Pretty difficult: Implementing kaupapa Māori theory in English-medium secondary schools

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Abstract

Developed in New Zealand some twenty years ago, kaupapa Māori has had a successful impact in education, notably in Māori-medium settings such as kōhanga reo, kura kaupapa Māori and wharekura. However, in mainstream educational settings, where the vast majority of Māori children continue to be educated, achievement disparities between Māori and their non-Māori peers persist. This article focuses on Te Kotahitanga, a large-scale kaupapa Māori school reform project that seeks to address educational disparities by improving the educational achievement of Māori students in mainstream schooling. Experiences with implementing Te Kotahitanga would suggest that reforming mainstream educational practices along kaupapa Māori lines is not easy. This article examines three main impediments encountered in attempts to implement the Te Kotahitanga project in mainstream schools: confusion about the culture of the Māori child; uneven implementation of the project; and problems with measuring student progress. For the project's aims to be realised, professional development needs to be ongoing, iterative and responsive.

Keywords: Te Kotahitanga Project; mainstream schools; culturally responsive pedagogy; Effective Teaching Profile (ETP).

Introduction

The major challenges facing education in New Zealand today are the continuing social, economic and political disparities, primarily between the descendants of the European colonisers (Pākehā) and the indigenous Māori people. Māori have higher levels of unemployment (especially among Māori youth), are more likely to be employed in low-paying employment, have much higher levels of incarceration, have much higher levels of mental and physical illness and poverty than do the rest of the population, and are generally under-represented in the positive social and economic indicators of the society. These disparities are also reflected at all levels of the education system.

In New Zealand schools, in comparison to majority culture students (primarily of European descent): the overall academic achievement levels of Māori students is low; Māori suspension rates are far higher than those of Pākehā, and they are over-represented in special education programmes for behavioural issues; Māori enrol in pre-school programmes in lower proportions than other groups, and they tend to be over-represented in low-stream education classes. Māori are more likely than other students to be found in vocational curriculum streams, they leave school earlier with

fewer formal qualifications, and they enrol in tertiary education in lower proportions.

What is of great concern is that this situation has not just developed recently, but is part of the persistent pattern of educational disparities first identified in the late 1950s (Hunn, 1960). Many policies, projects and programmes have been developed and implemented, and many millions of dollars have been spent since that time, but—while there have been some improvements during the past decade—the pattern of educational disparity for Māori remains.

One intervention, however, has shown great potential for addressing these educational disparities. This is the development of kura kaupapa Māori (pre-school, primary and secondary) options. These educational programmes emerged in the context of the wider cultural revitalisation of Māori communities, culture and language that developed in New Zealand following rapid Māori urbanisation in the 1950s and 1960s. The Māori renaissance grew further in the 1970s, and by the late 1980s had developed as a political consciousness among Māori that began to be termed kaupapa Māori. Kaupapa Māori promoted the revitalisation of Māori cultural aspirations, understandings, preferences and practices as a philosophical and political, as well as educational, stance. As Graham Smith (1997) put it, "Māori communities armed with the new critical understandings of the shortcomings of the state and structural analyses began to assert transformative actions to deal with the twin crises of language demise and educational underachievement for themselves" (p. 171), leading to the "new 'formation' of education and schooling options" by Māori (p. 249).

Māori communities challenged the dominant discourses in education with a call for autonomy. Māori were critical of the lack of programmes and processes within existing educational institutions designed to "reinforce, support or proactively co-opt Māori cultural aspirations in ways which are desired by Māori themselves" (G. H. Smith, 1992, p. 12). This call for autonomy is operationalised in a kaupapa Māori approach as self-determination (tino rangatiratanga) by and for Māori people (Bishop, 1996; Durie, 1995, 1998; G. H. Smith, 1997; L. T. Smith, 1999; Pihama, Cram, & Walker, 2002)—meaning the right to determine one's own destiny, to define what that destiny will be, and to define and pursue means of attaining that destiny. Calls for self-determination represent the 'critical' dimension of kaupapa Māori, that is, a critique of ongoing power imbalances that maintain a pattern of domination and subordination.

However, there is also a clear understanding among Māori people that such autonomy is relative, not absolute, that it is self-determination in *relation to others*. In other words, kaupapa Māori seeks to operationalise Māori people's aspirations to restructure power relationships to the point where partners can be autonomous and interact from this position, rather than from one of subordination or dominance.

Hence, kaupapa Māori theory promotes both Māori sense-making, and an active critical relational analysis of education within an appraisal of the impact of the dominant neo-colonial discourses on Māori peoples. In relation to education, G. H.

Smith (1997) contends that "resistance actions have … developed strong counter-hegemony and practices, which focus on critique of the assimilatory influence of dominant Pakeha cultural, political and economic interests within the taken for granted 'mainstream' education and schooling system" (p. 249). Smith (1992, 1997) further stresses that kaupapa Māori is not limited to any one sector but is relevant to all aspects of society, and that kaupapa Māori projects, including schooling projects share common elements of the cycle of conscientisation, resistance and transformative praxis. Crucially, kaupapa Māori approaches bring an explicitly political dimension to the question of educational disparities—a political dimension that foregrounds ethnicity and culture in the analysis of power in education in New Zealand. It is within these broad principles and politics of kaupapa Māori that the following educational project was developed and has been maintained.

The Te Kotahitanga Project

Te Kotahitanga is a New Zealand Ministry of Education-funded project that has attempted to take seriously the wider political and cultural principles that frame the kura movement by drawing on kaupapa Māori principles. These principles or 'intervention elements' were described by G. H. Smith (1997) as: rangatiratanga; taonga tuku iho; ako; kia pike ake o ngā raruraru o te kainga; whānau; and kaupapa; (self-determination; cultural aspirations; reciprocal learning; mediation of home and school relationships; school relationships as extended family; and a collective vision). Bishop and Glynn (1999), and Bishop (2008), explain how these elements were extrapolated by the Te Kotahitanga Project to provide a kaupapa Māori pedagogic framework for mainstream classrooms. This extrapolation forms an education project where power is shared between self-determining individuals within non-dominating relations of interdependence, where culture counts, learning is interactive and dialogic, extended family-type relationships are fundamental to the pedagogy, and participants are connected and committed to one another through the establishment of a common vision for what constitutes educational excellence. Drawing on Gay (2000), and Villegas and Lucas (2002), who identify the importance of a culturally responsive pedagogy, and on Sidorkin (2002) and Cummins (1996), who propose that social relations ontologically precede all other concerns in education, Te Kotahitanga was seen to develop a 'Culturally Responsive Pedagogy of Relations' (Bishop, 2008).

Such a pedagogy addresses a vision for Māori students' achievement by reciprocal decision-making constituted within relationships and interactions within a metaphoric whānau (extended family) context. In this context, whānau relationships enact reciprocal and collaborative pedagogies in order to promote educational relationships between students, between pupils and teachers (also, between whānau members in decision making about the school), and between the home and the school, as a means of promoting excellence in education. This vision creates an image of classroom relations and interactions where Māori students are able to participate on their own terms—terms that are determined by the students because the pedagogic process holds relational self-determination as a central value. Further,

the terms are to be culturally determined through the incorporation and reference to the sense-making processes of the student. Learning is to be reciprocal and interactive, home and school learning is to be interrelated, learners are to be connected to each other, and to learn with and from each other. In addition, a common set of goals and principles guide the process. Māori metaphors for pedagogy re-position teachers so that students' sense-making processes offer new opportunities for teachers to engage with learning. In this context, learners' experiences, and their representations of these experiences and sense-making processes are centralised and legitimated.

The above pedagogy was operationalised in Te Kotahitanga as the Effective Teaching Profile (ETP). The ETP promotes discursive (re)positioning by teachers so that they can see themselves as being agents of change, rather than being frustrated in their attempts to address the learning of Māori students through deficit theorising, or blaming the students and their communities. Activities take place within a critical appraisal of the impact of teachers' deficit discourses on Māori students' educational outcomes. Agentic (being an active agent), non-deficit, theorising is evidenced in teachers developing caring and learning classroom relationships and interactions. These central understandings are manifested in classrooms when effective teachers can demonstrate on a daily basis that: they care for the students as culturally located individuals; they have high expectations for students' learning; they are able to manage their classrooms and curriculum so as to promote learning; they are able to engage in a range of discursive learning interactions with students or facilitate students to engage with others in these ways; they know a range of strategies that can facilitate learning interactions; they collaboratively promote, monitor and reflect upon each student's learning outcomes so as to modify their instructional practices in ways that will lead to improvements in Māori student achievement; and they share this knowledge with the students (Bishop & Berryman, 2009).

In order to implement the ETP in their school's classrooms, teachers and school leaders are supported to engage in professional learning activities by means of the Te Kotahitanga professional development process. For teachers, this initially consists of a cycle of observations and feedback sessions, where evidence of their teaching practice is used to inform their next activities. Subsequently added to this process are co-construction meetings and follow-up shadow-coaching sessions that use evidence of student performance to actively identify how teachers might change their practice, so as to improve outcomes. School leaders at senior and middle levels in the school are also supported to use evidence of student performance to identify how they might change the culture and context of the whole school in ways that will support and enhance effective teacher practice.

The professional development process is undertaken with the self-determination of the participants firmly to the fore. The teachers and school leaders are introduced to the theory and practice of the project in ways they can adapt for their own particular circumstances. An approach that promotes the self-determination of the participants is important. As Sarason (1996) warns, without such principles determining the implementation of the project—once external support and funding are withdrawn,

personnel and policies shift, and competition for internal resources grows—reforms tend to founder (despite any initial success of a reform). Theory- or principle-based reforms (McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001) are designed to counter this tendency, in that, while they are generally large-scale, they have a motivating theoretical base which establishes core principles or norms of practice that define change in terms of the theoretical foundations of classroom practice. This flexibility allows the reform to be appropriate to, and owned by, practitioners in a wide range of settings and circumstances. As Coburn (2003) notes, to deepen and extend reform, schools, teachers, and students need to be able to take ownership of the reform in order to maintain the focus in the face of competing interests and agendas.

Timperley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung (2007) also point out that embedding and sustaining a reform is dependent on whether teachers acquire an in-depth understanding of its underlying theoretical principles, so that they can use their learning flexibly in their classrooms when new situations and challenges arise. In other words, sustainable educational reform does not just provide teachers with new instructional strategies, although these may well be part of the overall package. Rather, sustainable educational reforms are theory- or principle-based, so that teachers can address future problems by critical reflection from a base of theory rather than practice. Such theories can be encapsulated in what Alton-Lee (2008) terms *smart tools*, which provide teachers and school leaders with a means of critically reflecting on their practice and its impact upon student outcomes.

Commentators as widely divergent as Freire (1970) and Fullan (1993) acknowledge that too many educational reform initiatives have been top-down, drawing on expert theories of change while ignoring the necessary involvement and ownership by those on the ground. In contrast, while theory-based reforms are usually externally generated, they are given a practical form in school settings requiring "significant teacher learning and contextualization if they are to change teaching and learning in significant, sustained ways" thus allowing for "co-invention and flexible implementation in practice" (McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001, p. 302).

Te Kotahitanga has been implemented in five groups of schools over the past 12 years and is currently running in 49 (10% of the total) secondary schools in New Zealand. Recent analyses of the effect of the implementation of the Effective Teaching Profile show empirically that participation, engagement, retention, and achievement of Māori students in Te Kotahitanga schools are improving compared to a comparison group of schools (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, Peter, & Clapham, 2011, 2012; Meyer et al., 2010; Timperley et al., 2007). Further, Ladwig (2010) reports that gains in Māori student achievement, as measured by effect size measurements, increase as teachers demonstrate increases in their abilities to relate effectively with Māori students. In other words, Māori students are seen to make gains in norm-referenced, standardised tests in association with measurable gains (as measured by reliable observations) in the professional practice of secondary school teachers.

Problems of implementing a kaupapa Māori approach

A number of problems arise with attempts to conduct a large-scale comprehensive school reform model from a kaupapa Māori position. In this section I discuss how implementing kaupapa Māori principles in mainstream settings is not easy. I highlight here three major impediments: teachers' ongoing confused understanding of what counts as Māori children's culture; the uneven understanding and implementation of what constitutes self-determination; and problems with showing measurable gains.

Confusion about the culture of the Māori child

The centrality of culture to learning has proven to be a very perplexing notion for many of the teachers and school leaders, including project facilitators and regional coordinators, who seek to implement Te Kotahitanga in project schools' classrooms. Both in-class observations and interviews with teachers have revealed that, despite the suggestion that their implementing the ETP in their classrooms would create a culturally responsive context for learning, many teachers were often unsure about what the concept of culture means in this context. This confusion is caused by different interpretations about what constitutes culture in classrooms. The dominant concept of culture in schools tends to be static, representational and iconographic. For example, there is a tendency among the participating teachers, facilitators and professional development staff to consider 'culture' in classrooms to refer to tikanga, or customs, rather than as the practices of *mediation* of customs. This means that a typical initial reaction is to see culture in terms of the teacher's own needs to incorporate cultural iconography, to learn to pronounce Māori words and names correctly, and/or to incorporate Māori examples into their lessons or, in the case of the professional developers, to show others how to do so. The tendency among teachers—the legacy of Taha Māori programmes in New Zealand schools—is to see culture as an external commodity, which they need to import into the classroom in order for them to understand their students and to provide their students with authentic learning experiences. Problematically, the incorporation of iconography into their teaching tends to maintain teachers' unspoken and unacknowledged power over the decision-making processes in the classroom, and over what constitutes legitimate knowledge/s and ways of knowing in the classroom. The power of the teacher to be the all-knowing, the focus of all knowledge, and the person who has to determine all of the learning contexts, is maintained by these practices.

By way of contrast to this teacher-centred model, the underlying sociocultural, relational theorising fundamental to the professional development process of Te Kotahitanga promotes the culture of the child as being central to the development of caring and learning relationships. In other words, what students know, who they are, and how they know what they know or make sense of the world, forms the foundations of learning relationships and interaction patterns—what counts as culture—in the classroom. Teachers create sociocultural contexts wherein learning takes place actively, reflectively and where learners not only use a variety of learning

styles and approaches, but also have the power to determine which learning styles and approaches they need to use. In this way, teachers create contexts where children can safely bring what they know and who they are into the learning relationship.

Teachers and communities also interact, and home and school aspirations are complementary. The centrality of the child's culture means there is change to the fundamental relationships between students and teachers. When teachers shift from being all-powerful to being power-sharing, interactions go from passive to discursive/dialogic, and young Māori people are able to bring their meaning and sense-making processes into their classroom interactions. An analysis of interviews with students undertaken in 2004/5 (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007) showed that they were more supportive of teachers who were able to establish caring and learning relationships, and engage in discursive interactions. Their teachers created contexts for learning where the Māori students saw themselves as agentic individuals, and where they could bring their own prior cultural experiences, understandings and ways of knowing to the classroom interactions.

To become less confused over the concept of culture, and how power works in relation to culture in classrooms, teachers are supported to cultivate an awareness of the differentials of power evident in most relationships. This leads to the question of the legitimisation of representation/voice in classrooms. Whose voice is the legitimate/authoritative one in determining Māori culture in the classroom—the teachers' or the students'? The students interviewed were quite clear: *Let us speak, listen to our ways of knowing, let us bring ourselves to the learning conversation*. A key to shifting the power within the teacher–student relationships resides with teachers being able to establish learning conversations with Māori students, and thereby create conditions where, for example, Māori students' questions and curiosity are used to initiate learning. This requires a lot more than teachers simply learning Māori language and bringing some Māori cultural iconography into the classroom.

Uneven implementation

The second barrier to the impact that Te Kotahitanga (and therefore kaupapa Māori principles) can have on Māori student achievement in mainstream schools is the ability or willingness of teachers in schools to implement the project. The implementation of Te Kotahitanga in 12 Phase 3 schools for the period 2007 to 2009 saw, on average, an improvement in student outcomes that outstripped the performance of Māori students in national averages (see Bishop et al., 2011 and Meyer et al., 2010 for details). However, there was uneven implementation of the Effective Teaching Profile (ETP) by teachers both within and between the schools, and uneven institutional support provided by leaders, again within and between the schools.

Observations showed that, on average, across these schools, 75% of teachers were implementing the ETP to a high and/or medium level. However, there was no common pattern to be seen from school to school. For example, one school had 60% of its teachers implementing the ETP to a high level, whereas two other schools had

no teachers in this high category. The range for those implementing the ETP to a medium level was even greater. It went from zero teachers in the medium category to all teachers in one school being in that category. Similarly for the lowest implementers—they ranged from 0–50% of their particular schools. That means that in one school there were no teachers in the low-implementer category, whereas in another school nearly half the staff were in this low-implementer category.

On the surface of things, such differences were not a problem because, on average, they did not affect student outcome gains. For example, when the first full cohort of students reached Year 11 in the Phase 3 schools in 2006, the percentage of Māori students gaining NCEA Level 1 was double that of the previous year's Māori students when compared to the gains made by a comparable group of Māori students in non-project schools. Similarly, when the first full cohort of students reached Year 11 in Phase 4 schools in 2009, Māori students made twice the gains compared to the national cohort of Māori students. In other words, Māori students who had been in project schools in both phases for three years, made very large improvement gains in NCEA Level 1. In effect, Phase 4 schools replicated the gains made by Phase 3 schools at the same stage of the project's implementation. In addition, in both phases, there was a similar pattern of very positive sustained teacher–student relationships and improvements in the mean percentage of discursive practices. Also, the cognitive demand of the lessons, as an indicator of teachers' expectations, rose and was maintained. In association with these measures, positive changes in the levels of Māori students' completed work levels, and in measures of increases in Māori students' engagement in learning were seen in both phases.

However, in 2009 and 2010, when investigating the likely sustainability of the project, we undertook an analysis of each of the 12 Phase 3 schools in their 6th and/or 7th year of the project as to how each school was implementing and supporting the pedagogic intervention. We were aware of the overall pattern of variance of implementation of the ETP, and we noted that Phase 3 schools fell into two broad categories: either high implementing and partial or low implementing (see Bishop et al., 2011, 2012). What became problematic was that, on further investigation, this differentiated pattern of implementation was reflected in the pattern of Māori student achievement. While the actual numbers of schools is too small to draw firm conclusions, a higher proportion of Māori students in high-implementing schools were achieving passes in Level 1 NCEA than were those in the low-implementing schools.

The pattern of uneven implementation tends to suggest that there is a misunderstanding about what self-determination means in terms of teachers and schools implementing the various components of the pedagogic innovation that is Te Kotahitanga. It indicates that some schools interpret the overall self-determining approach as meaning they can do what they like with the project's components, forgetting that entering a kaupapa Māori project means that they are accepting their part in the 'whānau' with responsibility for improving the achievement of their 'collective' children. Others, however, understand that self-determination is

relational and needs to be exercised within a relationship of interdependence. In other words, entering a kaupapa Māori project means that you are taking on the kaupapa of raising Māori students' achievement, which in this case means implementing pedagogic change in a manner that will see improvements in Māori students' educational outcomes.

Gathering evidence of student progress

As Durie (this volume) states, a successful kaupapa Māori programme should be able to show measurable gains for Māori. Of equal importance is that an education intervention project should be able to demonstrate an association between the intervention and gains in student outcomes. However, realising these objectives is not straightforward. For example, the most commonly promoted way to demonstrate a causal relationship between an intervention project and its outcomes would be by implementing the project in one set of schools (the experimental group), and comparing the outcomes of their Māori students in norm-referenced, standardised tests with Māori students in a group of schools that are not implementing the project (the control group). Summative tests would be designed, implemented and graded by members of the research team, teachers would be selected to participate randomly, and groups of students used for comparison purposes would be equivalent.

However, Te Kotahitanga has not been able to implement what has been termed that 'gold standard' of empirical research because of the dual accountabilities created by working within a kaupapa Māori frame (Bishop, 1996, 2005). This means, that as well as researchers being accountable to the academic processes, they are also accountable to those with whom they are researching, hence the need to consider their needs, interests and concerns along with those of the researcher. As a result, we have undertaken what is better termed a 'quasi-experimental, non-equivalent/non-randomised, comparison' (Borman, 2005; Whitehurst 2003), meaning that, whilst we were not able to undertake a full experimental design, or to compare equivalent groups (and our participants were not selected randomly), we *were* able to use what has become a highly recognised and respected research design. This design recognises the realities and complexities of schools and schooling, and also fits more readily with kaupapa Māori considerations[v].

In researching outcomes—again within the parameters of the kaupapa Māori approach—we prioritised the schools' need to produce evidence of student performance for formative purposes above the official need for summative data. For example, when using national standard test (asTTle) data to identify changes in Māori student performance, we often cannot get a full sample of schools, because not all schools are able to administer asTTle, and those who do sometimes do not follow a protocol for administration of the tests in ways that mean we can compare students in one school with another. In effect, therefore, just as kaupapa-Māori-based pedagogic approaches support teachers to prioritise the cultural knowledges and understanding of Māori and other minoritised students, so too, do professional development approaches developed within a kaupapa Māori frame prioritise the

learning needs of the teachers and leaders within the educational institutions under review.

Conclusion

The above analyses illustrate some of the tensions that arise in a school reform project that seeks to implement kaupapa Māori principles. These principles promote self-determination of all participants within non-dominating, power-sharing relations of interdependence, where culture is central, learning is interactive, family-type relationships are foundational, and participants (both in and beyond the school) are connected and committed to one another through the establishment of a common vision for what constitutes educational excellence. The tensions described here could persuade us as a professional development team that we need to be more prescriptive about what we mean by culture, about the significance of consistent implementation, and how we should go about gathering assessment data for summative purposes. However, such a directive approach would mean the abandonment of the very dimensions that sustain the gains made by Māori students in classrooms of teachers who understand how to create culturally responsive contexts for learning, and by schools whose culture has changed to support effective pedagogies for all students. In other words, valuing the principle of self-determination, we stand back from a directive approach in favour of dialogue and relationship-building with schools.

What is probably the most important understanding to come out of the project is that reforming secondary schools so that they can be responsive to the learning needs of Māori students is a long-term enterprise, and we should not abandon our principles in the face of some problems that arise along the way. Instead, what the analyses have done is to persuade us to persist with the kaupapa Māori approach, as we have seen the benefits that accrue to Māori students in the classrooms where their teachers persist with learning how to interact in inter-dependent relationships with students and their families. Kaupapa Māori approaches that bring an explicitly political dimension to the question of educational disparities—a political dimension that foregrounds ethnicity and culture in the analysis of power in schooling in New Zealand—has enabled large numbers of Māori students to benefit from their participation in mainstream schools, and allowed for professional development opportunities for teachers to make this possible.

In addition, in those schools which establish these mutual relationships at all levels of the school and beyond, we see the development of a means of embedding and sustaining gains made in improving Māori student achievement. In contrast, schools that had dropped off the implementation of the project's central principles have seen Māori student achievement begin to reduce from levels reached when they were implementing the project effectively.

We seek to develop a kaupapa Māori-based professional development approach in an iterative, responsive and specific manner rather than retreat into prescription. Where tensions are encountered, we do not see schools and leaders as in deficit, as

not 'complying with the instructions', but rather we see opportunities for learning conversations, the provision of feedback and feed-forward on their actions, and for co-constructing ways to ensure they can realise their aspirations for sustainable, improved educational achievement levels for Māori students.

Note

[i.] The allocation of schools and teachers to Te Kotahitanga was not undertaken randomly because it suited the Ministry of Education better to select the 12 schools in Phase 3 from those participating in the Ministry of Education (MoE) Schooling Improvement Initiative. Further, due to internal constraints upon the selection process, it suited the schools better to determine their own means of selecting teachers to participate in the project, primarily through asking for volunteers. In the case of the Phase 4 schools, the assignment of schools was through an application process that prioritised their numbers and percentage of Māori students, not their suitability for a research project. In other words, the agenda of improving Māori student achievement was more important than our needs as a research team to perform a 'gold standard' exercise and, therefore, we needed to seek out an appropriate alternative that was an equally valid means of showing measurable gains (Borman, 2005).

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