Ko te manu e kai i te miro nōna te ngahere, ko te manu kai i te mātauranga, nōna te ao

The bird who feeds on miro has the forest, the bird who feeds on knowledge has the world

MANA RANGAHAU

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MANUKAU INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Te Whare Takiura o Manukau

Faculty of Education and Social Sciences
Manukau Institute of Technology

Foreword

The first edition of *Mana Rangahau*, the Faculty of Education and Social Sciences Applied Research Journal, includes invited papers arising from the first Mana Rangahau research conference held in November 2015, a review written on the National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia conference, an opinion piece based on professional experience, and a presentation to the National Tertiary Learning and Teaching conference. This journal showcases staff, student and communities who have presented their research in education, social sciences and sport science to the Manukau Institute of Technology community of practice (students, professionals, researchers and academics).

The 11 contributors to this edition come from several professional disciplines and their papers illustrate diverse practices. Deepa Ramalingam, Iuliana Martin and Natalie Roberts are early childhood teachers at a Play and Learn Early Education Centre, and their paper discusses how the teachers in their centre developed strategies for authentic partnership with parents and whānau. Sarah Probine and Lila Tekene both teach in the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Teaching) programme at Manukau Institute of Technology. Sarah's research interest is in arts in early childhood education, and her paper examines how arts-based research can be used to explore early childhood visual art pedagogies. Lila's research area is in mentoring Pasifika tertiary students, and in her paper, Lila shares how she used Peer Assisted Study Skills (PASS) to support early childhood degree students. Anna Jo Perry teaches in both an early childhood degree programme and tertiary teaching unit. Jo has contributed two papers to this edition: the first is about using narratives to support early childhood student teachers, and the second focuses on teaching in an online-environment. Jo used a self-study methodology when conducting both these research projects.

Merle Hearn wrote a review paper on the National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia conference she attended. Merle examines the keynote and other speakers' presentations in relation to enabling innovative practice in education. Merle also presented at the conference, and in her paper, she refers to her ongoing research project of virtual worlds and the online game that she developed for supporting literacy for adult learners. A second paper relating to "digital elements" is that from Paul Maloney, a former senior lecturer in the School of Social Services. Paul writes about how information and communications technology (ICT) is a common tool in the classroom, and presents his small-scale research project using an online survey to explore the use of ICT technology for tertiary students.

In addition to the research papers, the 2017 edition includes an opinion piece by Eva Dick, a senior lecturer for Social Services, registered art therapist and professional practical artist. Eva shares her experiences about introducing art therapy, especially for supervision. Finally, the journal finishes with a paper written Steve Samuela and Flo Tamehana. In it, Steve and Flo share some teaching strategies that the School of Secondary Tertiary Studies (SSTS) has put in place for supporting their students to achieve NCEA Levels 1, 2 and 3.

Thank you to all the contributors as well as the reviewing committee – you have made this journey an important milestone for the Faculty. Also thank you to the senior management team at the Faculty of Education and Social Sciences Research Committee for your support. Our intention is that this journal will continue to grow and promote innovative and significant research findings which can be used to make a difference in the fields of education and the social sciences. In doing so, the journal will meet its aim for enabling us to better cater for the varying needs of the youth and in-work learners in the community.

Melanie Wong

Academic Editor

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Arts-Based Research as a Way to Explore Early Childhood Visual Art Pedagogies

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Keywords: arts-based research, early childhood, visual arts

ABSTRACT

For some researchers, arts-based research methods have been found to be a valuable research tool within the context of early childhood visual arts education (Craw 2011; Pohio, 2013; Probine, 2015). This paper will draw upon the findings of a case study conducted in a community-based early childhood centre in Auckland, New Zealand during 2014. In this study, arts-based methods informed by the methodology of a/r/tography (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004) were used both during the collection of data and in the presentation of the research findings. The study was motivated by the understanding that within New Zealand, approaches to the visual arts in early childhood are widely varied and many teachers still grapple with how visual arts practices underpinned by sociocultural theories could manifest in the classroom. The study aimed to provoke discussion surrounding some of these uncertainties and to show how one setting had developed practices that valued the visual arts as a learning domain. The use of visual methods allowed a rich picture to develop of how the visual arts were valued and integrated within the children's experiences in this setting. The use of reflective art journals allowed deep pedagogical reflection to occur within this learning community as well as to provoke further shifts in their already rich visual arts practices. To illustrate this process, three of the teachers' stories, told through their reflective art journals, will be shared. The journals show how the teachers' pedagogical ideas about the visual arts developed over their lifetimes and then how these ideas translated into their classroom practices where they valued the visual arts as a learning domain. Each story is unique, but there is also a shared value of continuous reflection and re-evaluation of pedagogical ideas surrounding the visual arts. These examples highlight the potential arts-based research has to enable teachers to reflect on current teaching practices and to further develop visual arts practices informed by sociocultural theories.

> The visual arts are of particular significance to children within early childhood because, as Sheridan (2009, p. 75) explains, these years "are a time of metaphors and playful thinking" for young children, and the visual arts invite multiple of ways of thinking and exploring.

Introduction

As the early childhood sector has become increasingly influenced by sociocultural theories, the visual arts have become understood as a vital way through which children can explore and share their ideas. The visual arts are now recognised as an intellectual, complex domain through which experience can be explored, problematised and communicated (Schiller, 2000; Vecchi, 2010). This is a shift away from the commonly held perception of the visual arts as merely creative and aesthetic. The visual arts are of particular significance to children within early childhood because, as Sheridan (2009, p. 75) explains, these years "are a time of metaphors and playful thinking" for young children, and the visual arts invite multiple of ways of thinking and exploring.

Yet despite the potential the visual arts have to support children's learning, visual arts practices in New Zealand often contradict the sociocultural curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996).[1] There are multiple ways of valuing the role of visual arts in early education. These include the development of fine motor skills, emotional release, the achievement of realism, and to mediate thinking (Clark & Grey, 2013). Visual arts practices in New Zealand have been strongly influenced by Western educationalists (Baker & Hamilton, 2012). Three main teaching approaches in the visual arts have evolved throughout early childhood education's history and have been adopted by New Zealand educators. Wright (2003) referred to these as the *reproductive* (teacher directed), the productive (a developmentalist child-led approach) and the *guided learning approach* (a sociocultural approach where teachers and children work in partnership). Each of these can be observed in varying degrees within New Zealand early childhood settings today.

Despite the profound influence teachers' pedagogical beliefs have on this domain, as visual arts education has evolved there has been little examination of the impact of previous approaches; thus, they can continue to inform visual arts practices (McArdle, 2003). Many teachers continue to consider children as innately creative and view their own roles as observers and appreciators of children's art-making (Richards, 2007). These practices align with the productive approach and have been challenged by multiple authors spanning four decades (Eisner, 1973; Kindler, 1996). On the other hand, some teachers have reconceptualised their visual arts pedagogies to be informed by sociocultural theories. They have done this through examination of past experiences and the resulting beliefs and values that have evolved (McArdle, 2003; Vecchi, 2010), engagement in practical arts experiences and, in some cases, exposure to the social constructivist preschools of Reggio Emilia (Pohio, 2013). However, these teachers' voices are not always easy to access due to the breadth and diversity of the early childhood sector. For this reason, there have been calls for further research that makes visible these practices and educational journeys (Richards & Terreni, 2013), as well as for further examination of the complexity of sociocultural arts practices (Bresler & Thompson, 2002; McArdle & Wong, 2010). The aim of this research was to explore how teachers' beliefs and values regarding early childhood visual arts education had evolved throughout their lives and then to consider the impact this had on children's experiences of the visual arts in the classroom.

Reconceptualising early childhood visual arts pedagogies through arts-based research

Arts-based research developed as one of the outcomes of qualitative researchers' concerns that traditional research methods did not address knowledge power issues. At their conception, they were influenced by creative arts therapy practices. Knowles and Cole (2008) defined arts-based research as "the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies" (p. 29). This process allows researchers a new way of viewing each stage of the research process, and for participants, to retain more power within the research because they can explicitly engage in the process as well as shape the outcomes (Barone, 2008).

Arts-based research aims to challenge assumed truths in educational practices. The visual and sensory immediacy of the arts allows such research to reach a wider and more diverse audience (Barone, 2008). The arts can also induce an emotional response which can, in turn, provoke discussion that is critical in developing new understandings (Leavy, 2009). Arts-based research "rejects the idea that tools are neutrally implemented" (Leavy, 2009, p. 3). Therefore, it is important that the researcher makes their role explicit within each stage of the research process, and to make their subjective interpretation of the data transparent in the reporting of the research (Leavy, 2009).

1. This article was written prior to the publication of the 2017 edition of *Te Whāriki: Matauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearo*a, New Zealand's early childhood curriculum.

“Therefore, it was important to maintain transparency throughout the research process and participants were given opportunities to view the findings at several stages throughout the project.”

In the context of early childhood, the argument challenging visual arts practices that continue to be informed by modernist, developmental ideas has spanned over forty years (Eisner, 1973; Kindler, 1996; Wright, 2003). McClure (2011) has argued for “a repositioning of young children’s art and visual culture as legitimate sites of cultural knowledge production in order to ameliorate a restrictive view of childhood” (p. 127). To respond to these issues, an innovative approach to research such as arts-based research has the potential to begin to address and break down these master narratives surrounding current early childhood visual arts practices (Barone, 2008).

The process of engaging with art as a way to reflect on early childhood practitioners’ own understandings of the visual arts has been shown to be a valuable process for developing pedagogies that value the visual arts as a learning domain (Pohio, 2013). Clark and Grey (2013) maintain that “engaging with visual art, including responding to and critiquing artists’ works, can create new spaces to think in, through and with art in an early childhood education context” (p. 87). In this way, visual art itself becomes a medium through which new research can be conducted, a practice that has been embraced internationally (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Kind, 2010; Leavy, 2009).

Methodology

The methodological framework for this study was underpinned by a traditional qualitative social research paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Punch, 2009; Silverman, 2011), but was enhanced by including aspects of the arts-based methodology of a/r/tography. *A/r/tography* is a research process that integrates the role of the researcher, the artist and the teacher. Irwin and Springgay (2008) explained “that knowing (theoria), doing (praxis), and making (poesis) are three forms of thought important to a/r/tography (see Leggo, 2001; Sulllivan, 2000)” (p. 100). Therefore, an a/r/tographic approach privileges both text and image as important sources of knowledge throughout each stage of the research process. Given that three of the four data collection methods included visual data, it was important to include this methodological component as it emphasised the similarities between the processes of art making and social research practices (de Cosson & Irwin, 2004). An a/r/tographic view sat comfortably with the social-constructivist ideas that underpinned the study as it argues that knowledge is subjective and that doing is a means of knowing deeply (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). This methodology also supported the idea that engaging with imagery could act as a vehicle through which participants could explore their own relationship with visual art (Craw, 2011). For this reason, visual elements were included in each stage of the research process.

The a/r/tographical framework also enabled me as the researcher to take the role of “artist”. Following the collection (and analysis) of data from the early childhood centre, the data were re-interpreted in two art works that were presented in conjunction with a written interpretation of the findings. These images not only responded to the research questions and represented my subjective interpretation of the data, but also allowed another way of viewing and understanding the patterns and concepts that had emerged (Stephenson, 2004).

Data collection included classroom observations, video-taped interviews of four children and their parents if they wished to participate, a focus group interview with all the teachers and participatory art journals for the teachers. These methods enabled a rich picture of this setting to be documented and ensured the validity of the research (Punch, 2009). Leavy (2009), however, argued that arts-based research has disrupted traditional means for ensuring validity due to the subjective nature of knowledge. Therefore, it was important to maintain transparency throughout the research process and participants were given opportunities to view the findings at several stages throughout the project. Data analysis was also approached within an interpretive, qualitative research paradigm (Punch, 2009). Themes and concepts emerged from the data, and a process of subject coding and then further analysis allowed wider themes and concepts to be uncovered (Punch, 2009).

Participants

This small-scale case study took place in an urban Auckland community-based early childhood centre that caters for a diverse multicultural community. Up to fifteen languages are spoken at this centre. The six full-time teachers (at the time of the research) are also ethnically diverse.

The research questions

1. How are the visual arts used as a tool to support children’s learning in an early childhood setting?
2. What factors have shaped the teachers’ approaches to using the visual arts as a learning tool?

“They were asked to consider their own past experiences as well as their beliefs around teaching and how these had evolved and influenced their understanding of the role of visual art in children’s learning.”

Teachers’ stories told through participatory art journals

Why participatory art journals?

A number of authors argue that close examination and reflection on past experiences can begin to help educators to become aware of the images of childhood they hold and how their ideas surrounding the visual arts, and its role in education, have come to be (Clark & de Lautour, 2013; Eisner, 1973; McArdle, 2003, 2012; McClure, 2011; Pohio, 2009; Richards, 2007; Wright, 2003). Eisner (1973) believed that this is a fundamental process that will enable educators to move beyond the long-lasting influences of modernism. The setting that was selected for this research had already developed rich visual arts practices, underpinned by sociocultural theories.

By asking these teachers to apply a reflective lens to their pedagogical journeys in the visual arts throughout their lifetimes, I aimed to make visible how these teachers had made shifts in their practices, therefore offering valuable knowledge to the early childhood sector. The participatory art journals allowed the teachers to record their beliefs and values surrounding the visual arts through image making, found images or through written reflections. They were asked to consider their own past experiences as well as their beliefs around teaching and how these had evolved and influenced their understanding of the role of visual art in children’s learning.

McArdle (2003) uses the term ***palimpsest*** as a metaphor to talk about the way in which early childhood visual arts practices have evolved, with a layering of one theory over another, with little critical evaluation of the influence of earlier ideas. The teachers, through the stories they told in their participatory art journals, revealed a multifaceted range of influences that had informed and shaped their pedagogical ideas, bringing McArdle’s (2003) metaphor to life.

Findings

Hannah’s story

> “Art to me is an expression of the mind through drawing, sculpting, painting, etc. It is a way for me to express my feelings through the use of materials, colour and theory. It is my way of speaking.” (excerpt from Hannah’s art journal)

Hannah’s art journal was a combination of found images and written text. Through her journal, Hannah told stories about how her value for the visual arts had evolved as well as her beliefs about her role as a teacher of young children. Hannah was educated for 17 years in Hong Kong, an educational experience she described as very didactic:

> “I had to listen to my teachers and did what they asked/said. This one-way teaching made me feel bored and frightened about learning. I did not have enough time to think and did not know how to investigate more deeply the information that I was ‘given’ and transform that information to something that would make sense of my life. It made me feel I was not capable of learning and I felt too ashamed to ask questions.”

Hannah’s love of visual art began in the home. Her father was passionate about photography and both of her brothers later became photographers. When she immigrated to New Zealand and began her 6th form year at an Auckland secondary school, Hannah, too, enrolled in photography. This change of cultural context had a significant influence on her attitudes towards the visual arts as she gained the freedom to explore image making on her own terms. In her journal, Hannah explained that “photography also allowed me to see the relationships between people and places in the world”. Later, Hannah recognised education had prompted a further shift. As she studied early childhood education at the University of Auckland, she reconceptualised her image of the child. She explained:

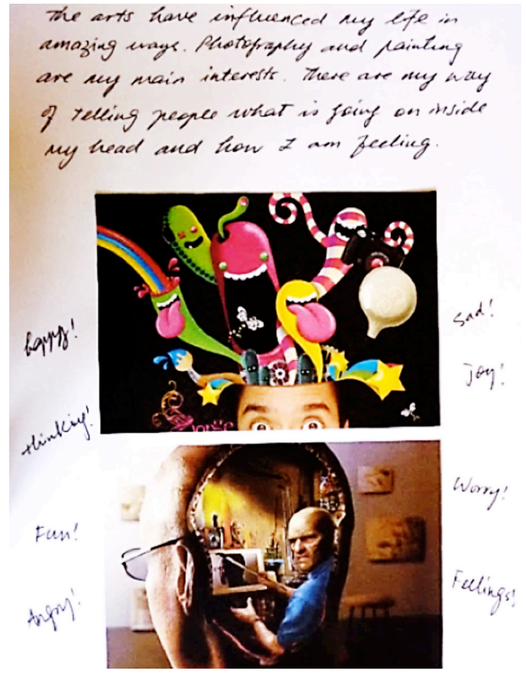

Figure 1 : Fragment from Hannah’s art journal

> Hannah believed that through representing their ideas, they understood more about themselves and others.

"It gave me an opportunity to think about what sort of teaching prepares very young children for life's challenges and lifelong learning. I believe that learning is most likely to happen when we start with an image of an intelligent child and listen to their thoughts."

These ideas were further emphasised by Hannah's introduction to the pedagogical ideas of Reggio Emilia. She learned about the role of the multiple symbolic languages, particularly visual art as a way to mediate children's thinking and to make thinking visible.

In her journal, Hannah articulated her beliefs about the role the visual arts played in children's learning. She explained that the process of making visual images allows children to develop a deeper understanding of the world around them. An example was given of when the children investigated, discussed and represented their ideas about feelings. Hannah believed that through representing their ideas, they understood more about themselves and others.

Figure 2: "Today my friend M is not at kindy. I am thinking of her. I try to make a plan for today when she is not here. I would like to play with R in the sandpit. You know... sunny day and seeing the flowers will make me feel happy too. I want to dress up like a butterfly." (extract from Hannah's art journal)

This visibility of ideas is important to Hannah, allowing her to know more about who children are and to "understand how they see themselves, the other people, places and things in their world". She considers there are three facets to her role in teaching visual art: to help children to appreciate the processes of art making and not just the finished product; to encourage children to "observe, plan, create, develop skills and reflect upon and evaluate their art works" (Hannah); and to use the visual arts as a tool for thinking. This involves Hannah planning experiences that provoke the children to inquire and extend their current thinking. She also believes it is her role to introduce complexity to children. For example, she introduced a large sheet of paper as a means of encouraging a child to make a record of a tree's shadow.

Near the end of the data collection period, the teaching team made a decision to make a further shift in their visual arts practices and to create an art studio in their centre. Hannah, with her deep regard for the visual arts, was appointed studio teacher. She explained how this change to the environment intensified the use of the visual arts:

> "I could sense the children's excitement in working together generating and expanding ideas and building on each other's discussions and explanations. Through exploring a topic in different ways and from different perspectives, children expanded their understanding and deepened their relationships with each other."

Hannah noticed that children were developing "languages" with materials as they expanded their skills. She also developed her practices further within this new environment as she understood more about how to recognise the relationship and exchange between children and materials.

Ginger's story

> "Visual art is a valuable way for children to represent their understandings. It requires respectful ears to listen to the young children for the meaning." (Ginger's art journal)

Ginger introduced her journal by talking about her Chinese heritage. Her drawing (Figure 3) illustrates the way the Chinese language itself is a series of drawings or hieroglyphics.

In her art journal, Ginger told the story of attending school in China. At her visual arts classes, she talked about how she learned about visual art through the rote copying of art works. She expressed this experience visually. In her journal, she expressed an interest in photography, reading about art and her experiences in textile design.

Figure 3: Fragment from Ginger's art journal

“She talked about the importance of encouragement when working with children and the visual arts, but she also believes it is her role to arrange situations where the children can extend their ideas and/or reflect on their experiences.”

However, she has not gained further experience in painting or drawing.

It was through her university studies that Ginger began to rethink the role of the arts in children’s learning. She recalled “The story of the triangle tree”:

> “This was a story told by my professor when I did my teacher training at Auckland University. A mum came to a kindergarten and taught her daughter to draw a Christmas tree. She drew three triangles and a line… It took the kindergarten quite a long time to get rid of this uniformed triangle tree. I remembered this story when the children in our kindergarten were interested in trees. I went out with them and we observed different kinds of trees. Each tree is unique was our finding. Of course then, the trees we drew were all different!”

Ginger talked about how her exposure to the pedagogical ideas of Reggio Emilia as the most significant factor in shaping how she now views visual art and its role in children’s learning. She explained:

> “Through my experience, I think children are able to use visual art as one of the most effective communication tools. Many times I have to say they are better than I in transferring different concepts/senses. For them it is obvious what they want to say – it’s up to us (teachers) to understand it.”

Ginger described visual art as a powerful way for children to communicate their understanding of the world. She values the way visual art allows children to reflect on their thinking, to develop relationships with each other, and to promote the co-construction of knowledge. She talked about the importance of encouragement when working with children and the visual arts, but she also believes it is her role to arrange situations where the children can extend their ideas and/or reflect on their experiences. On these occasions, she asks children questions and gives them opportunities to explore concepts through many mediums (such as their bodies and to use all of their senses). Ginger believes that children need time to develop their own solutions and strategies and that the teacher’s role is to learn about children’s working theories and to be open to children’s art-works. She said, “Visual art is a valuable way for children to represent their understandings. It requires respectful ears to listen to the young children for the meaning.” Ginger views herself as a co-learner alongside children and does not claim to always have the answers. She gave the example of a recent project she had been working on, which involved the representation of movement, where she had no idea what the outcome would be:

> “It was interesting to see how children visualise the movements. It was also my true curiosity to see how they were to represent running, walking, jumping, hopping… in drawing as I had no idea at all… we spent a long time to think and to try. This was also a time for us to learn from each other… Children’s thoughts are in search of meaning. This is the place where we construct meaning together, where we exchange our theories and strengthen our relationships.”

As part of the project about movement, Ginger gave the example of T’s drawing (see Figure 4). She considered this boy’s drawing to be significant as some of the children used it as a starting point for their own work. She explained, “They accepted some of his symbols and started to make their own ones”. This example illustrates the value Ginger places on helping “children to understand each other and respect each other’s points of view”.

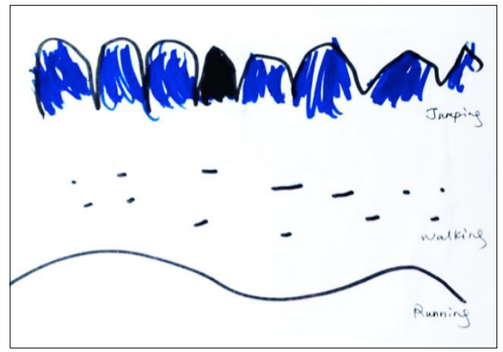

Figure 4: T’s interpretation of movements. (fragment from Ginger’s art journal)

Lucia’s story

> “More and more I have found satisfaction and benefit from seeing the arts as a cognitive tool, where teachers encourage children to draw as a way of both expressing and processing their ideas and theories.” (Excerpt from Lucia’s art journal)

For Lucia, images are central to how she processes information. As a child, she found it easy to recall images but more difficult to remember information she had heard. As an adult, she had now developed a technique of creating images in her head to “hang information off”. She said:

> “I don’t follow a linear thinking model – so for people who go ABCD… my approach of AZKPL… seems random. I do, however, address all the letters but it’s like being a jazz pianist who prefers to ‘jam’ rather than playing strictly to the music.”

“Lucia talked about the value of listening as a means of trying to understand what children are trying to communicate through their art.”

Lucia’s family have been one significant influence on the way she values the visual arts. She said, “My mother always valued my drawing as communicating my ideas and this is the way I see the work I do in our kindergarten.” It was possibly this value that led Lucia to communicate many of her ideas in her journal visually (see Figure 5).

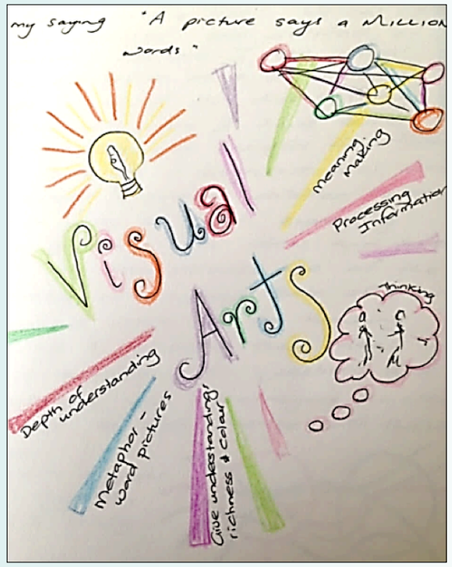

Figure 5: Fragment from Lucia’s art journal

Lucia’s tertiary education in early childhood occurred during a period when the role of the teacher in the visual arts was still very much a passive one. She explained that she was taught to set up art “activities” and that the role of the teacher was to observe and admire. This notion frustrated Lucia. She said:

> “I failed to see any communicative value in it – and saw it as craft that was produced mainly to satisfy parent expectations. Lecturers talked about valuing the process of these art experiences – but I couldn’t connect to the underlying processes of rolling marbles around in paint as having any significant learning value.”

Exposure to other pedagogical ideas confirmed and strengthened Lucia’s belief that the arts were also a cognitive act. It was later in her teaching career that Lucia was introduced to the pedagogical ideas of Reggio Emilia. She began to read about their work and the role that the arts plays within children’s learning. Lucia explained that as a teaching team, they had come to value the arts as a way to provoke thinking, explore ideas and to “dig deeper”. She believes that one of her roles is to provoke children to develop their thinking over time. She explained that this role “becomes of the ‘memory’ – reminding children of their previous work and the thinking behind it, bouncing their ideas back to them with questions and challenges, and encouraging the other children to also engage with these ideas”.

Lucia used an example by A to illustrate her approach. She said, “When A worked on his Gruffalo drawings, he struggled to represent the purple prickles on its back until he worked out that he could turn his work over and draw on the back”.

Lucia shared a quote by Vygotsky: “A child’s play is not simply a reproduction of what he has experienced, but a creative reworking of the impressions he has acquired.” Based on this idea, Lucia sees her role as offering the tools required for “creative reworking” and she encourages children to translate or rework ideas through several different mediums.

Figure 6: A’s Gruffalo. (fragment from Lucia’s art journal)

Lucia talked about the value of listening as a means of trying to understand what children are trying to communicate through their art. She gave a visual example using A’s troll drawings. She explained:

“A’s drawings of the troll – always with a friend – because if he had a friend he wouldn’t be grumpy anymore and he would let the billy goats gruff cross the bridge. This type of drawing gave us the insight into his behaviour and how important it was for him to have a friend. He understood himself, and through this drawing we were able to understand [him].”

Discussion

These three stories trace key factors that allow the teachers in this learning community to actively engage with children and their visual art making. For example, two of the stories speak about a strongly didactic visual arts education within the teachers’ early years. These experiences occurred within the cultural contexts of Asia and the teachers’ narratives highlight the significant influence

“Each day, they invite children to work on collaborative projects and encourage them to make their thinking visible as they formulate theories and then represent them before negotiating the answers among each other.”

that cultural and social values have on visual arts education (Clark & Grey, 2013; Richards & Terreni, 2013; Schiller, 2000). This reproductive approach was contested within a Western educational context at the turn of the century, as it was argued the approach is restrictive to children’s creativity and artistic autonomy (Eisner, 1973; Wright, 2003). The teachers reinforced this assessment, explaining how these experiences had constrained their creativity and had diminished their confidence to take part in the visual arts. For Hannah, having family role models who transmitted an appreciation for image making had ameliorated some of the consequences of a reproductive visual arts education (Wright, 2003). The head teacher, Lucia, had also experienced a childhood where the value for visual art as a cognitive act was modelled in her early years. She could trace how these early influences had informed aspects of her current practices (Veale, 2000).

For several teachers, tertiary studies in early childhood education had been central in shifting thinking about images of childhood as well as the role of the visual arts in children’s learning. Both Ginger and Hannah attended university after the publication of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), when early childhood education had developed a stronger awareness of sociocultural theories and practices. These two teachers explained how these educational encounters had allowed them to develop strong philosophies in the visual arts. Lucia, however, who had attended university some years previously, expressed a very different tertiary education narrative. She shared her dissatisfaction with the dominance of a developmental modernist perspective on the visual arts. These ideas sat in discord with her own experiences and she questioned modernist ideals that argue that children should be left to develop naturally in the visual arts, without interaction from adults – ideas that continue to inform many early childhood educators within New Zealand (Richards, 2007).

Each of the teachers’ stories examined in this paper shared how engagement with the pedagogical ideas of Reggio Emilia disrupted the teachers’ assumptions about childhood and children’s capabilities in the visual arts. This exposure also allowed the teachers to relocate themselves as learners alongside the children. (Millikan, 2003)

The teachers see their roles as multifaceted and feel comfortable teaching children skills and techniques with visual media. The influence of Reggio Emilia was visible, and although each teacher expressed their ideas about their roles differently, they also share key values. Each day, they invite children to work on collaborative projects and encourage them to make their thinking visible as they formulate theories and then represent them before negotiating the answers among each other. The teachers ask provocative questions, facilitate collaboration between the children, and encourage them to revisit and extend their previous thinking. Past representations are often used to remind the children of their previous ideas (Vecchi, 2010; Wright, 2003). Despite having developed rich visual arts practices, this teaching community does not consider that they have reached their destination. They continuously seek new knowledge and opportunities to reflect on their work with children. This makes apparent the notion that sociocultural visual arts pedagogies must be constantly renegotiated otherwise they become isolated from the context in which they operate, and this acceptance of change is an important part of the teaching practices at this centre.

Implications of using arts-based research

The process of image finding, image making and reflecting through the use of participatory art journals was a powerful one for the participants. This was a confronting process for some of the teachers, while for others, the process felt very natural. This shared visual experience allowed the teachers to both show and share their own narratives surrounding the visual arts as well as to discuss their feelings and experiences of making the journals themselves. The examination of how past experiences have shaped teachers’ beliefs and values in the visual arts has been shown as a key factor in moving across educational paradigms (Clark & de Lautour, 2013; Eisner, 1973; McArdle, 2003, 2012; McClure, 2011; Pohio, 2009; Richards, 2007; Wright, 2003). For these teachers, despite the fact they had already developed practices that valued the visual arts as a learning domain, the process allowed them to reflect deeply on why they taught the way they did. The method provoked collaborative discussions among the teachers, which resulted at the end of the project in the decision to set up an atelier or art studio within the setting – and hence, their practices evolved once again. For me, as an image maker, interpreting and translating the findings into images was a highly satisfying process. The notion that social research can be an aesthetic process and a feeling process is an idea that supports the core of my research interest. The notion that learning at its best is a thinking/feeling process is something that engagement in the visual arts – whether you are a child, a teacher and artist or a researcher – provides so powerfully.

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Sharing Power, Sharing Journey – Towards an Authentic Whānau Partnership

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ABSTRACT

Global and local research suggests that effective early childhood home–centre partnerships enhance children's learning both in home and at the early childhood centre. For this to happen, whānau involvement is critical. This article narrates the journey of the early childhood centre Play and Learn King Street, from passive participation with their whānau to developing authentic partnerships, through the process of reviewing the mathematics curriculum. The notion of "teachers as experts" was challenged and teachers moved to view themselves as "facilitators" and "co-learners". An action research framework was used and results show how strategies for authentic partnership, such as social media and face-to-face discussions, were implemented to move beyond the inclusion of whānau at merely a passive participation level. The results showed that queries and explanations by whānau exemplified shared understanding, shared leadership and authentic partnerships.

Introduction

Individuals constantly interact with their environment to make sense of the world around them. The influence of environment is critical particularly in the early years, creating a context of learning. The schools of Reggio Emilia discuss the environment as the third teacher (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). The New Zealand Ministry of Education (2015) stated that consistent, interlinked context strengthens "meaning making" processes, identity and learning, while Siraj-Blatchford (2006) noted that conflicting, fragmented contexts and practices hamper learning and identity. A growing multicultural tapestry of Aotearoa creates a myriad of contexts, which is constantly posing a challenge for teachers to understand a child's context. There is also compelling local evidence that the home environment significantly contributes to the education of young children (Biddulph, Biddulph, & Biddulph, 2003; McNaughton & Glynn, 1998; Wylie, 2004). To foster such a holistic approach, it is critical to connect the home and centre environments and strengthen whānau–teacher partnership. Such partnerships are essentially reflected in the bicultural tradition of Aotearoa, Te Tirti o Waitangi, which exemplifies the three key principles of participation, partnership and protection (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

In New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), the concept of authentic partnership is extended further through the concept of whanaungatanga, which refers to reciprocal and responsive relationships that are focused around shared aspirations and goals (White & Miller 2006). The Education Review Office national report on partnership with whānau Māori in early childhood services (Ministry of Education, 2012) found that strong partnerships were established with whānau when early childhood services had well-articulated philosophies of working with whānau. They were also evident when professional

“To build an authentic partnership with our whānau, the notion of teachers as experts needed to be transformed to “teachers as facilitators, coordinators and co-learners”.”

leaders understood whānau aspirations and worked with whānau to achieve their goals, and through early childhood educators placing themselves in the position of learner (Ministry of Education, 2012). At Play and Learn Early Education Centres, we have embraced the value of home–centre connections and whānau–teachers’ relationships, which is reflected in our philosophy, environment, vision and mission statements.

Play and Learn Context

King Street centre is one of the three Play and Learn early education centres. Based in Papatoetoe, it is a multicultural centre licensed for 45 children. It has a mixed-age-group philosophy exemplifying the whānau model and facilitating the principles of *tuakana-teina* (learning from each other). Our practices are based on a child-initiated philosophy and are embedded in nature-based education programmes. Children are involved in programme planning meetings and whānau are consulted regularly. The older children plan many of the experiences including outdoor centre trips and walks with the teachers. On critical examination, the team found that practices seemed to limit the level of whānau participation and often held tokenistic value! Prior to our research initiative, whānau readily contributed and participated in our multicultural festival celebrations and whānau gatherings, filled in questionnaires and shared their views and aspirations. As the Education Review Office report (Ministry of Education, 2012) suggests, partnership with whānau in early childhood education needs to go beyond welcoming whānau. Informal “chats over a cup of tea” and catching up with whānau are not partnership (Ministry of Education, 2012). The gap between our vision statement and practices became evident and this realisation drove our journey with the Education Leadership Project (ELP) team and committed us to embark on a journey together with our whānau. The realisation challenged our notion of “teachers as experts”, a notion often also held by whānau. To build an authentic partnership with our whānau, the notion of teachers as experts needed to be transformed to “teachers as facilitators, coordinators and co-learners”. To enable this transformation, we also needed to transform our views of “whānau as recipients” to “whānau as partners and experts”!

Our research journey began with a self-review process, facilitated by the Education Leadership Project (ELP) team, focusing on a mathematics curriculum for our children. Our team was committed to begin this journey along with our whānau community and to transform participation into authentic partnership – but the question was how? As Bishop and Glynn (1999) stated, authentic partnership is about sharing visions and making decisions collaboratively, for which sharing of power is vital. Hence, to build an active partnership with our whānau, our rationale of reviewing the mathematics curriculum needed to involve all stakeholders and facilitate making of meanings in multiple ways.

Theoretical Framework

Our research journey was about sharing the power and was rooted in a *socio-constructivist approach*. Social constructivism entails an inclusive approach, emphasising critical inquiry, respect for the other and genuine community (Beck & Kosnik, 2006). According to this approach, meanings are socially constructed via the coordination of people in their various encounters; therefore, meanings are always fluid and dynamic (Gergen & Gergen, 2012). Some socio-constructivist practices include a focus on strengths, an emphasis on the diversity of perspectives instead of on commonalities of ideas, trans-disciplinary teams, decentralised decision making, and increased flexibility in terms of approaches and policies. All of these practices are informed, in turn, by an appreciation for a multicultural and polyphonic environment (Camargo-Borges & Rasera, 2013). Using a socio-constructivist approach in our research project opened possibilities for developing authentic partnership between the centre and whānau. Camargo-Borges and Rasera (2013) suggested the strategies of dialogue, co-construction of knowledge and meaning making to foster such partnerships.

We used Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecology of Human Development as the guiding model for our research, to help us to understand a child’s holistic development and their different environment contexts. As explained in Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017), the learner and their immediate environment, the microsystem, are at the centre of this model (see Figure 1). The second level, which is the mesosystem, contains the major settings experienced by the learner – which are the child’s own home and the service or setting beyond their home – and the relationship between these environments. The relationship between the two sets of environment is critical, and for our research, it was vital to have authentic reciprocity-based partnerships between the home and centre, rather than a power-based relationship.

> We needed to challenge a partnership based on filling in questionnaires and feedback forms so that we could create a space for active partnerships and enable whānau to own the journey.

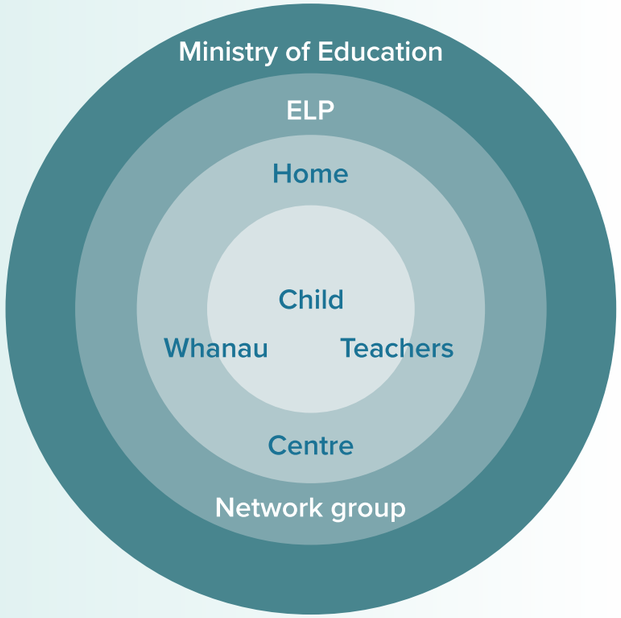

Figure 1: Illustration of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecology of Human Development in the research context

Research Methodology

Our research required a methodology that provided flexibility, participation and reflection as well as whānau input as part of the plan of action; hence, we decided to adopt an action research model. Action research methodologies pursue action and research outcomes at the same time. Action research, therefore, has some components of a change agency, which in our case was transforming whānau participation to active partnership while reviewing the mathematics curriculum. A crucial step in each cycle is critical reflection. The team and whānau involved critiqued what had already happened. The increased understanding, which emerged from the critical reflection, was then put to good use in designing the next steps. Thus, the reflection led to the next stage of planning; that is, the planning was not a separate and prior step, but was embedded in the action and reflection. Short multiple cycles allowed greater rigor to be achieved (Dick, 2000).

plan → act → observe → reflect → plan

Figure 2: The action research model (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988)

Using a cyclic process in most circumstances shows enhanced responsiveness. It made sense to design the later stages of an action research activity in such a way that we capitalised on the understanding developed in the early stages (Dick, 2000). Therefore, we decided to adopt *emancipatory action research* where the "practitioner group takes joint responsibility for the development of practice, understandings and situations, and sees these as socially constructed in the interactive processes of educational life" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 203). In addition, emancipatory action research includes attention to the spiral of self-reflection through the development of "self-critical and self-reflective community" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 205). Carr and Kemmis (1986, 2005) promote emancipatory action research as a tool for teachers to interrogate more widely the often taken-for-granted status of their own professional and educational practices. They advocate for an emancipatory form of action research that seeks to both improve practice and understandings of practice and the context in which practice takes place, and involve all of those affected by the practices under consideration in the action research process (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). We were seeking to transform passive whānau participation to active participation. Carr and Kemmis (1986) endorsed emancipatory action research as a means of working towards greater social justice in education.

Our story

The core of our story is the transformation of whānau involvement from passive participation to active partnership. We needed to challenge a partnership based on filling in questionnaires and feedback forms so that we could create a space for active partnerships and enable whānau to own the journey. In one of our initial meetings, the team reflected on the question: "What is the inspiration for any journey to be followed through?" The team's responses trickled down to ownership of the quest. For ownership of a journey, power needs to be shared and decentralised, and decisions need to be practised. As a team, we knew that if our whānau were to own the journey, they would be authentically involved and active partnership could be sought on their terms. Our story unfolded with sharing of what mathematics currently looked like in the centre. We shared a mathematics folder, videos and photos, depicting mathematics experiences of our children. After the initial warm-up activity, our journey began with a Facebook and whiteboard post asking our whānau to suggest a focus from the mathematics curriculum that they would like us to partner with them

“Our journey continued with Facebook networking and face-to-face talks between teachers and whānau about the current mathematics practices and the possible next focus.”

and their children. We received a few responses from our whānau, which reflected their perspectives. For example:

> “Maths is everywhere and it is great that the children do a lot of measurement. What about, how can we use other types of maths in the centre? e.g. finding and exploring shapes, taking surveys of favourite items.” (mum M)

> “Not sure about a research question but the link [http://nzmaths.co.nz/families] has awesome ideas for math at home.” (mum J)

> “Perhaps may be good to firstly get an outline of what the centres current math curriculum is?” (dad T)

As teachers, we always thought that we had communicated well the curriculum strands of statistics, measurement and numeracy through everyday experiences – but this feedback from our whānau clearly reflected a gap. As Bishop and Glynn (1999) explained, “Stories allow the diversities of truth to be heard rather than one dominant version. It validates the multiple interpretations of which none is privileged” (p. 177). This dialectic practice also brings forth differences and working through the differences is a vital dimension of a multicultural setting (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). As a team, we realised that documentation, parents’ evenings and informal talks were not making our curriculum visible. In response to our whānau, and particularly in response to dad T’s comment, we decided to unpack the mathematics curriculum from *Te Whāriki* and display it on both our home–centre wall and Facebook page.

We had not yet started forming our research question. However, understanding current practices and curriculum with our whānau was a crucial step for developing shared understanding, shared vision and active partnership. Our journey continued with Facebook networking and face-to-face talks between teachers and whānau about the current mathematics practices and the possible next focus. Teachers also discussed with whānau the different branches of the mathematics curriculum such as numeracy, statistics and measurement. Teachers discussed how everyday maths experiences nurture different branches of the curriculum. The difference in perspectives of the teachers and the whānau was evident. These were addressed and, based on one whānau suggestion, our question emerged as: “How can we strengthen visibility for mathematical learning with children, students, teachers, whānau and the community?” The process of deciding a research question with whānau did involve robust discussion and diverse perspectives, which was valuable in understanding aspirations and in sharing power. To continue the journey and to continue to share power with whānau, teachers held a reflection meeting to discuss strategies. The following strategies were employed to share power with the whānau with the end goal of transforming the home–centre relationship into one of active partnership.

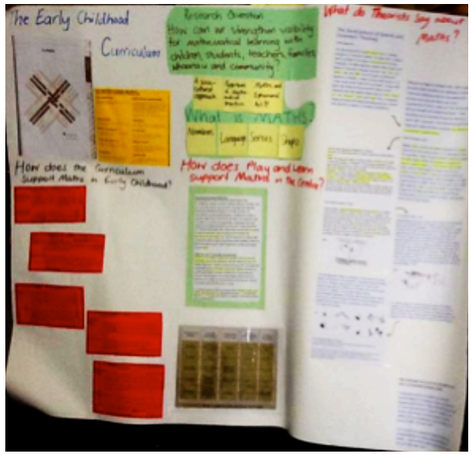

Figure 3: Wall display of unpacked mathematics curriculum based on *Te Whāriki*

Sharing the power

Ownership of a question

Teachers reflected that if they had initiated a research question, it would have been about focusing on one of the branches of the mathematics curriculum or focusing on involvement of the whānau. However, these questions would be representing the teachers’ perspectives and whānau involvement would have been on the teachers’ terms. Having a research question that emerged from whānau conversations put our journey in a new direction right from the beginning. Whānau involvement was on whānau terms, bringing authenticity and partnership to whānau involvement. This was a paradigm shift for the team. The initial natural conversations with whānau and teachers to decide our research question brought out some whānau queries and perspectives. As a result of these conversations, the team decided that they needed to unpack *Te Whāriki* and to explore the mathematics curriculum with whānau. This unpacking of the curriculum together with our whānau led to a negotiation of power. Now the challenge was to continue to implement strategies to share power with our whānau.

“The whānau started to notice the mathematics curriculum in everyday experiences, and not limited to just numeracy and shapes. In fact, our whānau saw the opportunities to extend mathematics through everyday experiences.”

Facebook networking

Sharing Facebook networks, photos, videos, TED talks and articles with our whānau had already been part of our centre culture and we already had a robust Facebook whānau community. One of the strategies to share power was to extend this Facebook space. Research indicates that practitioners must be conscious of the kinds of learning interactions that are likely to occur in the context of ICT use (including between adults and children, or between children), and adopt pedagogical strategies to support these (Bolstad, 2004). The teachers consciously decided not to answer all questions straight away and let whānau have discussions amongst themselves to nurture our Facebook whānau community. Whānau did not have much time for discussion at the centre, except during the organised whānau gatherings held once or twice a term. The Facebook network had created a space where whānau could respond in their own time, own space and at their own pace. Regular Facebook networking, discussions and conversations created a strong whānau community. Not everyone actively contributed, although active listening and sharing in the form of photos and videos combated language barriers to some extent.

Learning together

Apart from facilitating a whānau online Facebook community, the shift in viewing the teacher’s role from expert to facilitator and co-learner was equally critical. The team organised two professional evenings. The first gathering was a coffee evening with the focus on “know my child” and the second was a professional development night on “how children learn”, which was held in conjunction with Brainwave Trust Aotearoa. In both the events, teachers participated as co-learners with the whānau.

Having fun

The fun factor is a lifeline of any journey and so it was for us. Hence, another strategy for sharing power was to plan a competition for the whānau. The competition was about the families sharing their children’s stories of maths experiences at home through photos, videos, observation notes, artwork or through any other form. The family with the maximum tally marks for sharing would be declared the winner and win a prize. The competition triggered lots of sharing of photos on Facebook and sharing of observation notes with the team. Initially, the photos and observation notes represented numeracy, counting and shapes. As our journey progressed with professional development evenings, readings and feedback stories from an ELP facilitator, the gradual shift was noticeable and the photos and the observation notes started to represent everyday maths such as making nachos, making a train track with lounge cushions, etc. The whānau started to notice the mathematics curriculum in everyday experiences, and not limited to just numeracy and shapes. In fact, our whānau saw the opportunities to extend mathematics through everyday experiences. The whānau competition was well received and the idea for a prize was discussed in the children’s meeting. As per our children’s plan, lemon muffins and a loaf of fresh bread were baked for the winner!

Feedback and Reflections

The feedback received from our whānau was an integral element of the action research design: initial conversations with whānau and Facebook postings for the competition offered feedback and triggered the next steps of the design, while ongoing whānau feedback reflected the shift to noticing everyday maths. For example:

> “I never realized how important physical movement for children’s learning is. I’m always interested to learn about how play can help children’s learning, like math, science, geography and everything.” (mum K)
>
> “I never thought S. [his child] learn about length and distance from how far she can throw the ball”. (dad P)
>
> “Never knew by involving her [his child] in cutting fruits and veges and making halves they are learning about fractions.” (dad N)

The teachers’ reflections highlighted the value of using and displaying mathematics language with children and whānau in their conversations, stories and documentation for making mathematics visible.

Conclusion

Overtly, the Play and Learn journey embarked on in the mathematics research project focused on strengthening visibility for mathematical learning with children, students, teachers, whānau and community. However, at a subtle level, the story involved a journey of transformation from passive whānau participation in the centre to one of active partnership between whānau

> Our team has moved a step forward towards building our own community of learners, by sharing power and through authentic partnerships!

and teachers. The journey began with a question and the question itself emerged from the initial conversations among whānau and with the teachers. Thus, from the beginning, both whānau and the teachers established an ownership of the journey. To further nurture the shared ownership, it was critical to reconceptualise our role as teachers, our views about our whānau and our relationship with them. As teachers, we worked "with" rather than "for" our whānau. The Facebook network created a space and strengthened whānau as a learning community. The gap between the perspectives of whānau and the teachers was brought into the forum, and was discussed and negotiated. These negotiations facilitated the foundation of an active partnership, which has begun to develop not on the teachers' terms but on our whānau terms! Our team has moved a step forward towards building our own community of learners, by sharing power and through authentic partnerships!

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Exploring the Initiation and Development of Narratives of Practice to Support Teaching and Learning for Early Childhood Student Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Humans live storied lives. The stories we tell are the way we make sense of particular events for ourselves and connect with each other and our communities. Experience and literature has shown that such narratives are also powerful tools for use in mentoring student teachers in early childhood settings. This is because stories from practice, offered by more experienced teachers, can explain important events and answer emerging questions. This paper reports on a small, ongoing study aimed at exploring and documenting how such stories from practice appear and the pathway to their eventual use in the classroom. The project uses a self-study methodology to document the practice of one teacher in this process. Methods include the use of a research journal to document events and input from a "critical friend" to add a second perspective to the researcher's interpretation of events. The findings to date indicate that far from being simply haphazard memories, stories from practice are formed in a conscious and deliberate progression for possible later use.

Introduction

Storytelling is part of the traditions of many cultures across the world. Stories can involve anything from myths and legends to particular events or the personal histories that underpin social and cultural identity. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggested, "humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (p. 2). Connelly and Clandinin went on to suggest that teachers and learners are part of each other's stories as well as telling stories to explain who they are and what they have experienced. McDrury and Alterio (2003) underlined this when they wrote:

> Our capacity to express ourselves through narrative forms not only enables us to reshape, reassess and reconstruct particular events, it allows us to learn from discussing our experiences with individuals who may raise alternative views, suggest imaginative possibilities and ask stimulating questions. ...Through dialogue shaped to explore experiences in depth multiple perspectives can emerge. (p. 38)

The practice of teaching involves knowledge developed from two areas: the current theory of the sector, and the hands-on practical experience of individual teachers. Both intertwine to support the development of expert practitioners (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). In the realm of knowledge developed from experience, the telling of stories of past experiences that can help to explain those of the present is one of the most important forms of communication between both teachers and teachers and teachers and students. These narratives explain who teachers are and the pedagogy and reasoning behind the decisions they have made and will make in practice. Yet, where do these narratives start and how are they constructed? This paper reports on

“In this manner, stories of practice, either small events or longer reflective narratives, are important ways of teaching and learning about both theory and practice in teaching.”

a project concerned with examining stories of practice that emerged for one teacher in an early childhood education context, how the stories were developed, and how they were later used with student teachers.

The context

The contexts for this research were: (1) the over-two-year-olds room in an early childhood centre attached to an academic institution in which I had been working for five years, and (2) the classrooms in which I taught early childhood student teachers. I often use stories from my own practice, but had become increasingly aware that the stories that I used with the student teachers were becoming old and that, in the multiple classes that I taught, many of the students had heard the stories before. Therefore, the project was to return to the centre for one morning once a week for a year. This time frame could be considered problematic but it was controlled by the other elements of my work.

The methodology for this research was self-study (Feldman, 2009; Feldman, Paugh, & Mills, 2004; Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2009). Loughran (2008) described self-study as aiming to “develop and better articulate a knowledge of practice” (p. 9). Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) contended that self-study “[questions] the self-as-teacher educator, in context, over time, with others whose interests represent a shared commitment to the development and nurturance of the young and the impact of that interaction on self and other” (p. 15).

Self-study methodology involves practitioners examining their own practice with the intention of improving it. Thus, self-study involves the continuous interaction of research and practice as each folds into the other and changes in a methodology of professional practice (Pinnegar, 1998). From the outset, this was a study of my individual practice and thus consistent with self-study approaches. I used a research journal to record events and extracts of practice, weaving the snippets of events together to create stories.[1]

There are criticisms of self-study as a methodology. First, the matter of the single perspective that it uses. To lessen this effect, I nominated a “critical friend” with whom I had both informal and formal meetings to discuss the ideas that were emerging from the study and how the stories could be used to support the learning of the student teachers. Second, the reliance on memory of events that might mean some parts are forgotten while others are fore-grounded which means particular interpretations can be made of the events. Geertz (1995) explained this as:

> ...how particular events and unique occasions, an encounter here, a development there, can be woven together with a variety of facts and a battery of interpretations to produce a sense of how things go, have been going and are likely to go. (pp. 2–3)

Literature Review

The concept of teachers studying their own practice is not new. Boyer (1990) suggested a scholarship of teaching and learning to stand alongside the scholarships of discovery (research), integration (synthesis of knowledge) and application (disciplinary expertise), writing that “teaching at its best means not only transmitting knowledge, but transforming and extending it as well” (p. 24). The process of developing and exploring other perspectives in creating knowledge generates change and growth and incorporates both professional and personal sets of ideas. In other words, using a balance of theory from both research and practice is important. Kreber (2005, as cited in Gossman, Haigh, & Xiaomin, 2009), suggested teachers need to be aware that theory derived from both research and personal reflection influences their practice.

In this manner, stories of practice, either small events or longer reflective narratives, are important ways of teaching and learning about both theory and practice in teaching. Brookfield (2013) underlines this by proposing that such scholarly personal narratives can teach the wider community much about the events in classrooms and centres. Stockhausen (1992) described storytelling as “a useful strategy to advance understanding of professional practice because it enables practitioners to capture, code and validate the knowledge born of experience, observation and intuition” (p. 9).

The Data

As the data collection began, and I wrote about the events of the time spent with the children each week, it became apparent that not every occurrence was either noticed or remembered and thus only some became a story that I might later use in the classroom. I systematically went back through events, considering, describing and interpreting each event that I remembered. Yet when it came to answering the questions from colleagues – “How did you get on today?” – I found myself describing and explaining single events, not a synopsis of the whole morning. It became apparent that I was explaining things that were surprising or that I didn’t really understand. The rest faded out of importance.

1. This is a self-study of my own practice. Therefore, the use of “I” is used throughout this paper where deemed appropriate.

“This activity included choosing the words, organising temporal details, and deciding the events to include and exclude to ensure a well-structured story.”

To try and explain this, I took one of these events on the day it happened and consciously noted the process.

Stage one: Initiation

> “As I took my pen out to write about the patterns they were making, one of the children saw my pen and we began the process the children had gotten used to since my first morning at the centre. To try and quickly note a few key words to later jog my memory I had a small pad in my pocket and a pen on a string around my neck. As soon as the children had seen this they wanted to pull the pen out of the top, write with it and then put it back into the top. One of the children did this and the other was looking at the pen top which was still hanging around my neck. She rolled it around in her fingers and then put the top to her eye and said, ‘Yes Captain Hook, I can see him…’ as if it were a telescope. The jump from what we had been doing to this clear reference to a movie she had seen was startling.” (data extract B.2 p. 35)

This extract from the data answered one of the research questions immediately. Surprise can initiate the beginning of a practice story. The surprise here was about her clear memory of the movie scene and her linking of the pen top to the telescope. At the same time, being able to link the events to the theory also initiated this story. I knew the theories that backed this up: she was using the top as a representation of the telescope and showed her imagination as she created links for herself.

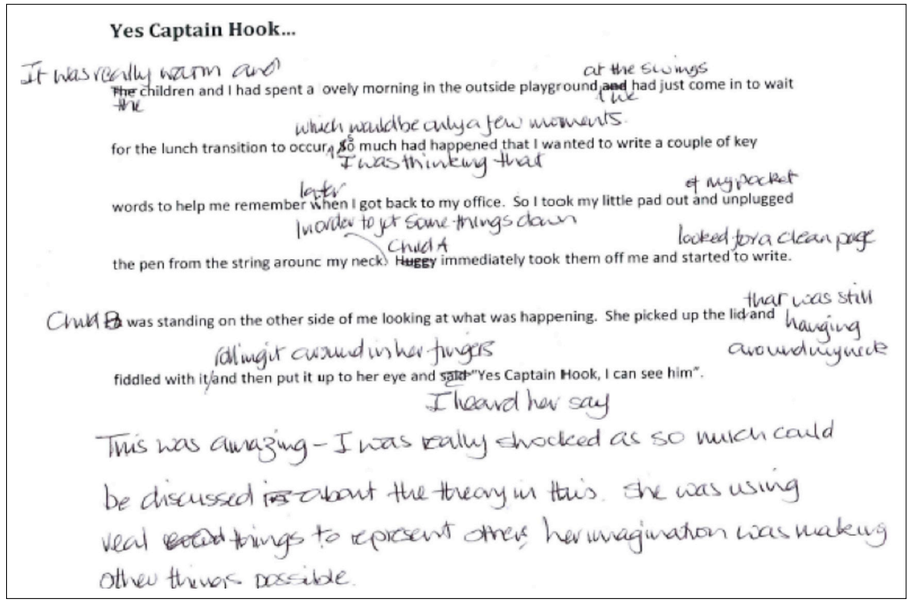
My surprise at seeing these events that were so close to the theory also initiated the beginning of a story.

Stage two: Crafting

> “As the afternoon progresses, I keep finding myself returning to the events and telling them over again to myself. I notice that I am changing the emphasis and the words on each run through. I have also added the context and an initial interpretation that would fit the students and their questions about reflective journals. I seem to be taking of a set of events and developing them from a snippet to a story for telling.” (data extract B.2, p. 36)

This repetition was as if I needed to make sure all the elements were fully in place to show all the possibilities that were framed in these events. Robinson and Hawpe (1986) suggested that “stories are a means for interpreting or reinterpreting events by constructing a causal pattern which integrates that which is known about an event as well as that which is conjectural but relevant to an interpretation” (p. 7).

Gradually the story took shape and the words no longer greatly changed but others were added as I fitted the story for the intended audience (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray Orr, 2007).


Yes Captain Hook…

It was really warm and
The children and I had spent a lovely morning in the outside playground and had just come in to wait at the swings
for the lunch transition to occur. So much had happened that I wanted to write a couple of key
which would be only a few moments
I was thinking that
words to help me remember when I got back to my office. So I took my little pad out and unplugged later
of my pocket
I wanted to get some things down
the pen from the string around my neck. Huggy immediately took them off me and started to write.
looked for a clean page
Child A
Child B was standing on the other side of me looking at what was happening. She picked up the lid and that was still hanging
rolling it around in her fingers around my neck
fiddled with it and then put it up to her eye and said "Yes Captain Hook, I can see him".
I heard her say
This was amazing – I was really shocked as so much could
be discussed about the theory in this. She was using
real things to represent others her imagination was making
other things possible.

Figure 1: Excerpt from the research journal

This activity included choosing the words, organising temporal details, and deciding the events to include and exclude to ensure a well-structured story. “We do not learn from experience. Experience has to be arrested, examined, analysed, considered and negotiated in order to shift it to knowledge” (Aitchison & Graham, cited in Stroobants, Chambers, & Clarke, 2007, p. 30)

Ideally each significant word, or cluster of words, serves two purposes: first, it contributes to the meaning of what is being conveyed, and second, it moves the text or story forward in ways that engage the audience. (McDrury & Alterio, 2003 p. 11)

Stage three: Trying it out

> "I've had to stop and write further as I am driving home. Once again I have been thinking about the story only this time I have found myself telling the story out loud so that I can hear how it sounds. This is different from this afternoon when I was substituting words and running through things in my head. This means that following the story preparation that I was consciously and sub-consciously engaging in this afternoon there is another stage, the sound of the story." (data extract B.2, p. 37)

The speaking of the story is about the audience who will hear it. I was envisaging telling the students about these events to show them how I developed the story in my research journal. It wasn't just one event that I wrote about, but several that evolved over time in a very conscious process. Yet, I could see that the sound would engage the student audience; the words that I used would either lessen or increase the students' "buy in" to the narrative. The final phase of the development would be focused on how the story was received by the students. Would it make sense and, importantly, would they see it as important as I had?

Conclusion

This research project showed that the creation of narratives of practice from day-to-day events is a process of careful construction. Through a process of reflection, interpretation and theory building, these events become part of the experience that teachers draw on to guide their practice. They also draw attention to what is valued by the narrator. As other events occur and are connected into experienced-based knowledge, a spider's web of connection, which Weick (2007) calls a "sprawling collection" (p. 395), is formed.

The process that I began to see in the data was a very conscious one as the series of events noted in my research journal were crafted into a narrative (Noddings, 1991). This meant that the stories of practice that I use with the student teachers were not just random memories but specifically created narratives. Carter (1993) called storytelling a "way of knowing and thinking…" (p. 6), and this research showed that the process I was subconsciously engaged in as I used stories from my own practice as examples in my teaching was not just memory but drawing on previously and quite consciously constructed stories.

Schön (1983) suggested that practitioners may:

> …sometimes, in the relative tranquillity of a post-mortem… think back on the project they have undertaken, a situation they have lived through, and explore the understandings they have brought to their handling of the case. They may do this in a mood of idle speculation, or in a deliberate effort to prepare themselves for future cases. (p. 61)

In other words, the experience that I draw on to both construct and interpret these stories is part of a theory-building and theory-testing process of sense-making and multiple connections.

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“Fifty Shades of Interaction”: Taking Relational Teaching into an e-Learning Environment

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ABSTRACT

Learning in a fully online environment can be a solitary experience. This paper describes one teacher’s journey from a relationally inspired environment into teaching a fully online programme. Here, the markers of teaching and learning as they had previously been practised were very different. Thus, negotiating and gaining familiarity with the new situation was difficult and puzzling at the beginning when connections and relationships are quickly made based on the idea that “the encounter with persons, one-by-one, rather than by categories and generalities is still the best way to cross lines of strangeness” (Bateson, 2000, p. 81).

Introduction

Traditional teaching and learning sequences focus on the transmission of content knowledge from the teacher to the learner. It enables the “expert” to impart important information to the learner. With relational teaching and learning, the content is still important but it is recognised that the relationship between the student and teacher is of prime importance. Relational pedagogy reflects recognition of the needs, passions and interests of the learners as well as the content knowledge of the teachers (Gold, 2005). In these circumstances, learning is a co-constructed, interactive pathway in a trusting, respectful relationship. In these learning events, a community of learning forms as each member draws knowledge and understanding as much from the teacher as the other learners present. Relationships form with the teacher through written and sometimes spoken words. Interactions between the students are also limited to discussion boards and forums where opinions on particular topics are sought. The personal relationships that mark relational teaching are not the same. Unless the students can all come together for a face-to-face meeting, even a photograph can’t really supplement the lack of the initial interactions. This research project explores the journey from encountering the initial online environment through experimenting with strategies to reclaim the teaching spaces to finally understanding that:

> Knowing is inherent in the growth and transformation of identities, and is located in the relations among practitioners, their practice, the artefacts of that practice, and the social organisation ...of practice. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 122)

Literature Review

The literature discusses many different themes for e-learning encompassing benefits and differences (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003), standardisation (Ustati & Hassan, 2013),

"Self-study research in education combines the roles of teacher and researcher on the premise that teachers can understand and improve their practice by examining it closely themselves."

connectivism (Siemans, 2004) and relationships (Beetham & Sharpe, 2007). These new learning environments offer the opportunity for learners from all walks of life to continue to study as they wish and as required. Moore's (1973) theory of learning by distance gives three essential components appropriate for e-learning environments: the structure of the programme, the amount of meaningful interactions between the student and teacher about content, and the ability of the student to work on their own. Mayes and de Freitas (2007) agreed and suggested that learning online is a continuum with "at one end institutional virtual learning environments with their emphasis on standardization... at the other end is an environment that empowers learners to take control of their own learning" (p. 21).

This research project focuses on finding a balance between these extremes that takes into account the relationships that stand at the core of teaching and learning.

Methodology

The intent of this research was to introduce the tenets of relational teaching into the online environment and thus develop the familiar strong connections between teacher and learners. The research question was: "How do I improve my practice in an online teaching environment?" In this, I sought to make changes to improve my practice and my forms of delivery to the students. Thus, the methodologies chosen were action research and self-study. These were appropriate because the online environment would be changed through development, and addition and reflection on individual practice would drive the change.

Action research

Traditionally, action research was seen as a deficit model, working from a problem that was perceived and then trying to rectify it through cycles of change that involve observing/reflecting, making changes/reflecting, testing/reflecting, and, evaluating/reflecting. Action research can also be collaborative, enabling communities of practitioners to study their own practice with a view to improving it.

Self-study

This approach to research can be traced back to the work of Stenhouse (1975) who suggested that "it is not enough that teachers' work should be studied: they need to study it themselves" (p. 142). Tucker (2011) described this form of research as that which is "designed to encourage teachers to be agents of their own change initiatives while working collaboratively with colleagues" (p. 2).

Self-study research in education combines the roles of teacher and researcher on the premise that teachers can understand and improve their practice by examining it closely themselves. Knowledge of the new e-learning environment would be developed through professional conversations about making closer contact with the students and adding more choices in the range of how this was possible in order to better support the students and their learning. These conversations and subsequent reflective practices are a way of developing the teaching and learning landscape based on personal experiences. Gonzales, Moll, and Amanti (2005) explained this process as:

> ...the everyday practices that we attempt to theorise, practices that are at times emergent, perhaps counter-intuitive, and sometimes opaque. Yet these practices do not emerge from nowhere; they are formed and transformed within socio-historical circumstances. Practices are also constructed by and through discourses, the ways of knowing that populate our streams of talk. (p. 1)

The Project

This paper details the professional conversations about change that grew from my growing understanding of "life in an e-environment" and my first attempts at altering it. The teaching and learning landscape that we inherited involved an adult literacy and numeracy certificate offered as an online paper. From late 2014 onwards, the New Zealand government had stipulated that this certificate was needed by all tutors working on levels 1 and 2 of tertiary education.

Baseline data

My early understanding of the possibilities of this shared learning and teaching environment were curtailed by the fact that the course was already online and had already been marked by the success of several groups of students.[1] The readings and tasks were clearly explained and as I began to "teach", I quickly realised that everything that was needed for the student's learning was already available to them on the institution's intranet page. The readings and course notes had been enough to facilitate successful completions with several previous groups of students. The only part of the process where there was interaction

1. As this is a study of my own practice, the personal "I" will be used throughout this paper where appropriate.

"From these developments, I began to realise that some of the students were as much strangers to the environment as I was and thus needed different styles of support than just the readings and course notes that were presently available."

was in the marking and comments that could be left for the students. Literally the marking was the teaching.

> "When I came to the startling conclusion that the content was already provided and the students went through it on their own and thus, teaching was confined to comments at marking times, I was thrown. The change in my role was difficult to come to terms with." (diary entry 3, pp. 4–5)

Some colleagues explained their own ways of teaching in this environment which included phone calls and "talking head"-style videos, while others reminded me of the limited amount of time available for pastoral care in this type of teaching and learning. Understanding and absorbing how different this teaching and learning environment might be was difficult to process. However, students who were also new to an online course began to phone to personally "make contact" and students who were close enough began to make individual and regular visits to the office.

> "A student rang me this afternoon and really told me all about himself. We were talking for 20 minutes. This is a nice change to just marking and making comments." (diary entry 1c, p. 4)

From these developments, I began to realise that some of the students were as much strangers to the environment as I was and thus needed different styles of support than just the readings and course notes that were presently available.

Change one

The place for "teaching" (i.e. instructing) was the comments I could give to the student about their work. Therefore, the first changes that I made centred on how I viewed the "comments" box. Even though it was small and seemingly limited, the comments box offered a window of opportunity to begin to develop the relationships I was looking for.

> "The comment box began to become a part-letter and part-instruction sheet. Where the student had completed the task appropriately, there was space to explain what they had done correctly and offer praise and encouragement. There was also space to offer a few words of explanation for the next assignment. Where the student had not completed the assignment and needed to add more, the area became much more a specific instruction sheet. As they had offered some answer to the assessment, there was need for tweaking what they had submitted. This came in the form of either 'Write one to two more sentences about …' or 'You need to be more specific about…'" (diary entry 4, p. 6).

Reflection

Developing the comments box was a small first step in personalising my teaching and learning space. It also became a tool for a two-way communication. The students would add comments as they up-loaded their assignments. These could include anything from "This was very confusing" to "I don't understand the next assignment" and my responses in the comments box began to include a reply. However, as the numbers of students grew, time spent in this activity grew shorter and the use of the comments box for building relationships was curtailed by the constraints of time and the amount of other assignments waiting. The comments box was a useful tool but it was still time consuming. As Beetham and Sharpe (2007) suggested, "learning is a set of personal and interpersonal activities, deeply rooted in specific social and cultural contexts. When those contexts change, how people learn changes also" (p. 6).

However, when the government directs that new qualifications are necessary and online environments are made available, the change in the learners is fast and often overwhelming.

Change two

As we added more groups of students to our lists, the time for each student grew shorter, so I thought about how to better personalise the intranet space. This meant adding more for the students to begin to connect with me a little more. Photographs enable students to picture the tutor, yet they are still static additions. A personal, visual mihi (introduction) was a useful addition and there was some email conversation about this when I added one. However, the challenge with this was relatively few students commented directly to me. Each individual student may have felt they knew me better but there was rarely feedback to me. In a traditional classroom, it is often possible to gauge the "buy-in" of the students in the room. This is not so evident in an e-environment.

> "I have added my photo and mihi and one student told me that she recognised the places in my visual mihi. There was a flurry of emails between us establishing joint familiarity and then it stopped. No-one else added any comments. Perhaps the space is what many students want. Nothing overpowering, just a focus on the work to be done as quickly as possible." (diary entry 7, p. 9)

> The issue of relational teaching in an online environment is a crucial point to be considered. In a community where relationships are fundamental to successful teaching and learning, how can teachers in e-learning environments take steps to ensure such relationships continue to be established and successful?

Reflection

Looking at what I wrote about not getting feedback seems very sad in retrospect. I was beginning to wonder whether the value that I put on relationships was for my benefit and the students just wanted to get through everything as quickly as possible and my job was simply to facilitate this. Yet, when I thought about the classrooms I had been in for teaching, the relationship seemed a very tangible thing to everyone. Every time I thought to stop trying to build these relationships, someone rang up just wanting to talk when “life” overtook them.

Change three

A third change centred on the use of the “Announcements” section of the intranet site. Instead of relying on the task instructions already in place, I began to give extra and longer explanations for each of the assignments. These were based on the questions and issues that arose from previous groups of students tackling the assessments. I began to gradually develop these for the whole course and these “conversations in writing” which were instructionally design based seem to have some success. The response here was clearer as there were more emailed comments from the students who commented on their usefulness.

> “I wonder sometimes about the solitary nature of e-learning environments. It seems like the changes I am making to try and make the students more comfortable are akin to changing wallpaper and hanging new curtains in a room full of people that I cannot see. I can’t see how they react to what I have done, or even if they notice.” (diary entry 9, p.11)

Reflection

In an e-learning environment, students still have particular needs on the pathway to becoming successful. Some need to talk by phone, others by email and text, and others in person. Even though this is a totally online certificate, I found the need as a teacher to try to meet all of these learning needs. Within each was the seed to the relationship with the learner. It was never a one-size-fits-all in the same way as the classroom. But in this environment, we had to develop a way to find out from each individual what they needed and how we could support their success.

Conclusion

I gradually developed enough experience to understand that to be fully operational in this environment, I had to operate fifty different shades of interactions with the students. Relationships still had to be built in the same way that teaching in face-to-face environments requires. Yet, this had to be done in many different ways. First through feedback that was at once instructional, encouraging and clear. Second through the flexible structure of the programme. I could see that adopting a “text behind glass”-only approach was limiting because it left the student dependent on just the written explanations. Third, e-learning has the possibility to be almost three-dimensional with audio and visual components and synchronous and asynchronous interaction easily possible. Relational teaching here looks very different and new strategies and techniques were needed to enhance the students’ learning experiences.

The issue of relational teaching in an online environment is a crucial point to be considered. In a community where relationships are fundamental to successful teaching and learning, how can teachers in e-learning environments take steps to ensure such relationships continue to be established and successful? The educational world is turning more and more to e- and blended environments, yet often this involves simply putting the work from the classroom online in a “text behind glass” approach. The idea seems to have bigger classes, but these classes are still full of human beings who need to interact with someone with whom they are familiar. The way to maintain these important relationships is complex and forms a strong element in planning future learning of this nature.

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Technology Use in the Classroom: A Comparative Study and Some Alternative Reflections

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ABSTRACT

Technologies are often valorised as the one shining thing that will save us. This piece is primarily a reflection on some aspects of this valorisation, focusing on the nature of technology within a learning culture. As a representation and expression of an ephemeral form of surplus value, it is developed conceptually within the culture as an "overvalued" idea, representing, emblematically, status bearing waste (Bataille & Hurley, 1993). Tensions between rationalist instrumental approaches to learning technology as represented by new public management and socio-symbolic aspects, discipline, surveillance and the reinforcement of cultural norms are considered.

> *Ah, but this changes everything. The engineers on the development committee who studied Aramis from the beginning agree: Aramis as a mobile unit has been perfected technologically; the contract was nearly fulfilled; only the operational side is left with a few unsolved problems. Well then, that's reassuring. I started worrying too soon. The engineers closest to the project have doubts about its technological feasibility; for psychological reasons perhaps, but the experts who are farthest removed remain quite satisfied.* (Latour, 1996, pp. 261, 262)

Reflections: Technologies are "Oversold and Underused"

There is some evidence that there are long-standing and particular impediments to the uptake of (digital) technologies in the classroom (Cuban, Kirkpatrick, & Peck, 2001) and that access is only a partial explanation. Cuban and Cuban (2009) used the title "oversold and underused" to capture the essence of the problem as expressed by teacher technology users.

It appears to be the case that problems with technology uptake are commonplace and superficially express a quandary of the types "you can take a horse to water, etc." and "if only there was adequate resourcing" (Brzycki & Dudt, 2005; Ertmer, 1999; Groff & Mouza, 2008).

Given the expenditure on technology tools, it might be supposed that the advantages are continuous and self-evident. It appears, however, that not only is there a tipping point in terms of utility, cost benefits and intrinsic value, but also that this occurs early on.

“This not only fundamentally shapes the relationship with the “other” in society but also awards primacy to relationships as market-based transactions.”

Some reflection on these features may be both informative and beneficial with respect to the management of scarce resources in the education sector. It seems to be intuitive that there are ultimately diminishing returns from the application of any technology, and if this is the case, then what are the drivers for such significant capital expenditures? The value added to production (and I am taking production to include production of knowledge and its signifiers) could be described within a Marxist model as an “ephemeral” value (Harvey, 2010, p. 169). Ephemeral value references a somewhat marginal and temporary advantage that one producer achieves over a competitor and that this advantage is always transitory. Technology provides a temporary advantage to early adopters but it then becomes commonplace as others take up the technology as a response to the dynamics of the “coercive laws of competition” (Harvey, 2010, p. 52); and, within capitalist structures, competition is an absolute.

It might be argued that capitalist modes of production do not map directly onto educational institutions and related bureaucracies; however, since the advent of new public management (NPM) (Christensen & Lægreid, 2013; Lægreid & Christensen, 2013) in the 1980s, there has been a close modelling of neo-liberal values within public service, not least by education and educational administrators. Suggestions that we are now living in a post-NPM era are not universally endorsed (Grey, Scott, & New Zealand Tertiary Education Union; Lodge & Gill, 2011). Conversely, there is a view that the New Zealand model has shifted significantly from the purist, ideologically founded market forces models of the 1980s to more “pragmatic” approaches (Chapman & Duncan, 2007). As such, it is also valid to reflect on how technologies are thought about within a NPM frame, or at least are represented as pragmatic imperatives.

NPM privileges a market-centric approach to value and progress and, as such, represents a somewhat refreshed version of neo-liberal capitalist imperatives founded on the principles of competition supply and demand. Notably and distinctively, the social economics of capitalist societies seek to divest from and externalise the costs of social reproduction; that is, to distance themselves from infrastructure and social costs (such as worker housing, education, pensions, etc.). In seeking to externalise the costs of social reproduction, divesting themselves of these costs as an impediment to profit, capitalist societies are effectively uncoupling costs from social relations and contexts. As such, the ethical constraints become amoral and are no longer paired with practices and traditions promoting socialised moral responsibility – there is a necessary compartmentalisation or disinvestment from responsibility and consequence. This not only fundamentally shapes the relationship with the “other” in society but also awards primacy to relationships as market-based transactions.

Trust and confidence in the prima facie utility of technology is therefore problematic given market as context. Transactions necessarily take on the imprint and imperatives of so called “market forces”. As emphasised by Feenberg (1996):

> ...technology as an application of a purely instrumental form of non-social rationality is less plausible after a decade of historicizing research in technology studies... The essence of technology is shown to be historical and reflexive, like the essence of other social institutions. As such an institution, its rationality is always implemented in value-biased forms subject to political critique.

There is a direct connection to fetishized and overvalued concepts of efficiency, productivity and improvement, all of which speak to the heart of a value base that defines technology as much symbolically as it does as an essential utility (Bijker, Hughes, & Pinch, 1987). It is suggested that an impediment to the uptake of technologies, both generally and as discussed here, is that these inherent contradictions are intuited by the user and are experienced as a disconnect from its purported value as a utility. These disconnects manifest as a resistance to use founded on a frequently intuitive response which sees beyond the warm glow in the firelight of the new to the uncertainties beyond. Technologies and their application and use may be thought of as being a product of social relations, culture, convention and social economics.

Studies have shown that technology (here technology in the service of education) frequently has a disciplinary dimension:

> ...six factors which influence teachers’ use [of] technology in their classroom: adapting to external requests and others’ expectations, deriving attention, using the basic functions of technology, relieving physical fatigue, class preparation and management, and using the enhanced functions of technology. Interestingly, these factors do not correspond to the common-sense theory of instructional technology. Additionally, we analysed the

“Significantly, technology may be thought of as having left many educators behind (or at least producing a sense that this is so), with teachers’ experiences of themselves as being less technically competent that their students (Vie, 2008).”

> patterns of factors’ scores by teachers’ level of teaching experience. From this study, we deduced that although the majority of teachers intend to use technology to support teaching and learning, experienced teachers generally decide to use technology involuntarily in response to external forces while teachers with little experience are more likely to use it on their own will. (Baek, Jung, & Kim, 2008)

Likewise, technologies (uptake and use) reflect both gender and to time discipline:

> Respondents indicated that course subject and classroom environmental factors did not affect their use of preferred technologies; however, time constraint was an issue for most of the faculty members, particularly for women. Female faculty members were also more likely than their male colleagues to see their perception of students’ learning style as limiting the effective use of their preferred instructional technologies. (Peluchette & Rust, 2005)

The use and applications of technology are viewed as extensions of surveillance technologies (Collinson & Collinson, 1997). As such, they reflect global trends and the emergence and dominance of these technologies. It is the case that an ancillary function of available digital technologies is that they also serve the function of instruments for surveillance. Arguably as an extension of Foucauldian panopticism, they reflect both societal norms and reinforce internalised disciplinary constructs.

Significantly, technology may be thought of as having left many educators behind (or at least producing a sense that this is so), with teachers’ experiences of themselves as being less technically competent that their students (Vie, 2008). This inverts values and beliefs and, not least, challenges and undermines power relations in a way that threatens traditionally structured relationships where the school and classroom mirrors the factory, the workplace, the family and society as a hierarchical construct (Hantula & Pawlowicz, 2004; Rossatto, Allen, & Pruyn, 2006; Saltman & Gabbard, 2011; Spina, 2000).

Survey

In this exercise, I sought to duplicate the survey undertaken by digedu (2014). The aim of the original survey was to test barriers to technology uptake. Here there is an attempt to demonstrate comparative local issues and itemise teacher experiences with technology locally.

Digedu describes itself as partnering...

> ... with schools and districts to deliver a comprehensive technology program that meaningfully enhances teaching and learning. With digedu, learning experiences are personalized, interactive, and measurable, and can be delivered on any device, anytime, anywhere. (digedu Enterprises LLC, 2015)

Digedu is committed to the promotion and introduction of technologies in the classroom, and as a face-value exercise, this is unproblematic. However, the question arises as to what degree technology use per se “meaningfully enhances” teaching and learning.

The question “What are the positive effects of the use of technology on student engagement?” can be broken down into three areas:

1. The positive effects of the use of technology on student engagement
2. The positive effects of the use of technology on teaching experience
3. The positive effects of the use of technology on student participation

These three areas feature prominently in the digedu 2014 survey results, as do the two following areas:

4. Teachers report lacking adequate training in the technology they use
5. Teachers report lacking adequate support for the technology that they use

Where findings from the digedu survey were reported (Piehler, 2014; Reuters, 2014 ; Smith, 2014), the importance of availability and access to technology was emphasised:

> The study highlights the barriers that teachers face when implementing classroom technology, with almost two-thirds of educators reporting a lack of hardware in school and two in five reporting a bandwidth deficit. In addition to fundamental infrastructure issues, a lack of adequate support (51%), training (46%), and visibility into student progress (33%) were cited among the teachers surveyed in reference to technology use in the classroom. (Reuters, 2014)
>
> Matt Tullman, co-founder and president of digedu, said, “It is critical that we move quickly to address barriers to meaningful use of technology in

> As such, technology provides a narrative that both asks and answers its own questions; where technology is essentialised as a solution to difficulties that are both existential and structural.

> schools so that students are equipped with the digital fluency necessary to succeed in our global economy. (Piehler, 2014)

Survey constraints

The duplication of the survey was limited by a smaller sample size (n =11) than that in the digedu survey (n = 620).

Data analysis

Calculations were carried out using the Social Sciences Statistics chi-square calculator (Stangroom, 2015). The chi-square tests for association between two categorical variables; in this case, comparing data scores for the digedu survey focusing on five principle questions and the results obtained using the same survey questions in a New Zealand tertiary college. The chi-square test seeks to affirm the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis asserts the independence of the variables under consideration, or in other words, that the sample observations result purely from chance. In this survey, the null hypothesis was one of homogeneity; i.e. “there is no relation between the two data sets”.

It should be noted that there are two key differences between the digedu and Manukau Institute surveys: as mentioned above, the sample sizes were markedly different (n = 620 and n =11, respectively), and digedu surveyed K–12 students (4–6 year olds through to 17–19 year olds) and their teachers while the Institute survey focused on tertiary teaching staff in a New Zealand polytechnic. However, there is also a key similarity, as both surveys used online digital self-completion questionnaires conducted through the online survey tool provider SurveyMonkey™.

Data analysis yielded a chi-square statistic of 8.7772 and, despite the small sample size, a p value of 0.066916, which is statistically significant at $p < 0.10$ (i.e. less than 10% probability that the results are due to chance).There is, therefore, an effective correlation between the data sets. Thus, it is comparatively clear that the responses to the questions are consistent between the two surveys and indicate at least a shared perception of experiences regarding educationalists and their use of digital technologies.

Table 1: A tally of comparative responses as a percentage of respondents

	positive effects of technology on student engagement	positive effects of technology on teaching experience	positive effects of technology on student participation	teachers report lacking adequate training on technology they use	teachers report lacking adequate support for technology they use
digedu	92	82	90	46	51
Manukau Institute	82	83	100	70	80
Mean	87%	83%	95%	58%	66%

Prima facie, then, there is a case that the demands for good access, support and technical competence are current and local.

Discussion

The object of desire is projected onto the technology and as such is consistently idealised, representing a collective overvaluing of ideas. Speaking here, albeit in terms of individual psychopathology, it may be useful to consider the nature of overvalued ideas as described by Veale (2002):

> It is argued that over-valued ideas are associated with idealised values, which have developed into such an over-riding importance that they totally define the “self” or identity of the individual. Idealised values are also characterised by the rigidity with which they are held.

It is perhaps also the case that technology has become fetishized to the extent that it “stands in for” and represents a fundamental aspect of late capitalist cultural hegemony (Harvey, 2003; Hornborg, 2014; Latour, 1996). As such, technology provides a narrative that both asks and answers its own questions; where technology is essentialised as a solution to difficulties that are both existential and structural.

> I turn in the first instance to Karl Marx for help. Technology, he writes (citing Marx’s Capital Vol I p. 406 footnote 2.), “discloses man’s mode of dealing with Nature, and the process of production by which he sustains his life, and thereby also lays bare the mode of formation of his social relations, and of the mental conceptions that flow from them.” Note that this idea of “disclosing” and of “laying bare” does not denote “determine”. Marx is not a “technological determinist.” Nor, on the other hand, does he indicate that technology is some free-floating deus ex machina that haphazardly evolves in the rough-and-tumble of diverse human endeavours or through the singular efforts of mythical figures, be they Prometheus or the creative entrepreneur. (Harvey, 2003)

As Harvey suggests, the contexts are reflective of social relations and the "mental conceptions that flow from them". Likewise, the narratives associated with technologies, their branding and marketing reveal accounts that alternately promote conceptions of personal/individual empowerment while having embedded within them aspects of surveillance and behavioural modification that provide tools for social control to administrative authorities (Andrejevic, 2007; Stratton, 2014)

It may also be the case that technology becomes a marker for institutional aspirations and anxiety in a manner that is totemistic and, as Bataille and Hurley (1993) advised, may also represent the complexities of surplus as a cultural event. Technology is an expression of wealth that confers status and prestige, and within this framework, contemporary institutions' needs must express status symbolically. Although it is well understood that information technology as hardware becomes rapidly outdated, it is in this very feature that it assumes a particular power in terms of symbolic waste as a marker for wealth as social capital. It fills a role with marked similarities to the Potlach both consuming and then discarding wealth as a marker for status. The cost benefits of technologies are therefore informed also by these processes.

Conclusion: Implications at a Local Level

Clearly there is a belief that digital technologies are a "must have" for educationalists and that, in part, the measure of an education provider's success and effectiveness is its perceived effectiveness in the use of new technologies. Clearly, also, there are marketing and other incentives for both consumers and providers of goods and services in the range of available technologies that drive their consumption. It is undoubtedly the case that digital technologies are becoming and have become embedded as cultural memes reflecting a hegemonic immersion in commodified relationships.

Measuring value in terms of utility requires a degree of scepticism and evaluation of the tendency to over-promise as part of the "marketing to" and the seductive "must have" as part of the structurally embedded relationship. Where the world is organised as producers and consumers, "use value" is obscured in deference to the imperatives of marketing.

There is a risk that the drive to technologies and technological competences becomes codified as risk to institutional providers and a de facto measure of competence and cultural literacy.

There is an invitation to reflect on the implications of technology (and its several meanings) as being socially determined. Likewise, there is a question, if not concern, as to the use of technology as a symbolic and symbolising gesture that extends beyond technology as a mere utility. If technologies are as Cuban suggests "oversold and underused", considerable caution is required in determining the actual needs of educationalists and educational institutions.

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Empowering Students to Successfully Complete Courses through a Mentoring Programme

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Keywords: Peer Assisted Study Skills (PASS), peer mentors, learning how to learn, successful completion, cultural alignment

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses an action learning project that provided (voluntary) supplemental support to first and second year Māori and Pasifika students at Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT). The paper argues that all students, especially from these cultural backgrounds, need to be taught scholastic skills so that they develop lifelong "how to learn strategies" in order to be successful and complete their studies. Peer Assisted Study Skills (PASS) students who faced many learning challenges were from the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Teaching) programme. Their peer mentors were recruited from the year three cohort so that 28 students were guided by seven mentors, with the cultural backgrounds of students and mentors being matched. Qualitative findings showed that academic confidence and sense of both the PASS students and their mentors grew. In addition, quantitative results demonstrated a number of differences, but these improvements were not statistically significant. Likewise, the final results of the PASS students at the end of the second semester of 2011 and first semester of 2012 were different from those of non-PASS students, but these differences were not statistically significant.

Introduction

Empirical evidence has detailed the effectiveness of supplemental instruction, more commonly referred to in Australasia as Peer Assisted Study Skills (PASS) mentoring (Atkins, May, & Marks-Maran, 2005; O'Donnell, 2004), to support students' successes and course completion. Many higher education providers have documented through research how the PASS programme contributed to course completion and students' successes (Dobbie, 2008; Dobbie & Joyce, 2009; Parkinson, 2009). On the other hand, Ross (2009) provided a mentoring programme for Māori and Pasifika students without using the PASS framework and he argued that in order for a mentoring programme to be effective with these audiences, there needs to be reciprocity which means the mentor and mentees co-construct knowledge in the process. In addition, the relationship should be authentic in that both partners depend on each other, be culturally sensitive and ensure that the invitation to build relationships is extended to mentees' families. This invitation entails the mentor, mentee and mentee's family venturing into a collaborative relationship to support the mentee. These characteristics are also similar to mentoring programmes that use PASS as a framework of their scheme. The Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT) PASS programme was underpinned by these four salient features. For example, peer mentors were selected to work with students from their own cultural background based on the assumption that students will learn better when they interact using their first language. Within the mentoring sessions, students and mentors engaged in reciprocal relationships where both mentors and students learnt from each other, and they both acknowledged this in their reflections. In addition, students' confidence to remain in the programme increased. Nevertheless, Ross (2009) has neither defined nor identified some characteristics of what authentic relationships are. What is an authentic relationship? What does it look like in practice? When does a relationship qualify as being authentic?

“The intention of the programme was to provide a mentoring service that caters for both the learning and cultural needs of the students, and hence improve student engagement and success.”

Rationale

The MIT PASS programme targeted Māori and Pasifika students because there is evidence that the overall mean grade of these students is below average compared with the mean grades of students of other ethnicities. Individual schools within MIT are thus expected to seek new initiatives to achieve this goal. The retention and success rate of students in the School of Education, Early Childhood Education, had increased in 2009–2010; however, Māori and especially Pasifika students’ achievements were identified as the lowest in a grade analysis that was conducted across different ethnicities in the Bachelor of Education (ECT).

From the Māori world view, Grant, Olivier, Rawlings, and Ross (2011) proposed a *tuakana–teina* framework, an e-mentoring programme for indigenous students that utilised an “appropriate cultural model in the design and operation online space” (p. 7). The intention of the programme was to provide a mentoring service that caters for both the learning and cultural needs of the students, and hence improve student engagement and success.

This was similar to one of the goals of the MIT PASS programme: to match the students with mentors from the same cultural backgrounds. The MIT PASS programme is based on the premise that the cultural identity of a student is linked to academic success for Māori (Ross, 2009). Comparable to Tamati’s (2005) presumptions, this relational model (Holland, 2009) is based on the concept of *whakawhanaugatanga* (the fundamental importance of relationships), which underpins peer mentoring within *kaupapa Māori* and is based upon Māori values and principles. However, there is no documented evidence on how these relationships are developed within this context.

The Action Development Project

The action development project used a blend of methodological approaches. These comprised action development research (Jenkin, 2010) and evaluation research (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Action development as a methodology is a fusion of action research (which is problem based in its approach) and appreciative inquiry (which focuses on developing progress from existing strengths). The blending of these two acknowledges that some dimensions of social learning situations can be problematic and yet other aspects of a situation can be interpreted from an appreciative or strengths-based perspective. More specifically, the point needs to be made that the current project was neither action research nor appreciative inquiry per se. Rather, it was a project concerned with improving educational outcomes for a selected population of students and a relevant theoretical framework that can be used as a template for explaining what transpired seems to align with the construct recently developed by Jenkin (2010); i.e. action development. More specifically, and intentionally, a component of evaluation research had been added to this project so that we can learn from the experience of participants and so that, in turn, others may also learn from our reporting of the participants’ experiences.

Evaluation research involves reviewing and gathering evidence about inputs, outputs and outcomes. It is “the kind of research where researchers attempt to solve specific problems or help practitioners achieve certain goals” (Davidson & Tolich, 2003, p. 229). Typically, such research involves a blend of methods. Within both the action development framework and the evaluation research processes, a range of methods and procedures were used. These included semi-structured face-to-face interviews and self-reflective cycles within focus groups. Anonymity of the focus group was not to be compromised because it was not the intention of this project to identify the participants; instead, the goal was to capture the participants’ thoughts verbatim as well as any other useful comments.

An action-reflection process based around “a spiral of self-reflective cycles” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 595) was used in the focus groups. Each focus group followed “co-operative inquiry cycles” (Heron & Reason, 2001, p. 180) of action and reflection within a community of practice. *Appreciative inquiry* (AI) is viewed as being more than a “tool, technique, or intervention” (Watkins & Mohr 2001, p. 21); rather, it is considered to represent a more system-wide approach where there is a “cooperative search for the best in people, their organisations, and the world around” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1998, p. 10). Elliot (1999) described AI within evaluation as a teaching and training exercise as much as an evaluative one. AI, said Elliot (1999), invites stakeholders to reflect on “their best practice rather than admit their failures and unsolved problems” (p. 203).

In this research, AI involved the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to heighten positive potential. Furthermore, knowledge and scholastic skills were investigated and were socially constructed by students and mentors within mentoring sessions. Through

“The government’s policies are now focused on bridging the “gap” and tertiary providers are seeking innovative schemes that might alleviate these disparities.”

these constructions, mentors were able to provide necessary support for the students. The (ongoing) reflections were tape recorded, transcribed and coded into themes using NVivo as a qualitative research tool for thematic and content analysis. The views of the mentors and students who participated in this voluntary scheme were canvassed through semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The evaluation of assessments included data about formative and summative evaluations and the intention was to replicate measures of effectiveness of the PASS programme that has now been completed by a range of researchers in Australia; in particular, Worthington, Hansen, Nightingale, and Vine (1995) and Hansen (1999).

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Four main themes emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews and participants’ reflections (see Figure 1).

1. Global impressions which students reported of the PASS scheme
2. The discernment of critical instances of success
3. Commentary about challenges arising within the scheme
4. Observations and suggestions about what could be improved.

Figure 1: The four main themes discovered from the qualitative data analysis

Highlights of the action development project

This action development project highlighted a challenge that, it can be argued, is common nationwide: that Pasifika students are underachievers (Nash, 2000). The government’s policies are now focused on bridging the “gap” and tertiary providers are seeking innovative schemes that might alleviate these disparities. Retention of and success for Pasifika and Māori students was nominated as a goal within MIT’s 2012–2020 strategic plan, which was revised in 2013.

A grade analysis was implemented to confirm that Māori and Pasifika students were the ones who needed an extra support. From the analysis of the grades of the three different year cohorts, it was found that Maori and Pasifika students, especially Pasifika, needed the supplementary support. An invitation was sent to all Māori and Pasifika students, especially those with a C+ or below grade point average, to be part of the PASS programme.

Nineteen students from both cohort 1 and 2 volunteered to participate in the first semester of the PASS programme under the guidance of five mentors, and nine students volunteered for the second semester under the guidance of two mentors. However, although twenty-eight Māori and Pasifika Island students initially signed the consent forms and participated at the beginning of the scheme, a few withdrew as the scheme progressed because they believed that they did not need the support and others withdrew for personal and family reasons. A few cohort 2 participants transitioned to cohort 3.

The project has highlighted some useful pedagogical approaches on how to work with Māori and Pasifika students. These effective strategies include:

1. Students engage effectively in learning when their identities and cultural needs are acknowledged

Ross (2009) conducted a study with Māori and Pasifika students at The Open Polytechnic University and maintained that culturally appropriate support was essential when working with these audiences. Furthermore, he contended that using students’ languages and culture in a mentoring programme was effective. Similarly, Grant, Oliver, Rawlings, and Ross (2011) implemented a e-mentoring programme that was culturally designed and operated online. However, we need to be cautious as some Māori and Pasifika students prefer to engage face to face rather than through other media. Holland (2009) stated that one of the strengths in mentoring schemes provided for apprentices by some Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) is their culturally appropriate approach. One way to ensure that their approach was culturally appropriate was to select Māori and Pasifika mentors. Likewise, the MIT PASS programme considered the cultural needs of the students and matched students with mentors with similar cultural backgrounds. Some of the students viewed working with a mentor from

“Another highlight that students in this research perceived as an indicator of successful course completion was the responsive and reciprocal relationships that were evident in their engagement with their mentors in the PASS programme.”

the same background to be an advantage because they can more easily relate to their mentor. For example, some reflected:

> “It makes me attach more and open to the mentors because they are people from my own culture and it makes me happy to open up and share my difficulties with them and also they help me learn more about the questions in our own language.” (Student 3, year 2)
>
> “My views, I think they are fantastic. I think they are fantastic in the sense that the way we learn – I’m talking about Māori and other cultural groups – the way we learn is your involving all our holistic way of learning and, and that’s important to me and you know – yeah I just feel comfortable. That’s important – that’s how I learn. And when you can bring that into the learning process, the learning is better for, for you know yeah.” (Student 3, year 1)

2. **Building responsive and reciprocal relationships is imperative when working with these students**

Another highlight that students in this research perceived as an indicator of successful course completion was the responsive and reciprocal relationships that were evident in their engagement with their mentors in the PASS programme. This finding is confirmed by other mentoring programmes provided for Māori and Pasifika students (Grant, Oliver, Rawlings, & Ross, 2011; Holland, 2009; Ross, 2009; Tamati, 2005). Furthermore, this finding is also echoed in Fletcher et al.’s (2008) research with Pasifika students.

> “I love that. I love meeting with other peers because I get to hear their perspectives as well which helps me. I prefer meeting as a group as opposed to working individually, and that works for me because I get to learn from others as well.” (Student 2, year 1)
>
> “It gives me a sense of I’m on the right track. I’m not alone, I’m not doing it on my own and I think that is the key for me because I work better as a group as opposed to individually. The people that I have met with who attend these sessions with, we’ve formed relationships and that helps too you know we support each other so you’re not on your own.” (Student 2, year 2).
>
> “Socially or emotionally – yes because I like to socialise and communicate with people of my own culture and speaking our own language. It helps me to express more and express my emotional feelings, yes.” (Student 2, year 1).
>
> “I believe it’s an ongoing process. I like the idea of working as a group and I know that I’m academically I need clarification on things because I can’t, I think I’d struggle just doing it on my own.” (Student 1, year 1).

3. **Students need a lot of encouragement and affirmation in a conducive and warm environment**

O’Donnel (2004) argued that the success of a mentoring scheme depends on how the mentors structure the sessions and structure interactions for “deep learning” (p. 4). Dobbie and Joyce (2009) maintained that students engage in deep learning when the peer mentors “encourage student interactions, facilitate group work and develop active learning and problem solving skills among the students” (p. 4). Latu and Young (2004) argued that Pasifika students’ intrinsic motivation was low and, therefore, these students need much encouragement and affirmation from their peers and mentors. Latu and Young’s (2004) assertion is supported by the findings of this current research, as these reflections illustrate:

> “Just having that sort of encouragement that you can do it and even just meeting other students that were with her that were already – that were already sort of done what I was doing so it was sort of comforting to know that things that I was probably working on she’d already been there and done that and was quite encouraging to say it’s not all that hard.” (Student 4, year 2).
>
> “I think it helped them because they became more confident and at their first semester they found it a bit difficult and for the PASS programme to be coming along for their second semester they were able to be motivated and I actually had one student who felt like giving up and so with this coming along they were able to even feel confident and able to being [sic] around someone who could help them improve.” (Mentor, year 1)
>
> “It’s a very relaxed atmosphere and that is key for me because the environment I think ties in with your learning, so it was a very relaxed, my mentor was always organised and she asked questions and having people alongside me, they’d ask the questions that I couldn’t think of you know at the time so you know we worked together as a, we worked really well together.” (Student 3, year 1).

“In their face-to-face interviews, the mentors and participants reflected on how the skills they have gained from the PASS sessions support them in their learning.”

4. Students need clarification and shared understanding of the expectations of each course

One of the factors in the disparities of students’ grades for Māori and Pasifika students is the language barrier. There’s much documented evidence that Māori and Pasifika students are marginalised in the Western education system by language barriers (Ross, 2009). For example, in an Ako-funded research project across three different tertiary providers, one of the gaps identified by students was the language barrier (Chu, Abella, & Paurini, 2013). This is also confirmed in this small-scale research, as some students reflected:

> “Just I needed, I need clarification of the questions because sometimes the questions I find they have double meanings and sometimes I just need to have a better clarification of what they mean and visiting and attending the sessions have helped me to put that in perspective and I understand a lot better.” (Student 2, year 1)
>
> “Well, it’s just clarifying things I don’t clearly understand. That, and yeah basically that, clarifying things and making things clearer to understand.” (Student 4, year 1)
>
> “Because I, I struggled to understand what they are asking for. I struggled to understand the questions and sometimes I struggled to, to know how to format that – how to set it out and that’s why I come – I have mentoring because that’s the kind of assistance I need.” (Student 1, year 2)

5. Students need to be taught scholastic skills so they can apply them in completing their course successfully

There is an abundance of empirical and anecdotal evidence on how the PASS mentoring programmes enhance non- Pasifika students’ achievements; however, there is no reliable evidence on the relationship between understanding “how to learn” and achievement for Māori and Pasifika students (Malm, Bryngfors, & Mörner, 2010; Sole et al., 2012). In their face-to-face interviews, the mentors and participants reflected on how the skills they have gained from the PASS sessions support them in their learning. The following quotes illustrate some of the scholastic skills identified by the participants.

> “You know other skills that I learnt. I learnt that I’m a mentor for them I have to learn from them as well. So sharing, sharing the knowledge and encouraging one another, communicate well and build relationships are the most important things to me.” (Mentor, year 1)
>
> “The skills that I developed I think most importantly was the use of organisational skills with organising what assignments were due when as well as helping the students to organise their time. With just breaking down the points in each assignment to understand clearly what was expected in the assignments I think that was yeah.” (Mentor, year 2)
>
> “Well the main one for me was the communication skills – you know using of communication skills in terms of like communicating, talking, having conversations with the – initiating of the conversations with the students. Trying to find out their concerns, their problems and then you went through those ones in using my communications skills. So, I found it really interesting and useful and it was – I believe it has an impact on the students.” (Mentor, year 1)
>
> “Time management. They give us enough time to talk about what we need – difficulties that we face and also they help us like lots on the days of the session, but some days they offer their help for us by managing our time wisely.” (Student 6, year 1)
>
> “Just very, very clear concise. Very clear, concise information very simple to understand – she’s not using language that we don’t understand. She’s, she’s come down to our level of understanding and she says well look at this. But she’s – yes, very clear and concise information. You know she, she really breaks down the questioning part of what is required of us. So that makes things so much easier because I find that when she can do that then I am able to, to structure my essay or thing in such a way, but no she has very clear and concise way of doing that and very knowledgeable.” (Student 7, year 2)

To determine the mean grades of each 2010 student cohort enrolled in the BEd (ECT), data were obtained through ‘Jasper’, the MIT repository for student grades, before, during and after the PASS intervention programme. The data were analysed using Microsoft Excel. Using the same system and numeric value systems to identify the participants was instrumental in analysing the grades and determining whether there was a significant difference in the participants’ grades at the end of the first PASS semester. The same process was used to find if there was a significant difference between the students’ grades before and after the second semester of PASS.

> “In addition, the students reflected that they had learnt some scholastic skills that could contribute to the development of lifelong strategies and a willingness to learn how to learn.”

Although there was no statistically significant improvement in the students’ grades after their participation in the PASS programme, the students reported in the semi-structured interviews and in their reflections that PASS had contributed to their achievements and success. This finding is evident in the analysis of the qualitative data, and echoes those found in previous research into PASS initiatives (Dobbie & Joyce, 2009).

Conclusion

Peer mentoring receives much attention these days as it is evident from numerous studies that students learn best when they are placed with their peers in conducive environments that allow collaboration (Sole et al., 2012). This collaboration, however, depends on the relationships that are created in the mentoring context. Peer mentors play a significant role in these environments because the success of the scheme depends heavily on the mentors’ content knowledge, the way they structure and process the mentoring sessions and, most importantly, the approaches they use in supporting the socio-psychological development of their students.

In this small-scale action research, participants who regularly attended PASS sessions reflected on how the knowledge and skills that they gained in these contexts fostered their academic achievements by improving their grades. The students’ social and emotional developments were also sustained, as evident in their reflections (Malm et al., 2010). In addition, the students reflected that they had learnt some scholastic skills that could contribute to the development of lifelong strategies and a willingness to learn how to learn.

It is suggested in the literature that institutions that use peer mentoring schemes such as PASS, PAL or SI must consider not only the students’ educational needs but also their cultural needs in order for the scheme to be effective. Consequently, it is important that institutions provide students with teaching approaches that meet both these needs. After all, the goal and aim of a peer mentoring scheme is to provide academic and non-academic support for the students under an institution’s care.

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A Review of The National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia

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ABSTRACT

The National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia (NAEEA) 2015 conference held at Western Sydney University was attended by foundation/bridging educators from Australia and New Zealand. This paper is based on oral presentations attended by the writer. The key-note speakers focused on the reach of education, widening participation, and open access. A number of presentations were centred on innovative teaching practice and the embedding of digital learning strategies, including two presentations on the use of virtual worlds for teaching and learning. All conference themes were encapsulated by the conference title, “Success and Opportunity in Challenging Times”.

The National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia (NAEEA) 2015 professional conference was hosted by Western Sydney University at the Parramatta campus. The conference sub-themes were literacy and numeracy support models, models of access and equity, opportunity and achievements in enabling education, flexibility in teaching and learning, and widening participation: international trends.

Several keynote addresses examined the challenge of widening participation. Professor John Storan, Director of Continuum, the Centre for Widening Participation Policy Studies at the University of East London, spoke about widening participation in the United Kingdom. Professor Penny Jane Burke, Global Innovation Chief of Equity and Co-Director of the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education at the University of Newcastle (also Professor of Education at Roehampton University, London), discussed widening participation through transforming pedagogical spaces. Sharon Thomas Parrott, Senior Vice-President of External Relations and Global Responsibility for the DeVry Education Group and President of the DeVry Foundation, addressed widening participation in the United States through access and affordability. “‘Come one, come all’: open entry to enabling programs” was a session conducted by Dr Barry Hodges from the University of Newcastle. This presentation had particular relevance to Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT) due to its focus on open-entry challenges – the same challenges faced by MIT’s School of Foundation Studies.

It is interesting to note that three of the keynote speakers – Professor Storan, Professor Burke and Sharon Parrott – were all products of enabling/access education pathways. Professor Storan grew up in East London, the area represented by a famous “lived experience” to sociological research study, “Family and Kinship in East London” by Michael Young and Peter Wilmott. Professor Storan

“She called the scheme her “lifeline”. The focus of her undergraduate studies was women’s access to higher education, and she developed a strong commitment to social justice.”

discussed issues of gender and class structure in East London: how jobs were acquired through kinship networks, girls were expected to end up in domestic work or aspired to administrative/clerical jobs in the city, and boys were either dock workers or handymen. Professor Storan left school “by mutual consent of the headmaster”, and only after a three-year hiatus and encouragement from his social worker and girlfriend, applied for a place on a Bachelor of Education teaching course at North London Polytechnic (a recycled shoe factory) through the Mature Student Access Scheme. He reflected on the dramatic restructuring of the area, and how universities needed to widen participation to serve a mass population and recognise individual needs, while struggling against an elitist past. He discussed the Centre for Widening Participation’s integration policy aimed at widening participation, social mobility and student choice, the need to re-balance research and teaching, and the necessity to regulate wider participation. The quote he used to sum up his discussion was: “The trouble with fairness is that there is just not enough of it to go around.”

Professor Penny Jane Burke’s personal story was one of being a mature student and a solo mum, the victim of domestic violence. She transformed her life through the American Access scheme, and enabling/bridging scheme (similar to New Zealand’s foundation programmes). She called the scheme her “lifeline”. The focus of her undergraduate studies was women’s access to higher education, and she developed a strong commitment to social justice. She stated that the critical factor in her pursuit of education was meeting particular people on the way, people who believed in her. Through her own experience accessing a scholarship for childcare, she highlighted the need to redistribute resources. Professor Burke used “trans/forming” in her title because pedagogical spaces can be fixed and can open up transformation. The aim of the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education at the University of Newcastle is to open up spaces of participatory, collaborative communities of practice.

Professor Burke discussed the subtle layers of inequality and the pedagogies of difference that exist in higher education today. She discussed the recent trend towards a competitive focus, compelling individuals to conform to the dominant order or be shamed. She also placed a spotlight on the rise of marketisation and its impact on teaching, with its overemphasis on types of over-evaluation. She used the term “dehumanising measurement” and stressed that what counts as a quality education must value any individual. Someone can be an excellent teacher/researcher, yet at the same time be assessed as poor by the quality assurance system. Standardising difference leads to narrow interpretations of success.

Professor Burke linked practices of exclusion and processes of misrecognition. A particular type of misrecognition referred to was gender misrecognition, seeing femininity in terms of multi-tasking and being docile and studious, while seeing masculinity as being disorganised, and naturally bright, or the opposite. Deficit perspectives are always problematic because they place responsibility on individuals seen as “lacking”. Shame is a social emotion often internalised as a lack of self-worth or sense of failure, while confidence is a neutral, decontextualised, disembodied trait that “non-traditional” students are seen to lack. Transformative pedagogies demystify taken-for-granted social and academic practices and forms of knowledge value, and recognise the richness and diversity of experiences and perspectives all students bring to their learning. Social and cultural differences should be accessed as a way of developing deeper levels of understanding. In higher education, we should be able to work through unfamiliar ideas without the fear of making “mistakes”, to be open to the possibilities of other ways of thinking, teaching, learning and knowing. Professor Burke referred to Freire’s Circle of Knowledge. Praxis (collaborative action/reflection, reflection/action) is necessary for transforming pedagogical spaces, pursuing the ongoing questioning of the assumptions and values we bring to our learning identities and understanding. We need to create collaborative and reflexive spaces. Difference should be part of the dynamics we use to create meaning and understanding.

Sharon Thomas Parrott, from the DeVry Education Group, was educated in the south side of Chicago and experienced inner-city violence. She thrived in the public school system because her parents accepted nothing less than excellence, with love. She outlined the diversity of choice in US higher education: mostly public-sector, government-funded universities/institutions (72%); some independent, not-for-profit universities/institutions (16%); and a minority of private, for-profit universities/institutions (12%). The DeVry Foundation Education Group is the largest group of career colleges, funded through private investment by the DeVry for-profit education group.

The “Sputnik Challenge” (referring to the launch of Sputnik 1), from 1957 onwards, led to the National Defence Education Act and the democratising

“The challenge of student support is mainly a problem of increased cost, yet as Dr Hodges pointed out, “opportunity without support is not access”.”

of higher education, with a focus on science. Former American President Obama’s challenge was that by 2020 the United States will have the highest proportion of college undergraduates in the world. To meet this challenge, there needs to be an additional 8.2 million graduates on top of the existing projection for 2020. At the same time, public-sector higher education is contracting. The US higher education arena is faced with daunting challenges. How can they get the system to work better? They need to expand reach. The democratisation of education is fundamental. Too many have been left out for too long.

Sharon Parrott suggested that the use of the term “non-traditional students” is no longer appropriate, and that we should now be referring to the emerging “new majority” of students. Research in the United States has found that more than 52% of higher education students are the first in their families to go to college. She suggested that what is needed is a commitment to supporting the new majority to complete courses. Sharon reported on a very successful programme at the University of Texas (Austin) where access (foundation/enabling) students are treated like honours students from their first day.

Research statistics have shown that the new majority graduate success rates vary significantly by race and ethnicity. Rates for students younger than 40 years are lower than those in older age groups, and these rates are lowering. It is evident that many more students are admitted than graduate (1 in 4). It is further noted that by 2050, it is predicted that there will be no clear racial or ethnic majority in the United States. Blame is placed on the student: adapt or fail. Opening access requires movement on all sides. We must successfully educate the students who come to us. This starts with vision. Students need to see themselves as graduates. We need to provide line-of-sight. Students need to envision themselves in careers and we need to give them ways to pursue their dreams.

Sharon Parrott discussed a successful DeVry programme where students have dual-enrolment or dual-degree programmes. A bridge is created from high school to college. Students complete degree courses and their high school programme together. Students graduate with a high school diploma and an associate degree in network systems administration or web graphic design (Advantage Academy DeVry University). More than 90% who showed up were admitted to the course. Although there is a 66% graduation rate in Chicago public schools, with minority rates lower, there was a 100% graduation rate at the Chicago campus, and 84% of graduates earned their associate degree concurrently. Students completed two years for free. More than 70% of students decided to stay in education. The winner is the student. Students begin to see themselves as college students. The programme motto is: “Meet them where they are, to take them where they need to go”.

Affordability is intertwined with access. Fifty-six per cent of higher education students in the United States are from lower-income backgrounds. Graduates are five times more likely to move out of poverty after graduation.

Dr Barry Hodges from the University of Newcastle discussed open-entry enabling programmes; i.e. programmes where there are no academic prerequisites for entry. The purpose of open entry is to widen participation. He stated that there is a major dimension of difference between open-entry, semi-open-entry and restrictive-entry programmes. Restrictive entry to programmes has always been to preserve standards, to preserve socio-economic privilege, resulting in restricted entry for non-traditional students. He suggested the challenges to open entry are low student retention and associated costs (“another” failure, financial costs, pedagogical complexity). He stated inadequate preparation leads to “dumbing down” of programme standards. The choice is either to reduce academic standards or to maintain standards and accept the costs. We need to reject the deficit model and increase support to remediate deficits. Dr Hodges discussed the multiple challenges of deficits. These included the challenges of achievement, academic standards, student support, and the multiple discourses.

The challenge of achievement is in reduced chances of student success (high drop-out and failure rates); i.e. “the open door becomes a revolving door”. The challenge of academic standards is to either accept drop-out and failure or to reduce standards. Market forces provide external regulation by indicating graduate success. Success/failure could be physical (a bridge collapses), socio-physical (teacher quality), or abstract and murky (literary criticism). Dr Hodges suggested that control of drift is simple when results are palpable and physical. He suggested the need for a science of evaluation to guard against a drift in standards. The challenge of student support is mainly a problem of increased cost, yet as Dr Hodges pointed out, “opportunity without support is not access”. Then there is the challenge of multiple discourses; i.e. providing access for students who are proficient in discourses

> “Talking activities built confidence. They reported “feeling the fear, and doing it anyway!”

other than the dominant one. This requires rejecting the deficit model; a radical redesign of higher education, as universities are failing the students; a dynamic culture embodying a multiplicity of sub-cultures, each imbued with their own discourses, literacies, and practices; a systematic challenge to the machinery of quality assurance; and, a social and economic revolution. “The road to open entry is paved with good intentions.” There needs to be a cost/risk–benefit analysis that answers the question whether or not the benefits outweigh the costs and risks.

Several sessions were aimed at specific research studies of innovative practice in enabling education: Trixie James and Hermina Conradie from Central Queensland (CQ) University presented their research into flipping a classroom; Robyn Saint, Chris Cook and Hermina Conradie, also from CQUniversity, discussed improvements to their enabling diagnostic test and enrolment procedures; Dr Carolyn O’Dwyer, Fiona Elgin and Matthew Bliss from La Trobe University outlined their procedure and findings from building a digital learning community in an enabling space; Anthea Fudge, Jennifer Stokes and Tanya Wheeler from the University of South Australia presented the embedding of digital learning strategies in enabling programme courses; and Dr David Powter from the University of Newcastle discussed research into orientation for enabling students.

Trixie James and Hermina Conradie presented “Flipping the classroom: Is it a flipping good idea, or a flop?” This session investigated a trial of a flipped classroom in the Preparation Skills for University STEPS course taught at Sydney University (60–90 students per term). Their aims were to be wiser with time and improve students’ digital skills, oral presentation skills and critical thinking. Their two biggest problems were having only one large area with little computer access and enabling students to hear them clearly in the large space. Data collection utilised GoSoapBox, and evaluation was conducted using O’Brien’s action research evaluation cycle. Students were evaluated after their first week and near the end of the term. Their results were not entirely positive. Just over half of the students read the material or watched the video before class sessions.

This meant some material had to be “taught” before activities commenced. Students reported the increased interaction as valuable; i.e. they felt “part of a bigger whole”. Some felt the big class was intimidating but small group tasks were more acceptable. Talking activities built confidence. They reported “feeling the fear, and doing it anyway!” Facilitator reflections described improvements such as the use of meta-language and deep questioning, greater interactivity and engagement, greater energy and enthusiasm in the room, greater rapport established, and the classroom environment feeling informal and fun. James and Conradie concluded that to be successful, the facilitator has to be energetic and well organised.

Robyn Saint, Chris Cook and Hermina Conradie presented an online application and enrolment diagnostic test that assessed a student’s personal writing, computing, numeracy and literacy skills. All enabling students complete the online diagnostic test before their interview with an access coordinator. At the interview, the student and access coordinator discuss the undergraduate programme, results of the diagnostic tests, and any personal circumstances that may impinge on the student’s learning journey. The student and access coordinator then co-create individual study plans.

The STEPS literacy diagnostic test contains multiple items that measure grammar, comprehension and other basic language skills. If the results of the literacy test are inconsistent with the student’s personal writing, the access coordinator can offer an alternative literacy test. The literacy test results determine how many courses a student is advised to take in the term in which they are enrolling. This is shown in the table below.

Literacy test result	Recommended study path
75–100%	Up to 4 courses per term
50–74%	1–3 courses per term
<50%	TAFE or alternative study

The literacy test was found to be the best predictor of completion of the STEPS programme and a good predictor of academic performance in essay writing for university. There was no significant difference for age or gender.

Dr Carolyn O’Dwyer, Fiona Elgin and Matthew Bliss pointed out that as enabling educators, we “teach” the educationally marginalised and socially disadvantaged – yet we continue to employ equivalent pedagogies that led to their original educational detachment. The three presenters described their Tertiary Enabling Program (TEP). They wanted to establish a digitally connected and open student learning community where prospective, current and alumni students could connect, create, share, support and customise their learning

> “Students are now digitally skilled in a social culture. TEP allowed them to transfer these skills to the academic sphere.”

experience. The aims of the programme are to create a student voice, broaden participation in education, facilitate peer-supported learning, engage students socially across multiple regional campuses and communities, foster student-created resources, challenge the deficit paradigm, and provide the continuity of connectedness. They chose to use Google Plus as the medium for connectedness.

Students were introduced to this ongoing project and discussed the responsibilities of digital citizenship. They used their own devices. Dr Carolyn O’Dwyer, Fiona Elgin and Matthew Bliss suggested that, consistent with research, students want more digital content than we actually give them. Students are now digitally skilled in a social culture. TEP allowed them to transfer these skills to the academic sphere. The creation of curriculum resources was completely student led. Facilitators were able to set aside a space for students to create, curate and upload digital content as part of their learning, to enable students by connection, and to populate the Google Plus platform with student videos. They concluded with the idea that connectedness is what keeps people in education.

Anthea Fudge, Jennifer Stokes and Tanya Wheeler presented the University of South Australia’s (UniSA) Digital Learning Strategy (2015). This strategy focuses on blended learning. Their Jeffrey Smart building has multiple ways to engage students with interactive digital learning and blended learning is facilitated due to information communication technology (ICT) integration. They have collaborative spaces for group work and no front of room. The presenters hypothesised that there has been a paradigm shift from digital natives to digital wisdom. Students now have access to devices. UniSA provides assistance with a stock of iPads students can use. Anthea Fudge, Jennifer Stokes and Tanya Wheeler are all in charge of subject areas. Using their own digital skills, they have completed a customisation of their Learning Management System (LMS), a redesign of MOODLE, to provide a virtual classroom with consistency of delivery. The site has a clean design and utilises colour coding. Students can prioritise tasks, which change week by week. Key resources are easily accessed and students are able to interact with each other. There are student discussion boards with video embedding, tabs for each week, and all areas are accessible to staff. Vodcasts are used (screen recording for videos, assessments and important concepts, using personal capture software). Analytics for each course can be viewed: engagements, lecture recording views, course visits and participant logs. Lecturers supply programme-support videos, enrolment videos, preferences videos and links to other support areas. Lecturers are continually improving their videos based on analytic data. Course content videos include a welcome video, course overviews, assessment vodcasts, lab/practical demos and theory lecturettes. Lecturers attempt to make all videos clear, and to minimise dates, etc., so the videos can be reused. They have found that the bring-your-own-device policy has been successful as students are comfortable using their own devices. The provision of interactive elements has fostered class participation. Digital literacy has increased and students and lecturers have created industry-standard digital products. Some of the challenges have included cost, staffing, system limitations, time and maintaining student attention. Learning Catalytics, the bring-your-own-device student engagement, assessment and classroom intelligence system, has improved integrated learning with face-to-face and online elements working together.

Dr David Powter reported on a research study examining the effectiveness of orientation for enabling students. The University of Newcastle Open Foundation has more than 2100 students per year. Many of these are the new majority, non-traditional students. They have had little or no exposure to higher education. They enter an unfamiliar environment and are faced with unfamiliar terminology and expectations. They lack cultural capital and need to learn to learn. They also have personal, academic and social challenges. Orientation, their first real higher education experience, can be daunting. This is a period of critical transition and their opportunity to connect to the institution, staff and peers. This study examined first impressions. Was the experience welcoming – or was it daunting? How successfully were the students transitioned?

The format for orientation comprised four general elements: a general information session including talks by former students (approximately 1.5 hours), course information sessions (1 hour), a campus tour/ barbeque (30 minutes), and voluntary enrolment-help sessions (running concurrently with the tours and barbeque). The researchers found several shortfalls of early orientation sessions. Firstly, the sessions were not evolving over time. Secondly, there needed to be a boost in online content. The University of Newcastle web page has been refurbished and is now far more student-friendly. Thirdly, orientation was not sufficiently student-focused.

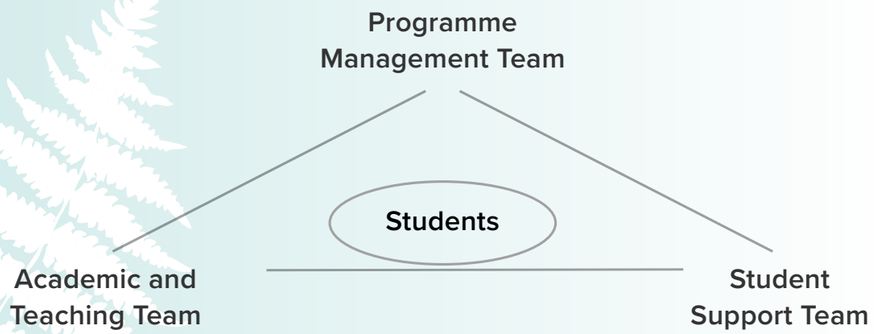
“Merle Hearns stressed that virtual worlds may not be for every educator; just as a food processor may not be for every cook.”

Students reacted positively to their initial welcome and validation of course placement, the provision of course-choice information, and being made aware of support availability. There were mixed feelings about the provision of information versus information overload. Talks from former students were seen as either comforting or confronting. To prevent former students from coming across as daunting, it became apparent that these speakers needed direction. It was important to get them to focus their messages on what they did to help them get through: benefits, tips, tricks and advice.

Course information sessions were highly valued. Students liked meeting lecturers and peers and making these important connections. They appreciated being given knowledge, skills and clarified expectations.

Students perceived support information negatively. They preferred to have this information available online. The general attitude was: “I don’t want to believe from the start that I will need it.”

The research resulted in the consolidation of a team approach, as shown in the following diagram:



This research study concluded that course information sessions were the most valuable, connections made were critical, most general information was best handled by web pages and self-access, sessions needed to be more selective with presenters sticking to key areas, and web page videos were found useful by almost all students.

Merle Hearns (MIT School of English and Foundation Studies) presented two sessions: “The food processors of education: the normalisation of virtual worlds” and “The mythical world of Hīnātore: a literacy game”. In the first presentation, Merle focused on her personal educational journey into virtual worlds. The first part of the presentation dealt with defining food processors and virtual worlds and examining the wide range of functions/tasks that can be accomplished using each resource. The historical timeline of each resource was compared. The parents of each resource were delineated: “father” mixer and “mother” blender of today’s food processor; “father” virtual reality and “mother” gaming worlds of virtual worlds. Both tools were initially seen as panaceas for all problems in the kitchen and in the classroom. Food critic Clairborn described food processors as “the best food invention since toothpicks”; Auckland University Professor Diener suggested that virtual worlds would “change everything in higher education”. Neither resource lived up to the initial hype, yet both are still worthwhile resources.

Merle Hearns went on to discuss her own journeys as a home chef and an educator and how similar these journeys have been. She was always a good cook but the processor added to her repertory and saved preparation time. She was initially reluctant to try virtual worlds with her students but recounted successes on her journey that highlighted the benefits of virtual worlds for her students. She spoke about the Second Life Education New Zealand (SLENZ) project with the successful development of interviewing skills in foundation students, post-SLENZ successes with interviewing teaching and assessment, a literacy intervention with a Māori pre-degree nursing cohort, and student progress and feedback from Virtual World Club activities. Merle Hearns stressed that virtual worlds may not be for every educator; just as a food processor may not be for every cook. But, in their respective spheres, these tools are efficient, versatile and have the potential to facilitate preparation and the transfer of skills and content. The food processor cannot be used without learning techniques and making an initial effort, but there are huge benefits and rewards. Likewise, with teaching in virtual worlds: there is a learning curve and time must be invested, but the end result is productive and positive.

In a second session, Merle Hearns presented her literacy game “The mythical world of Hīnātore”. This game was designed to fill literacy gaps. Many tertiary

> Student feedback from the pilot test described the game as motivating and engaging, and focused students' attention on aspects of sentence construction.

students fail papers, even though the concepts they are taught are understood and retained, simply because they cannot adequately express what they know. Merle designed her game to partially deal with this issue. The game was tested by students and staff at MIT's School of English and Foundation Studies. Student feedback from the pilot test described the game as motivating and engaging, and focused students' attention on aspects of sentence construction. Lecturers acknowledged that the game was a useful literacy resource. The game is not restricted to class time and computer laboratories – students can also play the game in their own time, on home computers.

Merle Hearns has continued her research into the game for three successive semesters. As the game was developed with partial funding from MIT and partial funding from Ako Aotearoa, a detailed report of the initial research is available on the Ako Aotearoa website: https://akoaotearoa.ac.nz/ako-hub/ako-aotearoa-northern-hub/resources/files/literacy-game-virtual-world-report. The analysis of data is still in progress. Quantitative data were collected for Ako Aotearoa, and qualitative data have been collected for PhD research under the supervision of the University of New England in New South Wales.

The literacy game "The mythical world of Hīnātore" is available 24/7. It is on Kitely, a virtual world that uses Open Sim technology. Anyone is welcome to try the game. Instructions for entering the game environment are available with the Ako Aotearoa report, or on the game's Facebook page.

The NAEEA 2015 Conference was a great opportunity to hear new perspectives, gain insights into new techniques and tools for facilitating learning with enabling/foundation students, and for reflecting on current practices and pedagogies. The theme for the conference, "Success and Opportunity in Challenging Times", was very apt. It was an excellent opportunity to network with colleagues and set challenges and goals for the year ahead.

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A Culturally Responsive Learning Environment

STEVE SAMUELA AND FLO TAMEHANA

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Keywords: high school, teaching strategies, student support

ABSTRACT

This articles explores some strategies the School of Secondary Tertiary Studies (SSTS) provides for the students who are seen in a “second chance school”. These students have not adjusted to mainstream education nor been provided with an alternative education platform to complete their formal academic qualifications. The combined approach of secondary education with social services is a wrap-around model that focuses on students and their families coming together for the future welfare and academic success of these vulnerable youth.

The School of Secondary Tertiary Studies (SSTS) is a senior secondary school which offers a base secondary curriculum for years 11, 12 and 13 students as well as NCEA qualifications at Levels 1, 2 and 3. In addition, because the school comes under the management of the Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT), we offer “taster” trades programmes for our students which then provide pathway opportunities into tertiary programmes.

Those students who enrol with us have been referred by their own secondary school due to lack of engagement – these are the students who are either “at risk” or “in risk”. This is the only school of its kind both nationally and internationally.

Rather than seeing our students as being “disengaged” from education, the approach we advocate is “transferred engagement” (the words were developed from Michelle Hards, the former principal of SSTS). Students are engaged in other activities – for example, truancy, drug and alcohol use, mental health issues, etc. – that do not support positive educational outcomes.

Our task is to re-engage these students back into learning while simultaneously changing behaviours and attitudes. We are often termed “the second chance school” by many and it is a very apt description of what we do as a school. Sometimes we provide our students with more than their fair share of chances!

My role as the deputy principal (DP) of this school, along with my colleague Flo Tamehana, our student engagement adviser (SEA), not to mention staff, is to manage that task of re-engagement. We have a wrap-around model that works well with our students and families. No doubt, many schools use a wrap-around approach of some kind when dealing with difficult students and supporting families to help young people to engage in education – or back into education for some.

> … the school advocates lifelong learning and, therefore, developing a more mature, resilient and independent learner is of more value to the student, their whānau and the community.

Flo Tamehana has extensive experience, knowledge and expertise in social work. She has a vast network and has worked alongside many agencies including the Child, Youth and Family (it is now called Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki), Youth Justice (YJ) and the Police. Her knowledge and expertise coupled with my experience in secondary education, which includes pastoral care, means that we have created a wrap-around programme that takes a holistic focus, combining both student welfare and education.

Furthermore, the culturally responsive pedagogy that drives our teaching practice obviously relies heavily on staff who not only have the curriculum knowledge, classroom expertise and high-quality delivery practices, but are also able to develop and maintain strong relationships with students and whānau. This is an important part of what we do.

Our academic pass rate for NCEA Levels 1, 2 and 3 have been consistently outstanding since the school's inception in 2010. However, the school advocates lifelong learning and, therefore, developing a more mature, resilient and independent learner is of more value to the student, their whānau and the community.

We believe our approach is providing the majority of our students with tools that enable them to set themselves up as confident, competent and responsible lifelong learners who are able to make a positive contribution back to our community.

Below are some of the strategies that we employ with our students that focus on changing behaviour and attitude.

Strategies employed with students to change behaviour and attitude

Behavioural

- Teacher as "role model" and mentor
- General day-to-day interactions – "we know our students…"
- Restorative justice
- Under-cover anti-bullying team
- School core values (mentoring programme)
- Resilience programme
- Stepping up programme

Attitudinal

- Academic achievement and success
- Unique school environment
- Camps/marae stays
- Briefings/celebrations
- Home–school partnership
- "Giving Back" community projects (new initiative; year 12)
- "My Success and My Graduation" presentations (year 11 and year 13)
- Resilience programme
- Stepping ip programme

Art Therapy as Supervision

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Keywords: art therapy, supervision, expression

ABSTRACT

Art therapy uses the creative process for the purposes of fostering self-expression, reflection and awareness, and effecting change and growth on a personal level. The art work can act as a container for anxieties and the inexpressible. It can make visible aspects of the personality and lived experience than might not be accessible if relying on verbal expression.

Introduction

Art therapy uses the creative process for the purposes of fostering self-expression, reflection and awareness, and effecting change and growth on a personal level.

An art therapist works to develop a dynamic interpersonal relationship with the client in a therapeutic context that has clear boundaries and goals. The emphasis of the engagement in artwork is on the process of creating, rather than the final product. However, the emerging or completed image or piece also plays an important role in the therapy, and can be seen as a reflection of meaning for the individual.

Why Use Art Therapy?

In my experience, using art can create a safe space in which to work and can open a new avenue of communication for the client.

Art therapy can make visible aspects of the personality and lived experience than might not be accessible if relying on verbal expression.

Creativity is life-affirming and can be a vehicle for improving self-esteem and awareness.

Art therapy can aid in expressing and processing feelings recognised or known by the conscious mind.

Art therapy is versatile and can draw from a variety of theoretical frameworks as needed.

Where Can Art Therapy Be Used?

Art therapists can work in diverse settings including, but not limited to, mental health services, domestic/family violence services, community outreach and support programmes, schools, aged-care facilities, hospitals and rehabilitation services, art studios and private practices.

Who Are Art Therapists and Who Are Their Clients?

Art therapists complete postgraduate training at a master's level to become qualified to undertake work in the field. Trainee art therapists often come from varied professional backgrounds such as fine arts, education, allied health disciplines, nursing and more.

As an art therapist for 10 years, I have worked with clients from a broad range of age groups, walks of life, and degrees of wellness or ill health. Art therapy is suitable for use with children, adolescents and adults, and can be directed towards individuals, families, groups or communities. It is useful as an intervention for those with many and varied issues – from complex emotional difficulties, to those with physical ill health, as well as those seeking a greater understanding of themselves and their life journey.

How Does Art Therapy Work?

During my professional practice, I have utilised various visual art forms. Painting, drawing, collage and sculpture, for example, can all be used by an art therapist, in the context of a therapeutic relationship, to assist an individual achieve change in their inner world and to develop a more integrated sense of self. Art therapy uses the interaction between therapist and client, the creative process, the product and its meaning for the individual to facilitate reflection, understanding and clarity regarding what the individual brings to therapy.

What is Supervision?

As a professional practitioner, I see supervision as a responsible professional practice for counsellors, social workers, mental health workers and therapists, with its ultimate aim being to develop and monitor good standards of practice by protecting the best interests of the client through reflecting on one's professional practice.

The supervision process parallels the therapeutic process and supervisors who model mutual respect, collaboration and empowerment in the supervisory relationship facilitate these processes in the supervisee relationship.

The art work to the left is a compilation of masks completed by domestic violence workers in an art therapy supervision group in response to the inquiry "How do you feel about working in the field of domestic violence?"

Each mask was done by a worker in a service as part of their supervision. We then chose a name for the piece and then as a group decided to make one large art piece. As the art therapist/artist, I then put the entire art work together.

Art Therapy as Supervision

In my 10 years of professional practice, I have found the following points an excellent description of the benefits of art therapy as supervision:

- The art making is the central communicative process.
- The art making encourages supervisory discussions.
- The art making can uncover the narrative beneath the presented verbal account of the supervisee.
- Supervisees discover their own insights.
- Supervisees have control of the process.
- Supervisees experience "light bulb" moments during the art-making process.
- The art image can act as a container for anxieties and the inexpressible.

The following two art works were from a supervisee working in the field of domestic and family violence who recognised a growing theme in her art work of needing space. She came to identify that perhaps she was suffering from some compassion fatigue which she felt had "just crept up on her". The art-making process reminded her to acknowledge just how demanding this work can be due to the disturbing circumstances and images communicated to workers from their clients' descriptions of abuse, which can lead to burn out or compassion fatigue.

The supervisee said she had the “idea of space – a growing theme in my work. I need space in my pictures to symbolise boundaries and healthiness”.

> “There was a black yukkiness in it.... there was this dark sort of place that I hadn’t really gone to yet. The time I was doing the art work I was getting quite burnt out by this huge, horrible time at work and this theme that came out of all my art work was this need for space, a need for air, I felt like I couldn’t breathe and I decided I needed time off and I don’t necessarily think that would have come out sitting and talking with a supervisor; I needed to paint it to experience it.
>
> “It wasn’t until I kept seeing the need for space revealed in my art work that it sunk in how much I needed time out and this was ultimately in the best interests of my client and workplace.”

The following two art works are from a supervisee who had several clients with complex needs in her case load. Through her therapeutic interventions with these clients, the supervisee had found enormous resilience in these clients in the face of financial hardship and physical and emotional distress. She said she sometimes felt overwhelmed but just kept going. Hence, her mask comprised black feathers signifying a sense of emotional trauma, and clothes pins keeping it all together. However, after completing the inside of her mask, she realised her mask signified to her that she was also full of admiration for the strength her clients had in “keeping it all together” under enormous hardship and the hope they had for the future.

Using different materials during art therapy allows an interplay between the materials and the unconscious, which can result in an embodied image. Furthermore, in the process of creating the image, feeling becomes live in the present and so the psychological state of the worker/artist/client is transformed. (Participants often call this “being in the zone”.) So, in a sense we are saying that the making of the image in supervision can, in varying degrees, facilitate a transformation enabling more thinking, even if it is not specifically talked about.

The art work can act as a container for anxieties and the inexpressible. It can act as a communication of unconscious feelings about workers’ relationships with their clients as well as acting as a communication of other unconscious processes for the individual supervisee.

Many supervisees said that having a theme “[o]pened doors in my insight like having a starting point and then after that you could be as creative as you wanted to be”. Examples of themes are “Depict your experience of termination with a client” and “Depict the agency and service you work for”.

Participants in art therapy supervision groups are asked to comment on their experiences. Here are some comments from past supervisees:

Comments from Supervisees in Art Therapy Group Supervision

- "It wasn't until I kept seeing the need for space revealed in my art work that it sunk in how much I needed time out"
- "Overlapping the cognitive and accessing multiple layers of feelings and insights was powerful and affirming"
- "Your themes were the triggers, I can get lost in words but because there was a theme each week it was very focused"

“This is how I feel today”

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge the supervisees who have allowed me to use their work that is depicted here. All supervisees have signed consent forms for the release of their art works.

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