

From whānau to akomanga: How to use reminiscing in the classroom to improve children's development



RESEARCH

‘Promoting identity development through memory narratives’

by Professor Elaine Reese and Dr. Tia Neha

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Background

Families across the world discuss past events and experiences. Previous research indicates that these discussions are related to the positive development of children, particularly their self-concept. Which incorporates one's sense of self and where they stand in the world, relative to others.

Parents differ in how they discuss the past with their children. Previous research has identified that the use of elaborative approaches to reminiscing engages children more than approaches that are less elaborative. This in turn helps to foster the positive development of the self-concept for these children.

Dr Tia Neha of the Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research, part of Victoria University of Wellington, alongside Professor Elaine Reese of Otago University provided a variety of recommendations for teachers on how to best utilise reminiscing to promote self-concept and self-regulation.

This research applies previous work conducted by Dr Tia Neha with over 40 Māori whānau to the context of early-childhood teaching.

Main research findings

Two main positive aspects of reminiscing were identified. The first is the extent to which narratives use an elaborative style, providing many details, and praising children's rudimentary responses. The second is the use of repetition in these memory narratives.

Elaboration is identified as a positive feature of reminiscing for most cultures. Repetitions are particularly important for Māori children. Māori culture has a strong oral memory tradition, suggesting that repetitions be used for children who come from cultures with similarly strong oral memory traditions.

A variety of different past events were utilised in these memory narratives. These were all found to be important for children's memory, self-regulation, and school readiness. Ultimately, teachers should use a wide variety of event types in discussions to facilitate positive outcomes.

Relevance of findings to New Zealand

As Aotearoa New Zealand becomes more multicultural and diverse, so do classrooms and other situations where children are learning. In order to enhance children's development, teachers should be aware of cultural differences when discussing past events that helps to build self-concept.

Reminiscing may be particularly important for dealing with misbehaviour and negative emotions in children. It is best to discuss these events some time after they have occurred, so that the emotions and misbehaviour are not interfering with the process. Reminiscing should also be used to discuss positive events that take place both within and outside the classroom. Puppets are often used in research and could also be applied to real-world classroom situations to help children engage with the reminiscing process.

Māori culture includes the practice of poipoia, which aids the development of the child's emotions and identity, while supporting their spiritual well-being, emotions, autonomy, and integrity. This practice may be useful for reminiscing with children from other cultures, particularly those that share similar practices or have similarly strong oral traditions.

The importance of elaboration in reminiscing is likely to be useful for dealing with children from a wide range of cultures, whereas the importance of repetition is likely tied to cultures with strong oral traditions.

Ultimately, reminiscing is an extremely useful tool for a wide variety of situations that has a multitude of positive outcomes for children and their teachers and should be utilised in order to foster positive development in children.