

An Interview with Emeritus Professor Russell Bishop

With Cath Steeghs, RTLB/BOS Facilitator and
Lyn Rogers, BOS Project Director at Fairfield College, Hamilton



Source: Waikato Times

We were privileged to interview Emeritus Professor Russell Bishop as he embarks on his new adventures in education as an international consultant. We asked him to reflect on his ground-breaking Kaupapa Maori research over many years in the Te Kotahitanga Project in our secondary schools. The evidence, collected over multiple phases of this project, demonstrated that the successful enhancement of Maori student achievement could be found through utilising the Effective Teacher Profile (ETP), a whanaungatanga relationship-based tool.

What else is there to know about you? Are you a gardener, a cook, do you collect stamps or anything? What else has been another passion of yours?

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How did you become interested in Maori Student achievement?

A friend of mine, Bruce Wilson and I were asking ourselves this one day recently. He is another educational researcher. He is a private consultant in the United States. We decided it was really because of our first job, which was teaching in Porirua together from 1973 to 1975 at Mana College. We didn't believe any of that stuff that people kept telling us when we kept asking "How come these kids aren't doing well?" We kept on getting all of these stereotypes: parents don't care; kids don't care; the kids are on drugs, well it was alcohol in those days;

they don't come to school; they wag and all of that sort of stuff. We didn't believe it. See I knew the Maori families from Takapuwahia. They were from the Church of the Latter Day Saints, Mormons. You couldn't get more concerned parents. They spent their life with their kids, they played basketball with their kids, and were all tied into the Church, all that sort of stuff. We knew that the one thing that Maori (and Pakeha people) in those suburbs wanted for their children was a decent education. We felt that the stereotypes held by the teachers were holding everyone back. We put into place approaches to teaching which we would now call relationship-based learning and we worked on discursive practices and all of that sort of stuff. It was a very rewarding place to teach! I loved it, really loved it because the kids were just really keen to get in there and succeed and we got to know the people in the community. Bruce ran the basketball team, I had a football team. They were our eyes into the community and into the school. Bruce had a van and he would take his team to town every Friday night to play basketball and honestly, it was the 70's and with their long hair, man these guys looked rough. The boys loved him. They would go anywhere for him. I have still got friends from that school (kids). I went back there a while ago and I met a whole bunch of them who were working at the Polytech, and they are now in their 50's.

I didn't believe the stereotypes they told us, and that's where the problems that students, teachers and families were having at school were coming from. So my earliest concern about Maori student achievement came from my experience at that school; my very first experience of teaching and we didn't believe that those kids should be achieving at that rate in that way.

I taught for 14 years in Porirua. I started at Mana College, then worked at Aotea College across the harbour. I didn't believe that those kids should be failing there either but they did. At Aotea, there were a lot more Polynesian kids because there were a lot of kids from Porirua East as well. Although it was a new school with a lot of new staff, the achievement patterns were similar. However, we did have a Principal who was pretty keen on destroying myths and stereotypes about people. We had good leadership but still, when it came to prizegiving, all the kids coming up and getting the academic prizes were Pakeha. and the sports prize winners were Maori or Pasifika.

I left there and went and got a job at Teachers College in Wellington, soon to be followed by a move to Otago University. They were just opening up Maori education at the time. They asked "Would you like to do a PhD if we will give you time to do it?" I couldn't believe my

luck! I did my PhD in 3 years. Well I had been a high school teacher for 14 years and as a teacher you can juggle six things at once. So when they said to me that they will give me an office on my own, and a lighter teaching load, I said "Let me at it".

I was already doing a study on my mother's family but the methodology that I developed for my masters and PhD studies sought to actually identify how a researcher could engage in ways that Maori people understood, that were fundamental to Maori families, in other words, whakawhanaungatanga (relationship building). When I came up here to the Waikato it seemed that here was a great opportunity to apply what I had learnt from those earlier studies about the centrality of relationships, to classroom practices. I developed this understanding in a book that became the founding hypothesis for what developed into Te Kotahitanga. It was really exciting, the evolution and the implementation from phase to phase. We obviously analysed what was going on in each phase and had a look at what could have been done better. Phase 1 showed us that we could do it. Phase 2 showed us that we had to do it as a whole school. Phase 3 showed how we could do it in every classroom and in the whole school which we then applied in Phase 4. At that point, we had to write another book "Scaling Up" about how leaders could support the classroom changes that were taking place in their schools. With Phase 5 we were fortunate to be able to say "Right Principals, here's your job: use the GPILSEO model and create the wider context for reform in your school". "Teachers and mentors, use the GEPRIISP model and create the context by which learning takes place in the classrooms".

The other thing we sorted out was that the first three years in each school went well because they had external funding to support the mentoring/facilitation function. Implementation in Years 4-6 wasn't so good, as some schools could reprioritise funding to sustain the reform process, but some couldn't. So the big question was "How do we support schools to reprioritise funding so as to sustain the reform in their schools?"

After 10-12 years of Te Kotahitanga, we can now say we know what works. More importantly, all the meta-analyses and research by people like John Hattie, Adrienne Alton-Lee, Helen Timperley and Viviane Robinson confirm that it is fundamentally important to have what can be termed relationships-based teaching at the centre of educational reform. We have also shown that the Effective Teacher Profile (ETP) is an example of relationship-based teaching in practice and is also what whanaungatanga looks like in practice.

What are some of your reflections from the Te Kotahitanga Project?

People say to me that teachers are resistant to change and my reply is “I couldn’t agree with you less”. What they are resistant to is another ‘good idea’ coming along – the ‘next best thing’, ‘the bold new initiative’ – and I quite agree with that. I would be hiking out the door too if someone came along and said they had a new idea without evidence to back it up. Evidence-based practitioners don’t want to pick something up if there is no evidence that it will work for kids. We can now say that if you implement the Effective Teaching Profile and you do it with integrity, you will get these results (enhanced Maori student achievement). Given the amount of research that has occurred in the past decades, and the number of effective programmes that have been developed, I do not think that school leaders and teachers should accept any new programme that does not identify its research base, its evidence of effectiveness or does not predict the level of outcomes that can be expected.

What makes things worse is that the fundamental problem in New Zealand education, actually with education right around the world, is that we don’t have a common code of practice. We need a common understanding about what practitioners actually do.

So what you get is the majority of secondary school teachers still teaching the way you and I were taught when we went to secondary school. So then people get stuck into the teachers. We are expecting these folk to go out and reinvent their practice. We don’t expect doctors to reinvent their practice, or lawyers to reinvent their practice. We can’t go to a judge and say “Let’s have a crack at it from another way, shall we?” A judge would probably have a heart attack if we said “Let’s try guilty until proven innocent or something like that!” If we had a common code of practice, we would understand what we should be saying and doing, and how to make a difference.

These things take time and you’ve got to go through a scientific approach, policies and experiments to see how anything works and see how it will be developed and phased in. You can’t just get a group of people in a room and ask them to give you the answers and put it in a report and call it research. We experimented for over twelve years and managed to increase the effectiveness of the project with each phase until now in Phase Five, most schools are very effective.

What would your words of wisdom be to those at the chalkface still wanting to enhance their practice around Maori student achievement?

The Effective Teacher Profile is the key. This can be

broken into two parts for argument’s sake, so you can actually talk about it. But it is a holistic device and needs to be put back together again in practice. In our early work we interviewed 300 - 400 Maori kids and they told us that it was those teachers who were able to create caring and learning contexts together who made a difference for them. This understanding was also found in my original analysis of what constituted whanaungatanga in research and classrooms and then through practice in Te Kotahitanga, and was developed into the two dimensions of the Effective Teacher Profile: relationships (caring) and discursive practice (learning). The research demonstrated that those teachers who have low levels of caring and low levels of teaching, were not able to create effective learning contexts for Maori students, but for those teachers who had high caring and high teaching, their students will learn. We also showed that you could be kind, patient and empathetic, but without the discursive practices you would be less effective. Also, most importantly, we found that any teacher who had low caring (relationships) could not, and did not, actually use effective pedagogies. So statistically, we showed that when you have teachers forming a foundation of care, high expectations and high standards in the classroom, this allows them to teach in the ways that Hattie and all the others have shown to be effective. When you have got those two working together they feed off each other. In other words, the development of caring relationships enables teachers to teach effectively. So what the kids had said was true. So that’s what you tell young teachers: “Be assured that we know what we are doing because there is 15 years of work behind us and here are the results of that work. It is not just a good idea that I had on the way to class”.

From that starting point, Te Kotahitanga actually breaks down classroom walls, it breaks down the competition and it brings unity, if through no other vehicle than the co-construction meetings where people are coming in and saying “I’ve got the same kids as you, and here is my evidence of how well they have done”. People are starting to collaborate. The relationships between the professionals are absolutely crucial effecting change. The Effective Teacher Profile is what whanaungatanga looks like in practice to describe both the relationships between teachers and students and among teachers as well.

What advice can you offer principals and leadership teams who are continually being bombarded with the next best thing?

You stick to your knitting and you work out where you want to take your school using the GPILSEO model as a guide. You work out where the school needs to

go and anything that comes along needs to be able to advance things in the direction you want your school to go. Good leadership says “Right, the school is going in this direction: if it fits in with our plan, we are going to take what you have to offer and we will put it in here”. Make decisions based on the school plan, making everything fit into that. I would suggest that key to such a plan being effective is the type of pedagogy that is selected for the school to use as a common code of practice. The Effective Teacher Profile is a common code of practice for our schools, it has been proven to be effective and anything new should be selected on the merit of its support for this practice.

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Biography: Professor Russell Bishop PhD

Russell Bishop is a descendent of the Tainui and Ngati Pukeko tribes of New Zealand, and Scots and Irish peoples of Europe. He is the foundation Professor for Maori Education in the School of Education at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. Until recently, he was the project director for Te Kotahitanga, a large New Zealand Ministry of Education-funded research/professional development project that seeks to improve the educational achievement of Maori students in mainstream classrooms through the implementation of a culturally-responsive pedagogy of relations and culturally-responsive leadership. He is the author of eight books and 80 other quality-assured publications. He has delivered over 100 keynote or plenary addresses nationally and internationally, and has attracted approximately \$32.5 million in research and development contract funding in recent years.

INTERVIEWER PROFILES

Cath Steeghs



Cath Steeghs has worked in both primary and secondary education. She has been privileged to work as a HOF of English in Brunei and DP in two schools in London, UK. Returning to New Zealand she worked as one of the Associate Principals at Murray’s Bay Primary School. She is a founding member of Kairaranga. Cath is currently part of the Cluster 16 RTLb team in Hamilton and is working with Lyn Rogers in the Building on Success programme at Fairfield College, following on from their work together in Te Kotahitanga over the last five years.

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Lyn Rogers



Lyn Rogers is an experienced secondary school teacher of Science, Biology, and Education for Sustainability. She has previously worked as HOF Science and as an advisor at School Support Services, University of Waikato, and has experience in curriculum implementation at both school and national levels. Lyn is currently working with Cath Steeghs in the Building on Success programme at Fairfield College, following on from their work together in Te Kotahitanga over the last five years.

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