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Enhancing teacher learning in inclusion

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Abstract

Enhancing teacher learning in inclusion is an action research study which researched how two New Zealand classroom teachers were facilitated to enhance their pedagogy and become more inclusive. An examination of the international literature suggested that contextual professional development, classroom action research, and a collaborative relationship with a critical friend would facilitate inclusive pedagogy. However, there were no published studies of New Zealand primary teachers engaged in classroom-centred action research on inclusion involving an educational psychologist. A two phase action research design was used, firstly negotiated and modelled by an outside researcher, second order action research, and secondly by empowering the teachers to become action researchers, first order action research.

Some inclusive practices were evident but two major barriers to inclusive practice in New Zealand classrooms were highlighted. These were an independent and autonomous teacher practice and limited use of individual student assessment data to inform teaching for individual learning. Active reflective thinking through reflection journals and teacher action research of teacher chosen classroom learning challenges occurred in two cycles of second order action research. Results established increased teacher focus on individual student learning, collaboration between themselves and the researcher, knowledge and skills of action research and its effectiveness in solving learning challenges within the teaching programme, use of student assessment data to inform subsequent teaching and learning, and critical awareness of the effect of their beliefs, knowledge and actions on student learning. Whilst literature suggests that schoolwide re-culturing is necessary, this research has demonstrated that two teachers engaging in practitioner action research, supported by a small community of practice, reflective thinking and critical dialogue, can improve their pedagogical and inclusive practice.

Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my four sons: Nicholas, Christopher, Benjamin, and Thomas, and to Lynne, my very patient wife who will no longer have to ask the question, “Are you going to school tonight?”

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List of abbreviations used to identify extracts

Abbreviation	Description
ARR	Action research review
CI	Child interview
CO	Classroom observations
J	Janine
PI	Parent interview
RJ	Reflection journal
T	Tina
TI	Teacher interview

Glossary

<i>Abbreviation or Term</i>	<i>Description</i>
6 Year Nett	A series of assessments given to children in New Zealand on, or around, their sixth birthday. It was developed by Dr Marie Clay (1979 – second edition) and assesses such skills as word knowledge, letter knowledge, and common features of books and writing knowledge (e.g. front of book, full stops, etc). The lowest scoring children are given remedial assistance based on interventions suggested by Dr Clay in her book, “The early detection of reading difficulties: A diagnostic survey with recovery procedures.”
Decile ranking	A school's decile indicates the extent to which the school draws its students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students. A school's decile does not indicate the overall socio-economic mix of the school. Census information is used to calculate the decile. There are five factors that make up the socio-economic indicator: household income, occupation, household crowding, educational qualifications, and income support. (Information from the website of the Ministry of Education, New Zealand)
Disabled children	This is the term used by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand as outlined in their 2007 -2012 Statement of Intent. This term replaces several others used in the past including children with special education needs and children with special needs.
NUMP	Numeracy Development Project. The focus of the Numeracy Development Project is improving student performance in mathematics through improving the professional capability of teachers. The focus is on the number strand of the New Zealand Mathematics Curriculum. As a part of the project teachers have been provided with an assessment kit that they can use to assess the number learning of their students.
ORRS	Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes. Approximately 1% of school-aged children in New Zealand qualify for these extra resources. The schemes provide extra teaching support to the child, and if needed, monies with which to employ para-professional assistance to assist the teacher to better meet the needs of the student. The student also qualifies for specialist support, for example, physiotherapy, speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, psychology and specialist curriculum support.
School Entry Assessment Kit [SEA]	An assessment kit compiled by the New Zealand Ministry of Education (2001) to assess the skills of five-year old children at school entry. Included in the assessment are book knowledge, mathematics, alphabet knowledge and oral language through retelling.