HELPING MAORI STUDENTS ACHIEVE EDUCATION SUCCESS AS MAORI

A Sabbatical Investigation – by Di Puati and Kath Bradley

INTRODUCTION

We are two primary school teachers who work in a Decile 8 school where we have enthusiastic teachers, a living and growing Kapahaka group, Year 8 Awards for students who excel in Te Reo and Kapahaka and a supportive parent community. Some of our Maori students thrive and make excellent progress. However, when we analyse our data, the results consistently identify that our Maori and Pasifika students are over represented in our under-achieving students. They are failing to succeed in the New Zealand Education system.

Our Professional Learning Activity, during our ten week sabbatical, was to investigate how to enhance the learning of Maori and Pasifika students through culturally responsive practise. We travelled to Rarotonga to observe Cook Island Maori students being taught within authentic learning contexts, and to gain an understanding of what they view as success and how they believe this is achieved, in order to give us a picture of how we can assist New Zealand Maori and Pasifika students to achieve success within our Education system and accelerate their learning.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The New Zealand Ministry of Education Documents ‘Ka Hikitia’ and ‘Tataiako’ challenge educators to ‘Step up how the Education System performs to ensure Maori students are enjoying and achieving education success as Maori’ (Kahikitia pg 4).

As educators we may well ask how to achieve this in our schools? What does this look like for our students? What aren’t we doing that we could be doing, to support our Maori students’ success and to nurture their potential?

To have an understanding of these questions we must first read and have a shared understanding of the two documents ‘Kahikitia’ and ‘Tataiako’. ‘Kahikitia – Accelerating Success 2013-2017’ is the Government’s strategy to rapidly change how education performs so that all Maori students gain the skills, qualifications and knowledge they need to succeed and to be proud in knowing who they are as Maori. The document discusses the strategies we can use to help our Maori students experience success as Maori, while Tataiako deals with cultural competencies for teachers of Maori learners, and gives us examples of expected behavioural indicators for teachers at all stages of their career.

As Education Professionals we have an obligation to meet the needs of a huge variety of students with many and varying needs. The New Zealand Education System has a reputation for doing an excellent job of this. However, research tells us that our Maori students are the ones left behind, the students who sit in the ‘achieving below or well below’ part of each cohort. ‘Too many Maori students are left behind and disengage from education before gaining the skills, knowledge and qualifications needed to reach their full potential. The negative impact of this on students, their whanau, wider communities and New Zealand is significant’ (Kahikitia pg 4).

The vision of Kahikitia is ‘Maori enjoying and achieving Education success as Maori’. There are five principles provided in Kahikitia to guide Educators:
1. **Treaty of Waitangi**

For Education Professionals, this principle talks about collaboration, creating ways for whanau, hapu, iwi, Maori organisations and communities to contribute to what and how Maori students learn, as well as working together to provide support for Maori students’ learning.

2. **Maori Potential Approach**

Students who are expected to achieve and who have high expectations of themselves are more likely to succeed. Kahikitia states that Education Sector Professionals can hold lower expectations for Maori students and this can be detrimental to their learning and achievement. The document goes on to state that everyone must share high expectations for Maori students to achieve, and that sometimes this means challenging long-standing beliefs and stereotypes. The Maori potential approach means more focus on:

- realising potential
- identifying opportunity
- investing in people and local solutions, communities or networks of provision
- tailoring education to the student
- indigeneity and distinctiveness
- collaborating and co-constructing

3. **Ako – a two way teaching and learning process**

Ako describes a teaching and learning relationship where the educator is also learning from the student in a two way process.

4. **Identity, language and Culture Count**

This principle acknowledges that students do better in education when what and how they learn reflects and positively reinforces where they come from, what they value and what they already know. Learning needs to connect with students’ existing knowledge.

5. **Productive Partnerships**

A productive partnership starts by understanding that Maori children and students are connected to whanau and should not be viewed or treated as separate, isolated or disconnected.

There are also two **critical factors**. Kahikitia states that improvements in these two areas will make the biggest difference to Maori Students’ achievement. These two critical factors are:

1. **Quality provision, leadership, teaching and learning, supported by effective governance.**

2. **Strong engagement and contribution from parents, families and whanau, hapu, iwi, Maori organisations, communities and businesses.**

There are also **five focus areas** with goals and actions to achieve these goals. The focus areas are:

1. Maori language in Education

2. Early learning
3. Primary and secondary education
4. Tertiary education
5. Organisational success

So firstly to answer the big question, what does Maori enjoying and achieving education success as Maori look like? Kahikitia gives us the answer in the breakdown of their vision:

‘This vision means ensuring that all Maori students, their parents and their whanau participate in and contribute to an engaging and enjoyable educational journey that recognises and celebrates their unique identity, language and culture. This journey will support Maori students to achieve the skills, knowledge and qualifications they need to achieve success in te ao Maori, New Zealand and in the wider world.’ (Kahikitia – pg12)

Kahikitia states that when we are successfully realising this vision, all Maori students will:

- Have their identity, language and culture valued and included in teaching and learning in ways that support them to engage and achieve success.
- Know their potential and feel supported to set goals and take action to enjoy success.
- Have experienced teaching and learning that is relevant, engaging, rewarding and positive.
- Have gained the skills, knowledge and qualifications they need to achieve success in Te Ao Maori, New Zealand and the wider world.

Maori Language in Education is the first identified, and a central focus area. The expected outcome for this major focus is that ‘All Maori students have access to high quality Maori Language in Education’. In our opinion, this presents a huge challenge to us as Educators, when New Zealanders are constantly surrounded by incorrect pronunciation of Te Reo Maori in all areas of the public media.

Why focus on Maori language in Education? Kahikitia states that Maori language is the foundation of Maori culture and identity. It goes on to say that learning in and through Maori language is an important way for Maori students to participate in Te Ao Maori, and it supports students to connect with their identity as Maori. This is a strong foundation for well-being and achievement, and is a key vehicle to revitalise and sustain the Maori language. (Kahikitia – pg27)

Kahikitia challenges educators by stating that ‘effective Maori language educators have a high level of Maori language proficiency and are experts in second language acquisition pedagogy. Education professionals teaching in and through Maori language must have high levels of language proficiency and the ability to teach across a range of subject areas’. (Kahikitia – pg28)

Kahikitia then goes on to challenge our whole learning community by stating that ‘activity with iwi and Maori must incorporate the fundamentals of language revitalisation. The strongest Maori language in education pathways are those embedded in homes and communities, on marae and, most importantly within whanau. Ambitions for the Maori language will only be achieved when education is coupled with active intergenerational language transmission, in homes and communities’. (Kahikitia – pg 29)
It is generally acknowledged that self-awareness of traditions is better developed and passed on through experience and knowledge of the language. (Tu Tangata-Cook Islands Culture). There is a traditional nakunga (wise phrase) that highlights the critical role of language: “Ko toku reo te i’o ‘o taku peu tupuna” - “My language is the essence of my culture.” In other words, without my language, my culture will be lost.

Language competence enables a person to fully appreciate the power of oral histories, names and places. It equips a person to respond to important questions that are basic to any claim to being Maori:

‘Where is your marae?’
‘Where is your mountain?’
‘Who are you?’

To meet the above focus area in all New Zealand schools is a huge challenge that, in our opinion, together as a learning community we can work towards achieving.

The other focus area that is of particular importance for Primary School Educators is focus area three, Primary and Secondary education. The major expected outcome of this focus area for Primary schools is that ‘All Maori students have strong literacy, numeracy and language skills’. Statistics show, and educators know that Maori students in English medium schools are more likely to have lower levels of achievement in literacy, numeracy and science than non-Maori students. If not addressed early, students are likely to fall behind and will be at risk of disengaging in the early years of their education.

Kahikitia states that Maori students in Primary and Secondary Education show improvements in their achievement when schools:

- integrate elements of students’ identity, language and culture into the curriculum teaching and learning.
- use their student achievement data to target resources for optimal effect.
- provide early, intensive support for those students who are at risk of falling behind.
- create productive partnerships with parents, hapu, iwi, communities and businesses that are focused on educational success
- retain high expectations of students to succeed in education as Maori.

Kahikitia tells us that improving the quality of teaching and leadership is a central action within this focus area. For this to be achieved schools need to improve professional learning and development for teachers, and make improvements to appraisal processes so that focus is placed on teachers supporting better outcomes for Maori students. The book ‘Tataiako: Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Maori Learners’ can help scaffold schools through this process.

Research tells us that students who expect and are expected to succeed are more likely to succeed. Teachers need to believe that students can improve through diligence, and must encourage all students to believe that they can achieve anything they set out to do. It goes without saying at this point to remind ourselves that teachers must then, hold high expectations for all Maori students.

Boards of Trustees who govern schools need to set goals around Maori students’ achievement through their School Charters. Boards are expected to set targets that deliver on the Government’s expectations for better outcomes for Maori students. Kahikitia tells us that promoting the value of BOT membership to
Maori parents, whanau, hapu, iwi and communities will be an important way to ensure governance decisions support strong outcomes for Maori students.

To measure and share success of the ‘Kahikitia – accelerating success’ concept, the Ministry of Education has put some challenging goals in place. The goal that pertains specifically to Primary Schools states:

-by the end of 2017, 85% of Maori students will be achieving at or above their appropriate National Standard in literacy and numeracy.

To succeed in achieving this goal, and indeed, to succeed in helping Maori students achieve as Maori, each stakeholder has their own important role to play. Kahikitia needs to be supported and delivered at all levels of the education system – at national, regional, local, provider, student and whanau levels.

‘Whaia te iti kahurangi; ki te tuohu koe, me he maunga teitei’. (Pursue the highest ideals; if you must submit, let it be to a lofty mountain)

**OUR OBSERVATIONS**

So we found ourselves in Rarotonga for three months, two teachers with a combined total of 40 years teaching practice, wanting to gain ideas that might help us to be better at our craft. After reading about Maori achieving success as Maori in New Zealand, and with our connections to Rarotonga through family, we wanted to observe what helped young Cook Island Maori students achieve in their own culture, and see if there were ideas and behaviours that were being practised in Rarotonga, that we, as New Zealand educators could learn from, and perhaps bring home to share with our school learning community.

Over three months we made many observations. **It needs to be noted that these observations are our opinion only,** based on what we saw and discussions with people on the island, some our family and friends, and some Education Professionals and parents/whanau of children currently at, or having been through school in Rarotonga.

Our first and most important observation was that in Rarotonga, the Cook Islands culture is alive and thriving. Cook Island people are proud of their culture. This is evident as soon as you get off the plane when you arrive, and is easily observed everywhere on the island. Here on Rarotonga, to be Rarotongan is celebrated, and something to be proud of. Children are surrounded by excellent role-models of their culture in their daily lives simply by living on the island. There are also many opportunities for young people to learn more and to participate in their culture and heritage through cultural performances. There are many cultural dance groups that practise and perform regularly for tourists at resorts. These groups also have the option to work towards performing at the ‘Te Maeva Nui’ Cultural Dance competitions that are held annually on the island. Dances that are performed are specific to each village and proudly tell the stories of that village’s history through dance. Dances are performed by adults and young people, and most groups have children’s groups for up and coming performers. This year, 2015, is particularly relevant as Rarotonga celebrates 50 years of self-government and independence from NZ rule, and there are many cultural celebrations planned for all of the Cook Islands. It is expected that all Cook Island people will be involved in the celebrations in some way. The mantra is “No one in the tribe to be left out...no one in the village to be forgotten.” Albert Royle Henry – First Prime Minister of the Cook Islands. (Quote taken from ‘Cook Islands Sun – Jan-June 2015)
Cook Islanders know and can often recite their whakapapa verbally. This is an important and acknowledged skill on the island. Knowledge of whakapapa is embedded in land ownership. It is worthy to note here, that all land in Rarotonga is owned outright by the Rarotongan people through ancestry. To be able to acquire land on Rarotonga, Cook Island people are often expected to be able to say who their ancestors are and to know their family tree back to the beginning.

In school there is an emphasis on speaking Cook Island Maori for the first three years of Primary School Education, and then instruction moves more towards English. Cook Islands Maori and English are both spoken on Rarotonga. Many Rarotongans would tell you that here on the island there are real concerns that English is being spoken too frequently, and there is a fear that the Cook Island language will eventually be lost, but it is fair to say that at this time you can regularly hear Cook Island’s Maori being spoken out in public. The evening local news programme is delivered in the Rarotongan language and there are also several local television programmes that are in Cook Island Maori. There is a local Rarotongan Radio station that only speaks in Maori, and also the local daily paper has some sections that are written in Rarotongan. At any important Rarotongan events, Cook Island Maori is always the main and first language spoken, and an English translation is sometimes, but not always, added at the end as a courtesy for visitors. Young people are constantly surrounded by good examples of pronunciation of their own language.

We observed parents spending a lot of time with their children. We often saw adults out with small groups of children at the shop, at the beach, walking along the road, driving together in the car or truck, or on a motorbike. The distance around the island is only 32 kilometres. Parents aren’t away from their children for twelve hour work days, as can sometimes be the case in New Zealand. We didn’t observe young people hanging out together in large groups after school. We did see parents and families together at the beach in the afternoons, enjoying the lagoon together. We did observe a lot of young people helping out with jobs at home such as mowing lawns, trimming hedges, moving and burning rubbish, helping to sell food and trinkets at the Saturday market or on the side of the road, and helping to build, fix and clean up around the local churches. It seems to us that everybody in the family has a responsibility to help out here on the island and that there really isn’t a lot of time for mucking around. Sometimes it’s hard to live in paradise.

There is plenty of work on Rarotonga. We asked if there was any unemployment benefit here and were told that there is none because no one is unemployed. If you don’t work it’s because you are lazy. In fact, here on Rarotonga there is too much work, and not enough people. The Cook Islands employs many people from other places such as Fiji and The Philipines because there are not enough Cook Islanders who live here available to do the work that needs to be done.

We spent some time at Te Uki Ou School. This school is a private school on the island. Parents pay $40 a week to send their children here. The school runs the New Zealand Curriculum, but also works towards teaching their students to become good Cook Island people. This is an important part of the school charter and vision. There is an expectation from the parents that their children will work hard and make good progress here. The school has an attached pre-school and children flow through from here to the main school. Even though Te Uki Ou is well resourced compared to the other schools on the island, in terms of resources in New Zealand, we would not consider them to be resource rich. Class sizes at Te Uki Ou are capped and the highest number any class can reach before being full is 27 students. Families wanting to enrol their children, are put on a waiting list until a place becomes available. We would like to continue our contact with Te Uki Ou when we return home to New Zealand, with a view to building a relationship
between our two schools, and possibly bringing some Raumati South School students to visit Rarotonga next year and hopefully to visit with Te Uki Ou and meet students there.

**SUMMARY OF OUR OBSERVATIONS IN RAROTONGA**

-The Cook Island culture is alive and thriving on the island. Children are constantly surrounded by and actively live within their culture.

-Culture is passed down and strongly demonstrated within and through the family unit. Knowledge of family history and whakapapa is linked to land ownership. People on Rarotonga know who they are and where they come from.

-The Rarotongan language can often be heard around the island. It is spoken on television, radio, and at all important occasions. Public schools spend the first three years of primary education speaking and learning in Cook Island Maori and then move the focus to English.

-the family unit is very strong. A lot of people live with extended family and family spend time together working and playing.

-there are many well-attended churches on the island and church plays a big part in many important functions and occasions on the island. Around 70% of Rarotongan people belong to the Cook Islands Christian Church (Presbyterian) and many other churches are also represented. (Cook Islands Sun: Jan-Jun 2015)

-In many ways Rarotonga has all the good family things that New Zealand had 30-40 years ago, but the difference is that Rarotongan people have held strong to their culture. They enjoy the good things about being part of a global society, whilst managing to hold on, be true to and proud of who they are as a race of Pacific People.

“Taka’i koe ki te papa ‘enua, ‘Akamou i te pito ‘enua. A’u i to’ou rangi.”
“You step on to solid land, Affix the umbilical cord. And carve out your world.”
Puati Mataipo

**NEXT STEPS - WHERE TO NOW?**

The main lesson and most important step for us as educators, from our three month stay in Rarotonga, is to go back to New Zealand and insist that teachers read, digest and discuss the implications of ‘Kahikitia’and ‘Tataiako’. These resources are challenging and empowering and they give us the mandate we need to make change. A working knowledge of these resources will help all educators to understand what is meant by the concept of Maori succeeding as Maori. Schools taking time to read and digest these texts as a whanau of professionals will also hopefully provoke discussion around the importance of teaching Tikanga and Te Reo Maori within each school.

Schools need to prioritise the teaching and learning of Tikanga and Te Reo Maori in their yearly budgets, both for students and including professional development for teaching staff. The reality is that mainstream New Zealand schools are full of teachers with a variety of knowledge and abilities when it comes to Maori. The teaching is not going to improve until all teachers are upskilled and feel more confident in their ability
to deliver a programme successfully. More money also needs to be targeted towards early intervention when students need extra support, especially with literacy and numeracy.

We need to think of innovative ways to get our Maori whanau, iwi, and hapu involved in schools on a day to day basis. We must keep trying, no matter how hard it gets. If something doesn’t work well, we don’t give up, we try a different way. The involvement of whanau is so important for Maori that we must never give up in our efforts to get more Maori in to school. A big part of this is ensuring, wherever possible, that there is Maori representation at every level, from a governance level, on Boards of Trustees, right down to parent helpers in the classrooms. Schools must work extra hard to make their Maori Community comfortable within the school setting.

We need to make a bigger effort to teach more about our own New Zealand history. It is important that students know where they come from, so that they can hold on to the pride of their ancestors as they move forward in education. It is also important that students understand the significance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi for all New Zealanders.

We need to have higher expectations of all our Maori students. The challenge should not be ‘can we get every Maori child at the expected standard?’ but rather ‘Let’s get all our Maori children ABOVE the standard!’ Whilst having these high expectations we must remember to teach in a positive and supportive way, using the goals and visions of Kahikutia, and our students will thrive.

All schools need to follow the vision and ideals of Kahikutia, using the competencies in Tataiako to make teachers accountable, and to support them in knowing the expectations upon them in regards to Tikanga and Te Reo throughout their teaching careers. In the Foreward of Tataiako the Hon Dr Peter Sharples makes the comment that for the longest time we have looked at Maori students as failing the education system, but he says now is the time to look at things from another angle. What does the education system need to change to help Maori succeed?

‘We are shifting the emphasis away from Maori students being responsible for under-achieving in our compulsory education programmes, to look at how education can be delivered in the context of the vibrant contemporary Maori values and norms, reflecting the cultural milieu in which Maori students live. To ensure New Zealand’s future economic prosperity and social harmony, we must make the education system work better for Maori.’ (Hon Dr Peter Sharples – Tataiako pg 3)

We believe that through Kahikutia and Tataiako the answers are there. The big question is, are the people willing to support the kaupapa?
REFERENCES

