

Leading from within education by legitimating students' voices

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Abstract

This paper examines a kaupapa Māori solution to the educational crisis that is currently facing Māori students in classrooms in a way that connects politics, pedagogy, action and critical reflection. Te Kotahitanga is a project of interest to researchers and professional developers. This project is improving the educational achievement of Māori students in New Zealand by operationalising Māori people's cultural aspirations for self-determination within non-dominating relations of interdependence. In this sense, the project is informed by a kaupapa Māori theory of self-determination.

Researchers will share the results of this work that focuses on raising the achievement of Maori students in New Zealand secondary schools. This project involves: (a) listening to the voices of indigenous children talking about their education, (b) implementing a professional development initiative to incorporate a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations in classrooms, and (c) using research outcomes to legitimate the voices of these Maori students. This paper is condensed from reports found at:

<http://www.educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz/publications/homepages/te-kotahitanga/index.html>

In particular we relied on the research reported in:

Te Kotahitanga Phase 3 Whanaungatanga: Establishing a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations in mainstream secondary school classrooms

Results from the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) 2000 study reveal that schools in New Zealand, Australia, and the United States of America provide education that is of high quality but at the same time of low equity. This means that while the quality of education in these countries is high, not all children are benefiting at the same level from attending school (OECD, 2001).

This paper addresses more effective responses to the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) resulting from on-going years of disparity for one group of students – indigenous children. This group includes Māori students in New Zealand, Aboriginal students in Australia, and Native American students in the United States.

Researchers from the University of Waikato in Hamilton New Zealand and the Ministry of Education will share the results of their work carried out over the past five years on a project called Te Kotahitanga. This project focuses on raising the achievement of Maori students in New Zealand secondary schools. This paper begins with a description of creating a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations and consists of three parts: (a) listening to the voices of indigenous children talking about their education, (b) implementing a professional development initiative to incorporate a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations in classrooms, and (c) using research outcomes to legitimate the voices of these Maori students.

This paper examines a kaupapa Māori solution to the educational crisis that is currently facing Māori students in mainstream educational settings in a way that connects politics, pedagogy, action and critical reflection. Te Kotahitanga is a research/professional development project that aims to improve the educational achievement of Māori students in New Zealand by operationalising Māori people's cultural aspirations for self-determination within non-dominating relations of interdependence. In this sense, the project is informed by a kaupapa Māori theory of self-determination.

Creating a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy of Relations

Russell Bishop

Like other indigenous students, many Māori students suffer from social and educational disparities. A kaupapa Māori educational research theory was developed (Bishop, 2005; Bishop & Glynn, 1999) as one response to these disparities. From this theory, a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations emerged (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Walker, 2006).

Te Kotahitanga commenced in 2001 with the gathering of narratives of Māori students' classroom experiences by the process of collaborative storytelling (Bishop, 1996). The project sought to understand the self-determination of Māori secondary school students by talking with them and with other participants in their education settings about just what was involved in limiting and/or improving their educational achievement (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). From these narratives of experience, researchers developed an Effective Teaching Profile (ETP), which identified understandings and practices that would enable educators to more effectively support Māori students to achieve to their potential in mainstream classrooms. Researchers then sought to implement this ETP by training teachers to create culturally appropriate and responsive contexts for learning in classrooms, through the development of a pedagogy of relations.

The students were clear about what would work. By placing the self-determination of Māori students at the centre of classroom relationships and interactions, teachers could change how they traditionally related and interacted with Māori students in their classrooms and thus could create a context for learning wherein Māori students' educational achievement could improve. It was from the ideas of those who were positioned within the discourse of agentic relationships that the ETP was developed. This profile puts at centre stage the necessity for a common kaupapa or philosophy that rejects deficit thinking and pathologising practices (Shields, Bishop, & Masawi, 2005) as a means of explaining Māori students' educational achievement. In concert is the underlying aspiration for rangatiratanga (self-determination) that promotes the agency of teachers to voice their professional commitment, willingness to engage in whānau relations and interactions and reciprocal practices that are fundamental to addressing and promoting educational achievement for Māori students.

Listening to the Voices of Indigenous Children Talking About Their Education

Lani Teddy

Just as the narratives of Māori students formed the basis of Te Kotahitanga and particularly the Effective Teaching Profile (ETP), their voices were the most important indicator about how effective the project was for these students. In the initial Phase 1 narratives, Māori students talked about the things that would engage them in education. They emphasised how problematic it was to be Māori in mainstream education. They indicated that teachers' rejection of deficit theorising about things Māori was essential to the development of respectful and caring relationships between Māori students and teachers. They yearned for positive recognition and acceptance of their own culture.

In the Phase 2 interviews, Māori students reported positively on their experiences in the classrooms with teachers participating in Te Kotahitanga. The students interviewed at this time commented on the benefits of good relationships with their teachers. These students reported that being Māori in the classroom was about being treated well by teachers, challenged in terms of their learning and listened to as individuals.

Students in Phase 3 strongly affirmed the importance of their teachers' theoretical positioning and the development of mutually respectful, caring relationships, if participation and learning was to follow. What was also evident was that as Māori students began to feel more secure in themselves and with their teachers, they can get on with learning and be far less concerned about the cultural manifestations of their identity. The students were certain that teachers being responsive to them as Māori and the way they were treated as Māori was essential; the quality of in-class relationships with teachers being paramount to their participation in the classroom. When their identity was secure the conversations of these Māori students focused largely upon being engaged with learning and thus better able to be self-determining, then and in the future.

Clearly, from these conversations, the ETP does indeed have real strengths for raising the achievement of Māori students. The professional development that these teachers received from their facilitators changed these teachers' approach to teaching making them exponents of the ETP and thus more effective practitioners for helping to raise Māori students' achievement.

Implementing a Professional Development Initiative to Incorporate a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy of Relations in Classrooms

Mere Berryman

The implementation of a professional development initiative to incorporate a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations in classrooms was based on the Effective Teaching Profile (ETP) that evolved out of the narratives of Māori students' experiences. This profile provided understandings and practices that enabled Māori students to achieve more successfully in mainstream classes.

Facilitators, all of whom were experienced teachers, were trained to work with teachers to implement the ETP in their classrooms. In so doing teachers were able to create a culturally appropriate and responsive context for learning through the development of a pedagogy of relations. Facilitators were trained to undertake four major professional development activities with teachers.

Initially teachers learned about the kaupapa or underlying philosophy of the project, They learned about the ETP and the cycle of related professional development activities. Teachers then returned to school and engaged with facilitators in a series of in-class professional development episodes that were implemented in each term of the school year. This process consisted of classroom observations, interactive feedback sessions on lessons observed, collaborative co-construction meetings followed by further in-class support in the form of shadow-coaching, all conducted by the trained facilitators. The regular (four times a year) formal observations provided details of classroom interactions, student engagement and work completion, teacher and student locations within the classroom, the cognitive level of lessons and details of the relational elements of the ETP.

Following the in-class activities, the facilitator conducted an interactive co-construction meeting with a group of teachers who were associated with a target class but who came from across different curriculum areas. Co-construction meetings involved facilitated opportunities for teachers to collaboratively and critically reflect on a range of Māori students' participation and achievement data and set goals for sustaining or developing further improvements. This was then followed by further in-class observations in the form of shadow-coaching, which involved in-class support and feedback on the lessons, the strategies or the approaches that were developed in the co-construction meetings. This process helped teachers to develop professional learning communities focused on improving Māori student achievement.

Using Research Outcomes to Legitimate the Voices of These Maori Students

Tom Cavanagh

Research for Te Kotahitanga was based on a kaupapa Māori educational research model (Bishop, 2005; Bishop & Glynn, 1999). The purpose of the research was to support the kaupapa or underlying philosophy and purpose of raising Māori students' achievement.

Using multiple indicators (Guskey & Sparks, 1996) we were able to show that when Te Kotahitanga teachers improved in their implementation of the Effective Teaching profile (ETP), their classroom learning contexts changed and Māori students improved in numeracy and literacy achievement. Based on these results we are confident that while teachers demonstrated significant shifts in their practice, Māori students have shown significant gains in their literacy and numeracy achievement scores. While other variables affected this outcome, we believe the evidence supports the conclusion that teacher involvement in Te Kotahitanga did contribute substantially to improvement in Māori students' literacy and numeracy achievement.

These results show that within a relatively short period of time, teachers were able to challenge and shift their traditional positioning vis-a-vis Māori students and shift their teaching practices, and we saw in association with these changes, improvements in Māori students' educational performance across a wide range of measures, including improving student achievement on standardised tests.

These changes in teacher understandings and behaviour meant that teachers changed their relationships and interactions with Māori students in a number of ways. Teachers formed closer relationships with Māori students, raised their behavioural and learning expectations of Māori students, changed the range of classroom interactions from traditional to discursive and interacted in more meaningful ways by engaging more closely with Māori students' prior experiences as a basis for new learning. These interactions resulted in less negative student behaviour with more students wanting to learn and learning how to learn. Teachers also learned how student achievement could inform their ongoing practice. In association with these changes, Māori students became more academically engaged, completed more work in class, attended class more regularly and saw their summative assessment scores improve.

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