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Developing information literate students who will become lifelong learners: Improving the current situation in New Zealand

Elizabeth Probert

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Abstract

Are New Zealand teachers equipped to develop information literate students, an important consideration when creating lifelong learners, a stated government goal, and if not, can this situation be improved through the use of a teacher-designed intervention?

In seeking to answer the research question, this thesis reports on a project carried out in three schools, with students from 11 to 13 years of age. The principals of the three schools formed a cluster, and in 2007 gained funding to carry out a four year project aimed at improving students’ information literacy skills and higher level thinking skills.

The New Zealand Curriculum includes the goal of developing students who are lifelong learners. To achieve such a goal, students need to be information literate. International and national research however demonstrates, that too often, such skills are not being specifically taught.

This study was a mixed method, sequential design consisting of four phases. The first phase involved the trial of the instruments. During the second and third phase, a needs analysis was carried out involving both teachers and students. The cluster Lead teachers then designed an intervention based on the needs analysis findings, and each school implemented the intervention in a different way. During the fourth phase, data were collected from teachers and students after the implementation of the intervention. Data collection included web-based and hard copy questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and documentation.

The needs analysis revealed that teachers were not teaching information literacy skills and needed strategies to enable them to do so. Students knew very little about tackling research assignments. After initial professional development sessions during 2008, a small, significant change was seen in teacher understanding and practice of information literacy at the end of 2008.

During 2009, student pre and post intervention progress was measured using two classes from each school. Students from two of the schools demonstrated much greater knowledge and understanding by the end of 2009. Unfortunately, the cluster’s funding was then cut with 18 months of the project still to go. The positive changes were encouraging, but probably not sustainable for a number of reasons discussed in the study.
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