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Discursive repositioning: The impact a group of Te Kotahitanga teachers within a mainstream secondary school had on one student

Edith Painting-Davis

Faculty of Education
University of Waikato

Introduction

This case study, from within a Te Kotahitanga mainstream secondary school, highlights the importance of a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations for teachers, Māori students, their whānau and the school. This case examines the intervention of a group of agentially positioned teachers who act as a collective. Amongst other things, it reveals the positive influence their agency had on a severely ‘at risk’ student and his whānau and also the challenges of implementing school-wide reform targeting Māori students. While it is understood that generalisations should not be made from such a small sample, possible implications for others working with Māori students in education are then considered.

Backgrounding Te Kotahitanga

The Te Kotahitanga professional development (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007) provides a means whereby teachers’ deficit theorising about Māori students could be challenged and supported to change. By implementing the Effective Teaching Profile (Bishop et al., 2007) teachers learn to “vehemently reject deficit theorising about Māori students” (p. 7). They also learn how to make a difference in the classroom that will soon begin to raise Māori students’ achievement. Te Kotahitanga facilitators are specifically trained to provide an intensive term-by-term in-school professional development cycle of hui, observations, feedback, co-construction meetings and shadow coaching. The implementation of this professional development challenges teachers to reject deficit theorising as a means of explaining Māori students’ educational achievement levels and also to come to understand how to change Māori students’ educational achievement and be committed to doing so. This new pedagogy is termed a ‘culturally responsive pedagogy of relations’. Teachers are also supported to move from very traditional, transmission-style teaching, to learning that is far more interactive and with the students’ culture central to their learning.



Evidence-based co-construction meetings then provide regular opportunities for teachers of a target group or class to reflect upon their practice and collaborate in the co-construction of an agreed goal. Shadow coaching, with the support of a Te Kotahitanga in-class facilitator, then enables teachers to try new strategies to reach the agreed goal. Through these processes, classroom observations begin to demonstrate greater teacher efficacy, improved student engagement, higher expectations of their students and the creation of more nurturing and supportive learning environments.

For teachers who are not agentic, who continue to deficit theorise about Māori students' learning and who don't know how to or want to effect change, the programme requires disrupting current beliefs and adopting new beliefs and practices. This repositioning, from a deficit to an agentic position, can be most demanding for both the teacher and the facilitator. It involves facilitators having 'challenging conversations' with teachers about their underlying beliefs about Māori students' academic ability, their pedagogical theories and their resistance to change. Trying to change teacher practice before encouraging the teacher to reposition to a more agentic position does not bring about or sustain change for Māori students.

Discursive repositioning is needed for teachers whose interactions with Māori students involve power imbalances rather than power sharing. Here students are likely to demonstrate low engagement, low participation, are easily distracted and are achieving poorly. Highly motivated students can be bored, non-compliant and non-participants in these settings, especially when teacher interactions are mostly to transmit information, focus on negative behaviour and give instructions from the front of the room, thus perpetuating the teacher as the font of all knowledge and students merely empty vessels to be filled.

Teachers who have agency believe that they can change the learning for Māori students by first changing the relationships and then the interactions they have with them, and the relationships and interactions students have with each other. Teaching strategies should allow students to use their own cultural learning or prior experiences as the basis for new learning. A teacher's caring for their students and having high expectations for the learning and behaviour of their students helps students to develop better self-management, communication and participation skills to succeed and reinforces key competencies as outlined in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007).

The research

This paper began as a special topic for a Masters level paper under-taken by the author, the lead facilitator at a Te Kotahitanga school. All ethical requirements were adhered to with the methodology following a kaupapa Māori framework that incorporated interviews as conversation and existing document analysis. Real names are used throughout at the request of those who participated.

A teacher and her positioning

Ruth Hills is a teacher who has been through the Te Kotahitanga professional development process. Ruth's classroom observations reflected a sound understanding of the importance of establishing a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations with Māori

students. She consistently demonstrated discursive teaching practices to engage her students and power sharing in classroom interactions.

Ruth has worked at the college for 16 years and has been a co-facilitator of Te Kotahitanga since its introduction into the school in 2003. She has long been concerned about the underachievement of Māori students. In 2003, prior to the hui whakarewa (Te Kotahitanga induction training), the first Te Kotahitanga intervention that challenged Ruth's positioning was the reading of Bishop and Berryman's (2006) narratives drawn from interviews with Year 9 and 10 Māori students about their experiences in mainstream secondary schools. The narratives demonstrate that teachers have the most influence on a student's perspective of school. Ruth was able to connect the experiences of the Māori students interviewed to her own, 30 years earlier.

The narratives resonated with me. I was a Māori student who experienced having to leave my culture at the door. A lot of my [Māori] friends left. They just couldn't cope with the negative messages they kept getting from everyone. My aim is to provide the type of learning experiences I would have loved to have been provided and when I look at these kids I see me and I see my friends ... I don't want them to leave [school early].

Ruth was openly responsive to the Te Kotahitanga collegial professional development support, she understood the importance of maintaining strong relationships and she soon began to trial numerous strategies to increase the opportunities to interact more discursively with her Māori students. Evidence of increased engagement, work completion, and higher cognitive levels were soon evident in her classes.

Making a difference for Māori students

This was the first year Te Kotahitanga was implemented in the school and these students' second year of college. The students were asked to comment about their learning in Ruth's class.

Yeah we use different techniques, like different formulas and stuff if you find a different one and it works for all questions then we're allowed to use it.

She teaches us to teach the other [students in the group]. She puts us in [expert] groups and then we learn this and that and we go back to our [social] group and teach them that. We work hard.

It's actually quite good, knowing that you can teach someone else.

It's just cool feeling the glory for once.

We work together.

Get more ideas from each other.

Oh of course like we're not ashamed to make mistakes.

The students easily identified the effect an agentially positioned teacher had on their learning in contrast to a non-agentic teacher from the previous year who described their Maths class as "highly disruptive". It might be fair to say that the relationship

between the students and their previous Maths teacher had broken down completely with very few students having been engaged and very few having achieved. They misbehaved, they bunked and generally conformed to the teacher's low expectations of them. Given that school management systems for junior student academic records did not exist within the school at this time there is no quantitative evidence to support this; however, they provided qualitative evidence through their recollections.

Last year we didn't achieve, well some did, but just not as much.

We were little eggs last year.

We didn't even do the work. Yeah so we were out the door most of the time.

We'd be told, "Get outside!"

Got struckⁱ out heaps.

In 2004 their learning experiences were very different. The whole staff had undertaken the professional development with Te Kotahitanga and these students were fortunate to have a teacher who was highly effective in creating a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations. The students' Maths results for 2004 demonstrated high levels of achievement and improved academic outcomes. But most impressive is the 'value added' between pre- and post-test results and the students' ability to speak 'knowingly' about the assessments.

[She] said we were top, like better than the brainy class.

More motivated, than the motivated class.

And we're achieving better than the mainstream.

We're above the New Zealand mean.

Because we're used to doing it by ourselves and not getting told what to do.

And she praises us more than what other teachers usually do.

Other indicators of improved outcomes for Māori students were attendance and retention data for the 2004 cohort of students. Almost 58% of Ruth's Year 10 Maths class completed Year 13, more than double the retention for Māori in the whole school (25%) and most of these students achieved NCEA Level 3.

We don't miss this class.

No, we don't want to.

I've only missed one.

We used to wag ... well last year I used to. I reckoned it was dumb.

... but now it's just, it's cool.

I want to learn it.

I didn't think I'd want to learn anything, but yeah, she's cool as.

And she tries to stop the people that are bunking classes.

Yeah, like heaps of people are missing days of school, and she wants them to come back in and keep on learning.

However, while it's positive that one teacher is doing their bit to raise Māori achievement it's still not enough.

It takes a village to raise a child

Tyson was a student at the college from 2005 until 2009. His story starts not unlike those of many other Māori boys throughout New Zealand who enter mainstream secondary schooling. In 2007 as a Year 11 student, Tyson was interviewed and spoke openly about his experiences in Year 9 where he described the difference Te Kotahitanga teachers had made on his education.

Tyson's parents are well known in the community. Both his mother and father come from very well-established local whānau. Tyson has two older siblings. His older brother dropped out at Year 11 at the same school three years earlier and his sister was a student in Year 11 when Tyson first started.

I started here as a Year 9 in 2005. I was a staunch person and thought that I was cool, didn't have to do any work, just came to eat my lunch, that's all school was to me.

Within the first two terms of secondary school his family started to notice a change in his behaviour. Whereas he had previously been a happy and successful student at primary school, Tyson had become belligerent, didn't want to talk to his parents about school and was quick to anger. His withdrawal from the family unit and his frequent arguments with his parents became the new norm.

Tyson vividly recalls the feelings he had about the interactions he was having with his teachers at this time.

I was in mainstream and I just felt unwanted by some of the teachers and they really made me feel worthless. Like I was a no one in class, it sort of pushed me to the boundaries that I've never ever sort of gone before. I came here with big expectations but then I sort of got caught up with the wrong crowd. I got really heavily into drugs and drinking alcohol and stuff like that and I was bringing that all into school and stuff which was making me do really bad.

Tyson had become a disenfranchised student. He resisted teachers' attempts to educate and control him in the classroom and put his effort instead into rebelling against the institution that he saw was causing him grief.

Tyson's mother recalls that things got progressively worse in Year 9 with letters being sent home or frequent phone calls about his misbehaviour, at first from classroom teachers and the Year 9 Dean, then from the Deputy Principal and eventually, as his transgressions worsened, from the Principal. Tyson was removed from class for a week to do community service at school under the watchful eye of his father, who ensured that Tyson's graffiti tags were removed from school property. There was also personal cost to his family for damages including broken windows and lights and purchasing of replacement textbooks in which he had 'tagged'.

Tyson's 'acting out' and antisocial behaviour is well documented in the student management system but as a majority of his teachers were not in Te Kotahitanga, this

behaviour was not seen through the Te Kotahitanga classroom observations. In the 2007 interview, Tyson clearly asserted that his misbehaviour was in retaliation to the way teachers made him feel.

I tagged a lot, wrecked things in the school, I fought, I got struck out often, got sent to the principal's office, got suspended a lot. My mum had to come and get me a few times, get me out of trouble and take me home and I wasn't allowed back at school. I didn't do my schoolwork, didn't care, was too staunch and I didn't care if I failed, just came to school to do whatever I wanted. I did a lot of bad things that I really regret doing.

While things were not good at school, they were also getting progressively worse at home. Tyson was leaving the house and disappearing for hours at a time. His parents didn't know where he was or what he was up to. They were caught between wanting to discipline Tyson's misbehaviour, and not wanting to alienate their son even more. They understood that what Tyson was doing was clearly unacceptable.

In the original Te Kotahitanga study by Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai and Richardson (2003), Māori students identified both negative and positive themes that influenced their learning in the classroom. Similarly, Tyson attributed his lack of engagement to teachers' low expectations of his learning ability and their treatment of him. However, he was able to recognise more responsive, relational and discursive practices when he had experienced them and he talked about the impact these had on his behaviour.

I only did work for my English teacher because she made me feel wanted and made me feel like I had something, that I was worth something, that made me want to work all the time for her but with my other teachers, they made me feel stupid, like I was dumb. That's why I was bad in their classes.

I first observed Tyson as a Te Kotahitanga facilitator in an English lesson in 2005. The teacher had chosen him as one of the target students to be observed. She was concerned that he was constantly in trouble with his other teachers. She found it difficult to accept that Tyson was such an 'at risk' student based on her own experiences of him in her lessons.

During the Te Kotahitanga observation Tyson's interactions with his English teacher were positive and respectful. He asked a lot of questions, sought assurance about his learning and thought aloud. He was definitely demanding of the teacher's time but he appeared to be genuinely interested in learning. His English teacher was astute enough to understand this and had established a caring relationship with him and his peers that included high expectations for their behaviour and their learning. Tyson was very responsive towards the many opportunities of 'ako' evident in the lesson. This was definitely contrary to the student described as "unruly" and "limited" by most of his other teachers.

It was Tyson's English teacher who first approached me about moving Tyson into a Te Kotahitanga class for Year 10. She explained that he thrived in situations where he could discuss his learning and would benefit from being with teachers who would allow these situations to occur on a regular basis. At the time Te Kotahitanga was already in a precarious position after one-third of the staff had withdrawn for 2005 (leaving only 15 out of 30 participants to continue); the principal refused our requests to train the

school's five new teachers and he was wanting 'out' of the contract with the Ministry of Education because of the 'can of worms' Te Kotahitanga was unearthing across the school. With all the problems Tyson was causing in the school in mind, I suggested that the new class might not be the panacea for his issues and that he might be an unsettling influence on the class. I admit to deficit theorising in this instance.

Fate fortunately had other plans. A week into Term One in 2006, Tyson was about to be excluded from the school. His mother had come in to collect him from the school for fighting. He had been warned that any more misdemeanours would mean disciplinary action from the Board of Trustees and he was given a three-day stand down. Tyson's mother was very upset so Ruth invited her into a meeting room and asked me to attend. Our relationship with Tyson's whānau was strong enough to ask if we could intervene on her behalf. We thought that Tyson might work better with the teachers engaged in the Te Kotahitanga professional development programme; we explained the programme in depth to Tyson's mother and she was willing to try any intervention to ensure he was not expelled or excluded. Tyson was moved into a Te Kotahitanga class.

I got moved into the Te Kotahitanga class because she [Ruth] explained the different ways the teachers were teaching in these classes. By then I had decided that I needed to do something because my mum had come to get me from school after another fight. When she cried in the principal's office it gave me a wakeup call. It made me realise how I was hurting my family and how we hardly ever talked anymore. I was losing their trust. That was a really important thing because my family means so much to me. I thought about how it would be if I changed my ways at home, my attitude towards other people and my education. I thought I would give Te Kotahitanga a go.

It wasn't all plain sailing. Initially Tyson arrived late to class, constantly distracted other students and was often off task. Because he had not yet formed relationships of trust and mutual respect with his new teachers he resisted their attempts to engage him in the learning. It is important at this point to understand that often a student needs time and space to discursively reposition just as a teacher does. To their credit, these Te Kotahitanga teachers persevered with Tyson and continued to manage their classrooms through the application of a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations rather than focusing on Tyson's behaviour.

Tyson had been in a Te Kotahitanga class for a month when his parents first noticed a change in his behaviour. He was coming home with homework and doing it. He started to talk to the family more about school and didn't disappear so often. Within six months Tyson's parents had resumed their previous normal relationship with their son. There were still letters and phone calls from the school but they were for 'good news' reasons. Tyson's mother recalls the apprehension she felt when she first received a letter of commendation.

I got the letter out of the mailbox and when I saw the school stamp all I could think was "what has he done now?" I never thought I'd be receiving a positive letter from the school.

Both parents spoke of how Tyson was sharing the experiences he was having with his teachers, using words such as feedback and prior knowledge and discussing how he

enjoyed being able to teach his mates so they understood their work better. Coincidentally, around the same time Tyson talked about how his home experiences had also begun to change for the better.

My parents trust me more, they trust me to go out and not get up to mischief how I used to in third form. I can talk to them now like I'm having a conversation with my mates. I tell my mum everything because I know that I can trust her and that she won't react in an out-of-it weird way. We have a good bond between the three of us. We never argue any more. We used to argue about schoolwork, coming home late, running off without them knowing. Now I tell them what I'm doing, where I'm gonna go, what time I'm gonna be back. That's why they trust me more. I'm acting more responsibly, responsible for myself and my actions.

Once Tyson realised that the teachers were sincere in their efforts to educate him, his behaviour did an about-turn. He started to be punctual, settled quickly, engaged in the learning, started achieving and became one of Te Kotahitanga's strongest advocates. Through Te Kotahitanga, the majority of classroom teachers Tyson was now interacting with recognised the importance of developing positive relationships with Māori students and the need to "positively and vehemently reject deficit theorising as a means of explaining Māori students' educational achievement levels." (Bishop et al., 2003, p. 199)

It took me a while to get used to it because I really wasn't used to teachers going that extra mile for me all the time. I was used to them just telling me what to do and if I didn't do it they'd give up. I didn't really notice the difference until I was in there for about a term and then I sort of woke up and thought about "yeah, these teachers are here to teach me" so I might as well give them a go.

Interestingly, Tyson's experiences with his Te Kotahitanga teachers enabled him to believe in himself enough to cope with non-agentic teachers. Tyson's choice to do something about his behaviour and education made it easier to help him. However, there had been a whole term when Tyson first moved into a Te Kotahitanga class where the outcome could have gone either way.

The teachers talked to me about what I was doing and it opened my eyes up and showed me what I could do, showed me that I did have brains and that I could do things that everyone else could do. I never thought that back in third form, I thought I was just dumb. The teachers talked to me about what I could do to improve so I took that on board and started doing it and it really changed. My learning levels went up, I achieved a lot of things I didn't think I could do.

The caring relationships, the constant scaffolding of his learning and the positive messages from teachers built his confidence to make better choices and become successful in education. He recalls one of his most memorable moments.

In a Year 10 [Maths] asTTle test at the start of the year I was 2A. At the end of the year I had come from 2A to 5P. That was really incredible, I freaked out because I didn't know I could do such a great thing.

When asked why he thought he had such a significant increase in his 2006 achievements, specifically his asTTle results, Tyson first said it was because he was dumb in third form and he got brainy in a Te Kotahitanga class. However, after further reflection he said he just couldn't be bothered showing his Year 9 Maths teacher how clever he was because the Maths teacher had already written him off as stupid by the things he said to him and the way he was treated. Again, the poignant point of this anecdote is to illustrate the power one teacher has to influence a student's potential, either positively or negatively.

In 2009 as a Year 13 student, Tyson reflected upon his time with this same teacher but now identified racism, rather than himself, as the problem.

Some teachers here are quite racist, like when I was Year 9 my Maths teacher was. That teacher is still here but he's not so racist now because he's woken up and realised I could do it; he just didn't put the time and effort into me.

Oliver Wendell Holmes' observation of the spiral shell of the nautilus as a symbol of intellectual and spiritual growth, featured in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), resonated with me in regard to Tyson's transformation. Holmes suggested that people outgrew their protective shells and discarded them as they became no longer necessary: "One's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions" (Ministry of Education, 2007, C2). As Tyson began to achieve he started to diversify his areas of achievement and discarded the antisocial behaviours that had been his protective shell in Year 9.

It [achieving] made me feel proud and made me want to achieve more and in other subjects. I got 8 credits in Maths and 9 credits in English in Year 10.

In Year 10 Tyson was taught by the same English teacher he identified as being agentic in Year 9. This one teacher had not been sufficient to make a marked difference in his learning and behaviour in Year 9; however, surrounding students with agentic teachers can make a huge difference.

Since being in the Te Kotahitanga class I haven't fought or barked, I haven't tagged; I haven't been sent home, suspended or gotten a strike out. I haven't been in any trouble since third form. It changed my life. It really did because if I hadn't been moved into a Te Kotahitanga class I probably wouldn't be in school right now.

I'm in the first XV rugby team, I'm a main character in the school production, I play touch, I'm in kapa haka, I'm really getting involved in the school. I never did any of those things in Year 9. Once I started to achieve in class I wanted to achieve out of class as well. And I started wanting to get involved with other people and really get to know them. I became confident to make new friends. I've been amazed at the things I have been able to achieve.

Tyson spoke of the high aspirations he had for himself in education, his willingness to participate and his desire to achieve.

I'm going to go to Year 13 and apply for Head Boy or be a prefect. I'd be very proud if I get that.

I just want to do something with myself.

In 2009 Tyson's parents and extended whānau attended a special assembly where Tyson was elected as Deputy Head Boy. His mother was extremely proud of her son and commented that when Tyson was playing up in Year 9 she would never have thought that he would get to Year 13, let alone be voted Deputy Head Boy, but he'd proven that with the right support he could do anything.

This cautionary tale is a small but powerful insight into the difference Te Kotahitanga made in one Māori student's life. One teacher argued that Tyson's improvement had more to do with the choice he made to stay away from drugs and alcohol rather than his experiences at school. I believe that it was the other way around; that his growing success in and out of class and the constant positive messages he was receiving from a range of people gave him the confidence to make that choice. Both Tyson and his parents believe that without the intervention of Te Kotahitanga he would have dropped out of school. Instead he completed Year 13, gained NCEA Level 3, represented the school as a prefect leader and was accepted into the regional rugby academy. This intervention not only reversed the direction he was heading in but also increased his life chances.

Although the goal was focused on Māori achievement, the change in teaching practice and the adoption of the Te Kotahitanga cycle of professional development exposed many areas of poor performance within the school and necessitated a shift in school assessment and recording processes/policies for all students, not just Māori.

What else was happening in the school?

To fully comprehend the resilience of Te Kotahitanga in effecting change within this school, other factors need to be acknowledged. In 2004 the pass rate for Māori students in NCEA Level 1 was 8%, Level 2 was 57.6% and Level 3 was 54.5%. Concerns were raised within the school's community about low achievement levels at the college, particularly for Māori students at NCEA Level 1, and low levels of retention beyond Year 11. Fortunately, by this time the school was already committed to becoming involved in Te Kotahitanga and had the processes, funding and management support to address this situation.

The school's 2006 ERO report stated that "although the 2005 NCEA results show improvement, student achievement in previous years, particularly at Level 1, has been consistently below that of similar schools. At the end of 2005 the Ministry of Education appointed a Limited Statutory Manager (LSM) to help the board address negative perceptions in some sectors of the community about the extent to which the school effectively promotes the achievement of Māori students".

By 2007, three years after the introduction of Te Kotahitanga, the NCEA pass rate for Māori students at Level 1 was 75.9%, Level 2 was 84.6% and Level 3 was 77.3%. While these have been the highest NCEA averages for Māori across Levels 1, 2 and 3 in this school, due to a number of factors, they have not been sustained.

In 2006, Te Kotahitanga was optional. Approximately two-thirds of the teachers received professional development aimed at strengthening learning partnerships. Those who chose not to be part of the programme expressed a range of reasons: that it was too "uncomfortable" for them; that they treated all students the same and it was "racist" to focus solely on Māori; and that the programme was too "evangelistic" and could not

guarantee that Māori students would improve. The senior managers established professional learning groups: one for Te Kotahitanga staff and one to cater for non-participants. However, these often turned into opportunities to complete administration tasks such as appraisal rather than challenging teachers' theorising, pedagogies or with a specific focus on increasing Māori student achievement. Departments were still failing to set specific and measurable targets specifically for Māori students and action plans were not clearly identifying effective teaching practices to bring about the desired improvements. This was mainly because many department/curriculum leaders were not in Te Kotahitanga when professional development in these areas was implemented.

Comments about student learning in the school's 2003 ERO report identified the lack of opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning through goal setting and self-assessment to further promote student achievement. Teachers were not keeping comprehensive records of individual student achievement for all areas taught. Neither was the data being analysed, critically reflected upon and being used formatively to inform practice.

Te Kotahitanga had the ability to rectify all these discrepancies within the school but it needed the commitment and leadership to drive and spread it from the top so that all members of the school would be part of the school-wide reform (Bishop, O'Sullivan, & Berryman, 2010). This also required discursive repositioning across the school. While there were pockets of agentic, culturally responsive teachers and leaders throughout the school, their impact was constantly thwarted by non-agentic middle and senior managers.

By 2009, six years after Te Kotahitanga was introduced, the ERO report was full of praise for the improved student outcomes.

- The achievement of students from this college has been above national averages for two of the past three years. (2006 & 2007)
- Monitoring and tracking of progress towards achievement targets has improved.
- Students acknowledge teachers' commitment to improving staff-student relationships and student achievement.
- Students have opportunities to become successful lifelong learners. They are encouraged to develop leadership skills and to contribute to the future direction of the school. The positive qualities of leadership, respect, and confidence are evident in the students' behaviour and their engagement in learning.
- Professional development. Under the acting principal's leadership, the Te Kotahitanga initiative has flourished.

A comparison between the 2003, the 2006 and the 2009 ERO reports shows a lot more transparency across departments and within the school.

It is not coincidental that the improved results also came with the appointment of a new school leader who promoted Te Kotahitanga as the school philosophy and increased the status of Te Kotahitanga as the **leading** professional development programme in the school. The goal of improving Māori achievement was integrated throughout the school charter and strategic plan. Work had begun on embedding elements of Te Kotahitanga into the teaching practices within the school. All teachers were expected to attend co-construction meetings and all new teachers were inducted into the programme. More effort was also made to invite the Māori community into the

school on a regular basis. Work was also undertaken in order to understand and embed some elements of the GPILSEO model (Bishop et al., 2010) towards sustaining the Te Kotahitanga school reform. For example, as above, raising Māori student achievement became the school GOAL, *some* teachers were challenged and supported to incorporate a cultural responsive PEDAGOGY of relations, new INSTITUTIONS and structures were developed, which included clustering Te Kotahitanga teachers around target classes, and EVIDENCE of the progress of Māori students (standardised assessment tools and procedures) was used throughout the school.

While these changes were also made in an effort to maintain the NCEA results in 2006 and 2007, unfortunately the inconsistency of practices within and across the school was not sufficient to sustain the previous high levels of achievement. In hindsight, the Te Kotahitanga facilitation team and teachers were being highly optimistic in thinking that they might be able to effect change from the bottom up alone. The school LEADERSHIP changed three times from 2003 to 2010, but none demonstrated leadership that was proactive, responsive, distributed and transformative. For Te Kotahitanga to be led successfully principals should be leading with their own agentic positioning.

Although the presence of parents, community members and external agencies in the school has improved, the SPREAD needs to include **all** teachers. For sustainability within the school to be ensured the school must take OWNERSHIP of Te Kotahitanga by funding it equitably and enabling all elements of GPILSEO to develop and become embedded.

With minimal release time and funding, the programme had to persevere on the goodwill of its facilitators. Ideally it should be funded by the Ministry of Education (MOE) as a Full Time Teacher Entitlement on a pro rata basis. But as usual, after an allotted time, the MOE continues to pull funding from initiatives, even from those that have been proven to work. In so doing they may well doom schools to fail yet again (Bishop, 2008). Timperley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung (2007) state in their comparison of students from Te Kotahitanga schools with those from non-Te Kotahitanga decile-weighted comparison schools that the magnitude of the gain for Māori in NCEA Level 1, 2005–2006 is quite remarkable. In our school Te Kotahitanga has also shown its potential in closing the gaps between Māori and non-Māori student achievement. Whereas there was a 37.5% percentage point difference between Māori and NZ European NCEA Level 1 achievement in 2004, this gap had closed to 7.5 percentage points by 2007.

Conclusion

In this school it is evident that the experiences on Māori students differed from class to class and that the culturally responsive and discursive practices of agentic teachers were being undone or undermined by non-agentic teachers. This needs to change if the prior knowledge, experiences and culture of Māori students are to become more prominent and valued in the school through the use of culturally responsive and relational pedagogies. Until these practices become the status quo the danger is that too many more Māori students will continue to leave school without any formal qualifications. This situation strongly aligns with Ladson-Billings' (2006) idea of educational debt that we too in New Zealand need to understand and work to reduce. Importantly, however, it highlights the success that can be derived from repositioning teacher and leadership

discourses to discourses and pedagogies that enable Māori students to become successful learners and achievers for life.

While sustaining the momentum of Te Kotahitanga has not always been easy in this school, what is noteworthy in this study is the determination and commitment of a group of Te Kotahitanga teachers who positively rejected deficit theorising as an excuse for low Māori student achievement; the impact it had on one student; and the ability he and his parents had to recognise and capitalise on the difference. Their agency has had a ‘ripple effect’ on school policies and procedures. In the 2003 ERO report there was no distinction between Māori and non-Māori student achievement, but by 2009 it was constantly stated within the report. The school charter, strategic plan, achievement plans and annual reports to the community promoted Te Kotahitanga as the key strategy for raising Māori achievement and reflected practices that arose from the discursive repositioning of staff. However, even though this was being portrayed to the community and the successes were being attributed to the whole staff, the reality is that these practices were still only evident in the classrooms of Te Kotahitanga teachers.

While Te Kotahitanga made a difference for the students in the target classes, and Tyson’s case may be perceived as an ‘extreme’ situation, this study also highlights the difference culturally responsive pedagogy could have made for many more Māori students in this school had it been enacted in all classrooms. It’s what we do as educators that makes the difference and as long as teachers like Ruth continue to believe they can make a difference, and they are both challenged and supported to do this, then they will.

Just as existing governments must work to repay the national debt accrued by previous governments at a systemic level, so too must current educators repay the debt accrued by their predecessors in schools and classrooms. Te Kotahitanga can help us to do this.

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ⁱ School discipline system: 3 strike outs = whānau must attend a meeting with student/Dean/teachers