



School and home contributions to overcoming the summer learning effect in decile 1 schools

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Introduction

A problem has been identified which faces schooling improvement interventions that are designed over several years to produce accelerated gains in achievement. It is the presence of 'summer learning effects' (SLEs) where there is differential growth in learning over the months when schools are closed (Cooper, Charlton, Valentine & Muhlenbruck, 2000; Entwisle, Alexander & Olson, 1997).

Aims

This study addresses the research question: What are the school and family practices that singly and together ameliorate the 'summer learning effect'? The immediate pressing concern is to design more effective schooling for children in low decile schools, so that we can better guarantee equitable educational outcomes.

Why is this important?

The recent history of interventions to build more effective schools has some notable success both internationally (Borman, 2005) and nationally (Lai, McNaughton, Amituanai-Toloa, et al., 2009). But in all cases where repeated measures have been taken either side of the summer break, a major barrier has been identified to greater effectiveness. While major advances have been made in our understanding of effective instruction while students are in school, our research has identified a major break in making large gains that continue to accelerate over calendar years; it is the ubiquitous 'summer learning effect' (SLE). This is a compelling problem that needs urgent solutions. It is logically the next step in designing highly effective interventions with schools.

What we plan to do

The project is divided into two distinct phases.

In the descriptive phase (Phase 1), student achievement data from seven schools in South Auckland will be used to identify Year 4–8 classrooms of two distinct types: eight classrooms with little or no SLE, and eight with high SLE. Teachers of these classrooms will be interviewed about what, if anything, they did to prepare their students in terms of literacy-related practices over the summer holidays. A sample of students and their parent/caregivers will also be interviewed about their summer reading activities. These interviews will be used to develop hypotheses about which core practices are associated with high and low SLE.

In the intervention phase of the study (Phase 2), ten classes previously having high SLE will be identified. Teachers from these classrooms will be trained in the core practices associated with little to no SLE. This will prepare students to read over summer. Students' achievement over summer will be compared with previous achievement and with other classes. Teachers will complete diary records, and teachers and a sample of students will be interviewed. Students will complete diary records over summer and parents/caregivers will complete questionnaires on their child's summer reading.

Data

Student achievement data (STAR Reading)

Interview data from teachers, students and parents/caregivers

Teacher and student diaries

Analysis:

Student achievement data will be used firstly to identify classes and students with high and low SLE. It will later be used in the intervention phase to quantitatively measure the effects of the intervention, in addition to the qualitative interview and diary data.

Interviews will be analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Some questions can be quantified and will be analysed numerically. Statistical analyses such as repeated measures ANOVAs and HLM will compare teachers, students, parents and student achievement data. Qualitative aspects of the interviews will first be coded openly to develop emerging themes. Once themes are developed, interviews will be coded in detail according to these themes. Patterns will then be identified in terms of differences between high SLE and low SLE participants.

Our partners

The WFRC has an ongoing collaborative relationship with clusters of schools in South Auckland. The specific partnership focused in the SLE is around ongoing inquiry within the schools and research and development focused on raising achievement and sustaining accelerated changes. Seven of these schools are participating in this study.

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