

“EMBEDDING THE TE KOTAHITANGA REFORM”

Sabbatical Research Report.

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Purpose/Background

The initial scope for the sabbatical was to investigate how Phase 1 to 3 secondary schools who had completed the five year Te Kotahitanga professional development in conjunction with Waikato University had sought to embed and sustain the reform and the gains achieved. Most initiatives have difficulty becoming permanent even when significant gains in student achievement and teacher practice have been achieved. Often when the funding provided by the government/ministry ceases schools can no longer afford to resource the reform and what has been gained is gradually lost.

Te Kotahitanga is a unique professional development program in that it aims to radically alter teachers pedagogical practice using evidence gained through classroom observation. Co-construction and shadow coaching. The program is very challenging and requires strong leadership and consistent support. The research team based at Waikato University developed the Effective Teaching Profile. This formed the basis of the Te Kotahitanga professional development reform. Central to the reform is the need for teachers to reject deficit theorising as a way of explaining poor levels of Māori student achievement and in turn make a professional commitment to the learning and achievement of all students. Clearly a professional development basis on the above premise can be very challenging for many dedicated and hardworking teachers. It is therefore essential that the school Principal and Board of trustees display consistent and unswerving commitment to the program during the five year supported period and continue to do so after the funding and PD support ends. The statistical evidence clearly shows that in the

schools were the Te kotahitanga reform has been introduced the achievement levels of Māori students have improved significantly. The question is not so much “does it work” rather “How do we sustain the reform and the gains made?”

Scope/Methodology.

At first I envisaged exploring with Principals what systems and structures they had put in place to ensure sustainability. While schools have been committed and innovative in this regard without on- going funding and resourcing from Wellington a heavy burden is placed on school’s GMFS and operations grant. This in-turn can threaten that very commitment and may also result in a loss of teacher support. The obvious answer is to include a Te kotahitanga allowance in schools staffing allocation the same as is currently done for RTLBs, guidance, itinerant music etc.

As I have stated earlier, leadership is a vital ingredient for success and sustainability. At my school the Lead Facilitator did not teach and was allocated 2 MUs. The 4 other facilitators each received an MMA and 8-10 hours per cycle to undertake observations and related activities. The school provided an office and meeting room for the team and money for resources, hardware and manaakitanga. Clearly, in order to continue the reform schools need to invest significant time, staffing and financial resources. This will inevitably adversely affect other initiatives and activities schools wish to undertake. It also may lead to conflict, opposition and a withdrawal of support.

Te Kotahitanga has the potential to radically change the way schools look and feel like. If what happens in the classroom is based around genuine power sharing and common vision where connectedness is fundamental to relationship and culture counts surely what happens in the playground, the staffroom and the Boardroom will need to change as well? This is for many us the greatest challenge of all. Traditional power structures and assumptions around the agreed culture of the school will need meaningful review and I suggest significant modification. Basically, we need to be courageous as we let go some of our power and authority. I have always believed that schools should challenge the status quo. Perhaps through Te Kotahitanga other organisations based as schools are on Victorian values and assumptions may seek to build culturally inclusive structures which share power with their stakeholders.

What Schools Have Done

All the Principals I spoke with displayed a very genuine and visible commitment to continuing the Te kotahitanga reform in their schools. They acknowledged the success of the project both in raising the achievement levels of Māori students and in creating a more inclusive and settled school environment. Interestingly there was a significant improvement for boys (both Māori and Pakeha) over the 5 year period. One school experienced a shift from 43% of Māori achieving level 1 in 2005 to 76% achieving Level 1 in 2010. These gains/evidence effectively silenced any on-going opposition.

What had schools done to embed the reform and sustain the gains achieved? Clearly no change can be permanent if the culture, school systems and processes do not change as well. Therefore embedding the reform offers very real challenges for school leaders. In my view change is extremely difficult to achieve in most New Zealand schools. When the change goes to the heart of the classroom, challenges teachers perceptions and traditional pedagogical practice we may face an educational minefield. This is where strong leadership is essential. The unreserved commitment of the Principal is plays a vital role. The language of the principal must be the language of Te kotahitanga.

Some key developments were.

1. The allocation of up to 2 FTTEs used to free the staff concerned so they can undertake classroom observation, facilitate co-construction meetings and shadow coaching. Where possible the lead facilitator has been awarded management units and/or MMAs. This is a considerable price for most schools and must carefully managed with all the staff and community. Such allocations can adversely impact on timetable, option subjects and class sizes. Schools with international fee paying students or other sources of funding have directed these at supporting Te Kotahitanga either paying for the staffing and/or providing resources etc.
2. At staff meetings Principals focussed on Te Kotahitanga as a core goal. Data was used to evidence progress and success was celebrated. Some schools have gone further and applied the GPILSEO model to every aspect of the schools operations, Goals, Pedagogy, Institutions, Leadership, Spreading and Evidence. In this way deep reform/change will become embedded structures and in school culture.
3. One school has a 3 day hui at the start of each school year for all staff. This process is also used for the induction of teachers new to the school. The local marae is used for this event. There are considerable benefits in this approach

especially in building and improving relationship with Māori parents and Whanau.

4. Systems were established that ensured that the Lead facilitator had direct line access to the Principal. Regular Senior management meeting with the Te kotahitanga team were calendared.
5. Board of trustees are provided with regular updates using data of student achievement, attendance etc. Boards attend school hui and develop a sound understanding of the reform. This is essential in order to ensure consistent support and resourcing by Trustees.
6. Strategic plans and school wide annual goals have explicit reference to Te Kotahitanga. Targets are established for Māori achievement and regular updates are provided to both staff and the Board. The use of accurate data which is used to measure progress towards specific goals ensures accountability and a deeper buy-in.
7. Some schools have produced teacher resources on teaching strategies based on the effective teacher profile. This has also provided opportunity to include other specialist staff such as the RTLB, literacy specialist etc.
8. Appointment policies have been reviewed and clearly state that a condition of appointment is based on a commitment to undertake Te kotahitanga training and support the underlying philosophy. Interestingly beginning/provisionally registered teachers just out of training require the same professional development as their more experienced colleagues. This issue must be addressed by training providers and the effective teacher profile should be a key element in teacher training across New Zealand. If this were to happen true deep change would be achieved over time.
9. Schools have changed their traditional weekly meeting schedule. To ensure one afternoon each week is dedicated to co-construction meetings. While a change like this may appear to be a simple one it can if not managed correctly led to a degree of turmoil amongst staff. Like so much change, some staff will feel threatened that the well-established hierarchies and patterns are being taken away. How change is managed in order to ensure that staff understand and support it is vital.

Conclusion

The evidence in my own school and others involved in the Te Kotahitanga reform is clear. The programme when implemented effectively does lead to a significant improvement in the rates of Māori student achievement. Schools that have completed the 5 year professional development programme have used a variety of strategies to embed the gains made and to ensure that there is continuation and a permanence going forward. While it is to their credit that they have sought to do this without continued funding and support the burden on staffing and operations grants is difficult to sustain. Clearly this ad hoc approach to sustainability is far from being satisfactory. While successive governments have provided funding for the initial phase of Te Kotahitanga only continued and substantial support from central government will ensure that this extremely valuable, timely and successful reform becomes the norm in New Zealand secondary schools.