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Academic Target Setting: Formative Use of Achievement Data.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education,
The University of Auckland, 2009.

Abstract

Improving student achievement is an ongoing challenge for schools with a great deal of data collected to ascertain improvement trends. In this thesis, possibilities for using this achievement data to improve outcomes for students, through establishing academic achievement targets was explored. Longitudinal achievement data were collected about students, over time and analysed for patterns and trends. This information was then used to formulate individual academic achievement targets for students in Year 9 and Year 11. All the academic targets for the students incorporated an element of challenge and were intended to lift individual student performance but were not designed to be predictive. The targets (specifying standards, credits and levels of achievement) were then shared with students as part of an academic counselling programme. The study also explored classroom teachers' experiences of the target setting process in the subject areas of English and mathematics.

The results indicated statistically significant higher achievement outcomes for students with academic targets compared to those without such targets. The students involved in the intervention were 1.9 times more likely to gain the Level 1 National Certificate of Educational Achievement, than those students not in the intervention, when controlling for prior achievement, ethnicity and gender variables. In addition, being part of the intervention allowed those students who entered the school with a significantly lower intake score (as measured by the Middle Years Information System (MidYIS)) to be more successful in gaining the Level 1 Certificate, than students in previous years. The quality of achievement in Year 11 was also improved as measured by a grade point score in the subjects of English and mathematics. The study demonstrated the benefits of the systematic use of longitudinal achievement data as a basis for establishing achievement targets for students.

The teachers reported that discussing the targets with students helped improve relationships between themselves and the students. However, the provision of targets did not change teaching practices and in some cases created an element of tension when teachers' expectations of students conflicted with the targets established through the models explained in the early parts of the study.

Acknowledgements

There are many people whom I would like to thank for their encouragement toward my goal of gaining a PhD in Education. First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors Professors John Hattie and Helen Timperley. Together they made a unique and highly complementary team that fitted my needs exactly. They provided support and guidance for a whole range of skills that I required, from the big picture ideas and statistical techniques to the complex and intricate skills needed to craft a thesis. In the main though, my thanks go to them for the times when this work was almost too much. It was their constructive feedback and encouragement that kept me going until I finally completed the work. It is said (Smith, 1999) that the best learning takes place at the edge of your comfort zone. John and Helen took me right to the edge of my comfort zone but didn't let me fall off.

Secondly, I would like to thank all of the Starpath team in its various incarnations. I have learned so much about the world of research from them. The team was always prepared to listen, discuss and offer advice on the different aspects of my work and help with the proof-reading.

Thirdly, I want to thank my family, my friends and my colleagues at New Zealand High School (NZHS) for their constant support, patience and friendship. To Rowena and Janna, for keeping me sane and aiding me through some difficult experiences. To Sweep, for keeping my feet warm on the many long, lonely nights when I had to carry out the analyses and again when completing the writing.

Finally, I would like to thank Bruce Ritchie, Principal of NZHS for his constant faith in me. As a Principal he has been an inspiration and a great source of knowledge, encouragement and leadership. Bruce is someone every aspiring principal should meet.

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