Chapter 5
Effective School Leadership for Māori Achievement:
Building Capacity through Indigenous, National, and International Cross–Cultural Collaboration

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ABSTRACT

This chapter leads a critical discourse amongst research and educational leadership communities around the nature of cross-cultural interactions and the role diversity plays in changing the status quo with regard to access, equity and academic achievement. Through this strengths-based qualitative inquiry, the authors bridge Kaupapa Māori (Māori ideology) and critical race theory methodologies with Māori and non-Māori culturally responsive leadership frameworks. Prerequisite conditions for effective cross-collaboration are presented based on the experiences of an international, interdisciplinary research team in collaboration with practicing Māori and non-Māori leaders of primary and secondary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ). The aim of the partnership is to promote the voices and practices of effective school leaders, through cross-cultural collaboration and research, to continue building critical mass for the important role of informing effective, culturally responsive leadership practices across Aotearoa NZ.

INTRODUCTION

For school leaders, responding to the needs of an ever-increasing diverse student population and the academic achievement disparities that exist between culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners and mainstream student populations requires a multi-dimensional kind of leadership. This approach must tap into resources developed through cross-cultural, interdisciplinary, and collaborative relationships. These relationships can be found in a variety of contexts, many of which are placed outside of the immediate school setting, requiring principals to be innovative, think outside the box, and even courageously step outside their comfort zone or usual patterns of practice to seek influence from alternative, but perhaps more appropriate, voices. Critical for improving leadership practice and school outcomes is the need to bridge across the divides separating schools and school leaders from each other, as well as from groups and organizations within the community. More specifically, within the Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) context where Māori (the Indigenous people of Aotearoa NZ) students are outperformed by their *Pākehā* (New Zealanders of European descent) counterparts, improving educational outcomes for underperforming Māori, as well as for Pasifika (e.g., Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, Niuean, Cook Island Māori) and other students impacted by disparities in achievement outcomes, requires a collaborative effort between Māori and non-Māori principals, and even between school principals and academic scholars.

The success of Māori students is a matter of national interest and priority and, thus, serves as the central focus of this chapter. Related to the gaps separating Latino, African American, American Indian, and other historically marginalized learners in the United States (U.S.), the achievement gap between Māori and Pākehā students continues to be one of the main areas of focus in terms of strategic planning and is a priority identified by Aotearoa NZ's Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2013). In 2013, approximately 88.3% of Pākehā students in Year 11 achieved Level 1 of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA – Aotearoa NZ's standards' based national testing system), while only 70.7% of Māori students achieved this same qualification [New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), 2014]. Additionally, in 2012, approximately one in ten Māori students left school without achieving any qualifications, which is three times higher than for Pākehā students. Despite an improvement in the achievement levels of both ethnic groups between 2009 and 2013, the achievement gap has persisted.

Within Aotearoa NZ's educational school system, there exists a high degree of autonomy resulting from a school-based management approach initiated by *Tomorrow's Schools* in 1989 (New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2013). One of the unintended outcomes of *Tomorrow's Schools* has been an increased level of competition between schools with regard to achievement outcomes as measured by standardized tests. This poses an issue for fostering an educational climate that promotes inter-school collaborative leadership, wherein principals develop partnerships with other school leaders to address common barriers towards improving student achievement (e.g., impact of low socio-economic status on achievement, effectiveness of professional development, ability for teachers to differentiate classroom instruction for high priority learners) (Ministry of Education, 2013). Nationwide, the Ministry of Education serves as the institutional body advising all schools. Without centralized organizational networks to unify schools like school districts in the U.S., cross-school collaboration can be challenging for principals to engage in shared-decision making practices with other principals. This structural divide between schools, however, is only one layer of complexity influencing the potential for school leaders to work collaboratively.

Aotearoa NZ has been governed since 1840 by a bicultural treaty written in English and *te reo* (Māori language) by representatives of the British Crown and 540 Māori *rangatira* (Māori Chiefs) (Orange,

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