



PRINCIPAL'S SABBATICAL REPORT

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ENGAGING MAORI (AND OTHER INDIGENOUS LEARNERS) WITH SCHOOL

**KI TE KORE TE IWI, E KORE KOE I KĀ – HE TANGATA
WITHOUT THE PEOPLE YOU ARE DIMINISHED, YOU ARE
NOBODY.**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

My chosen topic for my report came about as I became aware that as Principal I was not catering for the needs of Maori in a focused way. I was of the mind, as I believe many people are, that what works for all learners will also work for Maori. Of course this can be true but I was coming to feel that there needs to be a more focused and targeted approach to engaging with our Maori learners rather than a haphazard 'one size fits all' approach.

How this change of thinking came about was an acknowledgement that, although our data showed our Maori were not falling behind, their individuality and culture was not being acknowledged in a meaningful way.

Whakamaru School currently has 85 students – 56% of whom are Maori.

PURPOSE

The purpose of my report is to look at how Maori are engaged in our schools and, if possible, make comparisons with other indigenous learners – i.e. Aboriginal learners. This is to gain a clear direction for enhancing levels of engagement at Whakamaru School where I am Principal. To do this I am looking at what the school leadership, in particular, do to enhance the learning experiences of Maori within our schools.

RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND

I wish to create a learning environment in which ALL learners are catered for at school. At the end of my sabbatical I wanted to feel that we had a clear plan of action for the next steps for the professional learning of our staff. What specific targeted programme of approaches are we going to take to lead us in the right direction?

At the time I applied for the sabbatical I felt, and I was further challenged over this by a visitor, that there were very few obvious signs of our Maori culture embodied in our school culture and learning within the school and I wanted to look at ways to bring about change.

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

1. Professional readings and professional learning around culturally responsive pedagogies within New Zealand. One of the best pieces of professional learning I undertook was a day course led by Alan Bull and David Bradford titled 'Culturally Responsive Pedagogies'. This provided me with ample information, which led to a plan of action for leading the learning in this topic at school.
2. Professional reading emanating from Australia regarding indigenous engagement.
3. Visits to several schools in Australia – across different states – to establish what is the situation in their schools. These included visits in: -
 - Alice Springs and Darwin (Northern Territory),
 - Victoria,
 - South Australia – North Adelaide;
 - Western Australia – within Perth city.
4. A visit to the Department of Education office in Perth, Western Australia, to discuss their indigenous learners. This meeting was with their Aboriginal Education Department and was one of the highlights of my trip in terms of this topic.

FINDINGS

A. NEW ZEALAND

There are endless resources available to use and put into place while developing an action plan. A good starting point was 'Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success' – the Maori Education Strategy//2008 – 2012. This is to be refreshed for the next five years. This gives the overarching outcome for Maori in our schools to be “enjoying success as Maori”. The relevance for me from this document is the table contained on Page 19 proposing an attitudinal change with less focus on deficits and more focus on what we can do better – e.g. less focus on targeting deficit and more focus on tailoring education to the learner; less focus on Maori as a minority and more focus on indigeneity and distinctiveness, etc.

Also within the document there is a stress on ako – reciprocity and the fact that the learner and whānau cannot be separated. This has implications for us as educators which will be relevant for all – for example – how/when/where/who do we include in terms of our whānau in consultation about our School Curriculum and thereby our culture (or vice versa). This is a vexed question for many schools – and ours.

These implications are further discussed in the SET article “What can I do about Māori underachievement?” (SET magazine No.3, 2011) Attention is drawn to the fact that our thoughts and beliefs influence the way we as teachers interact with Maori students. We can display in the classroom “the perpetuation of the status quo, in which Māori students are subordinated and teachers dominate” (p. 34). I feel a lot of our teaching is like this – as mine has been and, to be honest, largely still is. How often do we hear what we do for Maori we do for all? Yes, but we need to make these actions more deliberate in working for Maori – and it will help others as well.

Incidentally one valuable action which arose from my study of Ka Hikitia was completing the training offered on-line through Training Services. As well as furthering our learning in Ka Hikitia this is sectioned in to different reflections. Out of this comes a specific actions audit leading to new priorities, what we need to know/do more, and actions in progress. The results of this session forms part of my overall action plan for engagement of Māori.

'Tātaiako: Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners' (Ministry of Education, 2011) continues the work of 'Ka Hikitia'. It specifically highlights the cultural competencies teachers should have and links these to the Graduating Teacher Standards and Registered Teacher Criteria from the New Zealand Teachers Council. Competencies include wānanga, ako, whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, and tangata whenuatanga. Of these I have included already the first two concepts into our School Curriculum. Our next step needs to be to break these down into what these criterion look like in our setting and what evidence we would collect to demonstrate this.

Also as part of our School Curriculum document we have included, at present in its entirety, Angus MacFarlane's Educultural Wheel. As a staff we felt this demonstrated the concepts around the 'outside' of the wheel while having the whole underpinned by the central concept of pumanawatanga – the morale, tone or pulse of our school. We liked the way that some of our school values such as manaakitanga and whanaungatanga were included as well as specific examples as to how they could be developed.



Our next steps from here need to be to discuss as a staff and a learning community how we are going to tie these concepts together and make them meaningful for Whakamaru School and its learners. I liked the way Prebbleton School – in Te Mana Kōrero’s online site – discussed their process toward becoming more meaningful with their culturally responsive pedagogy. They, in particular, stressed they did not want to be seen to show tokenism and were, initially, afraid to cause offence. I can relate to this sentiment as it is one that I have dwelled on also. I think we need to move past this and be confident that, in involving our whānau and other stakeholders in decisions, we are making our school culture and teaching more meaningful. In this we are demonstrating the concept of ihi – demonstrating assertiveness and other ideas further described in the Hikairo Rationale of: -

- Huakina Mai – opening doorways;
 - Ihi – demonstrating assertiveness;
 - Kotahitanga – establishing inclusion;
 - Awhinatia – assisting cohesion.
 - I runga I te Manaaki – engendering care;
 - Rangatiratanga – enhancing meaning;
 - Orangatanga – developing a nurturing environment.
- (Macfarlane, 1997; 2007; with reference to Argyris, 1990; Hargrave, 1999).*

I have looked at the concepts within the rationale – and the overarching idea of overall well-being – in relation to how well we are implementing these ideas at our school. Now, as a staff, we need to critically examine the way we do things and how it is contributing to our school culture.

B. AUSTRALIA

In discussing my thoughts around my Australian visits I would like to make it quite clear that this was a huge area to look at. I cannot possibly do it justice or have a complete understanding of cultural engagement of Aboriginal learners and I am certainly not intending to judge or to cause offence.

My Australian study tended to be very different from the research based professional readings I had undertaken from New Zealand. During the time I spent in Australia I had the opportunity to visit schools and see the practice taking place behind the theorizing. Given more time I would have liked to have included more school visits within our own country to see the 'successful' in action.

In my naivety I included in my sabbatical topic the engagement of Aborigine learners in schools. Little did I realize that the problem that Australian schools face is that there are so many different languages within the Aborigine culture; different 'mobs' that have quite different cultural mores. So, when it came to engaging Aborigine learners we were really talking about a lot of different subgroups. Therefore, when schools undertake to teach the aboriginal language – which dialect (or really completely separate language) are they going to teach? When they are sensitive to the Aboriginal culture – they have to be inclusive of all the different cultures within that.

Australia seems to be more deliberate in 'closing the gap' between their indigenous and non-indigenous learners. The South Australian model described below evidences this.

"The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) are committed to the Australian Government's target of reducing Indigenous disadvantage. This includes to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous children within a decade; and to halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020."

(DEEWR website)

In at least one of the schools I visited in South Australia this translated to an Action Plan (Northern Adelaide Region Improvement Plan), which includes the goal to "ensure Aboriginal learners meet regional standards". This is further broken down at this level into different strategies.

Within the schools I visited this was included at school planning level. Within classrooms every Aboriginal learner has an “Aboriginal Student Individual Learning Plan”. This includes what is to be done for this child, who is taking responsibility for it; student’s strengths, interests and ambitions; areas for development; and additional information. This is also signed by the guardian or carer giving consent to the ‘exchange of relevant information with other agencies that are/have been involved.’ Each of these Individual Learning Plans (ILP) is expected to be kept on file for every Aboriginal student within a classroom. Construction of these ILPs is done with the child’s teacher, the Aboriginal Community Education Worker, the student, and sometimes the school counselor. This is to be completed annually. This is additional to ‘Students Progressive Plans’, which are completed for every student – like a report.

Also within Australia there is variation between states – again, more than I realized. This is not to say that any one state is doing better than others – more that there are variations on the theme.

Within Western Australia I was able to visit the Department of Education and spend time in the Aboriginal Learners Department there. There seems to be a deep involvement within the wider department, which is highlighted by the Aboriginal Perspectives Across the Curriculum project (APAC). This project “aims to deepen students’ and teachers’ understanding of Aboriginal cultures and ways of being. Teaching APAC will assist all students to be able to look at the world from an Aboriginal viewpoint and understand the different Aboriginal points of view on a range of issues such as reconciliation, social justice and equality.” This project provides specific resources for teaching Aboriginal Studies. It also has resources for Department staff to undertake Cultural Awareness training themselves.

The reasoning behind APAC is explained in similar fashion to our Ka Hikitia and other strategies. It states that “teaching Aboriginal perspectives involves assisting your students to be able to look at the world from an Aboriginal point of view and understanding the different Aboriginal points of view on a range of issues. Different issues and viewpoints affect people in different ways, we need to start from, and keep in mind, a cultural aspect. Aboriginal culture should be valued in your curriculum and Aboriginal cultures should

be recognised as entities in themselves. There are many cultures valued in schools, Italian, Polish and others and it is important also to look at things from an Aboriginal point of view instead of always coming from the dominant culture. Alison Motlik (note – underlining my own). What I found, though, in looking at this website – and also having follow up material posted to me - is the amount of knowledge, and useful resources that can be used in any school by any teacher – and hopefully in the right manner.

Within Western Australia I visited two schools – both city schools with therefore different ‘issues’ versus more remote Northern Territory schools. There are indigenous programmes at both schools. Both also described receiving funding for their Aboriginal learners, which has benefited all their learners. Breakfast clubs operate in both schools although interestingly enough in one of the schools the format of this had to change. The Aboriginal children chose to come to school late if the breakfast club was held before school, as they were ‘shamed’ to be part of it. The Principal rethought the concept and now breakfast is offered to all children after school has already started for the day. This has removed the ‘shame’ factor. Principals mentioned the fact that they had outside providers at work in their school – funded from outside the Department of Education. At one of the schools this outside source funded their preschool – which was set up at the funder’s choice for Aborigine children only. The Principal has nominated it is to be for all children which has been accepted by the funder.

Attendance is an ongoing issue – particularly in indigenous learners. These Principals offer incentives to come to school – such as attendance awards, prizes, etc. Relationships with their learners are very important for the schools visited – from leadership to teachers. One Principal spoke of his school vision as being “Every Child, Every Chance, Every Day”. It was obviously not just a vision but a reality in which he has built a school culture starting with behaviour – getting that sorted, and moving on to learning. He was passionate about every child having a chance to start again tomorrow. Having said that, the children want to be part of his basketball team, take part in his ‘bets’ on events – the reward being time spent with him playing table tennis, etc. This has hooked in all his learners – indigenous learners as well.

My visits to Northern Territory schools were quite disparate from other states in that the indigenous learners there seem more

'traditionally based' than in other states. At Alice Springs – unlike in other cities – some of the indigenous people still live in their mobs (not a derogatory term – but the equivalent of our iwi). Principals visited spoke of children who had trauma daily at home – and services were stretched to help them. This school employs a School Support Officer who has daily follow up and home visits as necessary. Absenteeism again is a significant issue. This is dealt with by home visits, assembly recognition for attendance, and rewards for best attendance. It may be worth noting that in Northern Territory schools suffer a funding penalty if the 90% threshold for attendance is not met.

Around the Alice Springs school I visited I noted that there are obvious visual multi-lingual signs using the different Aboriginal languages as well as English. In the foyer there was a display of all the languages spoken by every child in the school. Each child had contributed their own language to this. In that particular school there were five different languages within their Aboriginal learners.

At the same school there were significant wraparound services offered to indigenous learners. There was a door – to – door bus service which picked up these learners from their individual homes, delivered them to school where they were showered, dressed in their school uniforms (which were kept at school), and given breakfast. The reverse happened at the end of the day. They offered smaller class sizes with an indigenous assistant teacher for each class. Emergency lunches were available should they be required.

The Principal spoke of positivity in their approach. One of the mantras she quoted was “disadvantage does not determine destiny”. Also, the school works hard at promoting the 3Es – the school principles. These include Expectations – setting the bar higher, Equity – being what children need rather than that they are all the same, and Effort – the harder you work the smarter you get. Both staff and children were able to articulate these.

In addition to the school in Alice Springs I visited one in Darwin - also in Northern Territory. At both schools they had separate indigenous learning 'units' – separate classrooms for some of their more behaviourally or learning challenged Aboriginal students. To be honest, I struggled with the final outcomes for these students.

Imposing Western educational expectations may in fact not be the most appropriate solution for these more traditional communities. These students were aged 12 – 16. They were removed from their communities, placed in 'boarding' situations (in one school), and were largely being taught, not subject content, but how to learn. While not wanting to appear negative or deficit thinking, there seems an insurmountable barrier to learning in an Anglicised world for students with deeply held and entrenched Aboriginal values and desired outcomes. There seems to be a clash of values.

IMPLICATIONS

Following from the research, observational visits, and study I pursued there were some clear directions in terms of an action plan for Whakamaru School, which we will be discussing as a staff.

These are: -

1. Discuss how children, parents, and visitors 'see' our school – what is the immediate visual impact for Maori in particular? How do we speak? What cultural mores are we portraying and/or generating?
To do this we will be looking at our foyer displays, our office areas, our signage, documentations, newsletters and 'biculturalise' these.
2. Collaborate with parents and the community to create Maori art for the drive-through/drop-off area. This has been done previously outside our Whare Manaaki where we have our weekly assemblies. However, this is beyond where most parents and visitors go to enter the school. This is not to be token art but rather to show value and relevance to our iwi and our area.
3. At regular intervals have opportunities for all staff to share their mihi and other personal background. This is important as Maori need to see where we come from. This can be furthered by being visually on our website, and also in our foyer area.
4. Students prepare their own mihi to be shared in class – and, again, visually in the foyer. This will also help us to see our iwi affiliations. Further to this we need to continue to connect with our iwi. We are on a 'boundary' so we need to listen carefully, seek advice, and avoid treading on toes or bordering areas.
5. Revisit Ka Hikitia using the resources as a staff on Teacher Only Day 2013. We need to identify as staff where our 'gaps' are and develop meaningful action plans for filling these gaps.
6. Actively pursue a continuing tutor for Te Reo. This is something we finally achieved after my sabbatical. This ensures the learning of both teacher and students. We will also further develop the opportunities for our fluent Te Reo students to immerse themselves more fully in the language.

CONCLUSION

As I have written this report I have been conscious that here I am sitting as a Pakeha saying what needs to be done in our school. I want to stress here that none of what is written is intended to be tokenism, or to be seen as politically correct. Rather, all that is intended by this is to be doing the best we can for our Maori learners to ensure they have equal chances. My aim is to ensure that we are doing all we can as a school for all our learners – and unashamedly, deliberately Maori.

I would like to conclude by reflecting on the words of the following Karakia, (which incidentally concludes the Ka Hikitia training). I have chosen this as it reflects the spirit of my learning and future implications of that learning: -

***Kua hikitia te kaupapa
Kua takoto te wero
Me hoe tahi i runga I te whakaaro kotahi
Tiaki tō tāua oranga
Kia kaha ai mo te tuku taonga
Kia tutuki ngā hiahia mō
Ka Hikitia***

***Tihei mauriora!
Ki te whai ao!***

***Ki te whai oranga e!
Mauriora!***

***We have come to an awareness
The challenge that lies before us
Let us work together as one
Stay well
So that we have the ability to manage success
Behold!
Here is the pathway to enlightenment and wellbeing!
What a positive feeling!***

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