

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

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
Master of Education (Early Years)

at Massey University, Manawatū,
New Zealand.

Lorna Kathleen Duley

2016

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.

Acknowledgements

Without a doubt, this research study is one of the most rewarding and demanding challenges I have ever undertaken. I know I could not have completed it without the contribution, support and assistance of some amazing people.

Firstly thank you to my supervisors, Dr Tara McLaughlin and Dr Alison Sewell. Your professional expertise and unfailing encouragement, support and guidance have made it possible for me to complete this work to the best of my ability.

To my teaching colleagues at Mountain Kindergarten, thank you so much for joining me in our collaborative research effort. It was fantastic learning together and I believe we are all better teachers as a result.

To the children and families of Mountain Kindergarten, I feel incredibly fortunate to be part of this wonderful community. Every day the children who attend this kindergarten amaze me. It is a privilege to share in your learning.

Thank you to my friends who have provided consistent support as I have worked towards completing my masters. Thank you for understanding when I have not always been as available as I would have liked. I have really appreciated both the enthusiastic interest in my work and the times when you knew it was best to talk about something else.

Last but definitely not least, thank you to my family for supporting this work that is so important to me. I know I have often been distracted, as evidenced by the many burnt pots and overcooked dinners! But with your support I have been able to finally get those cows home!

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Overview	1
Setting for Present Study.....	2
Aim of Study	2
Definition and Importance of Prosocial Behaviours	2
Teacher Strategies to Support Prosocial Behaviour.....	3
Professional Learning and Development	3
Researcher Motivation	4
Summary of Chapters.....	4
Summary	5
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	6
Introduction	6
Prosocial Behaviour Definition.....	6
Prosocial Behaviour and Positive Outcomes for Children.....	7
Supporting Prosocial Behaviour through Environment and Relationships	11
Professional Learning and Development	18
Action Research as an Effective Tool for Professional Learning and Development..	20
Summary	21
Chapter Three: Methodology	23
Introduction	23
Research Context	23
Research Question.....	24
Theoretical Paradigm	24
Action Research Methodology.....	25

Action Research Cycle	28
Data Generation Methods	32
Data Analysis	36
Ethical Considerations	37
Conclusion	39
Chapter Four: Findings	40
Introduction	40
Question 1: In what ways did the teaching team change teaching practices to support children’s prosocial behaviours?	42
Question two: How did the collaborative action research (CAR) process support the adoption of improved teaching practices to support children’s prosocial behaviour?	51
Chapter Summary	61
Chapter Five: Discussion	62
Introduction	62
Changes in teachers	62
Scenario-Based Learning (SBL) Strategy	63
Naturalistic Teaching	66
Summary	68
Collaborative action research as a means to support the adoption of new teaching practice	69
Asking Questions and Exploring Thinking	69
Engaging with Existing Theories of Practice	70
Shifts in Thinking	71
Inquiry Focus Emerging from Observations	72
Summary	73
Intentional Teaching	73
Summary	74
Chapter Six: Conclusion	75

Implications.....	75
Limitations and Delimitations.....	78
Further Research	79
Thoughts about Leadership in a Collaborative Inquiry.....	80
Final Comments	81
References	82
Appendix A	91
Appendix B	93
Appendix C	94
Appendix D	95
Appendix E	96
Appendix F.....	99
List of Figures	vi
List of Tables.....	vi

List of Figures

Figure 1: Depiction of our collaborative action research cycle	29
Figure 2: Puppet theatre and two main puppet characters used in puppet hui	59

List of Tables

Table 1: Data source codes	37
----------------------------------	----