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**How do principals of English-medium primary schools understand Māori students achieving educational success as Māori, and what are the factors that influence the development of this understanding**

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degree Master of Education  
at Massey University, Manawatū, New Zealand

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates how the principals of English-medium primary schools understand Māori students achieving educational success as Māori. Additionally, it explores the factors that support and hinder the development of their understanding.

A qualitative case-study was used to explore the understanding and experiences of the 28 principals of all English-medium, full and contributing primary schools on Te Tai Poutini West Coast of Te Wai Pounamu South Island. Twenty-seven principals were interviewed in their own schools over a period of two months, while one principal completed an on-line questionnaire.

The study found that English-medium primary school principals' understanding of Māori students achieving educational success as Māori align largely with the vision for young people who are confident, connected, actively engaged lifelong learners. Additionally, principals incorporate the acquisition of other skills and knowledge including the learning of te reo Māori that will enable students to participate in and contribute to te ao Māori. Although their descriptions approximate the broad student outcomes outlined in Ka Hikitia, few principals in this study refer specifically to them.

The findings from this study also bring to light a complex lattice of interacting connections and disconnections with place, people, and the power of Pākehā/Eurocentric hegemony that frames and influences the development of principals understanding of Māori students' educational success as Māori. Factors of physical and cultural isolation, and disconnection with Poutini Ngāi Tahu, hinder principals' ability to develop a wider understanding of Māori students' educational success as Māori.

The thesis concludes that although principals are the leaders of learning and teaching in their schools, they need support from, whānau, hapū, iwi and perhaps most importantly, the Ministry of Education, to connect with people, place, and the power of Pākehā/Eurocentric hegemony in order to develop their understanding of Māori students achieving success as Māori.

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*...nourish their minds and hearts to realise their human potential in the world  
bequeathed to them by their ancestors (Walker, 2016).*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	II
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	III
LIST OF TABLES.....	V
<b>CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 OVERVIEW .....	1
1.2 RESEARCHER'S POSITION .....	2
1.3 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY .....	2
1.4 RESEARCH AIMS .....	3
1.5 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS .....	3
<b>CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION .....	5
2.2 THE IMPACT OF COLONISATION AND STATE EDUCATION ON MĀORI STUDENTS .....	6
2.3 MĀORI PERSPECTIVES OF EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AS MĀORI .....	9
2.4 EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND .....	10
2.5 THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS IN BUILDING CONNECTIONS .....	13
2.5.1 <i>Factors impacting on principals ability to carry out their roles</i> .....	15
2.6 THE ROLE OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRINCIPALS .....	17
2.7 SUMMARY .....	18
<b>CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>20</b>
3.1 INTRODUCTION .....	20
3.2 QUALITATIVE CASE-STUDY .....	20
3.3 RECRUITMENT OF PRINCIPALS AND INVITATIONS TO PARTICIPATE .....	22
3.4 DATA COLLECTION .....	22
3.4.1 <i>Interviews</i> .....	22
3.4.2 <i>Education Review Office School Reports</i> .....	23
3.5 DATA ANALYSIS .....	24
3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	25
3.6.1 <i>Insider-Outsider research</i> .....	25
3.6.2 <i>Interview transcription</i> .....	26
3.6.3 <i>Benefits and risks to participants</i> .....	26
3.6.4 <i>Confidentiality</i> .....	27
3.8 REPORTING BACK TO PRINCIPALS .....	27
<b>CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>28</b>
4.1 INTRODUCTION .....	28
4.2 THE REGION, PRINCIPALS, AND SCHOOLS .....	28
4.3 RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RELATING TO EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS.....	31
4.3.1 <i>Primary principals' understanding of educational success</i> .....	31
4.3.2 <i>The Ministry of Education's influence on principals' understanding</i> .....	32
4.3.3 <i>The Influence of the Education Review Office</i> .....	32
4.3.4 <i>Other factors supporting principals' understanding of educational success</i> .....	33
4.3.5 <i>Factors hindering the development of principals' understanding of educational success</i> .....	34
4.4 RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RELATING TO EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AS MĀORI .....	35
4.5 FACTORS SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRINCIPALS' UNDERSTANDING .....	37
4.5.1 <i>The Ministry of Education</i> .....	37
4.5.2 <i>The Education Review Office</i> .....	40

4.5.3 <i>Personal experiences</i> .....	41
4.5.4 <i>Professional learning</i> .....	43
4.5.5 <i>Working alongside Māori colleagues and members of the Māori community</i> .....	45
4.6 FACTORS HINDERING THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRINCIPALS' UNDERSTANDING .....	45
4.7 CONNECTION AND DISCONNECTION WITH PARENTS, FAMILIES AND WHĀNAU .....	47
4.8 CONNECTION AND DISCONNECTION WITH NGĀI TAHU WHĀNUI AND POUTINI NGĀI TAHU .....	48
4.9 SUGGESTIONS FOR SUPPORT .....	50
4.10 SUMMARY .....	51
<b>CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>54</b>
5.1 INTRODUCTION .....	54
5.2 PRINCIPALS' UNDERSTANDING OF EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AS MĀORI .....	55
5.3 CONNECTIONS AND DISCONNECTIONS WITH PLACE – THE IMPACT OF ISOLATION .....	56
5.4 CONNECTIONS AND DISCONNECTIONS WITH PEOPLE – THE IMPACT OF PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS .....	57
5.4.1 <i>Principals' understanding of what it means to be Māori</i> .....	57
5.4.2 <i>Connections and disconnections with Poutini Ngāi Tahu and Ngāi Tahu Whānui</i> .....	58
5.4.3 <i>Connections and disconnections at a personal level</i> .....	60
5.4.4 <i>Connections and disconnections at a professional level</i> .....	60
5.4.5 <i>Connections and disconnection with the Ministry of Education</i> .....	63
5.4.6 <i>Connections and disconnections with the Education Review Office</i> .....	66
5.5 CONNECTIONS AND DISCONNECTIONS WITH POWER – THE IMPACT OF THE PĀKEHĀ/EUROCENTRIC HEGEMONY .....	67
5.6 SUMMARY .....	69
<b>CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>71</b>
6.1 CONCLUSIONS .....	71
6.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH .....	75
6.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION AND FURTHER RESEARCH .....	76
<b>REFERENCE.....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>83</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Broad student outcomes from Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success	12
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