

Dimensions Causing School Lateness in a Secondary School and Suggested Solutions

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ABSTRACT

A secondary school in a city in the South Island of New Zealand identified school lateness as a difficulty and queried what solutions could be implemented to address the issue. A qualitative research design was used which included two cohorts: students arriving late ($n=2$) and students arriving on time ($n=4$). A qualitative questionnaire was completed by the participants and the data were analysed. Themes derived from the data included: sleep deprivation; motivation and personal responsibility; family and cultural considerations, and transport. From the questionnaires, all the students indicated that it is important for them to arrive at school on time and expressed awareness as to why they may arrive late, which provided the foundation for exploring solutions related to this particular school community.

Research paper

Keywords:

school lateness

BACKGROUND

During my educational psychology internship year, one of the key learning tasks included a system level intervention project. Upon reflection, I thought it would be most beneficial to ask one of the schools where I was completing a portion of the internship what focus would benefit them. The school identified 'school lateness' as a current difficulty and wondered what solutions they could implement to address this issue. The objective of the research project was to determine the dimensions causing school lateness and provide possible solutions to improve school arrival times.

Bataineh (2014) defined the term 'lateness' as relating to an individual arriving after the scheduled time. When a student is late for school in the morning it can be viewed as disruptive behaviour as the rhythm of the teaching delivery is affected, and this disruption can distract other students who may be engaged and paying attention to the lesson. When a student/s arrives late for school it affects the individual, the

members of the classroom and the school system (Dafiaghor, 2011). On an individual level, the student misses out on access to the curriculum delivery and shared learning, and the classroom system is affected through the disruption of curriculum delivery, as well as the tension between the teacher and student/s arriving late which might create an uncomfortable atmosphere (Dafiaghor, 2011).

INTRODUCTION

Student attendance at school has always been a concern for educators, the community and legislators (Smink & Reimer, 2005). Regular school attendance is an important factor in school success as researched by Rothman (2001). Arriving to school and class on time has advantages for the student, namely: students are prepared for the lesson; are aware of the lesson objectives; follow a smooth transition process from one task to the next; develop punctuality as a life skill which encourages commitment to activities and future employment opportunities, and develops respect for self and others (Reynolds, 2015). Research reveals that there may be varying dimensions that contribute to school lateness.

Dafiaghor (2011) highlights some dimensions that contribute to school lateness, including: going to bed late; the distance or location of the school; family and cultural background, and engagement in untimely domestic chores.

Sleep Deprivation

Research pertaining to sleep and the developing adolescent brain shows the role that melatonin has on their sleep patterns. Melatonin is a hormone made by the pineal gland (a small gland in the brain) which controls sleep and wake cycles. Melatonin increases and is released in preparation for sleep (National Sleep Foundation, 2017a). Popova (2013) reports that the adolescent brain starts releasing melatonin around eleven o'clock at night and the hormone is effective well past sunrise. Adults, on the other hand, have little to no melatonin in their bodies when they wake up, which allows them to wake in

the morning. Adolescents, however, have a surge of melatonin present in their bloodstream which has an impact on the adolescent waking before eight o'clock in the morning. The impact, according to Carskadon (2012), may include: sleepiness; mood disturbances; inattention; poor academic results; behaviour difficulty, and increased weight. Research by the National Sleep Foundation reports that the effect of melatonin being released on the adolescent brain affects their circadian rhythm; the morning surge occurs between 03:00 - 7:00am and can last until 09:00 to 10:00am, if adolescents have had insufficient sleep (National Sleep Foundation, 2017b). Therefore, "asking a teenager to perform well in a classroom during the early morning is like asking him or her to fly across the country and instantly adjust to the new time zone — and then do the same thing every night, for four years" (Popova, 2013, p. 1).

Personal Responsibility and Organisation

An article written by Bataineh (2014) states that poor organisation is the most common reason for lateness. "Students wait until the last minute and do not allow themselves enough time for travel" (Bataineh, 2014, p. 3). The majority of students are responsible for ensuring they arrive at school on time, however some students experience difficulty with the independence of secondary school and what they may be required to do to become more organised, for example, allowing sufficient time to get ready in the morning (Eberly Centre for Teaching Excellence and Educational Innovation, 2015). When students are at school, they learn to follow a schedule or timetable, obey school rules and complete school work: these tasks teach students responsibility which will support them with functioning in the working world (Effects of Tardiness on Your Child's Education, 2016). Alongside responsibility features the support that students receive from their parents to assist with school arrival time. Parents can demonstrate this through teaching their children organisational techniques, for example, packing their school bags the night before and ensuring their clothes are ready (Effects Of Tardiness On Your Child's Education, 2016) .

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The students were randomly selected by a process of reviewing the school lateness data that had been written in a book by school administration staff, as well as the data pertaining to students who arrive on time on the school data system. Twenty student names in Years 8 and 9 in each cohort who arrived late and early were randomly selected, the names were written down and placed in a hat. Ten names

were then drawn from each cohort (arriving late/punctual) and 20 students in total were selected for the research project.

From the random selection two subsets were identified: punctual students and students arriving late (n=10 punctual and n=10 late). A research project information pack was discussed with each of the 20 participants and sent home with a consent form for the participant and parent to complete. Furthermore, this project was discussed with the parents. From the 20 randomly selected students, six participants responded and their parents provided consent to participate. A qualitative questionnaire was completed by these six participants (punctual students n=4 and late students n=2). The ethnicity of the punctual cohort included three students who identified as NZ/European and one student who identified as Pacific Island, and the late cohort included two students who identified as NZ/European. The two subsets were identified to allow comparative reasoning between punctual and late students which would contribute to exploring solutions for this particular school community.

Data Collection

Data were collected from the participants using a qualitative response questionnaire related to arriving to school on time (see Appendix A). Relevant literature was consulted on school lateness which informed the selection of the questions. I met with each participant individually, discussed informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity of self-reporting. The participants then had an opportunity to complete a hardcopy of the questionnaire and they could ask me to clarify any questions if required. The questions provided response answers that the participant could select as well as questions that required qualitative responses. Qualitative responses provided options that considered individual circumstances, for example, family circumstance, means of transport, the school system, and sleep. These themes were derived from school lateness research. The 'school system' and 'transport' were added as I wondered whether these may have been other factors to consider, particularly with transport as the city was going through a period of particular upheaval with its roads and transport routes.

Furthermore, a deputy principal (DP) from a separate secondary school was interviewed as the DP from the school being discussed suggested this may provide some additional information, and we wondered if similar or varying themes would be identified within their school community. The DP shared and discussed her school lateness data and was able to discuss themes as written reasons were provided by

the students as to why they were late; these responses were recorded by the school administration staff as part of their school lateness and absentee data.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed a four-step process. In the first instance, the data included the feedback from the qualitative responses, which included quantitative and qualitative data. This was completed by the six participants (punctual $n=4$ and late $n=2$). Secondly, the data from the survey questions were analysed and key comments colour-coded to track themes as well as establish differences between the two cohorts. Thirdly, the comments were analysed and organised into thematic groups. Lastly, quotes from the interview with the DP at the secondary school were added and included into the report.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Please refer to Appendix B for the dimensions identified from the qualitative responses.

Sleep Deprivation

The comments from the students highlighted that when they went to bed late they observed feeling tired in the morning; alternatively, if they went to bed earlier, they did not feel as tired. One participant reported, "Staying up too late as I have been watching TV and then have to wake up early". Research has found that the glow from electronic devices (television screens, laptops, mobile phones, tablets) emit a blue light that affects the release of melatonin from the pineal gland. The pineal gland is located deep within the brain and one function of this gland is to produce melatonin which aids circadian rhythm (Sargis, 2014). One does not have to stare directly at the screen to be affected by the blue light; if enough blue light hits the eye, the pineal gland can stop producing melatonin which results in the adolescent initially feeling awake and then sleep-deprived (Meeri, 2014). Meeri reported that parents found that sleep quality was better among children age six to 17 years old who always turned their devices off: 45 percent of them were described as having excellent sleep quality versus 25 percent of those who sometimes left devices on. As the circadian rhythm during adolescence is already delayed, when devices are used it further affects the release of melatonin contributing to sleep deprivation. As some of the students mentioned feeling less tired in the morning when they go to bed earlier, it is worth exploring if some students are more tired when they have had a later bed-time and what the contributing factors were (in some circumstances one factor could be the blue light from electronic devices).

Family and Cultural Considerations

The feedback from the interview with the DP at the secondary school indicates that there are ethnic factors to consider as well. During the interview, possible reasons for school lateness were discussed pertaining to their school cohort (please note this is the view of one person). These are summarised as follows:

- Pasifika students often have family commitments, for example, the oldest child may be required to take the younger siblings to school first.
- The commute with the bus and continuous change to road works may contribute.
- Some Pasifika students are the main financial providers in their family and have to work after school; therefore they may feel tired in the morning.

New Zealand is a bi-cultural country as well as consisting of other diverse cultures, therefore an awareness of cultural beliefs and values are an important factor to consider. An article written by the Centre of Pacific Studies (Schoeffel et al., 1994) reviewed Polynesian attitudes to child training and discipline in New Zealand. Parents in this study were interviewed and reported that life had revolved around the household, and children were expected to remain close to home, to be available to help with the work of the household, to run errands for their elders, and to help to take care of younger brothers and sisters. These beliefs were passed onto the parents from their elders. Most believed that the home should be the major force in shaping children's behaviour. Therefore, if the home is the primary focus, then the younger generation would participate in household family tasks which could have an influence on arriving at school on time. An article written in 1998 by the Education Group in New Zealand (Education Group, 1998) highlighted the pressure that Māori and Pacific Island students may face. This pressure included following a value system within their culture that is acceptable by the elders as well as for the individual student trying to find their place of belonging within the school culture. The article further discussed that the students would rather keep their two worlds separate by avoiding conflict and for the students some examples of this could include school lateness.

Personal Responsibility

Two participants (one from each cohort) acknowledged that it is important for them to arrive on time as they feel more organised. One participant mentioned, "Waking up early gives me a lot of time to get ready, I don't have to catch up with

work and it is a good way to start in the morning". Another student from the late cohort reflected on the advantages to arriving at school on time and reported that it allows time for "Organisation, chat to friends, and ease in, focus on what classes you have to prepare for". This indicates that although students may recognise the importance of arrival at school on time, it does not necessarily translate directly into punctuality.

Location and Transport

From the interviews, all the students indicated that it is important for them to arrive at school on time and both cohorts arrive with similar means of transport, namely with their parents, taking the bus or walking. To protect student identity, the areas that the students are travelling from have not been included, however the distance that some students travel varies and is further than others which has an impact on arrival time. One participant reported: "Sometimes the bus can be late due to road works and this creates traffic problems". Another participant reported arriving late at times as she relied on her mother taking her to school as she resided a fair distance from her school. This indicates that the distance that some students reside from school may contribute to school lateness, particularly if there are road works.

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Sleep Deprivation

When adolescents experience cumulative sleep loss, adverse effects can be observed. Some of these include: mood (low mood or anxiety); learning; memory, and emotion regulation (Gregoire, 2015). Furthermore, research found that drowsy students who lack adequate sleep are more often chronically absent and tardy at school (American Academy of Paediatrics, 2014). Some students may require support from adults with forming new habits and routines, particularly if the student does not have an intrinsic desire to make changes.

Educational interventions for parents and adolescents within the school environment could be developed by the pastoral care team (school counsellor and nurse). The content could include: strategies for mood improvement, overall health and well-being, and how this relates to school attendance and punctuality (American Academy of Paediatrics, 2014).

Some schools are responding to school lateness by starting school at a later time. In a research project involving more than 9000 students at eight different high schools in Minnesota, Colorado and Wyoming, Richmond (2015) reported that a later start time at school resulted in a boost in attendance, test scores, and grades in mathematics, English, science,

and social studies. Schools also saw a decrease in tardiness, substance abuse and symptoms of depression.

Family and Cultural Considerations

Even within a specific culture there may be cultural variations to consider, and therefore having a well-established collaborative relationship with each family in the school may develop a stronger partnership between the school and home which may encourage the student to arrive on time where possible. Developing a whole-school approach toward this will create an opportunity to involve the greater community in the design and planning of school punctuality. "A positive whole-school approach including and involving the wider school community is important in shaping the values, attitudes and behaviours of the students" (Ministry of Education, n.d.).

One branch of developing a whole-school approach can include increased communication with parents. An article written by Hill and Hawk (1998) focused on student achievement and highlighted that contacting parents in their form class once a term noted experiencing positive parent interview nights. Another suggestion in this article discussed altering the days or times of the parent interview meeting and offering alternative days and times to accommodate family commitments. When parents and teachers have an opportunity to meet, teachers can discuss the curriculum and clarify education assessment factors, and this would be a good opportunity to discuss punctuality. A further opportunity to enhance communication and fostering a 'working together' philosophy could include briefing students and parents about information pertaining to school topics, usually present in the school newsletter, and the reason why it is important for the students to share it with their parents. Improved communication between parents and school staff is imperative to promote an open discussion about school punctuality.

Personal Responsibility

The Eberly Centre for Teaching Excellence and Educational Innovation (2015) suggests that the school outlines and explains to students the policy about punctuality (school arrival time) and how this relates to standards of professionalism. This is a life skill that may form part of their life as adults; for example, work life or spiritual life (going to church or having powhiri on a marae). Communication was another area that was encouraged, through supporting the student to take responsibility for lateness and to discuss why it is an issue for them (Eberly Centre for Teaching and Educational Innovation, 2015). Discussing this with a school staff member (teacher),

solutions can be explored which can allow the student to develop their personal responsibility further.

Location and Transport

One possibility regarding the impact of transport on lateness could include the school, parents and students enquiring whether there are road changes in their area and explore the routes that have been changed, and students could consider travelling with peers who reside within the same area. This information could be shared in the school newsletter; the Ministry of Education website has included a detailed section about school transport and how to resolve some of these issues. Some topics outlined from the Ministry of Education includes: accidents and incidents; routes and stops; school transport assistance, and contacts for regional transport advisors (Ministry of Education, 2017). School transport assistance allows a student a place on the school bus, and if a school bus is not available a conveyance allowance may be an alternative. However, the school must be closest to the student's residence as well as within a certain distance (approximately 4.8km Year 9 -13 students) (Ministry of Education, 2017). Utilising these resources can assist with exploring solutions applicable to specific students and areas where schools are located.

SUMMARY AND LIMITATIONS

The objective of the research project was to determine what dimensions may contribute to school lateness and to explore solutions that may improve student punctuality. From the twenty students randomly selected in the school population, six provided consent to participate and they were divided into two cohorts: two participants arriving late and four participants arriving on time. Qualitative responses relating to arriving at school on time/school lateness were completed by six participants and the results indicated that these participants viewed it as important to arrive on time. Themes were derived from the project namely: transport, sleep deprivation, motivation and personal responsibility, as well as family and cultural considerations. Participants provided great insight into their arriving at school on time as well as when they arrive late, and what they perceived as reasons for their school lateness. This provided an avenue to possibly explore these reasons further and consider preventative measures and solutions. Both cohorts identified that they stay up late at times, however the punctual cohort recognised that they may feel tired in the morning but they ensure they arrive on time. For one student, they mentioned that they do not like to receive detention. The students in the late cohort drew on the theme

of organisation, which included going to bed earlier thus reducing the effects of feeling tired.

In terms of implications for future research on this topic, although the school provided access to quantitative data which primarily recorded school attendance data, it excluded data collection specific to school lateness. A second consideration for future research would be exploring the usefulness of including data from a computer-based programme that captures school lateness data. The data could include demographic details and explained reasons as this will reduce bias and explain why students are late. A further suggestion is to include a larger cohort of students as this is likely to highlight other important themes contributing to school lateness as well as more schools agreeing to participate in school lateness research.

A final consideration is that the twenty students who were randomly selected included diverse ethnic groups namely: Māori, Pacific Island as well as Asian. Due to the limited number of students who ultimately took part, it was not possible to gather useful data regarding the possible impact of ethnicity. Based on what the DP reported regarding information reported to her by one Pacific Island student, it may be helpful to explore culture, more specifically the roles of individuals within culture groups and how this relates to school and arriving on time.

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Appendix A

Survey related to arriving to school on time

1. How do you arrive to school in the morning?
 - Parent takes me to school
 - Take the bus
 - Ride a bicycle
 - Carpool with a friend
 - Walk or run
 - Other
2. How important do you think it is to arrive to school on time?
 - Very important
 - Somewhat important
 - Not important
3. Over the past month how often did you arrive to school on time?
 - 5 days
 - 5-10 days
 - 10-15 days
 - 15-20 days
 - 20-25 days
 - 25-30 days
4. Over the past week (Mon-Fri), how many days did you arrive on time?
 - 1 day
 - 2 days
 - 3 days
 - 4 days
 - 5 days
5. What are some of the reasons that you may be arriving late to school?
 - Don't like the teachers
 - Social difficulties (don't have many friends/bullied)
 - School difficulties (don't understand the schoolwork, don't like the subjects)
 - Feel tired in the morning
 - Transport problems
 - Family arguments
 - Can't be bothered
6. What strategies have you tried to arrive at school on time?
7. Explain why these strategies worked/did not work?
8. What are the advantages to arriving to school on time?

AUTHOR PROFILE

Jeanne Currie



Jeanne Currie is a registered Educational Psychologist who has a particular interest in working with the adolescent age group. In 2016, Jeanne completed the PGDiPEdPsych at Massey University and had an opportunity to complete the research project discussed in this article. Jeanne would like to acknowledge and thank the school (participants and school staff where the project was researched), Massey University programme staff (lecturers), Rebecca Abrahams (supervisor during the internship) and Jolie Hammond (supervisor post internship) in supporting Jeanne with this project. Jeanne looks forward to her continued work in the field of psychology.

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