

“It means everything doesn’t it?”

Interpretations of Māori students achieving and enjoying educational success “as Māori”

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KEY POINTS

- The Ministry of Education’s vision of Māori students “enjoying and achieving education success as Māori”, as expressed in *Ka Hikitia* and *Tātaiako*, has extensive implications for teachers and schools.
- Understanding and implementing the vision is needed to maximise Māori students’ educational opportunities and school–community partnership.
- Achieving “as Māori” is seen by some teachers and school leaders as meaning the same as achieving as everyone else. Others, including students and whānau, believe it to mean much more, including Māori students having connections with te reo me tikanga Māori, having pride in their Māori identity, feeling valued and comfortable to be themselves at school, and being able to walk comfortably in Māori and Pākehā worlds.
- Enabling Māori students to achieve as Māori is seen by some to require substantial shifts in schools’, teachers’, and communities’ thinking and practice.
- There are many ways to be Māori, and therefore achieving as Māori means different things for different people.
- Good communication between teachers, whānau, and students that accommodates diverse perspectives, desires, and needs is important for Māori students to be able to achieve as Māori.
- Strategies for ensuring Māori students can achieve as Māori were found in He Kākano schools in the evaluation of the professional development project.

Education policy requires that schools and teachers enable Māori students to enjoy and achieve educational success as Māori. Teachers are expected to ensure Māori learners can see and be themselves in their education and can participate in and contribute to te ao Māori (the Māori world). This article discusses how this policy can be implemented by drawing from a research evaluation project on the effectiveness of the He Kākano professional development, a project carried out in 80 English-medium secondary schools. Interviews with students, teachers, and whānau in nine case study schools indicated that understandings of the policy and its implementation varied from teacher to teacher and school to school. Findings show that Māori students' school experiences depend strongly on the school they attend and the teachers who teach them. Implications include that, consistent with the themes of *Tātaiako*, meaningful communication and strong academic relationships between teachers, students and whānau is needed to enhance implementation of the policy, and through this, Māori student achievement.

Background

New Zealand education policy requires schools and teaching to be culturally responsive, enabling Māori students to "enjoy" and "achieve" educational success "as Māori" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 4; 2011, p. 2; 2013, p. 5). Teachers and schools are called upon to ensure Māori learners see themselves in their education, realise their "cultural distinctiveness and potential" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 18), and participate in and contribute to te ao Māori (the Māori world). The *Tātaiako* cultural competencies for teachers of Māori students emphasise shared responsibility and partnership between those surrounding individual Māori students through themes of *wānanga* (communication), *whānaungatanga* (relationships with high expectations), *manaakitanga* (values), *tangata whenuatanga* (place-based awareness and knowledge), and *ako* (practice in and outside the classroom) (Ministry of Education, 2011, pp. 5–16). Each of these themes is broken down into a range of behavioural indicators (at graduating teacher, registered teacher, and school-leader levels) and indicative outcomes. Teachers and schools are responsible for interpreting and implementing the Ministry's policy in their own teaching. Given the priority of ensuring excellent educational opportunities for Māori, the linking of "as Māori" to educational achievement, and the cultural

competencies, it is timely to explore how "enjoying" and "achieving" educational success "as Māori" is put into practice. This article aims to help inform schools' and teachers' interpretation of these phrases and what they can mean in practice by bringing together views of teachers, students, and whānau. First, we describe the study background and the study itself. We then present the findings focussing on their implications for educators, policy makers, and further research.

Culturally responsive teaching is increasingly advocated for making learning environments inclusive of the culturally linked behaviours, ways of learning, knowledge, interests, and experiences that students bring to their learning (Gay, 2010; Macfarlane, 2004). The diversity of what it means to be Māori, the need for strong teacher understanding of Māori students' experiences, ways of being, knowledge, and skills, and the issue of how teachers reflect these in their teaching, are frequently discussed in research (e.g., Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Tuuta, Bradnam, Hynds, Higgins, & Broughton, 2004; Penetito et al., 2001). However, schools and teachers work within a broadly Eurocentric societal context which can affect the extent to which school and classroom practices are able to be culturally responsive (Brayboy, 2005). It is also often up to individual teachers to ensure learning builds on their students' prior experiences, which is particularly challenging when there are differences between students' and teachers' cultural backgrounds

(Villegas & Lucas, 2002), particularly if suitable resources and school, departmental, and professional development supports for such practice are not strong. A further challenge for teachers is that inclusion of Māori culture and knowledge in their teaching in ways that may be seen as superficial can convey negative messages about the place of indigenous culture and knowledge within the curriculum and the school more widely. For example, not including Māori-based knowledge or experiences, or doing so in seemingly minimal ways, can strengthen students' feelings that the only valuable aspects in education are those which come from European viewpoints and knowledge. This can, in turn, negatively impact on Māori student engagement and learning, leaving students further marginalised (Kidman, Yen, & Abrams, 2012). Two further challenges for teachers include variable access to the "external expertise [schools and teachers] need to keep developing in national priority areas" (Wylie, 2013, p. 2), and adolescent students' ethnic identities are "complex and ever-changing" (Webber, 2013, p. 67).

Despite these challenges, Māori students are able to enjoy educational success as Māori in some schools and classrooms. For example, schools successful for Māori students encourage parental and community involvement and incorporate "substantial elements of traditional and contemporary Māori language, culture and knowledge into the curriculum" (Education Review Office, 2002, p. 1). School-wide commitment to the incorporation of taonga and tikanga Māori (e.g., Māori language, protocols, and practices) into classroom practice has also been linked with Māori students making strong mathematics achievement gains and helped students make personal connections with and share responsibility for learning (Te Maro, Higgins, & Averill, 2008). An "effective teaching profile" (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003, pp. 95–116), which includes focus on academic feed-forward and feedback, co-construction of learning contexts and content, monitoring, and linking learning to students' knowledge and experiences, has proven a successful tool in promoting Māori students' learning in secondary schools.

Our study

He Kākano, a professional development programme involving 80 secondary schools (see <http://hekakano.tki.org.nz/>), included explicit focus on "improving culturally responsive leadership and teacher practices to ensure Māori learners enjoy educational success as Māori". It sought to "improve the emotional, social, cultural and academic outcomes of Māori children" (The University of Waikato, 2010, p. 4). Our research team was contracted by the Ministry of Education to evaluate the effectiveness

of the He Kākano professional development (Hynds et al., 2013). This article presents findings drawn from a subset of the study data relating to the question: What do participants understand by the expression "Māori students enjoying educational success as Māori"?

To catch viewpoints early and then later in the professional development, we collected data in mid-2011 and mid-2012. We wanted to collect examples of all stakeholders' ideas. Therefore, individual or focus-group interviews were carried out with junior and senior Māori students, whānau groups, teachers with head of department or dean responsibilities, principals, senior leadership team members, and boards of trustees chairs from the nine case study schools. Manutaki (professional-development leaders) linked to these schools were also interviewed. To enable students, whānau, and Māori heads of department to respond in te reo Māori and maximise sensitivity to local tikanga and Māori issues, Māori team members conducted these interviews and one Māori team member analysed the whānau group data. In addition, all interview data relating to the Māori students enjoying educational success as Māori across all interviews was identified and sorted by another researcher. To allow reflection and refinement of analysis and findings, these were shared across all team members over several months through discussion and feedback on drafts of oral and written reports.

In this article we highlight the participants' views of the phrase "Māori students enjoying educational achievement 'as Māori'" and discuss these in relation to the cultural competencies of *Tātaiako*. We report on challenges teachers and schools face in ensuring their Māori students can enjoy educational success as Māori, and provide strategies teachers and schools are using to accomplish this. In doing so we present evidence that the He Kākano professional development positively impacted on teachers and school practice.

Māori students enjoying educational achievement as Māori: Different students, different meanings

Two principals explained that Māori students enjoying educational achievement as Māori are school goals. Their comments emphasised that schools need to be places where Māori students not only achieve well academically, but where they are happy and comfortable to be themselves, where they can feel at home, valued, and cherished, where they can realise their potential, and where they are able to be strong in their Māori identity:

It's about... what are some simple things that we can do which would make Māori students say, 'Hey this is a cool place to be', in terms of our environment, in terms of how

TEACHING AND LEARNING

we interact with them, in terms of recognising what they do and how they achieve. (Principal, 2011)

I don't think it is just about the academic [side], I'd also think that [Māori students] would regard that success for Māori would be that they would have an affinity with who they were as Māori and that there would be a growing desire by Māori students to identify as Māori and that they would feel comfortable in this surrounding and would feel warmth and cherished and that they grow as people. (Principal, 2011)

Consistent with Webber (2013) and other literature regarding the complexities and variation in students' cultural or ethnic identities (see, for e.g., Banks & Banks, 2010; Gay, 2010), many participants saw the vision meaning different things for different students. Responses included enabling students to walk confidently in two worlds and ensuring students have a strong Māori identity:

It means everything doesn't it? To live and be successful in multiple worlds, te ao Māori, the Pākehā world and beyond. (Whānau member, 2011)

Interpreting the phrase as meaning different things to different students and their whānau is reinforced by another whānau member, who shared reservations over the vision in relation to the potential for students to feel that their success was tagged to their ethnicity, in effect acknowledging only one part of who they are:

[To achieve as Māori means] taking away the person's right to achieve as themselves. I've got three grandchildren here and none of them actually want to be Māoris ... To me, it takes away the need to achieve for yourself ... [My] granddaughter, who is a person and achieving happily on her own with no desire to be anything other than herself ... shouldn't have to be a Māori to achieve and to have her achievements taken away and made 'Māori achievements' ... We have the reo in our home, and they know where their marae is and their pepeha, but I don't think they would put themselves in as 'succeeding as Māori' [as opposed] to 'succeeding as Pākehā' because Māori is only one part of who they are. (Whānau member, 2011)

Some teachers also described the phrase as meaning different things for different students:

...when I look at Māori success as Māori, we've got all sorts of Māori at this school, so, are we talking about kura kaupapa full immersion Māori, are we talking about mainstream Māori, are we talking about Māori who do kapa haka, are we talking about Māori who play rugby?... It's like saying how do students achieve success as students? (Senior Leadership Team member, 2012)

The students that are achieving as Māori ... have got that huge enthusiasm for being Māori, they want to support the Māori students in the school. They want to be part of it and they want to be in your face as Māori, they want to bring guitars into class and start singing at the top of their lungs in Māori, so they are really encouraged by the support that the school gives them... They just want to achieve as Māori but there are others who are less connected and for them

there is also achievement but you don't see that same [sense of] family. (Head of Department, 2012)

To a large extent we have two groups of Māori students who achieve here, one group ... committed to Māori language, committed to tikanga Māori, ... then we've got another bigger group of Māori students, who achieve by deliberately not identifying with Māori language programmes and cultural strategies that we've got going here. They are still Māori so what does the [as] Māori bit mean and what does it mean to achieve educationally?... the two groups, when you speak with those kids, what they want out of the system and their success is hugely variable. (Senior Leadership Team member, 2011)

Other teachers spoke about the phrase with less assurance. Their comments indicate that their understanding that achieving as Māori may be different to achieving as other students is developing, but that what this might mean for their teaching and their school is not yet clear to them. While indicating some lack of confidence, teachers indicated beliefs that achieving educational success as Māori can mean more than a traditional interpretation of educational success:

I assume it means that they're achieving by learning things that within their communities are the things that they want to know and they can take back to their communities and share. I understand what achievement means, but not specifically achieving as Māori. (Head of Department, 2011)

Over both years of data collection, students being able to walk confidently in the Māori world, be engaged with te reo me tikanga Māori, and have pride in their Māori identity while achieving academically were included in interpretations of students achieving educational success as Māori. In the second year, additional responses across student, whānau, deans, and heads of department groups included: the importance of seeking and responding to student and whānau voice about learning, achievement, and communication; ensuring real and active partnerships between whānau and the school; and nurturing effective academic relationships, all indicating growing commitment to understanding and implementing the vision over the course of the He Kākano professional development. All these are consistent with *Ka Hikitia* and *Tātaiako* messages about what is important for ensuring Māori students can enjoy educational achievement as Māori.

The responses above illustrate that "as Māori" means different things for different people, underscoring that Māori students are a very diverse group. Some are strongly connected with their Māori heritage, others less strongly connected. In particular, the results highlight the value of teachers using the cultural competencies of *wānanga* and *whānaungatanga* in their preparation and teaching. *Wānanga* enables teachers and students to co-construct students' learning goals

through learning-focused teacher–student–whānau interactions. *Whānaungatanga*—relationships with high expectations—is the competency that enables these communications to be purposeful, effective, and carried out in the spirit of partnership. However, the results also show that challenges exist for some schools in enabling students to achieve as Māori.

Challenges for teachers: Varied interpretations across participants

Understandings of the phrase “enjoying educational achievement as Māori” varied a great deal within schools, within every participant group (i.e., students, whānau, teachers, senior leadership), across Māori and non-Māori, and across the 2 years of the study. Some had little or no understanding of it, or did not know what it would mean in practice in their school:

That's a strange question. I'm not sure about that. Would we ask Pākehā what it means for them to achieve as Pākehā? (Whānau member, 2011)

We're still struggling with education success as Māori ... We don't actually know yet, it's very, very difficult I think... (Principal, 2011)

That phrase ... we hear all of that language, we use a lot of that language, like ‘what works for Māori works for all’, but I'm not sure that we really understand what that means for us as a school ... what it means for our resourcing, our decision making, our structures, etc., I'm not sure we are getting that yet. (Senior Leadership Team member, 2011)

Some teachers were confused about how students achieving as Māori would be different from students achieving as non-Māori, or felt that prioritising Māori students' learning may be inequitable:

We measure Māori student success the same way we measure all student success through results and testing and NCEA results, Cambridge results, so what other things are you thinking of in terms of how you can measure that? (Senior Leadership Team member, 2011)

At the end of the day [we] should be focusing on all and hopefully all the Māori students come along with the group. (Dean, 2012)

The results show that not all teachers and schools have firm, workable interpretations of the phrase. However, many are aware of it and are questioning its meaning. Again, teachers and schools developing their cultural competencies—in particular *wānanga*, *whānaungatanga*, and *manaakitanga*—will help them use these as tools for moving further towards ensuring all Māori students can achieve as Māori. For example, the behavioural indicators for *manaakitanga* include teachers recognising their own cultural values and beliefs, showing care about Māori learners and respect for local Māori culture, incorporating

Māori culture in their curriculum delivery, and using appropriate protocols when working with Māori. These all involve using knowledge that can help develop understanding of enjoying educational achievement “as Māori”.

Challenges for teachers: Understanding te ao Māori

Across the literature, the theme of teachers understanding their students' cultural contexts is strongly stated (e.g., Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Gay, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). One student, poignantly describing her experience of being able to learn as Māori, shows that not all classrooms are places where Māori can enjoy achieving as Māori:

In class, I'm a good girl, best behaviour. Sometimes you have to hold all your Māoriness in, you have to hold it back, you can't be as Māori as you can in certain classes or you'd get in trouble. (Māori student, 2012)

Many teachers lacked confidence in their understanding of what being Māori means. Some took responsibility for finding out more for themselves (e.g., by learning te reo Māori and through personal reading). Others sought further clarification through the He Kākano professional development or from the Ministry of Education. However, few teachers talked about prioritising developing their own understanding of Māori language, culture, or history.

One whānau member felt strongly that whānau should be asked to decide what enjoying achieving as Māori meant for the school:

Well, I don't think it is up to the school to decide what achieving as Māori means. It is for us whānau to decide. (Whānau member, 2011)

Comments showed some people believed that what being Māori means and how this would affect teaching should be simple to explain. For example, this next comment seeks “specific information about suitable teaching strategies”, the “nuts and bolts” of what enjoying educational achievement as Māori means for schools:

We've not gotten a checklist of eight things of what it means to achieve as Māori ... one of the things that the He Kākano project can do is to enlighten, to show teachers all that stuff they don't normally get to see about just being Māori, not necessarily how Māori learn, because we're onto that one ... but everything else that they might bring into the classroom with them that isn't overt. (Senior Leadership Team member, 2011)

These comments show that some believe that such guides could be expected to exist and that if teachers could have them, they would be able to use them as something of a quick fix. Comments like these suggest that

understanding the complexities required for responding suitably to Māori ways of being, values, experiences, and knowledge are not only not in place; they and their implications for teaching are underestimated.

Participants identified a range of other challenges regarding making sure that Māori students can enjoy educational achievement as Māori, including difficulties establishing partnership between Māori students, their whānau, and schools, the need for more understanding of how teaching programmes can be culturally responsive, and developing shared momentum across whānau and teachers:

[Our school is] 33% Māori but [when] only 6 parents can be here [for a whānau meeting] and one turns up really late, that's another whole another issue as well, getting that buy-in from the parents to what the school can achieve. (Whānau member, 2012)

Some departments have certainly started to work progressively towards [including lesson content that is identifiably Māori] and are having those dialogues, but there are other departments saying [it] can't happen in my subject. (Senior Leadership Team member, 2011)

It's being driven by the principal and the assistant principal really.... I know that they've struggled to get some of the teachers who've been at the school for quite a while and are set in their ways [on board] ... there's a kind of opinion that we're here to deliver programmes to all students not just Māori students, and even when you put that data in front of them to say that Māori are underachieving in these areas, why, what are you going to do to improve it, they turn a blind eye to it. It's hard to get that commitment. (Whānau member, 2012)

Again, the cultural competencies within *Tātaiako* provide ways forward. For example, *tangata whenuatanga* includes harnessing Māori students' cultural capital, involving "whānau and people with the knowledge of local context, tikanga, history and language to support classroom teaching" (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 12), and using and encouraging the use of whakapapa, local icons, and history to support learning. The behavioural indicators of the *ako* competency are also useful here. For example, they encourage teachers to ensure congruence between learning in and out of school, take responsibility for their own understanding of Māori learner achievement, and validate the prior knowledge that Māori learners bring to their learning, all of which both require and support development of personal understanding of te ao Māori.

Challenges for teachers: Eurocentric society and education history

Consistent with Brayboy's (2005) findings, enabling Māori students to enjoy educational achievement as Māori was seen by some to require substantial changes

because of the Eurocentric historical development of New Zealand's society and education system:

I think the massive thing about this [He Kākano] project is it's addressing the question for the first time in about 200 years of schooling, isn't it? That to me is a huge reform.... I don't know if they realise how big it is quite frankly. To say that Māori will achieve as Māori at school is such a huge turnaround and I think it's a huge expectation in a very short space of time. (Senior Leadership Team member, 2012)

However, within this context, considering how to realise the vision has helped schools make large shifts in thinking about Māori student achievement:

The big message I've got from my involvement with He Kākano is that it's a question of Māori achieving as Māori. So, in the past we've looked at these kids who are underachieving and the focus has been as why aren't they achieving, and now ... the question is ... our school isn't unlocking their potential, what do we need to do better? (Principal, 2012)

Impact of He Kākano

School leaders reported that the He Kākano project had helped develop their understanding of Māori students enjoying educational achievement as Māori, saying it had led to increased discussion about how to do this, greater personal knowledge of historical perspectives of Māori within New Zealand education, and better understanding of the importance for Māori students of effective classroom relationships:

I think [He Kākano has] added to my understanding. I don't think I didn't have any, but it certainly has added to it. (Deputy Principal, 2012)

Using Māori students' achievement data to inform planning and new school initiatives for developing school links with whānau were other impacts reported from schools' involvement in He Kākano. More students identifying as Māori was also attributed to this development. Several heads of Māori departments stated that their school's involvement in He Kākano had resulted in a positive impact on grades and increased awareness of the importance of Māori success in education, which they felt was "preparing the ground" for further development. Manutaki also saw changes in understanding:

[The Senior Leadership Team] were asked to gift one suggestion of improving Māori success as Māori within the school ... together, we put them into three different categories ... the first category was talking about values and principles, the second ... was talking about relationships and the third one was curriculum stuff within the school ... the first one that people spoke about was about principles and values and they're not talking about honesty or western ideologies, they're talking about Māori metaphors ... things like manaakitanga came to

the fore about equal relationships ... they spoke about having clearer understandings, [and] people not talking in transmission modes. (Manutaki, 2012)

When asked how they would know that the school was successful in ensuring Māori students could achieve educational success as Māori, one principal said:

Firstly you would see improvement in attendance and I think that would indicate not only that students were enjoying education more but also that the parents were valuing it more.... I think changed teaching practice would indicate to me in some areas that our Māori students are being given a go at it. (Principal, 2011)

There is certainly room for further growth. Although all school staff participants we interviewed were aware of the vision, it is perhaps of concern that no shared understanding emerged in any of the case-study schools, nor did any of the participants directly mention *Ka Hikitia* (Ministry of Education, 2008) or *Tātaiako* (Ministry of Education, 2011). We found no direct evidence in the interviews of shared school-community-wide discussion or co-construction of how the vision would be interpreted in their school setting. Such discussions seem vital for progress with the Ministry's policy to be speedily achieved.

Discussion

The vision regarding Māori students enjoying achieving education success as Māori is a pillar of the Māori education policy and of the He Kākano professional development project. Māori students being able to feel nurtured, at home, and have their sense of their Māori heritage strengthened while at school, are important for enabling Māori students to enjoy educational success as Māori, and through this, for maximising Māori student achievement. Our findings help show practical ways in which this can be achieved. However, they also indicate that implementation is complex and challenging, and that the vision is not yet fully in place. So how can teachers and school communities develop a shared working model of what enjoying achieving education success as Māori means?

Consistent with *Tātaiako*, the New Zealand and international research discussed earlier, and the He Kākano professional development, we suggest:

- Using the ideas in this article, drawn from the He Kākano professional development and evaluation. For example, understanding that the phrase "Māori students enjoying educational achievement as Māori" will mean different things to different students and whānau.
- Teachers and schools developing strengths in "co-construction" of school decision-making that reflects strong active partnership between Māori whānau, students, and teachers.
- Asking Māori students and whānau what being Māori and achieving as Māori means for them outside school, within school, and what they would like it to mean at school. This could be done using co-construction, for example, a think–pair–share activity with Māori students, their whānau, and teachers. Considerations include:
 - self-selected grouping to maximise comfort in sharing ideas.
 - possible preferences to focus on iwi affiliations, for example, being and achieving as Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Whakaue and so forth, rather than "as Māori".
- Teachers developing personal knowledge of te ao Māori and working together and alongside those holding cultural expertise and resources, where possible, to implement ideas from students and whānau in their interactions and teaching. For example, by focusing on:
 - maintaining strong academic teacher–student–whānau relationships with high expectations of achievement,
 - classroom teacher behaviours which enable students to learn as Māori, such as sharing classroom decision-making, and
 - ensuring teaching content enhances students' Māori or iwi identity.
- Fostering culturally responsive learning environments through adopting the effective teaching profile, profiled in the Kotahitanga project (Bishop et al., 2003).
- Prioritising ensuring the *Tātaiako* cultural competencies (*wānanga*, *whānaungatanga*, *manaakitanga*, *tangata whenuatanga*, and *ako*) are strongly embedded in teaching and school practice.

Developing effective communication and relationships between Māori students, whānau, and teachers is consistent with *Tātaiako* and this, alongside developing understanding and use of the cultural competencies, will help implementation.

Conclusion

The experiences Māori students have of enjoying and achieving academic success as Māori are highly dependent on the teachers they have and the schools they are in. Given Webber's (2013) findings regarding the complexities of New Zealand adolescents' ethnic identity, persistent differences in Māori and non-Māori achievement, and the variability found in this study, it is urgent that this policy vision be supported. For example, further resources (e.g., curriculum resources that draw from Māori contexts) and guidance (e.g., support for initiating and managing effective student, whānau, teacher co-construction meetings) are important both to ensure effective partnership between schools and their Māori communities, and inform school-based implementation. Applied research is needed to explore and

describe how schools, whānau, and students can put into practice the vision of *Ka Hikitia* and He Kākano and the *Tātaiako* cultural competencies. It is certain that more-widespread implementation is required to enable more Māori students to enjoy achieving educational success as Māori, and fewer—ideally none—to, in the words of one Māori student, have to “hold all [their] Māoriness in” when at school.

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