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Editorial

Kia ora tātou

It has long been recognized that our education systems serve some learners better than others. Those who have not been well-served include students from minority ethnic, linguistic and religious groups; students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and students who are disabled or experience difficulties associated with learning and behaviour. New Zealand, along with many countries around the world, is working hard to reduce the disparity and disadvantage experienced by these learners and at least, since the introduction of the policy Special Education 2000 in 1996, there has been a focus on the creation of inclusive education systems. These are systems of education where all students belong and participate, where all students are valued and can learn, and where teachers feel confident and competent to meet the needs of all learners. It is a system where the personal and social circumstances of students are not barriers to their educational achievement.

However, despite the concerted effort of policy makers, parents, teachers and other educational professionals, inclusive equitable education remains elusive with current data demonstrating less-favorable education and social outcomes for students from some minority groups (e.g. Education Counts, 2014). Some would argue that there are strong forces present within our education systems that act to exclude and marginalise certain students (Slee, 2011). These include (but are not limited to) social factors such as bullying and lack of access to friendship groups, curriculum factors such as lack of access to appropriate and engaging curriculum, and factors associated with teacher confidence and competence. In this edition of Kairaranga, each of the papers address one or more of these important factors. In the first article, Lynda Knight-de Blois and Jenny Poskitt present findings from a study that sought the views of junior secondary school students of Pacific heritage about what enhanced their learning. Four themes were identified: engaging teacher behaviour, lessons that stimulated learning, positive student-centred relationships, and teachers respecting student culture. In the second article, Loreto Mattioni, Vanessa Green, Flaviu Hodis and Tegan Lynch report on a study that investigated teachers’ and senior school management perceptions of cyberbullying. Most respondents in their study understood what behaviours constituted cyberbullying, however many were unlikely to identify social exclusion as a component of it. The third article by Jane Taylor and Michael Townsend presents a literature review that examines the reasons why friendship is so important to the well-being of children. Recommendations for educator practice are made. Next Anastasia Miliffe explores the concept of child well-being, reporting on a study that explored the well-being views of primary school-aged children. The fifth article in this edition, written by Steve McNeil, explores dyscalculia and highlights some assessment tools for use with students who experience difficulties in mathematics. Teacher competence and confidence in relation to teaching children with high functioning autism is the focus in the following article by Debbie Williams, and the edition concludes with an article by Thecla Kudakwashe Moffat, Binky Laureta and Lata Rana which discusses the challenges of inclusive education in early childhood education and presents ideas on how early childhood teachers can promote equity and social justice in their settings.

We hope that readers enjoy this edition.

Thank you to all our contributors.

Nga mihi nui

Alison Kearney (for Kairaranga editing team)
‘O mātou ‘o le fatu ‘o le fa‘amoemoe - Fesili mai! 
We are the heart of the matter - Ask us!

Pācific heritage student views about effective teaching and learning

Lynda Knight-de Blois and Jenny Poskitt

ABSTRACT

Teachers often worry about how to optimise learning for students of Pācific heritage. To address the concern, this study sought views of junior secondary school students of Pācific heritage about what enhanced their learning. An innovative approach was trialled in focus group interviews which involved four Samoan teenagers as research assistants alongside the researcher to draw out participants’ views about what helped them to learn. Data analysis led to the identification of four themes: engaging teacher behaviour, lessons stimulating learning, positive student-centred relationships, and teachers respecting students’ culture(s). For Pācific students, successful learning involves: inclusion of Pācific mores and values; sufficient depth and clarity of explanation to ensure students understand new concepts; encouragement; varied and practical learning activities, and strong, respectful relationships between teachers and learners.

Keywords:
adolescent voice, culturally-responsive pedagogy, effective learning and teaching, Pācific heritage

Research paper

INTRODUCTION

The goal of raising educational achievement for students of Pācific descent remains a challenge for the compulsory and tertiary sectors of the New Zealand education system (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2015). There have been slight improvements for students of Pācific heritage in the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) results (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2014), and National Standards achievements (Ministry of Education, 2015). However, a significant gap remains between the performance of Pācific students and their New Zealand European peers. Such trends are viewed as distributional social injustice (Nakhid, 2003), for all ethnic groups ought to be proportionally represented in academic success.

Nakhid (2002) posits three reasons for Pasifika underachievement. Firstly, school system issues where dominant cultural assumptions undermine identity development of Pācific students. Secondly, conflicting perceptions of ability whereby teachers view ability as academic performance, while Pācific students view ability as ‘wanting to make the effort’. Thirdly, different explanations held by teachers and students for under-performance. Teachers reason cultural factors such as lack of academic motivation whilst Pācific students view motivation as dependent on teacher’s teaching styles – their use of ‘professional language’ at the expense of more accessible everyday language. These conflicting perspectives between teachers and Pācific students led Nakhid (2002, 2003) to argue the importance of identifying processes and negotiated spaces to foster learning. By identifying processes she meant an environment in which identity formation and a sense of belonging were valued – a redistributing power relationship in the education system to incorporate the way in which Pasifika students see themselves, how they wish to be seen and to have academic success proportionally represented. Teachers and students need opportunities to dialogue in order to negotiate new understandings about their different cultural and learning perspectives. Baskerville (2011) agrees and posits the power of storytelling to deepen relationship pedagogy. She argues that respectfully sharing personal stories enhances cultural understanding and forges connected relationships.

Student voice literature demonstrates how integral contributions of learners are to the design of relevant curriculum and pedagogy (Cook-Sather, 2009; Mansfield, 2014; Mitra, 2008; Rudduck, 2007). The power of student perspectives is seen in New Zealand’s Te Kotahitanga project where subsequent transformation of teaching methods has led to increased academic success for young Māori (Alton-Lee, 2014). It is therefore “important to find out who Pasifika students really are, how they see themselves, the schools, the teacher and their classmates, and how they themselves are seen, if we are to find an effective way of dealing with the problem of Pasifika underachievement” (Nakhid, 2003, p. 305).
Hunter and Anthony (2011) demonstrated the value of fostering meaningful talk and the power of creating authentic cultural contexts in the classroom. The manner in which teachers talked with students and the way teachers initiated learning situations enabled students to experience Pasifika values such as reciprocity and collectivism. Teachers’ ethic of care caused teacher expectations and actions to positively challenge the learning and achievement of Pacific students (Hunter & Anthony, 2011). This positive belief and challenge is critical because “students most in need of teacher support are most vulnerable to teacher expectations” (Rubie-Davies, 2009, p. 699). Often teachers have lower expectations of ethnic minorities, giving them less-challenging tasks and fewer opportunities to learn with peers. Teacher expectations pervade the classroom instructional and socio-emotional climate (Rubie-Davies, 2009).

Although there have been a number of other New Zealand research studies concerning Pasifika achievement and student views about learning and teaching (Amituanai-Toloa, McNaughton, Lai & Airini. 2009; Baskerville, 2011; Hawk, Cowley, Hill & Sutherland, 2002; Hill & Hawk, 2000; Otunuku, 2010; Spiller, 2012), research is needed to ensure the voices of Pacific young people influence national policy and practices to increase their engagement and achievement in learning. What might Pacific students view inform us about appropriate pedagogy and curriculum for these adolescents?

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design and selection of data gathering techniques for this study were informed by the research question: What do Pacific students say is effective teaching and learning for them? This research was partly inspired by the Te Kotahitanga narratives of experience work (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai & Richardson, 2003) and their subsequent development of the Effective Teaching Profile. Further motivation was the Pasifika Education Plan (Ministry of Education, 2012) that could benefit from specific information to guide classroom teachers.

Participants included twenty-three Year 9 and 10 students from three North Island secondary schools (single sex and co-educational schools) representing a range of socio-economic communities. The participants identified as Samoan, Cook Island Māori, Tongan and Fijian nationalities. Four Samoan high school students (from different schools) took a lead role as “insider” research assistants in the research design, questionnaire wording and focus group interviews. This approach was chosen in order to elicit more authentic student voice. Unlike the researcher, the research assistants shared similar generational and ethnic cultures with the participants.

Data were gathered from questionnaires, focus group interviews and a “post-it” voting exercise within the focus group. After completing questionnaires, participants took part in semi-structured focus group sessions which employed aspects of the talanoa’ approach. The early stage of the meeting involved food, drink and conversation which helped to build relationships. This aspect of talanoa is based on the premise that many Pacific people will not open up and share personal opinions until they feel they can trust those they are conversing with. The sharing of food and personal stories helped inter-personal connections to form and conversation to flow, as did the inclusion of “insider” research assistants. Talanoa relates to the pan-Pacific concept of the ‘va’; the ‘va’ or ‘space that relates must be cherished and nurtured to establish and maintain the relationships amongst researchers and participants. ‘Teu le va’ means ‘take care of the va’ in Samoan. The Samoan notion of ‘vafeola’i’ or ‘strong and respectful relationships’ is linked to the Samoan concept of ‘relational self’ which is explicit in New Zealand literature about Samoan well-being.

The “post-it” voting activity involved participants brainstorming words and labels describing what they believed were characteristics of effective teachers. Participants then selected their top three words or phrases which described their ideal teacher and wrote them on a post-it. Each data-gathering technique was analysed separately and a combined synthesis was subsequently undertaken to identify themes and factors students associated with effective learning and engagement.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The factors identified by students (across the three data sources) clustered into four themes:

a) Respect their culture (RTC). Factors included: relationships, respect, basing learning within their cultural/family contexts, and helping students feel sufficiently comfortable with and trusting of the teacher to learn.

b) Engaging teacher behaviour (ETB). Teacher factors included: explaining and refining students’ conceptions until students fully understand, being strict yet making lessons fun, having a sense of humour.

c) Lessons stimulating learning (LSL). Factors included: using practical and interactive activities, interesting and new learning (not “stuff they already know”), avoiding long periods of reading/writing and varying lessons.

1Talanoa is a term used in Samoan, Tonga, Fiji and other Pacific Island nations to describe a particular form of meeting or talk. It has been adopted by some Pacific researchers to describe a research methodology.
d) Positive student-centred relationships (PSR). Factors included teachers: being positive and caring, helpful, encouraging, understanding/knowing students, and having high expectations.

Relative proportions of these four themes are portrayed in Figure 1.

These themes are now examined more fully.

**Engaging teacher behaviours: Explain until I Understand and Lessons Stimulating Learning**

Explaining and refining students’ conceptions until they fully understood were frequently mentioned comments by students. Sometimes these students wanted ideas explained in different ways (either by other students or teachers) because the esoteric language of a subject confused them, at other times they wanted to pause (check, or apply their understanding) so they could ‘take on board new ideas’, or their life experiences meant the ideas were foreign to them. Multiple demands mean teachers often experience tensions between ‘covering the curriculum’ in a timely fashion, and ‘ensuring sufficient student understanding’. However, the Pasific students in this study appreciated teachers taking (extra) time to ensure they understood new concepts and ideas. The notion of time is perhaps different from a western perspective. In the Pasific context, time is related to ‘being’ – ‘being present with others’ (relationships) and ‘being in the conceptual moment’ (to deepen understanding and learn). Often teachers from a non-Pasific culture focus more on the efficiency or ‘doing’ of time – covering the curriculum, getting around each group or child, rather than ‘being and focusing on the moment’ or nurturing the ‘va’.

These Pasific students, like most adolescents (Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010; Hawk et al., 2002), valued teachers who supported their learning by making learning fun; such as practical, interactive and varied activities (not long periods of reading and writing); new learning, and a classroom atmosphere where the teacher is strict but has a sense of humour and sufficiently relaxed to enjoy students and their learning. Rubie-Davies (2009) referred to these classrooms as having a more facilitative approach to learning where teachers challenge and extend student learning through questioning, giving students more responsibility for their learning, and opportunities for working collaboratively with peers. In essence, Pasific students’ in the current study realised when teachers have high expectations they create positive learning climates so they will learn. They had also encountered teachers who have difficulty ensuring their students experience clarity of learning. ERO found many teachers and leaders would benefit from a better understanding of how to include their Year 9 and 10 students in their learning (ERO, 2012). System-wide guidelines and expectations e.g. Registered Teachers’ Criteria and the ‘Effective Pedagogy’ section of The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), could be more explicit about ways teachers might assist students understand what they are learning.

**Positive Student-Centred Relationships**

Students in this study reported that positive, caring connections with those who teach them are essential for their active engagement in learning and their subsequent educational success. Their views echo voices of Pasific and Māori students in other research about culturally-effective teaching (Amituanai-Toloa et al., 2009; Hill & Hawk, 2000; Ostler-Malaunau, 2009; Otunuku, 2010; Poskitt, 2015; Spiller, 2012). Hawk et al. (2002) argued that relationship-centred teachers were friendly, warm and connected to their Pasific students. They wanted to learn about them, their worlds and their experiences. Furthermore, such teachers displayed enthusiasm and a respectful manner towards their students. These teachers exhibited and expected a strong work ethic and educational success. Although New Zealand research, such as Amituanai-Toloa et al. (2009) and McGee et al. (2003), focused on the importance of teacher-student relationships, other than Hawk et al. (2002) and Te Kotahitanga (Alton-Lee, 2014), there is minimal research on how to strengthen teachers’ relationships with individual students.

Poskitt (2015) argues students are perceptive about the teacher qualities, interactions and learning processes that are likely to enhance their learning. Talking with students and seeking their views are key ways to improving teacher-student relationships and
learning quality. As Nakhid (2003) and Spiller (2012, p. 63) say, “Most of all, for good Pasifika learning to occur, teachers and schools need to really listen to their students”. What opportunities do we provide for listening to our students? To which students do we listen? What about those who disturb our views, classrooms or systems? Potentially these are the ones who have the greatest insights about fairness, equity and justice.

Students in this study yearned for teachers to spend time talking with them, to learn about their interests, culture and family, to ask questions and most importantly, listen. Using this knowledge to make learning relevant for students (e.g. maths problems contextualised in traditional Pasifika settings) helps them bridge together their school and outside-school lives. Efforts teachers make to get to know them convey to students that teachers respect and care about them. These conversational moments also provide teachers with opportunities to encourage students, to believe in them, and to convey high expectations for their learning.

Students are a potentially rich source of data to inform and guide teachers (Chu, 2013; ERO, 2014; Hill & Hawk, 2000; Nakhid, 2003; Poskitt, 2015). It may be timely for schools, educational leaders, policy makers, initial teacher education and Professional Learning Development (PLD) providers to examine how well teachers are provided with appropriate support to establish and maintain effective, caring and respectful connections with students, particularly Pasifika students.

Respecting their Culture (Culturally Responsive Curriculum Content)

Students in this study appreciated teachers who reflected the Pasifika concept of the ‘va’ and pan-Pasifika values of love and respect. However, only a few students in the research talked explicitly about a culturally-responsive curriculum or their cultural identities, unless prompted to do so. That is, there was little reference to lesson content, materials and concepts that reflected their own Pasifika cultures. Did students not talk about a culturally-responsive curriculum because they were interviewed by Pasifika students with an implicit understanding ‘it was a given’? Hill and Hawk (1998) referred to ‘different worlds’ in which these students live. The world at home is richly Pasifika, while the world at school is ‘other’ – Palangi. Or did cultural responsiveness not feature strongly in their experiences at school?

Researcher (late in the group interview): And what about teachers who make sure that some of the lessons have something to do with Pasifika cultures?

Student: We don’t have that here. That never happens. (Others shake their heads)

Student: Nah.

Researcher: What about in English? Do you ever get to read books that have anything to do with your culture?

Student: Nah. (General shaking of heads)

Research Assistant: Not even in Social Studies?

Student: Nah, aw – sometimes.

Spiller (2013) writes, “Pasifika students know only what they experience in front of them e.g. the pedagogies of their teachers. They have no other comparison” (p. 63). Other researchers also found Pasifika students rarely mentioned cultural experiences in discussions of effective teaching and learning (Amituanai-Toloa, McNaughton et al., 2009; Hill & Hawk, 1998; Ostler-Malaulau, 2009; Spiller, 2013). Nakhid (2002) argued this was because Pasifika students were rarely asked by teachers about their perceptions of the schooling experience, which differed remarkably from the assumptions teachers held. Hence efforts that both parties made to address educational shortcomings were disconnected. Nakhid (2003) argued that the absence of culturally-valuing experiences in schools denies Pasifika students relational opportunities, undermines their identity formation, and ultimately prevents proportional representation in the school’s academic success. Creating opportunities for students to negotiate teachers’ cultural understandings is vital if perceptions are to be changed and better-align learning and teaching to the needs of Pasifika.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Only 23 Pasifika students participated, they represented only three secondary schools in one region of New Zealand, the researcher and research assistants were inexperienced, and the study occurred in one school term. Further research is needed to ascertain how representative these student views may be. Although there are national guiding documents and resources which outline strategies to enhance teaching and learning for Māori students such as Ka Hikitia: Accelerating Success (Ministry of Education, 2013), Tātaiako: Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners (Ministry of Education, 2011) and the Effective Teaching Profile (Bishop & Berryman, 2009), there is minimal support for teachers of Pasifika students. The Pasifika Education Plan 2013-2017 (Ministry of Education, 2012) is a strategic document which highlights goals and strategies for various organisations and stakeholders, however it includes little specific advice and guidance for teachers at a classroom level.
Further research is needed to investigate why Pasifika students rarely mention culturally-responsive experiences at school. More research into systematic ways for teachers (and school leaders) to strengthen how they listen and respond to those at 'le fatu o le fa'amomoe'\(^2\) is needed so they can adapt their teaching and increase successful engagement of their learners. Further research alongside effective teachers of Pasifika students and their impact on the educational success of Pasifika students (Chu et al., 2013) could influence pedagogical practice more widely.

**CONCLUSION**

Pasifika students in this research commented on a range of factors they believed helped them to learn. Four themes emerged: engaging teacher behaviour; lessons stimulating learning; positive student-centred relationships, and respecting students’ cultures. Most prominent were the themes related to ETB (engaging teacher behaviour) and LSL (lessons stimulating learning) indicating students with a Pasifika heritage are keen to learn (despite what some teachers might think or that their achievement results may suggest). Valued by these students were: an atmosphere of positive, mutual respect; relationships based on mutual exchange and cultural understandings; teachers’ willingness for students to fully-understand new learning, to deepen and apply it, and believe in them as people and as effective learners.

New Zealand educators and policy makers have been striving for two decades, through successive Pasifika Education Plans, to close the achievement gap between Pasifika learners and their peers. While there have been recent small improvements in NCEA results for Pasifika cohorts, there remains a “long brown tail of underachievement” (Aumua, 2014, paragraph 1) with Māori and Pasifika youth overrepresented among the 10,000 students who leave school each year with no formal qualifications. This research demonstrates that the pan-Pasifika concepts of love, respect and the ‘va’ are of great significance for Pasifika peoples in all their relationships. With increased understanding of the importance of the ‘va’ and a deliberate focus on how to ‘teu le va’ in their interactions with Pasifika learners, teachers are more likely to adjust their expectations and instructional environments to better-match the cultural learning needs of Pasifika youth (Hawk et al., 2002; Ostler-Malaulau, 2009; Otunuku, 2010; Pasikale, 1998; Spiller, 2012). The words of a Year 10 male participant in this research sum up the significance of teacher-student relationships:

*If I don’t get along with the teacher then I don’t have a good lesson.* (September, 2014)

The words may be simple, but have we heard them?

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**REFERENCES**


AUTHOR PROFILES

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ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying has become a serious problem that can have significant long-term effects on students’ mental health and academic outcomes. Given that most cyberbullying experiences involve individuals from a student’s school environment, it is important to examine the views of school staff on cyberbullying to develop appropriate prevention and intervention strategies. Positioned within the social-ecological framework, where interactions are facilitated by technology, this study explored teachers’ and senior managers’ perceptions towards cyberbullying. An online anonymous survey yielded 210 responses. The results showed that most respondents understood what behaviours constituted cyberbullying. However, many were unlikely to identify social exclusion as a component of cyberbullying. They perceived cyberbullying as conducted by students across all age groups, but mainly by girls. Senior managers were more likely than teachers to report low frequencies of cyberbullying and thus, not surprisingly, less likely than teachers to perceive cyberbullying as a problem in their schools. Finally, the majority of staff wanted to receive training on how to deal with cyberbullying.

Keywords:
cyberbullying, perceptions, principals, schools, teachers, techno-subsystem

INTRODUCTION

Recent technological developments and the increasing proliferation of information and communications technology (ICT) have contributed to the development of a relatively new form of bullying: cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is defined as “an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself” (Smith & Slonje, 2010, p. 249). Studies have shown that students involved in cyberbullying are a subset of those involved in traditional bullying (Maher, 2008; Salmivalli, Sainio & Hodges, 2013; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004) and therefore victims of cyberbullying may also experience other forms of bullying from individuals in their school environment. The effects of cyberbullying, and other forms of bullying, are serious, with links to severe psychological, social and mental health problems (Cross et al., 2009, Smith, Steffgen & Sittichai, 2013).

To understand the impact of bullying and how it develops, Bronfenbrenner’s social-ecological model has been adapted by Swearer and Espelage (2004). In particular, through their framework, they emphasize that different contexts (individuals, family, peer groups, school, community, and culture) will influence the engagement, or non-engagement, in bullying and victimization behaviours. Within the social-ecological approach to bullying, the techno-subsystem is a type of microsystem that encompasses interactions facilitated by technology and is particularly covert (Johnson & Puplampu, 2008). Accordingly, incidences of cyberbullying that occur within this techno-subsystem can affect, and be affected, by all other systems in the child’s life. Another system that can have a significant impact on the development of cyberbullying is the school climate; the tone of which is often set by the adults in the environment (Carroll-Lind, 2009; Espelage, Low & Jimerson, 2014; Espelage & Swearer, 2010; Holt & Keyes, 2004; Huang & Chou, 2013). If the adults are not familiar with the current social media context, then they may be less likely to understand and address cyberbullying (Spears & Zeederberg, 2012).

There has been a recent focus on the importance of classroom environments to the perpetuation of bullying, with studies showing that teacher beliefs can have an impact on the prevalence of bullying and how incidents are dealt with (Espelage, Low & Jimerson, 2014; Oldenburg et al., 2015; Stauffer, Heath, Coyne & Ferrin, 2012). As most cyberbullying is reported as coming from students in the same class or year group (Smith et al., 2006), it is therefore important to examine the school climate and, in particular, the perceptions of school staff with regard to cyberbullying to inform and develop appropriate prevention and intervention strategies.
One study that has investigated teachers’ perceptions of cyberbullying involved 66 USA high school teachers who were asked about the effect cyberbullying had on students and about specific intervention and prevention strategies. The authors found almost 60 percent of teachers were against or unsure about implementing a formal bullying prevention programme in their school (Stauffer et al., 2012). The researchers suggest that this view could be because the participants did not see bullying as a problem in their school. In addition, a study conducted in Canada, looking at the perspectives of teachers toward traditional forms of bullying, identified that teachers’ perceptions can be influenced by an awareness of bullying prevalence (Craig, Henderson & Murphy, 2000). For example, as students are less likely to report cyberbullying than other forms of bullying (Smith et al., 2008) and when they do report it, they rarely provide the information to teachers (Huang & Chou, 2013), it is possible that teachers may not be privy to the prevalence of cyberbullying and may therefore not see it as a problem in their school.

It appears that the type of bullying can also have an influence on the relative importance it is given. For example, teachers do not necessarily view relational aggression as a form of bullying and are less likely to intervene with this type of bullying (Boulton, 1997; Craig et al., 2000). Cross et al., (2009) found considerable variability in their sample of teachers; with 20 percent stating that they did not know whether most teachers would consider students forwarding other student’s private emails, pictures and videos as a form of bullying. These findings suggest that it is important to investigate the perceptions of teachers with regard to how often cyberbullying can bring to their attention, and what behaviours they think constitute cyberbullying.

It would seem that perceptions of bullying can differ depending on what position an individual holds within the school environment. For example, in the USA, Newgent et al. (2009) conducted a comparative study on the perceptions of bullying in schools among students, teachers, parents, counsellors and principals. The researchers found that senior managers under-estimated the extent to which bullying behaviour was a problem in their school when compared to estimates made by teachers. However, there were only four participating principals in this study and given that it is usually senior management who are responsible for providing leadership around school policy, programmes and training, there is a need to investigate the perceptions of cyberbullying held by senior school staff. To date, however, relatively little attention has been given to the perceptions of senior management toward cyberbullying.

Regarding the gender of students implicated in bullying there is considerable evidence to suggest that boys are more likely to be involved in bullying than girls (Olweus, 1997). However, there is also some disparity in the current research on cyberbullying (Smith, Steffgen & Sittachai, 2013). Some studies have found that girls are more likely than boys to be involved in cyberbullying (Marsh, McGee, Nada-Raja & Williams, 2010; Rivers & Noret, 2010), whereas other studies have found that males were more likely than females to be involved (Calvete, Orue, Estévez, Villardon & Padilla, 2010; Li, 2008; Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2013; Salmivalli & Pöyhönen, 2012). Furthermore, Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) and Smith et al., (2008) found few or no gender differences. Despite different findings with regard to gender, most studies have shown that cyberbullying is more likely to occur in high school rather than primary school, and peaks around 13-15 years (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2004; Raskauskas and Stoltz, 2007; Smith et al., 2008; Smith, et al., 2013; Tokunaga, 2010). However, there appears to be a lack of recent research that identifies school staff perceptions of the gender and age characteristics of students involved in cyberbullying, particularly within primary school age ranges.

Some researchers have focused on the need for training of teachers to address cyberbullying incidents. In one recent study of 45 Irish post-primary school principals who were asked about their methods of addressing bullying and cyberbullying (Corcoran & McGuckin, 2014), the researchers found that while many respondents aimed to provide training to teachers regarding cyberbullying, there was great disparity with regard to the training approaches. Furthermore, Li (2008) found pre-service teachers were concerned about cyberbullying but had little confidence in being able to identify (13.1 percent) or manage (11.1 percent) it. In addition, only 3.3 percent of pre-service educators thought that they had been prepared within their university education to manage cyberbullying. Those studies suggest that principals as well as pre-service teachers have identified the need for further training around cyberbullying. However, there appears to be a lack of current research that identifies in-service teachers’ perceptions of the need for training around cyberbullying.

When considered within Swearer and Espelage’s (2004) social-ecological framework of bullying, cyberbullying appears to represent a unique aspect of the school environment as it occurs within the
somewhat covert techno-subsystem. In order for effective intervention and prevention strategies to be developed it is important to ascertain the perceptions of those adults who are responsible for setting the tone of the school climate. Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine the perceptions of New Zealand teachers and senior school staff toward cyberbullying with regard to what constitutes cyberbullying, its prevalence, who is involved, and whether there is a need for specific training.

METHOD
Participants
An anonymous online self-report questionnaire on cyberbullying was used as a data collection instrument. An introductory email explaining the survey was sent to the principals of 2,392 New Zealand schools. They were invited to respond to the survey and asked to forward the survey to their senior managers and teaching staff so that they might also have an opportunity to participate in the survey. This introductory email provided a URL link to the survey website.

Measures
Relevant questions from the ‘Bullying in New Zealand Schools’ online survey (Green, Mattioni & Prior, 2012) provided the focus of the current study. In particular, demographic questions asked respondents about their gender, school type (e.g. co-educational, decile, primary), length of experience teaching, and position within the school. Six of the questions that were related specifically to cyberbullying are presented in this report and were developed using a combination of original questions from three previously published surveys; the Child Health Centre Survey (Cross et al., 2009), the School Climate Survey (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009), and Teachers Perceptions about Cyberbullying Questionnaire (Li, 2008). In particular for the first question, participants were asked whether they believed cyberbullying was a problem in their school by indicating their response on a 5-point Likert type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). For the second question participants were asked how often cyberbullying was brought to their attention and they were provided with the following five options; not once in four weeks, one or twice in four weeks, once a week, more than once per week, and don’t know. For question three the participants were provided with a list of nine examples (e.g. students sending threatening emails; students deliberately ignoring or leaving others out of events over the internet) and asked to indicate their agreement (i.e. yes, no, or don’t know) about whether or not these constituted a form of cyberbullying. These items were based to a large extent on the questionnaire used to measure covert bullying in the Cross et al., (2009) study. The fourth question asked respondents to indicate (based on their own personal experience and perspective) the gender of students implicated in cyberbullying (i.e. mainly boys, equal number of boys and girls, mainly girls). The next question asked respondents to indicate (again based on their personal experience and perspective) what age children engaged in cyberbullying (i.e. mainly children 9-10 years, mainly younger adolescents 11-14 years, mainly older adolescents 15-18 years, or students across all age groups). Finally, respondents were asked to indicate (i.e. yes, no, or not sure) whether they think teachers need training to deal with and counteract the effects of cyberbullying.

RESULTS
Demographics
As shown in Table 1, of the 210 participants, 112 (53%) were senior managers (i.e. principals and deputy principals) and 98 (47%) were teachers. In particular, 32 percent of the participants were female teachers, followed by female senior managers (27%), male senior managers (26%), and male teachers (15%). The level of experience of school staff was grouped into three categories; early career (0 – 6 years), middle career (7 – 20 years) and later career (20 + years). Of the participants, 35 (17%) were classified as early career school staff, 78 (37%) reported being middle career school staff, and 97 (46%) as later career school staff.

Results showed that over half of the participants worked in primary schools (53%), followed by almost a third in secondary schools (32%). Only 11 percent of the participants worked in a school for children 11-12 years or schools targeted at children from 11-18 years. In addition, most of the participants worked in co-educational schools (93%). Only 9 respondents (4%) worked in an all-female school and 6 respondents (3%) worked in an all-male school. Relative to the number of schools who received the origina email, 210 participants was a low response; however, although senior management were over-represented in this sample, it appears to be a representative sample of New Zealand teachers with regard to gender and school type (Education Counts, n.d.).

Table 1
Participants’ Position Within the School as a Function of Gender and Level of Experience in Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position within the School</th>
<th>Teachers (n=98)</th>
<th>Senior Managers (n=112)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceptions of Cyberbullying

Teachers and senior managers were asked about what behaviours they considered to be cyberbullying. In particular, a list of nine examples of cyberbullying behaviours were presented to school staff. There was considerable agreement with between 81 percent and 85 percent of staff saying ‘yes’ to eight of the nine statements. The only type of cyberbullying where there was some disagreement was ‘ignoring or leaving others out of events over the Internet’. Although slightly more than half of the school staff surveyed (58%) considered behaviour as being cyberbullying, 20 percent did not consider it as a component of cyberbullying, and the remaining individuals were unsure if it would be considered cyberbullying.

To assess teachers’ and senior managers’ perceptions of the extent of cyberbullying among students, the staff were asked to indicate their agreement with the following statement: ‘Cyberbullying is a problem among students at our school’. Although 79 participants (38%) did consider cyberbullying to be a problem in their school, 90 (43%) participants did not consider cyberbullying as a problem in their school, and 39 respondents (19%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Overall, most of the participants did not consider cyberbullying as a problem in their schools or were unsure about its occurrence ($M = 2.79, SD = 1.27$). The results revealed a significant difference however between teachers ($M = 3.24, SD = 1.14$) and senior managers ($M = 2.39, SD = 1.24$); $Z = 4.65, p = .001$. These results suggest that teachers were more likely to report cyberbullying as a problem in schools than senior managers.

To assess school staff’s perceptions of the extent of cyberbullying among students, participants were asked to think about the past four weeks and indicate on a five point scale the frequency with which cyberbullying was brought to their attention. More than half of the participants (54%) reported that cyberbullying had not been brought to their attention in the last four weeks. Approximately 20 percent reported that cyberbullying had been brought to their attention once or twice in four weeks and 15 percent of the participants reported that cyberbullying had been brought to their attention at least once per week over the last four weeks.

Given the finding that teachers were more likely than senior managers to report that cyberbullying was a problem in schools, it was hypothesised that senior managers may be less likely to be aware of cyberbullying incidents than teachers. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between the frequency of cyberbullying reported and position within the school. The relation between these variables was significant, $x^2 (4, N = 202) = 16.54, p = .002$. As shown in Table 2, 72 (67%) senior managers stated that they had not had an incident of cyberbullying reported to them in the last four weeks compared to 38 (40%) teachers. In addition, 40 (42%) teachers compared to 30 (27%) senior managers had at least one incident of cyberbullying reported to them in the last four weeks. Although there is research to suggest that students rarely inform teachers about cyberbullying, it is plausible that given their front-line position, teachers are more likely than senior staff to be approached about the issue. This difference, however, does highlight the possibility that if a senior staff member is not told about the issue (even indirectly by a teacher) they may not see it as a problem in their school.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Cyberbullying Reports in the Past Four Weeks as a Function of School Position</th>
<th>Position within the School</th>
<th>Teacher (n = 94)*</th>
<th>Senior Manager (n = 108)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyberbullying Frequency</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not once in 4 weeks</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice in 4 weeks</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once per week</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* some respondents didn’t answer this question

Teachers and senior managers were asked if cyberbullying was conducted by mainly boys, equal number of boys and girls, or mainly girls. The results showed that most of the participants (65%) reported they perceived cyberbullying as conducted mainly by girls, while 34 percent of the participants said they perceived cyberbullying as conducted by equal numbers of boys and girls. Respondents were also asked about the ages of children involved in cyberbullying. Results showed that many participants (44%) reported they perceived cyberbullying as being conducted by students across all age groups. In addition, 39 percent of the participants perceived cyberbullying as being conducted by mainly younger adolescents, while 17 percent reported they perceived cyberbullying as being conducted mainly by older adolescents. However, some caution is needed in interpreting these findings given that the respondents were from across the sector and would thus have a diverse range of experiences with regard to their perceptions of cyberbullying.
Finally, school staff were also asked if they thought teachers needed training to deal with and counteract, the effects of cyberbullying. Results show that 75 percent of principals and 71 percent of teachers perceived a need for training, while only 10 percent of principals and 6 percent of teachers thought they did not need training.

In summary, the results from this study demonstrate that in terms of who is involved, teachers and senior management hold similar perceptions with regard to the need for training, what constitutes cyberbullying, as well as the gender and age of those involved. However, teachers were more likely than senior managers to report that cyberbullying was a problem in the school and that cyberbullying had been brought to their attention at least once per week in the last four weeks.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study were similar to previous literature in that school staff are likely to consider most of the listed phrases as types of cyberbullying, including the use of technology to upload and deliver inappropriate messages and posts (Cross et al., 2009). However, a large number of the participants in the present study did not view ‘ignoring or leaving others out of events over the Internet’ as cyberbullying. Again, this finding is similar to previous studies that have found school staff are less likely to identify social exclusion as a type of bullying (Boulton, 1997; Craig et al., 2000; Cross et al., 2009). With regard to who is more likely to cyberbully, the present study found that over half of the respondents believed it was more likely to be girls than boys. This finding is consistent with a view put forth by Smith (2014) who suggests that “overall there is relatively greater involvement of girls in cyberbullying” (p. 85). This is particularly relevant if we view cyberbullying as similar to relational bullying (Wang, Iannotti & Nansel, 2009).

The present study found that school staff perceived cyberbullying as being conducted by students across all age groups (i.e. 9-18 years old). However, previous research which investigated the characteristics of students implicated in cyberbullying (albeit from the students’ point of view) found that older students were more often implicated in cyberbullying than younger students (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007; Smith et al., 2008). This discrepancy could be attributed to a number of factors. First, the current study is one of the first that has attempted to elucidate school staff’s perceptions of the ages of students implicated in cyberbullying and included primary school age ranges. Second, the present study was conducted some years later than the previous ones, so it is more likely that young children have more access to technology and therefore the opportunity to be involved in cyberbullying. Finally, given that the staff in the present study were located in a range of settings and would have been teaching different age groups, this may have influenced their views and thus future research could include a more refined way of assessing these perceptions.

Although the majority of school staff in the present study were concerned about cyberbullying, most did not consider it to be a problem in their school. When this is considered in the context of infrequent reporting, this finding is perhaps not surprising. It could be argued that cyberbullying is not a problem in schools because it frequently occurs outside of school hours. Perhaps a more accurate question would be: Is cyberbullying a problem amongst school-aged children? However, there is considerable debate in the literature with regard to prevalence of cyberbullying, with some authors suggesting a prevalence as low as 1-2 percent and others reporting figures as high as 43 percent (Raskauskas, Gregory, Harvey, Rizhiana & Evans, 2010). Frisen et al. (2013) highlight the importance of recognising that prevalence can be influenced by a number of factors including the operationalisation of the term cyberbullying (e.g. vague vs specific definitions) as well as the reference period used in measuring the concept (e.g. students can be asked whether they have experienced cyberbullying in the last year vs the last month).

Given the existence and relative importance of the techno-subsystem that permeates the lives of pre-adolescents and adolescents, a tendency to under-report cyberbullying is understandable. Therefore, another possible reason for the relatively low reporting of cyberbullying is that students may be reluctant to report cyberbullying to school staff (Huang & Chou, 2010; Smith et al., 2008) possibly because of the consequences. For example, one study found most of the students surveyed believed the school could do nothing and students might be restricted in their use of technology (Li, 2010). Furthermore, there is some evidence demonstrating that young people are likely to spend time hiding their online identity from their parents (Livingstone & Bober, 2005).

The finding in the current study that teachers’ were less likely to view social exclusion as a type of cyberbullying mirrors previous results. For example, it has been found that a significant proportion of teachers view social exclusion by peers less seriously and are less likely to intervene than in the cases of verbal and physical aggression (Yoon & Kerber,
2003). Therefore, if social exclusion is not necessarily seen as a type of bullying by adults (whether in person or over the internet) then the same may be true of students. Yet there is evidence to suggest, through the use of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), that the damage caused by this type of bullying can be equivalent to the experience of physical pain (Eisenberger, Lieberman & Williams, 2003).

We predicted that perceptions of cyberbullying may depend on who was being asked. The findings revealed that although most teachers and senior managers were consistent in how they understood or viewed cyberbullying, there were some discrepancies between them with regard to awareness. While school staff who participated in the current study reported low frequency of cyberbullying among their students, teachers were more likely than senior managers to perceive cyberbullying as a problem in their schools and to report higher frequencies of cyberbullying in their schools. These findings are similar to those of Newgent et al. (2009) who found that teachers’ ratings of bullying were more similar to students’ ratings than they were to principals’ ratings, who generally did not characterize bullying as a problem in their schools.

One of the limitations of this study is the small sample size relative to the number of schools who were contacted. However, it is important to highlight the value of this preliminary study as one of the first to survey teachers and senior managers about cyberbullying. The current study used a self-report questionnaire to elicit school staff’s perceptions about cyberbullying. Future studies could present school staff with hypothetical scenarios to assess their views on cyberbullying. According to Poulou (2001), advantages of using vignettes based on real situations include their unobtrusive ability to capture complex thoughts about sensitive issues, such as the case with bullying and/or cyberbullying.

By viewing the results of the current study within the social-ecological framework, a number of important applied implications may be noted. For example, according to this framework, the school climate can have a positive or negative effect on cyberbullying and as the climate is strongly influenced by the perceptions and attitudes of school staff, their understanding of the issue matters. Given the vast perceptions and attitudes of school staff, their views on cyberbullying. According to Poulou (2001), advantages of using vignettes based on real situations include their unobtrusive ability to capture complex thoughts about sensitive issues, such as the case with bullying and/or cyberbullying.

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behaviours are largely influenced by individual factors and social environments, interventions also need to target those elements by implementing a whole-school approach that includes the parents as partners (Limber, Kowalski & Agatston, 2008).

Another implication is the need to better-understand the techno-subsystem, which has been proposed as part of the child’s social ecology by Johnson and Puplampu (2008). It has emerged as a new setting to prevent or address cyberbullying incidents. Spears and Zeederberg (2012), introduced the concept of online social marketing as a promising intervention strategy which makes use of the internet for preventing cyberbullying to young people. Schools may want to consider employing social media technologies, such as internet forums, social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), blogs and microblogs (i.e. Twitter) as internet platforms to deliver messages especially created for preventing cyberbullying. Those messages could potentially reach students online, which is one of the settings where they are socialising, playing and learning (Spears & Zeederberg, 2012).

As most young people in developed countries use both the internet and mobile phones (Kleeb, 2007; Netsafe, 2005), there is an elevated risk of experiencing cyberbullying (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig & Ólafsson, 2011) which can lead to significant emotional harm. It can disrupt childrens’ and adolescents’ social development, and it can be associated with negative student outcomes (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008; Marsh et al., 2010). Accordingly, schools must provide students with a safe learning environment. However, schools are challenged with ways to address the phenomenon of cyberbullying, and school staff think they need training to deal with it. As this study has highlighted, the perceptions of school staff can sometimes differ, and as such, the views of senior management need to be taken into consideration to ensure that effective whole-school programmes are implemented and fully-supported.

REFERENCES


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Childhood Friendship: Its importance and the Educator’s Role

Jane Taylor and Michael Townsend

ABSTRACT

Most of us intrinsically understand the importance of friendship in our lives, and although we may not spend time considering it, we are aware it is beneficial to our happiness and well-being. As educators, we are often conscious of the friendships that exist in our classrooms, and are particularly mindful of those students who have difficulties making friends. This literature review examines the reasons why friendship is so important to us, and in particular, to the well-being of our children. Furthermore, it highlights ways that we can meet our responsibilities as educators to support New Zealand students in developing and maintaining friendships.1

Keywords: friendships, well-being

Research paper

INTRODUCTION

If asked, most of us would have little difficulty in drawing up a list of our friends. We could likely apply descriptors such as ‘best’, ‘special’, ‘casual’, ‘lifetime’ or ‘intimate’ to some of these friends and not others. Further, we could answer questions about the characteristics of each of these friends, the circumstances of the formation of these friendships, or the ways in which these friendships have been important to us. The detail with which we could do this belies the little time we spend reflecting on our friendships and the ease with which we take them for granted. In part, this is because making friends is ‘natural’ for us as social beings. But at the same time we are all aware of some people who struggle to make friends, or keep friends. It is these differences that have led both philosophers and psychologists to examine the nature of human friendships, how they develop, and the purposes they serve.

Because children’s friendships are a prominent feature of the social landscape of schools (Parr & Townsend, 2002), educators are concerned with questions about the developmental significance of friendship and its role in school learning and motivation, and this has led to educators examining their own role in fostering social relationships in children (Ladd, 1990; Rizzo, 1989; Zettergren, 2010). In New Zealand, the role of teachers in developing friendships has become a responsibility by virtue of its inclusion as a “key competency dimension” in the development of psychological well-being (KCP Curriculum Group, 2011).

This review examines the implications of childhood friendship for the happiness and well-being of students, and the ways that teachers can facilitate the development of student friendships.

HAPPINESS AND WELL-BEING

Although teachers and parents are typically concerned with the development of happiness in their children, the psychological literature often conflates the terms ‘happiness’ and ‘well-being’ as closely related, if not interchangeable, concepts (Veenhoven, 2000; Veenhoven, 2013) because of the conceptual difficulty in separating them. Does happiness lead to (or cause) psychological well-being? Is happiness evidence of psychological well-being? Is psychological well-being a critical determinant of happiness? Although ‘happiness’ has more common usage and has had a longer history in research, it is extremely difficult to define (Exenberger & Juen, 2014; O’Rourke & Cooper, 2010; Seligman, 2008). As eloquently stated by Howard Mumford Jones, “happiness belongs to that category of words, the meaning of which everyone knows, but the definition of which no-one can give” (cited in O’Rourke & Cooper, 2010, p. 95).

Our conceptions of happiness and well-being are complicated by several different factors, in particular whether we are using the terms in a subjective or objective way. Subjectively, happiness may represent an individual’s positive emotional rating of their overall quality of life, whereas objectively, happiness may be determined by the presence of certain factors in a person’s life, such as having good health, freedom, and financial security (Exenberger & Juen, 2014; O’Rourke &

1 This paper was prompted by the master’s thesis study of its first author who investigated happiness as a function of types of children’s friendships (Taylor, 2015). Difficulties in obtaining full participation compromised analysis of the data preventing its inclusion here.
A popular model that attempted to knit together the intricacies of happiness and subjective well-being was that proposed by Diener (1984). Diener argued that well-being has three components, the first of which he identified as ‘life satisfaction’, or a person’s evaluation of the factors that make up his or her life as a whole. The other two components of happiness that Diener (1984) proposed are positive affect, or an elevated level of high energy and pleasure, and negative affect, or an elevated level of unpleasant emotions and moods. Positive affect and negative affect in this view are not seen as opposite ends of the same spectrum, but as independent factors allowing, for example, the possibility that someone could have both low (or high) levels of positive and negative affect (Exenberger & Juen, 2014).

In an attempt to clarify these relationships, Seligman (2002) developed a model of “authentic happiness” with a focus on achieving life satisfaction. In this model, general happiness has three domains. The first is the hedonic, or positive emotion domain, with its roots in Freudian principles. The second is engagement, a state of flow where there is a “loss of self-consciousness, where time stops for you, and you are ‘at one with the music’” (Seligman, 2008, p. 20). The third is based on living a meaningful life, in which people recognise that their strengths can be used to be a part of, and to serve a purpose for, something bigger than themselves. According to this model, happiness can be measured in terms of life satisfaction on a scale, and the overall objective of authentic happiness theory is to increase life satisfaction.

As evidence of the complexity in dealing with the relationships between these concepts, the same author has recently completely reworked his original theory (Seligman, 2011). Here, the concept of happiness is reduced to the element of positive emotion, merely one piece of the puzzle that makes up subjective well-being. Engagement and meaning, accomplishment, and positive relationships are the other puzzle pieces identified as independently contributing towards overall well-being (Seligman, 2011).

Another model that identifies smaller contributing factors to the larger concept of well-being is Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1998). This Māori model of health and wellness views the four dimensions of te taha wairua (spiritual health), te taha hinengaro (mental health), te taha whānau (extended family health), and te taha tinana (physical health) as being equally fundamental to one’s general well-being. Unlike Seligman’s recent theory involving independent ‘elements’, Durie’s four dimensions are viewed as being closely interconnected, each influencing the other three as well as overall well-being (Durie, 1998).

These models of happiness and well-being demonstrate the complexity of the notions, and although a precise definition may not be obtainable, happiness is undoubtedly an important part of our lives, and a condition that we, as humans, strive to attain. Like Seligman’s ‘elements’, easier to determine than a definition of happiness are the factors associated with it. Numerous studies have explored how demographic, personality, and other variables affect the happiness levels of children (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Exenberger & Juen, 2014; Holder & Coleman, 2008; O’Rourke & Cooper, 2010). The last two of these studies, conducted in Canada and Australia respectively, both found that social factors, life outcomes, and aspects of personality all correlate relatively highly with childhood happiness, whereas demographic factors have a significantly lower correlation. O’Rourke and Cooper (2010) noted that happier students are likely to be more included, popular, and optimistic. They concluded that this knowledge “provides classroom teachers with an understanding of what constitutes happiness and the beginnings of a model for interventions in primary classrooms” (p. 106).

Whether we view the terms as synonymous or not, in preparing students for their journey through school as well as their future thereafter, it is of the utmost importance that we strive for maximum levels of happiness and well-being for them while in our care. This is more than simply a responsibility for educators to fulfill their legal obligations (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2007; New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2002, 2011; New Zealand Teachers Council, 2009). One factor that we can focus on, in working towards the goal of increased childhood happiness and well-being, is friendship.

FRIENDSHIP

Perhaps the main feature of friendship is its reciprocity. It cannot exist within one person’s intentions and actions towards another; it must include voluntary and mutual choice, understanding, and interaction between two people (Blieszner, 2014; Rizzo, 1989; Sharabany, 1994; Sullivan, 1953; Zettergren, 2010). Being selected and liked by a peer does not make you friends; a genuine friendship relation demands that you “like and select him or her too” (Zettergren, 2010, p. 164).

As well as being reciprocal, there are other qualities that humans seem to instinctively understand and expect of friendship. For example, when adolescents and adults are asked to define friendship or to describe the nature of their friendships, it is typically seen as a relationship based on affection, trust, companionship, respect, care and commitment (Blieszner, 2014; Nicholson & Townsend, 2011; Zettergren, 2010). In short, friendships are mutual, close and informal relationships in which we feel that we are supported. As noted in the opening
paragraph, these are not ideas that we often consciously think about but appear, none-the-less, to be deeply ingrained in us.

These expectations are not necessarily the province of older children, as even young children have clear and advanced understandings of friendship. Rizzo (1989) found that, when children as young as five years old were interviewed about their friendships, they appeared to have internalised concepts of friendship that included many of the qualities mentioned by adults. When the children in his study attempted to determine the existence of friendships in their lives, they used a process in which they compared their “internalised concept of friendship” with specific features of interactions with frequent playmates (Rizzo, 1989, p. 113). Furthermore, in their interactions with their peers, these children were likely “to act in accordance with this concept when with their friends, and to object when their friends failed to act in accordance with the concept” (Rizzo, 1989, p. 113).

**Intimate (or Best) Friendship**

Not only do we have a sophisticated understanding of what constitutes friendship, but we are also very aware of differentiations regarding types, or levels, of friendship. Most of us are very clear about our best friends, friends, casual friends, and acquaintances (Blieszner, 2014; Sharabany, 1994). Not only can we categorise our friends in relation to our entire friendship networks, but we also categorise our friends within specific contexts (Nicholson & Townsend, 2011). For example, children may have an overall best friend who is different from their classroom best friend and their sports team best friend. Similarly, adults may have a different ‘best friend’ at their work, their yoga class, and their book club. In other words, we have independent friendship systems and hierarchies for each of the numerous social contexts that make up our lives. Through interviews with older adults in New Zealand, it was found that some ‘best friends’ remain in spite of no contact for years and, in some cases, when they are no longer living (Nicholson & Townsend, 2011). Despite the extensive and complex natures of our friendship networks, most of us are very clear about what types of friendships we have with each of our friends.

**Popularity**

Friendship may also be viewed in terms of popularity. Popularity is independent of intimacy, and refers to the extent that you are perceived as a friend by those around you, even though this may not be reciprocated (Nicholson & Townsend, 2011). Looking at friendship from an evolutionary perspective, humans are social animals, and we evolved to seek out company and friendship for survival reasons. Although in evolutionary terms there were costs to making friends and forming groups, such as the transmission of diseases and competition for resources, the benefits that our early ancestors gained from social interaction greatly outweighed the costs. These benefits included the sharing of knowledge, resources, and parenting duties (Griskevicius, Haselton & Ackerman, 2015). In addition, socialising with others was imperative if one was to gain social status and attract mates. Furthermore, and perhaps most significantly, our early ancestors were safer from predators in groups. In fact, the importance of peer sociability was sufficiently significant to human safety to have survived as brain structures that are activated today by both social rejection and physical threat (Griskevicius et al., 2015). From this perspective, the reasons why we seek out friendships and feel so good about having friends, and our natural abilities to mentally manage and categorise our friendships so efficiently, become clearer.

**Development**

A number of researchers have investigated human friendships in relation to childhood development. In earlier years, a focus on specific stages of friendship development led to relatively restricted views of the ways that children progress through steps of interacting and relating to their peers (such as the ‘chumship’ model of friendship development proposed by Sullivan in 1953). However, recent research suggests that friendship development is a more simultaneous progression of social skills and motivations. Smith (2013) noted that children as young as two years old “seek out others as companions, prefer to be with particular children, comfort each other and share feelings” (p.152). A New Zealand study by Dunn (2004) also highlights the significant social strengths of young children, demonstrating that four-year-old children are able to cooperate with their friends and understand their friends’ intentions (Smith, 2013).

In addition to maturational influences on friendships, the friendships themselves play an important role in development. In a study of the interactions of best friends, McChristian, Ray, Tidwell and LoBello (2012) found that friends in childhood are “valued resources” (p. 463) who assist in the attainment or mastery of age-related tasks and skills that are vital for development. Such tasks include perspective-taking, communication skills, skills of negotiation involved in sharing, coping with stress and rejection, the ability to suspend judgement until others have explained their point of view, and even simple turn-taking or following the ‘rules’ of informal debate. As noted by Seiffge-Krenke (1993), friends provide new perspectives from which students “discover their own power to co-construct ideas and receive validation” (p. 76). Although some of these skills may have been acquired initially through interactions with adults, particularly parents, friendships provide both the vehicle and the opportunity to practice, master and
use these skills and behaviours in ways not possible by any other means. McChristian et al. (2012) go so far as to suggest that some of these benefits are exclusive to peer friendships in that the skills are not accessible through the often unequal family dynamics governing children's relationships with their siblings and parents (McChristian et al., 2012).

In addition to the links between friendships and the development of children's social skills there are also links to wider aspects of development, most notably to their psychological health and ability to learn (Buyse, Goldman & Skinner, 2003; Cranley Gallagher, 2013; Ladd, 1990; Pijl, Koster, Hannink & Stratingh, 2011; Rizzo, 1989). Some authors (e.g. Pijl et al., 2011) point out several benefits of childhood friendship, including an increase in the ability to cope with the social challenges and difficulties of school life. In addition to social life at school, academic performance has also been shown to be positively influenced by friendship at school (Buyse et al., 2003). It is for these reasons that researchers emphasise the importance of friendships among students in school settings, and the consequent role that teachers need to play in monitoring their students' friendships (Pijl et al., 2011).

HAPPINESS, WELL-BEING AND FRIENDSHIP

It is reasonable to assume that having friends is positive and makes us happy, and that not having friends would be negative and would make us unhappy. This is generally a safe assumption in that many studies have shown a strong relationship between friendship and happiness (Blieszner, 2014; Demir, Jaafar, Bilyk & Ariff, 2012; Nicholson & Townsend, 2011; Uusitalo-Malmivaara & Lehto, 2012). Uusitalo-Malmivaara and Lehto (2012), investigated the effects of different social factors on levels of happiness and depression in over seven hundred 12-year-old Finnish children. It was found that, for both boys and girls, the presence of two or more close friends with whom one could share confidences was associated with high levels of happiness and a reduced risk of depression.

However, this assumption of a positive relationship between friendship and happiness and psychological well-being is confounded by the type of friendship. As noted earlier, friendship can be viewed as a function of popularity or intimacy. In an early study (Townsend, McCracken & Wilton, 1988), scores on two measures of psychological well-being (self-esteem and sex-role orientation) of Year 10 high school students were each separated according to four independent groups of students (low popular/low intimacy; low popular/high intimacy; high popular/low intimacy; and high popular/high intimacy). As expected, those children with a best friend demonstrated higher levels of self-esteem and more positive sex-role orientation than those without a best friend. Interestingly, however, whether students were popular or not had no influence on their self-esteem or sex-role orientation. In brief, while intimacy was related to psychological well-being, popularity was not.

The somewhat surprising finding that positive well-being is associated with having a best friend, but not with being popular, has been replicated in other studies investigating different aspects of mental health conducted in New Zealand. For example, postgraduate student Laurie (1997) found similar results favouring intimacy but not popularity on well-being measures of loneliness and parental attachment in Year 10 adolescents' same-sex friendships.

A peculiarity across these New Zealand studies is that psychological well-being was least positive in the 'high popular/low intimacy' group (rather than the 'low popular/low intimacy' group, as might be expected), though not significantly. This trend for psychological well-being to be lower in children who are popular yet do not have a reciprocated best friendship remains to be explored, but, in summary, it is clear that close friendship is an important contributor to the well-being of children.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

As educators and parents in New Zealand, we cannot take children's friendships for granted. Not only does a large body of international research evidence support the vital role that friendships play in enhancing school learning and motivation, but there is a need to be active in supporting those friendships as a critical element in the development of children's well-being as a stated key competency dimension in our national curricula (KCP Curriculum Group, 2011; Ministry of Education, 1996, 2007). It is not enough to simply provide opportunities for social interactions to occur, such as playtime, recreation breaks, and free periods. We need to deliberately structure ways to encourage positive social interaction, particularly the case for those children who show signs of not forming good relationships with their peers (Buyse et al., 2003).

In most cases, encouraging social interaction can be achieved unobtrusively or passively, such as by arranging classroom furniture in ways that enable eye contact, or using teaching methods such as cooperative learning that foster reliance between group members in the co-construction of knowledge for the completion of academic tasks. With newly-formed classes, or with children at risk of social exclusion, teachers might use more overt strategies, such as direct teaching in social skills. For children showing signs of difficulties forming friendships, Evans (2010) reviews a number of simple strategies that parents and teachers can use to foster social interaction with younger children, while Mychailyszyn et al. (2010) offer suggestions more suitable for older children and adolescents.
Another useful guide for teachers, developed by Reddy (2012), comes in the form of nine group play interventions that can be implemented with younger students (and modified for older students) to support them in making and maintaining classroom friends. Each of these interventions is designed as an enjoyable classroom game that targets different social skills known to be important in making and maintaining friends, including meeting others, initiating and maintaining conversation, listening, cooperation, teamwork, sharing about oneself, learning about others, and giving and receiving compliments (Reddy, 2012). The acquisition of these skills in non-threatening classroom environments not only promotes classroom friendships, but is the foundation for the formation of social relationships beyond and after the classroom.

Some teachers have found ‘positive peer reporting’ effective in improving the social environment of classrooms. This simple method designed, in part, to reduce negative ‘tattle tails’, involves encouraging students to be aware of positive social behaviours in their classmates and reporting them to the teacher (Sulkowski, Demaray & Lazarus, 2012). The teacher then rewards the students who engage in positive behaviours. Used judiciously, this appears to be a simple, convenient and effective technique for increasing social involvement and improving peer social support and relationships for students (Moroz & Jones, 2002; Smith, Simon & Bramlett, 2009).

In New Zealand, a school’s set values offer teachers a pro-social culture that can act as a platform from which they are able to teach their students about social skills that support the forming and maintaining of friendships (Ministry of Education, 2008). A school’s values direct a focus on the expected behaviours of children, and a variety of lessons and learning tasks can be targeted to these. For example, the value of ‘respecting others’ offers a teacher opportunities to establish classroom rules, give explicit instructions, and set learning tasks around empathy, inclusion, and pro-social behaviours, with the aim of improving the quality of social interactions between students and supporting their friendships.

Underlying the strategies and suggestions discussed above are a number of principles that govern support for the development of social relationships, and Cranley Gallagher (2013) has captured these principles in a pyramid model (Figure 1). Designed for teachers, the model shows how additional, more intrusive, layers of support may be necessary to support the skills of friendship development of different children. At the base level, support constitutes setting up the classroom environment in a way that encourages positive and safe relationships, using such techniques as modelling caring behaviours, and establishing expectations and rules for respectful and kind interactions with others. At the second level of the pyramid, attention shifts to the teacher’s capacity to provide explicit instruction in social-emotional skills to all children in the class, as well as further small group instruction for children who require additional help and practice with these skills. At the top of the pyramid, attention shifts to those students with high social needs. Cranley Gallagher (2013) notes that this level requires personalised strategies and monitoring for individual children, and this support will depend upon the broader ecological factors impacting on these social behaviours. It is important as educators to remember that a child’s difficulties in forming and maintaining friendships may stem from a variety of complex factors, such as family disturbance, cultural differences, or a lack of sleep, and that personalised strategies should address these factors. While this tiered model appears simple, it provides a powerful framework for examining how we might best ensure that all New Zealand students develop in ways that increase their levels of happiness and well-being.

Figure 1. A pyramid model for supporting friendship development (Cranley Gallagher, 2013).

CONCLUSION

“If you have two friends in your lifetime, you’re lucky. If you have one good friend, you’re more than lucky” (Hinton, 1997).

From many perspectives, friendship is fundamental to the quality of our lives as human beings. While the evolution of our social relationships may lie in the simple needs for safety and comfort, research has shown the complexity of the ways in which our friendships have a fundamental influence on our happiness and well-being. Educators play a critical role in ensuring that children develop positive social relationships, not just because research has shown that such relationships enhance academic learning and motivation at school, but because the development of friendships is intrinsic to greater happiness and well-being in children and, ultimately, to us all.
REFERENCES


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An Insight into the Well-being of Primary School-Aged Children

Anastasia Miliffe

ABSTRACT

The child well-being movement seeks to enhance the well-being of all children and protect our most vulnerable. The plethora of definitions and approaches to child well-being may create ambiguity and uncertainty about what child well-being means and what research-based frameworks are available to support it. In this initial study, the well-being views of primary school-aged children were explored and aligned with the Developmental Assets approach which conceptualises child well-being in terms of the relationships, opportunities, competencies, values and self-perceptions that all youth need to be resilient and thrive (Search Institute, 2012). The results highlight the importance of interests to subjective child well-being and the limited opportunities reported by the majority of participants to constructively engage with their interests. This study suggests advocacy for children to have increased access to interest-based learning opportunities. The Developmental Assets approach, which includes a model for community development, provides school communities with a potential framework to understand, measure and respond to the well-being needs of students, as is required of schools by the Well-being for Success policy (Education Review Office, 2013).

KEYWORDS:
child well-being, developmental assets, primary

BACKGROUND

Child well-being is a multi-faceted construct that varies in its meaning across cultures and disciplines (Aldgate, 2010). It is most easily understood through the term health, with the terms well-being and health often used synonymously (Durie, 1994). Health is defined in New Zealand by Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1994) which constructs health around taha tinana (physical well-being), taha hinengaro (mental and emotional well-being), taha whānau (social well-being) and taha wairua (spiritual well-being), all of which are located, for Māori, on the whenua (land), their place of belonging. Health and well-being are understood to exist on a positive continuum, linked to the idea of a ‘good life’ (Buchanan, 2000), in which individuals and collectives thrive (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

While child well-being has two measurement paradigms, both support the child’s rights to have their voice heard and included on matters that affect them (Aldgate, 2010; United Nations, 1989). The child well-being indicators provide quantitative measures of child well-being that are used, for example, to guide the development of social policy (Ben-Arieh, 2010). Subjective child well-being research describes the other measurement paradigm. These studies have employed a variety of methodologies and have generated a large number of child well-being taxonomies (Dex & Hollingworth, 2012). According to Dex and Hollingworth (2012), the overarching themes include feeling loved within significant relationships, having a quality home, school and community environment, and being physically and emotionally healthy (see Table 1). Culture will determine what these themes look like. The well-being views of primary school-aged children are also included in the subjective child well-being studies published by Morgan (2010) and Fattore, Mason and Watson (2009), both of which are included in Table 1.

The Developmental Assets approach is an ecological, strengths-based and child-focused framework that conceptualises child well-being in terms of forty different Developmental Assets (Search Institute, 2012). Research has repeatedly shown that higher asset levels are associated with: a) greater achievement in school (Scales, Benson, Roehlerpartain, Sesma & Van Dulmen, 2006); b) increased valuing of cultural diversity and satisfaction with life (Scales, 2014), and c) reduced risk of certain behaviours including alcohol abuse and violence (Benson & Scales, 2009). Used in over sixty countries by over three million youth, and recently aligned with the international study of Health Behaviours in School-Aged Children, the validity and efficacy of the assets approach is well-established (Scales, 2014).
The recent development of a spiritual axis, defined as awareness of self and the world, connection and belonging to others, and having a life of meaning and contribution (Benson, Scales, Syvertsen & Roehlkepartain, 2012) further aligns the Developmental Assets approach with Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1994), which underpins the Health and Physical Education section of the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). This study was an initial exploration of the assets approach within the New Zealand context.

**METHOD**

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC). Support was gained from the principal and the board of trustees of a local primary school to include all Year 5 and Year 6 students attending this school in the study. An information sheet was then sent to parents including an opt-out form. Only one parent elected to return the opt-out form.

The study employed a mixed method design which involved semi-structured well-being discussions and administration of the Developmental Assets Profile-Preteen questionnaire (DAP-P). The semi-structured well-being discussions, held in either small groups or one-to-one, used an adapted version of Fattore, Mason and Watson’s (2007) interview guide (see Table 2). The well-being views of 81 participants (41 female and 40 male) were recorded. The DAP-P, which contained 58 questions relating to the 40 Developmental Assets, was read out loud by the researcher to whole classes. It was completed by 132 participants (65 female and 67 male). The average age of participants was 10 years old.

A data-driven thematic analysis was completed on the child well-being discussions (Braun & Clarke,

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### Table 1

**Key Components of Subjective Child Wellbeing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being healthy (44%)</td>
<td><strong>Main themes:</strong></td>
<td>Quality of relationships:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling loved (24%)</td>
<td>- Significant relationships</td>
<td>- With parents, friends, family,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a home (23%)</td>
<td>- Emotional life</td>
<td>teachers &amp; pets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having fun (21%)</td>
<td><strong>Central themes:</strong></td>
<td>- Including qualities of love,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling happy (19%)</td>
<td>- Positive sense of self</td>
<td>acceptance, care, support,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being cared for (17%)</td>
<td>- Agency</td>
<td>togetherness, respect, praise,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being safe (17%)</td>
<td>- Security</td>
<td>fairness, listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a family (14%)</td>
<td><strong>General themes:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Self and freedoms:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having friends (14%)</td>
<td>- Physical environment</td>
<td>- Health; food &amp; exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being supported (11%)</td>
<td>- Material &amp; economic resources</td>
<td>- Education; achievement &amp; aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Physical health</td>
<td>- Choices; use of time, possessions,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Activities</td>
<td>IT, freedom &amp; responsibility, sports</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Social responsibilities</td>
<td>&amp; outdoor activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Adversity</td>
<td><strong>Quality of Environment:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Home, school, neighbourhood</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- The importance of having fun</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and play at home and in the</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>neighbourhood, particularly for</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>primary school-aged children</td>
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### Table 2

**The Interview Guide**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</th>
<th>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary questions</td>
<td>1. What does well-being or ‘being well’, mean or feel like to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Tell me about a time in your life when things were going really</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Components of well-being questions</td>
<td>3. Tell me about people that make you feel well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Tell me about places that make you feel well.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Tell me about things that make you feel well.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Previous research was used to guide initial interpretation of the data, leading to the identification of 21 themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thematic maps were used along with thematic frequency data and co-occurrence rates to identify three main themes and five subordinate themes. The main theme of interests included discussion of music, art, literacy, dance, technology, nature, sports and toys. Inter-rater reliability between the researcher and a fellow graduate student was 86.5% (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The DAP-P data was entered into a pre-formatted Excel worksheet provided by the Search Institute. This produced a total assets score and eight individual asset category scores. The **constructive use of time** asset category was the lowest scoring asset category, with the **positive values** and **positive identity** asset categories also scoring in the low and vulnerable range. All other asset categories including **social competencies**, **commitment to learning**, **boundaries and expectations**, **empowerment** and **support** scored in the moderately high level.

The two data sets were integrated through a ranking process. The thematic data was ranked according to frequency and the assets data relative to strength of response.

**FINDINGS**

The thematic analysis gave rise to eight interconnected well-being themes (see Figure 1). The three main themes were **relationships**, **emotional health** and **interests**. Their interconnection is illustrated in the diagram by the three overlapping circles. The subordinate themes of **safety**, **values**, **special events and accomplishment** provided independent and inter-related contributions to well-being. All themes co-occurred with the **environmental** theme, visually represented in the diagram by the outer environmental circle.

![Figure 1: Child well-being themes.](image)

The main themes of **relationships and emotional life** have been well-established in the literature (Fattore et al., 2009; McAuley & Rose, 2014). The identification of **interests** as a main well-being theme may reflect age-specific importance to local primary school-aged children, an assertion supported by Chen (2011). The extract below illustrates the inter-relationship between the key themes:

**Researcher:** Tell me about people that make you feel well?

**Participant:** My family and my best cousin.

**Researcher:** What makes her your best cousin?

**Participant:** We are the same age and like the same stuff and we’re nice to each other and happy.

Table 3 integrates the thematic data and developmental assets data. There is a semantic overlap between the two most-frequently discussed well-being themes of **relationships and emotional health**, and the two strongest asset categories of **support**, and **boundaries and expectations**, with the latter providing for the former (Scales, 2014). This implies that the Developmental Assets approach could be applied to develop the asset categories of **support**, and **boundaries and expectations**, which for vulnerable youth may facilitate enhancement of **relationships and emotional health**. The most significant disparity between the two data sets was in the main well-being theme of **interests** and the weakest asset category of **constructive use of time**, in which the majority of children reported limited opportunities to engage with their interests outside of school. This finding argues for parents, teachers, practitioners and school leaders to facilitate increased access to interest-based learning opportunities for all students, especially in light of the **commitment to learning** asset category being the third strongest asset category.
IMPLICATIONS

The Education Review Office (ERO, 2013) asks all schools to measure and respond to the well-being needs of students. This request is based on the belief that, by developing a system to strengthen the well-being all children, we will be better-able to protect our most vulnerable children, promoting their well-being and positive educational outcomes (Kahn, 2010). The recently published Well-being for Success Pilot Study Update (ERO, 2015) highlighted the continued need to develop a greater understanding of children's well-being views and the variability amongst schools in their response to child well-being needs. The availability of the research-based Developmental Assets approach, with its questionnaire designed to collate the child's voice, model of community development and measurement framework which provides for ongoing measures of treatment efficacy, may be used by school communities to develop a clearer understanding of child well-being needs from the child's perspective, and provide a measured response.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research on either subjective child well-being or the Developmental Assets approach may look to analyse the data according to the dimensions of Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1994) or Te Wheke (Pere, 1997). Once the Developmental Assets framework has incorporated the newly-developed spiritual axis, future research would include a cultural analysis completed by Māori, and a pilot study to assess the efficacy of the assets framework.

CONCLUSION

A significant opportunity has recently emerged for school communities to develop local child well-being initiatives (ERO, 2013). The current study identifies one research-based framework that may facilitate an effective and efficient response. This study suggests the importance of increasing children's opportunities to constructively use their time and engage in interest-based learning opportunities as a pathway to enhancing the well-being of primary school-aged children. This has relevance to parents, teachers and practitioners, all of whom make decisions on a daily basis that influence child well-being. To affect positive change for the larger school community depends on our ability to collaborate, release traditional role boundaries (Idol, Paolucci-Whitcomb & Nevin, 1995) and work together to access and utilise the available resources.

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Anastasia Miliffe has a Masters in Educational Psychology from Massey University. Her previous research topics have included specific reading difficulties and the efficacy of intervention programmes for struggling readers. She is currently completing her Educational Psychology internship through Massey University and is employed by the Ministry of Education in Dunedin.

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Students Experiencing Severe Difficulty in Learning Maths: What Resources are Available to Help these Students?

Steve McNeil

ABSTRACT

A crunch point in the maths development of some children is Year 4. At this point it becomes obvious they are not only well-below national standards, but they are experiencing such a degree of difficulty in learning maths that they are still working at a Year 1 level or below. This is exemplified by a case study of a student referred to the Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) service because of severe difficulties with maths learning. This paper discusses the challenge these children pose for their teachers and for the RTLB who support them. It raises the issue of whether some of these students may indeed have dyscalculia. The paper also highlights some appropriate assessment tools and discusses the particular needs of students who have dyscalculic tendencies that manifest at the Year 4/5 class level. A range of readily available resources are discussed including information on how to access them.

Keywords: dyscalculia, mathematics assessment, mathematics learning

Practice paper

INTRODUCTION

A challenge for both teachers and RTLB alike is how to provide best for the learning needs of students who struggle to learn mathematics. Students who are deemed to be well-below in mathematics after three years at school may be assisted in Year 4 through such programmes as ‘Accelerating Learning in Mathematics’ (ALIM) (see: http://nzmaths.co.nz/accelerating) and COSMDBRIC (an acronym for counting, ordering, sequencing, making, dictating, basic facts, revise game, introduce game, check student profile) (Hirst, 2010). However, there are some students who are not yet sufficiently advanced to benefit from these programmes. Assessing just what strengths and weaknesses these students have in maths can itself be challenging. The most commonly-used assessment tools that the teachers will likely have used are ‘Junior Assessment of Mathematics’ (JAM) and perhaps Global Strategy Stage Assessment (GloSS) and Numeracy Project Assessment (NumPA) (see: http://nzmaths.co.nz/mathematics-assessment). However, if children are working at Level One or below, none of these tools provides much useful information. Tools such as cognitive profiling systems (COPS) and ‘Lucid Assessment Systems for Schools’ (LASS) (see: www.lucid-research.com) may provide further guidance on visual sequential memory and the like. However, it may be wise to consider the type of indicators that typify students who have dyscalculia. In New Zealand, thanks largely to the work of leading academics such as Dr Anna Wilson, dyscalculia is now being recognised as a genuine learning disability. The field of educational neuroscience in which she is now a pioneer offers hope for such students and promises to add much quality to teaching practices in the immediate future. Experts such as Dr. Wilson and Professor Brian Butterworth of the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience at University College, London, claim that as many as six percent of the population may have dyscalculia (Butterworth & Yoe, 2011). If this is the case, then many of the students who fall so far behind their peers in mathematics in their early years of schooling may in fact have undiagnosed dyscalculia.

Research strongly suggests that dyscalculia often occurs in comorbidity with dyslexia and other learning difficulties. It may occur with dyslexia 50 percent of the time, and with ADHD 30 percent (Wilson et al., 2015). It is thought to be a difference in brain function which may occur in families (Wilson, 2008). Differences in the functioning of the parietal lobe are involved. Although there is a dyscalculia screener available online, this will only distinguish the dyscalculic learners from other low attaining learners (Butterworth & Yeo, 2011). The Dyscalculia Assessment Tool developed by Emerson and Babtie can give good data on what a child can do and what they think about numeracy (Emerson & Babtie, 2010). Their tool takes more than an hour to administer, but provides data on what the children themselves think about maths, parental voice and the voice of other professionals such as educational psychologists. It also
CASE STUDY

Student X, an eight year old boy at the time, was referred to the RTLB service by his school at the end of Term 2 of his Year 4 year. His school requested extra support in meeting his learning needs. At this point, despite having had all the programmes the school could provide, he was continuing to have difficulties with learning such that he was deemed to be well-below national standards in maths. He was also behind in literacy, but less extremely so. Despite his seemingly normal oral language ability, the gap between him and his peers, in maths in particular, was now much more noticeable than it had been when in Years 1-3. His Year 4 teacher was struggling to cater for his needs in this class with its wide spread of student abilities.

At that point his parents, concerned about his low sense of self-efficacy and increased anxiety, chose to move him to another local school for a fresh start. He settled in well. New his teacher, having observed his extremely-low level in numeracy, asked the RTLB to make this his focus.

Data gathering took the form of observations of his learning behaviour at maths time, teacher anecdotal records of her work with him, a JAM assessment, and an interview with the student himself, as well as one with his parents.

The analysis of the data revealed that although Year 4, Student X was in many ways still at early Curriculum Level 1 for he was missing some of the most foundational learning for maths development; most critically:

- the ability to subitise
- the ability to image a mental number line in his head
- the ability to estimate.

Because he had difficulty with this, he counted everything from one. He could not count on, nor make accurate estimates. Even given extra time to process, he became anxious and this exacerbated his problems with working memory. This was disguised by the fact that he had learnt some things by rote such as ‘5+5 is 10’ even though he clearly failed to understand that this meant one group of 5 plus another group of 5 makes a combined group of 10. He could not show ten with his fingers, but rather held them all up and started counting by pointing to his index finger firstly and then had trouble carrying the count over to his right hand. Although on his JAM test he came out overall around Stage Two or Three, this was not solid because in items involving counting and straight recall he did better. He said emphatically that he was ‘dumb’ at maths, and didn’t want his classmates to see him working with “baby things”. His parents’ belief was that until this time the extent of their son’s learning difficulties in maths had not been fully appreciated. They were in the process of arranging for him to have an assessment with a registered educational psychologist. The RTLB’s hunch was that he may well be diagnosed as having dyscalculia.

The initial goals were set just for the three months remaining of the school year. They were SMART goals but were perhaps overly optimistic. They targeted a shift towards the point where the overall teacher

Permission to publish this small case study has been given by the parent of Student X.
judgement would be that he was now working at Level One. The teacher made adaptations to her class timetable to allow for a daily slot when she would work one-on-one with him using concrete materials, subitising cards, dice, tens frames, number lines and a 100s board. The RTLB attempted to put Mathswizz in place for this student (http://www.whizz.com). However, the end of year review concluded that these goals had not been fully achieved. In truth the teacher had not been able to work with him as consistently as she had hoped due to all manner of factors ranging from Student X having lost some days due to sickness, and to school events that increasingly impacted on the class programme as the year came to its conclusion. The RTLB had found that for Student X one-on-one supervision was necessary with Mathswizz because without this the student just practiced his count-from-one strategy, applying this despite the oral instructions.

In the new year, with a new teacher, a new set of goals were set targeting more specifically the three foundational concepts of subitising, developing a mental number line, and estimation. The teacher attempted to work with him daily using resources provided by the RTLB, and a teacher-aide was trained to work with him providing further practice. This was funded by the Learning Support Fund (LSF).

After two terms the review produced data to show while there had been some progress overall (from Stage 1-2 to Stage 3-4 overall JAM), certain key concepts were still poorly developed. Student X struggled to consistently subitise groups up to five, though on good days he seemed to have mastered this, on other days he would revert to counting all the objects. He could count on and back on a number line when it was visibly present, but struggled to do so beyond 20 when having to visualise. Given a blank number line and being asked to mark where a number such as 42 would be, he was more accurate, being now usually within ten numbers of the correct position where initially he could be as far as twenty numbers off.

The referral, having run the maximum forty weeks as per the cluster policy, was discontinued with only two of five goals judged achieved. However, the recommendation was for the approaches being used to be continued for the rest of the year in the hope that given more time they might have yet a bigger effect. The school also created an opportunity for him to work one-on-one with the SENCO works with a younger ORS student on a programme focusing on number patterns.

The RTLB, reflecting on the intervention, felt that this referral had challenged the limits of his knowledge of foundational maths development difficulties despite having been an (NDP) Numeracy Development Projects Lead Teacher and having considerable junior school experience. Both teachers had been similarly challenged. Student X’s parents expressed appreciation of the new school’s efforts on their son’s behalf. Student X himself said he felt he was doing better, but still hated maths. Should the student be re-referred in the future, what further resources and teaching approaches would the RTLB be able to offer?

Resources: What resources are available for New Zealand teachers and RTLB struggling to provide for students such as Student X?

Resource selector tool: This tool has recently been developed to help educators provide more effectively for their students who are ‘well below’ in Maths (http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/System-of-support-incl.-PLD/Resource-selector/Year-1-10-students-below-mathematics-expectations). It has tabs that hyperlink to support if there is no leadership expertise in that school, and if there is a need for help with effective teaching practice. It also focuses on priority learners with hyperlink tabs including one for students with special needs. One of the helpful new resources that this links to is a Number Framework Matrix produced by the Central Regional Special Schools Cluster. This matrix has two parts: Fuel (PreLevel 1) detailing the steps a child needs to progress through to be ready for Launch. This is the type of tool that would have been helpful for the teachers of Student X who has existed for most of his schooling at PreLevel 1 to Early Level 1. It would support the type of more systematic small step programme that these students need much more than most other students. NZMaths (http://nzmaths.co.nz/alim-resources) has the ALIM resources of which Resource A may be useful; in particular difficulty recognising the patterns to 10. NZMaths also has a page called Knowing Five specifically on subitising and offers suggestions of what to try if students get stuck.

Commercial publications: The Dyscalculia Resource Book (Bird, 2011) suggest some teaching strategies and games. The Dyscalculia Assessment (Emerson & Babtie, 2010) also has specific teaching points for each subset of skills.

Apps: Many apps can be found to support subitising and number line concepts (e.g Little Monkeys), however, students need to use headphones to access the instructions. This can reduce the opportunity for the student to talk about his thinking. Furthermore, while working on the iPad, he can be simply practicing the very count-all-from-one strategy that is inhibiting his progress.

Numicon: (www.numicon.co.nz ) has a set shape to each of the numbers one to ten, and the holes in
each shape also help some students fix an image of a number in their heads. The highly visual and tactile nature of Numicon resources are particularly beneficial for such students. The manual Breaking Barriers is designed for students who are “experiencing particular difficulty in learning maths”, however, learning activities that involve using cuisenaire rods may be too abstract for our Kiwi children.

**Digital:** There are also a number of computer-based programmes designed to help students with dyscalculia: The Number Race by Dianne Wilson (http://www.thenumberrace.com) and the more general Word Shark (http://www.wordshark.co.uk numbershark). Both The Pond (https://www.pond.co.nz) and Pinterest (https://www.pinterest.com) are gateways to access excellent resources on subitising, number lines, and estimating. However, here too it is vital teachers mediate this learning. If teacher-aides are to work with such complex students they will need specific training even as far as following scripts supplied by the teacher and/or RTLB. It is vital that such students are encouraged to voice their thinking in order to overcome the dependence on counting from one. A free online resource has fifty games to help these students break out of the counting trap: (www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm/binaries/27870_02_Ronit_Bird_Ch_01.pdf). It may be helpful to these students to provide models of maths being used in authentic contexts.

**SUMMARY**

The most valuable resource for students struggling to grasp the basics in maths is their classroom teacher, especially when she/he commits to giving them a few minutes of one-on-one time daily. The missing foundations must be identified and teaching strategies must be systematically put in place in order to plug these gaps. Materials used need not be any more high tech than the old BSM maths gear or authentic materials such as shells or stones. It is vital that teachers direct teacher-aides very specifically when working with these very complex students. The challenge for the RTLB is how to assist teachers and schools as they work to achieve this.

**REFERENCES**


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**AUTHOR PROFILE**

Steve McNeil, an RTLB since 2006, works in the Twin Coast RTLB Cluster (Cluster 3) and has the curriculum responsibility for maths. Before this he taught for thirty years in New Zealand primary schools including junior school and special classes. He has been a lifelong learner completing a Trained Teacher Certificate in 1972 and then the Diploma in Teaching, Bachelor of Theology, Graduate Diploma in Education Technology, and in 2008, the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Special Needs Resource Teaching).

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ABSTRACT

Teachers are often faced with the challenge of teaching students with high functioning autism without any formal professional development in autism. Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) are a service which is able to provide short-term support for teachers. One of the roles of RTLB is to provide teachers with the required support to further develop their skills to enable them to effectively teach students with high functioning autism. The current study explored teachers' understanding of high functioning autism and aimed to identify what support teachers of these students would like to receive. Results indicated that, contrary to some previous studies, teachers have an understanding of the characteristics of autism. Results also identified support that teachers would like to receive. The supports identified are supports that RTLB are able to provide.

Keywords:
autism, teacher support

Research paper

INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) umbrellas a number of disorders (Ministries of Health & Education, 2008). The characteristics of autism spectrum disorder include impaired understanding and use of verbal and non-verbal communication, social behaviour, and the inability to think and behave flexibly. People with high functioning autism meet the criteria for autism but do not have an intellectual impairment and their language development may be average or even high (Ministries of Health and Education, 2008). New Zealand pre-service teacher education programmes often do not include content on teaching students with diverse needs (Chatfield & Higginson, 2012). With the rate of students with autism attending inclusive schools increasing, teachers are almost certain to teach a student with autism within the first few years of their teaching career. Without training in ASD or support from professionals with knowledge of ASD, teachers are faced with a significant challenge when they have a student with autism in their inclusive classrooms (Callias, Helps & Newsom-Davis, 1999).

One of the roles of RTLB is to work with teachers of students with learning or behaviour needs and to provide them with the support and guidance they need to further develop existing skills and to learn new skills as a teacher. RTLB are a service provided by the Ministry of Education. They offer short-term support for teachers of students with moderate needs. This service differs from the Special Education and Services (SE&S). SE&S is a service provided by the Ministry of Education for students with long-term high needs. Support for these students is provided through the Ongoing Resource Scheme (ORS) and often remains in place for the entire time a student attends school. RTLB receive many referrals to support teachers of students with high functioning autism. High functioning autism is not a visible difference. Unless a teacher knows that their student is on the autism spectrum or has knowledge of the characteristics of high functioning autism, their behaviours can easily be misinterpreted as non-compliance or poor behaviour choices. One of the challenges teachers face in developing their knowledge of the characteristics of high functioning autism is the fact that the characteristics can be quite different from one student with autism to another. No two students are the same (Able, Garwood, Schultz, Sherman & Sreckovic, 2014). The number of students with autism attending mainstream schools is increasing (Able et al., 2014; Barned, Knapp & Neularth-Pritchett, 2011; Lindsay, Proulx, Scott & Thomson, 2013). Teachers in mainstream schools in New Zealand will, on average, teach a student with autism at least once every four or five years (Chatfield & Higginson, 2012). Despite the large number of students with autism attending mainstream schools, the process of meeting their learning and participation needs is complex and poorly understood (Barned et al., 2011; Davis & Florian, 2004 in Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). Bryson, Corkum, Giffen, Hume, Power and Smith (2014) stated that teachers find it difficult to meet the wide-ranging and varying needs of students with autism in an inclusive environment, therefore
training professionals to educate and support students with autism can be a significant challenge in the field of autism.

The issues and concerns raised by teachers in regards to the effective teaching of students with autism appear to be overwhelmingly universal (Burns, Leblanc & Richardson, 2009). The purpose of the current study was to explore what teachers know about high functioning autism and what support they would like to receive to assist them in meeting these students needs. There is little published New Zealand research in the area of teaching high functioning autistic students so the current study is timely and relevant. The data obtained from the current study is useful not only for RTLB but also for principals, special education needs co-ordinators and other education professionals such as those concerned with initial teacher education or those thinking about professional development and learning needs of teachers. It will further enable education professionals to meet the needs of teachers who request assistance and support for teaching students with high functioning autism.

TEACHERS’ UNDERSTANDING OF AUTISM

Cassimos, Polychronopoulou, Syriopoulu-Delli and Tripianis (2012) and Campbell and Segall (2012) stated that although some studies have acknowledged the importance of teachers’ knowledge of ASD, there has not been a lot of research in this field. These authors distributed questionnaires to assess teachers’ knowledge of autism. The studies clearly identified teachers’ lack of knowledge of autism. Many teachers responded that they were not capable of recognising autistic characteristics and did not know that autism is hereditary (Cassimos et al., 2012). Over two thirds of teachers surveyed by Campbell and Segall (2012) thought that autism disorders only existed in childhood and that with proper interventions children would outgrow autism. Many teachers thought that autism could be caused by early childhood trauma. More than half thought that all children with autism are similar to one another. Over half did not know that the diagnosis for Asperger’s Syndrome is the same as the diagnosis for high functioning autism (Campbell & Segall, 2012).

Research published by Mavropoulou and Padeliaudu (2000), Barned et al. (2011) and Callias, Helps and Newsom-Davis (1999) found similarities with relation to the misconceptions revealed by Cassimos et al. (2012) and Campbell and Segall (2012) but their results also show evidence of teachers’ correct knowledge of characteristics of autism. When Mavropoulou and Padeliaudu surveyed pre-service teachers about the specifics of Asperger’s Syndrome and high functioning autism, more than 80 percent had the correct understanding about the diagnostic criteria. This contradicts the findings of Campbell and Segall. Teachers in the Barned et al. study understood that medication does not treat the core symptoms of autism and that the core characteristics of autism included social and language difficulties and sensory impairments (Barned et al., 2011). Teachers in the Callias et al. (1999) study were aware that classroom organisation such as predictability, explicit instruction and structure can make a difference to the behaviour of a student with autism.

TEACHERS LACK PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Often teachers do not have enough professional development in the area of autism and this lack of professional development may contribute to the many challenges of working with students with autism in inclusive classrooms (Barnard, Broach, Potter & Prior, 2002; Callias et al., 1999). Callias et al., in a study designed to gather information regarding professional development about autism received by teaching professionals and about their professional development needs, surveyed 72 teachers and support staff. The results revealed that although approximately 70 percent of the participants had worked with children on the autistic spectrum, only 5 percent had received specific professional development in their teaching qualification and 5 percent had attended in-service training days. Teachers in mainstream schools are working with students on the autism spectrum without formal training or professional development in the area of autism (Barnard et al., 2002; Callias et al., 1999).

Teachers Want and Need to Receive Professional Development

Lack of professional development has been identified as one of the challenges faced by teachers of children with autism in mainstream classrooms with some studies showing that teachers feel they lack adequate information about autism and how to work with students in their classroom (Lindsay, Proulx, Scott & Thomson, 2013). However, studies inquiring about the willingness of teachers to receive professional development in the area of autism have been carried out in recent years (Clinton et al., 2014; Humphrey & Symes, 2013). A major finding was that both beginning teachers and experienced teachers would like to receive professional development in teaching children with autism. Teachers have expressed the desire to not only participate but also implement professional development activities in the area of autism (Clinton et al., 2014). In a study by Humphrey and Symes (2013), as many as 80 percent of teachers - including members of senior management and special education needs co-ordinators - indicated a willingness to receive professional development on autism if it was made available.
Even a small amount of professional development is helpful for teachers, especially beginning teachers, to work effectively with students with autism. A professional development session as small as three hours and twenty minutes is enough to increase knowledge of autism and evidence-based practices along with an increase in comfort levels with potentially teaching a student with autism (Burns et al., 2009). Teachers have reported that the most helpful professional development they have received was hands-on training, mentoring by colleagues with experience in teaching students with autism, and workshops held by the school and by outside agencies (Bryson et al., 2004).

Additional Support Teachers Would Like to Receive

Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) aim to support teachers to meet the needs of students with diverse needs in mainstream classrooms. In order to provide effective support for teachers working with students with high functioning autism we need to consider the support teachers have identified as useful to them. Studies have identified a comprehensive list of support that teachers would like to receive. For example, Glashan, MacKay and Grieve (2004) found that one of the most useful aspects of attending one day courses is the chance to meet other teachers in the same situation, and that one of the greatest needs of teachers is the reassurance that the strategies they have developed are acceptable. Teachers highlighted the need for collaboration between teachers, special education teachers, school psychologists and parents (Able et al., 2014). An important finding from Campbell and McGregor (2001) was that it is not only the teachers with little or no experience of teaching students with autism who would like to receive support but also the teachers with experience of teaching students with autism. Teachers experienced in teaching students with autism listed practical advice and strategies; observations and ‘hands-on’ experience with the student; regular contact and follow-ups with parents, teachers and students; advising teachers about individual needs in all areas of school life; training to raise awareness at school level; written guidelines and information on courses; programmes of study for the student, and exchange visits with other schools as supports they would find beneficial. Teachers without experience in teaching students with autism identified supports such as the demonstration of strategies, provision of material on autism and assistance with individual action plans as assistance they would consider helpful (Campbell & McGregor, 2001).

As important as it is to consider support that teachers would like to receive, consideration also needs to be given to support that is offered but is viewed by teachers as ineffective or needing improvement. Emam and Farrell (2009) have found that teachers want the support of a teacher-aide who works closely with the pupil and that the role of a teacher-aide is indispensable. However, Glashan, MacKay and Grieve (2004) found that although teacher-aides were regarded very highly, teachers were stressed by having to direct a teacher-aide when they didn’t have the necessary knowledge themselves. Teachers felt that the support of a teacher-aide was adequate only if the teacher-aide had knowledge of autism. Teachers value collaboration between special education teachers and psychologists (Able et al., 2014) but teachers are sometimes confused about the role of special education teachers and how they can access the service (Glashan, MacKay & Grieve, 2004).

The remainder of this paper discusses a small study investigating teachers’ understanding of high functioning autism and what support they would like to receive to further develop their skills in teaching students with high functioning autism in mainstream classes.

METHOD

The study was carried out in one primary school in New Zealand. This particular school was chosen for two reasons. One, it is a large primary school with a high number of teaching staff and, two, because it is a school I have not worked in so there was no conflict of interest. Permission was gained from the school principal to conduct and publish this study. All teachers on the staff were invited to participate regardless of whether or not they had previously taught children with high functioning autism. The invitation to participate was also extended to the management team: they also teach in classrooms from time to time. Support staff were not invited to participate because the aim of the inquiry was to explore the knowledge and needs of teachers.

An introductory telephone call was made to the principal of the participating school and the topic and purpose of the inquiry was explained. This was followed by a letter and a copy of the questionnaire requesting permission to invite the teaching staff to participate. An information sheet explaining the purpose of the inquiry was personally distributed at a weekly staff meeting. Teachers were given the opportunity to ask questions and were encouraged to contact the researcher if they had any queries. Participants were given ten days to submit the completed questionnaire. A reminder was issued to the participants via the online daily staff notices after one week.

The data was gathered using a Survey Monkey questionnaire consisting of ten questions (see Appendix 1).
The questionnaire was divided into four sections: teachers’ knowledge of high functioning autism; professional development received by teachers; professional development teachers would like to receive, and support teachers would like to receive. The questions were designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire began by asking participants to indicate their experience of teaching students with high functioning autism. Three of the questions required a true or false response. Two questions were multi-choice where the participants were asked to choose all of the options that applied to them. These two questions included an ‘other, please specify’ option. Two questions asked the participants to rate a statement using a 5-point Likert scale and two questions required a brief written response. The questionnaires were automatically emailed to the researcher when participants submitted their completed questionnaire.

Thirty one teachers were invited to participate. Eleven teachers responded. Seven of the eleven teachers indicated that they had not had any experience of teaching children with high functioning autism.

Quantitative data was automatically analysed through Survey Monkey thus errors arising from faulty data management was avoided. Simple numerical techniques were used to analyse the data. Qualitative data collected as written responses were systematically recorded individually and have been included in the results.

RESULTS

Teachers’ Knowledge of High Functioning Autism

Six questions in the questionnaire explored teachers’ knowledge of high functioning autism. Results show that teachers in this study had a good understanding that interventions that work for one child with high functioning autism may not work for all. Teachers knew that not all children with high functioning autism have the same characteristics. More than half of the participants were aware that the diagnostic criteria for Asperger’s Syndrome is the same as the criteria for high functioning autism. Nearly all of the teachers understood that autism is not caused by a traumatic experience early in life and that even with effective intervention children will not outgrow autism. All but one of the teachers who participated in this study were able to identify characteristics of high functioning autism. The majority listed anxiety, difficulties with social skills, social interactions and communication skills as what they considered to be the main characteristics of high functioning autism. Other characteristics listed were the dislike of change, repetitive noises and rhythm, hypersensitivity, being ‘in their own world’, and preoccupation with a special interest.

Professional Development Received by Teachers

Less than half of the participants indicated that they had received professional development in the area of high functioning autism during their teaching career. Two of the five participants who had received professional development completed courses specifically relating to ASD. The remaining three participants indicated that they had received professional development from their Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo), Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), Speech Language Therapist (SLT), Occupational Therapist (OT) and colleagues. Five participants did not respond to the question. It is assumed that these participants did not respond because they have not received professional development in this area.

Table 1 Professional Development Teachers Would Like to Receive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of professional development</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visiting other classrooms with students with high functioning autism</td>
<td>6 80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A series of workshops</td>
<td>7 70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training included in a staff meeting</td>
<td>4 40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One day workshop</td>
<td>3 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other suggestions</td>
<td>2 20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: only 10 of the 11 teachers responded to this question

Participants were asked to choose the types of professional development they would find helpful from a list of four examples of professional development. The responses indicated that most teachers would like the opportunity to visit other classrooms with students with high functioning autism. Other suggestions of professional development participants would like to receive were short overviews and a series of workshops where the teachers try out strategies in between workshops. One participant did not respond to this question.

Table 2 Support Teachers Would Like to Receive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of support for teachers</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working alongside professionals trained to work with students with high functioning autism</td>
<td>11 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical advice and strategies</td>
<td>11 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from colleagues with more experience with teaching children with high functioning autism</td>
<td>10 91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>10 91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-aide</td>
<td>10 91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement and reassurance</td>
<td>8 73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other suggestions</td>
<td>1 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total respondents</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants were asked to identify what types of supports they would like to receive if they had a child in their class with high functioning autism. They were provided with a list of suggested types of support and were asked to choose all supports they would find helpful and also specify any other support they would find helpful. In addition to the suggested types of support provided in the questionnaire, one participant specified time to work one-to-one with the student to gain an understanding of how the individual thinks and works, support tailored to the individual needs of the student, and support with communication skills as other support that would be helpful to teachers.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to investigate two questions: 1) What are teachers’ understandings about teaching students with high functioning autism? and 2) What support would teachers like to receive to increase their confidence in teaching students with high functioning autism in their mainstream class? The purpose of exploring these two questions was to provide RTLB with data to further enable effective support and assistance for teachers of students with high functioning autism.

Results indicate that the teachers in this study have an understanding of high functioning autism as evidenced in the high percentage of correct responses to the survey questions relating to teachers’ knowledge. The majority of the participants understood the similarities between the diagnostic criteria for high functioning autism and Asperger’s Syndrome and that autism is not caused through a traumatic experience. Most participants knew that children will not outgrow autism even with an effective intervention and that one intervention will not necessarily be effective for all children with high functioning autism. Participants were able to list a variety of characteristics of high functioning autism. These results differ to the findings of Cassimos et al. (2012) and Campbell and Segall (2012) who identified teachers lacked knowledge in all of the knowledge-based questions asked in the current study. A possible reason for this contradiction in findings may be that teachers are becoming more aware of autism due to the increase in the number of children diagnosed with autism in recent years (Able et al., 2014; Barnard et al., 2011; Lindsay et al., 2013).

Despite the increase in students with autism in schools (Barnard et al., 2002; Callias et al., 1999) teachers in this study indicated a lack of professional development in the area of autism. Five participants did not answer the question asking if they had received professional development in the area of high functioning autism. The assumption could be made from this lack of response that these teachers had not received professional development. These results are consistent with the findings of Callias et al. (1999) and Barnard et al. (2002).

Other important findings of this study are that teachers would like to receive some form of professional development in high functioning autism. Of the four professional development options listed in the questionnaire for participants to choose from, most teachers indicated that they would like to visit other classrooms with students with high functioning autism. This form of professional development is aligned with the new approach to professional learning and development recently announced by the Minister of Education (Parata, 2015). An advisory group was established to provide a report to the Ministry of Education which sets out their thinking about a new approach and principles for professional learning and development (Professional Learning and Development Advisory Group, 2014). Evidence in the report suggests that professional learning development is effective when leaders and teachers collaborate with colleagues internal or external to the school. Barrar, Fung, Timperley and Wilson (2007) report that teachers getting together in formal learning opportunities or less-formal discussion groups and talking about problems is a valuable form of learning. The idea of professionals learning from and with each other is not new. Rogoff (1994) wrote that the concept of a community of learners is based on the premise that people learn as they participate in shared undertakings with others with all playing active roles. This contrasts with models of learning based on the belief that learning occurs through transmission of knowledge from experts to the learner who plays a passive role.

Teachers in this study have clearly indicated that they want to receive professional development in the area of high functioning autism. It was clearly indicated that they would value support in the form of working alongside professionals trained to work with students with high functioning autism and receiving support from colleagues with more experience with teaching children with high functioning autism. This finding is evidence that teachers want to engage in learning opportunities such as the community of learners described by Rogoff (1994). Interestingly, only a few teachers indicated that they would be keen to attend a one day workshop. Although one day presentations and workshops have been described as ‘one hit wonders’ (Chatfield & Higginson, 2012), Burns et al. (2009) reported that small amounts of professional development are helpful for teachers working with students with autism. This finding could be an indication that professional development considered beneficial to teachers is moving away from
the learning model where experts deliver the content to communities of practice where learners learn from each other.

Professional development is one way of supporting teachers to effectively teach students with high functioning autism but there are other forms of support available for teachers. One of the aims of the current study was to inquire about additional support teachers might like to receive. Participants were asked to choose from a list of five possible supports for teachers of high functioning autistic students in mainstream classes that they would like to receive. Nearly all of the participants indicated they would like teacher-aide support and the majority indicated that all five choices would be forms of support they would like. There is no way to know if the participants chose the supports because they are supports they would find helpful or if they chose them simply because they were the supports listed in the questionnaire. If the supports were chosen because they are examples of support that teachers would value, this identifies implications for RTLB. Teacher-aide support, practical advice and strategies, support from colleagues with more experience with teaching children with high functioning autism, resources, encouragement and reassurance, and working alongside professionals to work with students with high functioning autism are all supports that RTLB are able to provide.

The findings from the current study highlight the need for RTLB to ensure that teachers are aware of the support they are able to provide and how they can access this support to enable them to further develop their skills in teaching students with high functioning autism.

LIMITATIONS

While the results of the current study provides some valuable suggestions for RTLB there are limitations in the research which need to be considered for future studies. One important limitation of the current study is the small sample size. The participating school was chosen because of the large number of teaching staff but despite meeting with the staff to explain the purpose of the study only 35 percent participated in the survey. A further limitation was the limited number of response choices associated with some questions. More responses in the text boxes would have provided further data. A further limitation was the length of the questionnaire, it contained only ten questions. More data could have been obtained if the questionnaire contained more questions, however this had to be weighted up with the need for the questionnaire to be able to be completed in a very short time as teachers are very busy people and they do not have time to participate in lengthy surveys.

CONCLUSIONS

Research clearly shows that teachers would like to receive professional development in the area of teaching students with autism and they are willing to engage in professional development courses to increase their knowledge and confidence to effectively teach students with autism in mainstream classes. It is not only teachers with little or no experience of teaching students with autism who are seeking knowledge and support but also teachers who have had experience with students with autism.

Teachers have identified working alongside professionals trained to work with students with high functioning autism and practical advice and strategies as forms of support they would like to receive to assist them with teaching students with autism. Teachers identified visiting other classrooms with students with high functioning autism as professional development they would find helpful. These findings support the new approach to professional learning and development reported to the Ministry of Education by the Professional Learning and Development Advisory Group (2014). Findings from this study highlights implications for RTLB. The support and professional development that teachers are asking for can be provided by RTLB. The Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour Service Toolkit states that schools can expect that RTLB will work alongside teachers to provide practical support and advice, assist to build teacher capability and collaborate with other agencies. Through a seamless approach, RTLB will enable teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners (Ministry of Education, n.d).

REFERENCES


APPENDIX ONE: Questionnaire on teaching children with high functioning autism

1. Have you taught children with high functioning autism?
   ☐ No
   ☐ Yes. Between 1 and 5 students.
   ☐ Yes. More than 5 students.

2. The diagnostic criteria for Asperger’s Syndrome is the same as the criteria for high functioning autism.
   ☐ True
   ☐ False

3. Traumatic experience early in life can cause autism.
   ☐ True
   ☐ False

4. With effective intervention most children with high functioning autism will outgrow the disorder.
   ☐ True
   ☐ False

5. Children with high functioning autism all have the same characteristics.
   ☐ Strongly agree
   ☐ Agree
   ☐ Not sure
   ☐ Disagree
   ☐ Strongly disagree

6. If an intervention works for one child with high functioning autism it will work for all children with high functioning autism.
   ☐ Strongly agree
   ☐ Agree
   ☐ Not sure
   ☐ Disagree
   ☐ Strongly disagree

7. If you are aware of any characteristics of high functioning autism, what are the three main characteristics that you know of?

8. What support do you think you would like to receive if you had a child in your class with high functioning autism? (choose all that you would find helpful)
   ☐ Teacher-aide
   ☐ Practical advice and strategies
   ☐ Support from colleagues with more experience with teaching children with high functioning autism
   ☐ Resources
   ☐ Encouragement and reassurance
   ☐ Working alongside professionals trained to work with students with high functioning autism
   ☐ Other (please specify)

9. If you have received any professional development in the area of high functioning autism, what was the professional development and how useful was it to you?

10. If you think you would benefit from in-service training in the area of high functioning autism, what sort of training would you like to receive? (choose all that you would find helpful)
    ☐ One day workshop
    ☐ Training included in a staff meeting
    ☐ A series of workshops
    ☐ Visiting other schools with students with high functioning autism
    ☐ Other (please specify)

AUTHOR PROFILE

Debbie Williams

Debbie Williams is a Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour working in the Horowhenua region. Her teaching career began as a teacher-aide before completing her diploma of teaching at Massey University College of Education. Debbie completed her Bachelor of Education as an extramural student and she has recently completed her Master in Specialist Teaching.

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ABSTRACT

In early childhood education [ECE] settings, teachers need to be conscious of the diverse learning needs of individual children in their care. Meeting individual needs has roots in the rights discourse which aims to promote human rights, social justice and inclusion, removing barriers that may hinder learning for children with diverse needs (Gordon-Burns, Purdue, Rarere-Briggs, Stark & Turnock, 2012; Mortimore, 2011). As the population becomes more diverse, ECE teachers are challenged more and more in their daily practice. In response to the increasingly diverse needs of young children, teachers are continually trying to incorporate inclusive practice (Macartney, 2012; Moffat, 2011). However, for various reasons, some ECE settings may find this difficult and this may be due in part to society’s negative attitude towards difference (Macartney, 2012). Perhaps the biggest challenge teachers face today is dealing with issues of inequities (Christman, 2010). We propose that education be more focused on promoting an understanding of diversity and difference where educators understand each individual learner. In promoting social justice, strong advocacy is called for to meet individual needs in early childhood settings. Through a framework of inclusive education, this article discusses some existing challenges and presents ideas on how early childhood teachers could promote equity and social justice in their settings.

Keywords: early childhood, equity, inclusive education, social justice

Research Paper

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood teachers have many responsibilities and challenges. They want to teach, to protect young children’s rights and make efforts to meet each child’s individual needs. Protecting children’s rights is a challenge but it is a necessity because at this age children are defenceless to social influences (Christman, 2010). It is important for early childhood teachers to engage in self-review and reflection and in particular, to appraise their practice, taking a critical look to see if their early childhood education [ECE] settings are meeting individual needs of children and their families. As pointed out by UNESCO (1997), the early years are important for child development. It is a time when children discover diversity and difference in a positive way, especially if they have teachers who advocate for them. In light of this, it is very important to put measures in place to ensure that these attributes of respecting diversity and difference are fostered in early childhood settings.

Inclusive early childhood settings are those settings that recognise that all children and their families have rights to access quality education and care from settings of their choice regardless of their gender, culture, ability, disability or any difference (Education Review Office, 2012). In inclusive settings, teachers promote equity and social justice, and strive to give children and their families a sense of belonging while the individual needs of children are met (Moffat, 2011). To achieve this, teachers must be aware of dominant assumptions, beliefs, attitudes and exclusionary practices so that they can challenge these when advocating for children’s rights. Stark, Gordon-Burns, Purdue, Rarere-Briggs and Turnock (2011) argue that everyday beliefs, attitudes and actions that are exclusive need to be challenged early in the education of children. This is because they have negative consequences for the inclusion of children with diverse needs and their families. Deficit beliefs and assumptions are the biggest barrier to inclusion (Macartney, 2012), therefore it is important for teachers to be conscious of these so that they protect the right of every child to quality early childhood education because inclusive early childhood education “is about rights, social justice and equity” (Gordon-Burns, Purdue, Rarere-Briggs, Stark & Turnock, 2012, p. 155). A respect for every child’s right contributes greatly to inclusive settings.

WHY ARE INCLUSIVE ECE SETTINGS SO IMPORTANT?

There is national and international legislation that supports human rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) promotes the rights
of children worldwide. In New Zealand, the Education Act (1989) makes it unlawful to discriminate against any child attending their local school regardless of abilities, disabilities, culture, race, ethnicity or language. The Human Rights Act (1993) states that people from birth to adulthood should be respected regardless of who they are. The Special Education Policy 2000 (SE2000) was introduced in 1996 with the intention of ensuring that children’s individual needs are met without segregation. It was a landmark policy with the aim of supporting inclusion of students with special needs in educational settings and ensuring that their individual needs were met. In SE2000 it is stated that, “the government’s aim is to achieve, over the next decade, a world class inclusive education system that provides learning opportunities for all children” (Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 5). This is the system that every child with diverse needs and their family wish for. However, two decades on, New Zealand is yet to claim that it has a world class inclusive education system. A lot of work still needs to be done. It requires dedication and advocacy from all New Zealanders who believe in social justice for a world class inclusive society to be achieved.

In ECE, this was further strengthened by the early childhood education curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996b), which was “… designed to be inclusive and appropriate for all children and anticipate that special needs will be met … [and] programmes of each centre will incorporate strategies to fully include children with special needs” (Ministry of Education, 1996b, p. 11).

Te Whariki also states that all children, regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, age, background or ability should be given equal opportunities for learning. Though it does not prescribe the method to promote cultural diversity, it clearly states that education and care providers are expected to promote it. This was strengthened by the Education Early Childhood Services Regulations (SR 2008/204) which states that the curriculum should encourage, “children to be confident in their own culture and develop an understanding and respect for other cultures” (Article, 43, [i] [a] [iv]). These regulations recognise that families have aspirations for their children and it is the educators’ responsibility to ensure that these are met in collaboration with families to ensure that children are not discriminated against.

VALUES AND POLICIES

Socially-just and inclusive education in enabling environments is what most families wish for. This is where ECE leaders, owners, managers and teachers have a huge role to play. Families have often been frustrated because the settings are not ready or may not know how to include a child with diverse needs. For example, Macartney and Morton (2009) narrate a story of a child with special education needs. Teachers felt it was the responsibility of the Education Support Worker [ESW] to educate and care for the child, and therefore this child was only allowed to attend the centre on the days and times when the ESW was there. In this case, the teachers did not consider the right of the child to be educated by qualified teachers and to be in the setting of the family’s choice. In some cases of exclusion, those in settings argue that they are not ready for inclusive practice because the physical space is not accessible for every child. This was one reason given by a centre turning down a boy with cerebral palsy in a story which made headlines in July 2015 (Johnston, 2015). Denying children access was also cited in Purdue (2006) where she asserted that some settings simply did not accept disabled children or would put conditions on them such as coming with an adult each day. However, Watson and McCathren (2009) argued that designing settings to ensure that all children can be as actively involved and independent as possible is important. Consequently, educational leaders need to ensure that all areas of education and play are accessible. Creating inclusive environments is about changing our environment and practice to suit the needs of all children.

Once a physical structure suited to the needs of all children is in place, the next step is to look at centre policies and philosophy. Settings that clearly state their inclusive values and practise these are successful in inclusive practice (Moffat, 2011). Unfortunately however, values have been communicated within a range of excluding discourses, and in particular, the medical, charity, lay and rights discourses (Fulcher, 1989). The medical discourse emphasises diagnosis and specialised segregated facilities for children (Mortimore, 2011). The charity discourse views children as helpless and needing help. Whilst the lay discourse is associated with negative myths and stereotypes about these children (Neilson, 2005), the rights discourse is more concerned about social justice, human rights and inclusion (Mortimore, 2011). Gordon-Burns et al. (2012) advocate for teachers and educational leaders to consider children’s rights when creating policies. Familiarity with legislation is key. Clarifying philosophy and policies in a socially-just language is important in creating enabling environments as the language used may determine whether a setting is inclusive or not. It is important that educational leaders and teachers be guided by the rights discourse and recognise the importance of social justice. A centre with an inclusive philosophy and policies will determine how each individual child is viewed and whether efforts will be made to meet
individual needs (Moffat, 2011). We are therefore calling for educational leaders to stand up for children’s rights to create enabling environments.

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

There is no doubt that even with environment philosophies and policies that are inclusive to all children, settings will not be inclusive without effective teachers. Their dedication plays a big part in meeting individual needs (Foreman, 2011). However, some teachers may have negative attitudes towards children with diverse needs (Macartney & Morton, 2009; Neilson, 2005) and make it difficult to meet individual needs. Generally, New Zealand early childhood settings have a long history of children with diverse needs attending the same setting alongside their peers, but, as Macartney (2012) noted, attending the same setting as their peers does not necessarily mean their individual needs are met. It is important for teachers to see beyond the physical presence of children with diverse needs. In inclusive settings teachers are planning for individual children (Moffat, 2011). It is important for teachers to know that they do not need to change the child with diverse needs but that they need to change the programme and their ways of doing things to suit the needs of individual children (Ministry of Education, 2009). A willingness to engage positively with all children and their families, and create pedagogical practices that are reflective of an inclusive programme, is important. This is supported in the Education Early Childhood Services Regulations (SR 2008/204) which states that curriculum should,

“Respect and acknowledges the aspirations of parents, family, and whānau … of the enrolled children in relation to the learning and development and decision making about those children” (Article 43, a, iv & b).

For teachers to know the child and to provide for the child’s needs they need to work in positive and effective collaboration with families. Researchers have noted that when parents and teachers collaborate effectively around children’s learning, inclusion is enhanced (Dunn, 2008; Moffat, 2011). We are therefore encouraging teachers to actively engage with children and their families in order to give every child the best start in life regardless of their gender, ethnicity, abilities, disabilities or culture, and to find out what each child’s needs are and respond to these. If it is something teachers are not familiar with it is important to seek help from those with more knowledge in the area, keeping in mind that while the child is enrolled in the centre, they are the responsibility of the teachers. For example, a child who is deaf or hard-of-hearing may need the centre to critically look at their noise levels and how the child is spoken to. Some children may need ECE settings to implement sign language to be fair and just, and to address these children’s right to effective communication.

LOOKING AT INCLUSIVE ECE THROUGH THE LENS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

A major outcome of globalisation is increased migration of people to Western industrialised societies exposing all families to a multicultural life (Rana, 2012). Cultural diversity is an important issue in education where migrant families bring diverse languages and culture to the settings (Chan, 2006). This helps children, families and teachers to learn about different cultures and accept differences in a positive way. In order to provide an inclusive environment especially for children who are from different cultures, the curriculum needs to recognise differences and diversity and address cultural inequality so that all children can participate (Ang, 2010; Chan, 2006).

Provision of equal opportunity is embedded in Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996B). It recognises the diversity of ECE in the context of different cultural perspectives for children to “develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritages” (Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 9). However, there is the question of how to provide equal opportunities to diverse communities. It is argued in the literature that ECE settings only represent the values of the dominant social groups (Chan, 2011). Chan argues that the current discourse of multiculturalism practiced by early childhood teachers works only to marginalise diversity and encourages cultural homogeneity (Ang, 2010; Chan, 2011). Chan discusses that some educators believe all children go through the same developmental stages, have similar needs and reach their potential if these needs are met. However, this mono-cultural view fits only with dominant cultural perspectives and does not recognise cultural diversity, thus continuing to marginalise minority groups (Chan, 2006).

One characteristic of globalisation is the homogenising of cultural representation of western culture. In the context of ECE, as Pearson and Degotardi (2009) pointed out, the World Bank and UNESCO are encouraging globalisation influenced by the Western ideology of child development. There is research that suggests Western ideologies cannot be applied to all contexts (Kennedy, 2006; Pearson & Degotardi, 2009; Sanagavarapu, 2010). In many Asian cultures, children’s development is greatly influenced by others in the community and children’s identity is construed in relationship and interaction with others (Kennedy, 2006; Pearson & Degotardi, 2009). Also, behaviour and development are culture-specific, where, for example, in a cross-cultural study done by Shieffelin
and Ochs (cited in Fleer, 2006), among Kaluli families in Papua New Guinea, the caregivers refrain from making eye contact with babies. They face infants towards the social group so that they interact with the social group early in life. Thus, different cultures have different practices and expectations of child development.

When respecting diverse cultures, it is about recognizing that cultures are not all the same, or homogenous, but heterogeneous. Different cultures and communities need to be recognised as diverse and respected for their differences. It is important that teachers do not force children into the dominant culture at the expense of their own culture. It also helps to challenge power relations to see the world critically and reflectively (Chan, 2011). We are proposing that teachers, children and families be supported and encouraged to share information about their culture and to help others avoid making assumptions about specific cultural groups (May & Sleeter, 2010). Respect, positive relationships, positive attitude and role-modelling play a vital role. When teachers have positive attitudes about every child, when they role-model and include everyone despite their skin colour or cultural background, then children start to build friendships with others who respect and include them (Ponciano & Shabazian, 2012).

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Early childhood teachers have many responsibilities and challenges in providing inclusive environments and catering for individual needs. It is important that teachers understand each child’s needs including learning, physical, social, intellectual or cultural needs. Accepting diversity and difference in a positive way is an obligation. It is paramount to protect children’s rights to uphold equity and social justice. There are national and international legislation that support human rights such as UNCROC, Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008 Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008 and Te Whāriki, and these guide teachers and ECE settings to be aware of children’s rights and meet individual needs of children and their families. Social justice and inclusive education in enabling environments is what most families wish for. Therefore, settings where all children are actively involved and independent as possible, andcentre policies and philosophy that clearly state inclusive values and where teachers are effective in advocating for children’s rights, should be encouraged so that children receive the best start in life. It is imperative that early childhood teachers identify children who need focused attention for various reasons. Young children are the future, therefore it is important that teachers work in partnership with their families to understand them and help them grow up to be confident, competent and independent members of society.

**REFERENCES**


AUTHOR PROFILES

Thecla Kudakwashe Moffat

Thecla Moffat is a registered teacher who has been in the teaching field for over 20 years both overseas and in New Zealand. She started as a new entrant and Year 1 teacher for 10 years before transitioning to early childhood where she was an educator, a team leader and a mentor for student teachers. She then joined the tertiary sector in educating New Zealand’s teachers for three years as a lecturer. Currently she is working in the Ministry of Education providing early intervention support for children with special needs and their families. She has a huge interest in inclusive education for children with diverse needs and promoting emotional and social competencies in the early years. She has done research in inclusive early childhood education and positive child guidance.

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Lata Rana

Lata Rana has a PhD in Education from the University of Melbourne. She has a wide experience of teaching and research. Lata has done extensive research on globalisation and women’s access to education. Lata’s research focus is on globalisation, cultural diversity and early childhood education research.

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Binky Laureta

Binky Laureta has been involved in early childhood education for more than 15 years. She started her career as a preschool teacher, then lecturer in Manila, Philippines before moving to Auckland, New Zealand. She is currently lecturer and programme leader for the Graduate Diploma at New Zealand Tertiary College.

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ELWYN RICHARDSON AND THE EARLY WORLD OF CREATIVE EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND

MARGARET MACDONALD

Reviewed by: Jayne Jackson

Elwyn Richardson (1925-2012) was an important figure in New Zealand education. His visionary creative classroom practices, developed between the late 1940’s and early 60’s in a small rural primary school in Northland, received national and international acclaim after the publication of his book ‘In the Early World’ in 1964. This book has left an enduring legacy amongst teachers having been reprinted and updated several times, most recently in 2012. Richardson’s pedagogies have echoes in contemporary models of best practice that is child-centred, focused on personal inquiry, integration, and creativity, relational and relevant to the learner.

This book is firstly a sensitive biography which explores Richardson’s educational influences. MacDonald appears to have a fondness for Richardson as a person and admiration for his educational stance but this is tempered by her skill as a writer as she adopts a more neutral perspective, letting the facts speak for themselves rather than attempting to persuade the reader to hold Richardson in high esteem. Richardson’s own publications reveal details of the learning and the artistic, literary and scientific products of his students whereas this book enquires deeper into Richardson’s thinking and the development of his personal pedagogies. MacDonald documents his recollections of being an experimental learner and teacher from his early years on Waiheke Island, through a painful time at boarding school, to the evolution of his practice at Oruaiti School and beyond. In crafting this biography, the author drew on existing publications, personal correspondence with Richardson, interviews with Richardson’s past pupils, and discussions and observations during what was to be Richardson’s last visit to Oruaiti. Despite Richardson’s initial reluctance to be interviewed, MacDonald engaged him in extensive correspondence (in excess of 300 letters over a 5 year period). This primary source will be of interest to educators and historians for years to come.

The second theme of this book is the historical backdrop to Richardson’s teaching and writing. MacDonald weaves a narrative that reveals the contemporary landscape of New Zealand educational policy, practice and players. This is further augmented by her discussion of theory from leading international educationalists of that time such as John Dewey. This is a useful inclusion to the book as it helps the reader develop a broader understanding of the context from which Richardson’s pedagogies emerged. Richardson himself eschewed the world of theory in favour of contextual reflective practice and actively rejected the labels that others tried to give him. It is somewhat ironic that in this book he is now positioned as a theorist and model educator.

MacDonald draws attention to the centre of Richardson’s philosophy which she sees as a deep commitment to respect the learner and build a relationship between teacher and student such that both can benefit through the creation, examination and re-examination of the products of learning. Given that relationships inside the classroom were pivotal to his teaching approach, it seems anomalous that this biography does not include material regarding the relationships Richardson had with his own family and friends. At the end of this book, I was left wondering about Richardson’s personal life and how this may have influenced him as an educator.

I wanted a glimpse of Richardson as an ordinary person, not only as an educational hero. Despite Richardson’s teaching being more than 60 years old and set in a classroom without modern technology, many resources, and fast access to information via the internet, this book is a reminder that some classroom dilemmas have been unresolved for a long time. For example, MacDonald shares that Richardson saw integration as not just a way of dealing with the demands of a full curriculum but as an essential tool for learning as each discipline offers its own unique perspective on a subject. In turn, these varied viewpoints provide access to rich and varied...
learning opportunities. Richardson also grappled with other topics of current relevance including parent engagement, child-centred learning and peer assessment.

This book provides a refreshing contrast to our current educational climate of neoliberalism. It stand as a reminder that education can be and is about so much more than commodification, a means to an end and test results. I highly recommend MacDonald’s book for classroom teachers who are looking for inspiration and to think critically about their own practice. This book is an opportunity to refocus teacher priorities on the joys of teaching and learning. As a profession, we should acknowledge the gift that education can be to both student and teacher.

REVIEWER PROFILE

Dr Jayne Jackson is a lecturer at Massey University, she currently co-ordinates the Graduate Diploma of Teaching (Primary) at the Albany campus. Jayne’s background is in primary teaching. Her research interests are in situated literacy and the roles families play in supporting the development of learning in literacy.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Title: Elwyn Richardson and the early world of creative education in New Zealand

Author: Margaret MacDonald

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THE ESSENTIAL ORAL LANGUAGE TOOLKIT – A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

JANE VAN DER ZEYDEN

Reviewed by: Cath Steeghs

This extremely practical, colourful and theoretically-informative toolkit puts oral language skills and their development in their proper place at the centre of a vibrant literacy programme. Jane explains in her introduction about the need for all students in the 21st century to be able to stand out from the crowd with employers through their fluent, articulate speaking skills. She links these skills and their development to deliberate, explicit and strategic teaching of oral language skills as the foundation to the more expected reading and writing. She wonders if we have neglected or perhaps ignored the development of high levels of competence in speaking and listening of late, and if we want to ‘make talk more powerful’ in our classrooms then utilising her toolkit may be one way of achieving that.

The text is divided into nine chapters which cover such topics as the essentials in Chapter One, the things to know about oral language such as its early development; deliberate and learning-focused teaching in Chapter Three, and oral language and the digital world in Chapter Eight. Each chapter has theory linked to practice in classrooms the reader will recognise. This linking is concise, extremely informative and is followed by multiple examples, templates and explanations of activities that classroom teachers could immediately implement. The templates are easily reproduced and may be done so by the purchaser of the text. Throughout the text are photographs of classrooms, classroom displays and young people and their teachers at work. A useful item within each chapter are the ‘Tips’ highlighted in orange with suggestions for how the activities might be useful or provide reflection opportunities for students and teachers alike.

Teacher reflective practice is a highlighted activity within the text and has been presented in a variety of ways – tips within pages, questions at the end of sections and emphasised within the summaries at the end of each chapter. This reflection adds a richness to this toolkit that will allow each teacher to make the toolkit their own, tailored to their students, their school and their style.

This is an extremely useful toolkit that combines highly-regarded teaching strategies from the disciplines of co-operative learning, English as second language learning and pragmatic, evidence-based research about how skills in oral language completely underpin learning achievement in reading and writing for all students. I will be recommending this resource to my cluster members and teachers that I am working with as a valuable resource to add to their kete of knowledge and to broaden their knowledge of literacy development with their students. I sincerely thank Jane for compiling such a detailed and highly-informative text for us to use.

REVIEWER PROFILE

Cath Steeghs is currently working as an RTLB in Cluster 16 in Hamilton. She has worked in special education both in New Zealand and internationally for over 30 years. Recently her work has seen her focus on Maori student achievement supporting teachers to enhance their practice to include culturally-responsive pedagogy to their practice. Cath has been involved with Kairaranga since its inception and utilises the research it illustrates into her work with and for teachers.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Title: The essential Oral Language Toolkit – A practical Guide for Teachers

Author: Jane van der Zeyden

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