



Truth, Courtesy and Courage

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Investigating culturally responsive leadership and teaching practices that will support Maori student achievement in a Primary School.

A sabbatical leave report from Sue Horne, Principal, Maungatapu School, Term 2, 2011.

My choice for my investigation relates to the context of my leadership – a Principal of an urban school with a long and rich history of Maori connection, being formerly a native school and part of the Native Schools system that operated in New Zealand between 1867 and 1969. In present times, Maungatapu School has a roll of 510 students, of which 48 % identify as Maori. In addition to mainstream teaching, the school offers the provision of curriculum instruction in Maori medium within a 3 classroom rumaki unit for students from years 0 to 6.

While many initiatives, MOE contracts and Professional Development opportunities have been undertaken by a succession of teachers and leaders over the last 9 years that I have been Principal of Maungatapu School, there remains a disparity in achievement levels between Maori and non Maori students across the school. This has prompted me to explore and investigate approaches that have been successfully implemented to engage Maori learners and their whanau in the learning process, to help us identify and select processes and practices to lift and sustain pupil achievement at Maungatapu School.

I want to know what we could consider doing more of, what we need to reconsider, and what we need to do less of, in order to support Maori student achievement and sustain success for all of our Maori students.

I would like to thank the MOE for providing this valued opportunity to take a period of quality time away from the profession to engage in opportunities to think in-depth about aspects of my leadership and to chart future direction for my own personal professional development.

Sabbatical Report

2011

Thanks also to my Board of Trustees for supporting my application and to my leadership personnel, administration, support, and teaching staff, for maintaining a high standard of professional leadership, execution of systems and processes, and exceptional continuation of care of our tamariki during my term of absence. An outstanding benefit of experiencing sabbatical leave is to be able to maximize the time away from the demands and challenges of Principalship, knowing that the school is continuing to function effectively and efficiently.

Having experienced time away from the demands of the job of teaching has made it clear that the profession is an extremely life consuming one and I have clarified my respect and appreciation for those who dedicate their lives to teaching and leading within a school setting. To have enjoyed 10 weeks filled with opportunities to travel, day dream, ponder, reflect, and reset my focus, has opened my eyes to the complexities and demands which being a member of the profession brings, and has made me mindful of the expectations and demands I place on my own staff. Moving forward into the future, the challenge for me will be to maintain professional focus throughout the demands of educational leadership, while ensuring that I allocate sufficient time to myself and my dedicated staff to experience and appreciate guilt free time to spend with reflective thoughts, future plans, and family.

The following report outlines my thoughts and plans for ways forward in strengthening aspects and implementation of culturally responsive teaching and leadership practices and directions as they apply to my current school context.

Culturally responsive leadership and teaching practices.

Considering my own personal interpretation of what being culturally responsive means, I assembled the following points from my current position of leadership, experience, and understanding.

Being a culturally responsive leader is:

- Having an attitude of respect for other cultures
- Wanting to be informed of customs, practices, goals and desires of all stakeholders and being prepared to listen to their dreams and aspirations.
- Being aware of the importance of a culture's traditional forms of learning and considering how these can be included within 21st century learning contexts.
- Being prepared to accommodate additional and/ or alternative ways of thinking, leading and acting as opposed to what is being currently practiced in the school. Being prepared to challenge the status quo in terms of previous and current forms of instruction being the only ways to achieve improved pupil learning and academic achievement outcomes.
- Not accepting that other cultural representatives cannot achieve as well as their European peers.

In investigating culturally responsive leadership and teaching practices, my main source of reading, research, and reflection, has been the "Te Kotahitanga Research and Development Project" led by Professor Russell Bishop of the University of Waikato. Although this project has been designed for secondary

schools, I see great merit in giving consideration to the elements of the Te Kotahitanga Effective Teaching Profile within my primary school setting, to help clarify our school and community vision for improving the engagement and achievement of our Maori students.

We are very much a caring school, however, it has become evident to me through my reading and research that perhaps we have been leaning towards embracing cultural sensitivity and awareness, without ensuring that corresponding appropriate changes in teaching, leading and communicating are occurring. How successful are we at linking our educational setting with the real world of each student? Care does not necessarily bring about change!

As a result of my readings and reflections, I have added the following aspects to be considered by myself, my leaders, teachers, and BOT members, as we consider future action we can implement to provide a more effective learning environment for our students at Maungatapu School, and to provide a more substantial and sustainable culturally responsive approach to teaching and learning.

- School leaders, teachers, and Boards of Trustees need to understand and value the demographic realities of the children they serve, through nurturing and maximizing opportunities to build relationships within our schools and wider communities.
- School leaders, teachers, and BOTS, must continually search for ways to work more successfully with students from diverse backgrounds.
- There are numerous competencies and strategies required to meet the diverse needs of students in our schools. Being prepared to identify and nurture aspects of effective teaching which make a positive difference to students learning and achievement, must be accorded a priority of urgency for our school to consider.
- As a school leader I must be prepared to serve ALL of the children enrolled in our school and I must be prepared to identify, understand, and challenge the presence of any biases and patterns of discrimination that exist.

The Big Question

So, what should we place in our “Culturally Responsive Knapsack” that will build on the strengths we consider already have, and how will we make a more tangible and positive difference to Maori student achievement at Maungatapu School?

The following statements, questions, and actions, will guide my future direction in terms of providing assurance that a culturally responsive environment for learning exists at Maungatapu School that makes a positive difference to Maori student achievement across **all** classrooms in both immersion and mainstream contexts.

A component of the Effective Teaching Profile from the Te Kotahitanga project for secondary schools, “Culturally responsive pedagogy of relations”, states, “There is a common vision for Maori student success, supported by a clear agenda, goals, and planning based on evidence about achievement”.

- Do our current policies, standards and practices increase the quality of interactions and outcomes for our Maori students?
- Do we need to review and adapt our structures and processes to support the improvement of Maori student educational achievement?
- Has our school committed itself to articulating a clear vision for success for our Maori students in both contexts for learning and teaching that we provide?
- How can we develop respectful relationships with our community and whanau members so that we can compile a common vision for Maori success supported by clearly stated goals underpinned by research based evidence around Maori student achievement?

The Effective Teaching Profile highlights the importance of teachers caring about the performance of their Maori students and developing explicit and observable ways to show their commitment.

- How confident are our teachers in their beliefs around an effective teaching profile that research shows, can make a positive difference to the achievement of Maori pupils?
- As a staff we will investigate the actions and characteristics that effective teachers demonstrate in their classrooms as identified in the research project “Te Kotahitanga”, and relate these to our own school context within each dimension.

Aspects for my staff to consider and discuss from the Effective Teaching Profile:

- Teachers care for and acknowledge the mana of the students as culturally located individuals
- Teachers have high expectations of the learning for students.
- Teachers are able to manage their classrooms so as to promote learning.
- Teachers can reduce their reliance upon transmission modes of education so as to also engage in a range of discursive learning interactions with students or enable students to engage with others in these ways
- Teachers know and use a range of strategies that can facilitate learning interactively
- Teachers promote, monitor, and reflect on learning outcomes that in turn lead to improvements in Maori student achievement, and can share this knowledge with the students so that they can reflect on and contribute to their own learning.

Culturally responsive learning contexts and practices promote very different interactions and educational outcomes for students when compared with classroom practice where most learning is based on content and contexts determined by the teacher.

- How much do our teachers know of their students’ history, tikanga and world view?
- Is our curriculum culturally connected to place and people?
- Is our local history evident in the curriculum contexts?
- Within a Maori immersion context, can our subjects whakapapa back to the ancestors of our Maori learners?

- How can we better engage our community to assist us to establish and sustain priorities for learning and achievement that are important to Maori?

Effective teachers talk about reflecting on student progress, and in turn, work towards the constant improvement of their practice.

- Are we using pupil achievement data adequately to inform school development for all cultural cohorts and in particular our Maori students?
- Does the type of data we gather, identify the skills, cultural attributes and dispositions our pupils require to move forward within their community, as well as the academic levels each child presents?
- Can we be sure that our students are gaining levels of achievement without losing who they are as people?
- Are our teachers actively and consciously reflecting on learning outcomes that could lead to improvements in educational achievement for our Maori students? Do we need to make this more explicit in our practice of teaching as inquiry?

Conclusion.

Maungatapu School has a proud history of overall pupil achievement and attainment, and places high value on establishing positive relationships with pupils, their families, whanau, and the wider community. It is timely to consider additional actions within the school and the community, which will strengthen and extend Maori student achievement in mainstream and full immersion contexts, and to shape the approaches and developments that the school will select and implement to realize this outcome. This will be the challenge for me to guide future development and strategizing for 2011, 2012 and beyond.

Sue Horne
Principal.

Quotes/ information from Russell Bishop and Mere Berryman "The Te Kotahitanga Effective Teaching Profile" Set 2 2009