Reading summary

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.* Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

This is a report that examines the Te Kōtahitanga research project that was implemented in twelve schools in Aotearoa (New Zealand), to focus on classroom changes to improve Māori student achievement. For an overview of the project, there is an executive summary on pages 1-3. The conclusions outlined in Chapter 10 are summarised here.

1. The Effective Teaching Profile

The Te Kōtahitanga project aimed to improve Māori student achievement in mainstream secondary schools through a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy of Relations. This approach, based on an Effective Teaching Profile, rejects deficit theorising and emphasises teacher agency. Results show improved classroom experiences for Māori students and positive impacts on their academic achievement, engagement, and cultural identity.

2. Anti-deficit thinking

Anti-deficit thinking and teacher agency are crucial to the Te Kōtahitanga project. Multiple evaluation methods, including feedback session analysis and student interviews, provide a comprehensive view of teacher implementation. Discursive repositioning remains a priority for promoting lasting change in teacher perceptions and beliefs about Māori student achievement.

3. The importance of relationships

The Te Kōtahitanga project emphasises the importance of positive teacher-student relationships for Māori student achievement. Research shows that classroom interactions, rather than socio-economic factors, significantly impact educational disparities. The project focuses on changing educational experiences through professional development, aiming to create caring, culturally responsive learning environments where teachers demonstrate high expectations for Māori students.

4. Teacher-student interactions

Te Kōtahitanga promotes interactive classrooms where teachers shift from instruction-focused to more diverse interactions, including co-construction and feedback. Qualitative changes occur in classroom dynamics and the nature of teacher-student interactions. Teachers shift to more interactive, process-oriented instruction; Feedback becomes more academic than behavioural; And small-group interactions increase. Many teachers find Te Kōtahitanga validates their preferred teaching approaches.

5. The dominant pattern of teacher-student interactions

Classroom patterns, dominated by teacher-centred transmission of knowledge often leads to Māori student frustration, resistance, and behavioural issues. This supports deficit thinking, that attributes Māori students' struggles to poor attitudes rather than to inappropriate teaching methods.

6. Addressing Student Achievement

Ladson-Billings (2006) insists that rather than conceptualising an ‘achievement gap’ that we should be addressing, we should instead see this as an education debt. This suggests that the system owes an "education debt" to Māori students due to accumulated achievement gaps over generations, which has implications for how we address and assess student achievement.

7. Towards Sustainability and Scale

There are systemic and institutional developments that are necessary to support the changes taking place in classrooms, as the project grows and develops.

Discussion questions:

The report reframes the 'achievement gap' as an 'education debt.' How might this shift in language and thinking change how we approach educational inequities?

The report suggests that deficit thinking can be masked by well-intentioned explanations for student underachievement. How might we recognise and challenge deficit thinking in our own practice?