
High Level Executive Summary: ***Quality Teaching, Research and Development*** ***English Medium Settings¹***

BACKGROUND

The Quality Teaching Research and Development Project (QTR&D) was funded by the Ministry of Education. The exploratory project was developed collaboratively between the ministry, university academics, research facilitators, schools, teachers, students and their communities. The tenet was that teacher inquiry, supported by productive learning partnerships, is a critical contributing factor to improving the quality of teaching and learning outcomes for students.

This summary is compiled from the research coordinators' report about QTR&D in English medium settings (which will be referred to as English medium in this document).

The project referred to in this summary, aimed to improve the quality of classroom practices used by teachers in English medium schools so that students from all cultural groups could experience successful learning outcomes. A considerable amount of New Zealand research evidence shows that the education system does not enable Māori and Pasifika students to fulfil their potential as learners.

In the English medium project teachers worked collaboratively in seven hubs² to investigate classroom practice across literacy, numeracy, social studies and science and documented the changes in Māori and Pasifika student learning outcomes. With the reports from the other settings and the overarching evaluation the findings of this project will inform policy, and future research and development work with teachers in schools.

QTR&D PROJECT PRINCIPLES

The principles that underpin the design of QTR&D include:

- recognition that 'culture counts'
- use of ako (reciprocal teaching and learning)
- development of productive partnerships and joint construction of knowledge and learning processes by all participants
- use of multiple, structured opportunities to learn
- development of high quality evidence-based practices to enhance Māori and Pasifika student outcomes
- use of collective inquiry processes which engage teachers' personal theories
- development of culturally inclusive and responsive learning communities.

¹ In English medium settings, English is the language of instruction.

² Term used in this work to refer to clusters of teachers

Teachers engaged with Māori and Pasifika world views/perspectives so that they could better connect learning opportunities in classrooms to students' cultural contexts.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE ENGLISH MEDIUM HUBS

The overall objective was to build on existing knowledge to understand more about quality teaching for Maori and Pasifika students in predetermined contexts.

A key part of the English medium hubs was to provide postgraduate / undergraduate course work for teachers. The purpose was to help teachers:

- develop a theoretical framework that would support engaging and working with Māori and Pasifika students, their parents/caregivers, whānau and community members and more effectively investigate the quality of teaching and learning outcomes within the four designated learning areas
- conduct collaborative inquiry and explore the existing evidence base about quality teaching for Māori and Pasifika students within the designated contexts
- develop and improve the quality of their teaching and learning outcomes for Māori students and Pasifika students.

To achieve this in the English medium, the research coordinators and facilitators aimed to:

- **facilitate a collaborative inquiry process** that incorporated common socio-cultural understandings, shared goals, protocols and practices across all seven designated research hubs
- **engage teachers in collaborative** research and development activities so that they worked in caring, inclusive and cohesive learning communities
- **improve the quality of teachers' practice** and document changes in Māori and Pasifika students' learning outcomes
- **develop teachers' culturally responsive pedagogies** so that students' learning experiences were relevant to their cultural contexts
- **build teachers' motivation** so that they engaged with and sustained changes in classroom practices that improved the learning experiences of their students
- **use research evidence and other literature to help teachers connect** theory and practice as they developed their inquiry projects

OVERVIEW OF THE ENGLISH MEDIUM RESEARCH APPROACH AND PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The seven hubs were located in both the North and South Islands. Altogether 37 schools were involved across primary, intermediate, middle and secondary. Students from Year 1 to Year 10 took part and all decile levels were represented.

Research facilitators who were employed by the respective regional university were assigned to each hub to act as external learning partners, co-researchers and co-inquirers with their designated teachers. They also collaborated with a university colleague to deliver the academic courses which were mainly at post graduate level.

Initially 70 teachers were involved across the hubs and were enrolled in tertiary courses over two semesters in 2007. Across the seven hubs 11 teachers withdrew and/or did not pass their respective tertiary courses. Reasons for teacher withdrawal included: lack of preparedness for postgraduate study, competing work demands, personal circumstances, new teaching position and/or lack of support from school.

The teachers ranged in experience from beginning to senior leaders. All were registered teachers with a range of qualifications.

Research co-ordinators worked across all English medium hubs. In addition to the aims described above they worked as co-researchers with participants to identify, analyse and synthesise findings from hub collaborative inquiry projects. Research coordinators also initiated, developed and assisted in maintaining effective working relationships with the research facilitators and participating teachers, the Ministry of Education project manager, the project evaluator(s) and communities, groups, institutions and individuals involved in the project.

The project worked in close collaboration with two cultural advisors for advice and guidance on ways in which to respond sensitively to Māori and Pasifika methods of working, research protocols and interpretations of evidence. These advisors guided the research co-ordinators on how to respond sensitively to Māori and Pasifika ways of working, research protocols and interpretations of evidence, in liaison with their own cultural elders where appropriate. They offered advice and guidance during the initial planning meetings between the research co-ordinators and the Ministry and later through the implementation hui.

Data collection

The sources of data generated by the participants were:

- postgraduate / undergraduate course outlines
- teachers' final research report assignments
- research facilitators hub reports
- personal communication with research facilitators to check accuracy of research coordinators' reports
- documents associated with national hui
- teacher questionnaires
- teacher and research facilitator interviews.

A range of procedures was adopted to ensure validity of the qualitative research. For example triangulation of multiple data sources and data collection sources was undertaken.

Some descriptive quantitative data was included in the findings to supplement the qualitative data. The qualitative data were essentially simple descriptive statistics including frequency counts and percentage calculations.

FINDINGS

Clear, triangulated evidence supports the reported success in improving the quality of teaching practice and learning outcomes for Māori students and/or Pasifika students

across all seven hubs. Success was also reported in creating learning communities and linking classroom activities to Māori and/or Pasifika cultural contexts to facilitate learning. However there was considerable variation in how teachers interpreted such contexts and processes. The evidence also indicated that the shifts in practice reflected the different circumstances, starting points and understandings of teachers.

Shifts in teachers' practice

- Teachers strengthened their focus on improving Māori student and Pasifika student achievement by monitoring student engagement, responses and understandings, and examining data related to their students' achievement.
- Teachers developed skills to examine their own classroom practices. For most it was the first time they had been involved in collaborative inquiry processes. They reported increased use of observational tools to monitor their own practices and their students' progress.
- A number of changes were reported which were specific to the QTR&D project goals. For example, teachers practised forming research questions, planned interventions, became more aware of theory-practice links, and improved their knowledge and inclusion of Māori and/or Pasifika perspectives.
- There was an increased awareness, understanding and use of culturally responsive teaching approaches. For example teachers were able to link classroom activities to students' lives outside the classroom. In some cases they were able to enlist cultural experts to help improve their knowledge, and show themselves as learners, so demonstrating the use of ako.
- Teachers used new assessment tasks to capture shifts in students' learning. Many used both standardised and non-standardised assessment approaches. However there was variability in teachers' experience with and use of assessment and evaluation information in their project assignments. For example, few teachers included evidence from pre-and post data of students' achievement. They tended to provide general reflections on students progress rather than hard evidence of specific changes.
- Closer links were developed between the classroom and the home, and community lives of students. Students were encouraged to talk about school work at home and to engage their families, whānau and elders in what they were doing.

Teachers acquired a number of new practices, skills and knowledge which made their teaching more effective. For example: many reported taking more account of students' prior experiences; they became more conscious of the level of their students' engagement; they increased their skill at making teaching and learning activities relevant for culturally diverse students.

Shifts in learning outcomes for Māori students and Pasifika students

A range of improved student outcomes was reported in the teachers' research assignments and were substantiated through standardised tests, teacher assessments and changes in observed student behaviours. They included:

- Students gained an increased sense of agency and efficacy. Many students were more confident, motivated and engaged. There were reports of improved quantity and quality in student work..
- Students improved their knowledge of curriculum areas, and developed greater metacognitive skills and abilities. For example there was an increased use of curriculum specific vocabulary. Results indicated that students had a better sense of the purpose and meaning of their learning experiences at a deeper rather than surface level.
- The results indicated an improvement in social behaviour. Students increased their participation, collaboration and worked more cohesively in the classroom. They were also more tolerant of others, inclusive and more willing to talk to others.
- In the classroom students became more aware of and showed respect for people's views. They also indicated that they felt their values and views were more respected by their teachers.
- Students became more aware that their own identities were affected by their culture. They indicated that they felt safer about bringing knowledge and ideas from their own communities into the classroom.
- In general the students felt more pride in their work and achievements, and had an increased sense of belonging to the classroom and the school.

How changes in practice can be supported

The findings indicated that there were five significant ways in which the QTR&D project structure provided support for change to teaching practice.

1. Tertiary course and associated in-school support. Research facilitators and research coordinators encouraged change through:
 - providing readings and leading discussions
 - facilitating collaborative inquiry and mutual support
 - supporting teachers' study within the school and the community

There was a high level of teacher satisfaction with the courses. In particular they appreciated the way links were made between theory and practice, and the new tools and skills that they acquired in order to plan and implement changes.

2. Teacher motivation was an important factor in initiating and sustaining changes in practice.

3. Collaboration between each other and support from others were reported as significant enablers of change. Teachers appreciated feedback and suggestions of the academic and community experts who supported them in the classroom. Some teachers reported that they would have appreciated more feedback.
4. The project provided extrinsic motivation through contributions to their course fees and funded release time for the teachers enabling them to gain papers towards additional qualifications.
5. It is important to ensure that teachers receive support from school leadership and that their inquiry into teaching practice better understood across the whole school community.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

The English medium full report documents significant successes within the hubs around improving teacher practice and student learning outcomes. It also highlights some insights and lessons about future provision and conditions that could ensure maximum gains are made in teacher professional learning to further improve outcomes for Māori students and Pasifika students.

- Teachers reported on the challenges they met as they balanced theory and practice, and attempted to combine research and teaching in their classrooms. Those with no previous research experience had difficulty handling, accurately recording and interpreting the amount of data they gathered. They experienced complexities in researching their own practice and being critically reflective about it. Some had difficulty in keeping focused on their research question in the day-to-day busyness of their classrooms. The experiences teachers have gained from this project will assist them as they continue to develop their practice.
- The English medium full report expressed concerns over the effectiveness of some teachers' interventions and/or their new teaching practices. There were some examples of practices that may have reinforced stereotypes of groups of learners, rather than providing them with experiences to enhance their academic success. Teachers need support to help them to select and apply interventions which will improve student learning outcomes.
- By the time schools were approached to participate many had already decided on their 2007 PD programme. This meant there was a range of readiness among teachers in relation to engaging and undertaking academic study. For most it was their first experience of a research requirement and there was limited time to plan, enact and record shifts in their practice. In addition there were clashes and pressure points caused by university processes and expectations.

Teachers in the English medium hubs received valuable resources, time and support from QTR & D. The project not only resulted in successful learning outcomes for many students. It was also highly regarded by the majority of QTR & D participants.

