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Ako Panuku: An Evaluation of the Programme’s Effectiveness

Case studies

Below are examples of five schools/kura where Ako Panuku has had a direct impact on the schools’ policies and practices. In each of these schools/kura an enthusiastic and capable Māori teacher has participated in the programme, shared her experiences with her colleagues and encouraged their participation. Consequently, a sizeable group of Māori teachers have been empowered by a supportive school leadership team to contribute to positive change for Māori students at each of the schools.

The positioning of Māori in formal leadership roles was also a key factor contributing to positive change. In two of these schools the deputy principals were Māori and participants in Ako Panuku. They were well placed to influence school leadership decisions. In two other schools, Māori staff had designated responsibility for raising the quality of teaching and learning, particularly for Māori students. In all the mainstream schools Māori teachers were in middle management roles. This network of Māori leadership across the schools assisted with the embedding of effective practices that cater for the needs of Māori students.

While Ako Panuku is available to kura Māori as whole-school professional learning and development provided by Māori, for Māori teachers, this whole-school model is not available to mainstream schools. However, where numbers and participation levels of Māori staff in these mainstream schools were high, and they had the full support of school leaders, then they were able to be agents for whole-school change.

Massey High School

Massey High School is an urban, coeducational, decile 5, Years 9 to 13, secondary school with a roll of 2383. Twenty-one percent of the students and eight percent (12) of the teachers are Māori.

The school was an early participant in Te Kotahitanga and the principal describes this as “the pedagogical model for the school”. They were also initial participants in The University of Auckland programme, Star Path.

This research-based programme has supported and complemented the school’s own research-based approach to raising Māori student achievement.

Twelve Māori teachers are at the school, one of whom is a member of the school leadership team. They teach across a wide range of curriculum areas. All Māori staff were given the opportunity to participate in Ako Panuku. Participation started with one teacher who became a cluster coordinator and promoted Ako Panuku to other staff. The numbers expanded until most Māori staff were participating in what became a school-based cluster. It is significant that one of the Deputy Principals has also participated in Ako Panuku, providing Māori staff with a strong voice in the school leadership team.

A teacher-only day was held, with the full participation of school leaders, to discuss the establishment of a Faculty of Mātauranga Māori. The faculty incorporates Māori achievement, Te Reo Mahana (Māori medium programmes), Te Reo Māori (mainstream te reo programmes) and the Academy of Performing Arts. This day was followed by ongoing hui over subsequent months to further develop the model.

The faculty works with an advisory group of iwi representatives including kaumātua and kuia. The faculty provides leadership on kaupapa Māori for the school. Staff believe that this faculty structure has provided a sustainable model for ongoing support and development for Māori staff and students at the school. Teachers say that the drive and enthusiasm gained from participating in Ako Panuku has led to the establishment of the faculty, which in turn has promoted a higher profile in the school for things Māori.

Teachers continue to participate in Ako Panuku courses of their choice. Some participate in the external Ako Panuku cluster, in addition to their school-based cluster. The original cluster coordinator now acts as an advisor for the group.

Manurewa High School

Manurewa High School is an urban, coeducational, decile 2, Years 9 to 13, secondary school with a roll of 1943 students. Twenty-six percent of the students and 11 percent (14) of the teachers are Māori. One staff member participated in Ako Panuku. Her improved pedagogy has seen her promoted to the Specialist Classroom Teacher. This means she is able to influence other teachers’ practice. Her energy and enthusiasm, which she attributes to Ako Panuku, means she has been the driving force in initiatives to raise the profile of tikanga Māori at the school. Māori staff, under her leadership, have come together as a group known as Kahui Kaiako Māori. This group also incorporates a number of non-Māori staff, including some members of the school leadership team. They meet after school on Friday afternoons with an average attendance of about 30 percent of the school’s teachers. They support the whole-school focus on raising student engagement and Māori student achievement, through participation in the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) programme. A stated aim of the group is also to “normalise tikanga Māori in a school setting”.

Achievements to date include changing the school motto from Latin to te reo Māori, whole-staff participation in regular waiata practice, and annual professional development for all staff on a local marae. With the assistance of the music department, teachers have written a school song in te reo Māori, which is sung by all students. “Māori now have the cultural upper hand.”

The group contributes to whole-school professional development, providing staff with strategies that promote the engagement of Māori students. They identify a consequence of these initiatives as the high turnout (over 80 percent) of Māori whānau at recent parent interviews. Currently 50 of the school’s teachers are participating in an external wānanga for a ‘mauri ora’ te reo Māori certificate. “We are focusing on staff and changing their belief system.”

These initiatives have positively impacted on Māori students, in particular their confidence, visibility in the school, and achievement. NCEA results for Māori over a five-year period have improved between 19 and 40 percent across the three levels of NCEA. The successes of all Māori students were celebrated at a special evening with a very high turnout of whānau. Teachers say “Māori students now hold their heads high and are proud to be Māori. Whereas once they were invisible now they have a high profile in the school.” All students respect and support these Māori initiatives.

Te Kura Māori o Porirua

Te Kura Māori o Porirua is a designated special character kura that provides Māori immersion education for students in Years 1 to 13. It is decile 3 and located in the Ngāti Toa Rangatira region, Porirua. The majority of the kura roll of 214 identify as Māori, with Samoan and Cook Island students who are also members of the kura whānau.

Kaiako have participated in Ako Panuku courses for pūtaiao, pāngarau and rūmaki Māori. In addition, a team of six middle managers (pouako) have also worked with Ako Panuku facilitators in the leadership and management programme. This programme was specifically designed to meet the needs of this group of pouako. On attending their first course with Ako Panuku two kaiako exclaimed “these are the right people for us.” They refer to the connection that they felt with a group of highly professional Māori facilitators who delivered professional development that is consistent with kaupapa Māori theory and practice and therefore consistent with practice in kura. Ako Panuku facilitators have worked with kaiako to develop specific teaching strategies for pāngarau as well as supporting the kura to develop its own pūtaiao programme.

A strategic goal of the kura was to increase the leadership and management capacity of its middle managers and support succession planning. A new appraisal system was introduced where kaiako and pouako choose a colleague as a peer appraiser and critical friend. The pouako spent time together developing a sense of team as well as exploring their individual and collective strengths. An Ako Panuku facilitator was instrumental in supporting them to build strong trusting relationships that allow them to participate fully in the new appraisal process. They appreciate the space that was created so that they could celebrate their individual successes and talk openly about their next steps for development. They use a tool from Ako Panuku for gathering and analysing data about their own progress. They make greater use of self and team reflection in order to improve their practice and ultimately improve outcomes for students.

Rotorua Girls’ High School

Rotorua Girls’ High School is a provincial, decile 4, Years 9 to 13 school with a roll of 886. Sixty-three percent of the students are Māori. Thirty percent (20) of the teachers are also Māori. One is a member of the school leadership team, six are heads of faculties and one is the Specialist Classroom Teacher. They teach across a wide range of curriculum areas.

The school was an early participant in Te Kotahitanga. The Deputy Principal first attended Ako Panuku and then encouraged others to also participate. Teachers have attended a range of courses including the course for beginning teachers, Wānanga Reo, leadership, raising Māori student achievement and Pūtaiao. The principal identifies Ako Panuku as being ‘a strong thread’ in the significant improvement in Māori student achievement over the past six years. During that period:

* the number of Māori students leaving with NCEA Level 3 or better has risen from nine percent to 28 percent (from 8 to 30 students)
* those leaving with Level 2 or better has risen from 27 percent to 58 percent (from 24 to 63 students)
* those leaving with Level 1 or better has risen from 44 percent to 79 percent (from 39 to 85 students).

Eight years ago, Rotorua Girls’ High School had 32 percent of Māori students who left in the ‘no formal qualifications’ category. In 2011, this had dropped to one percent. It is of note that during this period Māori as a proportion of the student population has increased. Māori student achievement data is still below that of other students at the school. However, the 2011 NCEA Level 2 pass rate was 85 percent for both the whole school and for Māori students. Staff are continuing to work towards eliminating this gap.

Students spoken to by ERO all had high aspirations for their future. They said “Māori teachers see the potential in you that you don’t see yourself. They really push you.”

In 2009, the progress the school was making in raising student achievement was recognised by ERO and it was one of the first secondary schools in New Zealand to be placed on the four to five years return cycle.

Gisborne Intermediate

Gisborne Intermediate is a provincial, decile 4, Years 7 and 8, coeducational school with a roll of 502 students. Forty-nine percent of the students and 10 percent (3) of the teachers are Māori.

The three Māori teachers have all been participants in Ako Panuku. Two of the teachers have leadership responsibilities and are members of the school Ka Hikitia team that developed an action plan and is overseeing its implementation. Central to the plan is an evidence-based approach to identifying students who are not succeeding and supporting teachers to develop strategies to help them achieve success. There is a member of the Ka Hikitia team in each syndicate. They have facilitated professional development for staff on reducing deficit thinking and discussing agentic positioning.

This evidence-based approach to teaching and learning has resulted in Māori students making significant gains in achievement in literacy and numeracy. This is particularly apparent for girls.

Other initiatives promoted by this team relate to strengthening manaakitanga and whānaungatanga within the school, and developing staff understanding of te ao Māori. The teachers report that school leaders have been fully supportive. Other teachers are receptive. A positive shift in their perceptions about Māori students is evident, along with higher expectations and a move away from deficit thinking.