

Kia Tū Māia

A social-ecological approach to nurturing academic resilience for Māori student success

Abstract

Historical educational disparities have persisted between Māori students and their Pākehā peers. The narrative that explains Māori underachievement has evolved over time from cultural deficit explanations to the more recent narrative whereby Māori students (among other groups) are identified as “priority learners”. To address Māori student underachievement, in more recent times a range of explicit policies have been developed and implemented by the Ministry of Education. While well intentioned, these policies have not significantly achieved the goal of narrowing the achievement gap. It is argued that affirmative remedies tend to only address surface relationships and leave the conditions which create the inequalities intact, such as negative stereotyping, lower student expectations and so on.

Many Māori students overcome personal adversity and defy the stereotypes that impinge on academic success. These high-achieving Māori students are often referred to by researchers and educators as academically resilient. The aim of this study was to investigate the factors which promoted academic resilience for a group of Māori students in Te Tai Tokerau. Kaupapa Māori theory and critical race theory were employed as the guiding theoretical frameworks to underpin the research design and research processes. Narrative research methods provided insights into students’ beliefs about what influenced their academic resilience for success at school. The research findings showed that Māori students continue to face a barrage of risk factors at school that threaten their academic success. Successful Māori students adopt a range of self-protective factors from both internal and external sources to develop their academic resilience. The findings of this strengths-focused study show that academic resilience for Māori students is developed in culturally meaningful ways within the social ecologies of school, whānau and Te Ao Māori. This study provides some valuable insights for school leaders, teachers, whānau, iwi and researchers about nurturing academic resilience in school programmes to support Māori student success.