



CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGIES / OVERVIEW

Seven principles to effectively support Māori students as Māori



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Seven principles to effectively support Māori students as Māori

Māori underachievement is of critical concern for education. Māori students are more likely to be in low-stream classes and to leave school early or without qualifications than non-Māori students, and are less likely to enrol in tertiary education. Their rate of suspension is three to five times higher than other students, and they are overrepresented in special education programmes for issues related to behaviour. These outcomes occur in students' secondary years, but issues often begin during primary schooling. Research suggests that the cultural gap between mainstream (as represented by the education system) and Māori cultural values is the primary factor related to Māori underachievement.

Te Kōtahitanga, a research and professional development programme developed by Russell Bishop and his colleagues and focused on improving cultural responsiveness towards Māori students, was found to be more effective for improving Māori students' achievement than specific literacy or numeracy interventions. This suggests that improvements in Māori students' achievement can result from changing interactions and relationships within classrooms.

In developing cultural responsiveness towards their Māori students, the most important actions on the part of teachers are:

- Accepting professional responsibility for, and making a commitment to, improving Māori students' educational achievement
- Caring for Māori students as Māori
- Developing relationships with whānau and iwi
- Transforming power relations in the classroom
- Developing discursive and co-constructive pedagogies
- Managing classrooms to promote learning
- Having high expectations of Māori students and reflecting on learning outcomes and goals with students and whānau

Accept professional responsibility for, and make a commitment to, improving Māori students' educational achievement

Why this is important

Teachers need to strongly believe that Māori students are capable of greater achievement. *Te Kotahitanga* shows the greatest literacy and numeracy gains for Māori students occur when teachers take up new, positive and nondeficit discourses, and adopt positive beliefs about their ability to make a difference for Māori students through their teaching.

Effective teachers of Māori students reject deficit theorising, such as blaming Māori students' lack of motivation, character defects, or home deficiencies for their underachievement. This kind of thinking frames teachers as powerless to make a difference to Māori students' achievement. It also leads to negative and unproductive interactions and relationships between teachers and students. Māori students experience these negative interactions as an assault on their identity, which affects the way they participate in classes and school activities. By contrast, when teachers look to teaching approaches and interactions as the cause for underachievement, they are empowered to make changes that lead to improvements in students' engagement, participation and learning. Research finds that effective teaching and effective interactions between teachers and Māori students are tied to the teachers' positive and nonjudgemental relationships with Māori students, and with teachers having a strong sense of efficacy in regard to teaching Māori students.

What this looks like

Teachers see themselves as agentic, with the skills and knowledge to support students, to solve problems as they occur, and to make effective changes to improve teaching and learning. Part of accepting professional responsibility for Māori students' achievement involves reflection on your own cultural assumptions and beliefs, and the ways in which you might be influencing Māori participation in education. Even with the best intentions to support Māori students, without examining and adjusting your beliefs about Māori students, your best intentions may well not have the desired impact.

Reading narratives of Māori students, such as those from the *Te Kotahitanga* project, or perhaps seeking and examining the perspectives of Māori students in your own school, can help you to reflect upon your understanding of Māori students' experiences, your own theorising of Māori students, and what impact these theories have on your interaction with Māori students.

Caring for Māori students as Māori

Why this is important

Relationships are key to the effective engagement of Māori students in education. Relationships impact the ways that teachers treat and interact with students, with quality teacher-student relationships strongly associated with academic achievement. Māori students report that they often feel their teacher doesn't like them, and that they feel underestimated or unsupported by their teacher. They associate not being liked with their teacher having lower expectations of them as learners. These students report a desire for stronger and more effective relationships with teachers, but believe themselves powerless to make these changes. Teachers, therefore, must lead the way in transforming relationships.

Caring relationships with teachers indicate a measure of self-worth to Māori students. Māori students want teachers who are friendly, helpful and hold a positive attitude towards them. They want their teachers to know them and their families and contexts well; awkwardness between students and teachers suggests that the teacher does not know them well. They seek whānau-type relationships created within the sense of connection and shared experience of working together in the group. Such relationships give Māori students a sense of belonging.

Making Māori culture integral to interactions and relationships in the classroom facilitates and promotes positive relationships. It helps students feel that it is acceptable to be Māori and to learn and make sense of the world as Māori. This can support students' positive identity development and interrupt negative stereotypes. Caring for the students as Māori enables and empowers Māori students to bring themselves and their knowledge to learning contexts in safety, which is essential if they are to make meaning of new ideas and knowledge by building on the understandings gained in prior experiences.

Interviews show that Māori students want to succeed in school as Māori. Being Māori can include both traditional concepts that locate Māori identity within whānau, hapū and iwi, but also a range of social identities associated with being Māori in diverse contexts. Individual students' identities will be multi-faceted.

What this looks like

Caring for students as Māori involves acknowledgement of their mana, having high expectations, and caring about and supporting student performance. Students report that being accepted as Māori means being treated well by teachers, challenged with high expectations, and listened to. In other words, it means relationships built on trust and respect. Genuine caring for students sets a strong foundation for establishing the kind of relationships that are so important to Māori students. Caring is shown when you emphasise connection by being deeply committed and connected to your students and their community.

Show that you care by

- Learning to pronounce students' names accurately.
- Treating students and their whānau with respect.
- Enjoying being in the classroom with students, and participating with students in a variety of ways in class.
- Making an effort to get to know students well. Having regular conversations with students, making personal links with them, and using more personal interactions.
- Trying to understand the students' worlds, as Māori and as children/teenagers. Being compassionate.
- Affirming students' ability.
- Ensuring learning environments are spaces in which students feel secure. Being fair and just, friendly but firm.
- Maintaining a sense of humour.
- Showing you can be trusted and keeping students' confidences.
- Giving of yourself and your time.

Caring for students as Māori involves acknowledging Māori cultural identities and Māori cultural knowledge as normal, valid and legitimate, without making assumptions or drawing on stereotypes about what it means to be Māori. It means appreciating Māori students for having cultural understandings and experiences that are different from those of other students, and which can enrich learning for the entire class. It also means using Māori ways of being and acting as a guide for interactions and relationships in the classroom ([link to discursive pedagogies section](#)).

Teachers can demonstrate their interest in and commitment to valuing Māori by

- Extending their knowledge and use of te reo Māori for greetings, instructions and praise, and improving pronunciation.
- Extending their knowledge of tikanga Māori.
- Getting to know Māori students and families better.
- Including Māori materials in curriculum content and displays, using Māori contexts for exploring concepts.
- Being responsive to Māori issues and world views.

Develop relationships with whānau and iwi

Why this is important

Building strong relationships with parents, whānau and iwi and strengthening their engagement in students' learning can improve students' achievement. Research shows that, where parents are involved in the education of their children in ways they can understand and endorse, students are more successful. Most students appreciate improved communication between their teacher and their whānau, particularly when this leads to their whānau taking an increased interest in their learning.

Teachers can work with Māori families to develop a sense of collective efficacy – the belief that Māori students can achieve and be successful – as well as to develop actions and behaviours that support this belief. A sense of whānau connection is built when teachers, students and parents work together. This can be achieved through learning about and implementing a teaching intervention both at home and in class, interactive homework, and inviting families to contribute to curriculum content. The underlying aim is to understand parents' aspirations for their children and find ways to weave them into school goals for students, so that school and home aspirations become complementary.

What this looks like

The engagement of families with schools needs to be based in meaningful, respectful partnerships focused on the students. Respectful relationships are central to encouraging involvement. Partnership requires ongoing attention and monitoring, and teachers and schools must be sensitive to the diversity of aspirations among whānau. Power needs to be shared for optimal whānau and community engagement. *Ka Hikitia* (Ministry of Education, 2013) calls these two-way relationships 'productive partnerships'. It is important to let whānau determine how they will participate, and not to try to dictate what this participation will look like. Māori communities need to benefit from the partnership too, so engage in discussion and negotiate what these benefits might be.

A good first step is to get to know the school's whānau, and let whānau get to know who you are, before they find out what you do, or how you might work together. Māori whānau want to know personal details, such as information about your family, and where you are from, rather than know you as a professional. Knowing you on a personal level helps whānau to trust and build relationships with you.

In addition, you can

- Try different ways of communicating with whānau and agree which mode suits families best. Ensure there are no hidden agendas, be transparent, listen to whānau, negotiate purposes for meetings, and be prepared to follow the tikanga or protocols whānau propose for meetings. Involve whānau in school decision-making processes.
- Be seen at community functions: become a familiar face. Find out about the activities whānau do outside school with which you might be able to make links (kapa haka, sports, marae events). Consider which local functions you might attend in order to have opportunities to connect with local iwi.
- Work with whānau to explore students' potential and the trajectories they might take in learning. Help identify the role that each (the family and the school) has to play in helping the student to achieve. Involve whānau in developing aspirations or values for students. Consider how to align the goals and aspirations of the school with those of the whānau, hāpu and iwi.
- Consider how you might invite families and iwi to contribute to the learning conversations in class, perhaps by offering some expertise or a unique cultural perspective. Focus on sharing expertise based on shared understandings about the goals and processes for learning. Make these invitations and presentations usual practice rather than isolated events. Seek the expertise of iwi by inquiring into local stories and history to develop a more localised and culturally responsive curriculum. Find out about the land on which the school is built, its historical custodians, and links with your Māori whānau. Ensure, however, not to dominate the partnership by determining its purposes and activities and the terms of whānau engagement with school.

- Provide physical and cultural spaces in your school for whānau. These spaces allow whānau and the school to talk and work together, and in the process to learn about each other and what each can offer the other. Use these spaces to promote Māori language, culture and identity for whānau, and also to benefit other cultural groups.
- Go to meetings to listen to what is being said rather than just to speak, and consider what you can contribute rather than just what you can gain. Ensure the sharing is not one-way but reciprocal, so that each group learns from and supports the efforts of the other.
- Take school activities to the whānau and iwi, for example, such as through student-whānau inquiry or recording interviews with whānau and iwi. Seek to make these collaborations as multi-dimensional as possible, and to respond to community needs as well as asking communities to support the school. Encourage students to ask kaumātua for support and encouragement with different projects. Ask students themselves to devise questions to ask whānau about their view of the school, and collate their responses.
- Provide whānau with comprehensive information about their child's learning and plenty of time to discuss these during parent-teacher appointments. Give the report in advance of the meeting to give whānau time to think about questions or concerns, and to enable them to take more of a lead in the discussion. Research indicates that 20-25 minutes of discussion is appreciated by Māori whānau. Whānau also appreciate efforts to hold meetings at maraes where they are more at ease to direct the proceedings, and where you are more likely to listen and respond respectfully. Try to ensure whānau experience regular meetings with the same teachers in order to build a sense of connection.

Transform power relations in the classroom

Why this is important

Being culturally responsive to Māori students involves developing educational relationships that are founded upon Māori understandings of rangatiratanga or self-determination. This involves restructuring power relationships in the classroom in a way that students can be autonomous, and contribute to the programme from a position of self-determination, rather than from a position of subordination. It particularly points to a need for power-sharing over decision-making.

This is because the concept of rangatiratanga involves a call for others to position themselves in relations of support for the self-determined action of the student and his/her whānau. Teachers have an important role to play in students' self-determination, which means allowing students to be themselves, to be different, and to participate in learning and in education in unique and personal ways. Such support for self-determination requires classroom relations based in interdependence rather than relations of domination and subordination. Research suggests that such relations of interdependence raise the educational achievement of all students and reduce disparities. They enable students to participate and engage in educational experiences on their own terms, and at the same time enable teachers to better understand the world of their students.

What this looks like

When interactions and relations are built on interdependence, the class becomes similar to a collective whānau context, in which students and teachers communicate ideas and construct common understandings and meanings. These whānau-type interactions make individuals responsible for the learning and care of other members of the class, and actions and behaviours are guided by the kaupapa or vision of the group. The focus is on connectedness, relations and involvement with others in order to promote self-determination for all.

It means:

- Encouraging students to initiate interactions, and to determine and use the learning styles and sense-making processes that work for them.
- Creating relationships and interactions in which Māori students are able to bring themselves into learning interactions, where students can participate on their own terms as determined by them.
- Involving students in curriculum decision-making, sharing power over decisions about the curriculum content and the directions learning should take.
- Collaborating in critical reflection on power relationships in the classroom.

Develop discursive and co-constructive pedagogies

Why this is important

As Māori people perceive and interact with the world in different ways in order to create knowledge, culturally responsive approaches require learning relationships and interactions which enable Māori ways of learning. The concepts of wānanga, ako and whānau are useful guides for considering new pedagogies.

- Wānanga refers to a learning forum which involves the rich and dynamic building and sharing of knowledge. It involves the exchange of views and ideas through discussion and debate which in turn serve to reshape knowledge. This means recognising students as participants who have meaningful and relevant experiences, valid questions and legitimate concerns. It means that teachers and schools do not define what counts as acceptable or appropriate knowledge, ways of learning and making sense.
- Ako describes a learning context in which teachers and students learn from each other, with all involved in processes of imparting knowledge as well as of acquiring knowledge. It involves active and interactive dialogic relationships focused on collaborative knowledge creation rather than transmission.
- Whānau as a concept for classroom relationships and interactions emphasises connectedness, mutual respect and commitment to the group. Learning is a collective achievement, the responsibility for which belongs to all members of the whānau. Processes for learning based on a collective whānau context will avoid singling out individuals, and focus on group products and group achievement.

Pedagogies built on these concepts will be collaborative and reciprocal. Māori students enjoy a more co-operative learning environment and being able to discuss things with their peers and with the teacher in smaller groups facilitates Māori students' learning, while teaching strategies that preclude interaction and discussion may create barriers to learning. Responsibility should be fostered for one's own learning and the learning of others, and all students should participate and contribute to decision-making with this in mind.

Rather than predetermined learning objectives, students should be provided with opportunities for self-determination, agency and voice in terms of participating in a group process of making decisions about curriculum content and learning direction. Māori students interviewed by *Te Kotahitanga* researchers felt they had good ideas to share with their teachers and peers, and wanted to offer these ideas and participate in deciding the directions of lessons and learning. Enabling students to be active participants in shaping lessons and connected in shared endeavours of knowledge-building has been found to create vibrant learning environments which consist of quality learning interactions. In cases where these conditions were created, an increase in student attendance, engagement and achievement was found to have occurred.

What this looks like

Interactive and dialogic approaches to learning position students as co-inquirers, able to raise questions and evaluate answers. Collaboration is a key feature, and knowledge and understanding is co-created. When students are taken seriously and treated as knowledgeable participants in learning dialogue, they feel more motivated to participate constructively in their own learning. They can be encouraged to critically reflect on their learning and that of others as they are empowered with responsibility for class learning. Learning is holistic, problem-based and involves active participation. Different ways of learning and different contributions to knowledge-building are validated, and students are able to bring their cultural experiences to the learning in an authentic and inclusive way.

This means you need to reduce transmission approaches and whole class teaching and instead use collaborative approaches based on

- Student generated questions.
- Brainstorming. This encourages students to share prior learning.
- Informal or structured group activities. These enable you to engage in discussion with students at an individual or small group level.
- Inquiry/project based work. You might give different groups different responsibilities.
- Co-constructing assessment tasks and assessment criteria.

These practices are effective not only for Māori students but for all students.

Manage classrooms to promote learning

Why this is important

Effective interactions for learning depend on well-managed, well-organised, and secure environments that create safe spaces for each student to contribute to their own learning and support others' learning. This means having clear rules and consequences which are negotiated to ensure an agreed understanding of desired behaviour and relationships. In interviews, Māori students stated that they had a strong desire for rules, boundaries and organisation, which they felt were fundamental for effective learning. Māori students find it more difficult to learn when teachers are task-oriented and do not clearly show that they care about student learning, but equally they find it difficult to learn if teachers show that they care about students but do not provide them with meaningful learning experiences.

What this looks like

Managing learning well also means teachers need to know their curriculum area well, be passionate about it, and use it flexibly and imaginatively to respond to the co-construction of learning in the classroom.

- Ensure that lessons are planned carefully and well-structured, with clear links between learning goals and activities, while offering multiple task contexts to support students' learning and opportunities for students to adjust the learning direction. There should be plenty of scope for negotiation with learners about content. Make homework relevant and responsive, and check it carefully.
- Effectively monitor students' individual and group work while encouraging students to take responsibility for their own and others' learning.
- Give students timely feed-forward (expectations in advance) as well as feedback about learning and behaviour.
- Use non-confrontational classroom management strategies and emphasise respectful relationships.
- Maintain an organised and tidy classroom which students can use independently.

Have high expectations of Māori students, and reflect on learning outcomes and goals with students and whānau

Why this is important

Shared and supported high aspirations for Māori students are crucial for raising achievement. For Māori, aspirations are understood as being pursued in relation to, and with support from, others. In order to enable collaborative support, teachers, whānau, and students need to share a common vision of what constitutes excellence or success for Māori students. This might involve a more holistic view of success, instead of one purely focused on educational achievement. Research has found that schools' responsiveness to Māori whānau improved when they came to understand success in a holistic way.

Māori students appreciate clear teaching and learning goals, negotiated with the teacher, as well as an understanding of what meeting these goals actually involves. It is important to give voice to, or put in writing, high expectations in regard to learning goals. These high expectations must be accompanied by a sense of professional responsibility for and a strong commitment to supporting and developing students' learning, for example, by teaching students learning or study skills, by critically reflecting on teaching regularly, and by changing plans and activities in response to students' progress. It is also important that school goals and aspirations complement parental goals and aspirations.

When teachers maximise opportunities for students to develop competence and succeed, students perceive this as evidence that they are cared for and it strengthens the relationship between teachers and students. When teachers have low expectations of students, and seem to care less about students, they are likely to receive poor quality work from them. High expectations are generally interpreted as evidence of a positive attitude toward the student and also toward their status as Māori, and motivate the student to try harder.

Some students, however, may experience a fear of failure in relation to a teacher's high expectations. This fear of failure and the consequent shame may serve as a barrier to the student engaging in learning, lowering self-efficacy, goal commitment and academic performance. Māori students are likely to link academic failure with their worth as a person, and their worth as Māori. Sometimes pessimism about their own achievement can be self-protective, a strategy for avoiding failure, and is likely to occur when the student has suffered stress or setbacks.

Once goals and aspirations are agreed, reflection on progress supports students to take responsibility for their own learning. Research shows that Māori students want to know how well they are learning, and want to understand what they are learning so they can monitor their own progress, and what else they could do in terms of what they have attempted so far. They like having regular reviews of their work with the teacher, and with both their parents and teacher.

What this looks like

Having high expectations involves promoting, monitoring and reflecting on outcomes and achievement, together with Māori students and their whānau, in order to set new goals and make progress in a collaborative way.

- Set positive academic goals together with the student, offering lots of encouragement and academic support.
- Find multiple ways and occasions to express your high expectations, and at the same time support and reward the efforts of students and the learning that results.
- Help students understand their achievement and the goals for their learning so that they can understand what learning looks like. Share achievement data with students to decide with them what the next steps are for learning.
- Use evidence of student progress to inform, and even transform, your teaching.
- Approach students who are struggling to offer support. It is important to Māori students that teachers can notice problems without being told and come to sit beside the student to make suggestions, rather than making a more public proclamation. Teachers often aim merely to make themselves approachable, so that students having difficulty can come and ask for help, but this action creates shame (whakamā) for the student and is likely to be avoided. Māori students prefer one-on-one conversations with teachers and dislike being exposed in front of other students.

What's your first step?

You might work collaboratively with students in order to develop plans and strategies to promote, for example:

- Non-dominating and interdependent relations in the classroom
- Discursive interactions and caring relationships
- Dialogic, interactive and collaborative modes of learning
- A culture of mutual support towards a common vision of what constitutes excellence in outcomes

Use your informal and formal monitoring and evaluation of Māori students' progress to inform your practice and plan for change.

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