Effective Practice in Education
Professional development case studies in Auckland and Northland schools

Building sustainability in the final years of the Te Kōtahitanga project
Kokiri ngatahi, Moving forward quickly in partnership

A focus on evidence helps build sustainability for a secondary school in Northland as it looks ahead to life after the Te Kōtahitanga project

Bay of Islands College sits at the top of a hill as State Highway 1 slides north past the town of Kawakawa. Approaching the entrance to the school’s new administration block, the first thing a visitor sees is the school’s crest etched into the glass of the front door. Originally designed in the 1950s, the crest has retained its relevance throughout the years. The right-hand side of the crest depicts a jumping swordfish against a backdrop of Piercy Island in the Bay. On the left-hand side two chiefs are seated before the Busby Residence, one of them holding aloft a taiaha in salutation. Symbolising the union of the two races at the Waitangi Treaty site, this theme is reinforced by the kowhaiwhai pattern across the top of the image. Widely used on roof rafters inside wharenui, it was the custom to stain these rafters black (denoting male) and red (denoting female). These symbols reflect the school’s co-educational nature while the whole image, with its Māori and European motifs, expresses the bicultural ethnicity of the students and staff at the school.

The motto of Bay of Islands College is ‘kokiri ngatahi’ or ‘moving forward quickly, in partnership’ and that is what this case study is about.

Bay of Islands College is a decile 1 school with a roll of around 350 students, over 80% of whom are Māori. In 2004, it was selected for the Te Kōtahitanga project. Te Kōtahitanga is a research and professional development programme which supports teachers to build more effective teaching and learning relationships to improve the educational achievement of year 9 and 10 Māori students in English-medium secondary schools.

Te Kōtahitanga is now in its sixth year at the College and at the start of 2009 the school engaged with Team Solutions to ensure that the effective practice developed by the teachers involved in the project would become embedded across the school.

A principal’s vision

“Teachers involved in Te Kōtahitanga work collaboratively to use teaching strategies that suit the students,” says Bay of Islands College acting principal Auretta Perrin. Auretta’s early teaching was in primary schools and she originally came to Bay of Islands College as a homeroom teacher. “Coming from a primary background actually helped me because it’s so much about the development of students and their learning. It’s that knowledge of how students learn that is important in this role.”

To help the school in its journey from the funded support of Te Kōtahitanga to sustainable practice across the school, Auretta worked with Fiona McGrath, Team Solutions facilitator at The University of Auckland’s Faculty of Education.

Te Kōtahitanga Project

Te Kōtahitanga is a nationally and internationally esteemed professional development programme run under the auspices of the University of Waikato. The programme is based on research led by Professor Russell Bishop and is partly funded through the Ministry of Education. The key objective of Te Kōtahitanga is for schools to improve educational outcomes for Māori students, by:

• enabling teachers’ deficit beliefs to be challenged
• embedding new knowledge and practices
• building collegial professional learning communities

Source: www.minedu.govt.nz
**Working in partnership with the principal**

Auretta insists that “the student is central to everything we do. To get teachers to really take ownership of change it is important to identify what the purpose is and highlight the benefits to the students.”

A key part of Fiona McGrath’s role as a facilitator is to work with the school leadership team and the Te Kātahitanga team to help them analyse and reflect on student achievement data. Auretta knew it was not about finding someone outside to come in and solve issues around student engagement and achievement. “The expertise was in the school, it just needed to be facilitated and distributed.”

Auretta’s strategy was to plan for more distributed leadership in the school to build capacity so that the momentum of the Te Kātahitanga gains could be sustained and even accelerated. “But what was critical to all of this happening,” says Auretta, “was having real experts who knew how to crunch numbers, look at data and work effectively with our lead teachers.”

“At Bay of Islands College we surrounded ourselves with education professionals - both internally and externally,” says Auretta. “People from Team Solutions like Fiona McGrath, with her practice and research background and leadership and management facilitator Madeline Armstrong. “Also involved was Erica Wellington who works with the school’s Tai Tamariki programme, a Tai Tokerau iwi-based initiative to support Māori achievement.

“We call them our external critical friends and they helped us improve our subject targets, aligning them with the school’s strategic plan and The New Zealand Curriculum.”

“Auretta has been great with distributing leadership,” says Edith Painting-Davis, a science/maths teacher and lead facilitator of Te Kātahitanga in the school. Now, middle and senior management at the school have a range of roles and there is a more collaborative approach across departments.

**Looking behind the data**

Fiona appreciated the school’s approach. “Although Auretta had been at the College a while, she was a new acting principal and wanted to actively promote student learning. The school opened its data to me. I was able to go through all their data, to be critical and challenging.”

Fiona knew that it was not just about the data, it was also about teacher practice. One of her initial tasks was to see how the school’s espoused commitment to formative practice was actually implemented. This meant Fiona needed to check how formative practice (feedback/feedforward/co-construction) was embedded into the school’s systems. She found that formative practice was mentioned in the staff handbook but not in the school’s strategic plan. “Fiona supported the leadership team to manage the process of change it is important to identify what the purpose is and highlight the benefits to the students.”

The key goal has been to distribute the Te Kātahitanga practice across the school this year. As a facilitator, Fiona helped shift the focus from just the Te Kātahitanga team to a school-wide strategic focus for all departments.

**Building sustainability**

Bay of Islands College wanted all features of the Effective Teaching Profile, as well as the practices and pedagogy of Te Kātahitanga to become embedded across the school. “The work we are doing on Te Kātahitanga sustainability now links to the new school priorities and charter targets,” says Fiona.

Edith agrees. “We have now deliberately written the job descriptions of new teachers, deans and HODs to reflect the specific characteristics of the Effective Teaching Profile, some of which may have been further refined by our school’s engagement in the Project. Any new person knows what they have to do as a Bay of Islands College staff member. This means that no one can see focusing on student achievement or engagement as someone else’s job – it’s everyone’s role to embed Te Kātahitanga practices in our school. Teachers now know what is expected and what language should be used with students and they’re quick to pick each other up if they hear deficit language.”

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**Working in partnership with key teachers**

Ruth Hills, head of physical education and co-facilitator of Te Kātahitanga, has appreciated Fiona’s role. “Fiona provided us with evidence to challenge us to connect with our school strategic plan, with The New Zealand Curriculum and with our school goals. With the data, she could help us see where we were doing well and not so well.”

Fiona supported the leadership team to manage the process of change at the school. “The discussion and analysis around the evidence actually...”
helps the shift,” says Fiona, “as does the focus on the strategic plan.
You see conversations start to change from being about students not
bringing a pen to school to ‘how can I get my class to engage better at
the start of a lesson?’ Teachers ask questions of their practice and ask
others for help. At the final stage teachers look to support each other for
the benefit of students and take more control of their own professional
learning. We’re heading towards that stage.”

Class co-construction meetings
Bay of Islands College now has co-construction meetings each term,
facilitated by Edith Painting-Davis or one of the Te Kātahitanga team.
“We used to have these meetings only for the Te Kātahitanga classes,”
says Auretta, “but now we cluster all classes.”

At the meetings evidence about particular students is shared, along with
strategies aimed at raising achievement. All students’ progress is closely
analysed and the four highest and four lowest achieving students from
each class are identified. Teachers must have evidence for their selections
and be able to articulate how they might go about raising achievement
for these students.

“Teachers have to bring evidence and base their conversations on that
evidence,” says Edith. “This evidence can include student bookworks,
charts, student reflections on their learning and student achievement
data.” Teachers make extensive use of asTTle and the interventions are
discussed with the deans, heads of department and senior management.

There is a developing culture of evidence-informed discussion focused on
raising student achievement. Edith notes that the co-construction
meetings help teachers decide a focus. “Using the evidence, teachers
may decide to work on the self-management skills of the lower achieving
students. Another teacher may decide to focus on higher thinking skills.
Conversations are professional and evidence based.”

A focus on evidence
As part of the process, teachers needed to develop their skills in data
analysis. “Some teachers didn’t necessarily know how to analyse data
properly in the most effective way. Once we highlighted this issue, the
school leadership team was able to design systems and programmes to
remedy this.”

“When we have conversations now, they’re based on data,” notes Edith.
“Six years ago, asTTle was our only snapshot for student achievement at
years 9 and 10. Now we have many ways of collecting evidence. It’s
about identifying students at risk before they hit year 11.”

Teachers are required to share student achievement data weekly. “I now
get regular updates so I know where student achievement is at each
term,” says Auretta. “We also have regular student questionnaires. I try
and do a classroom walkthrough once a week and I also teach junior
classes. We have better information to target students who need special
support or can be extended.”

Auretta calls Fiona the school’s quality checker. “She’ll always say, what
about this student? It’s about promoting a culture of evidence. She
always says, where’s your evidence for that, when we look at the
behaviour or progress of students.”

Shifts in teacher practice
The power of the co-construction meetings is that teachers are now
reflecting more on their practice and are problem solving by asking
themselves what they could do better.

“Edith Painting-Davis has noticed that teachers more actively verbalise
their practice about formative assessment and the use of data. “As a
classroom teacher, it’s given me transparency. I can see across the school
how a student is doing department to department. It’s no longer a
secret.”

Shifts in student engagement
Edith has noticed that teachers are more willing to co-construct learning
with their students. Student voice is better understood by teachers and
Fiona’s work with the leadership team has stimulated significant change
across the school.

Auretta is proud of comments made by a student new to the school. “All
the teachers know my name,” the student wrote in her notebook. “Here
you get told about good things and teachers try and deal with the issues
themselves.”

Students who are more engaged start to care about their attendance
records. Attendance has improved this year and students are also more
engaged with the way achievement is reported. Some students co-
construct their reports with their teachers and parents. They are given a
sheet to take home with asTTle maths results so they can discuss their
achievement with their whānau, looking at progress and their learning
intentions. The learning intentions are co-constructed by the student and
teacher.

“Our kids love sharing what they are doing in the classroom,” says
Auretta. Student achievement data is shared at school assemblies. As
students achieve NCEA levels, this is celebrated. Auretta is proud that all
but 3 students at year 12 have gained NCEA level 1.

Marysa Rihan, Year 9, Bay of Islands College
Engaging with whānau

The school leadership team encourages parents to come and voice their concerns or praise. For the last two years, every parent has been rung with a personal invitation to report evenings. Teachers are encouraged to make regular contact with parents either at the school gate or via phone or text. As a result, there have been increased numbers of parents at parent evenings and prizegivings.

“It’s the parent, child and teacher who all have to make changes,” says Ruth Hills. “We wanted to include parents more because some of them had deficit ideas about the school and their own kids’ abilities. They didn’t always know their children could succeed.”

“It’s about demystifying secondary education for some of our whanau,” says Ruth. “Some of our kids go home and say ‘look at this mum – look at the progress I’ve made’. Students know about their goals and this keeps them enthusiastic. They take that enthusiasm home, plus the evidence of their achievement.”

Students are taught how to read their asTTle results and the four quadrants. The students all know their asTTle results so well that they take the results home and the parents usually complete a written response. Edith says it’s great to see parents writing comments such as “I knew you could do it.” Fiona calls this ‘ako’ in action. “The student becomes the teacher at home.”

The College sends letters of congratulations when milestones are reached for achievement or attendance. “Kids love them and it’s cool to achieve. Students are rewarded for 100% attendance with a multi-day which is important to them,” says Auretta.

Kokiri ngatahi

Through a new focus on middle leadership, the school aims to embed effective practice in the school. “Our focus is to upskill heads of department to support the classroom teacher,” says Auretta. “Their professional development will focus on managing teachers in their department and supporting classroom practice to enhance achievement, as well as developing their ability to utilise all the data they collect for the benefit of the students and their next learning steps.”

“I feel confident that students at Bay of Islands College are now more likely to feel that it’s cool to achieve, whereas before we often felt that they didn’t want to be different, to stand out. The way we have achieved this is to reward and encourage any achievements so that it becomes the norm among the teachers and students.”


Acknowledgements

Effective Practice in Education: Professional development case studies in Auckland and Northland schools is a series of case studies that has been developed to demonstrate effective ways that schools work in partnership with Team Solutions. Each case study looks at innovative professional learning partnerships that bring about sustainable change in teaching practice to improve student achievement and engagement. The Te Kōtahitanga project has been a significant part of New Zealand’s professional development landscape for a number of years. This profile focuses on the importance of sustaining the gains of Te Kōtahitanga in student achievement and engagement, especially for Māori students.

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Te kāhui akoranga ngaio

Camilla Hightield, Director

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Team Solutions contacts for Auckland and Northland schools

Team Solutions provides quality professional development to support teachers and leaders in Auckland and Northland schools. It is an integral part of the Faculty of Education at The University of Auckland. In most instances the service provided by Team Solutions is funded through the Ministry of Education.

To discuss how your school may benefit from working in partnership with a Team Solutions leadership and management facilitator, contact:

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