

*Principals Sabbatical report
Lynley Ward
Makarora
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Inquiry: What can I do to improve the learning of the Maori children at my school?

Mihi

Kia ora katou.

Hutia te rito o te harakeke

Kei hei te komako e ko

Ki mai ki ahau

He aha te mea nui o te ao?

He tangata he tangata he tangata

If you pluck out the centre of the flax bush

I ask you where would the bellbird feed from?

What is the most important thing in the world?

I tell you it is people it is people it is people.

This is a philosophy we try and live by at our school. The children at the centre surrounded and protected by parents, whanau and community and always awareness of the ancestors, those who came before and what they can teach us.



My maunga is the Takitimu's in Southland Murihiku, my awa the Oreti, my iwi is Chisholm Clan my hapu is Ward and Chisholm. My ancestors came from Scotland and England, I am pakeha both in my heritage and my upbringing. I grew up in a time and place when people didn't often openly acknowledge Maori ancestry. We learnt very little of history of Maori reading *The coming of the Maori school* a school bulletin published by education department, and sometimes doing a project like doing a project on Eskimos- an oddity from the past. Teacher College included a one week Maoritanga course.

Makarora School, a very small school at the head of Lake Wanaka in the South Island, has a high proportion of students identified as Maori. At times we are 100% Maori and over the past 10 years rarely less than 60%. I am really fortunate to be surrounded by some understanding, patient and really supportive people who guide, teach and encourage me to provide an environment that supports the learning of all our students. We try to live our beliefs, by working together to build a strong learning community *Nau i whatu te kakahu, he taniko taku* You weave the cloak and I the border.

Beginnings –tuning in

What does the current education literature and policy tell us is good practice?

Ka hikitia - Managing for Success/ Maori education Strategy 2008-2012 Reading and re reading Ka hikitia offers some excellent philosophy to base good practice. It speaks of Maori enjoying education success as Maori – of cultural advantage. That is, understanding that being Maori is an asset, not a problem (page 19), less focus on Maori as deficit and more on realising potential, tailoring education to the learner, collaborating and co-constructing, moving away from instructing and informing.

Teachers as learners – Improving Outcomes for Maori and Pasifika students through inquiry (Kate Dreaver Published by MOE 2009) Kate Dreaver has produced a report summarizing a Quality Teaching Research and Development project. She highlights the need to recognise the rich diversity among students, where each student is individual with their own understanding of what it means to be Maori or Pasifika or what it means to be a New Zealander. She points out that it is not enough to raise awareness of other cultural backgrounds, that teachers need to understand how their own cultural background effects the way they teach.

Making a Bigger Difference for all students Schooling Strategy 2005-2010 MOE 2005

The key messages for me in this documents reiterates that teaching practices must work for all students and we need to build knowledge about what works to support student learning.

Relationships between teachers/schools and families /whanau are important in supporting student learning was also highlighted, and while this is nothing new its making genuine efforts to engage parents in the school.

(page 19)

Promoting Success for Maori Student: Schools' progress education Review Office June 2010

Some of the good practice reported are

- Inclusive practices- relationships involving students, parents and whanau views and aspirations in working with Maori learners,
- Responsive teaching, positive teachers engaging students more actively in learning making processes explicit and improving students understanding of their own learning
- Integrating te reo and me nga tikanga central to in the curriculum, and Incorporating tuakana-teina approach
- Schools and teachers evaluating the impact of initiatives
- Providing leadership support and professional development
- Schools reviewing their school curriculum to ensure they reflect aspirations and needs of Maori students
- Use of a variety of ways to engage parents / whanau, flexible strategies for communicating with parents

- Board employing a kaiwhina to assist integration of Maori dimension
- Personalized 1-1 conversations with parents about their child/ren

The Cultural Self Review - Providing culturally effective inclusive education for Maori Learners , Jill Bevan –Brown NZCER 2003

Jill Bevan – Brown has developed a review tool for looking at how effective schools are at providing effective learning programmes for Maori students . She believes that teachers need to increase their knowledge of the cultural background of the learners they teach and at the same time increase their understanding of their own culture and the influence it has on them and their teaching. Part of this is gaining an understanding of how Pakeha culture influences Aotearoa/ New Zealand education system and the effect this has on children of ethnic minority groups. She believes that expertise and attitudes of teachers are pivotal . Teachers are needed who have culturally relevant knowledge and value Maoritanga, positive caring attitudes towards maori children, have high expectations of them, develop friendly supportive relationships with Maori students and their whanau

She supports the concept of Including cultural content in every aspect of the curriculum so that Maori culture is firmly woven into the school life, because cultural effectiveness recognises that a learners cultural development is equally as important as their cognitive, physical, interpersonal and intrapersonal development. (p11)

Schools have Treaty of Waitangi requirements that and need to see themselves on a continuum towards delivering effective cultural education. High quality education is based on sound research, includes timely accurate on going assessment, well planned, effective teaching strategies, adequately funded, quality equipment and resources builds on students strengths,

New Zealand Curriculum, MOE 2007

The current NZ curriculum document is an inclusive document that *applies to all English medium schools and students irrespective of gender sexuality ethnicitycultural background*

Its vision –is to create an Aotearoa new Zealand in which Maori and Pakeha recognise each other as full treaty partners, in which all cultures are valued for the contributions they bring (p8). It aims for all students to be positive in their own identity, connected to the land and environment .

- Schools have an legal obligation through the Treaty of Waitangi to provide opportunities to acquire te reo and me ona tikanga. By learning te reo and becoming increasingly familiar with tikanga, Maori students strengthen their identities while non Maori journey towards shared cultural understanding
- They must reflect cultural diversity, value the histories and traditions of all its people,
- Be inclusive non sexist, racist, non discriminatory, ensuring student identities, languages abilities and talents are recognised, affirmed and learning needs addressed
- Connect with their community and engages the support of families whanau and communities

Issues

What or who is Maori – in our school system students are identified because of what parents choose to record on enrollment forms. People are more than who they identify with, people have the right to be many things sometimes simultaneously. (Webber, 2008)) We are not either /or but and . This can raise issues for families and students who may have perhaps a more mixed heritage, labelling and categorizing can deny the student the opportunity to explore all facets of their heritage. Two thirds of Maori babies and half Pacifica babies have multiple ethnic groups as do one third of all other babies (Human Rights commission 2008 cited in Webber, 2008) . Marilyn Webber describes New Zealand as a hybrid nation.

Previous education policy and strategy has given rise to the concept of Maori as deficit. Schools must report on achievement of Maori apparently as a way to identify those not achieving in our system, but this in itself gives credence to “ deficit” generalising that all Maori are failing the education system . *Ka hikitia* suggests a refocus to tailoring learning to the learner. Jill Bevan Brown warns that stereotyping – (2008 p7) can diminish rather than enhance cross cultural competence and we must remember that Maori are a diverse group with values and beliefs may change over time as is the case for all people. Maori itself is not a homogenous group of people, with strong tribal affiliation and characteristics (Webber 2008). In a school many tribal groups may be represented each with their own set of beliefs, attitudes and histories to be shared. This can give rise to the idea of what is authentic Maori and what is not and sideline those who do not have such a strong cultural background (Webber 2008). Melinda Webber in her book *Walking the Space Between identity and Maori/Pakeha* suggests that we learn to value dual / multi heritage as a positive force enabling people to walk in all worlds with heads held high.

What counts as learning – whose concept of achievement are we using. While we report on student achievement in terms of what is dictated to us by the NZ curriculum and National Standards it does not necessarily take into account what counts as learning and achievement for Maori. Jill Bevan Brown (see note) quotes from The Working Party on Gifted Education (MOE 2001) *Individuals’ abilities and qualities are taonga to be protected under Article Two of the treaty of Waitangi. Therefore Maori values and perspectives must be embodied in all aspects of definition identification and provision for gifted and talented children.*

Good practice

So what might be good practice that can guide me to improve the learning for my Maori students indeed all my students? What I know about good education, but sometimes don’t want to accept, is that there is nothing new, no quick fix , no text book... ***Unfortunately there are no short cuts and no magic wand. Acquiring skills is a long process a life long process (Jill Bevan Brown P7:2008)***

- Treat every child as individual – acknowledging the many facets that make up who they are
- Build strong relationships based on respect

- Operate from the concept of ako, people value and build on each other's knowledge and expertise, the teacher becomes the pupil - the pupil become the teacher
- Engage with families/whanau on student learning
- Build a strong school culture that fosters engagement, inclusion, motivation and learning for all students respect for families / whanau building a sense of belonging and cultural identity
- Teaching as inquiry – any teaching strategy works differently in different contexts for different students I need to question how is my teaching impacting on student learning
- Use evidence to support decisions on student learning
- Know yourself your culture and how that impacts on cultural customs, values beliefs and behaviours on practice

Next steps

Having the sabbatical leave gave me real time to step back and reflect on my job. As a teaching principal in a small school having time to reflect is a luxury that for me that I may not be able to repeat as I near the end of my career. I will continue to build and nurture the already strong relationships I have with staff. I plan to use Jill Bevan Brown's Cultural review as a starting place to review the effectiveness of the learning programmes we have put in place. I am committed to continue my own learning journey . I am enrolling in Te Wananga Te Aotearoa to do a paper on Maori culture. I will continue to be guided by my good friend and colleague Careen (Te Whanau Apanui , Nga Puhī) appreciating her wisdom on things Maori as well as on life.

ERO in our school report told us we were “doing Ok” (my words) , in terms of our Maori students and I didn't really believe them. I thought we should be doing more ,and maybe we should, but I have come to accept through this investigation that we each must work out our own way to meet the needs of all our students regardless of their cultural backgrounds. I think in the past I have tended to stereo type. I will continue to look for ways to integrate aspects of Maori cultural, and ways of doing into our school programmes that suit who we are, so it becomes how we do things around here, but mainly I want to help all students to accept and appreciate each other for who they are.

E Tu kahikatea

Whakapae ururoa

Awahi mai awahi atu

Tatou tatou e

Stand tall like the kahikatea (tree)

To brave the storms

Embrace one another

We are one together

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