Intentional teaching: empowering children to be leaders amongst their peers

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A little bit about myself.................
What is this research about?

Purpose
To explore teachers’ understandings of peer learning and to discover how these understandings are connected to their practice

Key research question
What understandings do early childhood teachers have about how children learn from their peers and how do these beliefs inform their practice?
Importance of this study

The need for a deeper understanding of how to enact sociocultural theory in practice has been emphasised in more recent research (Anning, Cullen & Fleer, 2004; Nuttall & Edwards, 2004; Stephenson, 2009).

In her investigation of the enactment of curriculum in a New Zealand early childhood centre, Stephenson (2009, p. 15) stated that more than a decade after the introduction of Te Whāriki, “some teachers are still grappling with the implications of the sociocultural approach and the concept of curriculum contained in Te Whāriki.”
There is an identified need for an examination of the interplay between early childhood teachers’ beliefs and practices (Rivalland, 2007; Sakellariou & Rentzou, 2012; Wen, Elicker & McMullen, 2011).

Wen, Elicker & McMullen (2011, p. 946) state that there have been few investigations of both early childhood teacher beliefs and “contextual explorations of their practices” and that such investigations need to take place as the current empirical evidence does not provide support for a strong relationship between teacher beliefs and practices.
Intentional teaching (Fleer & Hoban, 2012)

How has this term come about?

There has been growing discontent with previous research which positions early childhood educators as facilitators of children’s ideas rather than taking a more active role in children’s learning and teaching.

The term reflects a growing trend for teachers to take a more active role in fostering the conceptual development of young children.
What has happened to the term teaching?
(Thomas, Warren & de Vries, 2011)

The founding influences of early childhood education such as Rousseau and Froebel have constructed and maintained the identity of the early childhood teacher as someone who nurtures, mothers and cares for young children; the teacher guides and facilitates as learning unfolds naturally through play.

There is a suggestion in the literature that the term ‘teaching’ has been somewhat silenced and that instead the terminology describes what teachers do, eg ‘notice, recognise, respond’
Defining intentional teaching

Intentionality is defined as “educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 15)

The term intentionality “suggests a stronger positioning of the role of the educator...it strengthens the professional identity of educators, empowering their role and capacity to teach young children” (Leggett & Ford, 2013, p. 43)

Intentional teaching is also connected to relationships of power – teacher led & child led
Methodology

*Mixed methods: explore the phenomenon in depth and then measure its prevalence*

*Use of mixed methods in this study helps create a ‘synergistic’ effect whereby the results collected from the use of qualitative methods will help inform the quantitative part of this study (Hesse-Biber, 2010)*

*Methods used were case study and survey*
Methods – first phase

Three case studies involving a small number of teachers in three early childhood centres – ten teachers in total took part in this first phase of the research

Initial interview exploring beliefs and knowledge

Filming of teachers’ practice as they supported peer learning

Second interview using footage to stimulate recall of teachers’ practice
Ethics

Relationships perspective: trust, open and clear communication channels with participants (Cullen, Hedges & Bone, 2005)

Protect interests of participants, avoid deception or misrepresentation, informed consent from participants (Denscombe, 2007)
Findings from the first phase: first interviews

When asked about their role in supporting peer interactions, the teachers gave a variety of examples of how they might do this:

‘we may set up specific experiences that are based on children’s interests...we might pair children up’

‘I see myself as a resource centre...a listener, a guider, a communicator’

‘Create an environment that sets up collaborative learning opportunities for children’
‘teachers can help to scaffold children’s understandings around being a researcher themselves’

‘children that have expertise and knowledge...giving them a voice, an opportunity to share it’
Notions of power sharing

‘It’s important for children to see other children as teachers...I want children to be able to negotiate and to talk...and to be empowered to fix their own problems and to drive their own learning and to find their own answers and if those answers are with one of their peers well that’s good too’

‘Everybody has a voice’

‘If it’s teacher driven all the time then you lesson the opportunities for those peer interactions to happen’
The water problem

‘We took the teaching side of something that was very say teacher directed and handed it over to the children...really sharing that responsibility with them’

‘It created them to be leaders of their own, like the strategising and problem solving, they were coming up with it...we saw a dramatic change in the practices that the children had around the water and we saw how the children were supporting and monitoring each other’

‘The power of children being able to share their knowledge...support each other’s learning and to be able to give each other praise, it was just fantastic’
Letting learning happen naturally

‘It’s just stepping back and letting it happen…rather than sharing your knowledge with the children all the time…if you’re sharing too much you’re sort of squashing it and it doesn’t seem natural’

‘We’ve created an environment where that is, it happens naturally…often it will happen without a teacher needing to instigate and be there’

‘It’s naturally driven…teachers can provide opportunities for peer learning to occur, but I don’t believe it’s actually peer learning if a teachers’ too heavily involved in that sort of situation’
Findings – second interviews
Negotiating what we watched together

‘That’s the contrast between...these clips and the ones at the start, is just completely different, like the first one I’m talking lots and I’m asking lots of questions and stuff whereas in these ones it’s kind of it’s not the opposite, I’m still trying to probe their thinking and ask questions wherever possible but I’m not doing it all the time’
Reflecting on past practice – a maths experience

‘She was videoing me and I was so conscious of her there....I did so much talking about stuff that the children were thinking what the hell are you on about? I would be rhyming number one lets go to the sun and stuff...and I just thought thank god you’ve learnt because I’ve started to talk about the spray paint and the children have just gone and so I’ve just gone, I thought thank god you’ve learnt from your mistakes’ (laughs)
The complex nature of the teachers’ role

‘It’s up to the teachers to really just grab those moments and say ok well I can step back here, I don’t have to be in the circle that they’re playing in, I can just be the observer or the ears and the eyes and stuff.....it’s about your teacher philosophy and how you view children, do they need me in that circle and whose it about, it is about you or is it about the children?’
Rockets: children driving the programme

‘This is...about our children being drivers of their programme like one of the younger boys in this video clip is very into space and so we’ve set up lots and lots of space areas, but from that I’ve learnt that he’s actually interested in the blasting off and the taking off of rockets and so this was an experiment to allow him to be part of that process’
‘Although it’s an experience for M, it is quite a, this is what I would class as quite a teacher led experience that I wouldn’t do very often….well not I wouldn’t do very often but I would do it with a specific purpose in mind and that’s sort of come from the rocket interest’
Teachers sharing their thinking with children

‘I think as a teacher it’s important for you to...talk about what you’re thinking as well, like ok this is tricky so they can understand too where you’re coming from... and the learning for you as a teacher and the learning for the children, if you just packed it up and didn’t give it your all...they’re not learning persistence...it comes back to your teaching intentions...we are able to position ourselves whereabouts in the environment we want to be to allow us to follow through on our children’s interests and so for me, this is where I wanted to be today, an experience I wanted to provide for M’
Intentionally sharing the power

‘positioning myself too, sort of low so that they’re able to take on those leadership roles and we are part of a group, not heh I’m the big teacher, watch me, this is what we’re doing, it’s more like ok we’re a team, let’s work through this’
‘For you to get the best out of your intention then teachers have to follow through with it and be there with the children, there’s no point setting something up and then thinking ok sweet I’ll just go sit over this side of the room now’

This teacher talked about the importance of being fully in it, of being ‘present’
The spontaneous nature of the play context

‘I think that sometimes the play context just presents opportunities...and if you frame it in a way that you know the child’s thinking is that a lot of the time that learning that’s happens from it is that little bit more relevant I think...he was quite obsessed with the fire truck and all the equipment so it’s not that we’re trying to shift his thinking away from that, we were just trying to broaden it that little bit’
'There’s nothing planned and that’s what I like about this, I threw a bit of lego on the floor and they arrived...completely unplanned...it’s those moments that probably I think the most learning comes out of it...you need to be in tune so that when you hear something you're ready to put that language out there and get them thinking or involved'
‘Clearly the relationship between the child as agent and the teacher as pedagogical driver is a very delicate one’ (Leggett & Ford, 2013, p. 44)
Thank you for listening

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