

The New Zealand Curriculum

Update



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Welcome to *The New Zealand Curriculum Update*

Curriculum Updates support school leaders and teachers as they work to design and review their school curriculum, in line with the New Zealand Curriculum and with current knowledge and understandings about effective classroom teaching.

Curriculum Updates are published in the *Education Gazette* and are available online at <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Ministry-curriculum-guides/Curriculum-updates>

This Update focuses on findings from Te Kotahitanga and highlights how this programme is producing positive gains for Māori students by influencing leadership, teaching, and learning in participating schools. Te Kotahitanga is one of a number of Ministry of Education initiatives to support schools to raise Māori student achievement. It's findings may well match your current practice and stimulate new thinking in your school.



Te Kotahitanga

Improving the educational achievement of Māori students in English-medium secondary schools

An education system is only successful if everyone in it can experience success. Historically, the New Zealand education system has underserved a disproportionate number of Māori students.

Māori students make up around 22 percent of the secondary school population, but during 2009, 44 percent of the students who left school in year 10 and 33 percent of the students who left school in year 11 were Māori.

Of those who stay at school, a disproportionate number do not make the learning gains required for success in NCEA. In 2009, only 66 percent of Māori students achieved the literacy and numeracy requirements for level 1 of NCEA by the end of year 11 (compared with 75 percent of all students) and only 46 percent of those Māori students actually achieved NCEA level 1 by the end of year 11.

a substantial body of evidence ... demonstrates that students who are not well served by the education system are heavily disadvantaged in later life. Bishop et al., 2010, page 12

Te Kotahitanga is an iterative research and development project led by Professor Russell Bishop of the University of Waikato. It began in 2001 with the goal of finding out how teachers in English-medium secondary schools could raise the achievement of Māori students in years 9 and 10.

To date, forty-nine secondary schools have been involved in Te Kotahitanga. The programme includes hundreds of teachers, principals, and school leaders working together to change the ways they relate to and engage with the thousands of Māori students for whom they are responsible.

Russell Bishop and his colleagues have published three major research reports on the project to date. In addition, a team of researchers from Victoria University conducted an independent evaluation of Te Kotahitanga (Meyer et al., 2010) for the Ministry of Education. The results hold some important messages for teachers and school leaders.

Effective teaching for Māori students

Te Kotahitanga began by gathering the views of students, teachers, families, and principals on what makes a difference for Māori learners.

From these narratives, the researchers developed the effective teaching profile (ETP), which is now used in Te Kotahitanga schools as a tool for developing culturally responsive contexts for learning that are embedded in relationships of trust. (For an outline of the ETP, see: <http://tekotahitanga.tki.org.nz/About/The-Development-of-Te-Kotahitanga/Effective-Teacher-Profile>)

Bishop et al. (2007) describe how educators can create learning contexts that will support the engagement of Māori students and allow them to improve their achievement. They can do this by developing a “culturally responsive pedagogy of relations”, in which:

- Power is shared, so learners’ right to self-determination is recognised.
- Culture counts, so learners can bring who they are into the classroom.
- Learning is interactive and dialogue-based, so teachers are learners and learners are teachers (ako).
- Connectedness is fundamental to relationships, so teachers and students share who they are and students are supported by teachers and each other.
- There is a common vision for Māori student success, supported by a clear agenda, goals, and planning based on evidence about achievement.

The importance of teachers

John Hattie (2003), using reading test results from aTTle research, identified that achievement differences between Māori and non-Māori remained constant regardless of whether the students attended a high- or a low-decile school. He concluded that it is not socio-economic differences that have the greatest effect on Māori student achievement:

the evidence is pointing more to the relationships between teachers and Māori students as the major issue – it is a matter of cultural relationships not socio-economic resources. Hattie, 2003, page 7

While acknowledging that there are various factors that influence achievement, Te Kotahitanga embraces teacher agency. Teacher effectiveness stands out as a factor that makes a major difference to student achievement and that can be influenced within the school system. Te Kotahitanga therefore focuses on the potential of teachers to make a difference with their Māori students, rather than on difficulties or barriers that sit outside their direct sphere of influence.

Bishop et al. (2003) analysed the discourse of teachers, principals, whānau, and Māori students. The results for teachers were quite different from those for any other group. Overall, about 80 percent of teacher statements explained the difference in achievement between Māori and non-Māori students in terms of factors over which they felt they – as teachers – had little, if any, control. Well over half (58 percent) explained the influences in terms of student and/or home deficiencies. It was found that such beliefs, or “discursive positioning”, can undermine teachers’ confidence and determination to make a difference, which disempowers both teachers and students.

Te Kotahitanga has continued to demonstrate that teachers can develop respectful relationships and teacher practices that enable Māori students to learn more effectively. This has led teachers to believe more strongly in their own ability to influence positively what happens for Māori students.

A key outcome of participation in Te Kotahitanga is that teachers know and understand how to bring about change in Māori students’ educational achievement and are professionally committed to doing so.



“I think the first step is just recognising that culture counts – that again, as a group, on average, Māori kids don’t achieve at school. And it is basically saying that, yes, there are the factors explaining why. One critical factor is that we as practitioners have the influence over what goes on in the classroom.” Teacher

(All teacher and student quotes are taken from the video clips at: <http://tekotahitanga.tki.org.nz/videos>)

High expectations

The powerful effects of teacher expectations on achievement have been documented in a range of other research projects. The connection between expectations and achievement lies in the effect that those expectations have on teacher practices. For example, research on the Numeracy Project has found that many teachers limit the language they use in relation to mathematics for Pasifika and Māori students, thereby restricting the students’ exposure to complex ideas and their capacity for cognitive growth.

The effective teaching profile highlights the importance of teachers caring about the performance of their Māori students and developing explicit and observable ways to show this commitment.

“They have so much faith in you, almost like their expectations are so high, you don’t want to let them down. So you keep pushing yourself until you get there.” Student

Culturally responsive contexts for learning

When a learner builds on their prior knowledge and experiences, new information and ideas are likely to be more meaningful and enable more effective learning to occur.

Teachers and researchers involved in Te Kotahitanga have found that the most effective learning takes place when students and teachers actively construct knowledge together. This enables students’ prior experiences to be brought to classroom conversations and then built on with new knowledge and insights.

Culturally responsive learning contexts and practices promote very different interactions and educational outcomes from those in a classroom where most learning is based on content and contexts determined by the teacher.

Respectful, reciprocal, and responsive relationships

Te Kotahitanga demonstrates how positive, inclusive relationships and interactions within a classroom lead to improved student engagement in learning and improved outcomes (see chapter 1 of the 2007 Te Kotahitanga Phase 3 report).

As part of the Victoria University evaluation of Te Kotahitanga (Meyer et al., 2010), students highlighted the importance of positive relationships with their teachers as a basis for their success. They saw these positive relationships as essential for their learning and commented on how difficult it was for them to be motivated and to work hard in class if teachers did not seem to care and appeared to have low expectations for them.

In addition, whānau of students involved in the programme reported that their children felt appreciated in school and were more positive about school than they had been.

Parents, teachers, facilitators, principals, and other school leaders reported improvements in student attendance, participation, motivation, and engagement in school and classroom learning activities.

“You can tell he respects us because when it comes to learning big time, he’s always there. If we don’t understand something, he doesn’t talk to us like little babies, he talks to us like young adults.” Student

“[The learning from Te Kotahitanga] has helped me to develop much better learning relationships with the kids as a result, which has got to be a huge and tremendous positive. Not just from their point of view, but certainly from mine as a teacher.” Teacher

Succeeding as Māori

From their student interviews, Bishop et al. (2009) learned that when Māori students have good relationships with their teachers, they are better able to engage with their learning. Meyer et al. (2010) identified some key differences between Māori students in other schools and those in Te Kotahitanga schools. In schools that were applying the knowledge and skills developed by Te Kotahitanga, Māori students:

- were proud of their Māori culture and identities
- could “be Māori” as learners, rather than having to leave their culture outside school in order to succeed
- felt that teachers valued them both as learners and as Māori.

“I used to wag a lot of classes and stuff like that, but [now] I found that you come to school and be yourself but learn at the same time too. And, like, I have achieved heaps, like I got my first merit in maths and my first excellence in cooking, and I achieved a merit in science.” Student

Teachers as learners

Te Kotahitanga demonstrates that teachers can learn from their students how best to engage them in learning. The effective teaching model highlights that effective teachers use a range of teaching strategies that promote effective interactions and relationships with their learners, including engaging Māori students as Māori.

“Most of our models had looked at changing the kids. This model [Te Kotahitanga] said we actually need to look at changing ourselves.” Teacher

Research findings

The Te Kotahitanga research programme has sought to identify how English-medium secondary schools can improve their performance for Māori students.

There is clear evidence of improved outcomes for students as a result of teachers’ and students’ participation in Te Kotahitanga. For example, in 2009, Ngaruawahia High School teachers committed themselves to achieving a goal of an 80 percent NCEA level 1 pass rate over 3 years. (In previous years, their level 1 pass rate had never reached 60 percent.) Within a year, they had achieved a 73 percent pass rate for Māori students and a 77 percent pass rate overall.

Student retention also strongly improved compared with a similar set of non-Te Kotahitanga schools: in Te Kotahitanga schools, the year 11 Māori student enrolment increased by approximately 250 percent from 2005 to 2008.

Role of professional leaders

Bishop et al. (2010) identify that for sustainable education reform, effective leadership:

- establishes and develops specific measurable **goals** so that progress can be shown, monitored and acted upon
- supports the development and implementation of new **pedagogic** relationships and interactions in the classroom
- changes the **institution**, its organisation and structures
- **spreads** the reform to include staff, parents, community, reform developers and policy makers so that a new school culture is developed and embedded
- develops the capacity of people and systems to produce and use **evidence** of student progress to inform change
- promotes **ownership** of the reform shifts within the school.

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The Victoria University evaluation found that successful implementation of Te Kotahitanga requires willingness from school leaders to change systems and structures.

Informed by the evaluation, the Phase 5 model [of Kotahitanga] is focused not only on teacher professional development, but also on school leadership to achieve whole-school change and the use of evidence of student outcomes to improve and inform practice.

Meyer et al. (2010) summary report, page 2



Improving outcomes with your Māori students

Te Kotahitanga demonstrates that it is possible to improve the performance of school systems for and with Māori learners.



A crucial first step lies in teachers' critical reflection on their own beliefs about teaching and about Māori students. In addition, teachers need opportunities to learn new ways of interacting with students and to be willing to change their teaching practices.

"It is important to reflect on your positioning and go in with your eyes open and say: why am I doing this? First, realising I can be an agent of change – I can control the things that I can control. Second, knowing Rome wasn't built in a day and that this project takes time. Finally, enjoy the process and be open to the process."

"Recognise that culture counts and look at the ways of making a classroom a welcoming place for Māori kids to bring their own culture and to engage them in tasks and activities which they are going to enjoy." Teachers

Messages for the classroom

The success of Te Kotahitanga underscores a number of important messages for teachers about how they can improve the achievement of Māori students in their classes. These messages are highlighted in the online teacher stories. For example:

- Donna, Amy, and Delina's story emphasises the importance of relationships and listening to students.
- Jane's story explains how establishing effective contexts for learning requires teachers to value learners.
- Tu'u's story shows students leading the learning in the classroom.
- Patsy's story emphasises the need for teachers to critically reflect on their own practice.

Listen to these and other Te Kotahitanga teachers' experiences firsthand at: <http://tekotahitanga.tki.org.nz/Videos/Teacher-stories>

Guiding questions He pātai

- What are Māori students experiencing in my classroom?
- How inclusive are my ways of working and of building relationships?
- In my classroom, do I establish a learning relationship where students can bring their prior cultural knowledge and experience?
- How well are our Māori students achieving compared with other students?
- What is our school's vision for success for our Māori students and how do we plan to achieve this vision?
- How do our school structures and processes impact on Māori students? If so, how will we review these?

Related resources

- **Evaluation of Te Kotahitanga**
Meyer, L., Penetito, W., Hynds, A., Savage, C., Hindle, R., and Sleeter, C. (2010). *Evaluation of Te Kotahitanga: 2004–2008. Report to the Ministry of Education*. Available from: www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/maori_education/78910
- **Ka Hikitia**
Ministry of Education (2008). *Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success: The Māori Education Strategy 2008–12*. Available from: www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/PolicyAndStrategy/KaHikitia.aspx
- **Kia Hiwa Ra!**
MacFarlane, A. (2004). *Kia Hiwa Ra! Listen to Culture: Māori Students' Plea to Educators*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- **The Education Counts website**
This website provides education statistics and information on research, including Te Kotahitanga: www.educationcounts.govt.nz
- **The Te Kotahitanga website**
This website contains information, video clips, and downloadable versions of reports, articles, and other publications about the project: <http://tekotahitanga.tki.org.nz>
- **The University of Waikato website**
This website gives details of the programme and downloadable resources and publications: http://edlinked.soe.waikato.ac.nz/departments/index.php?dept_id=20
- **The BES Te Kotahitanga Case Study**
This document backgrounds Te Kotahitanga, looks at the impact of the project on student learners, and outlines teacher responses to the professional development. Available from: www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/?a=59197

References and additional bibliographic resources

For a full list of references, see the online version of this Curriculum Update, available at: <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Ministry-curriculum-guides/Curriculum-updates/NZC-Updates>

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Bishop, R. and Glynn, T. (1999). *Culture Counts: Changing Power Relations in Education*. Palmerston North: Dunmore.

Gorinski and Fraser (2007) *From Targeting Problems to Tailoring Potential: The Wairoa West Cluster Schools Success Strategy*. Report to the Ministry of Education. Wellington.

Hattie, J. (2003). "New Zealand Education Snapshot: With Specific Reference to the Years 1–13 Years." Presentation to Knowledge Wave 2003. The Leadership Forum.

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