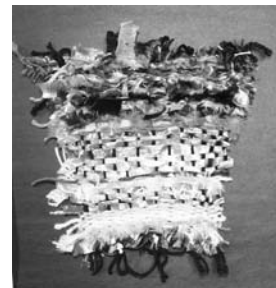


Despairing the Disparity: What Can We Do to Help?

Moni Donaldson
RTLБ, Te Whiri Kōkō



ABSTRACT

This article is a position paper, based on, and supported by, the extensive literature on the topic of Māori underachievement in education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It places emphasis on what underachieving Māori students need to reach their full potential and ways in which educationalists can assist. I am of mixed heritage raised amongst three world views - Dalmatian, Māori and Pākehā. I have been fortunate in being exposed to a wide spectrum of environments and cultures, and therefore see, and am seen, through these associated lenses. My involvement in Aotearoa New Zealand education, as both teacher and student, has also provided me with the insight to learn and teach using both Pākehā and Māori approaches. I do not claim that the position I take in this paper is the accepted view of all on Māori underachievement; rather, it is the result of my personal experiences which is also backed by evidence from research literature. The paper argues that effective relationships between home and school, teacher and student, together with a constructivist, cooperative, collaborative approach in the classroom can improve Māori students' achievements and enable them to reach their full potential. It calls for further research focused on Māori students' underachievement to ensure their aspirations are considered and acted upon.

Position paper

Keywords: *Achievement, collaboration, kaupapa Māori, relationships*

INTRODUCTION

One of the well-established features of Aotearoa/New Zealand's educational system is the enduring disparity in educational achievement between Māori and non-Māori (Bishop, 2003; Lee, 2005; Gilgen, 2010; Marie, Fergusson, 2008; McKinley, 2008), the issue being inherent since the inception of Aotearoa/New Zealand's first native schools in 1867 (Simon & Tuhiwai Smith, 2001). For over a decade the Education Review Office (ERO) has questioned the low achievement levels of Māori

students and outlined a number of initiatives for improvement (ERO, 2010). However, this appears to have made little or no impact and begs the question, why? Since it is essential that the issue of under-achievement is addressed we must continue to ask: what do underachieving Māori students need to reach their full potential, and what can educationalists do to assist? I will now focus on literature which has provided us with some answers to the above questions.

The Aotearoa/New Zealand Government uses PISA results to determine how its students fare in relation to other countries on completion of approximately 10 years of schooling. They believe disparities in achievement have been reduced as a result of Aotearoa/New Zealand students being armed with more skills. Precisely what skills, and which student clusters, are not stated and it is unlikely that it reflects the results of Māori students. However, *Ka Hikitia* – Managing for Success strategy (Ministry of Education, 2009), currently in its final year of roll-out, is designed to address the underachievement of Māori students. This initiative suggests a shift in the focus of our educational system from being one of 'failure', to 'maximising the potential' of Māori students. The strategy aims to assist Māori learners' achievement levels by pursuing evidenced-based, culturally-responsive and effective teaching methods.

IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE

Culture is an important aspect of a Māori student's learning; therefore teachers need to be aware of how their pedagogy meets the cultural needs of their Māori students (Gilgen, 2010). Lee (2005) contends that it is important to recognise that Māori are not a homogenous group, and other scholars note that while the underachievement issues may be common to many Māori students, they may not apply to all (Macfarlane & Moltzen, 2005). Culturally-appropriate assessment practices need to be incorporated as part of culturally-appropriate teaching pedagogies in order for achievement levels to be raised (McKinley, 2008).

Mahuika and Bishop (2011) believe that before the assessment procedures and educational achievement levels of Māori students can advance, a widespread notion that culture is irrelevant must be addressed. Whitinui (2004) proposes that to determine and achieve a balance between culture and education so as to realise Māori cultural learning aspirations, Māori students' experiences must be fully understood. Mahuika and Bishop (2011) suggest that the Ministry of Education needs to accommodate cultural differences from a Māori learner's perspective in relation to learning and assessments through its policies and procedures. Therefore, there is an imperative for a practical framework that addresses Māori educational underachievement.

Boyd (2008), Macfarlane, Glynn, Cavanagh and Bateman (2007), and Gilgen (2010) concur with Bevan-Brown (2009) that a safe culturally-responsive environment is vital and that all learners need the opportunity to work and learn cooperatively in programmes in which tikanga Māori is embedded. To make any impact on Māori achievement it is also essential that teachers develop trustful relationships with students and their whanau, and accept professional responsibility (Bevan-Brown, 2009; Macfarlane, 2007). Macfarlane et al., (2007) observe that sensitivity to students' cultural values and learning needs is critical in Aotearoa/New Zealand schools and classrooms, and caution that if mainstream curriculum delivery remains static, so too will the underachievement of Māori students. Macfarlane (2007) suggests that the dominant culture does not fully understand Māori customs, as they have not always been taught, learned or understood. While teaching elementary but essential characteristics of Māoritanga is no cure, these should assist in increasing whānaungatanga - an awareness of cultural sensitivity among professionals in developing effective relationships with students, parents, caregivers and whanau (Bishop, 2003; Gilgen, 2010; McKinley, 2008; Macfarlane, 2007).

Bevan-Brown (2006) and Macfarlane (2005) agree that collaboration is the key, particularly in meeting the criteria set by the Government for schools in reporting to parents, caregivers and whanau. This is further supported by the findings of the ERO (2010) report. Not only is it important for schools to be collaborative for the sake of mandatory reporting purposes, but making it their preferred way of working will better demonstrate to parents and whanau that they are appreciated, valued and respected as an integral part of their child's education. When such effective relationships are formed students benefit through significant gains in learning, morale, levels of achievement and self-esteem, and there will also

be a reduction in truancy (Ramsay, Hawk, Harold, Marriott & Poskitt, 1993 cited in Macfarlane, 2007, p. 147).

Bevan-Brown (2006) notes that the five 'self-hyphens' of self-esteem (Titus, 2001; Whitinui, 2004), self-identity (Titus, 2001), self-efficacy, self-concept and self-assessment, become positive when the teacher/student relationship is positive. She found that "positive teacher-student relationships, interactive teaching strategies that engage students in their own learning, teaching that builds on students' strengths and interests; high teacher expectations of Māori students; the inclusion of cultural input; and the involvement of parents, caregivers, whanau and peers" (p.22), to be the six elements essential to effective teaching practice. Increased student positivity and participation positively affects the teacher/learner relationship (Hawera, Taylor & Herewini, 2009).

ROLE OF TEACHERS AND PEDAGOGY

Effective teachers hold the key to educational achievement (Langley, 2008). While effective teachers enhance the educational performance and achievement of all their students, evidence suggests that the teacher's role is also fundamental to raise the level of Māori student aspirations (Hynds & McDonald, 2010; Bishop & Berryman, 2009). When teachers view their Māori students in deficit terms, it is mirrored by students in terms of having lower expectations of themselves (Bishop & Berryman, 2009). Until such beliefs change the educational potential and achievement of Māori students will continue to stagnate (Bishop, 2003; Mahuika & Bishop, 2011; Gilgen, 2010; Neville-Tisdall & Milne, 2003; Sexton, 2011). Bishop and Berryman (2009) observe that changes to the underachievement of Māori students can occur when their teachers accept responsibility for their learning in a culturally-responsive classroom environment in which students are "present, engaged, and achieve" (p. 28). Listening to students assists the teacher's pedagogical practice (Hawera et al., 2009; Langley, 2008), and while it is a teacher's responsibility to initiate positive change, the student's voice must be heard as it impacts powerfully on the cooperative classroom (Bishop, 2003; Macfarlane, 2007; Sexton, 2011). Macfarlane (2007) emphasises that it is vital for teachers to value the out-of-school experiences of Māori students, and that whanau were most comfortable engaging with teachers who interacted spontaneously, and demonstrated genuine interest in their child.

For reciprocal learning (ako) to occur, there must be mutual respect between teachers and students (Macfarlane, 2007). Macfarlane et al.,

(2007) propose a pedagogy in which learning is co-constructed and culturally-inclusive. In such an environment, both the student and teacher can work cooperatively in creating an equitable environment in which shared responsibility is the key to meaningful learning. This is because Māori students generally prefer, and are motivated by, a cooperative approach to learning that can lead to greater academic achievement. Motivation is the key to them achieving set goals and aspirations to excel (Macfarlane, 2007). Otrell-Cass, Cowie and Glynn (2010) propose that it is effective teachers that provide the environments that have a profound effect on Māori students' educational achievement which includes attaining positive relationships and affirming their student's cultural identity.

In addition, Mahuika and Bishop (2011) note that since Māori differ both culturally and in their mode of learning, assessments should be multi-faceted to ensure that Māori students are taught in appropriate ways. Students need to be an integral part of the assessment process. Titus (2001) observes that consistent monitoring of their 'doing it right' instils a sense of distrust in Māori students; they fear failure and perform poorly as a result. Also, in reality, the issue is not their inability to achieve, but rather, their misguided belief of their inability which must be addressed (Hawera et al., 2009). Mahuika (2008) believes assessment for Māori needs to be culturally-appropriate, responsive, and implemented in such a way as to meet the Māori learners' needs, whether academic, emotional, social, or cultural. And while holistic assessment procedures such as narrative, formative, non-competitive, interviews, oral, listening, self, peer are all focal, I believe overall teacher judgements and next step learning are foremost in building a pupil's confidence and desire to learn, particularly because feedback is immediate and specific. I also believe that holistic assessment is the key to ameliorating a Māori student's 'fear of failure' and allows for the individual to be seen as a whole. Macfarlane (2007) believes that the collaboration of students and teachers encourages the development of a greater insight into what must be learned. Any classroom reform must be maintained, and encompass the essence of Māori learning by using a constructivist, cooperative, collaborative approach (Bishop, 2008). Such a learning environment is devoid of pretence, each being accepted for who they are and are provided with options for their preferred ways of learning (Bishop, 2003; Hook, 2006; Macfarlane et al., 2007).

KAUPAPA MĀORI APPROACH

Historically, Māori students have been required to acquiesce to an inflexible, dominant cultural educational system that has held a wholly Pākehā perspective on teaching and learning that until recent times has failed to show as being conducive to the recognition and accommodation of the specific needs and preferred ways of Māori learning. Mahuika and Bishop (2011) believe for the education system to be deemed as optimum, its fundamental aim must be to ensure enhanced educational outcomes for all its students consistently, and accept that poor educational performance is not indicative of a lacking in Māori intellectual capacity, but rather a lacking in its ill perceived acceptance. Indeed, knowing what Māori value in education, and implementing educational initiatives that consider the cultural needs of Māori, is an important part of combating Māori underachievement (Whitinui, 2004).

Macfarlane et al., (2007), Whitinui (2004), Macfarlane, Glynn, Grace, Penetito, and Bateman (2008) and Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, Peter and Clapham (2012) suggest that teachers need to employ a co-constructing, cooperative, collaborative approach, to improve Māori achievement outcomes. Mahuika and Bishop (2011) agree and propose that cooperative learning and assessment, peer support, and family involvement also improve outcomes for Māori students. The Māori learner relates best to teachers who understand, are committed and passionate. Teachers who are sensitive to Māori preferred ways of learning have a pedagogy that is culturally-responsive and enables the experiences, knowledge, skills, and realities of the Māori student's world to develop (Bevan-Brown, 2006; Macfarlane, 2007). Teachers and students learning together provide opportunities to modify methods and direction in the classroom (Ferguson, 2008; Gilgen, 2010; Lee, 2005), such as in the reversal of student/teacher roles, in which one can learn from the other (Hawera et al., 2009; Hemara, 2000). Bateman and Berryman (2008), Bishop (2003), Hemara (2000), Lee (2005) and Sexton (2011) believe in the pedagogical framework of Kaupapa Māori, in enabling Māori to work for change and to better understand their world. Bishop and Glynn (1999) even state that the theory and practice of Kaupapa Māori could be effectively adopted to the advantage of all learners. However, what is important to remember is that the educational requirements of Māori can be more complex than Pākehā, as Māori may exist in dual worlds; te ao Māori and te ao Pākehā. In recognition of this, Macfarlane et al., (2007) propose that teachers and schools need to ensure programmes that acknowledge, reflect, and

respond to Māori-preferred ways of learning. They suggest being guided by the empirical evidence of the *Te Kotahitanga* project and the underpinning tenets of *Ka Hikitia* to promote effective practices in teaching students.

IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

In view of the continued disparity between Māori and non-Māori educational achievement levels over the last decade, there have been several remedial initiatives introduced by the government to promote the success of Māori in education that have either not been widely accepted and/or initiated (ERO, 2010). Tooley (2000) suggests that Aotearoa/New Zealand's education system should recognise and acknowledge the proven Māori initiatives implemented by Māori that successfully address and meet the needs and aspirations of Māori: "After a long history of New Zealand governments failing to seriously address Māori under-achievement and wider-societal issues, Māori independently established Te Kohunga Reo in 1982 and Kura Kaupapa Māori in 1985 (Tooley, 2000, p. 18)". In the recognition and accommodation of Māori students' educational needs and maximising their potential, effective relationships need to be developed between whanau, teacher and student as the first step in rectifying the damage done over many generations. As Professor Durie (2004) notes "Contrary to views that are still prevalent in New Zealand, being Māori is not incompatible with aspirations for high levels of achievement" (p. 7). There are many questions yet to be asked and answered, but for now, along with the beliefs of those educationalists cited through the literature above, it is my contention that the introduction of some form of Kaupapa Māori approach as being the educationalists' initial mechanism as a means to this end. One such research and professional development project, *Te Kotahitanga*, derived from Kaupapa Māori to combat Māori underachievement in mainstream Aotearoa/New Zealand high schools (Bishop, et al., 2009; Bishop, et al., 2012), focuses on the implementation of culturally-responsive pedagogical practices by teachers (Bishop, et al., 2012). It is designed to allow Māori to realise their aspirations, in an equitable and collaborative wholly supportive school environment (Bishop, et al., 2009). The successful outcomes of the *Te Kotahitanga* project clearly demonstrates that the approach raises teachers' awareness of their students' needs (Bishop, et al., 2009). This leads me to believe and support the introduction of *Te Kotahitanga* into more English-medium schools is potentially the answer to lifting the achievement of Māori students.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I still have some unanswered questions. I recap some solutions based on the above literature and suggest some ways forward to reverse the trend of Māori students' underachievement. Why have important Māori education initiatives such as *Taha Māori* and *Ka Hikitia* failed to have the intended impact? Is it due to the manner of introduction, a lack of resources and/or capability of teachers, or simply an entrenched acceptance of low Māori achievement that such initiatives are simply considered a waste? Or is the magnitude of the problem so great as to be overwhelming and therefore sidelined? What is it that we as educationalists and classroom practitioners need to do to reduce the educational disparity between Māori and non-Māori and to improve the achievement levels of Māori students in Aotearoa/New Zealand?

But these questions are not new. Solutions to these dilemmas have come thick and strong from our own scholars as the literature reviewed above shows. Whitinui (2004) sees the scrutiny of Māori student underachievement as an ongoing process, particularly in mainstream schools, and that a meaningful and purposeful Māori curriculum is the key to protecting their identity. Culturally-responsive teaching practice that is focused on students' cultural needs has been shown to raise the achievement level of Māori students. When teachers' practices are culturally-responsive and their pedagogical approaches are collaborative in nature, it not only enhances students' motivation and engagement, but also raises their achievement levels. On the contrary, research has also shown that deficit-minded teachers negatively impact on Māori students' achievement. All of the above solutions lead me to the conclusion that in practice firstly, the highly important interrelationships between home and school need to be maximised. Secondly, the classroom teacher needs to ensure their environment is non-prejudicial, welcoming, accepting and safe. Classrooms must be wholly conducive to the learning and teaching of all students by teachers adopting a constructivist, co-operative, collaborative approach to pedagogy. Thirdly, the tenet of *Ka Hikitia* of Māori learning as Māori must be embraced in classrooms. As Whitinui, (2004) states it is not about a teacher knowing all things Māori, but rather their ability to support the Māori learner. Lastly, it is necessary to heed the aspirations of Māori for Māori as being fundamental to increase the level of Māori students' learning and achievement.

REFERENCES

- Bateman, S., & Berryman, M. (2008). He Hui Whakatika: Culturally responsive, self-determining interventions for restoring harmony. *Kairaranga*, 9(1), 6-11.
- Bevan-Brown, J. (2006). Teaching Māori children with special education needs: Getting rid of the too hard basket. Keynote address delivered at the Learning for All: Enhancing Effective Practice in Special Education Symposium June. *Kairaranga*, 7, 14-23.
- Bevan-Brown, J. (2009). Identifying and providing for gifted and talented Māori students. *APEX*, 15(4), 6-20. Retrieved from <http://www.giftedchildren.org.nz/apex/>
- Bishop, R. (2003). Changing power relations in education: Kaupapa Māori messages for mainstream education in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Comparative Education*, 39(2), 221-238.
- Bishop, R. (2008). GPILSEO: A model for sustainable educational reform. *New Zealand Journal of Education Studies*, 43(2), 62.
- Bishop, R., & Berryman, M. (2009). Te Kotahitanga effective teaching profile. *set: Research Information for Teachers*, 2, 27-32.
- Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Cavanagh, T., & Teddy, L. (2009). Te Kotahitanga: Addressing educational disparities facing Māori students in New Zealand. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25, 734-742.
- Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Wearmouth, J., Peter, M., & Clapham, S. (2012). Professional development, changes in teacher practice and improvements in indigenous students' educational performance: A case study from New Zealand. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28, 694-705.
- Bishop, R., & Glynn, T. (1999). *Culture counts: Changing power relations in education*. Palmerston North, New Zealand: Dunmore Press.
- Boyd, S. (2008). Spotlight on the culture of the classroom: An interview with Mere Berryman. *set: Research Information for Teachers*, 2, 2-3.
- Durie, M. (2004). Māori achievement: Anticipating the learning environment. Address given as part of increasing success for Rangatahi in education: Insight, reflection and learning. Hui Taumata Mātauranga IV. Turangi/Taupo, New Zealand.
- Education Review Office/Te Tari Arotake Mātauranga. (2010). *Promoting success for Māori students: Schools' progress*. Wellington, New Zealand: Author.
- Ferguson, S. L. (2008). Key elements for a e-learning framework. *MAI Review*, 3, 1-7. Retrieved from <http://www.review.mai.ac.nz>
- Gilgen, R. M. (2010). Whakarongo mai: Transformative teaching to support Māori identity and success in a mainstream school. (Unpublished thesis). University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.
- Hawera, N., Taylor, M., & Herewini, L. (2009). Mathematics and Māori medium education. *set: Research Information for Teachers*, 2, 52-57.
- Hemara, W. (2000). *Māori pedagogies: A view from the literature*. Wellington, New Zealand: NZCER.
- Hook, G. R. (2006, September). *A future for Māori education*. Seminar given at The Treasury (Kaitohutohu Kaupapa Rawa), New Zealand.
- Hynds, A., & McDonald, L. (2010). Motivating teachers to improve learning for culturally diverse students in New Zealand: Promoting Māori and Pacific Islands student achievement. *Professional Development in Education*, 36, 525-540.
- Langley, D. (2008). *Students challenging behaviour and its impact on classroom culture*. (Unpublished thesis). University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.
- Lee, J. (2005, June). *Māori cultural recognition: Purakau as pedagogy*. Paper presented as part of a symposium 'Indigenous (Māori) pedagogies: Towards community and cultural regeneration' with Te Kawehau Hoskins and Wiremu Doherty. Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning International Conference, Stirling, Scotland.
- Macfarlane, A. (2005). The value of Māori ecologies in special education. In D. Fraser, R. Moltzen, & K. Ryba (Eds.), *Learners with special needs in Aotearoa New Zealand* (pp. 77-98). Palmerston North, New Zealand: Dunmore Press.
- Macfarlane, A. (2007). *Discipline, democracy, and diversity working with students with behaviour difficulties*. Wellington, New Zealand: NZCER.
- Macfarlane, A., Glynn, T., Cavanagh, T., & Bateman, S. (2007). Creating culturally-safe schools for Māori students. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 36, 65-76.
- Macfarlane, A., Glynn, T., Grace, W., Penetito, W., & Bateman, S. (2008). Indigenous epistemology in a national curriculum framework? *Ethnicities*, 8(1), 102-127.
- Macfarlane, A., & Moltzen, R. (2005). Whiti ki runga! Gifted and talented Māori learners. *Kairaranga*, 6(2), 7-8.
- Mahuika, R. (2008). Kaupapa Māori is critical and anti-colonial. *MAI Review*, 4, 1-16. Retrieved from <http://www.review.mai.ac.nz>
- Mahuika, R., & Bishop, R. (2011). Review Paper 6: *Issue of culture and assessment in New Zealand education pertaining to Māori students*. University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.

- Marie, D., Fergusson, D. M., & Boden, J. M. (2008). Educational achievement in Māori: The roles of cultural identity and social disadvantage. *Australian Journal of Education*, 52(2), 183-196.
- McKinley, E. (2008). *Māori parents and education: Ko nga matua Māori, me te matauranga*. Wellington, New Zealand: NZCER.
- Ministry of Education. (2009). *Ka Hikitia: Managing for success 2008-2012 – updated 2009*. Wellington, New Zealand: Author.
- Neville-Tisdall, M., & Milne, A. (2003, December). Like I wasn't there, I didn't exist': The invisible students in New Zealand today. NZARE/AARE Joint Conference, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Otrell-Cass, Cowie & Glynn. (2010). Connecting science teachers with their Māori students. *set: Research Information for Teachers*, 2, 35-41.
- Sexton, S. (2011). Transformative praxis in teacher practice: One taurira finds her place in education. *Compare*, 41(1), 59-74.
- Simon, J., & Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2001). *A civilising mission? Perceptions and representations of the New Zealand native school system*. University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand: University Press.
- Tooley, C. W. R. (2000). Māori education policy in the new millennium: Political rationality and government mechanisms. (Unpublished thesis). University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Titus, D. (2001, November). *High stakes down under for indigenous peoples: Learning from Māori education in New Zealand; An outsiders perspective*. Presented at the National Association for Multicultural Education Eleventh Annual International Conference, Las Vegas, NV.
- Whitinui, P. (2004). The indigenous factor: The role of kapa haka as a culturally responsive learning intervention. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 10, 86-96.

AUTHOR'S PROFILE

Moni Donaldson



Moni Donaldson is currently working as an RTLB in Te Whiri Kōkō (Cluster 26). I have previously performed the role of DP and taught in a range of primary schools Years 2-8. I have a MEd in special education and interests in Māori education and youth suicide.

EMAIL

m.donaldson@huiarange.school.nz