

Sabbatical Report

Improving the engagement and raising the achievement of Māori Students

Simon Akroyd
Principal
Apanui School
Term 3, 2018

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Principals and Schools in the BOP, Waikato, Hawkes Bay and Gisborne regions who were happy to invite me into their school and to share their data and stories that helped me to develop my thinking.

My thanks to the staff of Apanui School who stepped into new roles and especially to my very capable DP, Ruth, who did a fantastic job in my absence (as I knew she would!)

Thank you to the Board of Trustees of Apanui School who fully supported this opportunity.

Executive Summary

Schools are all very conscious of the fact that a number of Māori students have potential to fall through the cracks in our current traditional education system. A number of Māori children are disengaged with their primary education and this can have a flow on effect into their secondary education and their role as a parent / community member.

To have positive student achievement outcomes we need to ensure that Māori children are actively engaged in their learning, so that the practices are embedded in 'what we do' at schools.

My belief is that there are several key actions that appear to be making some change:

- Focus on a consistent, culturally responsive pedagogy.
- A collective approach from all staff.
- Engaging parents and the community.
- Creating a local curriculum that meets the needs of Māori students.
- Developing the school environment to reflect Te Ao Māori.

Ultimately to improve Māori student engagement and in turn raise student achievement we need to be prepared to undertake these keys over an extended period of time, ensuring that there is consistency and embedding of the pedagogy and practices and that all stakeholders understand the collective vision and steps.

Purpose

I wanted to look at how schools are trying to find the golden bullet - ultimately raising Māori achievement. I am looking from a mainstream school perspective. Additionally, I wanted to look broader than reading, writing, maths, remedial groups, analysing the data etc. This work is already being undertaken by

schools, in a variety of ways and very thoroughly. However, overall student achievement indicates we need to look beyond these factors.

My belief is that we need to look more holistically - beyond the core subjects as what we have been doing during the National Standards era has not worked for many Māori students.

Background and Rationale

Apanui School is a U5 School, located in the heart of Whakatane township. We are a decile 5 school. 48% of the students identify themselves as Māori, 44% are NZ European and the remainder of the students are Asian or other European ethnicities. The school roll is at capacity, we have an active enrolment scheme and a lot of interest from outside our zone in having children attend our school. Apanui School has three classes (Year 1&2, Year 3&4 and Year 5&6) that operate at level three immersion - we call these our Māori enrichment classes. These classes operate both vertically as a team, but equally they operate within their year group syndicates - the parents of the children in our Māori enrichment classes have expressed their want for this to occur. They also want their children to learn English and Mathematics predominantly in English, hence the level three immersion. The children in these three classes learn what our whole school learns, however they look at things from a Māori world perspective (Te Ao Māori). 98% of children in these classes are Māori. However, we have more Māori students in our mainstream classes than we do in our Māori Enrichment classes, so we must ensure that best practice is applied in all classes. Our entire staff, including our mainstream teachers have undertaken professional development to build teacher knowledge, capability and confidence in teaching / integrating Te Reo Māori into their classroom programme. We have moved away from a Kaiawhina as it is my belief that this is a teachers role. We are fortunate to have several teachers with strong Te Reo and understanding of Te Ao Māori who are willing to share their expertise or to use their network to source the correct answers to our questions or direction for our school.

‘We know that through time the New Zealand education system has been persistently inequitable for Māori learners by for example, low inclusion of Māori themes and topics and failure to uphold mana’ (Berryman & Eley, 2017).

In New Zealand the National Standards era has allowed us to be more accurate at assessing, moderating and using data to identify achievement and then look to track students. However, at Apanui School the overall achievement data indicates that there is a clear gap between Māori and non-Māori students, across the core subjects in achievement data. Our PB4L (Positive Behaviour for Learning) data shows that Māori students are disproportionately represented. Over the last few years our PB4L data has reduced, including that our Māori students. However, there are still more incidents involving Māori students than non-Māori. This has been the case for several years. The attendance of our Māori students is also lower than for non-Māori students. This issue has been discussed at length, by all interest groups.

As a school (Board, staff and parents) we have made a number of changes, this includes: looking at what the research tells us, reviewing the our curriculum and upskilling our staff. There has been some progress, but there is still a clear and substantial gap.

The bottom line is that we needed to do things differently. There are countless articles that have been written about this issue, lots of ideas but I wanted to see what other schools are really doing, at the chalkface and how this can help our school and hopefully others.

Methodology

I planned to undertake visits to a number of schools in the BOP, Gisborne and Waikato regions. I focused on visiting schools with at least 30% of the children identifying themselves as Māori on their enrolment and the schools needed to have a roll of at least 150 children.

During these visits my aim was to talk to children, management, teachers and possibly whānau about what their current data is and how they are improving the engagement of Māori student, thus raising the achievement of these children.

I would then compare my findings from these discussions to current research, looking for similarities and differences.

Findings

Developing Teacher Capability

All school talked about Teacher Capability being a very important aspect of how they can raise achievement and engage Māori students. Key features of the work include:

- Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. All schools that I visited have undertaken some professional development with Culturally Responsive Practice. The depth of the professional development varied greatly. Guiding documents such as Ka Hikitia, Tataiako and the Teaching Council Code and Standards were often used as the basis of this professional development.

At times this professional development was undertaken by internally. However, many schools had engaged professional providers, either through the MOE PLD model or through their local community.

A number of school had undertaken work to define the term that is often used in education - 'Māori experiencing success a Māori'. There were slight variations in the definitions. Each school acknowledged that this was important work to have undertaken and that the shared understanding was valuable.

- Coaching model. Undertaking professional development for teachers and / or the management team around coaching has appeared to have success for Māori students in a number of schools. The coaching can be in two ways - either coaching colleagues through their inquiries with target children or to coach the children to reflect upon and improve their understanding of their learning and next steps. The outcomes for coaching children or colleagues are the same. It provides improved practice and understanding.
- A shared understanding of the school direction and what the data is showing teachers. Schools who were taking the time to analyse the data on the children and to collectively develop ways to differentiate the learning for the children had made pleasing progress with their Māori students. Schools that were prepared to plan differently for the target children and having the shared understanding that what they have previously done was not working for the children - therefore, we need to try something different.

Creating a strong local curriculum

Schools that I talked to have tried a number of initiatives over the years, always for the right reasons, but often with minimal positive long term outcomes for Māori students, even with a strong pedagogical approach. However, two of initiatives that appear to be working to raise Māori student engagement are:

- Involve the students and community in developing their schools local curriculum

- Make clear links in the learning to what students know and understand so that we call upon their prior knowledge and so they can make links to new learning.
'Students do better in education when what they learn reflects and positively reinforces where they come from, what they value and what they already know. Learning needs to connect with students' existing knowledge. (Ka Hikitia, Ministry of Education, 2013).

- Ensuring that there are opportunities to undertake EOTC opportunities in the curriculum, including marae and local landmarks.

- Whole School kapa haka - a number of schools are using this approach. It often raises the profile of kapa haka within the school, provides opportunities for tuakana : teina to occur and it provides a clear message to the community about the value placed on things Māori at your school.

I saw examples where children from a range of ethnicities were very proud to be part of the kapa haka. Feedback from staff was that the outcomes, such as whole school engagement in powhiri and having everyone knowing waiata and karakia created a sense of togetherness, pride in their school and the Māori children that I managed to talk to thought that everyone doing kapa haka, including the teachers, was 'very cool'.

- A number of schools are developing a curriculum that has a Learning through Play / Makerspace / Genius Hour focus. This approach underpins the teaching that is occurring and the philosophy that is used as a school.

Learning through Play provides opportunities to develop oral language, especially in our year one classes. Low oral language levels for five year olds appears to be an issue across all of the schools that I have visited. Each of the schools commented that this has a flow on effect for learning and engagement.

Schools are reporting that there is an improvement in engagement and attitude towards school by Māori children using this approach. It requires the teacher actively teaching, coaching and engaging with the children and providing provocations and invitations to motivate the children. Schools are starting to collect and track data relating to this focus. Teachers and schools are also finding that this approach is helping to address a number of social issues / behaviours.

"Play is a child's way of understanding the world around them and allows opportunities to practice skills and develop resilience" (Glascott, Burriss and Tsao, 2002).

Using learning through play and makerspace to help to increase student engagement from the real world problem solving and learning is also a key feature and positive outcome for Māori students.

Engaging local Marae

There has been success for groups of children who have been provided with opportunities to engage in their learning through their local marae. This has been undertaken in a variety of ways, some with a shorter term opportunity and others with a longer term, sustained approach. Short term involves noho for either a day or overnight, the children may learn about the marae / wharenuī, the local history and for many it is a chance to become comfortable in being on a marae. The sustained approach involves schools developing relationships with marae and whānau - this takes time and must be approached strategically, ensuring that a shared vision is developed and that the school is prepared to offer / provide koha for the work / time that is being put in by the marae and whānau.

"As Māori [means] being able to have access to te ao Māori, the Māori world – access to language, culture, marae... tikanga... and resources... If after twelve or so years of formal education, a Māori youth were

totally unprepared to interact within te ao Māori, then, no matter what else had been learned, education would have been incomplete." Professor Mason Durie, Ngā Kahui Pou. 2003. Page 199.

Many factors influence the potential success when engaging local marae. Factors to consider include: why are we doing this, which children, how many, how often, how long for, who is the facilitator (school and / or external expertise), availability of the marae, cost, role of the parents, transport to and from the marae, how will we assess the impact on students, what is the focus for the learning eg: kapa haka, taiaha, traditional games, social skills, etc

Using Te Reo

We must all take ownership of the Māori language. We are fortunate to have this language as one of the official languages of New Zealand. As such, we must use this language, where and when we can. Schools provide an ideal environment to develop Te Reo Māori.

Teachers need to be the role models. We need an environment in schools where teachers and children feel safe to use Te Reo and to try and fine tune their mita, while being supported by their peers and the school community. The flip side is that I am aware of situations in schools where teachers have been put down for incorrect pronunciation or for making other errors with Te Reo Māori or tikanga. This causes teachers / children to shut down and often give up on using the language. This must not occur. The environment needs to support not ridicule and this should always be seen as a learning opportunity.

Simple things, such as pronouncing people's names and place names correctly, being prepared to ask experts (children or adults) to gain further knowledge and to have supporting resources for teachers to refer to and important aspects of ensuring that the language is valued and developed.

Involving parents / community

Schools were engaging with their parent body in a range of ways, always looking to for ways to involve parents in their child's learning. Many schools found that they were needing to look to different ways for bring parents into the school or to have the school move into the community. This had mixed success. Ultimately, schools were successful at engaging with parents on a 'social' level. This social level is around greeting parents, talking about the weather and surface level discussions about the child.

School's wanted to develop deeper level relationships, where the child's learning was the focus and the ability to work closely with parents to develop learning partnerships with the all adults working together to benefit the child.

Having positive role models in school who are parents or community members have positive outcomes. Schools used parents to talk about their jobs, their skills or expertise or to talk about their lives. The biggest impact for students appears to be around parents talking about the importance of education in their life. Male role models appeared to also have a great impact on many of the children. Role models were also used to promote reading, sports, behaviour and cultural activities.

School environment

Providing events where the children and community come together, so that children of all ages and their parents mix and experience something together. This included: matariki celebrations, festivals, sports, book days, working bees, house / whānau group events (eg: tug of war, relays etc) and amazing race style events.

A major impact in engaging children and their whānau was when a school liaised with local marae with links to children from the school. They took the time to meet with each marae, on the marae and negotiated to have professional photos taken of the marae and some its history and significance. This was then printed on large outdoor posters that were displayed around the school. This provided the community and children with opportunities to make links with each other and for the children to feel ownership to their school and local environment.

Most schools had dual language signs. This provided clear messages to the children, staff and community about the value of Te Reo Māori in their school. A simple idea, but sending the right messages.

Outdoor learning spaces that provide children with the opportunity to play, create and work outside of the classroom appear to be growing in popularity. This is providing more than a rugby and soccer field. Spaces such as native bush, hills, water play, etc and areas that make links to the local environment so that the children understand that this is their school and that their school is important in their town. Examples include using sculpture for local stories / history, pou, replicating local landmarks, such as hills through their playground development and art work created by the children or community members.

Implications

There needs to be a commitment from everyone involved, ensuring that this is a priority for school over a number of years - there is no short term fix. Boards need to provide resourcing (staffing, physical resources and / or money) to assist with the change.

Relationships must be built between the staff and whānau. This must be more than having parents feel safe being in school. We need to build professional relationships, where open and honest discussions can be held with the child as the centre of the focus. We can then look to implement change.

This work has to start with developing a shared understanding of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. In turn this will allow for a review of what is currently happening and it will lead to a change in teacher practice - a key to real change.

Schools need to be provided with support to develop own tikanga for their school. This is then adhered to by all people on the school site. To successfully do this we need the input of whānau, students, iwi and staff. This needs to include how we act, how we value each other and expectations around the use of Te Reo.

The implications for students are huge. If we get this right then we will see a shift for Māori students, with both engagement and achievement.

Benefits

The benefits of this change can be substantial for each individual, teachers, a school and ultimately our society. We have been working on this for a long time in NZ education. We know the stats, when understand the long term implications. If we can make this shift then it will greatly help with not only education, but also with health and social welfare.

“We know that what works to lift Māori achievement lifts the achievement of all students - Ministry of Education, 2013”. (Green, 2017).

Conclusions

There is little doubt that the work being undertaken by schools to improve the engagement and to raise achievement of Māori students is for the right reasons. The Ministry of Education, ERO, numerous experts, a number of iwi and of course, schools, whānau and individual teachers are all looking at what might work. Even with these ideas, the work is not easy, if it was then we would not have the long tail that we currently have for Māori students.

However, we must be strategic in our thinking, looking to engage the parents early and genuinely, so that there is a united approach between school and home.

Ultimately I do not think that there is anything amazing or new in what I have found. However, it does reinforce the fact that our schools do need to make some changes. As a school (teachers, children and whānau) we need to review what we currently do and consider some of the factors that I have suggested. We then need to take the time to strategically plan for this change.

I believe that ultimately we need to ensure that the child's attitude to school is positive and that schools are a place where Māori students want to be and a place where they are valued, challenged and able to experience success as Māori.

References

- Berryman, M., & Eley, E. (2017). Succeeding as Māori: Māori Students' Views on Our Stepping Up to the Ka Hikitia Challenge. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* 52(1), 93-107.
- Durie, M (2003). Ngā Kahui Pou: Launching Māori Futures. Wellington: Huia.
- Green, E (2017). Te Puna Taiao - The School Oasis Project
- Glasscott Burriss, K & Tsao, L. (2002). Review of Research: How much do we know about the importance of play in Child Development? *Child Education* 78 (4)
- Ministry of Education (2013). *Ka Hikitia - Accelerating Success: The Māori Education Strategy 2013-2017*. Wellington: NZ Government