

# **Principal Sabbatical Report**

**Term 2 2015**

**To explore theories and practices that lead to improved learning outcomes for Māori students.**



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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Halsey Drive School Board of Trustees for supporting my application and sabbatical leave. Many thanks to the staff and in particular my Deputy Principals Charmaine Strang and Andrea Ritchie for leading the school and carrying out extra duties in my absence. Your support is greatly appreciated.

I wish to acknowledge the Ministry of Education and Teach NZ for the provision of sabbaticals for principals. This is an important programme which allows principals the opportunity to reflect, refresh and research aspects of teaching and learning which can lead on to positive improvements within schools.

Thanks to the many principals who gave their time to discuss and share their experiences and practices. The level of commitment shown by these school leaders leads me to believe NZ education is in good heart!

My sabbatical report is not meant to be an academic research paper. It is a record of findings from discussions and surveys from a range of schools similar to my own.

### Purpose

To research the notion of 'Māori Success as Māori'

To research how schools effectively engage in consultation and communication with whānau in order to improve ākongā achievement.

### Background and Rationale

I have been principal at Halsey Drive School for ten years. Our school is a high decile school with a very small number of Māori students averaging 4% of our school population for the past ten years. Interestingly, the majority of our Māori students are what Webber (2008) terms as hybrid - those who have mixed parentage, and many of these do not actively see themselves as Māori in spite of recording 'Māori' as one of the ethnicities on the enrolment form.

Achievement levels of our Māori students have been, and remain high. Data from the last few years shows an average of 80% at or above NS in any one year. This is slightly lower than the whole school average.

Parent involvement is strong. Parents are happy with their child's progress at school and they are actively involved in their learning but consultation on Te Ao Maori generally has very poor participation.

As a leadership team we agreed that Te Aō Māori needed to be accentuated and last year we implemented plans to address this.

- We felt that we could do more professional development.
- We wanted to have discussions that would challenge us, put us in the role of the ākongā.
- We employed a facilitator to help us with in class support, leadership and governance responsibilities.

- We are developing a long term strategy, not a plan that will be ‘ticked off ‘ at the end of any one year.

This sabbatical has enabled me to have the time to read and talk with like schools ie high decile schools with a small percentage of Māori students. I want to know how they have addressed ‘Māori Success as Māori’ for their school and what consultation practices/procedures are used.

## Methodology

My learning activities included:

1. Researching relevant documentation
2. Engaging with principals from high decile schools with small numbers of Māori students on:
  - how they went about defining ‘Māori Success as Māori’
  - how they successfully engage with whanāu to improve their children’s learning.

## Literature

The amount of literature relevant to my research was overwhelming. Online forums and blogs were also a welcome change from the mountain of published material available.

Main publications used were:

*‘Ka Hikitia - Accelerating Success 2013-2017,*  
 Education Review Office resources including *‘Promoting Success for Māori Students : School Progress ( 2010)’* and  
*‘Partners in Learning: Schools’ Engagement with Parents, Whanau and Communities ( 2008)’*  
*‘Effective Governance: Supporting Education Success as Māori’(2013)* and  
*Tataiko: Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners ( 2011).*

## Findings

### 1. Defining ‘Māori success as Māori’.

Common themes have emerged from my reading and discussions with schools. Schools have used a range of approaches in order to come up with their own description of ‘Māori success as Māori’ as it is in their particular school. Many had professional development for staff and all had consulted with their whanāu (with varying levels of success it has to be said). Schools described the following behaviours as being present/visible for demonstrating Māori success as Māori.

#### ākonga

- being able to participate in their own culture and knowing that it is cherished and valued by those around them.
- experiencing academic success
- having confidence in themselves as learners
- having confidence in themselves as Māori

#### whānau

- feeling welcome in the school
- being actively involved in their child’s learning

- being part of strong home/school partnerships
- having shared expectations about their child's learning i.e. high expectations, positive attitudes towards learning, schools
- having targets and plans in place to address achievement challenges
- building strong communication and consultation practices with whānau
- having a school culture that recognises and respects Te Ao Māori
- having strong relationships with children and parents

### What does Ka Hikitia say?

"Māori enjoying education success as Māori" means Māori learners succeeding in our education system while maintaining and enhancing their identity, language and culture as Māori".

### Goals:

1. All Māori students are engaged in quality teaching and learning experiences.
2. All stakeholders with a role to play in Māori student success:
  - have high expectations for all Māori students
  - are sharing and growing knowledge and evidence of what works, and
  - are collaborating to achieve excellent educational and Māori language outcomes.

It is suggested that schools will:

- integrate elements of students' identity, language and culture into curriculum teaching and learning
- use student achievement data to target resources for optimal effect
- provide early, intensive support for those students who are at risk of falling behind
- create productive partnerships with parents, whānau, hapu, iwi, communities and businesses that are focused on educational success
- retain high expectations of students to succeed in education as Māori.

There was a clear commitment by schools to the goals of Ka Hikitia and this was evident in school charters and teaching and learning programmes. Some schools also linked teacher appraisal to charter goals on Te Ao Māori development.

## **2. Engagement with parents and whānau**

Many of the schools had similar experiences in regard to engaging with their Māori community. The level of whānau engagement was low in spite of many of the same parents exhibiting high involvement in school events and their child's learning. Schools had tried surveys, both online and hard copy, one on one meetings, having meetings when other school events were on i.e. report evenings, concerts, etc and holding dinner meetings.

When asked what challenges schools faced in engaging whānau some of the commonalities were:

- With having so few Māori, some parents felt aggrieved at being singled out.

- Many of the parents don't see themselves as Māori.
- Parents were supportive of the school and actively involved in their child's learning and so saw no benefit in attending any other meetings.
- One parent did not appreciate her child being singled out by ERO.
- Parents said they were happy with the status quo i.e. had a good relationship with the teacher and school leaders, felt fully informed

I have spoken to MOE about parents who have the above views and was surprised by the response. The notion of 'being ashamed to be Māori' was put forward as the reason 'part Māori' parents do not engage as Māori in schools. It was suggested, by a Māori MOE representative, that those parents who did not wish to engage with schools as Māori, felt safer in the Pakeha world. I was bemused by this assumption and so were the principals I spoke to. If this is the case then what are the strategies to overcome it? What role does a school play? What role does the MOE play?

Here lies the biggest challenge for schools with small numbers of Māori students who are achieving well. It is imperative that schools and parents have discussions in order to come to a shared definition of what 'Maori success' looks like for students but maximizing engagement can be an issue. How each school engages with their Maori community can be different from school to school.

Schools are often held to account by ERO over the level of consultation. ERO seemingly do not take into account each schools unique situation. Consultation is not the same from one school to another and whilst one school 's Māori community may be vocal, another may not wish to engage in these discussions. Surely then it is up to the school, the staff and board, with as many whānau as possible, to define 'Māori success as Māori' as best as it can? Surely these schools should not be criticized for doing the best they can?

Research has clearly proven that where parents are engaged, take an active role in their child's learning and feel part of the school then student achievement improves.

Strong home/school partnerships are essential in improving student achievement.

*"The essence of this is relationships and the research has clearly shown that relationships have the biggest impact on educational success for Māori. Relationships that are strong and reciprocal in nature and that extend past the teacher:student relationship and incorporate whānau, iwi/hapū and all those that the tamaiti is connected to."* (VLN Janelle Riki 2012)

This fits very well with ERO's findings in 2010. (*Promoting Success for Māori Students : School Progress*)

*"There were several common characteristics in these (successful) schools, but most of all they were inclusive of students and their parents and whānau. This was reflected in school leaders' and teachers' understanding of the centrality of te reo me ngā tikanga in the curriculum, responsive teaching,*

*positive student-teacher relationships, and the inclusion of parents' views and aspirations in working with Māori learners”.*

## **Summary**

Whilst the schools I worked with had many similarities to my own, it was felt by all principals that every school will need to find its own way to engage parents and whānau the best way it can. Success for Māori students can only but improve when schools have a planned approach with strong communication and engagement from all key stakeholders.

It appears that more support from the MOE is forthcoming and is being welcomed by schools. One initiative, the Māori Achievement Collaborative is aimed at lifting Māori achievement levels and will help schools find a better way to approach learning for Māori. The Minister of Education will fund a full time coordinator to oversee this initiative.

Many schools felt that ERO could be more realistic in its evaluative approach and be more supportive of schools instead of the over zealous approach it is seen to be taking in determining high performance in schools based on Māori Success as Māori” being the critical factor.

The NZSTA has just released ‘Hautū – Māori Cultural responsiveness Self Review Tool’. This is proving to be a useful document for boards and principals to use in order to review and adapt practices.

For my school, we are also on the way. Discussions need to be had, both at a leadership level as well as a community level, an implementation plan put in place, provision of ongoing professional development to build confidence in te reo and tikanga - these are all steps in the right direction.

I look at my Māori students and for every child I want to see a child who is proud of who he/she is, a child who is engaged and confident in their learning and who has a supportive whanāu.

Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou  
ka ora ai te iwi

(by my basket and your basket , the people will live)

## Bibliography

Webber, Melinda. *Walking the Space Between* NZCER Wellington (2008)

Ministry of Education: *Ka Hikitia - Accelerating Success' 2013-2017*,  
Ministry of Education: *Effective Governance: Supporting Education Success as Māori*"(2013)

Ministry of Education: *Tataiko: Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Maori Learners* ( 2011).

Education Review Office '*Promoting Success for Māori Students : School Progress* ( 2010)'

Education Review Office '*Partners in Learning: Schools' Engagement with Parents, Whanau and Communities* ( 2008)'

*Kia Hiwa Ra! Listen to Culture – Māori Students Plea to Educators*  
(MacFarlane, A 2004)

*Te Kotahitanga: Towards effective education reform for indigenous and other minoritised students* (Bishop, Berryman and Wearmouth 2014)

*Ka Awatea: A tribal definition and examination of Māori student success.*  
Webber,

M. J., Macfarlane, A., McRae, H., & Cookson-Cox, C. (2014).  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2292/21690>

*Ka Awatea: An iwi case study of Māori students experiencing success.*  
Webber, M.

J., Hunt, A.-M., & Blennerhassett, M. (28/11/2013).

### On line resources

Ed Talks - Core Education

TKI Te Mangōroa - 'Māori achieving educational success as Māori'

Virtual Learning Network