



## Connecting curriculum, connecting learning

**TLRI grant holders:** Deborah Fraser (project director), Viv Aitken, Graham Price & Barbara Whyte, The University of Waikato

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### Introduction

The project is working with three schools initially, extending to further schools as the study progresses. The focus is upon negotiated and integrated curriculum that includes the arts. It builds upon a previous TLRI on the arts but does not solely focus on the arts per se. For example, the drama pedagogy Mantle of the Expert is an approach being studied which includes student-teacher negotiation and cross-curricula learning.

### Aims

The project aims to strategically **consolidate and build** upon a previous TLRI, *The art of the matter* (Fraser et al., 2006). It also extends upon a pilot project undertaken in 2009 on arts-based integration. It will focus upon ways in which children seek, use and create knowledge when learning through arts-based integration. Moreover, it will examine the ways in which teachers are influenced and the wider communities are engaged in arts-based integration. In particular, we are focusing on:

- 1) What connections are made between the arts and other curriculum areas a) by children? and b) by teachers?
- 2) What influence does arts-based integration appear to have on engagement and learning a) for children? and b) for teachers?
- 3) What opportunities are there for shared ownership and decision making in planning and negotiating curriculum?
- 4) How do schools foster integrated projects, founded on the arts, that maximise engagement with their communities?

### Why is this research important?

There is much misunderstanding around curriculum integration and a fear that subject knowledge may be jeopardized. Furthermore, most of the international practices in this field fall into the 'good idea' category rather than in the research-based practice realm. Thus, this project aims to **address this gap in knowledge**. It will contribute to the theory and practice of 'negotiating the curriculum' and it intends to examine the

learning that occurs when the arts are aligned with integrated learning contexts.

### What we plan to do

#### Data

In terms of data collection we will:

- observe teachers focussing on teacher talk, teacher-child interaction patterns and teacher-child negotiations using a systematic observation chart and running records.
- observe children's interaction with each other, with their teacher, and with their activities during lessons
- collect work samples (including literacy)
- undertake semi-structured interviews with teachers and wider school community members
- undertake learning conversations with children individually and in small groups (some of these will be undertaken using drama strategies such as teacher-in-role as a projective device)
- track engagement with an engagement tool
- observe children's groups sorting and categorising pictures and statements

The range of data collection methods outlined above will be necessary for investigating the research questions and for tracking children's learning. There will be whole class and group observations that focus on interaction. There will also be a close focus on five children per class in some depth. Such tracking will have the added benefit of contributing to the teachers' assessment records as well.

#### Analysis

This study utilises both inductive and deductive analytical processes. There are some theories that inform curriculum integration that will be taken into consideration during data

analysis. These include co-construction, agency, and social constructivist theories. Thus, in a deductive fashion, these theories will help to shape how the data are analysed by providing lenses through which to organise data and generate themes. However, inductive processes will also be utilised in order to remain open to the unexpected and the unpredictable which is particularly important in qualitative research. Grounded theory is the inductive approach employed for analysing qualitative data. Grounded theory assists researchers with clarifying or challenging existing theories.

### Our partners:

Penny Deane at Omanu School  
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