MEDIATING CLASSROOM CULTURE BASED ON DEMOCRATIC VALUES: AN EXPLORATION OF A TEACHER’S FACILITATIVE ROLE.

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this work has not been submitted either in whole or part, to this university or any other educational institution for marking or assessment either previously or concurrently. I also certify that unless otherwise stated the material presented in this thesis is the result of original research.

Signed_________________

Dated__________________
ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to examine the teacher’s facilitative role to engage students in Values Education (Curriculum Council, 1998) based on a cooperative and collaborative learning pedagogy. The study was conducted in a primary school classroom with thirty-one year 4/5 students aged 9-10 years of age.

During the research process the core shared values underpinning the Western Australian Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council, 1998) provided the foundation to negotiate agreements for behaviour based on The Tribes process (Gibbs, 2001), which included mutual respect, in order to foster a safe, supportive and democratic classroom culture. The Tribes process was used to operationalise the teaching of values, social skills, cooperation and collaboration. Hart’s (1992) collaborative framework informed the organisation of the classroom to create the conditions that supported collaboration amongst peers and the teacher.

An action research approach was used to reflect on the classroom context and provide a focus for a range of qualitative research methods. Multiple data sources such as teacher observations, interviews, student and teacher reflection logs and sociograms were used to triangulate findings from parents, students and teachers.

A sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978) provided the conceptual framework for this study as the underlying assumption is that students learn from each other, mediated by the teacher or more capable peers. The focus on the action within the social context during the development of interpersonal
relationships is a key feature of peer mediated learning, which complemented the processes chosen by the teacher researcher to elucidate how a safe, supportive and democratic classroom was created. Class meetings, group work and reflective practices were used to scaffold students’ understandings of interpersonal relationships to promote a culture that was consistent with Australia’s democratic traditions. Reflective practices in the classroom provided opportunities for new perspectives to be developed, as new knowledge and experiences were integrated with existing personal practical knowledge.

The major findings reflected the foci of student and teacher conversations about students’ interpersonal skills and their ability to get along with each other. In the first phase of the study establishing positive ‘relationships’ based on trust, through teambuilding activities provided the impetus for the next phase of the study about ‘leadership’. This phase continued for most of the study, and provided authentic opportunities for students to develop leadership skills, which permeated the last phase of the study about ‘friendships’. Students established mutually beneficial relationships that broadened their views about discriminatory behaviours, friendship and leadership.

The major conclusions drawn from the study is that teachers play a significant role in mediating positive relationships amongst peers. Further, it was evident that the explicit teaching of core shared values (Curriculum Council, 1998) provided the foundations of productive and active citizenship during the process of creating the conditions for a safe, supportive and democratic classroom.
DEDICATION

To my family Peter, James and PJ
for your encouragement and love.
I would like to gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the following persons whose invaluable support was crucial to the completion of this study.

At a district and school level my gratitude is extended to the district director and the principal for allowing this research to proceed. At a classroom level my appreciation is extended to all the students in my class and their parents for willingly participating in the study, providing their oral and written feedback and accepting to be interviewed and observed. I would like to thank my colleagues for their support with a special mention to my ‘the critical friend’, Mrs. Alison Foster. The ongoing support and interest in the research, coupled with critical feedback, became an additional source of motivation.

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