Research in a Nutshell

A Message from the Editorial Team

In this issue of *RiaN*, our contributors share an array of knowledge spanning four domains of education research, from kindergarten assessment and arts practices in the classroom, to resilience and distributed leadership.

Sincerely, Lindsay Mainhood and Sofia Melendez (RiaN@queensu.ca)

How do Ontario Kindergarten Teachers Conceptualize Classroom Assessment?
Dr. Heather Braund, PhD

Why is this important?
- Classroom assessment practices are becoming more formative with the goal of providing students with feedback, informing instruction, and engaging students.
- However, more research is needed to understand assessment practices and the role of students in assessment at the Kindergarten level.

What did the findings uncover?
- The Kindergarten context was identified as a 'unique' context for assessment.
- *Functions of assessment:*
  1) Accountability and reporting, teachers collected data to share with parents and meet reporting requirements;
  2) Assessment for Learning, teachers also used assessment to inform their instruction, check in with students, and to identify next steps.
- *Assessment practices:* Observations, anecdotal notes, photo documentation, and traditional assessments were most common.
- Student-centred assessment practices (e.g., self- and peer-assessment) were rarer.

Why does this matter?
- We need to integrate more student-centred assessment practices and encourage greater student agency in assessment at the Kindergarten level.

How Can Teachers Use the Arts a Tool to Support Students with Exceptionalities?
Yaara Docrat, MEd Candidate

Why is this topic important?
- Special education students are integrated within mainstream classrooms and, in Ontario, represent 12.5% of all students (over 260,000).
- Educators may find challenges meeting the wide array of needs of their students.
- The arts (music, visual art, dance, drama, media arts), when used as pedagogical tools, offer a solution for both students and teachers.

What are the key messages?
- According to self-determination theory, the arts can increase student motivation by providing feelings of *autonomy, competence* and *relatedness.*
- A generalist teacher's self-efficacy for 1) the arts and 2) supporting students with exceptionalities can improve if the teacher knows *how* to integrate the arts as a pedagogical tool.

How can teachers apply this conceptual framework in their teaching?
- Teachers without specialized arts knowledge or skills who seek to creatively support students with exceptionalities can:
  - Provide student-directed arts activities which intrinsically motivate them to learn.
  - Create social situations and learning experiences for students to exercise agency and meaningful choice.
  - *Example:* designating time for students to form a band, write their own music, and rehearse.

Braund, H. (May, 2020). *Exploring Kindergarten Teachers' Conceptions of Classroom Assessment.* Paper presentation accepted for the Canadian Educational Researchers' Association 2020 meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, London, ON.

Docrat, Y. (2020). Generalist teachers using the arts as a pedagogical tool to support students with exceptionalities in inclusive educational settings. *Canadian Music Educator, 62*(1), 40-47.

How can distributed leadership mobilize networked learning?
Stephen MacGregor, PhD Candidate

Why is this topic important?
- Networked learning within and between schools can promote teachers' use of research-informed teaching practices (RITPs).
- Distributed leadership (DL) is important for facilitating networked learning, but the intersection of these two topics remains understudied.
- DL refers to school leadership expanded beyond the activities of formal leaders (e.g., school principles).

What did this research uncover?
- We identified three models of DL that support the effective mobilization of RITPs:
  - DL1: teachers are empowered to make school improvement decisions, with RITPs expected to spread through being championed by advocates.
  - DL2: builds on DL1, but school improvement through RITPs is a collective process of knowledge sharing, decision making, as well as trial and refinement.
  - DL2+: builds on DL2, but school improvement through RITPs involves ongoing investigation.

Why do these findings matter?
- Approaches to DL that involve a whole-school collaborative process and where potential distributed leaders are centrally placed within their school networks tend to be most successful in ensuring RITPs are mobilized.

Are Internal Assets and External Resources the Building Blocks for Developing Student Resilience?
Jodi Basch, PhD Student

Why is this topic important?
- With the onset of COVID-19, determining how to develop and strengthen one's resilience is more important than ever.
- Students are facing the challenge of staying resilient through the various difficulties that they encounter through their educational career.

What did this research uncover?
- Competence, coping skills, and self-efficacy are positive factors within students that contribute to their perception of how resilient they are.
- Students need to look outside of themselves and connect to their social support networks, community organizations, and their external environment.
- While both internal and external factors are necessary, the combination of both factors allows students to develop and draw from their resilience.

Why do these findings matter?
- Students often try to manage their challenges in isolation, for fear of appearing incompetent. However, as resilience is co-constructed, students need to draw on their strengths and also connect to their positive support network to thrive.

Brown, C., MacGregor, S., & Flood, J. Can models of distributed leadership be used to mobilise networked generated innovation in schools? A case study from England. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 94*, 1–11.

Basch, J. (2019, November). *Internal Assets and External Resources of Resilience.* Paper Presentation at the 2nd International Conference on Well-being in Education Systems. Locarno, CH-SZ.

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