

‘culturally responsive curriculum’

Meeting the needs of Maori students in mainstream education.

(In schools of decile 6 – 8)

The purpose of this Sabbatical was to look at a range of decile 6 and 7 schools who had Māori students and a ‘culturally responsive curriculum’ and who were decile 6, 7 and 8. At each school visited, a range of questions were asked of the Professional leader based around their ‘school culture’ what was understood as a ‘culturally responsive curriculum’, in order to sharpen our School learning environment for Māori children and add some support to Principals looking to evaluate their schools ‘culturally responsive curriculum’.

Brian Eales

Principal of Clive School (Decile 7 Hawke’s Bay).

Acknowledgement to the Professional School leaders who gave of their time in the Hawkes Bay and Wairarapa regions and spoken openly about their schools.

A ‘good school culture’ reflects the links between the community and school and when combined with all aspects of curriculum learning, it does have a positive combined impact on student outcomes especially if students get to experience a ‘culturally responsive curriculum’.

It stands to reason that if different cultural backgrounds are evident in a school then the culture of that school would increasingly reflect it.... not in terms of what it teaches but perhaps in how it interacts with both the students and community members. The more diverse the students the greater the tensions between groups who seek to alter or sustain the school culture.

The Board and Principal collectively have to be the ones who start the process of change within the school and community and develop culturally responsive curriculums.. I have been fortunate to visit schools in the North Island who have taken that step and made real differences for Māori learners in their schools even though they are in a minority and at higher decile schools and developed ‘culturally responsive curriculums.’ However it is the Principal who must drive it.

Many Māori learners have been as a cultural group, marginalised in many schools... over many years. And as a result a ‘deficit teaching learning’ theory has in many cases developed. If schools wish to bring about positive change in mainstream school especially where the numbers of Māori students are low, an explanation of what ‘school culture’ is, needs to be more fully developed and explicitly linked to and written about to all parents and staff. (changes to school wide process and systems has to occur at the same time)

These changes need to be articulated, celebrated and continually strengthened through all means of communication. ‘School culture’ needs whole community input as well, but more importantly Maori community input. For many schools it is difficult to either identify or engage people in this development.

In the schools with an easily identifiable, very defined geographical area and community of Māori parents (even if only a few), schools found they could achieve a ‘culturally responsive curriculum’ more easily’ because they knew who to talk with. It was however perceived as difficult in schools where they had enrolled Māori families and children who did not identify as tangata whenua and where from outside the area. These parents stayed well out of the debate as to what was a ‘culturally responsive curriculum’ in that school, as it was not their place. Transient students also meant parents had another degree of detachment from the school as their parents often had no attachments or input into the school vision and culture. This then links to everything a school tries hard to do in developing a culturally responsive curriculum.

In every school I visited that had a 'culturally responsive curriculum' they believed that a 'culturally responsive curriculum' in a school was more than just the visible signs of ... words, pictures and kapa haka. They also saw it as being about systems, relationships and processes. And it was also thinking and responding in a shared holistic way that was important. These schools started from the premise 'If it is good for Māori then all will benefit and if it is good for non -Māori then it will benefit Māori as well. They believed that one is not exclusively above the other. Bi cultural means just that. Bi cultural it is not exclusive or re-jective of the other. But bi cultural is necessary to bring about lasting genuine change in our schools regardless of Māori student numbers within them.

So how could you as a Principal start to develop a culturally responsive curriculum at your school?

Lead with moral purpose; Having a sense of moral purpose and a commitment to improved learning and social outcomes is not just about supporting and guiding students, it also involves a commitment to the professional growth and support of other school leaders and teachers. This is Manakitanga.

Have self-belief; (Pono) is about valuing one's self. It includes self-esteem and self-care. It encompasses resilience, wellbeing, and a healthy lifestyle.

Be a learner ;(Ako) Leaders who take their own learning seriously and keep their own passion for learning alive act as important role models for their schools. Keeping up to date with the evidence for professional leadership in schools is a fundamental expectation of principals and those leaders who aspire to principalship.

Guide and support (Awhinatanga) is about having empathy with groups and individuals in the school community. By being able to appreciate the point of view of others, leaders can help build a strong learning culture.

As a Principal you would need to review your own beliefs, practices and knowledge and how they impact on Maori at school... what you don't know , you don't know. Before you as a Principal embark on staff change seek support from those Principal colleagues who are able to offer another possible starting point.

A staff survey (anonymous if necessary) needs to occur between the professionals in the school. Attitudes and understandings of teachers, support staff and teacher aides needs to be conducted the findings openly discussed in a supportive way and the underlying reasons for those results spoken about.

Are the results from a lack of cultural understanding (professional knowledge?). Or from a I've tried it all before and it wont work, a prejudice that is just not expressed is still a prejudice . Are the staff comfortable in their own culture?

Some schools visited demonstrated initially that they had had a problem with comments such as; *they are all kids and I treat them all the same in the class; they don't want to be treated as different, his problem is his parents and home I've tried to get the parents in but they wont come , we have no way of getting all to a meeting, our other parents want to know why we are doing all this stuff and so much time on Maori stuff; but what about alienating our pakeha parents I do try but I am scared to make a mistake with pronunciation as I was once growled by a parent for getting saying it wrong. I don't want to stay on a Marae I've a family to look after; I don't send readers home as they get lost their parents don't care. Opportunities for PD in our crowed curriculum where will we fit it in , we are already over worked in National Standards, we are having PD in literacy and numeracy and now you want this change as well, and then there is the new Teacher registration criteria, and teaching as Inquiry ; when will I get the time to plan and teach that is what I am paid to do. Just what is our school PD focus.*

But with a systematic consistent approach their Principals had broken down these comments and moved the school forward.

Dr Paul Whitinui in his latest writing looks at the Politics of Indigenous Schooling

Ka tangi te Titi permission to speak. He has some very interesting valid points to make and for many Principals a great point to start from;.

Schools and teachers buffering of knowledge; Schools level of commitment in upholding the key principles of the Treaty of Waitangi; Teacher discipline approaches; Lack of Māori teachers Māori pedagogy (ies) are not well understood; Things Māori are often 'clipped on'. Teacher expertise; Prioritising Māori culture and language within and across the curriculum; Increasing Māori student participation (voice, success, engagement, interest, attendance, association); Māori student talent, giftedness and needs are often designated to specific year levels and within a prescribed curriculum. Professional development and learning opportunities for teachers and school principals / leaders are valid and have proved to be highly successful in raising Māori student achievement levels

- Te Kotahitanga, Te Kauhua , Te Hiringa i te Mahara, He Kakano, and others; Learning initiatives for Māori students requires Māori input from Māori leaders in the community. Culturally inclusive learning activities, strategies and approaches need to become the norm not the exception- see all students as culturally diverse learners more so than ethnically challenged/challenging; Time spent engaging Māori students in the Arts. Languages, Technology and Physical Education/Sports/Health curriculum areas has historically seen the greatest gains in Māori student academic achievement.

Do teachers play the most significant part in the learning of Māori students?

Or,

Do different learning environments that schools provide connect Māori students to being more interested and wanting to attend, learn.

In conclusion we have National Standards, we have Priority Learners we have the new Teacher Registration Criteria. Principals as the Professional leaders are the ones who must make the first difference for Māori students in our schools by developing a 'culturally responsive curriculum' within our school.