

Title: Strategies for Schools to improve retention and Academic Achievement for Maori and Pasifika students

Author: Mark Patrick Shanahan: Principal, Waitakere College
AUCKLAND

Sabbatical period: 18 March 2013 to 10 June 2013

Acknowledgements:

My thanks go to the Principals and Senior Leaders of the following schools, who gave up their time to provide me with the relevant information, meet and discuss ideas and issues with me, and allow me to meet key people within their Colleges. The Principals, in order of the schools visited are: Gary Moore, Rutherford College; Anne Miles, McAuley High School; Susan Impey, Alfriston High School; Allan Vester, Edgewater College; Vaughan Couillault, James Cook High School; Rex Smith, Nayland College; Nick Coghlan, One Tree Hill College; Pat Drumm, Aorere College; Greg Watson, Mt Roskill Grammar School; Chris Rooney, Liston College; Louise Anaru, Flaxmere College; Robert Sturch, Hastings Boys High School; Peter Rutherford, Kelston Boys High School.

Executive Summary:

Thirteen schools were visited over a six week timetable. Principals and senior leaders gave up their time willingly. The findings of best practise that appear to impact positively for Maori and Pasifika student achievement revolve around four key themes: Relationships, Course Design, Feedback and Feedforward and informed use of Data.

The key to having positive relationships extends from student, teacher, family and whanau community all being involved in the academic journey of the student. This has to be supported with a genuine whole school restorative practice model that values people in that journey. Without a positive culture within the college, monitoring and mentoring, tutorials etc will not be as effective.

Course design is crucial to engage the student and must be responsive to ensure students achieve success with the right flexible courses for the needs of the student.

Feedforward and feedback is the crucial skill and link between formative and summative assessment. The more coherent and cohesive these skills are with the community of teachers at the school the better the achievement for students, particularly Maori and Pasifika students.

The use of data as the driver of decision making is the key. A culture of co-construction around solutions as a result of guidance from the data must be in place. So the data has

to be regular, timely so changes and actions can occur, and shared so that all involved are focussed on academic achievement for the student.

The challenge is to coordinate this best practise around these themes across the school on a consistent and sustainable scale.

Purpose:

To look at strategies schools are using to improve retention and Academic Achievement for Maori and Pasifika Students.

Background and Rationale:

The purpose of my sabbatical was to reinforce the understanding of the successful implementation of our College strategic goals:

Strategic goals

1. Raising academic achievement for all students through differentiated learning.
 - a) To improve the levels of literacy and numeracy of students from the beginning of Year 9 to the end of Year 10.
 - b) To increase the levels of achievement in NCEA.
 - c) To enhance provisions for gifted and talented students.
 - d) To promote the achievement of Maori students.
 - e) To promote the achievement of Pasifika students.
 - f) To continue to support refugee students' successful integration into Waitakere College and into New Zealand.
2. Improving attendance
 - To improve levels of attendance as a vital prerequisite for raising student achievement.
3. Enhancing teaching
 - Building staff capacity to enhance lifelong learning and implement the key competencies.
 - a) To support all teachers to achieve the standards set in the Waitakere College effective teacher profile.
 - b) To continue the important support provided by the Te Kotahitanga project in working towards these goals.
 - c) To consolidate and further develop the explicit teaching of thinking and learning skills throughout the school.
 - d) To continue review of all curriculum areas to that scheme, programmes and units of work enable us to implement the NZ curriculum and NCEA Standards Review.
 - e) To build staff capacity to use emerging technologies to support 21st century learning goals.

4. Connecting with community in order to enhance achievement
 - a) To enhance dialogue with parents and whanau focused on student achievement.
 - b) To develop closer relationships with contributing schools in order to create a successful transition into Year 9.
 - c) To maintain and enhance links with industry and tertiary providers in order to provide successful future pathways for students.

I investigated how the secondary schools in New Zealand with a similar demographic and Decile to our own school were implementing successful programmes indicated by their NCEA outcomes and their Analysis of Variance. (AoV)

My specific focus was on researching what features these schools were using to lift Maori and Pasifika achievement to equal or to be above the national average and the Ka Hikitia and Pasifika Education Plan priorities and goals. I investigated further whether these schools were closing the gap and how they were closing these gaps between Maori and NZ European and Pasifika and NZ European within their schools.

Waitakere College is now part of the STARPATH project with the University of Auckland (38 schools in total) so I was able to dovetail the research and experience we gained as a college from this programme into the knowledge I gained from visiting some of these schools and others in New Zealand. We have also been active participants of the Te Kotahitanga Programme but our involvement in the programme is no longer supported financially by the Ministry of Education. (MoE)

I believe that the four strands of our Strategic Goals and Annual Plan needed to be coherent and co-ordinated for the first goal, Raising Academic Achievement for All Students using differentiated learning, to be achieved. I explored programmes and procedures these colleges had in place regarding professional development pedagogy programmes for their staff, the relationship they had with their communities and how they developed this area to be stronger, as well as interventions they had regarding attendance.

Methodology:

Sixteen schools were identified as having significant numbers of Maori and / or Pasifika students. These schools represented a spread of small and large colleges within urban areas but not specifically close to the Central Business District. Schools selected showed a trend of improving results in Level 1 NCEA over the last two years for overall results and by implication Maori and Pasifika results, due to the large numbers of these students in their schools. Of the sixteen schools selected, thirteen were available for a visit during the sabbatical period.

Characteristics of the schools involved were as follows:

Schools – District/Location	
West Auckland	3
South Auckland	5
Central Auckland	2
Hastings/Napier	2
Nelson	1
Total:	13

13 School	
Te Kotahitanga Schools	4
Starpeth Schools	5
Te Kotahitanga Only	2
Starpeth Only	3
Both Starpath and Te Kotahitanga	2
Total:	13

School Types	
Decile 1	5
Decile 3	3
Decile 4	1
Decile 5	2
Decile 6	2
Total:	13

The two current initiatives which have a focus on Maori and/or Pasifika Achievement are STARPATH run by the University of Auckland and Te Kotahitanga run through Waikato University. Not all the schools involved in this study had these initiatives:

The Te Kotahitanga schools had a variable status as some had stayed in the programme with only financial support from their own Board of Trustees (BoT) allowing the initiative to continue in their College. Similar to the status of our College, for the past three years. (2011 – 2013)

Each school was sent a series of focus questions to research from their college based on their Analysis of Variance (AoV) to their BoT and Ministry of Education (MoE) from their Annual Report.

All Principals were promised anonymity regarding their responses to the focus questions that allowed them to gather answers from colleagues within their school without prejudice. This could then be shared with me for open discussion at the visit. A copy of the focus questions is included in Appendix 1. The theme of the questions were around operational data systems with a focus on monitoring and mentoring, how that was used,

and the systems in place to ensure success for all students, but specifically success for Maori and Pasifika.

All visits were carried out over generally a three hour time frame. Significant time was spent with the Principal as well as individual time spent with the Maori Mentor, Academic Mentor, or coordinator, or numeracy coordinator responsible for achievement of their targeted group.

Findings and Implications:

As stated in 'Methodology' the focus was on operational and management issues. After gathering and collating notes and resources from each school visit, four common themes became apparent on what had positive outcomes for Maori and Pasifika Students, (if not all the students) which contradicted my initial thinking and focus of my questions. The aspects of Best Practise that impact most positively on outcomes for Maori and Pasifika students are: Relationships, Course Design, Feedforward + Feedback, and finally Data – evidence, review and analysis.

The development and focus in successful schools was on the strength of their **Relationships**. As one teacher stated "Kids believe the teacher believes in them" was probably the common theme across the schools where most significant shifts had occurred for Maori and Pasifika students. Very simply, there was a visible school-wide system of caring for the kids in their care.

Characteristics common to these schools was where there was a genuine whole school approach to restorative practice that was coherent from BoT level to the classroom and playground activities. Programmes such as an active Te Kotahitanga, positive behaviour for learning (PB4L) or Restorative Practice Programme that were 'owned' by all and carried out by all. The Professional Development within the school around whatever restorative programme was in place was on-going and renewed annually.

Schools that had conferences where family and whanau were part of the discussion around general achievement for the students, and where there were specific conferences for their son, daughter or mokopuna focussed on their achievement. How these conferences were carried out varied and ranged from school to school, but some examples that clearly involved and engaged more, were where families were invited to their school with invitations, around a round table, led by senior students at each table to discuss and gather ideas. Another example was where one representative from each iwi from the area, was on the school whanau committee to see the data and give feedback and feedforward on strategies. This process was held at local marae and rotated between marae so all iwi were equally valued as the review was ongoing. Ideally term by term.

Mentoring is a way of strengthening relationships in many forms at these schools where the emphasis was on the name, needs and action for each student. Teachers knew the students, departments knew the student, family and whanau knew the student, the

student knew he or she was being cared for and everybody was expected to make positive changes for that student to shift. Again the format that was done varied in schools. Some had a Maori Achievement Teacher (a MATe) some had Maori and Pasifika deans.

Departments and teachers knowing each student highlighted actions for that student or group of students with tutorials prior to assessments. Again owing the issue and having student names on the radar at departmental meetings added responsibility of who could impact on that student and to be aware in their planning.

These relationships were strengthened by such things as: on-going contact with home via a significant teacher in school, success assemblies in many forms, and rewards in many forms. All positive feedback for kids, done regularly to show the students are in a caring community.

The **Course Design** was significant in reducing barriers for students in two ways: Engagement and Achievement. Schools that were explicit in their Year 10 and year 11 programmes to include numeracy standards and literacy standards within their courses so students could see they had achieved an Achievement Standard (AS) in numeracy and literacy in subjects other than Maths or English produced more success.

Creating pathway courses for students so a course lead into Level 2 NCEA and beyond was crucial for how students saw themselves. Making this explicit for students was crucial to their engagement. The barrier subject for many Maori and Pasifika was Maths and Numeracy. Where students could see pathways and build on more than 10 credits in that subject ensured more success. Engaging courses for Maori, especially Maori Performing Arts (M.P.A) standards kept Maori students at school. They could achieve success as Maori within the NCEA framework. One school noted that while Te Reo struggled the MPA programme engaged a further twenty plus Maori boys in year 10 who stayed until year 11 and were able to add credits from MPA to their Level 1 NCEA credit count. Another successful reason to stay at school.

Feedforward and Feedback was indicated as the most significant positive impact teachers can have on student success. The emphasis was on formative assessment and the changes and learning that can occur prior to summative assessment as one school put it, “creating a culture shift where the student was likely to achieve, to where they will achieve”, made the difference in approaching the teaching and assessment of the unit of work or standard.

Within classes and departments, teachers identified the literacy and language challenges around the assessments. Once again, a particular emphasis was placed on the literacy around the numeracy standards. There was a no surprises culture around the teaching and delivery of assessments.

Scaffolding and formative assessment had good, constructive feedforward and feedback to students prior to the summative assessments. MATes etc ensured that students attended tutorials in departments prior to the summative assessment. Family/Whanau were reminded and informed of the timing of tutorials via their significant adult at the

school. In at least two of the schools, leaders of learning ran regular professional development across their school on successful feedback and feedforward techniques used in their subjects.

This culture of feedback, feedforward and reflection was an expectation of students, staff (departments) and management including the BoT as well as iwi and parent groups. The emphasis was on co-construction of solutions so that changes and impacts could be made during the year.

This culture relied heavily on **Data**. The data has to be relevant, regular, explicit, and shared so that co-construction and solutions are put in place. The key is to use the data to inform the student, the teacher, the whanau and what we do next.

Schools that used data and review standard by standard, term by term, class by class and used techniques like traffic lights for kids where a student as indicated by results, if he or she was in the green to pass the correct number of credits or red where they were tracking to miss credits or assessments could be followed and acted on by everyone within the school. These schools actions impacted most positively on student achievement.

Benefits:

Where to from here? This was the question for me as Principal of Waitakere College, our BoT, staff, students and parent whanau community. On my return from sabbatical I implemented on a trial basis a MATes programme within each department, reviewed the course design in conjunction with the departments to look for opportunities within 2013 and what could occur for 2014.

The key to the information has been to share the findings with staff, students, and/ or parent whanau community which I have presented at our Maori Celebration evening, Pasifika Celebration evening and both Senior and Junior Prizegiving.

The impact of aspect of Feedforward and Feedback has seen a specific Professional Development Programme implemented within our college Maths department in Term 3 and Term 4. The effective and reflective use of Data has shown that this change in feedforward and feedback and the teaching around the assessment standards in numeracy has had a positive impact on Maori and Pasifika Achievement in this area.

The college has employed a teacher of Maori Performing Arts (MPA) additional to staffing in 2014 to enhance the engagement of young Maori to achieve as Maori while in the NCEA framework.

Conclusion:

The Sabbatical was a wonderful opportunity to go into schools, observe their best practise and create a more relevant model of good teaching for better outcomes for Maori and Pasifika Students at Waitakere College.

The collegiality of the teaching profession in the schools I was able to visit, the sharing of ideas and honest reflection of what works and why, the leadership shown by their Principals and senior staff on the outcome of improving Maori and Pasifika Achievement was outstanding.

There was not one school I visited doing all of the key ideas. Like us at Waitakere College we were doing some ideas well. However, the more successful the school with respect to development of relationships, course design, feedforward and feedback, and effective use of data, the better the success of their Maori and Pasifika students.

Waitakere College will develop many of the strategies observed at these schools around the four areas to enhance the retention and achievement of our Maori and Pasifika students. The goal is to be better than before.

This is the magic generation of Maori and Pasifika to 'catch'. Every young person needs positive role models of themselves in the past, present and future. Our young Maori and Pasifika are demanding more and respectfully expect to be at the decision making table in the future. Our job as educational leaders is to ensure that they achieve at our Colleges so that it becomes a recognised and deserved seat at the table on a basis of ability.

Appendix 1 attached.

Sabbatical Research – Data Gathering

College _____ Principal _____

Curriculum Manager _____

1/ Achievement

	ALL	M	P.I.
L1 NCEA			
L1 Numeracy			
L1 Literacy			
Retention of Yr 9 into Yr 12			

2/ Special courses or programmes implemented that positively impact on achievement

In L1

In Yr 9/10

3/ Data Collection (Monitoring, checkpoints and what action taken through year)

L1

L2

4/ Actions and interventions that have worked for

L1

L2

5/ Actions and interventions that have not worked for

L1

L2

6/ What AS/US/(non-aligned to courses but NZQA approved) do you use to assist achievement and credit totals.

L1

L2

7/ Have you considered ITO standards or courses to help L1/L2 Numeracy for apprenticeship courses?