

TE KOHANGA SCHOOL



KIA KANA - KIA TOA



SABBATICAL
LEAVE

CAROL
HARWOOD
PRINCIPAL

Te Kohanga School.



Kia Kaha – Kia Toa

Carol Harwood

Term 3 2016

Raising the achievement of Maori Students by growing Student Agency in a modern learning environment.

Background and Rationale:

Te Kohanga School is a small decile 3 rural school in northern Waikato. The roll is highly transient with 85% of students identifying as Maori. The intent of my Sabbatical is to grow my understanding of how to create a modern learning environment for primary students in a school which is 100 years old with single classrooms.

I will investigate how Maori student achievement can be nurtured through:

1. The adaptation of physical spaces
2. The pedagogical environment required to grow confident engaged learners

I suspect that a successful modern learning environment can be created in a school with single classrooms, when teachers use pedagogical approaches that enable students to take control of their learning and by developing the concept of student agency.

Watkins (2009) describes that when learners drive the learning it leads to:

- greater engagement and intrinsic motivation
- students setting higher challenges
- students evaluating their work
- better problem-solving (p.20)

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank the Te Kohanga School Board of Trustees for supporting my application and sabbatical leave. Many thanks to the staff and in particular Ruth Illsley for leading the school and carrying out extra duties in my absence. Your support is greatly appreciated.

Thank you to the Ministry of Education and Teach NZ for the provision of sabbaticals for Principals. This is a wonderful opportunity which allows Principals that scarce commodity,

'time', for reflection, refreshment and research. Thanks to the many Principals and Teachers who welcomed me into their schools and gave their time to discuss and share their experiences and practices with me.

Maori Achieving as Maori:

Maori achieving as Maori is a fundamental right embedded in the intent of the Treaty of Waitangi. Yet (Ministry of Education 2013a) states 1 in 5 Maori students will not achieve basic numeracy and literacy standards by the time they leave primary school. The Ministry publication Ka Hikitia- Accelerating Success 2013-2017 outlines the Government strategy for accelerating achievement of Maori learners. The vision is for all Maori students to have their identity, language and culture valued and included in learning opportunities thus encouraging student engagement and success.

The Ero publication 2010 identified 5 fundamental factors present when Maori students achieve success, these are:

1. Reflection of the student's identity language and culture in the learning and teaching environment. An environment where Maori students feel valued and included - the student has to feel they belong.
2. Use of student achievement data to target resources to meet the needs of students.
3. Early identification and intensive support for at risk students. Where students are closely monitored and expected to succeed.
4. Building productive relationships with parents, whanau, iwi and the wider community. Involving parents and whanau in conversations about their child and their child's learning, where working together towards a common goal is the norm.
5. High expectations of teachers for Maori students to achieve success. Parent and whanau expectations are also crucial to Maori students achieving success as Maori.



Pedagogy behind a modern learning environment:

Pedagogy refers specifically to the art of a teacher teaching and their beliefs, teaching methods and the theories being employed. It is at the heart of the teaching profession.

Modern learning environments physically allow students and teachers more flexibility by being able to combine classes in one for team teaching, split a class into small groups or spread out over a wider area.

Modern learning environments allow for more openness, they tend to have fewer walls, more glass and often use the idea of a shared learning space (or hub).

(Mark Osborne; April 2013 Core Education White Paper - Modern learning environments)

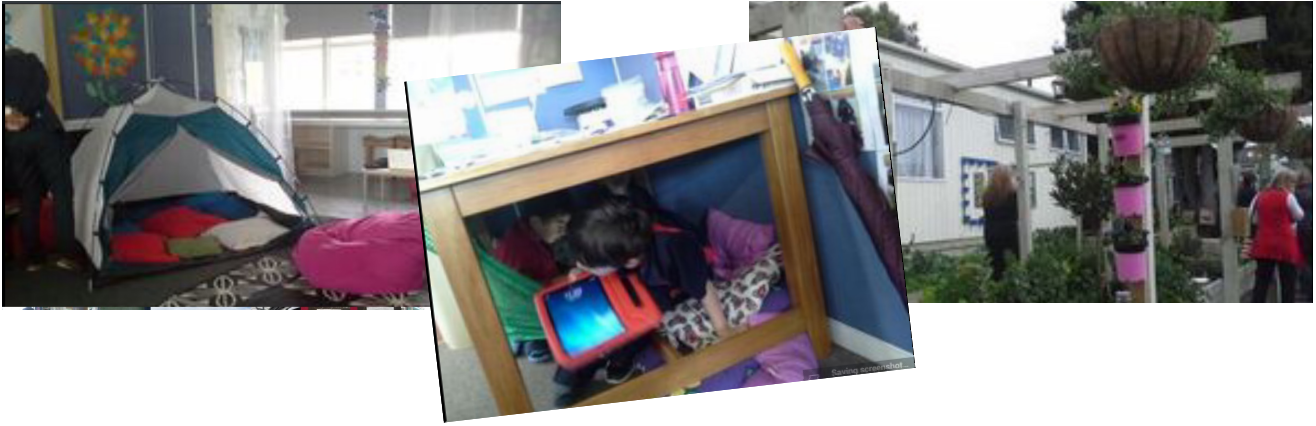
A modern learning environment utilises modern technologies and a variety of spaces that allow teachers and learners to engage in learning where the learning spaces created allow for students to work collaboratively and promote student self-management of their learning and foster student engagement through real life problem solving.

A modern learning environment is also conducive to developing student agency because students take responsibility for their own learning, are able to talk about their learning, recognise their next steps and set their next learning goals.

A Modern Learning Environment in action:

I believe a modern learning environment in action has a holistic approach, where the students are valued and their physical and emotional needs are met first and foremost. Children who cannot see their own culture reflected in the environment around them or who are hungry, feeling unsafe, or upset, need these conditions met before successful learning can take place.

Students are then freed to give voice to investigations which interest them. They can take responsibility for setting and adhering to pre-negotiated tasks on a timetable, where there is an expectation that this learning journey will be worked through to completion. The student will meet with facilitators for workshops as agreed to support this learning.



Student-Led Conferencing:

Student led conferencing allows student voice to be the loudest voice in their own learning. A Portfolio for Assessment is a living document that records a student's learning journey throughout the year and is the student's vehicle to report to their parents on their progress towards their learning goals.

Through self, peer and teacher assessment, the academic achievements are recorded against National Standards with the added opportunity to capture the student's voice when reflecting on their own learning.

Underpinning the academic achievement is a body of teaching practice that gives teacher feedback and feedforward for students to act on to improve their learning. Relevant personal and academic goals are set by the student's and revisited to self assess their progress towards their goal.

The Portfolio for Assessment is a record / measure of 'PROGRESS and ACHIEVEMENT' and is a celebration of the same. This form of reporting to parents, highlights their child's progress across the year, even though their child may not be meeting the National Standards.

The success of Student Led Conferencing and the Portfolio for Assessment as a tool, is hinged on the development of a safe learning environment where the students feel they are in control, valued and are able to trust that others will celebrate their learning with them. It is not a competition against their peers, rather an acknowledgement of their efforts. resulting in progress and achievement

Where to for Te Kohanga School?

A holistic approach to teaching and learning through inquiry, is where teachers and learners work together to solve real life problems in an environment where a student's background and culture are valued. These contexts will help to personalise the learning for the students in our school and will help to build a safe physical and emotional environment where students feel valued and where their physical needs are met. These considerations are vital to underpin all learning at Te Kohanga School.

Within this environment, students will build their trust in themselves as learners and in their teachers as learners too. Students will be free to engage in the curriculum, take responsibility for their learning, share their thoughts and ideas without fear of intimidation or 'put downs'.

The introduction of Google Docs to students will help to create an environment with minimal paper. The technology will nurture independence and student agency, while still maintaining tracking and accountability.

The physical environment in a 100 year old school with single classrooms can also be enhanced with a little creativity.

- making small intimate spaces to encourage students to work where they are most comfortable.
- revisiting furniture requirements taking into account variable heights and types of furniture, not necessarily a seat and desk for each student.

These changes will help to minimise the amount of furniture in the room and open up the floor space. An internal doorway between the two classrooms would enable the spare classroom to be used as a breakout space, while still maintaining a connection with all students. At Te Kohanga School we have a large outdoor shade awning which could easily be converted into an outdoor learning space by adding a wide deck running the length of the building with a large stacker door opening on to it. With a ramp running along the front, this would then make way for future development of the Room 2 classroom and underutilised corridor space because access for disabled would have been addressed.

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Te Kohanga School

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