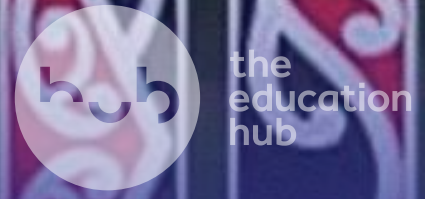


# Seven principles to effectively support Māori students as Māori



School resources

Māori underachievement is of critical concern for education. Māori students are more likely 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 often begin during primary schooling<sup>1</sup>. Research suggests it is the cultural gap between mainstream values, as represented by the education system, and Māori cultural values that is the primary factor related to Māori underachievement.

*Te Kōtahitanga*<sup>2</sup>, a research and professional development programme developed by Professor Russell Bishop and Professor Mere Berryman that focuses on improving cultural responsiveness to 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 the interactions and relationships within classrooms. Below are seven approaches that research has shown to make a difference for Māori students' learning, achievement, and wellbeing.

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

Māori students experience negative assumptions and interactions as an assault on their identity, which they perceive as making their participation in classes and school activities impossible<sup>3</sup>. Teachers need to strongly believe that Māori students are capable of greater achievement. *Te Kōtahitanga* shows that the greatest literacy and numeracy gains for Māori students occur when teachers take up positive, nondeficit discourses, and adopt positive beliefs about their ability to make a difference for Māori students through their teaching<sup>4</sup>. **Effective teachers of Māori students reject deficit theorising**, such as blaming Māori students' lack of motivation, character defects, or home situation for their underachievement<sup>5</sup>. 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<sup>6</sup>. 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.

Part of accepting professional responsibility for Māori students' achievement involves teachers **reflecting on their own cultural assumptions and beliefs**, and the ways in which they might be influencing Māori participation in education. Reading narratives of Māori students, as in the *Te Kōtahitanga* project, or perhaps seeking and examining the perspectives of Māori students, can help teachers to reflect upon their understanding of Māori students' experiences, their theorising of Māori students, and what impact these theories have on their interaction with Māori students.

## Care for the students as Māori students

Relationships are key to the effective engagement of Māori students in education. Relationships impact the ways that teachers treat and interact with students, and quality teacher-student relationships are strongly associated with academic achievement<sup>7</sup>. Māori students report that they often feel their teacher

does not 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<sup>8</sup>. Teachers, therefore, must lead the way in transforming relationships.

Māori students want their teachers to know them, their families, and their contexts 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. Teachers can demonstrate their interest in and commitment to valuing Māori by extending their knowledge of tikanga Māori and their knowledge and use of te reo Māori for greetings, instructions, and praise, and improving pronunciation. They can include Māori materials in curriculum content and displays, and use Māori contexts for exploring concepts (such as rangatiratanga as part of learning about leadership). Being responsive to Māori issues and world views also helps to demonstrate respect and care for Māori students.

Interviews show that Māori students want to succeed in school as Māori, which can involve 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. Caring for students as Māori involves **perceiving 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, and acknowledging their mana. 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.

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. 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. Learning to pronounce students' names accurately, treating students and their whānau with respect, and making an effort to understand the students' worlds, as Māori and as children/teenagers, are ways that teachers can demonstrate care for their students.

## Develop relationships with whānau and iwi

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 approve of, 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 – and develop actions and behaviours that support this belief. A sense of **whānau connection is built when teachers, students, and parents work together**<sup>9</sup>. The underlying aim, however, 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. The engagement of families with schools needs to be based in meaningful, respectful partnership 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. 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 for teachers to get to know their students' whānau. Māori whānau also want to know personal details, such as information about a teacher's family, and where they are from, rather than just knowing teachers as a professional<sup>10</sup>. This helps whānau to trust and build relationships with teachers. Teachers might also consider 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. Listen to what is being said and ensure the sharing is not one-way, but reciprocal, so that each group learns from the other, and supports the efforts of each other. Involve whānau in school decision-making processes.

A key aspect of building relationships with whānau involves sharing their thinking about students' potential and exploring the trajectories their children might take in learning. Help identify the role that each (the family and the school) has to play in helping the student to achieve, and 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**. 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 enable them to take more of a lead in the discussion. Research indicates that 20-25 minutes of discussion is appreciated by Māori whānau, as compared to a five minute slot. Whānau also appreciate efforts to hold meetings at marae where they are more at ease to direct the proceedings, and where teachers are more likely to listen and respond respectfully. Try to ensure whānau experience regular meetings with the same teachers for building a sense of connection.

Teachers might also consider how to 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. 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 current Māori whānau. Ensure, however, not to dominate the partnership by determining its purposes and activities, and the terms of whānau engagement with school. Students might also take school activities to the whānau and iwi, such as through student-whānau inquiry or recording interviews with whānau and iwi. 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. Providing physical and cultural spaces in schools for whānau allows 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.

## Transform power relations in the classroom

Being culturally responsive to Māori students involves developing educational relationships that are founded upon Māori understandings of rangatiratanga, or self-determination<sup>11</sup>. 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 their 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. This enables students to participate and engage in educational experiences on their own terms, and at the same time enables teachers to better understand the world of their students.

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, with actions and behaviours guided by the kaupapa or vision of the group. The focus is on **connectedness, relationships, and involvement with others** in order to promote self-determination for all. A power-sharing approach enables Māori students to bring themselves into learning interactions and participate on their own terms, as determined by them. It involves students in curriculum decision-making, sharing power over decisions about the curriculum content and the directions learning should take. Teachers and students collaborate to critically reflect on power relationships in the classroom.

## Develop discursive and co-constructive pedagogies

As Māori people perceive and interact with the world in different ways in order to create knowledge, culturally responsive approaches require learning relations and interactions which enable Māori ways of learning. The concepts of **wānanga, ako and whānau** are useful guides for considering new pedagogies<sup>12</sup>. 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 recognises students as participants who have meaningful and relevant experiences, valid questions, and legitimate concerns. It means that teachers and schools alone do not define what counts as acceptable or appropriate knowledge and ways of learning.

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 avoid singling out individuals, and focus on group products and group achievement.

Pedagogies built on these concepts are collaborative and reciprocal. Māori students **benefit from a cooperative learning environment**, and being able to discuss things with their peers and with the teacher in smaller groups facilitates Māori students' learning<sup>13</sup>. Students should be provided with opportunities for self-determination, agency, and voice by participating in a group process of making decisions about curriculum content and learning direction, rather than being given predetermined learning objectives<sup>14</sup>. 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<sup>15</sup>, and student attendance, engagement and achievement have been found to increase.

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 are 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. 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**. Teachers can enable this by reducing transmission approaches and instead using collaborative and co-operative approaches based on student-generated questions, sharing and activating prior learning and knowledge, informal or structured group activities, inquiry or project based work, and co-constructed assessment tasks and assessment criteria. These practices are effective not only for Māori students but for all students.

### Manage classrooms to promote learning

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. Positive behaviour can be supported by using non-confrontational [classroom management](#) strategies and emphasising respectful relationships. Maintaining an organised and tidy classroom which students can use independently also helps to support learning.

In interviews, Māori students stated that they had a strong desire for rules, boundaries, and organisation that they felt were fundamental for effective learning<sup>16</sup>, but find it more difficult to learn when teachers are task-oriented and do not clearly show that they care about student learning. Equally they find it difficult to learn if teachers show that they care about students but do not provide them with meaningful learning experiences<sup>17</sup>. Managing learning well means teachers need to know well, and be passionate about, their curriculum area, 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. It is also important to **use formative assessment to 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) so they understand what they need to know and learn, as well as feedback about learning and behaviour.

### Have high expectations of Māori students, and reflect on learning outcomes and goals with students and whānau<sup>18</sup>

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, there needs to be a common vision, shared by teachers, whānau, and students, 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. Understanding success in a holistic manner can also improve school's responsiveness to Māori whānau.

Māori students appreciate clear teaching and learning goals, which are 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 with a sense of professional responsibility** for and strong commitment to supporting and developing students' learning, for example, by teaching students learning or study skills, by critically reflecting on teaching regularly, and 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 being cared for and it strengthens the relationship between teachers and students. When teachers have low expectations of students, and seemingly 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 serve as a barrier to the student engaging in learning, lowering self-efficacy, goal commitment, and academic performance<sup>19</sup>. 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 when the student has suffered stress or setbacks. It is important to **approach students who are struggling with offers of support** rather than aiming merely to be available so that students having difficulty can come and ask for help, as this can create shame (whakamā) for the student. Māori students prefer one-on-one conversations with teachers and dislike being exposed in front of other students.

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<sup>20</sup>. They like having regular reviews of their work with the teacher, and with both their parents and teacher.

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. It is important to **help students understand their achievement and the goals for their learning** so that they can understand what learning looks like. Sharing evidence of progress and achievement data with students helps them to decide with them what the next steps are for learning.

---

## Endnotes

- 1 Bishop, R. (2009). Addressing diversity, race, ethnicity and culture in classrooms. In S. Steinberg (Ed.) *Diversity and Multiculturalism: A reader* (pp.111-121). Peter Lang.
- 2 Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Cavanagh, T., & Teddy, L. (2007). *Te Kōtahitanga Phase 3 Whānaungatanga: Establishing a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations in mainstream secondary school classrooms*. Ministry of Education.
- 3 Bishop, 2009.
- 4 Bishop, 2009.
- 5 Bishop, R. (2012). A culturally responsive pedagogy of relations. In C. McGee, & D. Fraser (Eds.) *The professional practice of teaching* (pp. 185-205). Cengage.
- 6 Bishop, 2012.

- 7 Bishop, 2012.
- 8 Bishop et al., 2007.
- 9 Bonne, L., & Hotere-Barnes, A. (2015). English-medium schools engaging whānau: Building relationships, creating spaces, SET 3, 26-34. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18296/set.0024>
- 10 Berryman, M., Ford, T., & Egan, M. (2015). Developing collaborative connections between schools and Māori communities. SET 3, 19-25. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18296/set.0023>
- 11 Bishop, 2012.
- 12 Bishop, R., & Berryman, M. (2009). The Te Kotahitanga effective teaching profile. SET 2, 27-33.
- 13 Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Cavanagh, T., & Teddy, L. (2014). A culturally responsive pedagogy of relations: Effective teaching for Māori students. In A. St. George, S. Brown, & J. O'Neill (Eds.). Facing the big questions in teaching: Purpose, power and learning (pp. 165-173). Cengage.
- 14 Bishop & Berryman, 2009.
- 15 Bishop & Berryman, 2009.
- 16 Bishop et al., 2014.
- 17 Bishop, R. (2011). How effective leaders reduce educational disparities. In J. Robertson, & H. S. Timperley (Eds.) Leadership and learning (pp.49-54). Sage.
- 18 Bishop, 2012.
- 19 Webber, M., McKinley, E., & Rubie-Davies, C. M. (2016). Making it personal: Academic counseling with Māori students and their families. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 47, 51–60
- 20 Bishop et al., 2014.

---

**PREPARED FOR THE EDUCATION HUB BY****Dr Vicki Hargraves**

Vicki is a teacher, mother, writer, and researcher. She recently completed her PhD using philosophy to explore creative approaches to understanding early childhood education. She is inspired by the wealth of educational research that is available and is passionate about making this available and useful for teachers.