

Strengthening children’s learning and whānau involvement through the sharing of student-created videos.

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Student teachers completing their field practice placement in early childhood education during the Covid-19 pandemic in Aotearoa New Zealand found themselves unable to attend their early childhood education and care centres during centre lockdowns in 2021. In order to continue to meet field practice placement learning outcomes, many student teachers, alongside their teaching teams devised innovative ways to connect with children and parents at home that enabled children, parents and whānau (extended family) to contribute their ideas and experience. As lecturers in early childhood education, the authors have been impressed by students’ use of digital technologies. One digital technology that was particularly engaging for the children and their families, were student-created online videos and online meetings. The authors contend that the value of posting videos goes beyond extending individual learning experiences of children, and opens up possibilities for parent involvement and the consolidation of children’s learning. This article will explore the potential of student-created videos as a teaching tool to promote the continuation of learning beyond the centre environment.

Introduction

Online teaching programmes had not been an important consideration for children in early childhood education before the Covid-19 pandemic (Iyengar, 2020; Kim, 2020). During the pandemic, this changed with teachers and student teachers reaching out to the families and children who were not able to attend the centre due to lockdown (Kim, 2020).

Student teachers shared many songs, activities and learning that commonly took place in the centre, which was an additional effort to the usual sharing of individual learning stories through children’s online portfolios (Penman, 2014). To connect with children and whānau during lockdown, teachers and students shared topics they thought were meaningful to the children and their families in the context of learning at home. Instead of reporting on children’s individual learning experiences in the centre, one of the goals of online activity during lockdown was to reaffirm and re-establish relationships between teachers, children, their families, and peers. Another goal was to share regular activities and songs known to the children and ideas for activities connecting to children’s current interests. This article will provide examples of student-created videos and explore the potential of continuing to use online videos after lockdown to which children and their families could respond to

through an online platform (meso-system), bringing centre and home micro-systems together (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Continuing learning through online engagement

An important benefit of including online teaching in the early childhood curriculum is the continuity of learning between the centre and everyday experiences at home (Education Review Office [ERO], 2021). Mitchell et al. (2020) agree purposeful discussion of learning content knowledge during everyday experiences at home leads to a better understanding of curriculum content by whānau. Students were able to respond to the children's home experiences and modelling strategies such as including mathematical and scientific terminology, thus empowering the family, and breaking down the barriers between teachers as professionals and whānau at home. Parents and whānau can draw onto their funds of knowledge, which are lived experiences that help parents and whānau connect to the child's learning and validate the parent's and whānau knowledge (González et al., 2005).

Online teaching experiences consolidate children's learning and opens opportunities for involvement of parents and whānau, especially when songs, music and movement are included (Szente, 2020). Mitchell et al. (2020) indicate that managers of early childhood education and care centres have reported that online engagement with parents and whānau during lockdown strengthened interactions between parents and teachers. Many managers and teachers stepped up and further developed their online engagement.

Distance learning opportunities through student teacher-created online videos promoted a general understanding of the early childhood curriculum by parents and whānau, allowing teachers to empower parents with curriculum knowledge and support children's interests and working theories through play (ERO, 2021; González et al., 2005). In the online videos, teachers could include information about *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum (Te Whāriki)* (Kahuroa et al., 2021; Ministry of Education [MoE], 2017). Whānau can contribute their funds of knowledge, while benefiting from gaining an insight into the curriculum (Kim, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2020; MoE, 2017).

Promoting a sense of belonging

Videos can assist in creating a sense of belonging for children and their whānau, especially if their home language and culture are highlighted. The videos allowed students to teach using a range of strategies and resources, blending different teaching strategies such as song, music (ukulele), gestures and subtitles to support these aspects (see examples in Figure 1 and Figure 2). Students, including a student from Tonga, combined all these strategies to promote home language for the Tongan Language Week (5th - 11th of September 2021). The online videos specifically offered opportunities to revisit songs and other learning resources made available to all children, parents and whānau on multiple online platforms. The Tongan student's video was posted on Storypark. Whānau responded positively as their children kept asking to watch it while they were home. The student likened this to being similar to having the children sitting in on one of their mat-times at the centre. Creative use of technology is of significance as researchers have noted a lack of Pasifika based resources in mainstream early childhood centres (Matapo, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2020). Having kaiako with knowledge of the

culture and language making a video can support centres with large numbers of Pasifika whānau whose home language is key to keeping their culture alive (Mitchell et al., 2020).

Figure 1

Ulu, Uma Tui, Mo e Va'e



Figure 2

Ukelele and Sign Language Song: Malo e Lelei



Students' narratives enhancing sense of belonging

Another way in which teachers and whānau shared cultural understanding and identity was by telling stories from their home country. One student teacher introduced his culture by singing Incy Wincy Spider (Maliliit na gagamba) in his home language, Tagalog (Philippines), and telling children and whānau how he collected spiders when he was young. This prompted one of the parents to share a photo of their 'Bug Hotel' (see Figure 3) they made in their garden, which was then shared on an online platform. Sharing family artefacts and activities increases participation and sense of belonging of parents and whānau (Wenger, 1998), ideas which can then be passed on to other families. Using a song with a recognisable tune helps children to understand what the song is about. This student also sang "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" in Hindi, linking multiple cultures.

Figure 3

Bug Hotel



Bicultural practice

There were also opportunities for a focus on te reo Māori during Māori Language Week (13th - 19th of September 2021), which coincided with the lockdown. Students embraced the opportunity to use video technology to provide such examples as retelling “Dear Zoo” with puppets and props including te reo Māori names for the animals (see Figure 4). One student created a demonstrational video on a hand-held camera of how to make a waka out of bark, twigs and a paper sail that could float (see Figure 5). Suggestions were made that natural materials could be used such as a leaf for making the waka or story stones for storytelling, to help children express their feelings about being in lockdown (Kahuroa et al., 2021). The ideas covered by the students, linked to the te ao Māori concept of reciprocity/ whakaututu and mutual interdependence (Quigan et al., 2021), as children and whānau could respond in the moment and later in online comments. Students showed their understanding of the bicultural curriculum and ako, a te reo Māori expression meaning both to teach and learn, as they positioned themselves as learners and teachers of te reo Māori and te ao Māori.

Figure 4

Dear Zoo: Incorporating sounds



Figure 5

He Poraka! A Frog!



Linking to content knowledge of learning areas

A number of students were able to link learning taking place in the centre and learning during play at home to curriculum content areas. For example, one student presented a video discussing the science of what plants need for growing, such as soil, water and sunlight, and how plant root systems work, which was based on the children’s interests in plants started in the centre (See Figure 6). In the video, the student extended learning through discussing how leaves could be drawn, which strengthened children’s technological knowledge and mathematics through aspects of geometry such as shape and line. Parents and whānau responded by posting photos of children’s drawings online. Plants were also looked at by another student who showed how kūmara grow and how a hāngī is made. This student composed a video presentation, illustrating curriculum content areas with miniature gardening tools, showing how to make a garden at home. Highlighting mathematical and scientific terminology in the student-created video demonstrated the use of intentional teaching to parents and whānau. This linking to relevant experiences from home helps parents and whānau to understand the principles of whakamana (empowerment), kotahitanga (holistic learning), hononga (relationships) and whanaungatanga

(family and community) of *Te Whāriki* curriculum (MoE, 2017). This is what ERO (2021) also found in their examination on teachers' use of online learning during lockdown.

Figure 6

Student demonstrating what a plant root looks like



In terms of looking at supporting students in their ongoing practice, it could be considered how students' knowledge and confidence in being able to interact with children and whānau online could be increased (Heitink et al., 2017; Kim, 2020). Student-created online videos open up conversations, enabling students and teachers to clarify expectations and aspirations with whānau (Kim, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2020; MoE, 2017). This could result in whānau being willing to offer their expertise, time, and engagement to support the children's learning (Mitchell et al., 2020). The Education Review Office (2021) and Mitchell et al. (2020) concur that online engagement with children, parents and whānau can generate opportunities for teachers to use digital technologies to build on learning happening at home and in the centre.

One possibility to capitalise on online engagement is to share a video online of a mat-time story told in the centre about the children's current interest. A further video could then be added onto the topic to deepen the learning and open up further conversations between the child, parents and whānau. As this article has shown, parents and whānau can add their expertise and share comments online with the other parents and children in the centre. Songs learned in the centre can also be shared online, revisited, and sung by family members together. In turn, family members can share their songs and stories with the other children and whānau on their online platform.

Conclusion

The global Covid-19 pandemic has presented a lot of challenges for teachers and students in early childhood education. Students responded to these challenges by creating innovative videos to support children's learning at home, which fostered direct engagement with parents and whānau. This opened up multiple learning opportunities such as revisiting subject related learning online, sense of belonging by making connections to children's home and community life and bicultural practice. The online engagement encouraged parents and whānau to contribute their ideas and facilitated a better understanding of *Te Whāriki*. The opportunities for

learning that presented themselves during the Covid-19 lockdowns could be carried forward beyond the lockdowns into current teacher practice.

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