



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Faculty of Education

Te Kura Toi Tangata

Waikato Journal of Education

Te Hautaka Mātauranga o Waikato



Volume 18, Issue 2: 2013

WAIKATO JOURNAL OF EDUCATION TE HAUTAKA MĀTAURANGA O WAIKATO

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The Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research (WMIER), which is part of the Faculty of Education, The University of Waikato, publishes the journal.

There are two major submission deadline dates: December 1 (for publication the following year in May); June 1 (for publication in the same year in November). Please submit your article or abstract to wmier@waikato.ac.nz.

Submissions for special sections of the journal are usually by invitation. Offers for topics for these special sections, along with offers to edit special sections are also welcome.

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Subscriptions: Within NZ \$50; Overseas NZ \$60
Copyright: © Faculty of Education, The University of Waikato
Publisher: Faculty of Education, The University of Waikato
Cover design: Donn Ratana
Printed by: Waikato Print

ISSN 1173-6135

Waikato Journal Of Education

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Effective Pakeha teachers of Māori students

Unpublished Ph.D thesis, Faculty of Education, The University of Waikato

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To teach in primary schools in Aotearoa-New Zealand means to encounter students from diverse backgrounds. A significant proportion of those students are Māori and a significant proportion of Māori students are not achieving to their potential in school. There are several reasons for this under-achievement, which this thesis explores, and there is substantial research evidence as to what will turn this situation around, which is also explored. Some argue that the answer is for Māori learners to be taught by Māori teachers, and in Māori medium contexts. This approach has achieved considerable success for a small number of Māori learners; however, the demographic data tell us that for now, the significant majority of Māori learners are in English language medium classrooms, taught by non-Māori teachers. At present, there are not enough Māori teachers to teach all Māori learners.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education has goals for improving the achievement of Māori learners through providing “high-quality, culturally responsive education that incorporates the identity, language and culture of Māori students, and engages their parents, families and whānau” (Ministry of Education, 2008). The Ministry and the New Zealand Teachers Council expect all teachers to be ‘culturally competent’, that is, to teach in culturally responsive ways.

The Ministry of Education’s research and development project, Te Kōtahitanga, continues to provide evidence of ‘what works’ for Māori learners in New Zealand secondary schools. The effective teaching profile that was developed as part of this project informs this thesis.

The thesis describes qualitative, social justice-based case study research undertaken between late 2004 and 2006 with four effective Pākehā primary teachers of Māori children, and with children from those classes and their parents/whānau. The study sought to glean insights about what characterises effective Pākehā primary teachers of Māori students.

