

Project a “win-win” for teachers and students

Professor Russell Bishop is buzzing and he should be as he has been working towards and developing this project over the 15 years that he has been working in universities.



Professor Russell Bishop

In fact, he has probably been thinking about this project even longer, as his experiences of teaching secondary school in Porirua alarmed him regarding the unequal outcomes of education, despite the best intentions of himself and his colleagues. He is passionate about the current Te Kotahitanga project that he has developed with Mere Berryman of Poutama Pounamu Research Centre and his colleagues from Waikato University.

first phase of the project began in 2001 and involved interviewing Year 9 and 10 students, their teachers, principals and parents to find out what was behind low levels of Māori achievement. (40% of young Māori leave school without any formal qualifications.)

Students said that having teachers who believed in them and who created a non threatening classroom environment made them want to learn. These teachers boosted their academic performance. Research findings – that low teacher expectation and poor quality classroom relationships are the key factors contributing to Māori non achievement – support this.

“Teachers experience much greater job satisfaction through improving their relationship with their students.”

Professor Russell Bishop

Phase 3 of the Te Kotahitanga Project involving 400 teachers in 12 schools in the Bay of Plenty, Waikato, Auckland and Northland is now underway. The research team has worked extensively with each school’s ‘team’ who are responsible for working with the staff in their schools. The ‘team’ consists of: the Principal as ‘lead learner’ and leader of the professional learning, an existing staff member as in-school facilitator, one R.T.L.B and one School Support Service Facilitator/Advisor.

After initial intensive Professional Development Training, these teams return to their schools and take their respective staff members through the professional development process.

Professor Bishop says 6 key areas are focused on during the Professional Development process and that teachers are helping to create a classroom environment where there is:

- Mutual trust, respect and concern.
- High teacher expectations of students.
- Superior teacher organisation and management.
- Interactive teaching with use of feedback and feed forward techniques.
- A range of teaching strategies.
- Ongoing assessment and an awareness of the needs and capabilities of individual students.

He says the outcome has been “win-win” for both teachers and students. Those involved in Phase 1 of the project have reported improved levels of student “on task-ness”, behaviour and attendance.

“When the classroom environment changes, student engagement goes up, academic achievement goes up and absenteeism goes down,” Professor Bishop says.

Teachers, as role models for the next generation are in a unique position to make a positive impact on the lives of their students and the wider community. They are the key to improving the level of Māori achievement. Teachers who come “onboard with the project can expect ongoing support.”

Russell Bishop and the Te Kotahitanga team in collaboration with the Ministry of Education are committed to helping teachers make a difference.

“Most teachers enter the profession because they genuinely want to make a difference. The Te Kotahitanga Project gives teachers the opportunity to act as agents of change.”

For more information about the Te Kotahitanga Project visit www.minedu.govt.nz.