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Enhancing Student Decision Making in Technological Practice

A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD Education

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March 2014

ABSTRACT

This research focused on identifying the influence of conceptual understandings of *technological modelling* on students' ability to make informed decisions when developing technological outcomes. It also explored the relationship between student achievement in the components of Technological Practice (*brief development, planning for practice, and outcome development and evaluation*) and their concepts in *technological modelling*.

An emancipatory action research design was adopted for this study due to its responsiveness to the context in natural settings, and focus on critical reflection with intent to improve understandings and practice within social settings (Elliot, 1981; Poskitt, 1994). Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered using a mixed methods approach, consisting of a questionnaire, portfolio evidence and interviews. These data were gathered over three research cycles from 27 student participants who were in years 12 and 13 in 2008 and 2009 respectively.

Category labels were developed from literature and an initial exploration of the data, to describe the 'nature of reasoning' and the 'nature of practice' students applied when engaged in undertaking technological practice to address a need or opportunity. The category labels allowed exploration of the relationships between the different forms of reasoning students employed when undertaking technological practice. These labels also enabled exploration of how reasoning informed student decision making and supported their justifying that the technological outcomes they developed were 'fit for purpose'.

The research found a positive connection between student understanding of concepts underpinning *technological modelling* and their curriculum achievement in the components of Technological Practice - *brief development, planning for practice, and outcome development and evaluation*. That is, when student understanding of *technological modelling* were enhanced their competency to undertake *brief development, planning for practice, and outcome development and*

evaluation also increased. The research also showed that students who held more sophisticated understanding of *technological modelling* (Level 6 or above) could discuss how practical and functional reasoning work together to identify risk, and enable informed and justifiable design decisions to be made. In addition these students could also justify the technological outcomes they developed as ‘fit for purpose in their broadest sense’ (Compton, 2007; Compton & France, 2007b). In contrast, those students who held low curriculum level understanding of *technological modelling* (below Level 5) demonstrated a lack of ability to integrate practical and functional reasoning to inform their decision making when undertaking technological practice. As such, their decision making most often centred on determining the physical description of a technological outcome, with little apparent thought to social-technical considerations that underpinned its development, and later implementation into its intended environment.

This research concludes that when teachers support students to develop their curriculum understandings of *technological modelling* their ability in undertaking technological practice becomes more sophisticated, and they are equipped to develop technological outcomes that they can defend as ‘fit for purpose in their broadest sense’ (Compton, 2007; Compton & France, 2007b). The research findings therefore present a case for teachers to place an explicit emphasis within their teaching programmes on enhancing student conceptual understandings of *technological modelling*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have kindly contributed time, expertise and support during my research. I would like to especially thank the following people, and share the achievement of this thesis with them:

The student research participants and their teachers, who generously gave their time and support to me, that enabled this research to be undertaken.

My colleagues, in technology education, that have encouraged and supported me to undertake this research.

My supervisors, Dr Jenny Poskitt and Dr Vicki Compton, for their unwavering support and the critical feedback that has helped shape my thesis.

My family and friends, whose untiring patience, support and encouragement was ever present and much appreciated, and Les Harwood (my father), an old school no nonsense traditional woodwork teacher, who inspired me to pursue a career in technology education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>page</i>
Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Tables and Figures	ix
Acronyms used in Thesis	xii
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Overview of Chapter	1
1.2 Context of Research	2
1.3 Rationale for this Research	5
1.4 Research Aim and Questions	7
1.5 Structure of the Research Report.	8
CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1 Overview of Chapter	10
2.2 Technology Education in New Zealand Curriculum	12
2.2.1 Background	12
2.2.2 New Zealand Curriculum and Marautanga Project	14
2.2.3 Technology in New Zealand Curriculum	16
2.2.4 Nature of student learning in technology education	28
2.3 Technological Practice and the NZC (Ministry of Education, 2007)	31
2.3.1 Technological Practice: what is it?	31
2.3.2 Technological Practice within Technology Education	33
2.3.3 Technological Practice and Technology in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007)	35
2.4 Technological Knowledge	38
2.4.1 Technological Knowledge: what is it?	38
2.4.2 Technological Knowledge within Technology Education	39
2.4.3 Technological Knowledge and Technology in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007)	50
2.4.4 Technological Modelling in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007)	51

	<i>page</i>
2.5	Decision Making and Reasoning 55
2.5.1	Decision making 56
2.5.2	Reasoning 59
2.5.3	Decision making and reasoning in Technology Education 65
2.6	Summary of the Emergent Themes and Issues Identified from the Literature 66
 CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS	
3.1	Overview of the Chapter 70
3.2	Educational Research 70
3.2.1	Methodological approaches 70
3.2.2	Research methods 75
3.3	Approaches used for this Research 78
3.3.1	Methodological approach 78
3.3.2	Action research design 79
3.3.3	Rationale for using Action Research for this study 86
3.3.4	Data collection tools 91
3.3.5	Coding and Categorising Data 95
3.3.6	Indicators and Category Labels for Components of Technological Practice 96
3.3.7	Indicators and Category Labels for evaluating student reasoning and decision making within technological practice 109
3.3.8	Validity and reliability 113
3.4	Research Participants 117
3.4.1	Profile of schools and participants 117
3.5	Ethics 119
3.6	Summary 120
 CHAPTER FOUR RESEARCH FINDINGS: CYCLE ONE	
4.1	Overview of Chapter 122
4.2	Findings by Individual Students 123
4.2.1	Cycle One: Students' achievement in technological modelling, brief development, planning for practice, and outcome development and evaluation 124
4.2.2	Cycle One: Students' reasoning and decision making 125

	<i>page</i>
4.3	Cycle One Findings 127
4.3.1	Cycle One: Student Level of Achievement in technological modelling 127
4.3.2	Cycle One: Student Level of Achievement in brief development 129
4.3.3	Cycle One: Student Level of Achievement in planning for practice 130
4.3.4	Cycle One: Student Level of Achievement in outcome development and evaluation 131
4.3.5	Cycle One: Student Level of Achievement in reasoning and decision making 132
4.4	Relationship between Student Understanding of Technological Modelling and their Achievement of the Components of Technology Practice 133
4.4.1	Cycle One: Relationship between student understanding of technological modelling and their achievement in undertaking brief development 134
4.4.2	Cycle One: Relationship between student understanding of technological modelling and their achievement in undertaking planning for practice 135
4.4.3	Cycle One: Relationship between student understanding of technological modelling and their achievement in undertaking outcome development and evaluation 136
4.5	Relationship between Understandings of Technological Modelling and Reasoning and Decision Making 137
4.6	Summary of Findings 140
4.6.1	What curriculum levels for technological modelling, brief development, planning for practice, and outcome development and evaluation do students exhibit in Cycle One? 140
4.6.2	What evidence of reasoning and decision making can be identified from Cycle One student data? 142
4.6.3	In Cycle One: what is the relationship between student achievement in technological modelling, and their achievement in brief development, planning for practice, and outcome development and evaluation? 143
4.6.4	In Cycle One: what is the relationship between student achievement in technological modelling, and their reasoning and decision making when undertaking technological practice 144

CHAPTER FIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS: CYCLE TWO and THREE

5.1	Overview of Chapter	145
5.2	Interventions Focused on Enhancing Student Concepts of Technological Modelling: Cycle Two and Three	146
5.2.1	Cycle Two and Three: description of interventions	147
5.2.2	Cycle Two and Three: Students' achievement in technological modelling, brief development, planning for practice, and outcome development and evaluation	153
5.2.3	Cycle Two and Three: students' reasoning and decision making	157
5.2.4	Cycle Two and Three: student level of achievement in technological modelling	161
5.2.5	Cycle Two and Three: student level of achievement in brief development	162
5.2.6	Cycle Two and Three: student level of achievement in planning for practice	164
5.2.7	Cycle Two and Three: student level of achievement in outcome development and evaluation	166
5.2.8	Student Level of Achievement in reasoning and decision making	167
5.2.9	Relationship between student understanding of technological modelling and their achievement of the components of technology practice	172
5.2.10	Relationship between student understanding of technological modelling, and decision making and reasoning	182
5.3	Summary of Findings	188
5.3.1	What impact did interventions have on student achievement in technological modelling, brief development, planning for practice, and outcome development and evaluation?	188
5.3.2	What impact did interventions have on student reasoning and decision making when undertaking technological practice?	190
5.3.3	What is the relationship between student achievement in technological modelling, and their achievement in brief development, planning for practice, and outcome development and evaluation?	191
5.3.4	What is the relationship between student achievement in technological modelling, and their reasoning and decision making when undertaking technological practice?	192

	<i>page</i>
CHAPTER SIX DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS	
6.1	Overview of Chapter 195
6.2	Contribution to Research Literature 196
6.2.1	Reasoning and decision making category labels 198
6.3	Relationship between student conceptual understanding of <i>technological modelling</i> , their achievement in the components of Technological Practice, and their reasoning and decision making when undertaking technological practice 201
6.4	Implications of the research findings on the design of classroom based technology curriculum 204
6.5	Suggestions for Future Research 207
6.6	Conclusion 210
REFERENCES	212
APPENDICES	226
Appendix A	Information Sheet for Research Participants 227
Appendix B	Student Questionnaire 236
Appendix C	Interview Questions - Sample 239
Appendix D	Indicators of Progression for Technological Practice 241
Appendix E	Indicators of Progression for Technological Modelling 251

TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLES

	<i>Title</i>	<i>page</i>
Table 1	Research Cycles	89
Table 2	Examples of Category Labels: brief development	97
Table 3	Examples of Category Labels: planning for practice	100
Table 4	Examples of Category Labels: outcome development and evaluation	101
Table 5	Examples of Category Labels: technological modelling	105
Table 6	Category of reasoning and drivers underpinning decision making	111
Table 7	Individual student level of achievement in technological modelling; brief development, planning for practice, and outcome development and evaluation	124
Table 8	Individual student reasoning and decision making	126
Table 9	Combined student participant data Cycle One: technological modelling	128
Table 10	Combined student participant data Cycle One: brief development	129
Table 11	Combined student participant data Cycle One: planning for practice	130
Table 12	Combined student participant data Cycle One: outcome development and evaluation	131
Table 13	Combined student participant data Cycle One: reasoning and decision making	132
Table 14	Cycle One: student understandings of technological modelling and their achievement in undertaking brief development	134
Table 15	Cycle One: student understandings of technological modelling and their achievement in undertaking planning for practice	135
Table 16	Cycle One: student understandings of technological modelling and their achievement in undertaking outcome development and evaluation	136

	<i>Title – cont.</i>	<i>page</i>
Table 17	Cycle One: student understandings of technological modelling and their decision making and reasoning	138
Table 18	Individual student level of achievement in technological modelling; brief development, planning for practice, and outcome development and evaluation	153
Table 19	Individual student reasoning and decision making	158
Table 20	Combined student participant data Cycle One, Two and Three: technological modelling	161
Table 21	Combined student participant data Cycle One, Two and Three: brief development	163
Table 22	Combined student participant data Cycle One, Two and Three: planning for practice	164
Table 23	Combined student participant data Cycle One, Two and Three: outcome development and evaluation	166
Table 24	Combined student participant data Cycle One, Two and Three: reasoning and decision making	168
Table 25	Cycle One, Two and Three: student understandings of technological modelling and their achievement in undertaking brief development	173
Table 26	Cycle One, Two and Three: student understandings of technological modelling and their achievement in undertaking planning for practice	176
Table 27	Cycle One, Two and Three: student understandings of technological modelling and their achievement in outcome development and evaluation	179
Table 28	Cycle One, Two and Three: student understandings of technological modelling and their decision making and reasoning	182

FIGURES

	<i>Title</i>	<i>page</i>
Figure 1	Diagrammatic definition of technology and technological practice	31
Figure 2	Lewin's Scheme of Action	87
Figure 3	Cycles of the research	88
Figure 4	Combined student participant data Cycle One: student understandings of technological modelling	128
Figure 5	Combined student participant data Cycle One: student achievement in brief development	129
Figure 6	Combined student participant data Cycle One: student achievement in planning for practice	130
Figure 7	Combined student participant data Cycle One: student achievement in outcome development and evaluation	131
Figure 8	Combined student participant data Cycle One, Two and Three: understandings of technological modelling	162
Figure 9	Combined student participant data Cycle One, Two and Three: brief development	164
Figure 10	Combined student participant data Cycle One, Two and Three: planning for practice	165
Figure 11	Combined student participant data Cycle One, Two and Three: outcome development and evaluation	167
Figure 12	Cycle One, Two and Three: practical reasoning	170
Figure 13	Cycle One, Two and Three: functional reasoning	171
Figure 14	Cycle One, Two and Three: integrated reasoning	171
Figure 15	Cycle One, Two and Three: decision making	172

ACRONYMS USED IN THESIS

<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>page</i>
TiNZC	Technology in the New Zealand Curriculum	2
NZC	New Zealand Curriculum	2
LA	Learning Area	2
ECEC	Early Childhood Education Centres	2
NZQF	New Zealand Qualifications Framework	3
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority	3
MoE	Ministry of Education	3
NCEA	National Certificate in Educational Achievement	3
NZCMP	New Zealand Curriculum and Marautanga Project	4
IoP	Indicators of Progression	5
TKNoT: Imps	Technological Knowledge and Nature of Technology: Implications for teaching and learning	5
NMR	National Moderator Report	5
ELA	Essential Learning Areas	12
NZCF	New Zealand Curriculum Framework	12
MiNZC	Mathematics in the New Zealand Curriculum	13
TAiNZC	The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum	13
NSSS	National School Sampling Study	14
TKMoA	Te Kaupapa Marautanga o Aotearoa	15
DeSeCo	Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations	15
LAS	Learning Area Statement	16
TEALS	Technology Education Assessment in Lower Secondary	19
TKNoT	Technological Knowledge and Nature of Technology	19
BoT	Board of Trustees	119