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Establishing a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations

The sociocultural environment

Context

Te Kotahitanga is a project that aims to improve outcomes for Māori students in mainstream New Zealand high schools. The first phase involved 11 teachers in four schools; the focus was on students in years 9 and 10. In the second phase, professional development was offered to all staff in the original four schools. The third phase took in another 12 schools. In the fourth phase (2006), 21 more schools joined the project. The focus of research in phase 4 is on the replicability of the programme as it is scaled up to include new schools and on the sustainability of the reform in the 12 phase 3 schools. Participation is voluntary. In the early phases, only 20–50% of the staff in any particular school was involved (except in the case of two small schools). Each year 30 new teachers from each school are brought into the project, so that by the end of the second year there are up to 60 to 70 teachers, which in some cases is the whole staff.

Time

At the time of writing, the project is in its fifth year, with some schools in their third year of involvement. The professional development consists of an initial three-day induction hui, followed by a term-by-term cycle of formal observations, follow-up feedback, group co-construction meetings, and targeted shadow coaching. Other activities such as new knowledge, new teaching strategies, and/or new assessment procedures are introduced on an 'as needs' basis.

Focus of PD

The emphasis of the project is on reducing disparity in educational outcomes for Māori students. The project aims to help teachers reflect critically on the assumptions they make about their relationships and interactions with Māori students and to interrogate their own roles in the perpetuation of low academic achievement, high rates of suspension, and high absenteeism. Professional development supports participating teachers to implement the Effective Teaching Profile (ETP) in their classrooms.

Goals

The goals of Te Kotahitanga include:
- challenging teachers' assumptions about their Māori students and classroom dynamics;
- having teachers adopt a pedagogical approach consistent with the Effective Teaching Profile;
- improving educational outcomes for Māori students.

Impact on student learners

Prior to PD

Prior to participating in the project, many of the teachers attributed difficulties experienced by Māori students to personal and home deficiencies. This was particularly true in their assumptions about the causes of low achievement, high absenteeism, and disruptive behaviour. Some of the teachers had responded by providing classroom activities with a low level of cognitive challenge. Student engagement, achievement, and attendance were all below acceptable levels.

Student

I think we don't pass and we fail because of the way they teach you. I just don't like it.

She doesn't even congratulate you if you've done something good or anything. She doesn't smile either. Yeah, I've never seen Miss smile.
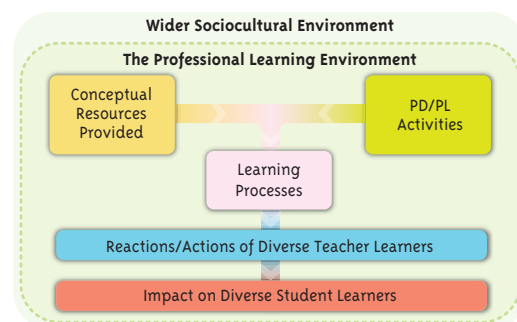
Student

After PD

Following their involvement in the project, teachers reported that they had reconsidered their attitudes towards Māori students in their classes; they talked about changed relationships, improved rapport, and enhanced interactions. Observers noted that the cognitive level of lessons had increased, reflecting teachers' higher expectations of their students.

Research conducted in the 12 schools in 2004–5 showed that 78% of Māori students observed were engaged for 80–100% of the lesson—up from 59%. The greatest increase occurred between the second and third observations, coinciding with the greatest change in teaching practice. Observer ratings of work completed increased from 3.6 to 4.2, measured on a 5-point scale. The attendance of Māori students also improved, with a decrease in unexplained absences. Stand-downs had decreased in six of the schools, as had suspensions in 10. While the total number of stand-downs remained similar over the three years, the number of suspensions decreased.

The research project showed that as Te Kotahitanga teachers became more proficient in their use of the ETP, their Māori students improved in numeracy and literacy achievement. While other variables may partly account for these positive gains, the totality of the evidence demonstrates that the participating teachers, across multiple schools, built their knowledge, skills, and capacities through implementation of the ETP.

For longitudinal evidence about the impact of Te Kotahitanga on the first full cohort of students from participating schools, see the later section in this case: Impact on student success in terms of NCEA.

To engage teachers in rethinking their (deficit) theories in a constructive manner, Te Kotahitanga used kaupapa Māori 'collaborative storying' to give authority to the voices of participants. Teachers were presented with stories (compiled in an earlier phase of the project) from students (engaged and non-engaged), parents, whānau, principals, and teachers, expressing their perception of the influences that shape student engagement and achievement. Each of these groups had markedly different perceptions of what it was actually like to be a Māori student. The most divergent views were the ones expressed by the teachers and the students.

The teachers attributed the difficulties experienced by Māori students to deficiencies in the students themselves and in their backgrounds. They pathologised the students' lived experiences, with many believing that Māori learners were simply less capable of educational achievement because of limited language skills and poor home backgrounds. In contrast, the students' own stories focused primarily on their classroom experiences and their relationships and interactions with teachers. They spoke about the negative attitudes and beliefs they experienced and their feelings of being excluded. They also identified positive relationships, where teachers knew and trusted them and made an effort to know them as Māori. Further, they described how they believed their achievement could be enhanced if their teachers would use alternative pedagogical approaches that essentially were more discursive and inclusive than the expert–novice transmission model that they most often experienced.

The style used throughout the professional development drew upon wider kaupapa Māori understandings, along with those of the students. Teacher learning experiences mirrored those they were being asked to use with their Māori students. Rather than tell teachers what changes they should make, opportunities were provided for them to engage in dialogue about issues that they themselves had identified. In this way they were able to formulate needs as mutually agreed goals, and co-construct new theories.

The research and professional development team was responsible for implementation of the programme in participating schools. Some members of this team acted as regional coordinators, providing in-school support for in-school facilitation teams, who then provided professional development for participating teachers.

GEPRISP: the Te Kotahitanga professional development model

Goal: To improve the educational achievement of Māori students	**Examine** Māori students' current experiences.	Challenge teacher **Positioning**.	New **Relationships**	New **Interactions**	New **Strategies**	**Plan** for all this to happen.

Teachers experienced models of practice that could enhance their classroom dynamics. While the emphasis was on how teachers perceived their Māori students and the expectations they had of them, the marae setting and protocols followed during the initial three-day hui helped teachers to understand reo and tikanga appropriate for the classroom. Teachers were introduced to the Effective Teaching Profile and discussed how it differed from more traditional approaches. Teachers began to see how Māori students learn within the framework of a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations.

Evidence from the research showed that the hui experience on its own could not provide the depth of understanding teachers needed in order to change their practice in ways that would impact on student outcomes. They needed further opportunities to acquire new pedagogical approaches and learn new ways of interacting with their Māori students. These opportunities were provided in the form of a series of structured classroom observations based on the Effective Teaching Profile, followed by one-to-one learning conversations involving teacher and facilitator. At first, the facilitators provided much of the feedback. As the teachers became more familiar with how the different components of teaching practice interacted, they began to take more of a leading role themselves, analysing data, seeking solutions, and co-constructing new practice. This might involve collaborative lesson planning, adapting the learning environment or curriculum, or provider modelling of next steps. Shadow coaching was used to support the implementation of planned changes. Such coaching stressed the importance of the teacher–facilitator relationship, mirroring the kind of working relationship teachers were encouraged to have with their students.

Regular, collaborative, co-construction meetings were also held at each school with a school-based facilitator. These meetings gave teachers an opportunity to analyse the ways in which their practice was impacting on the learning of a particular class. Data on student attendance, participation, and achievement was gathered for formative purposes and teachers engaged in collective problem solving to identify changes in practice that would lead to progress.

The Te Kotahitanga Effective Teaching Profile

Effective teachers of Māori students create a culturally appropriate and responsive context for learning in their classroom.

In doing so they demonstrate the following understandings:

a. They positively and vehemently reject deficit theorising as a means of explaining Māori students' educational achievement levels.

b. Teachers know and understand how to bring about change in Māori students' educational achievement and are professionally committed to doing so.

In the following observable ways:

1. **Manaakitanga** – They care for students as culturally located human beings.

2. **Mana motuhake** – They care for the performance of their students.

3. **Whakapiringatanga** – They are able to create a secure, well-managed learning environment by incorporating routine pedagogical knowledge with pedagogical imagination.

4. **Wananga** – They are able to engage in effective teaching interactions with Māori students in Māori.

5. **Ako** – They can use strategies that promote effective teaching interactions and relationships with their learners.

6. **Kotahitanga** – They promote, monitor, and reflect on outcomes that lead to improvements in achievement for Māori.

Why did this work?

Cultural and cognitive dissonance was created by exposing teachers to the considerable gap that exists between the assumptions that typically underpin teacher analysis of classroom dynamics and the actual experience of students, as revealed in their stories. By using the relatively non-confrontational approach of presenting stories from different groups, the context was created for an alternative understanding of classrooms, and an opportunity offered to teachers to reflect critically on the part they might play in student learning. To ensure the requisite depth of learning, repeated, intensive opportunities were provided for teachers and facilitators to identify and solve problems that surfaced in the course of the cycle of hui, observations, feedback, co-construction meetings, and shadow coaching.

Teacher responses to PD/PL

Dissonance

As they examined the stories, teachers were able to reflect on the changes in beliefs and practice that they would need to make in order to see change in their students. They wanted to know how they could go about addressing aspects of their classrooms that may be impacting negatively on their Māori students, and improving educational outcomes for Māori.

While teachers were motivated to change their practice, the initial hui could not provide sufficient depth of learning for them to do so. They needed opportunities to engage with the new learning in their own contexts and to increase their knowledge and understanding.

Teacher

What it made me realise was that there are a lot of things … that had got squeezed out because of (my) concern for getting through the content of the curriculum.

Teacher

I have been teaching for 32 years and I tell you what this project has done for me—it has rejuvenated me, and not just practically in the classroom, but reflecting on the teaching too.

None of us will progress this year unless we support each other and work together.

Teacher

Active engagement in new theory and practice

Observations and feedback, shadow coaching, and co-construction meetings gave teachers repeated opportunities to refine their practice in the light of data gathered specifically to discover how effective they were being in terms of their interactions with students. Measures of student engagement and participation were discussed and practice changed accordingly. Typically, the most significant changes in the pattern of interactions did not occur until the third observation, suggesting how difficult it was for teachers to change fundamental aspects of their practice, even when motivated to do so.

Co-construction meetings gradually became more and more focused, with teachers analysing how their practice was impacting on their students.

Two elements of effective practice that led to improved student outcomes were high expectations and the creation of a nurturing and supportive environment.

Student

You can tell he respects us, because when it comes to learning big time he's always there. If we don't understand something, he doesn't talk to us like little babies, he talks to us like young adults.

Why become a teacher if all you care about is teaching students then going home? I reckon they would feel better if they knew they had taught a student rather than when their payday comes.

Student

Cognitive reconstruction

By creating dissonance with their existing beliefs, it was the students' stories that acted as a catalyst for teachers to engage in the professional development that followed. The stories motivated teachers to review their philosophical positions and, from there, to try and change their practice. The process was gradual, achieved through opportunities to implement new, more discursive teaching methods (that is, providing multiple opportunities for students to engage with learning in a variety of ways), and build constructive relationships with their students. Teachers' new practice was co-constructed with facilitator support, using knowledge based on the Effective Teaching Profile.

How did this work?

The teachers started by evaluating the effectiveness of their practice for their students, accepting responsibility for the effect of their teaching, becoming more self-critical, and taking greater agency. The Effective Teaching Profile provided a clear focus for teacher and facilitator efforts. It was used as a source of knowledge and to inform observations and follow-up discussions. Teachers had sufficient time to make the necessary changes, as well as support that helped them to maintain focus and refine practice. Rather than implement a programme, they reconstructed their practice based on new principles, knowledge, and understandings.

Impact on student success in terms of NCEA

In 2006, the first full cohort of students from participating schools reached year 11, providing an opportunity to assess the impact of Te Kotahitanga on National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) level 1 results. An analysis by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) showed that the increase in the percentage of Māori and Pasifika students gaining NCEA level 1 from Te Kotahitanga schools was greater than the increase for students from non-Te Kotahitanga schools (comparing 2006 results with 2005 results and weighting for decile[1]).
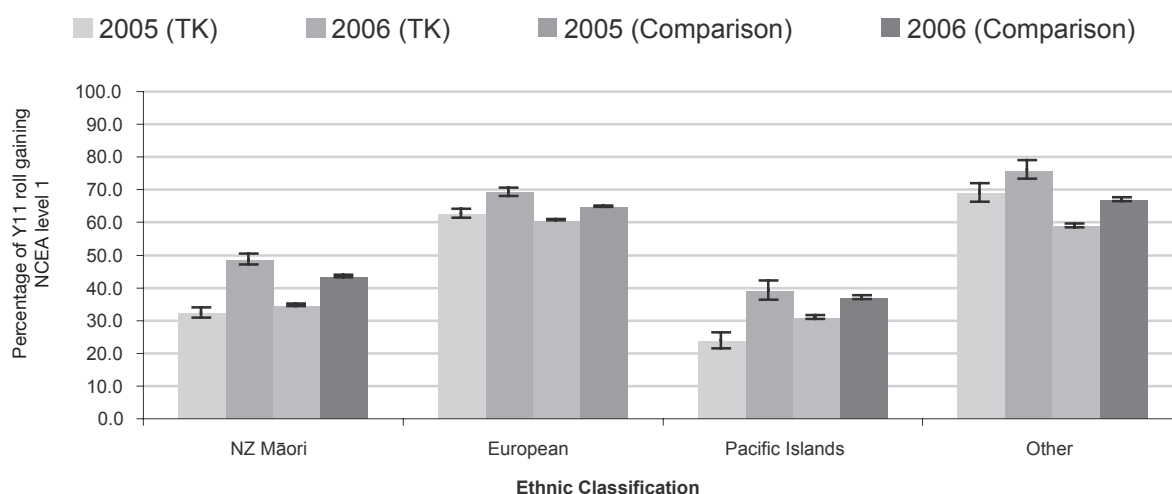
The following table shows that between 2005 and 2006 an increased percentage of students from all ethnic groups gained NCEA level 1 in both Te Kotahitanga and non-Te Kotahitanga schools. But the increase for Māori and Pasifika students from Te Kotahitanga schools was much greater, indicating that the programme was having a long-term positive impact on these students in addition to its immediate positive impact across the student body. The 16.4% increase in 2006 for Māori students represents a 50% increase over the 2005 levels of attainment.

Success in NCEA level 1, 2005–06
(comparing students from Te Kotahitanga schools with those from non-Te Kotahitanga schools and the national cohort)

Ethnicity	Te Kotahitanga schools							National cohort (decile weighted)[2]
	Year 11 students on roll (number)		Year 11 students gaining NCEA level 1					
			Number		Percent		Increase (percentage points)	
	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005–06	
NZ Māori	973	952	312	461	32.1	48.4	16.4	8.9
European	1210	1302	756	899	62.5	69.0	6.6	4.1
Pacific Islands	292	282	69	110	23.6	39.0	15.4	6.1
Other	263	231	181	175	68.8	75.8	6.9	8.1

The graph below shows NCEA level 1 data for 2005 and 2006 by ethnicity. The standard error bars at the top of each column allow the reader to make informal judgments of the statistical significance of the changes across years: where error bars do not overlap, the difference can be regarded as significant (confidence level = approximately 95%). It can be seen that all four ethnic groupings made gains that were significant, whether from Te Kotahitanga or comparison schools.[3]

The magnitude of the gain for Māori is quite remarkable: in 2005, prior to the intervention, the percentage of Māori students in the Te Kotahitanga schools that gained NCEA level 1 was significantly lower than the national percentage for Māori—in 2006 it was significantly higher. In one of the schools involved, 18.8% of Māori gained NCEA level 1 in 2005 (n = 64)—the following year the percentage was 63.9% (n = 61).

Percentage of year 11 students gaining NCEA level 1, by ethnicity

Reflective questions

Teachers in this project achieved fundamental changes in both their teaching practice and student outcomes.

- What allowed them to reconceptualise their interactions with Māori students?
- What factors allowed them to change successfully?

Source

Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Cavanaugh, l., Teddy, L., & Clapham, S. (2006). *Te Kotahitanga Phase 3 Whakawhanaungatanga: Establishing a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy of Relations in Mainstream Secondary School.* Ministry of Education Research Division. Wellington.

Available at: www.educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz/publications/homepages/te-kotahitanga/index.html

The analysis of NCEA results is by Dr Michael Johnston, Research and Knowledge Services, New Zealand Qualifications Authority.

[1]   The national data have been weighted to reflect the decile profile of the Te Kotahitanga schools. That is, the NCEA level 1 achievement rates nationally for each decile level were multiplied by the number of Te Kotahitanga schools at each decile level, the products were summed, and the result was divided by the total number of Te Kotahitanga schools (12) to give a decile-weighted national average.

[2]   See above note.

[3]   Note that because these data have been aggregated, they do not reveal variability of impact as a result of the differing proportions of teachers participating in each school (critical mass effect) or variation in the conditions supporting changes in practice.