Inclusion: Cultural capital of diversity or deficit of disability? Language for change.

A Journey Towards Inclusion

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Abstract: If we do not change our language to match changes in thinking, we perpetuate what always was. If we keep talking about "special education, disability, dysfunction, disorder", we focus on the deficit. We have changed theory, we have changed practice, but we haven't changed the language. In one small rural secondary school in New Zealand (Year 9-13) of 400 students, we have created an environment truly inclusive of ability, ethnicity, culture, gender and language. Keywords: inclusive, equity, language, diversity, holistic, ability, ethnicity

Introduction: Language is a powerful creator of realities and if we as educators change the language we use we can create an environment which truly empowers, embraces and celebrates diversity of all kinds. The model we present where a school community honours the vast range of differences and where the cultural capital of diversity is deliberately sought and included, presents an example of praxis which is powerful and practical. We believe this 'cultural capital' lies at the very heart of how we reshape practice and language to bring theory alive; to engender true inclusion and ultimately success for every student. "Success for All" as our NZ Ministry of Education (2010) declaims.

Method: The practice presented is the culmination of a five year journey reshaping a secondary school to be inclusive. New Zealand's Education Review Office inspects schools every 1, 3 or 5 years depending upon their sustained success in implementing the NZ Education Act (1989) with its attendant amendments. Our school was reviewed at the start of our first year, eighteen months later and again in three years at the end of our fifth. The October 2013 review identified excellence of equity and inclusion, huge upshifts in student achievement of all kinds (cultural, academic, sporting and vocational) and evidence of effective, embedded systems, processes and relationships supporting inclusion.

Results and discussion:

The New Zealand Disability Strategy (2001) describes disability:

> We live in a disabling society. The New Zealand Disability Strategy presents a plan for changing this. Disability is not something individuals have. What individuals have are impairments (sic). They may be physical, sensory, neurological, psychiatric, intellectual or other impairments. Disability is the process which happens when one group of people

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create barriers by designing a world only for their way of living, taking no account of the impairments other people have. (p. 3)

The goal of creating "a totally inclusive school," is a personal lifetime commitment for the authors and in line with the New Zealand Ministry of Education vision of "Success for all: every school, every child" by 2014 (Ministry of Education, 2010). We believe for inclusion to live, we must 'live inclusion'. How do we go about creating a school that 'lives inclusion'? We begin with a vision which celebrates the uniqueness and value of the cultural capital a person brings, this includes whatever richness is inherent in their difference. In the words of a local Māori proverb or whakataukī: "Kei tēnā, kei tēnā, kei tēnā ano. Tōnā ake ahua, Tōnā ake mauri, Tōnā ake mana. Each and every one has their own uniqueness, life essence and presence." (F. Kana, personal communication, November 9, 1998). One of the first steps we took was to examine not where the deficits in educational provision lay, but instead to ask who were the favoured stakeholders in our school community. By then disaggregating our data by ethnicity, gender and age level we could see who were relentlessly under-served in our school. From there we identified girls, Māori, students with high and/or complex needs, junior year levels and gifted students as being often overlooked and their lack of success either under-reported or not responded to. Our next step was to undertake intensive self review of many aspects of the school/kura, identifying enablers and barriers to inclusion. One such barrier was differentiated academic targets determined by ethnic designation; lower expectations for indigenous students (Māori) were documented and entrenched in teaching and learning. Terminology which created a concept of "normal" which then manifested an unspoken "not normal" or "less than normal" was another barrier. This language accentuated difference by implying or attributing a deficit to anyone other than the "norm." The school system recognised and categorised students by ability or disability. This created a school where some students/tauira were known for what they could *not* do rather than for their strengths. The school wide self review led to identification and analysis of words used in the school, for

example "special education, special ed kids, the kid with hearing aids, hostel kids, teacher aides, disabled kids" etc. After identifying deficit language we had to address the issue with the Board of Trustees, the staff and the students and then rewrite school documents using the language of empowerment. The move to use the title "specialised educational provision" for every educational intervention from extension and enrichment to assistive technology was a significant enabler. This action required people to differentiate students by who they are not what needs they carry, as students could no longer be identified by deficit labels or phrases. The effect was to humanise and acknowledge each person in a respectful way. Programmes were renamed, designations redefined and the way that staff spoke with and about students changed. Teacher Aides were renamed Support Teachers to give more value to the work they do to support a wide range of educational needs. A lot of work was done to reposition adult thinking about what the 'dis' words imply. Students talk about 'dissing' people, a corruption of the word 'disrespect.' Staff constantly and gently had their attention focused upon the hidden curriculum of the deficit language of disability.

The enabling focus upon the concept of difference as richness, cultural capital as an asset not a barrier, became central to curriculum design decisions, pedagogical discussions and the organising of events in the school. Diversity as strength and richness became the 'new normal;' a reason for celebration. With the consistent integration and embedding of empowering language to describe diversity and difference, gradually attitudes and actions changed to become more inclusive.

Another part of identifying barriers was to invite all staff in their various roles to hold up the mirror of self reflection and ask themselves "what do we/I do that excludes?" followed by "how will we/I change this to include?" The ensuing enablers included a wide array of approaches both creative and innovative from the school community. Our response was therefore to unapologetically use positive discrimination to redress the balance. Gender, for example, was an

area of the school we identified as not being equally served. Resourcing was distributed inequitably with boys receiving more of the discretionary funding than girls, and of boys it was senior, European boys. This is now changed and our equity provision withstands the closest scrutiny. It is now compulsory for every Faculty and cultural or sporting area of the school to disaggregate data according to gender, ethnicity and ability and to identify and set specific goals against which they report to the Board of Trustees and the Principal twice a year. Every area must include in their management documents a description of what they are doing to support differentiated learning of all kinds for students. There is a huge amount of energy invested to ensure that every student receives a relevant programme of study which meets their needs and develops their potentials, whatever they may be.

Another major focus was the introduction of dual cultural heritage practices within school events. This is one way we strive to honour New Zealand's Treaty of Waitangi which pledged a partnership between the British Crown and the indigenous people
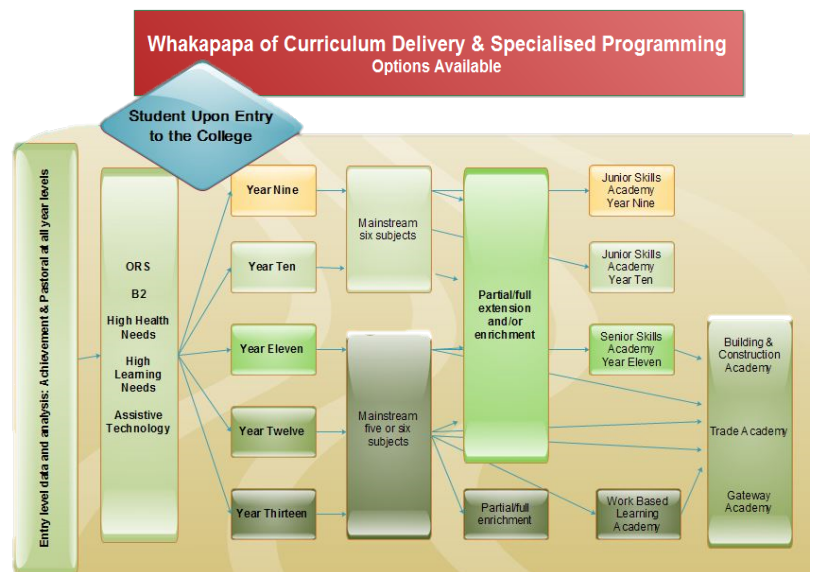

Figure 1: Differentiated Programmes Years 9-14 at Ōtorohanga College 2014

of our country (Orange, 1987). Around half of our students are Māori, and 90% of our Boarding Hostel of approximately sixty students are Māori. Practices in our school prior to our move to inclusion were mono-cultural and mono-lingual; this is no longer the case. By embracing kaupapa Māori, or Māori ways of doing and being, our school has gradually become more inclusive. This does not mean we ignored or removed European/Pākeha customs and protocols, just that we found a way to include both, thus changing the exclusive practices of the past. We now have

representative attendance at school functions, parent evenings, events and celebrations of all kinds. Whilst these claims of vastly improved cross-cultural equity are short statements, the changes involved a huge amount of political, cultural, emotional and spiritual repositioning by our school community to embrace difference of all kinds and include and celebrate te ao Māori, the Māori world view. Correct pronounciation of student names, including learning contexts and content that reflect things of a Māori world, use of Māori words alongside English in the school newsletter, strategic documents, awards certificates, and the inclusion of Māori protocols and customs such as karakia/prayer at school events and the blessing of new buildings, were all part of the shift in our school life to ensure we did not exclude Māori or jeopardise cultural safety. What we did not expect was the 'organic' alignment that soon transpired as equitable educational provision and various opportunities were made available to all students and staff. Within two years of beginning the self review process our student leadership, our academic achievement, attendance and even our discipline statistics became increasingly representative of our student population without more direct intervention. As students were empowered and expectations raised, participation, engagement, attendance and achievement all increased dramatically. More Māori adults presented themselves for positions of employment at the school and the 'face' of our adult staff became more of a reflection of our community outside the school. Our most recent Education Review Office report (November, 2013) stated that Ōtorohanga College is:

> …providing strong and effective leadership for school direction with a particular focus on building authentic bicultural practices and partnerships, and fostering positive outcomes for all students…trustees and senior managers use evidence-based internal and external self review to inform decision making, set high expectations, and respond to the ongoing needs of students…curriculum leaders and teachers are committed to adapting and designing programmes that best respond to the interests and needs of students…(and) there is a caring and inclusive school culture. (p. 7)

Conclusions: Our school is no different to any other state co-ed school in Aotearoa New Zealand. We get no differentiated funding, we have deliberately not engaged in any government funded interventions for 'target groups.' Over the last five years we have attained a growth in student academic achievement which surpasses that of the average state secondary school anywhere in New Zealand. The school looks like every other state school however the culture, the outcomes, the experiences and the wairua, or spirit, are all radically different to what they were before we embarked upon this five year journey to create an inclusive school. Our latest achievement data now shows a complete reversal of the deficit results for the target groups in New Zealand education: that of Māori, Pasifika and students with a need for specialised educational provision.

Our European/Pākeha students continue to improve their performance also. We believe the transformative catalyst is the praxis of absolute belief in the value and potential of all people and the courage to refine and redesign
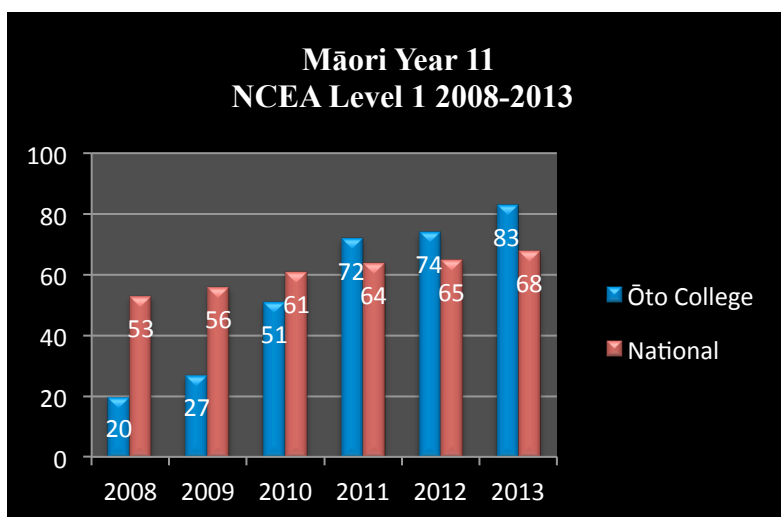

Figure 2 Growth in Māori student achievement at Ōtorohanga College at Level 1 National Certificate in Educational Achievement. NCEA is at Levels 1, 2 and 3 for Years 11, 12 and 13. Full data available www.otocoll.school.nz, keyword NCEA.

every system and process within our school to align with best practice guidelines underpinned by evidence. We acknowledge we still have work to do. Overall our goal is to create a school/kura where every tauira/student has an individualised education programme. Such a school will provide a reality where everyone's uniqueness will be catered for. We wish to create a school where process and programming bring alive the metaphor of a ramp; why build steps? Steps will naturally exclude some; a ramp allows all to enter without anyone being made to feel 'other than.'

Our dream is for every aspect, every detail and every reality of our school to manifest this concept, a place where no one is excluded and everyone has a place to belong, to stand; or it to truly be a turangawaewae; a place where every person is empowered and connected. Turangawaewae; our foundation, our place in the world, our home.

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