

Evaluation of Te Kotahitanga – Phase 3 by Professor Roger Openshaw

Key Findings

1. The claims for the project's success made by the Phase 3 report are not conclusively proven by the data

- The data does not take into account other initiatives that may be operating in individual schools alongside Te Kotahitanga, e.g. the Literacy or Numeracy Initiatives, the Student Engagement Initiative, Extending High Standards projects, ICT cluster participation, etc. Improved student outcomes may be attributable to these other projects rather than, or as well as, Te Kotahitanga (pp.13-14).
- There are no control groups with which to compare outcome data (pp.13-14), and the project's implementation can differ from school to school, e.g. by treating target students differently. One teacher said: *"There have been specific attempts (bribes) to TK students to improve figures such as attendance when other groups in the school have not received such incentives"* (p.40).
- The report does not present student data from all 12 schools in Phase 3 (p.14).
- Numeracy and literacy data is collected as evidence of improvements in Maori student achievement as a result of the programme. However, this data is relevant to only some of the subject areas taught by Te Kotahitanga participants, who teach across the full curriculum (pp.13-14).
- There is insufficient baseline data on teachers in the project to claim that participation in Te Kotahitanga had significantly changed their teaching (p.15).
- The use of effect sizes is statistically flawed (pp. 14-15).

2. Key assumptions underpinning Te Kotahitanga are questionable

- The report overstates the capacity of teachers to alone shape the achievement of students, and understates the impact of home, peer and individual effects (p.10). The ideology of 'cultural essentialism' understates the diversity of Maori students and consequently over-simplifies the task of remedying the under-achievement of some but not all Maori students. It fails to take account of the intersecting influences on achievement of socio-economic difference, family values differences, and other factors (pp.23-30).
- The report adopts a 'blame and redemption' model involving surveillance and control of teachers aimed at shaping their practice by changing their mental models (p.21). It labels teachers as engaging in 'deficit theorising' of Maori students, but the evidence for this collected for the Phase 1 report was flimsy and has not been collected again in relation to the teachers in this phase. Respondents to the survey rejected this labelling vigorously (p.37 and p.45). One respondent said that Te Kotahitanga had *"overtones of a religion the basic tenets of which are extremely disparaging of teachers. In my 30+ years of teaching the overwhelming majority of teachers have been keen to do their best for all students including Maori. Even most of those who, at a depressed moment, might espouse the wicked 'deficit theorising' statements will in fact show in their classrooms a determination to try to assist all students to succeed. Having created this problem TK seeks to provide*

answers. *Russell Bishop comes as the Messiah and tells us a range of answers, many of which are not new and are part of basic good teaching* (p.45).

- The report lacks a sense of the history of education, by making claims for having 'discovered' the importance of power-sharing, co-construction of curriculum, and positive relationships in the classroom (pp.8-10).

3. Data from the survey conducted as part of the review suggests that the professional development programme needs modification

- The research is undermined by elements of coercion in its implementation in some schools. Significant proportions of respondents had not felt free to decide whether or not to participate in Te Kotahitanga, and did not feel free to opt out if they were participants (pp.32-36).
- There was worrying evidence of a bullying culture around participation in the project in some schools, evidenced by comments such as "*continual pressure from principal to participate*" (p.33), "*Staff who did not opt in received written letters from principal expressing principal's concern*" (p.34), "*Staff members who have opted out of doing TK or who have withdrawn are 'unofficially' blacklisted...*" (p.35).
- Few respondents believed that the data collection processes were transparent and rigorous, and there was a common perception that the data collection was not neutral, evidenced by comments such as "*We will take any data that backs the project*", "*TK is swift to interpret any success as proof of its own interventionist value when that is not the case: e.g. there have been some very good and successful interventions carried out at this school that have been the work of people **not** in TK*" (p.40) and "*Any gains in our school are attributed to TK – no credit given to many other programmes going on in school*" (p.45).
- Only about half of respondents believed that their participation in the project had improved their professional relationships with Maori students or the achievement of their Maori or non-Maori students (p.43). Respondents' views were very mixed on this, with many believing that the programme simply confirmed existing practice, e.g. "*I always was working on lesson learning intentions, clear success criteria, good academic feedback and feedforward and utilising student prior knowledge. It's a little irritating TKP seems to have claimed these as its own inventions*" (p.44).
- The programme is insufficiently resourced to compensate teachers for the extra time involved, with few teachers receiving any tangible recognition of this (pp.44-45).

On the other hand:

4. Teachers are generally keen to participate in professional development projects that are focused on improving classroom practice

- Respondents highly rated the induction hui as a professional development opportunity (p.41).
- Respondents generally valued the co-construction meetings, but this depended on the composition of the groups and the quality of their facilitation (pp.41-42).
- Respondents generally rated highly the pedagogical model presented through the Effective Teaching Profile (pp.38-39).