

The Te Kotahitanga Effective Teaching Profile

RUSSELL BISHOP and MERE BERRYMAN

KEY POINTS

- Relationships and interactions between teachers and students in the classroom are key to effective teaching of Māori students.
- Effective teachers take a positive, nondeficit view of Māori students, and see themselves as capable of making a difference for them.
- Effective interactions rely on:
 - manaakitanga (caring for students as Māori and acknowledging their mana)
 - mana motuhake (having high expectations)
 - ngā whakapiringatanga (managing the classroom to promote learning)
 - wānanga and ako (using a range of dynamic, interactive teaching styles)
 - kotahitanga (teachers and students reflecting together on student achievement in order to move forward collaboratively).

Te Kotahitanga is a project that seeks to improve the educational achievement of Māori students in mainstream schools. Through interviews with Māori students, their teachers and whānau, the authors learnt about the characteristics of teachers that made a difference. They have drawn these together into the Effective Teaching Profile.

Introduction

Te Kotahitanga¹ is a kaupapa Māori² research and development project that seeks to improve the educational achievement of New Zealand's indigenous Māori students in mainstream secondary schools. Over the past seven years, through four phases, the project has spread to 33 secondary schools in New Zealand. In 2001 and 2002, the first phase of the Te Kotahitanga research project was undertaken by the Māori Education Research Team at the School of Education, University of Waikato and the Poutama Pounamu Research and Development Centre based at Tauranga.

We began the project by talking to Years 9 and 10 Māori students in a range of schools, along with other major participants in their education, such as their extended families, their school principals and their teachers. The schools ranged from single-sex to co-educational, high- to low-decile, urban to rural, large to small and those with high to low proportions of Māori students. The aim of our conversations was for us to gain a better understanding of Māori student experiences in the classroom (and also of those others involved in their education).

We then sought to develop a means of passing these understandings on to their teachers in a way that might lead to improved pedagogy, which would ultimately result in reducing educational disparities through improving Māori student achievement. In doing so we sought to identify those underlying teacher and school behaviours and attitudes that make a difference to Māori achievement. We developed these understandings and practices into what we termed an Effective Teaching Profile (ETP).

Overall, the research was concerned with finding out how schooling could make the greatest difference in reducing educational disparities through raising the educational achievement of Māori children (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007; Bishop, Berryman, Powell, & Teddy, 2007; Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003). An increasing body of evidence has begun to show that as teachers are supported to

implement the ETP, they begin to develop classroom relationships and interactions that see Māori students attend more regularly, engage as learners and achieve to levels that begin to realise their true potential (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh et al., 2007; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007).

How the ETP was constructed

The ETP was constructed from reflecting upon the numerous conversations we had with the students, their whānau, their principals and their teachers when we were constructing the narratives of experience (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). These narratives are at the heart of the project and are central to the professional development part of Te Kotahitanga, which seeks to assist teachers to implement the ETP in their classrooms so as to improve Māori students' achievement. The narratives are used to allow teachers to critically reflect upon and compare their own understandings about how Māori students see the world and experience schooling with how Māori students themselves experience schooling. This reflection is a necessary part of the consideration by teachers of the part they play in their students' learning.

The ability of students to articulate their experiences clearly and in detail formed the basis of this profile, as the students told us about the types of relationships and interactions between themselves and their teachers that hindered their educational achievement or promoted their advancement.

The ETP is made up of two parts. The first identifies two major understandings that effective teachers of Māori students possess, and the second identifies six ways these effective teachers relate and interact with Māori students on a daily basis.

Part 1 of the ETP

It is clear that our actions as teachers, parents or whoever we are at that particular time are driven by the mental images or understandings that we have of other

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people. To put it simply, if we think of other people as having deficiencies, then our actions will tend to follow this thinking, and the relations we develop and the interactions we have with these people will tend to be negative and unproductive. That is, despite our having the best intentions in the world, if the students with whom we are interacting as teachers are led to believe that we think they are deficient, they will respond to this negatively. Various scholars such as Alton-Lee (2003), Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997), McLaren (2003) and Valencia (1997) have elsewhere discussed the detrimental impact of such deficit theorising on the educational outcomes of students. Our own findings support this research.

We were told time and time again by many of the interview participants that negative, *deficit thinking* on the part of teachers was fundamental to the development of negative relations and interactions between the students and their teachers, resulting in frustration and anger for all concerned. The students, their whānau, the principals and the teachers gave us numerous examples of the negative aspects of such thinking, the resultant behaviours and the consequences for students and teachers. Both groups spoke of how negative relations affected them. The teachers spoke of their frustration and anger about not being able to relate to and interact effectively with Māori students. The students spoke about negative relations being an assault on their very identity as Māori people. They told us of their aspirations to participate in learning, and with what the school had to offer, but they spoke in terms of negative relations and interactions being an all-out assault on who they were—on their very basic need to be accepted and acceptable—which precluded them from being able to participate in what the school had to offer.

We also learnt that positive classroom relationships and interactions were built upon positive, nondeficit thinking by teachers about students and their families that saw the students as having loads of experiences that were relevant to the classroom interactions. This *agentic thinking* by teachers means that they see themselves as being able to solve problems that come their way and having recourse to skills and knowledge that can help all of their students, and that they believe all of their students can achieve, no matter what. We learnt that

this positive, agentic thinking was fundamental to the creation of learning contexts in classrooms where young Māori people are able to be themselves as Māori: where Māori students' humour was acceptable, where students could care for and learn with each other, where being different was acceptable and where the power of Māori students' own self-determination was fundamental to classroom relations and interactions. Indeed, it was the interdependence of self-determining participants in the classroom that created vibrant learning contexts, which were in turn characterised by quality learning relations and interactions.

The teachers who were already running effective classrooms along the lines described in the ETP told us about the importance of their not seeing Māori students in deficit terms and of their knowing in themselves that they could make a difference for all of their students. Indeed, these teachers were able to give us numerous examples of strategies they used to create effective learning relationships and interactions in their classrooms (see Bishop et al., 2003, for details). These teachers were very clear that their ability to teach and interact effectively with Māori students in their classrooms was closely tied to their having positive, nonjudgemental relationships with Māori students; seeing Māori students as being self-determining, culturally located individuals; and seeing themselves as being an inextricable part of the learning conversations—not as the only speaker, but as one of the participants. The principals spoke of the importance of classroom relationships that were built on trust and respect, which in turn led to positive learning outcomes. The whānau members were also convinced of the value of positive relationships based upon teachers respecting who the students were as Māori, rather than whatever problems they presented. Above all, the students were very clear that teachers who saw them as having deficiencies were not able to develop positive learning relationships with them, but that their teachers who saw them in positive terms were wonderful to be with and learn with.

Many students spoke of how they reacted strongly when confronted with what they saw as unfair treatment; for example, unfair punishments. Some spoke of retreating into themselves, into drugs and/or using selective absenteeism as a means of escaping from untenable relationships in some particular classrooms. However, one group in particular told us how they reacted and “fought back”, signalling to us that they were striving for their own self-determination within a situation they saw as being manifestly unfair. In many ways, it is a sad irony for Māori people living in modern New Zealand that Māori haka is used in international sports clashes to signal defiance and self-determination,

whereas when Māori students display their aspirations for self-determination in a defiant manner at school, they are punished rather than understood.

Part 2 of the ETP

We now turn to the actions that effective teachers demonstrate on a daily basis in their classrooms. In this section we describe each of the actions as drawn from a detailed consideration of the narratives, and then describe how our kuia whakaruruhau explained these actions in terms of Māori understandings. We wish to acknowledge our kuia whakaruruhau, Rangiwakaehu Walker, Mate Reweti and Kaa O'Brien for their insights into the cultural meanings that are fundamental to the ETP.

Manaakitanga: Caring for students as Māori

The students and their whānau members spoke in detail about the importance of teachers caring for the children as Māori. Indeed, they spoke about this as often as they spoke about their aspirations for the students to achieve at school. Many Māori leaders have echoed these aspirations and asked "What if we gain good achievement levels but we lose who we are as a people?" That is, what was clear from the stories was the aspirations of Māori people, old and young, for educational relationships and interactions that respected their aspirations for self-determination; for them to be able to be themselves, to be different, but to be part of the conversation that is learning, and to participate in the benefits that education has to offer.

The people we spoke to emphasised the importance of teachers demonstrating on a daily basis that they cared for Māori students as Māori, as being culturally located; that is, as having cultural understandings and experiences that are different from other people in the classroom. They emphasised that Māori people see, understand and interact with the world in different ways, and it is important that teachers are able to create learning relations and interactions where this is fundamental. Despite many teachers saying that they do care for Māori students, their actions that express this need to be in ways that Māori students can understand. Our kuia whakaruruhau termed this phenomenon *manaakitanga*, where *mana* refers to authority and *aki*, the task of urging someone to act. This concept refers to the task of building and nurturing a supportive and loving environment by

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Mana motuhake: Caring for the performance of Māori students

The students spoke at length about the low expectations that many of their teachers had of them, and how their performance in class changed when their teachers signalled that they had high expectations of them. Time and again, the students emphasised that teachers get what they expect from Māori students. Teachers who did not appear to care for them, and who had low expectations of them, by and large received poor-quality work from them. The students told us that teachers who expected and allowed them to work interdependently would see them become independent learners. Our kuia explained that in modern times *mana* has taken on various meanings such as *legitimation* and *authority*, and can also relate to an individual's or a group's ability to participate at the local and global level. *Mana motuhake* involves the development of personal or group identity.

Ngā whakapiringatanga: Creating a secure, well-managed learning environment

The students did not appreciate chaotic classrooms any more than did their teachers. They also knew when lessons were not prepared and when they were not at the centre of the teacher's attention, but more of an irritant to be coped with until a more acceptable and probably senior class came along. The effective teachers and the students spoke of the strong desire for and necessity of the boundaries, rules and organisation that are fundamental to effective learning. This includes teachers knowing their curriculum area and being able to use the curriculum flexibly so as to respond to the learning conversations being developed in the classroom. Our kuia saw this action in terms of *ngā whakapiringatanga*, which involves the careful organisation of the specific individual roles and responsibilities required in order to achieve individual and group outcomes.

This concept has at least two major implications for classroom management. The first is that teachers are able to create a secure, well-managed learning environment by incorporating routine pedagogical knowledge with pedagogical imagination. The second is that teachers need to be able to organise classrooms so that all the individuals involved are able to contribute to their own learning and to support the learning of others. *Ngā whakapiringatanga* is about teachers taking professional responsibility for activating the engagement of all learners.

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Wānanga: Engaging in effective learning interactions with Māori students

The students spoke time and time again about the problems that traditional approaches to teaching posed for their learning. They just could not cope with the teacher writing notes endlessly on the board or talking at them for long periods of time. They could not learn from this style of teaching, whereas when they were able to discuss things with their mates and interact with the teacher in smaller-than-classroom-sized settings, they felt much more able to learn. They also wanted feedback on their attempts at learning, and indications as to where they could go with what they had attempted so far (feed-forward). Others spoke to us about the fact that they had good ideas (prior knowledge), and would like opportunities to share these with teachers and their peers in ways that would help them have a say in the direction of lessons and their learning. Our kuia identified that as *wānanga*. As well as being known as Māori centres of learning, *wānanga* can also be a learning forum that involves a rich and dynamic sharing of knowledge. With this exchange of views ideas are given life and spirit through dialogue, debate and careful consideration in order to reshape and accommodate new knowledge. This means that teachers are able to engage in effective teaching interactions with Māori students as Māori.

Ako: Using a range of teaching strategies

Many of the people we spoke to talked about the problems posed for students' learning by teachers using a limited range of strategies, especially those that precluded interaction and discussion. Our kuia spoke of the aspiration to change this as the desire to implement the Māori understanding of *ako*, which means to learn as well as to teach. It is both the acquisition of knowledge and the processing and imparting of knowledge. More importantly, *ako* is a teaching-learning practice that involves teachers and students learning in interactive, dialogic relationships. With *ako*, teachers use strategies that promote effective teaching interactions and relationships with their learners; teachers can learn from students just as students learn from teachers. It is in contexts like these that *co-construction* of knowledge is likely to occur.

Kotahitanga: Using student progress to inform future teaching practices

Students spoke about their desire to know how well they were learning and their desire to be let in on the secret; that is, learning in such a way that they can monitor their own progress. Effective teachers spoke about how reflecting on student progress could allow them to work towards the constant improvement of their practice. Our kuia understood this in terms of *kotahitanga*, which is a collaborative response towards a commonly held vision, goal or other purpose or outcome, meaning that teachers and students can separately and collaboratively promote, monitor and reflect on outcomes that in turn lead to improvements in educational achievement for Māori students.

Conclusion

Fundamental to the ETP is the creation of a culturally responsive context for learning where teachers understand the need to explicitly reject deficit theorising as a means of explaining Māori students' educational achievement levels, and where teachers take an agentic position in their theorising about their own practice. That is, where teachers see themselves as being able to express their professional commitment and responsibility for bringing about change in Māori students' educational achievement, and where they accept professional responsibility for the learning of their students. This notion of agentic positioning addresses what Covey (2004) terms *response ability*; that is, teachers understanding the power they have to respond to who the students are and to the prior knowledge and experiences that they bring with them into the classroom. This often involves the invisible elements of culture, which are the values, morals, modes of communication, decision-making and problem-solving processes, along with the world views and knowledge-producing processes that assist individuals and groups with meaning and sense making. In short, the realisation that improvements in learning outcomes can result from changing the learning relations and interactions in classrooms, not by just changing one of the parties involved, be they the students or the teachers.

These two central understandings are observable in these teachers' classrooms on a daily basis and are here expressed and understood in terms of Māori metaphor such as *manaakitanga*, *mana motuhake*, *whakapiringatanga*, *wānanga*, *ako* and *kotahitanga*. In practice these mean that teachers:

- care for and acknowledge the mana of the students as culturally located individuals

- have high expectations of the learning for students
- are able to manage their classrooms so as to promote learning (which includes subject expertise)
- can reduce their reliance upon transmission modes of education so as to also engage in a range of discursive learning interactions with students or enable students to engage with others in these ways
- know and use a range of strategies that can facilitate learning interactively
- promote, monitor and reflect on learning outcomes that in turn lead to improvements in Māori student achievement, and share this knowledge with the students so that they can reflect on and contribute to their own learning.

This ETP, constructed from Māori students' suggestions as to how to improve education for themselves and their peers, and supported by the reported experiences of their whānau, their principals and their teachers, resonates with other analyses of Māori educational aspirations, preferences and practices (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Smith, 1997). At centre stage is the necessity for a common kaupapa or philosophy that rejects deficit thinking and pathologising practices as a means of explaining Māori students' educational achievement (Shields, Bishop, & Masawi, 2005). In concert is the underlying aspiration for rangatiratanga that promotes the agency of teachers to voice their professional commitment and willingness to engage in effective relations, interactions and reciprocal practices that are fundamental to addressing and promoting educational achievement for Māori students.

The ways suggested for attaining Māori student success draw upon Māori cultural aspirations as identified by the interview participants. That is, the need for caring in the form of manaakitanga; for teachers demonstrating their high expectations and creating secure, well-managed learning settings, again in terms of the mana of the students; and the creation of whānau-type relations and interactions within classrooms and between teachers, students and their homes. These, together with the introduction of discursive teaching interactions and strategies and a focus on formative assessment processes, are identified in the narratives as resonating with Māori cultural aspirations.

Culturally responsive and reciprocal approaches to pedagogy in concert with the underlying aspiration for relative Māori autonomy underlies both the desire and solution for improving the educational achievement of Māori students in New Zealand. This can be operationalised by attending to Māori people's cultural aspirations for self-determination within nondominating relations of interdependence, and better understanding and supporting these contexts to emerge in our classrooms and schools.

Additional reading

Bishop, R., & Berryman, M. (2006). *Culture speaks: Cultural relationships and classroom learning*. Wellington: Huia.

This book contains narratives of experience of Māori students, their families, school principals and teachers. It was from these remarkable stories that the ETP was constructed.

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Notes

- 1 *Te Kotahitanga* literally means “unity of purpose” but has increasingly come to embody its figurative meaning of unity through self-determination. Many Māori meeting houses and marae are named Te Kotahitanga in acknowledgement of the late 19th century movement of the same name, which had self-determination for Māori as one of its key policies.
- 2 Kaupapa Māori is a discourse of proactive theory and practice that emerged from within the wider revitalisation of Māori communities following the rapid Māori urbanisation in the 1950s and 1960s. This movement grew further in the 1970s and by the late 1980s had developed as a political consciousness among Māori people, which promoted the revitalisation of Māori cultural aspirations, preferences and practices as a philosophical and productive educational stance and resistance to the hegemony of the dominant discourse.

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