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Exploring teaching practice to support young children’s prosocial behaviour: “What would we tell Pig and Frog to do?”

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

This thesis presents the results of a collaborative action research (CAR) study undertaken with a small group of early childhood education (ECE) teachers to explore teaching practices to support children’s prosocial behaviour development. Prosocial behaviour is an essential component of children’s social-emotional development and has been shown to be a critical factor for children’s positive life outcomes. As many children attend early childhood education centres, the ECE teachers in these settings need to have effective strategies to support and enhance children’s development of prosocial behaviour. In this study, the teacher participants wanted to make changes to their existing teaching practices and the CAR inquiry process acted as a form of professional learning and development to support teachers to make these changes.

Placed within the theoretical paradigm of social constructivism and pragmatism, qualitative data was gathered using a range of methods. As part of the action research process, the initial research question was refined to form two questions: 1) in what ways did teachers change their teaching practice to support children’s prosocial behaviours, and 2) how did the CAR process support the adoption of changed teaching practice. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic coding approach. Findings from question one showed that teachers adopted an integrated and strategic approach, implementing a scenario-based learning strategy using puppets at the group level and supporting this with prompts to children’s thinking in the natural context of play. Findings from question two revealed that each of the five stages of the CAR process was instrumental in supporting the teachers to achieve the aims of their inquiry.

Furthermore, an overarching theme of intentionality and intentional teaching emerged from both research questions. As a result of the CAR process teachers developed shared intentions for children’s prosocial behaviour that shaped their subsequent teaching strategies. Consistent with previous research in professional learning and development, the CAR process of engaging with research and evidence enabled teachers to make shifts in their teaching theories of practice resulting in teachers embracing more intentional teaching strategies.
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