and reality; although the benefits of PI are well known, it can be difficult to support and implement PI in education. A critical step in the development of successful PI is recognising that parents’ beliefs will have a significant impact on their involvement in the education of their children.

In Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler’s (1995) review, results indicated that a parent’s perceived ability to help will impact on their involvement; parents with low self-efficacy and belief in their abilities were found to avoid contact with school related topics as they were concerned that their involvement would not result in positive learning outcomes for their child. This is despite the fact that studies have shown that supporting a child’s learning does not require a high academic level from parents. Clinton & Hattie (2013) found that the key to linking PI with increased academic achievement was for parents to be explicit in expressing their high expectations and aspirations for their child’s learning.

Parent – Teacher Partnership

Another factor found to influence PI was the quality of the parent to teacher partnership and whether schools set the expectation that parents be involved (Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Trinick, 2015). Bull et al., (2008) identified a trend within the case studies and literature that they reviewed; in schools where strong partnerships were fundamental to operations rather than an ‘add on’ there were higher levels of PI and consistency between the home and school setting. This trend aligns with that identified by Trinick’s (2015) evaluation found parents who were treated as full partners and included in the decision making and goal setting in their child’s education, had a greater understanding of the actions they could take to support and engage with their child.

Epstein & Salinas (2004) draw upon a range of research articles and case studies to suggest strategies teachers could use to increase PI in their students’ education. An emphasis was put on the importance of teachers fostering PI through designing tasks that encourage collaboration, such as setting homework that facilitates students having to discuss and share information with their parents. When parents feel their academic input is valued by teachers, they are more likely to engage with their child’s education at home (Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

A number of research projects (Bull et al., 2008; Graham-Clay, 2005; Hornby & Laface, 2011) found successful partnerships work best when the actions taken by teachers are embedded in the whole-school development plans. A number of common strategies identified to increase PI were identified, such as: keeping parents up-to-date with student progress, collaborate in goal setting (teacher, parent and student collaborating), encourage high expectations and use culturally inclusive practice. Epstein & Salinas (2004) analysed a number of case studies where parent workshops were run to equip parents with content knowledge and skills to support their child’s education. These workshops were found to strengthen school-home relationships, provide parents with content knowledge as well as a platform for parents to share their cultures and expertise. It was found that as a result of these workshops, many of the school student pass rates exceeded expectations (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). This research indicates that there are many measures that can be taken to increase PI however these require commitment, interest and active engagement from all parties involved (parents, teachers and students).

Ethnic Diversity

The increasing ethnic diversity throughout schools in New Zealand will have an impact on the involvement of parents in student education. Hornby & Witte’s (2010) survey of 21 primary schools in New Zealand found that many ethnically
diverse parents were not aware of the importance of being involved with their child’s schooling, nor how to engage with the school. This was because many of these diverse parents had English as a second language or came from backgrounds where PI was not considered important; as a result they were less likely to be actively involved in supporting their child’s education from home (Hornby & Witte, 2010). A challenge for teachers is to build relationships with, and gain input from, these parents about their beliefs around the child’s educational aspirations. A number of studies found Pasifika parents do not know what questions to ask and are not confident in voicing their opinions or challenging the New Zealand education system (Trinick, 2015). This is in contrast to the longitudinal study analysed by Fan (2001) that looked into the effects of PI in secondary schools. Fan (2001) found that there were comparable degrees of PI between different ethnic groups, indicating that ethnicity is not a factor when it comes to the degree of PI in a student’s education. This discrepancy may be due to the illusive nature of PI in that it is hard to create a definitive answer as to what factors equate to PI. Hornby & Witte (2010); Trinick (2015) and Fan (2001) all still recognise the importance of PI in raising academic achievement and stress that teachers need to use innovative, context relevant measures to increase PI. Jeynes (2005) found PI to share a strong association with academic achievement across all ethnic groups and that increasing PI may be one means of bridging the achievement gap between white European students and ethnic minority groups.

**Implications for Future Teaching**

Home-based PI can have a huge influence on a child’s development. The scope of PI enables it to both facilitate and enhance student learning, resulting in improved academic achievement across student groups and different ethnicities. Throughout the literature reviewed, PI has been recognised as a complex affair, with a multitude of barriers that can manifest themselves as gaps between the rhetoric and reality (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). These include parents’ beliefs and perceptions of how they can be involved, the partnership between school and parents and ethnic diversity. As teachers, it is important that these barriers be identified and measures taken to reduce their effects, so that PI can be utilised as a strategy in raising academic achievement. Research has stressed the importance of all parties involved in PI (parents, teachers, students & schools), having a clear understanding of what is expected from them so that a cohesive language of learning can be created and used in both the school and home context (Bull et al., 2008).

The barriers to PI are dependent on context and learning about the beliefs and cultures of parents and how these may influence PI in the home may be one of the first steps in gaining any understanding of that context. This may be achieved through forming a partnership with families, collaborating to set goals and coming to a shared understanding of what is expected of the child and what can be done to support and help the student. When these measures are successfully integrated into schools, they can bridge the achievement gap between students; in particular between European and ethnic minority students throughout New Zealand (Jeynes, 2005; Trinick, 2015). The successful integration and utilisation of home-based PI by teachers and education institutes is essential in the development of successful, competent, lifelong learners.

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Homework in Secondary Schools: Helpful or a Hindrance?

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Abstract

Homework is a key element of secondary schooling across many contemporary education systems worldwide. However, debate about the value and efficacy of homework at the secondary school level is ongoing. Proponents of homework promote its numerous benefits for learning and achievement, while critics challenge the merit of homework, and highlight the potentially detrimental impacts it can have on student learning. Overall, the evidence from current research and literature shows that homework at the secondary school level generally has a positive impact on student academic achievement and learning. However, many factors and variables can influence this link in both a positive and negative fashion. These variables include: parental income and socio-economic status, parental support vs. control, quantity of homework completed, and overall time spent on completing homework. The research also suggests that homework is most useful and effective when it is used to expand upon concepts already taught in class, and when students have intrinsic motivation to engage with and complete homework.

Keywords: Homework, Secondary School, Academic Achievement, Detrimental Effects, Parental Involvement, Intrinsic Motivation, Homework Quality, Student Anxiety

Introduction

According to Cooper, Robinson and Patall (2006), homework is “any task assigned by school teachers intended for students to carry out in non-school hours” (p.1). Homework is a complex, contentious and heavily debated aspect of education systems worldwide. In the United States especially, the homework debate has been somewhat cyclical in nature. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was a strong “anti-homework” movement, where homework was viewed as being possibly detrimental to learning, especially for younger students. However, from the 1950’s onwards, the cold war and desire to compete with other countries internationally, saw a rise in focus on homework as a means to increase academic standards and achievement (Fren & Henderson, 2011). Proponents of homework have promoted numerous benefits for learning and achievement while, paradoxically, critics have “challenged the role and merit of homework in educating students” (Maltese, Tai & Fan, 2012, p. 53). A plethora of historical and contemporary research has focussed on the impacts of homework on academic achievement, and the many variables which influence homework completion, quality, quantity, and overall effectiveness. This research has produced inconsistent results and studies that have examined different factors and variables which influence homework outcomes used a variety of methods. This review intends to examine a selection of contemporary literature in order to ascertain whether homework at the secondary level has positive or negative effects on learning and academic achievement. Both sides of the homework debate will be reviewed and implications of findings will be discussed.

Variables and Academic Benefits

There has been a multitude of research studies investigating the impact homework has on achievement across all school levels. Cooper et al. (2006) conducted a meta-analysis of research undertaken in the United States pertaining to homework and achievement between 1987 and 2003. This meta-analysis looked at 73 different studies, and found that overall, there was “generally consistent evidence for a positive influence of homework on achievement” (Cooper et al., 2006, p. 1). Stronger and more frequent positive correlations were found for secondary school students as opposed to primary school students (Cooper et al., 2006). Similarly, John Hattie (2009) in his synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement found that homework had an effect size of 0.29, making it a significant contributor to academic achievement. This evidence is useful in providing an indication of the trends in the links between homework and achievement at the secondary school level. However, the meta-analysis conducted by Cooper et al. (2006) used only data from the United States in a singular, unique educational and socio-cultural context. Therefore, these results may not necessarily be directly applicable to students globally. Hattie’s (2009) synthesis on the other hand included analyses from numerous countries, which may provide a more universal understanding.
There is further evidence that supports the notion that homework at the secondary school level improves academic achievement. In a study investigating the association between homework and achievement in high school science and mathematics, Maltese, Tai and Fan (2012) found that time spent on homework was moderately associated with achievement gains in these subjects, when measured against standardized test scores. Similarly, Núñez et al., (2015) in a Spanish study investigated the relationships between perceived parental involvement in homework, student homework behaviours, and academic achievement across all school age students, found that the amount of homework completed was positively associated with academic achievement for all school levels, including secondary school. Furthermore Núñez et al. (2015) also found a positive association between time spent on homework and academic achievement at the secondary school level.

Parental involvement in homework was also a key factor in the homework-academic achievement link in the study by Núñez et al. (2015). The study found that parental control, whereby parents enforced strict rules, or punishments around homework, had a negative association with academic achievement at all schooling levels. Therefore, higher levels of parental control was linked to lower academic achievement. This finding was paralleled in a study looking at New Zealand secondary students’ perceptions of parental involvement in learning and schooling by Clinton and Hattie (2013). This study found that parental surveillance of secondary students’ homework was negatively related with achievement, with an effect size of -0.19 (Clinton & Hattie, 2013, p.327). Conversely, Núñez et al. (2015) found that parental support, whereby parents gave encouragement, support and clear guidelines about homework, was positively associated with academic achievement at all schooling levels. Thus, higher levels of parental support was linked to higher student academic achievement (Núñez et al., 2015). This contemporary study provided an interesting insight into the effect parental involvement in homework can have on academic achievement. Data was collected in part through student self-reporting in this study however, so there is the potential for bias, especially if students did not wish to criticise their parents’ approach to involvement in their homework. Further controlled variable or control group research in this area is needed, in order to further understand the impacts parental involvement in homework has on student achievement.

Another important variable in homework achievement is parental income and socio-economic status. In a study assessing the effect parental income had on variability in homework efficacy in secondary school Jonathan Daw (2012) found that higher income students gained more knowledge from homework, and thus had higher academic achievement. This was the case for all grades, and all subjects, except history, with greater disparity observed in mathematics than for science and reading. This finding aligns with concerns raised in both Cooper et al. (2006) and Sallee and Rigler (2008) that homework could increase inequality in academic achievement, between students of low and high income families. However, reasons for this increase in disparity in academic achievement between different socio-economic groups are varied and more research is needed in this area (Daw, 2012). In their research, Sallee and Rigler (2008) hypothesised that differential access to resources such as technology and parental help and differential time pressures, due to the need for some students to work or to look after younger siblings, may “contribute to the widening of the gap” (p. 49).

As indicated in the broad meta-analysis of Cooper et al. (2006), homework at the secondary school level had a positive impact on learning and academic achievement. However, within this link lies a multitude of variables, which can impact homework completion. Therefore, it is important to investigate the factors which influence student completion of homework, as this could have a tangible impact on their learning and achievement. In a multilevel analysis of homework completion at Secondary School level, Xu (2011) found multiple factors that had a positive influence on homework completion. These included gender; females were found to have higher homework completion rates than males, a finding also corroborated in Cooper et al., (2006); parent education, student attitude, teacher feedback, student interest, perceived task utility, and homework management strategies (Xu, 2011). Although this study was conducted in the United States, and relied in part on self-reported data which could be susceptible to bias, it provides an insight into factors which prevent students completing homework. This is an area which requires further study, in order to enable teachers and schools to maximise homework efficacy for students, in terms of its academic benefits.

Ineffective and detrimental effects of Homework

Alongside the literature which supports a positive link between homework and academic achievement in secondary school, there is also some research which suggests it can be ineffective. In a study examining the effects additional homework had on academic achievement for 12 and 13 year old students in the United States, Eren and Henderson (2011) found that additional homework in science, history and English had little or no impact on test scores. However the study did find that additional mathematics homework did have a statistically significant large effect, and led to improved mathematics test scores. This study demonstrates a potential gap in the literature, where the differential effects of homework across subject areas need to be more comprehensively investigated.

Another issue with effectiveness of homework lies in its delivery, in that it is often not differentiated for students in mainstream classrooms. Bryan, Burstein and Bryan (2001) found that students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms reported significantly more issues with homework difficulty and completion, compared with their non-disabled peers. These issues included: not understanding homework, inability to maintain focus, distraction, difficulty organising materials and time, and forgetting to bring homework to school (Bryan et al., 2001). Although this research was completed 15 years ago, it raises the salient issue over the lack of homework differentiation, and the lack of provision for the diverse needs of students in inclusive classrooms. If students with disabilities struggle to complete set homework, they may miss out on the potential academic benefits homework can provide.

Cooper et al. (2006) in their meta-analysis of homework and achievement research noted that potential negative effects of homework, especially excessive amounts of homework, included: satiation (where students become weary and repulsed by homework), loss of interest in academic material, physical and...
emotional fatigue, increased stress and pressure on students, denial of leisure time (activities that may enhance academic and life skills), increased confusion relating to material, negative attitude towards school and cheating and copying from other students. These negative effects of homework could negate the positive effects of homework, and in fact be detrimental to learning and academic achievement. Indeed, different homework assignments may garner positive, or negative effects, or a mix of both, thus “complex patterns of effects ought to be expected” from the array of ways homework can be constructed, construed and completed (Cooper et al., 2006, p. 8).

Studies have shown homework can be time-consuming, intrusive and stressful for students who may already be stretched for time due to other commitments. Coutts (2004) argued that “many students are explicit that homework is an activity that prevents or disrupts other more desirable leisure activities” (p. 186). This notion is echoed by Sallee and Rigler (2008), who in a survey of more than 180 American high school students found 49% of students were committed to two to three hours of extracurricular activities per day, while 62% devoted themselves to at least four hours of extracurricular activities per week (Sallee & Rigler, 2008, p. 48). These students may feel the need to sacrifice important extracurricular activities, in order to focus on homework. Alternatively, they may sacrifice homework, and its potential academic benefits, in order to pursue other extracurricular or leisure activities (Coutts, 2004).

For students who are committed to other activities outside of school, homework is an additional activity and stressor in their lives. Indeed, Sallee and Rigler (2008) noted that students are actively encouraged to “be involved in multiple activities” in order to “compete in a competitive marketplace of college applications” (p. 48). Students who are involved in multiple activities may feel somewhat overburdened, which could lead to undesirable and excessive levels of stress. Indeed, in a study of the relationships between homework, stress and mood disturbance on Australian senior high school students, by Kouzma and Kennedy (2002), they found that homework was a key source of stress in high school students’ lives. This study also found that increased amounts of homework led to increased student stress levels (Kouzma & Kennedy, 2002). High stress levels are ultimately unlikely to be helpful or beneficial for students’ overall health, and thus it is a factor that should be considered in delegation of homework given by schools and teachers.

Implications

The New Zealand Curriculum supports student development of the key competencies of thinking, relating to others, using language, symbols and texts, managing self and participating and contributing, in partnership with students’ whanau and communities. This learning partnership also extends to home learning and homework (Ministry of Education, 2007). Indeed Alton-Lee (2003) in the ‘best evidence synthesis’ report for the New Zealand Ministry of Education, noted that research shows that home-school partnerships which nurture student learning lead to “strong and sustained gains in student achievement” (p.38). Homework is one important dimension of this home-school partnership, and an avenue for parental engagement in their children’s learning and schooling (Clinton & Hattie, 2013).

It is therefore important for teachers to ensure that homework is developed and delivered in a manner which is conducive to promoting student achievement, and developing the key competencies in a home-school partnership.

Despite homework being recognised as a tangible way to foster student achievement, one American survey of teachers indicated that teachers “very often or often assigned homework because they ran out of time in class” (Markow, Kim & Liebman, 2007 as cited in Fisher, Lapp & Frey, 2011, p.71). Although this survey was conducted in America, teachers in New Zealand also face time and workload pressures in covering the curriculum and preparing students for assessments, and beginning teachers often feel that there is “not enough hours in the day to get everything done” (Fraser & Hill, 2016, p.288). This could lead teachers to assigning students homework as an “afterthought”, as opposed to a “well integrated dimension of their instruction” and this could negatively affect the utility and quality of the homework and learning (Fisher, Lapp & Frey, 2011, p.74). Fisher, Lapp and Frey (2011) suggested that in order for homework to be most effective, it should be explicitly linked with concepts students have already been taught by the teacher, and it should not rely on parental or financial support in order to be completed. If homework is assigned on concepts yet to be adequately covered, students can be left “bewildered” and “confused”, leading to poor quality learning, or a lack of task completion. Under these circumstances, students are at risk of missing out on the potential academic benefits of homework altogether (Fisher, Lapp & Frey, 2011).

Coutts (2004) further expanded upon this notion, stating that students need to have more intrinsic motivations to complete homework, as opposed to extrinsic motivations such as punishment for non-completion, as this will encourage better quality learning. She argued that students too often see the immediate associated ‘costs’ of homework (in lost leisure and social time) as more important than the longer-term learning benefits of homework, and thus they may choose not to complete it. However, if students viewed the homework as interesting, engaging, relevant and useful, they may have more intrinsic motivation to complete it, and reap the academic rewards as a result (Coutts, 2004). In sum, the challenge for teachers is perhaps to only allocate homework that is well considered, engaging and useful to students, and builds upon previously taught concepts. This approach will encourage student understanding, and intrinsic motivation for homework completion. In this way, students will be better supported to capitalise on the academic benefits quality homework can provide.

Conclusion

The overall trend in the examined literature for homework at the secondary school level showed that homework generally has a positive impact on academic achievement. However, many factors and variables can influence this link in both a positive and negative direction. These variables need to be researched more thoroughly in order to understand and foster maximum homework efficacy. Moreover, homework can also be less effective, ineffective, or detrimental when: it is not differentiated to account for student differences and diversity, it is given in increasing high amounts, it interferes with extra-curricular activities and leisure time, or when it causes excessive stress. In
order to maximise the potential academic benefits of homework for students, teachers need to make sure homework is relevant and engaging for all students, and built upon concepts taught in class. Although there is an abundance of literature investigating the impacts of homework on student achievement, many of these studies have been conducted overseas or in the United States. More New Zealand based research is required, in order to inform best practice in the unique New Zealand context.

References


Interdisciplinary Team Teaching to Support Twenty-First Century Learning Skills

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Abstract

There is a need to reimagine education in the New Zealand secondary school context that better supports twenty-first century learning skills. Interdisciplinary team teaching provides a model of change that could enable schools to reimagine how education is delivered, how knowledge is created, and better exemplify and incorporate learning skills relevant to a rapidly developing world. This article explores primarily qualitative data drawn from research addressing interdisciplinary team teaching (ITT) that spans across primary to tertiary settings in a range of contexts. The findings from this research express why it is necessary to reimagine current education systems, the benefits and barriers of ITT, and what enables the successful implementation of ITT. If a school is able to negotiate the barriers and understand what is necessary to make it work then research suggests that ITT can provide a structural, pedagogical, and philosophical change that will enhance learning skills necessary for the twenty-first century world.

Keywords: Interdisciplinary, Team Teaching, Collaboration, Ākonga, Kaiako, Risk Taking, Critical Thinking, Innovation.

Introduction

There is a push in New Zealand to critically reflect upon and reimagine the education system to more appropriately meet the demands of the twenty-first century (Hood, 2015). The purpose of this critical literature review is to assess whether interdisciplinary team-teaching (ITT), in a New Zealand secondary school context, provides an approach that can better support ākonga to learn the skills necessary for life in the twenty-first century. Team teaching can be defined as involving “a group of instructors working purposefully, regularly, and cooperatively to help a group of students learn” (Buckley, 2000, p.4). Interdisciplinary teaching commonly is the combination of two or more subjects to explore a thematic unit (Barton & Smith, 2000).

There is limited literature and research on this topic from a New Zealand context, therefore, this review draws on literature primarily from the United States with supplementary literature from Japan, Taiwan and New Zealand which spans from 1998 to 2016. The literature chosen also focuses on ITT in three education sectors; primary, secondary and tertiary, as research specifically related to the New Zealand secondary school context is limited. To look at the relevance of ITT in a New Zealand secondary school context this review will examine the four major themes that emerged from the literature:

• The importance of ITT pedagogy in twenty-first century education;
• The benefits of ITT pedagogy for both ākonga (learner) and kaiako (teacher);
• The barriers that hinder implementation of ITT; and
• Those pre-requisites and kaiako dispositions to support ITT.

Why Interdisciplinary Team-teaching?

Education authors such as Sir Ken Robinson (2015), New Zealand’s David Hood (2015) and Richard Wells (2016), argue that current education systems are outdated as the ‘factory model’ they were based upon is no longer relevant in the twenty-first century. To bring about necessary change requires a philosophical shift in how we perceive knowledge, the roles of kaiako and ākonga, and what is relevant for our current and future world. Cathy Wiley (2011), posited that due to political pressure to raise student achievement, coupled with the decline in public spending on schools, means that New Zealand schools need to make greater use of their internal strengths. She concluded, through analysing data from the 2009 and 2010 NZCER primary and secondary teacher surveys, that this could be done through developing collaborative practices, which she suggests is essential for meeting the learning demands of a rapidly changing world, which will challenge the traditional approach to education.

Reimagining contemporary education means it is essential to promote learning in the areas of communication, cooperation, collaboration, risk taking, critical and reflective thinking, creativity, innovation, compassion, curiosity, and perseverance.
(Hood, 2015; Wells, 2016; Wylie, 2011). To achieve this ākonga and kaiako need to identify as learners who have an active role in creating and applying knowledge. Kaiako can model this through ITT which involves collaborative teaching that enables classrooms to function as a team. In this environment ākonga and kaiako work together to develop subject skills, to understand how knowledge(s) emerge and function, and provide multiple perspectives. Ākonga are then able to develop frames of reference that enable application and contextualisation (Anderson & Speck, 1998; Murata, 2002; Harris, Harrison & McFahn, 2012). ITT is an approach that can promote collaborative practices, capitalise on internal strengths and enable the shift to an education system that better meets the demands of the twenty-first century.

What are the Benefits?

Multiple Perspectives

Anderson and Speck (1998) and Perry and Stewart (2005) concluded that multiple perspectives is a significant benefit of ITT. Ākonga gain multiple perspectives as two teachers provide different points of view. However, this can be undermined if a teaching team is experiencing tension and conflict. Ideally being presented with multiple perspectives causes ākonga to learn how to respectfully engage with other points of view without hostility, when kaiako model this in the classroom it can lead to open dialogue and greater ākonga participation (Anderson & Speck, 1998). Multiple perspectives can be gained on issues, concepts, processes, opinion, beliefs, values, and sources of information – all of which can be further enhanced when subjects disciplines are combined (Anderson & Speck, 1998; Perry & Stewart, 2005). This then helps develop interpersonal skills that are necessary for life in and outside of school.

Deeper Learning

Oitzinger and Kallgren (2004) noted that research from the 1980’s and 1990’s showed that cognitive growth, such as critical thinking, developed better in an interdisciplinary setting than through studying separate subjects. ITT also helps shift kaiako focus toward a conceptual curriculum, which helps break down artificial barriers between subjects that do not exist in life outside of school (Murata, 2002). Conceptual teaching is an integral part of the current New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) and Wiley (2011) found that schools with higher collaborative practices were better able to unpack the complexities of the New Zealand Curriculum which includes the shift toward conceptual teaching.

Risk Taking and Richer Material

The department of teacher education at Brigham Young University (USA), compared solo student teacher placements with team student teacher placements in the context of primary schools. The study highlighted that although there were some ‘tradeoffs’ to team-teaching, there were more benefits for all involved. One benefit that was highlighted was that student teacher teams felt that the support from their partner encouraged them to take risks (Bullough et al., 2003). A different study of a USA high school also showed that kaiako felt teaming provided a safe environment to develop and implement new ideas (Murata, 2002). A University interdisciplinary teaching team also noted that team teaching gave them the courage necessary for teaching a topic that neither individually felt confident delivering alone (Shibley, 2006). In the study at Brigham Young University, researchers identified the second benefit of training student teachers in a team was that it enabled teacher teams to develop a richer, more varied and creative curriculum (Bullough et al., 2003). In another case study approach, Perry and Stewart (2005) identified similar themes, and went on to argue that good communication enables richer creativity and deeper insight of kaiako.

Student Assessment Results

Research explored in this review provides qualitative data, such as data drawn from case studies, the limitation of this is that it does not provide a source of quantitative data to support the argument that ITT does benefit ākonga. Only one article provided qualitative data that also showed student assessment results had improved as a result of team teaching. Gathering student voice through a questionnaire showed that over 50% of ākonga who were team taught thought that team teaching positively impacted their results (Jang, 2006). Future research that provides qualitative data on the correlation between ITT and NCEA results would be helpful for the New Zealand context.

Professional Development and Community

Anderson and Speck (1998) concluded that kaiako find they learn more about themselves, such as their weaknesses and strengths, as a result of working together. Kaiako report learning from each other’s differences, being able to bounce ideas off one another, and reflecting together, which results in a greater response to problems faced (Anderson & Speck, 1998; Murata, 2002; Perry & Stewart, 2005). Wiley (2011) found that collaborative practices were more likely to be effective for professional development than attending a workshop. She compared secondary kaiako collaborating through implementing Te Kotahitanga (Bishop & Berryman, 2009) to primary kaiako who undertook professional development for Māori achievement and found that secondary kaiako were more likely to say they had changed their thinking or improved their practice. ITT also lessens teachers’ experience of isolation by creating a supportive nurturing community which leads to a higher teacher moral (Murata, 2002; Wylie, 2011). This creates a shift away from individualism that Bullough et al. (2003) suggested, if not done, significantly stands in the way of education renewal.

What are the Barriers?

Control and Micro Politics

Despite the many benefits of ITT, Gunn and King (2003) and Perry and Stewart (2005) posited that there are significant barriers that can have a negative impact on ākonga, kaiako and kura. Gunn and King (2003) provided an analysis of their experience of ITT. They acknowledged that team teaching can lead to effective educational results, however, they found that their experiences of issues of control and micro politics overwhelmed the outcomes. They reported a cyclical experience where lack of shared vision exasperated political conflict and political conflict prevented them from developing shared understanding.

Inadequate Leadership

Murata (2002) and Wylie (2011) suggested that the support of school leadership will help foster and develop ITT. However, despite reporting that school leadership supported democratic ideology, Gunn and King (2003) found that the leadership of the department, in practice, did not. They described two styles of leadership that led to issues, which hindered collaborative practice; top down authoritarian leadership and laissez-faire
leadership. The outcome of the first was a lack of open communication where kaiako felt it was unsafe to express issues they were facing in the classroom, or the issues they were experiencing in the team, as they perceived that this would be seen as challenging the leader’s authority. The outcome of the second style led to a sense of freedom which included freedom from working collaboratively. Gunn and King (2003) in reflecting upon their experience likened it to changing a car tyre while driving down the road. It is difficult to imagine, create and implement change when in momentum. This was further hindered as department leadership were only familiar with centralised and hierarchical power that they struggled to conceptualise what ITT could look like.

Team Tension
Perry and Stewart (2005), who have been involved in team teaching for 25 years, carried out research through interviewing fourteen team teachers over a two-year period. They also found that problems in teaching teams can make the experience ineffective very quickly. One teacher interviewed described feeling like he was in a fishbowl, noting that students readily pick up on the tensions in a teaching team relationship. Another teacher pointed out that the positive outcomes of team teaching can be quickly undermined if team teachers are incompatible (Perry & Stewart, 2005). This affirms the notion that it is important for teachers to have choice and that it is vital to resolve conflict.

Time and School Systems
Gunn and King (2003) and Sandholtz (2000) state another significant barrier is lack of time and timetabling issues. This often affects teams at the planning and evaluation stages of ITT, for example Murata (2002), Shibley (2006) and Sandholtz (2000) concluded that teachers face timetable clashes that make it difficult to find time to plan or reflect upon and evaluate lessons. Therefore, if it is difficult to meet to plan and evaluate, then making time to deal with conflict resolution would also be difficult. Many New Zealand secondary schools would have to reassess current structures that do not allow for this flexibility ITT requires.

How to make it work
Philosophy
Shibley (2006), Murata (2002), Gunn and King (2003), and Perry and Stewart (2005) agreed that it is vital to have a shared philosophy about teaching and learning for collaboration to succeed. A lack of philosophical consensus was highlighted by Shibley (2006), who explained that the failure of one team was due to philosophical differences that could not be resolved, despite having the time to do so. These authors also stressed that philosophy is the most complex element of implementing ITT and that it is essential to explore philosophy for ITT to be effective. Murata (2002) highlighted that if members agree on beliefs about their roles and attitudes towards teaching then it leads to an openness on matters of pedagogy, curriculum and assessment. This is not to say that there is no place for difference in ITT, because if fundamental beliefs can be agreed upon it creates a freedom for teachers to utilise difference in things like teaching style.

Team Choice
Bullough et al. (2003) studied student teachers who were paired in teams while on placement. The university chose who students were paired with, the student teachers did not have any input in this. Student teachers reported that it was difficult at first to work with someone they would not necessarily have chosen to work with, but over time they grew in trust and respect for one another, learnt how to work in-sync, and learnt from each other’s differences. In comparison, Sandholtz (2002) also studied team teaching during teacher training and concluded that personality conflicts are minimised when people are able to choose team partners. She also suggested that getting to choose the team meant that the relationship will begin on a stronger foundation. Anderson and Speck (1998), Murata (2002) and Perry and Stewart (2005) also explained that when people are able to choose their teaching team and there is a good level of compatibility, especially on philosophy, then teaching teams are generally more likely to be successful.

Planning
Effective planning is another element necessary for successful outcomes. It is important to collaboratively plan lesson objectives, leadership of teaching within the lesson and lesson conclusions. It is also important to plan and agree upon assessments so that expectations are clearly communicated to ākonga to avoid unnecessary confusion (Murata, 2002; Shibley, 2006). Finally, Sandholtz (2000) concluded that planning curriculum development collaboratively has many benefits for a team, such as enabling the collaborative experience to go deeper than just assigning teaching tasks. She argued that it promotes experimentation and utilises the strengths and experiences of team members (Sandholtz, 2000). This then leads to benefits such as risk-taking, creativity and deeper learning.

Kaiako Dispositions
There are several kaiako dispositions that can lead to ITT success. Gunn and King (2003) analysed their experience of ITT and concluded that it is important to be reflective upon one’s practice. Shibley (2006) and Perry and Stewart (2005) who looked at case study data both agreed that kaiako need to be prepared to deal with conflict, which involves open and honest communication when there is a problem. Otherwise, if conflict is avoided then it can have a direct impact on ākonga. Sandholtz (2000), Shibley (2006) and Roth and Tobin (2005) argued that collective responsibility is an integral disposition of kaiako. This involves seeing team members as equals and working collaboratively, especially in the areas of planning, instruction, and evaluation. Roth and Tobin (2005) reported their experiences of team teaching and reasoned that when teachers view each other as equals and take collective responsibility they are more comfortable to step in while the other is teaching to clarify or add value to what is being taught. They do not wait until after to discuss what could have been if they think there was something that would have improved the learning experience for ākonga.

Conclusion
This literature review has examined the many benefits of ITT, a good amount of which are very applicable to learning in the twenty first century. These include: interpersonal skills, such as relating to each other, respectfully engaging with issues of difference, and learning to see things from multiple perspectives. Discussion and analysis of the literature has also explored the
development of a deeper conceptual curriculum that makes connections across subjects, and encourages risk taking and creativity. Therefore, if teaching teams are able to minimise or work through barriers like micro-politics, team tension and time restraints, then this is an approach to New Zealand secondary school education that would enhance as opposed to hinder learning in the twenty-first century. To enable ITT to flourish kaiako need a shared vision and philosophy, teacher choice in team configuration, time to effectively plan and dispositions such as collective responsibility, having a holistic view of learning, and being invested in the success of ITT for all involved.

References

Effective Use of Technologies in the Classroom

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Abstract

The use of technologies within classrooms in New Zealand and worldwide is increasing significantly. Twenty-first century learners are growing up as ‘digital natives’ who are exposed to multiple forms of technology from a young age, creating a culture among learners to ‘always be connected’. Classroom technologies range from computers to iPads to mobile devices and beyond. Teaching with technology is moving away from past teaching pedagogies and improving personalisation, independence and quality of student learning. There is a need for teachers to learn how to effectively teach with technology, involving new pedagogies and ways to implement them successfully into the learning environment. This literature review focuses on the TPACK framework (Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge) and why teachers need to learn how to effectively teach with technology in the classroom. Affordances and limitations for teachers and students are specified throughout the review. Content knowledge, skills and appropriate pedagogies all play a part in delivering successful education through the use of technologies.

Keywords: ICT, TPACK Framework, Technology, Pedagogy, Content Knowledge, Barriers, Benefits, Device, Affordances, Limitations, Mobile Learning

Introduction

Education both in New Zealand and worldwide is showing an increasing trend towards the use of technologies in the classroom (Pegrum, Oakley & Faulkner, 2013; Snell & Snell-Siddle, 2013). With the benefits of technology offering increased motivation, independence of learning, flexibility and beyond, it becomes an attractive tool for teachers to use (Baskerville, 2012; Bingimlas, 2009). Most studies show that technology is only fully effective when implemented correctly and this implementation can be investigated using the TPACK framework (Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge). Effective implementation relies on how well teachers use technology with pedagogy and content knowledge combined (Abbitt, 2011; Baskerville, 2012; Ingram, Williamson-Leadley & Pratt, 2016). This critical review discusses the idea of technologies within classrooms, the TPACK framework, the impact on teachers who use technologies in their practice and technologies as a learning tool for students. A number of implications will also be covered.

Classroom Technologies

Technology is a significant part of a learners life resulting in expectations for them to operate in an information age (An & Reigeluth, 2011; Baskerville, 2012). Information and communications technology (ICT) is a term used to represent ‘technologies’ as well as mobile learning (m-learning) (Herro, Kiger & Owens, 2013; Otrel-Cass, Khoo & Cowie, 2012; Melhuish & Falloon, 2010). Technologies in the classroom can include: computers, tablets, interactive whiteboards and beyond. Technology provides a way for learners to explore, identify and seize opportunities that daily living spaces offer, rather than the same day to day learning goals and resources (Melhuish & Falloon, 2010; Orlando & Attard, 2016). Hicks (2011) identified the need for students to have the opportunity to link technologies that they use at home to activities in school.

TPACK

Most technology integration training appears to focus mainly on technology knowledge and skills while overlooking the dynamic relationships between technology, pedagogy and content knowledge (Abbitt, 2011). The technological pedagogical and content knowledge model (TPACK) incorporates pedagogy and content knowledge, not just technology itself (Abbitt, 2011; Ingram et al., 2016; Otrel-Cass et al., 2012). Ingram et al. (2016) in a study that examined the integration of a ‘show and tell’ app (application software) for mathematics in a New Zealand school with 11 teachers and age 5-14 year old students, found that to get the best results, for students and teachers, the technology and app needed to be used appropriately. Results showed that students were able to engage in deep mathematical thinking (Ingram et al., 2016). The teachers in this study clearly had the skills to understand what technology was being used and how to incorporate it with content knowledge and effective pedagogies. Getting students to engage in activities can lead to more autonomy and agency (Ingram et al., 2016).
According to Abbitt (2011), TPACK provided a lens to observe the role of technology with teacher knowledge to allow and understand different pedagogy and content knowledge. One hundred and seventy research articles were used to describe the application of the TPACK framework in teacher preparation showing productive and meaningful ways to support student learning (Abbitt, 2011). Along with challenges, Abbitt (2011) described how teachers do not have to use technology as an ‘add on’ but can incorporate it with strategic learning techniques. Shimassaki (2015) in a review of literature regarding the use of ICT in teaching, discussed the importance of understanding the barriers that are implicit with the integration of pedagogy and technology and how teachers must understand the difficulties to have success in their integration of ICT. Otrel-Cass et al. (2012) explained the theoretical and practical ideas related to teachers application of TPACK in science. Their study was conducted over two years with the aim to explore the potential of ICT for teaching and learning with science with diverse groups of students. The TPACK framework was acknowledged when using digital videos to scaffold learning because the teacher related their ICT skills with pedagogical knowledge of formative assessment. The TPACK framework was used to support the teacher as they became more competent with the design of technology-enhanced learning (Otrel-Cass et al., 2012). TPACK can clearly be used to support teachers learning, however, teachers need guidance in understanding how to plan their teaching with supporting technology in mind. Without the proper implementation of TPACK, technology is not nearly as effective. The way teachers take up these affordances and integrate them meaningfully with pedagogy and content knowledge is important.

TPACK Supports Teaching

The role of a teacher is changing as more digital technologies are integrated into schools. There is a need for teachers to evaluate their practice and realise that teaching with digital technologies is very different, in comparison, to teaching without them. An & Reigeluth (2011) explored teacher beliefs, perceptions and support needs for teachers in technology enriched learning environments. Their study consisted of an online survey involving 126 teachers and took specific feedback from 11 participants. They discussed how many teachers use devices for low-level tasks including: word processing, practice activates and exploring websites. This is a start, but student learning does not necessarily follow just because technology is used in a classroom. This study is an example of how teachers need to understand that technology integration is more than just using it for low-level tasks. If teachers are open to using the TPACK framework they can integrate subject specific technology, ideas and opportunities to explore technologies within teaching and learning contexts.

Orlando and Attard (2016) drew on data from three separate studies and re-analysed them to explore how a small group of four early career primary teachers use information and communication technologies within mathematics. Results showed that the teacher’s mathematical knowledge appeared to be directly related to the ways they used the technology and the type of technology used was biased towards the individual preferences of each teacher. Tablets used in one of the studies posed a problem because of their mobility and the need to rearrange the organisation of the teacher and students roles (Orlando & Attard, 2016). This study identified a common theme, that teachers often teach only with the knowledge they already have, without necessarily learning how to incorporate TPACK effectively. Teaching with mobile devices showed gaps in their implementation because they lacked understanding of how to use mobile technology to teach mathematics. It highlighted the complexity of the TPACK framework and the interplay among the areas of pedagogy, content and technology knowledge.

In other studies, Pegrum et al. (2013) analysed schools in Australia who were looking to go ‘mobile’ by integrating mobile devices into learning. They identified that it was vital for staff to be grounded in pedagogy. Teachers in this study showed a significant desire to learn how to integrate the curriculum and pedagogy with technologies. It showed how the devices alone are less important than how they are used to support teaching and learning. Bingimlas (2009) touched on multiple barriers through his meta-analysis of technology integration in science. He brought together a number of key findings: teachers have a strong desire to integrate technologies into education, teachers lack confidence in using technologies, teachers lack competence in using technologies and teachers often have limited access to resources. Bingimlas (2009) highlighted the importance of studying the barriers involved so technology integration can be adopted into teaching and learning effectively. Barriers encourage improvement for future teaching situations showing that teachers need resources, effective development and technical support to learn how to teach well with technology (Bingimlas, 2009). Teachers need to challenge the minds of young people and strive to provide them with quality learning experiences that will benefit them now and later in life (Orlando & Attard, 2016; Pegrum et al., 2013). There is also a significant need for teachers to be supported accordingly through this process (Ingram et al., 2016). The literature above shows that when a teacher is engaged and understands how to use devices effectively, using TPACK, students are more likely to succeed (Abbitt, 2011).

A Learning Tool For Students

There are extensive studies in the literature discussing the benefits of devices used in classes and how student learning becomes more personalised, independent and productive (Ingram et al., 2016; Melhuish & Falloon, 2010). Wong (2012) explained how technology is a good way for learners to explore and identify opportunities that daily living spaces offer. Ingram et al., (2016) discussed how technology is taking a turn to being braided into classroom activity everyday rather than used as a once off experience. Their study showed that students were able to reflect on their own learning, stay engaged and work independently without teacher help. Student intuition and self management proved to grow as they took on roles like scribe or leader when working in pairs or groups. The device and app that the students were using in this study was flexible and personalised to each learner at their learning level. Even further, it lead to a high level of student engagement and students were collaborating, discussing and sharing rich perspectives of the different views they were finding. Baskerville (2012) touched on the notion that technology can help students learn more effectively. This study was implemented in New Zealand engaging 23 Year 7 and 8 students using e-learning. Students showed signs of being extremely motivated when engaged in a project that had them designing an avatar and creating an avatar voice. The stimulating experience of using technology to complete their work gave students the opportunity to think critically and creatively while engaging in reflective thought and action. The integration of technology into teaching activates facilitated student learning.
especially with students collaborating and refining ideas based on direct feedback they were given (Baskerville, 2012). On the other hand, an element of frustration was found with the availability of computers and device deficiencies. Baskerville’s (2012) study demonstrated that students can stay engaged while using technology when it has been implemented properly, even if possible barriers arise.

Kearney, Schuck, Burden and Aubusson (2012) discussed what pedagogical framework may look like from a socio-cultural perspective. Their study focused on how student learning is affected by the tools used and how they are easily modified to suit users needs. Most technologies used were not specifically manufactured for education but rapidly became adapted as a tool for student learning (Kearney et al., 2012). Melhuish and Falloon (2010), in a similar study, looked at the potential affordances and limitations of the iPad as a tool and its potential uses for learning. Teachers showed to be experimenting with the endless possibilities for collaboration and communication the iPad offered, especially as it rapidly centres around learners lives (Melhuish & Falloon, 2010). Similarly, a three year study by Snell and Snell-Siddle (2013) that involved a New Zealand tertiary institution using mobile phones to deliver supplementary learning material, assessments and study tips to students, showed that the learning environment can be enhanced through the use of mobile technologies. They suggested that practitioners need to be using mobile technologies to provide as much access and interaction as possible in order to provide an ideal learning environment. According to Snell and Snell-Siddle (2013) enhanced mobile communication and feedback can lead to improved student motivation and greater understanding of the learning process. It has also been argued that students’ perceptions of using mobile technology will differ greatly and that teachers must incorporate mobile technology alongside other methods of teaching in order to reach all students (Snell & Snell-Siddle, 2013).

Conclusion

The literature reviewed identified that there is a significant need for teachers to understand the importance of incorporating TPACK into teaching. There is a culture among young learners today of ‘always being connected’ and as Herro et al., (2013) discusses: technology needs to be incorporated into this idea, not be kept separate. Schools that do not incorporate the use of technologies cannot seriously claim to prepare their students for life in the twenty-first century (Bingimlas, 2009). Melhuish and Falloon (2010) go into deeper detail about the future of m-learning. They raise issues whether or not the interaction and knowledge gained with technologies can be sustained or if the higher use of technologies is detrimental for learners in relation to their health. Does it leave students with a deeper understanding that they have really grappled with what they are learning? As a beginning teacher I would hope that when I implement technologies into my classroom I can effectively incorporate the TPACK framework for deeper learning to occur. I am aware that I have an advantage having grown up as a ‘digital native’ however, as an educational practitioner, I still need to understand the importance of learning how to braid teaching strategies fully with the TPACK framework. This also raises the issue, found through the literature reviewed, of the need for professional development in this area (An & Reigeluth, 2011; Pegrum et al., 2013). If professional development is not given to teachers around how to best use the technologies then it will not be as effective as it could be. Technology holds many benefits for teachers and students therefore needs to be effectively integrated with pedagogy and content knowledge or else enhanced learning opportunities will be missed. Studies show that TPACK supports teaching pedagogies and therefore allows students to have positive learning experiences through the tools used. It is significantly beneficial in education to look at how teachers take up these affordances and integrate them meaningfully with pedagogy and content knowledge. A teacher’s attitude and experience towards technologies will also influence the students attitudes towards learning and their use of technologies.

References


Gender and Sexuality Diverse Student Inclusive Practices: Challenges Facing Educators

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Abstract

Inclusivity is at the heart of education in New Zealand and is founded on the key principle that every student deserves to feel like they belong in the school environment. One important aspect of inclusion is how Gender and Sexuality Diverse (GSD) students are being supported in educational settings. This critical literature review identified three key challenges facing educators that prevent GSD students from being fully included at school. Teachers require professional development in order to discuss GSD topics, bullying and harassment of GSD individuals are dealt with on an as-needs basis rather than address underlying issues, and a pervasive culture of heteronormativity both within educational environments and New Zealand society all contribute to GSD students feeling excluded from their learning environments. A clear recommendation drawn from the literature examined is that the best way to instigate change is to use schools for their fundamental purpose: learning. Schools need to learn strategies to make GSD students feel safe, teachers need to learn how to integrate GSD topics into their curriculum and address GSD issues within the school, and students need to learn how to understand the gender and sexuality diverse environments they are growing up in.

Keywords: Gender, Sexuality, Diverse, Pre-Service Teacher, Education, New Zealand, Heteronormativity, Harassment

Introduction

New Zealand education is based on the fundamental principle that every learner deserves to feel like they belong in their classroom or centre. As outlined in Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996) and the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), educators have a duty to ensure that the background of each student is respected and the physical and mental needs of the learners are met, and that each ākonga feels safe and free to be themselves. Within the Master of Teaching and Learning program at the University of Canterbury, a major focus has been on building an inclusive learning environment, both from a theoretical perspective and through professional practice experiences. Specifically, this has included learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, those who have linguistic learning needs, as well as learners with physical or mental needs outside those of the normative student. Issues of gender and sexuality diverse (GSD) students have not been addressed and this literature review aims to attend to this knowledge gap.

Though many texts discuss methods and strategies for creating and sustaining inclusive classrooms for all students (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Fraser & Hill, 2016) the focus of this literature review was to explore research that focused specifically on supporting GSD students in educational environments. The selected studies discuss a variety of issues facing educators in both primary and secondary sectors. From these it became apparent that there were three key themes surrounding the inclusion of GSD students in schools: teachers feel ill prepared to address topics of GSD in their classes, gender issues must not be addressed solely as a response to bullying in schools, and the heteronormative dialogue that guides modern education must be challenged in order to create safe and inclusive learning environments for GSD students.

Teacher Readiness

Pre-service teachers are starting their careers without proper training to support GSD students in their classrooms and schools and it is becoming more of a challenge to provide systematic professional development for teachers (Leonardi and Staley, 2015). Through their idea of ‘Teacher Institutes’, a notion of empowering teachers’ professional development around Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer (LGBTQ) topics through a collegial community approach, Leonardi and Staley (2015) identified the need for educators to be better educated on the issues, have understanding of beliefs surrounding the age appropriateness of the subject matter, and awareness that misconceptions can act as barrier to learning. Parental disapproval, and the encouragement of sexual behaviour are just two reasons educators feel reluctant to initiate discussions on GSD topics. Elizabeth J. Meyer has written a variety of texts about educational gender issues in the United States and Canada, and her book Gender and Sexual Diversity in Schools (2010) lays out and refutes many misconceptions. Citing
an Ontario study that states “fear of parental backlash is the most prevalent obstacle” (p. 79) to the inclusion of GSD topics in education, Meyer showed the strength this belief has in shaping our school environments. Elizabeth Boskey (2014) emphatically denounced this view, stating that studies prove the majority of parents support the inclusion of GSD topics in schools. Meyer (2010) was more cautious in encouraging teachers to ignore parental concerns, recommending a careful consideration of the students and school environment before jumping into topics around GSD, though she too pointed out that most parents are supportive of schools’ efforts to foster overall inclusion.

Another concern, this one expressed by both parents and teachers, surrounds the decision on when to introduce this topic to students. In her text on navigating GSD in schools, Jennifer Bryan (2012) acknowledged that age and maturity level are often concerns that manifest as barriers to the inclusion of gender or sexuality discussions in the classroom. She concluded that much of this dissent is based around the mistaken idea that these discussions will include information about sexual behaviour, rather than about relationships and identity. In the same vein, there is a fear that these types of discussions might sexualise children, but studies conducted under the No Child Left Behind guidelines show that “comprehensive sexuality education actually delays sexual experimentation” (Bryan, 2012, p. 6). The point Bryan makes is that society, social media, and marketers are already sexualising children, therefore teaching about gender or sexuality is needed to give students proper context to what they are exposed to on a daily basis.

Boskey’s (2014) work, though narrowly focused on sexuality education in schools, highlighted the fact that children can self-identify gender by age two, and concluded, based on research into early identity formation, that age-appropriate gender diversity topics could be developed for children in early primary school. These realities emphasized by Boskey are confirmed by Bryan (2012) and are addressed in Ryan, Patraw, and Bednar’s (2013) study which was designed to confirm whether or not primary school children were ready for a gender and sexuality inclusive education. The article explores the results of the first year of the study, which followed a single teacher in an American third grade classroom (which transitioned to fourth grade during the study) for four specific episodes designed to introduce and explore the ideas around gender diversity and gender non-conformity. The results showed learners gained a deeper understanding of gender diversity, and the lessons helped make the school safer and more supportive for GSD students (Ryan et al., 2013). However, the small sample size and the fact that the teacher was a lesbian may be a limitation to the study. The authors also noted that at the outset of the study they, as researchers, were writing from a gender normative world view, and that this lens may colour their study. Correspondingly, because the teacher at the heart of the study was gender nonconforming, the success of including GSD topics into her curriculum could have been influenced by her own identity.

While the research of both Ryan et al. (2013) and Bryan (2012) are US-centric, they echo findings in both the United Kingdom and Canada that the inclusion of GSD topics in curriculum helps make school communities safer and more inclusive for all students (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Meyer, 2010).

If teachers are to develop safe and inclusive environments within their own classrooms, research shows they need to be better educated about GSD issues. Leonardo and Staley (2015) pushed for more pre-service teacher education programs and professional development sessions to focus on filling gaps in educators’ knowledge, and outlined strategies and dialogues to approach GSD topics in their own practice. Bryan (2012) suggested that the use of accurate language is a vital step for both parents and educators towards open discussion about gender and sexuality diversity. Meyer (2010) reinforced this idea by stating that educators need to learn the language and skills in order to interrupt harassment at all ages. She then emphasised the need for teachers to question their own practice in order to identify how they can reinforce gender in practice and how they support heteronormativity (Meyer, 2010). DePalma and Atkinson expanded on the importance of the role of the teacher by synthesising studies which show GSD students who “could not identify a single supportive adult in their schools” (2010, p. 1669) did not feel as though they belonged. Combined, these researchers prove the need for educators to learn more about GSD in order to combat misconceptions and design age-appropriate inclusive lessons to implement in their classrooms.

**Bullying Culture**

Beyond the walls of the individual classroom, educators also need to address GSD issues within the wider school culture. Students who do not display the same gender identity as their perceived biological sex are subject to bullying, harassment, and feeling unsafe at school. New Zealand is not exempt from this behaviour, as a recent survey concluded that transgendered high school students experience significantly more health and well-being issues while at school than their non-transgendered peers. GSD (Clark, Lucassen et al., 2014) Most studies prefaced their findings by reiterating the devastating consequences of bullying towards gender nonconforming students. The killing of Matthew Shepard, and the murder of Larry King, victims of hate crimes against GSD individuals (Boskey, 2014; Bryan, 2012), as well as the numerous suicides committed by those identifying as GSD (Clark, et al. 2014) are some extreme examples. As Meyer clarifies “for many students this is a matter of life or death” (2010, p.4) and teachers need to be prepared, or else face terrible consequences.

Meyer (2009) illustrated how the impacts of gendered harassment go beyond simply the person being bullied, and can negatively impact all students. She concluded that if schools and teachers do not intervene in bullying they are signalling their tacit compliance with this negative behaviour. In her later work she states that bullying and harassment peak at the beginning of a students’ schooling and again around puberty, putting the responsibility to prevent GSD related bullying on both primary and secondary teachers alike (Meyer, 2010).

Research conducted by Ryan et al. (2013) demonstrated how student’s lives are largely impacted by gender, and that reinforcing gender norms can lead to this culture of harassment. Meyer (2009) expands on this through synthesising research and showed that a schools culture is a determining factor of whether bullying behaviours increase or decrease. Her findings also showed that teachers who are more sensitised to these issues, because they themselves are GSD or have been marginalised, are more likely to intervene when they witness gendered harassment. Teachers must question how they reinforce gendered practice, support heterosexual practices, and present cultural information while at school in order to start challenging their own preconceptions (Meyer, 2010).

Beyond the individual teacher practice, DePalma and Atkinson (2010) argued that the tendency is to focus on issues of
bullying and harassment on a case by case basis, instead of challenging the fundamental social culture that drives these incidents. Targeting individuals will not institute the widespread culture change that is needed to make schools truly safe for GSD students. Leonardi and Staley (2015) affirmed this point of view, stating that intervening to prevent bullying does not challenge the fundamental institutional practices, and that professional development around GSD issues needs to be focused on systemic change. Only then can educators move past anti-bullying and address the larger pattern of heteronormativity that operates to marginalise GSD students within education systems.

**Heteronormative Culture**

The driving factor behind GSD students feeling unsafe and underrepresented at school is the institution’s overall heteronormative culture (Boskey, 2014; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Francis & Paechter, 2015; Leonardi & Staley, 2015; MacArthur, Higgins & Quinlivan, 2012; Meyer, 2009, 2010; Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012). Meyer (2009, 2010) tirelessly reiterates how schools reflect and reinforce the dominant societal cultures. Society is, and historically has been, heteronormative; a system which privileges those who exhibit heterosexual gender behaviours and social expectations (MacArthur et al., 2012).

In schools, this heteronormativity is reflected in the culture, policies, and curriculum. DePalma and Atkinson’s (2010) observations in the primary sector showed how children learn to reproduce cultural attitudes towards gender and sexuality at a very young age, reflecting the heterosexual biases presented to them at school. Recognising that this transmission of dominant culture is not limited to schools, they posit that the starting point to address and challenge these issues is education.

Toomey, McGuire, and Russell (2012) conducted a study to determine what strategies to promote GSD student safety contributed to students’ perceptions of safety. The 28 schools used were in California, which recognises gender identity and sexual orientation within its statewide non-discrimination code. This is a factor which may impact the findings, as the study has limited scope and was conducted in an area that already has institutional policies supporting GSD students. The data showed that students perceived their schools to be safer and have less harassment if there was an inclusive curriculum in place that supported gender nonconformity, and information supporting GSD issues was readily available, such as clubs like the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). The researchers also concluded that heteronormativity continues to be persistent, and recommends that schools must address these issues of gender nonconformity.

An overwhelming majority of the literature concludes that the most significant factor in making school environments safer and more inclusive is the creation and implementation of school wide policies, culture, and curriculum designed to promote and address GSD issues and topics (Bryan, 2012; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; MacArthur et al., 2012; Meyer, 2009, 2010; Ryan et al., 2013; Toomey et al., 2012). Leonardi and Staley (2015) reported that teachers who pursue professional development to address GSD related issues feel isolated and unsupported in applying what they learned in practice. Meyer (2010) emphasised the important role school culture plays in teaching and reinforcing cultural values. Both these works illustrate how imperative it is that education environments commit to change at an institutional level.

**Limitations**

There are some limitations to this literature review, most notably the lack of contemporary New Zealand sources. This is not to say that New Zealand is not producing literature in this field (see Quinlivan & Town, 1999), but updated, modern versions are few and far between.

An interesting observation is that although many of these studies recognise the negative impact of heteronormative society on GSD students, the studies themselves are written from a heteronormative perspective, and view the research from a gender binary lens. Boskey (2014) displays restrictive heteronormative speech throughout the article, notable when using the term “cross-gender” as it does not account for the entire spectrum between male and female. Meyer (2009) points out this trend in the research on harassment, emphasising how this rhetoric limits the amount of information available around GSD issues. Francis and Paechter’s (2015) research on gender and education showed that issues of classification, essentialism, and reinforcing the gender binary continue to influence all research in this sector. Performance is analysed in regards to male or female, and research tends to record how subjects promote gender stereotypes, rather than interrogate the status quo. These limitations are perpetuating hierarchies and stereotypes in the very papers that are being produced to combat them.

**Areas for Future Research**

As gender studies in education have historically focused on the divide between male and female students (Sadker & Silber, 2007), further evidence of the pervasiveness of binary heteronormative influences, all aspects of the field are wide open for new studies incorporating the entire spectrum of GSD students.

One study noted the lack of research on inclusive elementary school curriculum in this field (Ryan et al., 2013) yet failed to reference DePalma and Atkinson (2010), Bryan (2012) or Meyer’s (2009, 2010) more current works all of which specifically address GSD students in primary settings. This is one example of how valuable research in this field is being overlooked. Meyer (2009) recognises the same problem, stating that researchers of bullying and harassment do not address the works of other scholars in the same field. What is missing is a comprehensive summary of all relevant literature and data currently available addressing gender and sexuality diversity research. The last similar study in New Zealand was commissioned in 1999 (Alton-Lee & Prat, 2000) and reflects the binary divide between males and females that was the common view of students at that time. Given that society has since expanded the gender narrative to include an entire spectrum, an updated general survey is due.

**Conclusion**

Educators face many barriers when implementing GSD inclusive practices, not least of which are teacher preparedness, bullying and gendered harassment, and challenging the heteronormative rhetoric. These key themes grow from a discussion on the role of individual teachers, to the impact of teachers as a whole, to the significance of a schools’ guiding culture. A clear recommendation drawn from these texts is that the best way to instigate change is to use schools for their fundamental purpose: learning. Schools need to learn strategies
to make GSD students feel safe, teachers need to learn how to integrate GSD topics into their curriculum and address GSD issues within the school, and students need to learn how to understand the gender and sexuality diverse environments they are growing up in. The findings prove that all members from all levels within schools play a significant role in making GSD students feel safe and welcomed in their educational environment.

References


The Twenty-First Century Landscape of Assessment and Implications on Student Engagement

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Abstract

High-stakes testing has encouraged achievement at a low-level baseline and successfully disconnected many students from their passion to learn. Simultaneously, the globalised nature of the twenty-first century world requires students to develop additional skills and knowledge beyond the traditional core subjects to thrive. There is a dire need for better summative tests which encourage students to engage in real-world challenges, rather than regurgitate memorised information. Additionally, though summative and formative assessment are both necessary in the teaching and learning process, formative assessment is more effective in the learning process and complements the development of these needed twenty-first century skills. Therefore, teachers should actively emphasise and implement formative assessment in order to develop engaged learners prepared for the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Assessment, Twenty-First Century Learning, High-Stakes Testing, Summative, Formative, Feedback, Student Engagement, Te Kotahitanga

Introduction

As technology and globalisation continue to transform our rapidly changing world, there is a demand for education to adapt with it; teachers must prepare students for skills and challenges we do not yet know exist (Roberson, 2014; Trilling, Fadel, & Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009; Zhao, 2015). Trilling et al. (2009) created a “Knowledge and Skills Rainbow,” which adds relevant twenty-first century themes like global awareness and environmental, financial, health, and civic literacy to the traditional core subjects, along with three sets of skills most in demand: learning and innovation; information, media, and technology; and life and career skills. Likewise, Zhao (2015) explains that education must rest on a paradigm that cultivates creativity, entrepreneurship, and global competence. As the curriculum responds to what must be taught, assessment – how students demonstrate their learning – must adapt to measure these twenty-first century skills too.

High-Stakes Summative Assessment

Summative assessment seeks to provide a measured summary statement of student capability at a particular time, usually at the end of an educational unit or course, and it is typically used for credentialing, selection, or as an accountability measure for educators (OECD/CERI, 2005; Falchikov, 2013; Ussher & Earl, 2010). As part of heavy-handed federal education reform, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was institutionalised in American schools in 2001 based on the need for a renewal in student performance on national and international standardised testing (Plake, 2011; Roberson, 2014). Summative assessment is considered “high-stakes” when it is used to make important decisions about the test-taker or those involved in the education process (Plake, 2011).

The NCLB reform assumed that teachers held accountable for their students’ performance will teach better and students faced with high performance expectations will perform better (Roberson 2014). These assumptions did not uphold scrutiny and the US Department of Education finally replaced NCLB in 2015. Rather than seeing improvements and increases in learning, high-stakes testing over the last fifteen years has only created a culture among American public schools, and many other western world educational systems following in their wake, of an instructional focus, rather than regurgitate memorised first-century world requires students to develop additional skills and knowledge beyond the traditional core subjects to thrive. There is a dire need for better summative tests which encourage students to engage in real-world challenges, rather than regurgitate memorised information. Additionally, though summative and formative assessment are both necessary in the teaching and learning process, formative assessment is more effective in the learning process and complements the development of these needed twenty-first century skills. Therefore, teachers should actively emphasise and implement formative assessment in order to develop engaged learners prepared for the twenty-first century.

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(2003) corroborates this assertion, noting that too often, goals in education are too low, and that progress in itself, often set as just above zero, is not rigorous enough. The three examples of instructional focus in Roberson’s (2014) Goals of Learning Model all demonstrate upper-level thinking and increasingly allow students to engage and operate in higher spheres of rigor, analysis, and application. Of these three, Daggett and McNulty’s Rigor and Relevance Framework aligns with twenty-first century education, in which students use the knowledge they have and apply it to unfamiliar situations.

Standardised assessment is often described as the “tail that wags the dog,” in which assessment defines the curriculum in all tiers of education, from primary through to higher education. Because summative assessments generally measure the base-level learning standards (as described above in the Goals of Learning Model), they limit students’ exposure to more challenging types of instruction and do not effectively capture complex knowledge and skills (Roberson, 2014). Falchikov (2013) identifies other problems with summative assessment, including emphasis on exams, reliability issues and teacher marking bias, students “playing the game,” and student stress. Additionally, the high-stakes in many summative assessments have a reverse effect on teaching and learning: both teachers and students narrow their focus to performance outcomes on the assessment, and students lose their curiosity to learn.

The quantity and pressure of final assessments is especially prevalent throughout the United States, but it is a worldwide concern (Roehrig, 2006). While assessment is supposed to enhance learning, the current practice overemphasises “the importance of assessment for progression and certification purposes” (Crisp, 2012, p. 33). Summative assessment is still a necessary and important facet to gauge and record student learning. However, it should be curbed and adjusted to test higher-level, comprehensive thinking. We do not need more tests; we just need better tests that measure more of the basic and applied skills students need in the twenty-first century (Trilling et al., 2009).

For instance, one question in an eleventh grade West Virginia online summative social studies test, moves beyond memorised fact knowledge to ask students to analyse graphs and charts to determine the changing nature of civic responsibility. In the College Work and Readiness Assessment (CWRA), “students use research reports, budgets, and other documents to help craft an answer to a complex problem, such as how to manage traffic congestion caused by population growth” (Trilling et al., 2009, p. 132). These are the types of assessments that more closely align with how students should creatively engage and display their ability to not only cope, but successfully participate in the dynamics of a changing global world.

Formative Assessment

The international over-emphasis on summative assessment (assessment of learning) has also undermined the value of formative assessment (assessment for learning). Formative assessment examples which align with a twenty-first century teaching philosophy focused on innovation and creativity include:

- Extended student essays
- Observation rubrics on a teacher’s handheld device
- Online instant polls, quizzes, voting, and blog commentaries
- Progress tracked in solving online simulation challenges and design problems
- Portfolio evaluations of current project work and mid-project reviews
- Expert evaluations of ongoing internship and service work in the community (Trilling et al., 2009, p. 132)

There are no unanimous definitions of summative and formative assessment. Indeed, they can share many of the same types of learning activities; some of the examples on the bulleted list above could be summative assessments, and it is a fallacy to assume they are two entirely separate assessment types (Brookhart, 2001; Hattie, 2003). The difference is in the function, in how the learning outcomes are used – to inform, or to measure. In this review, formative assessment is understood as the frequent, interactive assessments of student understanding and progress to identify learning needs and room for improvement, which is then used for feedback (or feedforward) for both students and teachers (OECD/CERI, 2005; Falchikov, 2013; Hattie, 2003). Formative assessment allows teachers and students to answer three questions: Where am I going? How am I going? and Where to next? (Hattie, 2003). It also enables students to monitor their own learning process (Jiao, 2015).

Though properly integrated formative assessment scaffolds students to be more engaged and reflective in their learning, both formative and summative assessment influence future learning. A study collating interviews from motivated mathematics and English honors students revealed that highly successful students do not differentiate between formative and summative assessment, but integrate the two; they consider ‘how well they did’ on a test or final assignment while also realising that the formative preparation for the summative assessment gave them information to approach learning in the future (Brookhart, 2001). Teachers should aim to integrate summative and formative assessment and teach their students the usefulness of both; this kind of understanding and application of formative and summative assessment among students, however, is rare, so teachers should also focus on using formative assessment most effectively. Formative assessment is at the heart of effective teaching; it is central to education reform and student engagement – “promoting student achievement, equity of student outcomes, and ‘learning to learn’” (OECD/CERI, 2005, p. 6).

Feedback on student work is an essential component to formative assessment, and it enables students to both review and improve their work (Brookhart, 2001; Jiao, 2015) However, it must be employed properly, being prompt, qualitative, and repetitive. It needs to be prompt enough so that students can continue working and complete the feedback loop (Jiao, 2015; Looney & Poskitt, 2005). In a study involving undergraduate students, Jiao (2015) analysed student learning behaviour with the use of a formative e-assessment computer program that provided instant feedback. This approach towards formative assessment, in which the e-assessment tool provided responses to students quickly so that they could continue working and improving, resulted in improved student performances and greater engagement in learning (Jiao, 2015). If marking is used in formative assessment at all, comments, rather than numeric or alphabetical marks, are better (Looney & Poskitt, 2005). However, in higher education, Jiao (2015) found that students will not do work unless it is worth marks, and written feedback to students did not have much impact.

Despite these setbacks, when formative assessment is effectively implemented, it engages more students (Falchikov, 2013). While high-stakes testing has increased over the last two
decades, research conclusions have simultaneously veered from the properties of restricted tests, “which are only weakly linked to the learning experiences of students” to focus on classroom learning and formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 7). Research studies confirm that formative assessment improves standards and helps low achievers (Black & Wiliam, 1998; OECD/CERI, 2005). When coupled with timely feedback, formative assessments can significantly improve student learning outcomes (Crisp, 2012).

New Zealand Case Studies

In New Zealand, the Ministry actively began to promote formative assessment after piloting the Māori Mainstream Programme (MMP), or Te Kotahitanga, in 2005. The project encouraged teachers to understand their own preconceptions and welcome Māori learners’ identities into the classroom. MMP teachers at the pilot schools focused on “active, problem-based, and holistic learning” (Looney & Poskitt, 2005, p. 181). At Waitakere College, this included formative assessment techniques such as feed-forward with a focus on what students would learn and why, proper levels of scaffolding so that students have only as much information as they need in order to work problems out on their own, group work, and feedback, such as using exemplars to help close the gap between current and desired performance (Looney & Poskitt, 2005). Such techniques also engage students in reflective thinking and problem-solving – key skills for twenty-first century learners.

At Rosehill College, the whole school specifically focused on formative assessment in the classroom. They defined formative assessment as: “…basically giving kids feedback, feeding forward about how to improve their learning … looking at a piece of … work that a student’s doing … and giving them some information about what’s good about it and some next steps to improve” (Looney & Poskitt, 2005, p. 185). Teachers found the timing (in the moment rather than recorded) and specificity (comments instead of marks) of feedback to be crucial (Looney & Poskitt, 2005). Teachers were then able to identify and provide additional materials for aspects of learning that needed extra attention. Though these two case studies took place in 2005, Te Kotahitanga has steadily been phased into more New Zealand schools, and the report covering findings from 2007-2010 continued to emphasise the importance of feedback and feedforward (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, Peter & Clapham, 2012). In contrast to high-stakes testing, formative assessment is much more conducive to the type of learning schools and educational curriculums should be encouraging in order to engage students in meaningful learning and to develop skills for the twenty-first century.

Twenty-First Century Teaching

Aligning with twenty-first century teaching, some formative assessment types also serve as particularly strong examples of how powerful learning can be when it is driven by real world problems. In 2003, six high school students from six different countries entered a ThinkQuest competition, in which they collaborated online to make a website on the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) virus. The global team was responsible for all components of creating the site – research, interviewing, writing, designing, branding, and programming. Because of geographic and time zone differences, they utilised online tools to communicate and coordinate (Trilling et al., 2009). Such a project reflects the reality of our global world – one in which working together is essential and colleagues are likely to not be in the same physical location. In such a rapidly changing, technological world, it is worth noting that this example of assessment was cutting edge in 2003, but is now relatively outdated. In an age where messaging, filming, and the internet are all a touch away on smart phones and where website design has become common, one must question why these resources are so often under-utilised while summative assessments with little real world application are still in use. Regardless, ThinkQuest allowed the students to engage in a topic which they were passionate about, work together globally, and solve problems in a real world context.

Conclusion

Summative and formative assessment are both necessary educational pedagogies, and students need exposure to each type, to fully participate in the teaching and learning cycle. However, teachers should use as much classroom autonomy as possible in order to reduce both the perception and pressure of the high-stakes nature of many summative assessments. Favouring formative assessment, teachers can move beyond the “basement level” learning which high-stakes testing presently demands of students. In order to more fully engage students in their own learning, formative assessments should use prompt and repetitive feedback to inform students of how their learning is progressing, and, when possible, grading should not initially be provided in formative assessment so that students seriously consider the feedback they are given and strive to improve their own work. Most of all, regardless of the assessment type, educators need to ensure that their assessment practices prepare learners with twenty-first century skills – assessments that measure “a combination of content knowledge, basic skills, higher order thinking skills, deeper comprehension and understanding, applied knowledge, and 21st century skills performance” (Trilling et al., 2009, p. 131). In contrast to standardised testing in which students have simply mastered the art of “test-taking,” twenty-first century formative and summative assessment could offer a broader picture of the cognitive, emotional, physical, social, and ethical components of the “whole child” – one who is actively engaged in the learning process.

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Early Childhood Assessment in Aotearoa New Zealand: Perspectives on Narrative Assessment

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Abstract

Assessment practices in education are important because they evidence desired and actual learning outcomes of curriculum. In Aotearoa New Zealand narrative assessment in the form of Learning Stories is the assessment method used for the National early childhood curriculum Te Whāriki. This literature review collates different perspectives on the current approach of assessing dispositional learning and working theories through narrative stories, with the intention that a best practice outcome might be observed. Quantitative studies appeared scarce on this subject, with most literature consisting of qualitative verdicts and theory-based opinions. Findings support the current assessment and curriculum goals in New Zealand, but valid concerns raised support further consideration and more substantial research.

Keywords: Narrative Assessment, Accountability, Learning Story, Dispositional Learning, Early Childhood Education, Te Whāriki

Introduction

In the 1990s educators took a more passive role in children’s learning but these approaches have been challenged by socio-cultural perspectives encouraged by the 1996 National curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996), developed to support interaction with children for the extension of their thinking and learning (Peters & Davis, 2011). Early childhood pedagogy that provides support for thoughtful engagement in children’s natural daily interactions and appreciation for what has been termed intelligence “in the wild” is grounded in formative assessment as the context for pedagogy (Peters & Davis, 2011). Formative assessment involves using assessment as a process to improve learning, rather than as a tool to measure ‘fixed’ ability (Turnock, 2009). Summative assessment focuses on performance at a particular point in time and is most often utilised to quantify a child’s ability for external reasons against normalised references (Turnock, 2009). The avoidance of summative assessments in early childhood education has meant that formative assessment is prioritised and teachers work collaboratively with children to provide meaningful feedback and aid in natural learning moments. Narrative assessment is used to provide feedback to children in an inductive manner, where development and learning progress on an individualised continuum consisting of observed dispositions and working theories. This process-based formative assessment has garnered tensions due to the way it is carried out by teachers and the lack of documentation detailing children’s learning as a result. Scholars have argued that the accountability of dispositional assessment and the results of teacher impact support further research or clearly defined learning outcomes Turnock, 2009).

This review seeks to consolidate and discuss ideas relating to assessment in early childhood education with the intention to help inform a best-practice outcome. Assessment is a broad and important topic in education, with decades of literature and studies informing its application. With this in mind, this review narrows its focus specifically to literature with a focus on the current early childhood curriculum in New Zealand, Te Whāriki.

Learning Story Approach

Early childhood assessment in New Zealand is currently undertaken through ‘Learning Stories’. These are a form of narrative assessment with a focus on recognising dispositions and children’s working theories that provide a space, largely without boundaries, for educators to assess children’s learning. This steps away from the New Zealand Competent Child approach where a “checklist of single items for any given skills or knowledge area [were found to be] unreliable indicators of children’s performance at this age” (Wiley, Thompson, & Hendricks, 1996, p. 29).

Te Whāriki was designed to have assessment fit alongside the curriculum where both were created for, and intended to maintain, the interests of children and their families (Carr, et al., 2002). Therefore, assessment practices should involve families, empower children as competent learners, consider teacher child relationships and relate to the holistic development of the child (Education Review Office, 2008). Narrative assessment fulfils this by “giv[ing] a sense of ownership… and provid[ing]
feedback to learners and their families” (Smith, 2013a, p.266). Learning and teaching stories were developed through government-funded research initiatives to develop best-practice for assessment (Carr, et al., 2002). Additional documents exist such as Kei Tua o te Pae (Ministry of Education, 2004), which provide examples for how to write learning stories, as well as Te Whatu Pōkake (Ministry of Education, 2009) which provides insight specifically for Māori assessment. Sluss (2005) found that effective assessment resulted from the involvement of parents in the process.

Assessment as a collaborative and beneficial process is possible when quality observations of dispositional learning and working theories are recorded. Such an approach will incorporate both a dispositional and ipsative learning measurement. Lucas and Claxton (2010) proposed that intelligence is not fixed and this is demonstrated in those moments when a child is faced with a particular challenge and forced to rely on ‘dispositions’ to solve the problem. Dispositions are described as “participation repertoires… and [socio-cultural] orientations towards learning that are shaped during interactive and relational experiences” (Cooper, Hedges, & Dixon, 2014, p. 736), which the learner utilises in their learning contexts. Dispositions are different from knowledge, skills and understanding. Katz described them as “motivation-related orientations towards learning [which are] as important as the oft-quoted educational outcomes of skills and knowledge” (as cited in Cooper, Hedges, & Dixon, 2014, p. 736).

Assessment with this kind of socio-cultural foundation is designed to allow children to feel empowered in their learning, and values the cultural contexts from which much of their learning has arisen. Carr has previously acknowledged concerns regarding the validity of narrative assessment, but proposed that “conventional criteria of validity and reliability can be replaced by judgements of ‘accountability’” (as cited in Blailock, 2008, p.79). In this regard, narrative assessment directly places accountability with the educators who are observing children’s learning socio-culturally, as it occurs naturally during interactions with people, the environment, and other resources. Assessment practices that are ‘ipsative’, focusing on the child’s progress over time in relation to their past ability rather than prescribed standards, can be achieved through narrative assessment (Smith, 2013a). The artificial context of summative testing may lead to inaccurate results where children performed unnaturally due to anxiety or misunderstood expectation (Smith, 2013a).

**Challenges to Narrative Assessment**

Assessment practices should foster children’s learning in a meaningful way and contribute valuably to the process of learning (Turnock, 2009). In one New Zealand study where educators explored children’s working theories in action in five Playcentres, the authors found it difficult to distinguish working theories most relevant to learning and also how to respond to children’s learning without unintentionally hijacking the direction of their interests (Peters & Davis, 2011). If educators have trouble recognising children’s learning and responding in ways that offer opportunities to extend this, then perhaps clearer guidelines around knowledge assessment are required. Smith (2013a) notes that the way judgements are made when assessing has a profound effect on children’s experience with the learning, noting that some judgements do not enhance the well-being or learning of children. In their qualitative New Zealand case study that explored teachers’ views about involving whānau in assessment, the authors found that although Te Whāriki instigates a collaborative approach towards assessment of dispositional learning and encourages discussion with parents, some teachers did not perceive such collaboration in assessment (Cooper, Hedges, & Dixon, 2014). They indicated that teachers’ could be more aware of the evolution of learning dispositions and consider the socio-cultural nature of their development. This study also highlighted the difficulty in upholding collaborative expectations on assessment due to philosophical tensions around how to implement such processes (Cooper, Hedges, & Dixon, 2014).

In his critical analysis paper, Ken Blailock has been outspoken in his criticism of the Learning Story approach of assessment, having observed that teachers were struggling to evidence language development with this technique of narrative assessment (Blailock, 2008). He cites a lack of research studies in evidencing the effectiveness of the implementation of Learning Stories and is critical of the qualitative approach to assessment. Blailock (2008) is also critical of Margaret Carr’s suggestions as to how to increase the accountability of educators performing narrative assessment, believing that any observation is lacking in adequate evidence. He further adds that Learning Stories are incapable of reliably evidencing children’s learning progression and that the development of knowledge and skills often remains unassessed. In a later discussion paper around the use, or need, of evidence to support the effectiveness of Te Whāriki, Blailock is critical of the efficacy of Te Whāriki and he argues that too much responsibility is being placed on Centre staff and practices and little regulation or assessment of their accountability by the Education Review Office, who rely on staff assessment stories to demonstrate quality (Blailock, 2013). Similarly, Turnock, in her discursive analysis of contemporary Early Childhood assessment in New Zealand, found that that many teachers have struggled with Learning Stories as an assessment method, identifying that professional development is needed to assist teachers to reconceptualise their understanding of assessment practices (Turnock, 2009).

**Potential Assessment Alternatives**

Blailock (2013) expresses respect for the intentions of the curriculum and assessment in Aotearoa but believes having such little prescription and regulation for learning outcomes and assessment areas is dangerously lacking in accountability. He does not believe that “overly prescriptive programmes” would improve the outcomes, but advocates for more balance and a clearer association between curriculum and assessment (2013, p. 3). This balance could potentially come in the form of criterion-referenced assessment, which clearly links the curriculum to the assessment by providing a guideline of what to assess through an external standard (Turnock, 2009).

Blailock (2013) believes that discussion of potential alternatives is stymied by a lack of open discussion in early childhood education in New Zealand, as a result of the prominence that the curriculum’s inclusive intentions have garnered internationally and the widely-held beliefs of those in the field. Smith (2013b) claims to encourage the critique of Te Whāriki as a method for keeping the curriculum and assessment of high quality, and specifically invites the critique of training early childhood teachers in the form of reflection and discussion but confusingly has labelled other discussion as attacks on the curriculum.

In a critical literature review, Dumphy (2010) draws on an assessment approach developed in a research endeavour called Project Spectrum that was developed in America over a twenty-
year period to provide a fairer and more informative assessment model. This project sought to reliably assess alternate learner cognitive abilities and strengths and to provide a more reliable assessment of learning and development in under-fives. In this project, domains of learning were compartmentalised and detailed observations occurred around tasks that were meaningful, alongside unplanned observations of dispositions, the intention being to blend curriculum and assessment (Dunphy, 2010).

Concerns for Alternate Assessment

_Schoolification_ is a term most often used by those resistant to summative assessment practices in early childhood education to refer to the ‘trickling down’ of government derived educational outcomes. The focus on standardising knowledge and learning viewed most valuable for further schooling concerns those who think these systems are detrimental to an individual’s relationship with learning (Carr, 2001). Prior to the integration of _Te Whāriki_, assessment practices were focused on the specific skills, knowledge and developmental gaps of children where teachers were responsible for remediating these issues, and this often resulted in deficit theorising (Turnock, 2009). Deficit theorising is where an individual is thought to be inherently incapable of acquiring particular skills or abilities for genetic or cultural reasons (Skidmore, 2002) and teachers are therefore absolved from responsibility for poor achievement. Smith (2013a) is critical of summative assessment as the focus is on surface-level learning, such as information recall, where the results constrain and restrict children’s learning rather than support. She compares summative assessment with other measures of intelligence, such as IQ testing which originated through governments requesting a procedure for identifying children who would not benefit from schooling. The categorising of ability which results from summative assessment does not cater for individual differences and can impede children’s potential through institutional or individual teaching beliefs that underlying capacity is measured. There is no correlation between standardised measures of intelligence through early childhood and adult IQ scores (Smith, 2013a) but the classification of an individual as intellectually deficient can result in widespread impact, where the individual is viewed as “undeserving of access to educational or employment opportunities” (Smith, 2013a, p. 251).

Norm-referenced assessment, where children’s achievements are compared against other children, identifies children as performing at, below or above an expected range (Turnock, 2009). The application of these concepts to preschool aged children is a concern because of the long-term issues that negative labels attached to intellect can cause (Lucas & Claxton, 2010). Smith (2013a) argues that summative assessments such as tests do not provide opportunities to understand children’s learning in context or to assess capacity through the use of Vygotsky’s theory of the ‘Zone of Proximal Development’ where “expert others” assist with the reaching of new skills or understanding. Another concern with directive learning outcomes is that teachers who focus on trying to get all children to a static level of achievement often utilise techniques which are inappropriate for improving the learning of the most and least capable children (Crooks, 2011 cited in Smith, 2013a). Highlighting this issue in another context, the implementation of the National Standards in 2010 into primary schools moved away from formative assessment, and provides a service of accountability for schools rather than improving children’s learning (Smith, 2013a).

Conclusion

The literature presented supports the idea that assessment is interdependent on curriculum and the selection of ‘valued knowledges’ and cannot be understood in a capacity of its own (McLachlan, Fleer, & Edwards, 2010). This correlates with the idea that assessment of knowledge, skills and disposition development, or working theories, should be considered in relation to context and discourages the idea of standalone assessment techniques. Suitable studies to further support the ideas discussed were limited, potentially meaning that findings would not translate to other teaching and learning contexts. It was clear that although a number of studies support the current assessment and curriculum goals in New Zealand, there are some concerns that are worthy of consideration. Summative or norm-referenced assessment methods are not desired by academics in local or international contexts and appear to be the result of governmental initiatives aimed at measuring quantities of institutional accountability. Interestingly, the research was dominated by qualitative verdicts and theoretical opinion as opposed to studies with objective quantitative findings. The intentions of New Zealand’s early childhood curriculum remain unchallenged, but concerns remain regarding accountability measures. Due to the context-reliant relationship for assessment, New Zealand specific studies would be required for informing changes to best-practice outcomes in early childhood education.

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