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Sense of community in a primary school learning community

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education (Guidance Studies)
at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

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I certify that the thesis entitled *Sense of community in a primary school learning community* and submitted as part of the degree of Master of Education (Guidance Studies) is the result of my own work, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for any other degree to any other university or institution.

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Abstract

This study examined the strength and nature of the sense of community in a small New Zealand primary school learning community. The research used a mixed methods approach to examine individual and group-level predictors and characteristics of sense of community among parents, students and staff. The strength of sense of community was assessed through the Brief Sense of Community Index (BSCS) while further understanding of the sense of community was gained through analysis of qualitative data according to McMillan and Chavis' (1986) four dimensions of sense of community.

Factors identified as enabling sense of community were: acceptance and belonging, shared understandings of and commitment to parent volunteering, positive experiences of adult induction, being heard, shared norms or guiding principles, pride in the community, shared values and goals, reciprocal support, friendship, personal development, shared history, and sharing experiences. The study revealed a difference in the sense of community between students and adults in the school, with students having a higher sense of community. Parents with more children in the school had a significantly higher sense of community than parents with fewer children enrolled in the school. Data showed small negative correlations between sense of community and being in the Synergy building, and also between sense of community and frequency of contact between Synergy community members.

The findings reveal the overlapping and multi-dimensional nature of sense of community.

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