Māori and Pacific secondary student and parent perspectives on achievement, motivation and NCEA

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Abstract

New Zealand's previous examination-based secondary assessment system can be viewed as encompassing cultural values presenting unfair challenges for indigenous and other nonmajority students. The standards-based National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) incorporates enhanced flexibility, student choice and grading practices independent of comparisons with others. These features may be a better match for the educational aspirations of collectivist cultures, yet little is known about the views of Māori and Pacific students and their parents on NCEA. In this study, Māori and Pacific students and parents were interviewed about NCEA and its impact on motivation and achievement. Participants reported valuing the opportunities and outcomes associated with NCEA while emphasising where further work is needed. The implications of these findings are discussed for policy and practice within the NCEA framework.

Introduction

Student achievement is a product of what the student brings to learning and the opportunities provided through education. Personal history, accomplishments and behaviour can enhance or complicate learning. Learners' dispositions—including competence motivation, achievement values and attitudes about achievement potential—are related to actual achievement outcomes (Ames, 1992; Dewey, 1913; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Meyer, McClure, Walkey, Weir, & McKenzie, 2009; Schunk & Pajares, 2005). Social contexts, including family and friends, also have

an impact on learning (Pomerantz, Grolnick, & Prince, 2005). Children spend considerable time in schools interacting with teachers, curricula, resources, classroom organisation, assessment practices and fellow learners, and there is extensive evidence that educational practices can either add value or undermine outcomes (Hattie, 2009; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). However, issues of cultural identity, cultural mismatches and the impact of cultural perspectives on the learning process have been less well researched until recently (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009; Gay, 2000).

In contrast to expectations that students from different cultures adjust to "the mainstream", educational researchers have challenged monocultural school identities that advantage and disadvantage different students (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005). Bishop et al. (2009) suggest that New Zealand "policies and practices were developed and continue to be developed within a framework of neo/colonialism and as a result continue to serve the interests of a mono-cultural elite" (p. 735). Ogbu (2003) has described how schools in the USA represent an oppositional culture for African-American students, who were less likely than their White classmates to believe that school achievement would enrich their future. Andriessen, Phalet, and Lens (2006) maintain that students from minority populations with limited resources are confronted by more hazardous school careers than students from dominant cultural groups. These perspectives attribute disparities in educational outcomes to a cultural mismatch between the dominant culture in schools and nondominant cultural groups. Rather than attributing low achievement to student deficits, these interpretations emphasise how oppositional cultural systems contribute to educational inequity.

New Zealand's mainstream schools are largely "Western" cultural institutions, reflecting its British colonial history and traditions in curriculum, teacher education, classroom organisation and staffing patterns. Indigenous Māori are acknowledged as tangata whenua (see, for example, the curriculum document *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa,* Ministry of Education 2008), but most Māori students experience primarily Western-oriented learning environments daily. Māori nurtured by their cultural traditions are less accepting of a Eurocentric education, and a "reinterpretation and repositioning takes place that involves remodeling

of cultural foundations" (Hook, 2006, p. 8). In contrast, New Zealand European students experience educational practices more aligned with their cultural background than Māori, Pacific or recent immigrant students from non-Western countries.

The NCEA assessment context

Introduction of the NCEA was driven by concerns about inequities and high numbers of students leaving school without appropriate qualifications (Ministry of Education, 1999). NCEA replaced the previous norm-referenced secondary examination system with standards-based certificates comprising internal and external assessments, and various features (such as expanded choice and flexibility for schools and students) were designed to encourage more active learning engagement. Subsequent changes to NCEA announced in 2007 and 2009 reflected research on its impact on student motivation and achievement (Meyer, McClure, Walkey, Weir, & McKenzie, 2006; Meyer, Weir, McClure, Walkey, & McKenzie, 2007), including Certificate endorsements for merit and excellence (from 2007), a standards review, increased moderation for consistency and subject endorsements for merit and excellence (from 2011).

Recently, the Ministry of Education released the discussion document *Directions for Assessment in New Zealand*, which emphasises a more active role for students in assessment through using and interpreting information about their own educational achievement, conversing with their parents and teachers about their learning and setting personal learning goals (Absolum, Flockton, Hattie, Hipkins, & Reid, 2009). Thus, both NCEA and national discussions of assessment policy suggest a greater responsibility and control over educational outcomes for students compared with previous practice.

How NCEA is working for Māori

Since the introduction of NCEA more students are leaving school with a Year 12 qualification or better. Māori and Pacific students are also achieving at higher levels than previously, though less well than their European New Zealand/Pākehā and Asian counterparts (Hook, 2006;

Stock, 2008). In 2005, the first year of NCEA implementation at all levels, 33 percent of Māori attained NCEA Level 2 or higher compared with 64 percent of European students; 1 in 10 Māori students achieved NCEA Level 3 (Stock, 2008). In 2006, 45 percent of Māori students left school without any qualification, in contrast to a quarter of European/Pākehā students. By 2007, 35 percent of Māori students left school with no formal qualification; 44 percent of Māori attained NCEA Level 2 or higher, compared with 71 percent of European students (Stock, 2008). While outcomes have improved for all students, large discrepancies in educational attainment between Māori and Pākehā remain. More research is needed regarding the attainment of achievement goals set for Māori and Pacific students and how the remaining challenges might be addressed.

Aims of the research

The research reported in this article forms part of a larger project on the impact of NCEA on student achievement and motivation, including quantitative evidence relating student motivation orientations to achievement and qualitative analyses of stakeholder perspectives (Meyer, Weir, McClure, Walkey, & McKenzie, 2009). This paper adds to previous reports by focusing exclusively on Māori and Pacific student and parent perspectives, thus contributing to an emerging body of research (represented by projects such as Starpath) to address inequities and transform educational outcomes for students, especially Māori and Pacific Island students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Madjar, McKinley, Jensen, & Van Der Merwe, 2009). The longitudinal Competent Learners project has reported research on student experiences regarding NCEA for a sample that includes Māori students (Wylie, Hipkins, & Hodgen, 2008), but information is limited regarding the views of Māori and Pacific students and their parents on how NCEA relates to their educational aspirations.

A major aim of this study is to give voice to Māori and Pacific students and parents about NCEA and how they see it working for them. A second aim of the research is to solicit perceptions about particular design features of the assessment system and the impact of these features on motivation and achievement. This article addresses a research gap in reporting Māori and Pacific views about how much this educational initiative is addressing

educational aspirations in ways meaningful to them. A third aim of the research is to provide educators and policy makers with input from Māori and Pacific key stakeholders—students and parents—about further improvements to practice towards enhancing student outcomes.

Method

Kaupapa Māori research approach

Data collection and analysis were informed by an approach that is largely consistent with Māori beliefs and values in terms of reflecting key elements of kaupapa Māori[1] research (Bevan-Brown, 1998; G. H. Smith, 1991, 1997; L. T. Smith, 1999; Pihama, Smith, Taki, & Lee, 2004). Table 1 summarises how a kaupapa Māori research approach was addressed. All 10 characteristics could not drive the overarching research due to various influences on the larger project, including the educational policy agenda of the Ministry of Education, requirements of the Ministry's research contract and the university's ethics committee, design considerations to enhance dissemination internationally and a research team including (but not exclusively) Māori or Pacific members. Māori researchers argue that Pākehā can participate in kaupapa Māori research provided the research is not defined, controlled and dictated solely by Pākehā (Bishop, 1996; Powick, 2003). Furthermore, Walker, Eketone and Gibbs (2006) argue that, as Treaty of Waitangi partners, Pākehā have an obligation to impart knowledge and skills to benefit both Māori and Pākehā. Hence, good practice when working with Māori and Pacific communities has been incorporated within the constraints of the larger project, including the involvement of Pacific and Māori researchers with expertise in kaupapa Māori research.

Participants

During the first half of 2008, parent and student focus groups were interviewed at two urban secondary schools regarding NCEA changes announced in 2007. The schools have a high percentage of Māori and Pacific students; one school has a bilingual programme and the other a Māori immersion programme. The schools were asked to invite a range of students for each focus group, including one group of Year 10 students

Table 1 **CHARACTERISTICS OF A KAUPAPA MĀORI RESEARCH APPROACH**

Characteristic of a kaupapa Māori approach	**Whether and how the characteristic was reflected in this research**
Research should incorporate Māori concepts of knowledge, skills, experiences, attitudes, processes, practices, customs, reo, values and beliefs.	Time was provided before and after interviews for cultural protocols (mihimi), allowing opportunity for interviewees to talk about their beginnings and thoughts, before specific research questions were asked. The researchers gave an appropriate koha (gift of appreciation) for the focus group interviewees' contributions to the research.
Māori research should be conducted by culturally appropriate researchers.	Researchers were aware of cultural practices and norms, and focus group interviews with Māori and Pacific participants were conducted by Māori and Pacific researchers.
Research should be focused on areas of concern to Māori and should arise from their self-identified needs and aspirations.	Research was focused on educational attainment as an area of concern to Māori and Pacific people, but the specific questions were driven by Ministry of Education contract requirements.
Research should have positive outcomes for Māori people.	The aim of this research was to gain knowledge and understanding of how Māori and Pacific secondary students and parents view opportunities provided by NCEA to meet their aspirations, and what they consider to be the impact of NCEA on motivation to achieve.
Māori people being researched should be active participants at all stages of the research process.	Schools—not Māori—decided whom to invite for participation in the focus groups. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw from the interview if they wished. Access to participant information was available throughout the research process.
Research should empower and be a learning experience for both the researched and the researchers.	The intention of this project component is to give voice to Māori and Pacific researchers and participants who have not, to date, had the opportunity to share their specific perspectives on NCEA.
Māori research should be controlled by Māori.	The project lead researchers were not Māori, but focus groups were led by Māori and Pacific researchers. The Ministry of Education controlled the overall scope of the research project.
Researchers should be accountable to research participants.	All interviewees' recorded comments were reviewed by participants for feedback, amendments and deletions.
Māori research should be of a high quality and assessed by culturally appropriate methods.	Feedback on this research has been given by participants, internally by the research team (including Māori and Pacific researchers), by key Ministry of Education reviewers and externally by academic peer reviewers to ensure it is of a high quality and culturally appropriate.
The research process should take into consideration Māori culture and preferences.	A kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) approach was used in this research, as this is a culturally appropriate and preferred method with Māori and Pacific peoples.

Source: Adapted from Bevan-Brown (1998).

and one group of Year 12 and/or 13 students. There were two separate Māori student focus groups (n = 20 students) at one school, one Year 10 and one Year 12. The four focus groups (n = 40 students) at the second school included two groups of Pacific students and two mixed groups with both Māori and Pacific students (two groups each of Year 10 and combined Years 12/13). In all, 60 Māori and Pacific students participated.

Four parent focus groups and individual parents were interviewed at the same schools to solicit Māori and Pacific parent perspectives, with eight parents per group and two individual interviews with Pacific mothers (who requested individual interviews by a Pacific interviewer).

Interviews and data analysis

Two researchers conducted each focus group: one as facilitator asking questions and the other as note-taker. Facilitators were Māori and Pacific, fluent bilingual speakers of English and either Māori or a Pacific language, and experienced researchers. At the first kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) contact, mihimihi (introductions) were exchanged and the rightful place of te ao Māori and te ao Pacific (Māori and Pacific world views) established, thus implicitly reinforcing a kaupapa Māori approach to the research. The focus groups and interviews took place at times and places selected by the schools and participants, with Māori and Pacific cultural preferences prevailing. Once mihimihi, explanations, confidence and trust had been clearly established, focus group sessions began tackling the questions, and the note-taker read recorded responses aloud after each question to invite participants to make additions and edits.

Year 10 students were asked what they knew about NCEA; what their parents, siblings and friends think about it; what they knew and thought about changes to NCEA; and their sources of information. Senior students were asked about the influences of recent NCEA design changes on their work; if they would like additional change; and what should stay the same. We also asked about Unit Standards and Achievement Standards. Students were also asked how friends, parents, family/whānau, teachers and other factors influenced their schoolwork.

Whānau were asked how well they thought NCEA was working for their child; what they knew about endorsements; what strategies they used to influence their child's achievement; whether they thought their child was influenced by others; and, finally, something they would like changed about NCEA and something they thought should stay the same.

Interviews were transcribed and analysed qualitatively using established procedures to identify themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Student perspectives

The main themes emerging for Māori and Pacific students and parents were largely consistent with findings for other cultural groups, including Asian, Māori, Pacific and New Zealand European/Pākehā (Meyer, McClure, Weir, Walkey, & McKenzie, 2009); with some differences in emphases highlighted below.

Influences on motivation

Social agents (whānau, teachers, friends) were seen to be major influences on motivation, consistent with the cultural values of Māori and Pacific people. A Māori world view maintains that the tikanga Māori (values) of manaakitanga (caring), whānau (family) and whanaungatanga (interpersonal connections) are integral aspects associated with many facets of Māori tanga, which influence how external factors such as social agents affect intrinsic motivation (Waiti, 2007). Determinants of motivation, including relatedness, competence, autonomy and vicarious experiences, offer similar themes or situations to those of a Māori world view, such as whanaungatanga, whānau and tuakana–teina (the reciprocal relationship between teacher and learner). Relatedness, for instance, is characterised by the need to feel connected with others and a sense of belonging within social systems (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The quality of relationships with others, feeling understood, having fun with others and interacting effectively within a social context (Ntoumanis, 2001) are all components of relatedness (Waiti, 2007).

Māori and Pacific students talked about learning for learning's sake and for one's self-worth or "internal motivation". When asked about the

impact of the Certificate endorsements (external recognition) on their learning, they mentioned responsiveness to whakamihi (praise) and intrinsic factors:

> [Being recognised] gives us a sense of pride, you know you've worked hard, you're proud of achievement.

Students mentioned classmates who were not highly motivated and did not seem to care about school:

> There are students who just settle at an 'Achieved', though, they just get there.

There were also comments about external rewards and punishments, along with references to future goals such as getting a better job or gaining University Entrance (UE):

> [The endorsements] enhance chances of getting into university.

> I know you can get Merits and Excellence credits, and that you need it to get a better job.

Social influences

For Māori, a sense of whānau, whanaungatanga, tuakana–teina and associated tikanga Māori underpin interactions and relationships, affecting motivation. Kay's (2008) research into the stories of Year 13 Māori students emphasises the importance of whānau or influential adults who value and support students, encouraging motivation and self-efficacy. Teacher–student relationships and friends also affect academic achievement (Kay, 2008). In comparison with references to extrinsic or intrinsic motivators, students commented more about social influences, describing how key people in their lives made a difference to their learning, achievement and school engagement—either positively or negatively. Peers could be a distraction or role model:

> It depends on your friends. If you have good friends who want an education, they will encourage you to get yours. But if they just come to school to eat lunch or whatever, then you'll end up just like them.

> It's good to be able to see a role model—if one of your friends is achieving, that motivates you to achieve.

No-one suggested performing below their best to avoid accusations of being whakahīhī (boastful) or whakamā (reluctant/shy), what Bevan-Brown refers to as "that quiet way of working" (2009, p. 7). On the contrary, Māori and Pacific students wanted to do well in front of their peers. Competition was not seen as outperforming others, but as competing with one another to encourage everyone to do well:

> We're involved with friends: our friends push each other to reach for Excellence and Merit. Friends-wise, Merit and Excellence is the standard.

> Friends are good competition, to see who gets an E and if you both do well, then it's a bonus.

Family influences could also be negative:

> You can lose focus because during study leave, we have to babysit; this is very common with Pacific people. If we are not babysitting, then we are taking care of the house and the house is too noisy to study. Family stuff is easier to manage during the year because we don't have the pressure of all the exams.

> [My parents] encourage [me] to leave school and get a job, but I want to get an education.

However, there were many more comments about parents and whānau who set high expectations:

> [It's] good to have role models in your family too. My mum is a role model for me to excel—she's doing her doctorate [like the focus group facilitator]—to look up to people really motivates us.

> [Parents] are a good influence—they want me to achieve and have opportunities they didn't have.

They talked about specific support:

> [Family] are supportive, backup, help, with homework. They are there for us 100% and encourage us to do well.

> Teachers' influencing motivation to achieve in school by caring about them as learners: they're here to help us. Supportive like a parent, push us to do well and really want us to pass. Good to know they are there for us—they are really caring about us totally as people, all aspects of our life.

They wanted teachers to be "straight up" with them and appreciated help with challenges:

> Teachers do motivate us. They help us to try to fix our mistakes.
>
> [Teachers should] show us the long way to do work rather than the short way.

Negative expectations were also mentioned:

> Teachers don't believe that we can make it.
>
> [Question: How do you know this?] It's how they treat us, they don't motivate us.
>
> The teachers decide where the class is at in terms of choosing which standards [Unit versus Achievement]. It's a disadvantage on you because it depends on what the teacher thinks you can do and what the kids in your class can do.

Finally, students mentioned how schools seemed to push them in different directions:

> The teachers decide what type of standards we do. We don't get to choose together. We do Unit Standards for the internal credits and Achievement Standards for the external credits.
>
> You're always encouraged to achieve Excellence and Merit at this place.
>
> Teachers really encourage us to get Merit and Excellence, that's the standard our teachers expect from us.
>
> We want them to give us a chance.

Features of NCEA

Discussion about NCEA design changes and the impact of the Certificate endorsements addressed consistency, credit parity and the fairness of a

dual system of Achievement and Unit Standards. Typical comments about consistency supported the guidelines on further assessment opportunities published by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) in 2009:

> In some ways, a re-sit is good, but in the real world there are some things you cannot re-sit—if you fail, you fail.
>
> Doesn't make sense to me to be able to re-take internals over and over again, shouldn't be able to have everyone pass for the reputation of the school.

They preferred consistency:

> Change the amount of credits. For some credits you have to do lots of work and for others you don't—it should be balanced.

There were opinions about having both Unit and Achievement Standards. Generally, students saw Unit Standards as "easy options" for less capable students:

> Unit Standards are for lower level.
>
> Unit Standards are for people who just want to pass, Achievement Standards for people who want to do Merit or Excellence.

They regarded Unit Standards as less valued:

> Unit Standards don't mean anything. People will always pick the person with Achievement Standards [for tertiary or a job].
>
> I'm interested in Psychology but the subject is Unit Standards and people see it as a joke.

Students knew that Merit and Excellence were unavailable for most Unit Standards and commented that this disadvantaged them:

> Stupid—students who do Unit Standards can't aim for Excellence … and sometimes if it's your best subject, it can be disheartening.
>
> There's no advantage to studying harder for Unit Standards.

Students wanted a unified system:

> Having both is confusing—why not just one?

However, the Certificate endorsements were viewed positively:

> Makes you feel better if you get Merit and Excellence.
>
> You aim to achieve at a higher standard.

Unlike older students, Year 10 students seemed uninformed about the NCEA and endorsements:

> [We] haven't heard about [the endorsements].
>
> Don't know much about NCEA [all students in the group agreed].

They may have been given information but wanted more.

Theoretically, the flexibility of NCEA allows students to enrol early in areas of strength rather than waiting until they reach a particular school year. These opportunities were not always available to students, nor did students know about the possibility. Those who knew that NCEA Level 1 credits can be taken early, in Year 10, expressed disappointment at limited opportunities to do so:

> [We should] have opportunity to do more credits in Year 10 like maths, etc. Practice introduced to subjects earlier to increase confidence when you sit the credit.

Seniors wanted advice to go beyond earning credits:

> We are expected to learn for the assessment to get the credit, but we don't learn the background. We learn different parts but not the whole thing; for example, we learn only what we need to learn for the credits. We want to learn the whole thing.

Others thought students need to take more responsibility:

> Instead of waiting for the teacher to advise when you can do the subject, choose yourself when you're ready.

Parent/whānau perspectives

Themes emerging from the families/whānau were similar: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, social influences, the features of NCEA and NCEA knowledge. An additional theme, high expectations, highlights family

values in positive intrinsic motivation orientations. Māori and Pacific parents had much to say about the benefits of NCEA in comparison to the previous system.

NCEA as motivator

Virtually all comments about motivation referred to how NCEA supported different learners. Parents affirmed that NCEA enabled individual students to explore strengths and saw the previous system as unfair:

> School C [6th Form Certificate] was a problem; many failed. NCEA is different for those who fell apart under exam conditions—internals are good.

> The NCEA works well for my granddaughter. The old system failed half of the students and wasn't fair and I had to wait until the end of the year [to find out].

They discussed the advantages of internal assessment opportunities throughout the year:

> [It's a] good system for Māori who can achieve while learning—can see it working throughout the year and can understand what the student is doing.

> This is a good way to encourage children to be learning all the year round and not just rely on examination time, because some kids have that attitude to just roam around the whole year so the internal exams are a good way of keeping an eye on your child's progress.

Parents discussed how high and low achievers could succeed with NCEA:

> Good for strugglers, improves self-esteem.

> NCEA meant my brother achieved a qualification which he wouldn't have under previous ways.

Extrinsic motivation

Parents talked about what motivated children to work hard in school:

> We always reward them, we buy things. We promised at the beginning of the year to pay their fare to [place name] if they do good. We always do these kinds of things to encourage them.

There were also negative consequences when students didn't meet expectations:

> If fail—I take something out of [his] room for three months.

Parents affirmed the influence of opportunities to earn Merit and Excellence:

> [Our] son likes to be able to get Excellence. Some kids are really smart.

> New grading for Excellence and Merit should be a real motivation.

High expectations and intrinsic motivation

Family/whānau spoke of expectations and supporting achievement:

> School matters as this is the last year for him, and he's working to pass. [We] can't afford for him to repeat.

> We help him with homework. Try to be his teachers at home too. We don't send him to school and then sit home and do nothing, but when he's at home, we make home another classroom.

Parents mentioned specific approaches to goal setting and time management:

> [We] developed a plan for our son about what he wants to do and focus on a goal—support—take him to sporting, library books, etc., computer.

What was most important to families was a brighter future for their children through education:

> Children have seen the difficulty of working long hours packing Woolworths' shelves.

> [There is a] family expectation that our children will do well, encourage through communication and focus on future goals.

They discussed the importance of higher education:

> [UE] is the minimum requirement in our family. Both parents achieved university qualifications and our children encouraged [to do the same].

> [I want my child] to see what it's like to participate, go to uni—opens eyes and broadens horizon.

Social influences

In addition to whānau influences, parents acknowledged the roles of friends and teachers in motivating children:

> [My child is part of a] small group of friends, and they push each other; if one lapses they encourage and support each other.

Friends also influenced subject choices:

> Our daughter won top in computing but changed to art because her friend wanted her to do art. So [I] came in and changed back to computing. [We] don't agree that friends should influence subject choice.

Parents commented less frequently than students about teacher influences on achievement. They wanted more specific information about their child from teachers and from school:

> Teachers don't tell us the honest truth—rather say [my child's] doing good without detail.

> I like to find out the truth about what my child is doing, [like] truancy and missing classes.

Positive comments about teachers focused on how teachers supported learning:

> Teachers have a good influence on child's performance—wonderful teachers.

> My daughter [was a] bit wayward until Year 13 and knew what was needed and eventually achieved her goals through teacher support—holistic support. She passed with good Excellence and achieved UE.

Features of NCEA and NCEA knowledge

Some parents thought that NCEA would not be sufficiently motivating if certificates were seen as too easy:

> [The NCEA] makes kids lazy if they only just 'Achieved' and don't get recognised for extra effort.

> Once students have the credits, [they] don't have to pass external exam, so no incentive.

Many parents indicated they lacked sufficient understanding of NCEA to support their children:

> [There is] not enough information—am confused about what it is. There's internal and external; found out when there was 'A' results but found out it means 'Achieved'.

Parents seemed dependent on learning about NCEA from their children rather than from schools:

> Sons explained it to me—I was confused before about how credits are accumulated.

Discussion

Common threads emerging from these participant perspectives are consistent with international findings on motivation (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Pintrich, 2000; Weiner, 1992), different goal structures (Roseth, Johnson, & Johnson, 2008), and social relationships (Urdan & Maehr, 2005; Wentzel, 1998). Results indicate that tikanga Māori is useful in helping explain a Māori construct of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Motivation can be fostered through an overriding notion of kotahitanga (unity) to provide a sense of relatedness, competence and autonomy. Thus, tikanga Māori such as whanaungatanga, manaakitanga and tuakana–teina relationships can help to develop and enhance a sense of cohesion, self-efficacy, self-esteem and social support through kotahitanga (Bevan-Brown, 1994, 1998; Kay, 2008; Waiti, 2007). Enhancing these constructs fosters the psychological needs of relatedness, competence and autonomy, affecting motivation and achievement. Qualitative findings from interviews with Māori and Pacific students and whānau also align with the results of quantitative analyses of the influences of motivation orientations and teacher affiliation on NCEA achievement (Meyer, McClure, Walkey et al., 2009; Meyer, Weir, McClure et al., 2009).

Patterns in the relationship between motivation and achievement

Patterns of motivation and achievement attitudes for Māori and Pacific students share theoretical underpinnings identified for other cultural groups (Davis, Ajzen, Saunders, & Williams, 2002; Glanville & Wildhagen, 2007; Martin, 2006). Māori and Pacific parents and whānau have high expectations for their children, value achievement, use rewards and punishments as motivators and focus on short-term (grades, endorsements) and long-term (UE, employment) achievement outcomes.

The standards-based design of NCEA assessments may be particularly relevant for Māori and Pacific students. The international literature on co-operative learning discusses three different goal structures—co-operative, competitive and individualistic—reflecting different levels of social interdependence (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, 2005). Goals are socially interdependent when one student's performance affects the outcomes for others—either positively or negatively. Norm-referenced assessments reference subject mastery but are also affected by performance across students. Roseth et al. (2008) describe how goal structures that are competitive can encourage oppositional behaviours to discourage others from achieving (such as hiding information and resources from others) and acting in distrustful ways, thus working against classrooms as learning communities.

In contrast to competitive goal structures, Māori and Pacific students described collaborative-achievement goal structures. Students made comparisons not to surpass one another but to pull everyone up to a higher level. Cormack's (1997) model of creating an effective learning environment for Māori learners parallels this goal structure: Cormack locates students as individuals, but simultaneously as part of wider social systems or a "class", including whānau, hapū (subtribe), waka (tribal canoe) and iwi (tribe). Competition is employed cohesively at all levels, where individuals work to develop what he refers to as "esprit de corps" or kotahitanga among the class. Attaining E grades within a standards-based assessment system such as NCEA does not depend on how others perform, which means NCEA may be uniquely suited to encouraging outcomes of collective excellence appropriate to Māori and Pacific world views.

The influences of social relationships

Not surprisingly, Māori and Pacific students described both positive and negative influences on achievement from friends and families. Friends can contribute to poor study habits, attendance and engagement, or provide a collaborative-achievement context of high expectations for all. Families acknowledged peer group influences and shared stories of friends who either support or "side track" achievement. They also commented on peer group pressure to make inappropriate choices.

Students and whānau talked about how family can have an influence through rewards for achievements and negative consequences for not meeting expectations. Both students and parents/whānau favoured Merit or Excellence and Certificate endorsements. Parents were more likely than students to discuss longer term outcomes such as University Entrance and future employment. They wanted more for their children than what they had been able to achieve, and whānau who had attended university expected their children to do so. Students commented on parents and family members who were role models, and about older siblings who had left school without a qualification and/or were unemployed. There was a clear sense of community expectations whereby everyone would reach a certain level of achievement.

Many interpersonal influences parallel those for other cultural groups, but Māori and Pacific students emphasised the importance of the teacher—consistent with quantitative findings on the relationship between achievement and teacher affiliation. Meyer, Weir, McClure et al. (2009) found a significant positive relationship between the total number of NCEA credits attained and teacher affiliation ratings, suggesting that, especially for Māori, relationships with teachers are critical to student achievement. Bishop and Berryman (2006) advocate discursive, collaborative teaching and learning for Māori students that reflect "non-dominating relations of interdependence" (Bishop et al., 2009, p. 735) rather than teacher-directed instruction. Discursive pedagogical practices allow students to bring their own experiences and culture to learning, requiring students to become active learners as well as respecting their contributions to learning.

In New Zealand's mainstream schools—where school organisation, curricula and staffing are dominated by European/Pākehā—students whose cultural identities and backgrounds are more closely aligned with existing traditions and structures are at an advantage. For Māori and Pacific students as for other students whose culture differs from that of the mainstream, schools can be oppositional cultures (Ogbu, 2003), resulting in hazardous school careers (Andriessen et al., 2006). Teachers who engage in culturally responsive pedagogies help students negotiate this hazardous terrain: if they do not, teachers may be adding further obstacles to student achievement. This interpretation is supported by student comments about wanting teachers who help them "fix their mistakes" and explain "the long way to do work rather than the short way". Students wanted teachers with high expectations, as evidenced by supporting students to meet learning challenges. They resented teachers with low expectations, who made assumptions about what they could do and made assessment decisions for students rather than allowing students to make their own choices.

Home–school relationships: Communications about NCEA

Despite having been recruited by the schools to participate in the interviews about NCEA, whānau expressed disappointment that they did not know more about how NCEA works but stated that what they knew came primarily from their children—not from the schools or teachers. Partnership between home and school towards higher achievement will require more effective communications with parents/whānau about NCEA. Parents were committed to motivate and encourage their children in various ways to do their best to reach expectations set for them, but they lacked a clear understanding of NCEA to support their children's achievements more effectively. Without more information, parents and students cannot effectively manage this changed environment. These families clearly wanted a closer relationship with schools and teachers. The home–school relationship may be important to parents of all ethnicities, but it is both symbolic and practically meaningful for Māori and Pacific cultural communities.

A pattern of lack of information was also evident for students, with only students in the senior secondary school well informed about the workings of NCEA. Students in Year 10, including Māori and Pacific students—less than a year away from this new assessment system—reported that they knew little about NCEA. Intended advantages in terms of enhanced flexibility, student choice and active engagement require better understanding of NCEA and its design for students to assume more responsibility for assessment and achievement.

Summary: The potential of NCEA for Māori and Pacific people

We found consensus across parents/whānau and students that NCEA is a positive development for Māori and Pacific students. Overwhelmingly, NCEA was preferred over norm-referenced assessments, which were perceived to be confrontational and alienating rather than supportive; similarly, norm-referenced assessments were reported to be a mismatch for the cultural values of Indigenous students in Australia (Groome & Hamilton, 1995). Parents emphasised that under the previous system, half of those students who sat School Certificate examinations at the end of Year 11 failed. They supported NCEA as a standards-based assessment system measuring learning outcomes against standards rather than against other students' performance. The previous norm-referenced system measured student mastery of content, but it was also influenced by the performance of other students so that final results were influenced by other students' performance. Success included an element of having surpassed others, and failure reflected not only not knowing content but also knowing less than others. This competitive goal structure directly contradicts a key cultural value of Māori and Pacific people—the collective good—whenever one's own achievements require others to fail. Timimi (2005) discusses the need to acknowledge this commitment to the collective good—a characteristic of non-Western cultures—for effective engagement in multi-ethnic societies.

In theory, NCEA has the potential to support achievement by all students in a manner culturally responsive to core values held by Pacific people and indigenous Māori. A standards-based assessment system such as NCEA

can be a springboard for collective accomplishment and pride that neither overshadows individual accomplishments nor requires individuals to fail. Yet, paradoxically, neither whānau nor students seem able to take full advantage of the flexibility and opportunities available in principle for NCEA. Better communication and deeper understanding of how NCEA fits within diverse cultural values and operational practices are needed in order to reflect New Zealand's bicultural and multicultural realities. Finally, further research could also investigate how equity issues may be affected by flexibility constraints such as school size, organisation and resources, so that the strengths of NCEA available in principle are realised in practice.

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Note

1. *Kaupapa Māori* is a term used across a range of spheres and sectors, although it is perhaps best known in relation to the education and health sectors, where the term derives from wider Māori knowledge and where it is part of and subject to tikanga Māori—Māori values. Kaupapa Māori research is defined as research over which Māori maintain conceptual design, methodological and interpretive control

(G. H. Smith, 1997). It concerns the generation and transmission of Māori knowledge and so is also an integrative process that reflects Māori ways of knowing and doing.

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