Teachers navigating students driving their learning
Maungaraki School (TLIF 1-031)

For the Ministry of Education
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Summary

The area of focus was teacher collaboration to raise the achievement of 16 year 7 students who were not achieving at National Standards in two or more areas. Teachers sought to foster achievement through the development of learning environments designed to increase student agency. The inquiry was guided by the following questions:

1. What teacher strategies support student agency?
2. Is strengthened student agency associated with improved academic outcomes for students?

Inquiry Team

- Project leader: Jackie Sutherland, Maungaraki School.
- The other members of the project team were: Bernita Bennet, Our Lady of the Rosary School, and Caine Webster: Korokoro Primary School.
- External advisors: Jean Annan and Mary Wootten, Infinity Learn Limited.

Background

It was hypothesised that student achievement would be influenced by the extent to which students are active agents in learning. Teacher practices are likely to contribute to contexts that allow and encourage students to take agency.

The inquiry

Teachers worked together over two years with the support of their external advisors to explore new practices to support student agency. Teachers had opportunities to learn about their learners, and to design learning approaches that encouraged learners to set goals, to reflect on progress, and to share their learning with others. Students also had opportunities to develop “passion projects” and develop their own daily timetables.
Tools and measures

Academic achievement was measured by National Standards Data at the end of 2015 compared with end-of-year data in 2016. E-asTTle reading, writing and mathematics data was collected at the beginning of each year and once a term.

Student agency was measured by a student agency quiz, a key Competencies rubric (Managing self, thinking, and working with others). “Infinity maps” were used formatively to ascertain student views about their learning, their learning environments, passions and goals.

Frequent teacher observations and discussions enabled teachers to share practice and learn from one another. Teachers developed formal and informal observation measures to capture examples of opportunities for student voice, choice, negotiated learning, deliberate teaching of skills for independent learning, time for reflection, and connected learning in their colleagues’ classrooms.

Key findings

- Positive gains were made in student achievement on the selected e-asTTle items, although apart from writing these were not evident in National Standards.
- Some increases in student agency, particularly in connected agency were evident.
- There were gains in Key Competencies in the three aspects measured.

Key implications (in terms of the goals of TLIF)

- The team found that one of the most difficult challenges in undertaking new teacher practices is "letting go" of previously valued traditional practices. Interaction and shared learning among teachers provided peer support and encouragement to try new practices.
• Support from the three principals enabled teachers to inquire together—to observe their colleagues in other schools and meet to conceptualise, navigate and report the project.
• There are powerful benefits for teachers when they observe their colleagues teaching and talk about this later.
• The support of informed external partners who are able to challenge and support the team throughout the project is essential.
• Although gains for some of the students were not sufficient for them to be achieving at the desired level, they will be able to build on their learning during the next school year. They will be in the same classrooms and teachers will continue to refine their approaches to accelerate their progress. In this way learning from the TLIF is continuing.

Plans for sharing the findings

• All three schools shared the findings with their communities at three separate presentations for families.
• The final report is available for anyone who requests it.
• Maungaraki school hosted a number of secondary and primary schools from around New Zealand with sharing our practice, as well as access to the report if desired.
• Jackie Sutherland has presented at conferences in Australia and New Zealand around this programme (FlipCon2017, Leading a Digital School Melbourne, NZEI - 'Leading the Dream' & DP Hui on 'Sustainable Leadership', EdLead AP/DP Conference Palmerston North).
Reference List


For further information

If you would like to learn more about this project please contact the project leader at:

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