

# KANOHI KI TE KANOHI

## *Establishing partnerships between schools and Māori communities*

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The Treaty of Waitangi has enjoyed gradually increasing political status since the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975. However, the contestable nature of the Treaty of Waitangi texts, the lack of power that the Treaty exercises in school charter frameworks, and the lack of Treaty knowledge in school communities have all served to widen gaps and subvert partnership relationships between schools and their Māori communities. For instance, since the implementation of the Tomorrow's Schools educational reforms (Department of Education, 1988), partnership relationships between schools and their Māori communities have been left to develop in an ad hoc fashion. A lack of partnership guidelines has confirmed such developments (Johnston, 1998). Yet the notion of partnership has been used extensively to promote educational reform since this period. For instance, the rhetoric has consistently maintained that partnership is a key objective to addressing Māori interests in education (Ministry of Education, 2003).

In this article, the notion of partnership represented through a bicultural dichotomy of Māori and Pākehā perspectives of biculturalism (see Table 1) is explored at the local school level. While it is clear that the state has had a vision of partnership, this vision for Māori has been unrealisable, because guidelines have not been clear. For instance, where there is a necessity for Māori input (legitimated by the Treaty of Waitangi) into either providing partnership guidelines or developing these in conjunction with the state's agencies, the state has maintained ultimate power and control, and has consequently been able to define how partnerships are to be developed. Thus, Māori participation has been reduced to tokenistic representation that has met legislative requirements, but not the needs and interests of Māori whānau and communities. Research and analysis (see Ministry of Education, 2003; McKinley, 2002) confirms that schools have entered into partnership relationships (and

continue to do so) with their Māori communities. However, structural barriers and a lack of partnership guidelines have meant that in doing so, the relationships have occurred with little planning or consultation, and consequently have often been flawed.

Recent changes to the nature of our education system directly impact upon the type and frequency of contact that schools, teachers, boards of trustees and other personnel are to have with their Māori communities (see Ministry of Education, 1999). In the past, Māori communities have been disadvantaged by failing to establish and maintain relationships with their children's schools. Teachers, too, have been disadvantaged, in that they (and their schools) have not had any guidelines as to how they were to go about forging partnership relationships with their school's Māori community. Recent research carried out by McKinley (2002) has, however, gone some way towards addressing these issues. The crux of the matter centres on Māori educational achievement, where teachers are the ones who engage. Teachers are the education system's direct link to Māori whānau (via their Māori pupils), therefore filling an important link in the "better relationship for better learning" process.

Also included as part of this process of fostering links between Māori communities and schools today are Pouwhakataki and Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs). Pouwhakataki are part of the Ministry of Education's *Te Mana: Ki te Taumata – Get there with Learning* strategy, launched in 2001. A key responsibility of Pouwhakataki is to provide a "kanohi ki te kanohi" (face to face) approach between schools and their Māori communities (Ministry of Education, 2003). RTLBs work within schools around the country to provide advice and guidance to teachers of students who are at risk of low achievement, due to learning or behaviour difficulties. An important obligation of Māori RTLBs is to improve the wellbeing of Māori whānau in culturally

effective and appropriate ways (Ministry of Education, 2002). Māori perspectives would expect a "kanohi ki te kanohi" approach to be practised here too. This is discussed later in the article.

### Better relationships

Research into better relationships was conducted with Māori parents and teaching staff at two schools in 2001. Both schools had high Māori rolls, and a number of factors that could be seen as conducive to producing better relationships between schools and Māori communities. These are outlined below. The information comes from the Education Review Office (ERO) reports on each school. However, pseudonyms have been used for each school.

#### Mātai School

- A home liaison officer is employed by the board to monitor student attendance and provide a link between school and home.
- The appointment of the home liaison officer reflects the board's commitment to ensuring the safety of all students, providing an effective system for communication.
- Parents are well informed about the school and constantly invited to participate in the day-to-day programme and special events. Parent / teacher meetings are attended by most whānau. (According to the Education Review Office (ERO), the notion of being well informed implies that the school's board of trustees consults regularly with its school community, although how this actually occurs is not clearly stated by ERO.)

#### Kauri School

- A breakfast club operates to give whānau and students an opportunity to begin the day well fed and nourished, and food is provided for the many students attending the after school homework centre.

- Community members have taken advantage of computer introduction programmes. This strengthens the capacities and confidence of these adults, who are mostly school parents, in using computer technology.
- Reading recovery records demonstrate progress made. This is in part due to the pro-active approach of the reading recovery teacher, who has worked with parents to ensure continuity of student attendance. (While these initiatives are driven by the school, this is done from a Māori epistemological base; according to the research, they are developed and driven by Māori for Māori.)

Mātai School's high Māori roll meant that Māori consultation was seen as a normal and natural part of everyday interactions between staff and Māori whānau:

Well our roll is 98 percent Māori so it's virtually 100 percent therefore our parents are virtually 100 percent ... So whenever we hold a meeting it goes, the Māori are invited and when we send out newsletters they go to Māori; so it's not as if we've got a small group, they're all Māori just about ... so in terms of consultation with Māori it's not unusual to be consulting with the Māori community (research participant).

Both Mātai and Kauri Schools consulted with their Māori communities in similar ways. These included:

- Telephone conversations
- Newsletters and notices (pānui)
- Formal and informal hui (meetings)
- Parent/guardian – teacher interviews
- Home school liaison officer visits
- Sport activities
- Kapa haka festivals
- Fundraising activities
- Community forums with outside agencies (Graham, 2002).

While these interactions are enthralling for such Māori communities, some of these methods were more successful than others. For instance, Māori parents and whānau are not always totally autonomous in directing their own participation. However, if interaction is developed and controlled by "what counts as important for Māori", then the Māori community participants are more likely to take ownership and direct their own participation. If a school maintains the balance of power and fails to take cognisance of Māori community perspectives, the status quo is maintained and Māori participation is minimal. At both schools, "kanohi ki te kanohi" contact was by

far the greatest and most effective mechanism for communication with Māori whānau.

## Kanohi ki te kanohi

According to Māori traditions, a kanohi ki te kanohi or face to face approach derives from the expression "kanohi kitea", the "seen face" (Te Awēkotuku in Smith, 1999). Like all Māori traditions, the kanohi ki te kanohi approach has its foundations in Māori epistemology, where it still remains an important mechanism for developing trust and sharing information between groups today.

The "seen face" conveys the sense that being seen by the people – showing your face, turning up at important cultural events – cements your membership within a community in an ongoing way, and is part of how one's credibility is continually developed and maintained. (Bishop and Glynn, 1992 in Smith, 1999, p.16)

This research shows clearly that a kanohi ki te kanohi approach is essential for effective consultation between a school, its staff and their Māori community. Here "effective" means that strong and positive relationships are able to be forged and sustained, and the balance of power and control is fairly distributed among Māori communities and their schools. For example, an educational institution going out of its own comfort zone shows real commitment by engaging in structural considerations that directly affect Māori: "There's always a way of connecting to them and that's by visiting them in their homes, kanohi ki te kanohi!" (research participant). Structural change to school approaches to consultation reflects a greater bicultural approach, whereby a kanohi ki te kanohi process is an efficient procedure for systematic change and the abandonment of yesterday's (flawed) practices.

Mātai School and Kauri School are both low decile, so socio-economic barriers to forging partnership relationships between the schools and their Māori communities do exist. Such barriers include a genuine lack of physical and material resources, a lack of essential and skilled people within the school communities, a lack of parent confidence in education, and therefore parents' reluctance to participate at all in their children's education. Critical analysis of these barriers shows that the real obstruction to creating partnership relationships is the imbalance of power between Māori and Pākehā in Aotearoa New Zealand (Bishop 1996, Bishop and Glynn 1999).

It is argued here that a kanohi ki te kanohi approach begins to address this imbalance of

power. In terms of enhancing partnership relationships, research participants at Mātai School suggested a range of factors that the school could develop further. These included:

- The enhancement of kanohi ki te kanohi practices and guidelines
  - Upfront, open and transparent consultation with the school's Māori community
  - The maintenance of a two-way communication process where everyone has a fair say
  - Honesty throughout consultative processes.
- At Kauri School, factors that supported improved school-Māori community relationships were similar to those at Mātai School. They included:
- Nurturing kanohi ki te kanohi contact with the school's Māori community
  - Credibility, transparency, and delivering "positives" to the Māori community
  - Cleaning up the school's backyard to get whānau to "buy into" schooling
  - Giving whānau more choices, but remaining professional throughout
  - Cohesion, collectivity, and honesty, so that everyone moved forward together.

Kauri School focused on creating an environment that would attract Māori whānau, visitors and other community members, so that the whole community could have a greater say in the education of their children. The foundation and maintenance of this environment entailed the nurturing of a physical, cultural and spiritual place conducive to Māori needs, a place where Māori could comfortably visit and be themselves – be Māori. Such an environment complements the capacity for Māori whānau to be autonomous when making choices about their children's education. This autonomy includes having the confidence and power to validate Māori knowledge.

## Participatory action

While schools have struggled in the past to reach out to their Māori communities, greater Māori participation in school governance and school policy development has served to start to eliminate such struggles. Māori community involvement has occurred in varying degrees and capacities within the environments of Kauri School and Mātai School. This has been both effective, in terms of procuring positive outcomes for Māori children, whānau, and school staff, and also inadequate, where the level of participation has varied in terms of engagement and decision-making. For example, each school's Māori community has

been involved in varying degrees in school activities. However, these communities have not fully participated in decision-making roles on matters of school policy and the appropriation of school resources. There was a willingness to become involved in school activities such as kapa haka, fundraising, sport, and trips, but a reluctance to participate in decision-making processes at board of trustees level: "It's hard enough getting parents to come into school at all, let alone become involved in school governance and management" (research participant).

At Kauri and Mātai Schools, new initiatives will take time to develop, as will the confidence in whānau to become willingly more involved in their children's schooling. Māori community confidence needs to be nurtured in order for them to want to participate more actively across education. The kanohi ki te kanohi approach is outlined by the research as the strategy most likely to foster such confidence. More importantly, this involves the two-way sharing of information, where transparency is maintained. This approach not only reflects traditional Māori forms of communication that stem from oral traditions, but also revisits a "back to the basics" approach that stresses the importance of good, clear and authentic communication. This involves:

- Listening as much as talking
- Sharing information
- Dialogue
- Providing people with feedback
- Increasing understanding (Department of Education, 1989).

### Back to the basics

While the kanohi ki te kanohi approach may have become taken for granted and overlooked by mainstream processes that have marginalised Māori, this lack of power, assertiveness and confidence on behalf of Māori communities, combined with the "newsletter" or "telephone" communication approach of many mainstream schools, has seen school and Māori community partnerships almost cease to exist. As McKinley (2002) points out, "Contacting parents by letters, newsletters, and phone did not encourage greater involvement ... Many schools believed that personal contact was the way to contact Māori parents" (p.44). Reverting "back to the basics", to notions of "what counts as knowledge to Māori", has clearly been beneficial and effective for Kauri and Mātai Schools. Māori community participation in school affairs has increased, thanks to these two schools and their Māori communities engaging

in a legitimate (Māori) process of communication. "People seem to think that because they've got gang affiliations or because they're really transient it's a waste of time, but we know we can connect to our people and that is by visiting them in their homes kanohi ki te kanohi" (research participant).

While this process has been left up to the schools themselves to plan and develop, and there has been a lack of resources and guidelines to do so, teaching staff interviewed at Kauri and Mātai Schools have relished the positive outcomes of such initiatives, in that the schools' communities are starting to become involved:

I think it's really healthy for our parents to actually be involved in governance at this time. I did say to them not to be whakamā because we're gonna evolve today .... I'm really excited about them coming on board (research participant).

Māori whānau are now "coming on board" to be directly involved in decision-making and policy development, through structural mechanisms such as boards of trustees, through avenues such as school hui, or through Māori processes of sharing information kanohi ki te kanohi. Improved communication between the schools' principals, teachers and Māori communities has occurred by virtue of two groups – the school (teachers, principals, board members, RTLs and Pouwhakataki) and Māori whānau – sitting down and talking and listening to one another. This has come about without the use of any official guidelines on "what should be happening" in education (see Te Puni Kōkiri and Ministry of Education, 1998). On the contrary, the guidelines that are being employed are those which are rooted deep in Māori epistemology. While a kanohi ki te kanohi approach may seem informal from Western perspectives, its simple yet strong Māori focus reinforces a notion that recognises the validity of Māori knowledge and power. For example, one research participant said, "It was appropriate to consult with the local Iwi Authority first so that we had a mandate and the background to practise what we preached".

A school that is proactive with its community will enjoy the rewards of a healthy relationship; a school that languishes in developing partnership relationships with its community will maintain the status quo (unequal partnership and Māori educational underachievement). This notion is reflected in the adaptation of a Māori proverb to an educational context: "Kura tū, kura ora; kura noho, kura mate". A school (and its school community) that is proactive and productive will enjoy a

healthy status; a school (and its school community) that languishes in its partnership policies and the credibility of these will fail to capture the positive impacts of biculturalism, and consequently will not enjoy a healthy cultural status.

The dynamics of school communities (and Māori communities too) mean that schools such as Kauri and Mātai must continually refine effective methods of communicating with their Māori communities. They cannot rely on past initiatives, but must be proactive and adapt to changing climates. "Effective consultation can lead to positive and constructive action, but this should also be seen as dynamic and ongoing, where feedback and feed forward are crucial to the process" (research participant).

### Dynamics within Māori communities

Given the lack of guidelines, Māori community consultation throughout the last 15 years has taken place to the best of a school's ability, within the parameters that schools are obliged to follow as set by the Education Act 1989. The research evidence suggests that schools have tended to believe and act as if one consultation approach with Māori communities was applicable across time and space. That is, there has been a practised fallacy that Māori community consultation is the same for every Māori community. The *Better Relationships for Better Learning* guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2000), for instance, exemplify this, in that Māori are alluded to as a homogenous group. While Māori are recognised as an ethnic group comprising tribal based sub-groups (iwi and hapū), even within iwi and hapū (let alone across iwi and hapū) there are socio-economic differences, idiosyncrasies and distinctions that warrant the non-generic development of education policy for Māori. Therefore the dynamics of Māori communities and Māori educational issues require that educational initiatives and consultation methods reflect a school's total environment and time.<sup>1</sup> While identifying such concerns acknowledges Māori aspirations and state responsibilities, state responsibilities seem to be ostensibly addressed through recognition (and acknowledgment) in state reports and policies. This suggests that considerable improvement is required on the part of the state in recognising the intracultural diversity within Māoridom.

The diversity among Māori communities, and the barriers that schools and Māori communities encounter when attempting to forge partnership relationships, result in diversity that cannot be neglected. However, a kanohi ki te kanohi

approach recognises this diversity and the differing dynamics among Māori communities, because every community is seen as different, with different needs, different concerns and therefore different aspirations.

## Bicultural perspectives

The convergence of Māori and Pākehā conceptions of biculturalism (see Table 1) has seen the development of new state initiatives (such as *Better Relationships for Better Learning* and *Whakaaro Mātauranga*), hence the convergence, but not the complete (bicultural) unification. The Treaty of Waitangi, for instance, has been both minimalistic and ambiguous in guiding policy and partnership relationships. The Treaty has been relegated to a position of acknowledgment that is highly contestable and open to many interpretations. The main issue here is that acknowledgment and wider consultation occurs in a framework that is developed by the state, is controlled by the state, and values all Western knowledge and values as opposed to those of Māori; unequal power relations prevail, and partnership is misleading. While state educational initiatives since the turn of this century are beginning to become more intertwined with Māori perspectives such as the *kanohi ki te kanohi* approach at the local level of policy development and implementation, two distinct "streams" are still seen to exist:

1. A Māori conception of biculturalism and partnership
2. A Pākehā conception of biculturalism and partnership.

Given that there exist different views and interpretations of biculturalism, it is not surprising to find that government (through

policy) has interpreted Māori expectations according to its own perceptions of what biculturalism (and henceforth partnership) means. It is this parallel chain of understandings that has led to the development of separate Māori and Pākehā notions of biculturalism, and ultimately to opposing perceptions of partnership between the two Treaty partners – Māori and the Crown. Table 1 highlights these opposing perceptions by illustrating the epistemological differences in Māori and Western thinking.

## Summarising better relationships

In the recent past, schools, boards of trustees and Māori communities such as those at Mātai and Kauri Schools have been left by the state to forge their own partnership relationships, without support and guidance in critical areas. Because Mātai and Kauri Schools have revisited traditional Māori perspectives, *kanohi ki te kanohi* contact has been the sensible approach practised and taken on board. They have felt greater compulsion in the company of their Māori communities to facilitate the positive nature of their partnership relationships. But Māori communities must be empowered at the same time to be autonomous in their decision-making. There are a number of ways in which schools can increase and sustain the autonomy and the participation rate of Māori whānau across education. However, whānau must be genuinely involved; equal power between Māori and Pākehā is essential at all levels of decision-making. For instance:

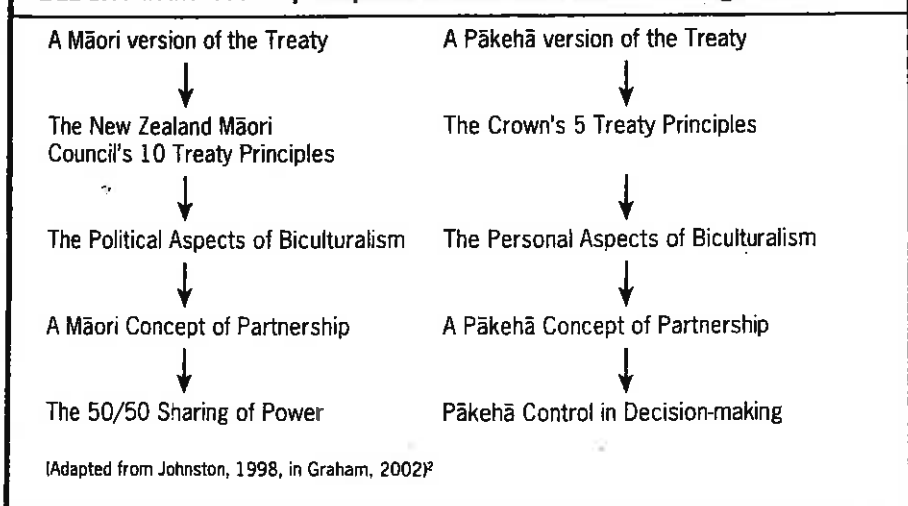
- Whānau have (nationally) expressed what they want from the education system (see Te Puni Kōkiri and Ministry of Education,

1998) and how they can be involved. The diversity of Māori communities means that these concerns must be recognised at the local level too.

- There is a need for whānau to be supported across a range of areas, including health, employment and education, both locally and nationally.
- Whānau must be kept informed of what is occurring in education through direct *kanohi ki te kanohi* contact. This information should include national statistics, future Māori education broadcasts and trends, law and regulation changes, and rights and obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi.
- All whānau must be notified of and kept up to date with the school's activities, academic, cultural, sport, fundraising initiatives, and governance/management issues.
- Māori whānau must be embraced by the education system in a positive and diversified manner that accounts for all whānau, including single parent whānau, unemployed whānau, and whānau that live in low socio-economic areas.
- Māori whānau must be equipped with the skills and resources necessary to become empowered by the education system and by their local school in order to participate in the school affairs of their children.
- Whānau need to have confidence in the education system and its capacity to be inclusive and empowering of Māori whānau. Accordingly, the credibility and accountability of the education system to Māori children and their whānau must be transparent for all whānau.

These imperatives can be fulfilled only if Māori have a greater say in the education of Māori, or at the minimum, an equal 50/50 voice in the development of Māori educational policies and initiatives, both nationally and locally. Table 1 presented a bicultural dichotomy of Māori and Pākehā perspectives of biculturalism. The Pākehā perspective supports the argument that Māori educational policy has been developed according to Pākehā perspectives of the Treaty of Waitangi and biculturalism, because of state dominance and Māori inferiority. It is therefore essential that existing unequal power relations prevalent in many schools are revoked, in order to enable a stronger Māori epistemological perspective, greater Māori power and greater Māori control in Māori educational policy development. The *kanohi ki te kanohi* approach would be the sensible vehicle for doing this.

**TABLE 1: A model of Māori perceptions of Māori and Pākehā meanings of biculturalism**



## Looking ahead

Although greater partnership and participation with Māori in education are key notions that have been promulgated by state educational reforms throughout the last 15 years, there have been problems with the types of partnership relationships that schools and their Māori communities have had to develop and enter into. These problems have come about due to conflicting Māori and Pākehā conceptions of biculturalism. Māori have not been empowered to the extent that they have become able to be in control and make decisions for Māori.

Satisfying the needs and aspirations of Māori whānau will create a greater level of access to and participation by whānau across education. The way to achieve this is through listening to and obliging Māori communities with all of their multiplicities, for instance through kanohi ki te kanohi contact, thus perhaps opening the door to greater participation and involvement of Māori whānau in the development, maintenance and appraisal of partnership relationships between schools and their Māori communities. Having a truly bicultural state and taking this biculturalness for granted will make initiatives that focus on better guidelines for partnership relationships between Māori communities and schools a reality, and thus more productive.

Creating such a state would entail a process of addressing the power imbalance that permeates the education system (Bishop 1996). A kanohi ki te kanohi approach would yield such a state where both Māori and Pākehā could develop trust and share information, cementing each other's credibility and permanently nurturing this. Achieving this

throughout Aotearoa New Zealand could then actually result in Māori and Pākehā developing "Better Relationship" guidelines for Māori and Pākehā partnership relationships. Only then might we begin to address the bigger issue of educational (under)achievement of Māori children (the "Better Learning" aspects), by means of a bicultural framework representative of Māori and Pākehā conceptions of biculturalism.

"Ko koe ki tēnā, ko ahau ki tēnei kīwai o te kete – You at that and I at this handle of the basket".

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## Notes

- 1 There are now seven partnerships between the Ministry of Education and individual Iwi. These seven Iwi have signed memorandums of understandings with the Ministry of Education and are directly involved in the provision of education for their Iwi and hapū at all levels (Ministry of Education, 2003).
- 2 This model is explored in greater detail in recent theses by Johnston, P.M.G. (1998) and Graham, J.P.H. (2002).

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