

Executive Summary

The purpose of this project is to explore what is successful in the alternative education setting, identify the key elements and be able to replicate this so other programs can be just as successful. Many young people attending alternative education centres have left mainstream schooling because of personal circumstances and/or significant conflicts with schooling authorities. I want to show that the unique ways in which alternative education centres design their classroom environments, teaching programs and pedagogical relationships are conducive to supporting such young people to re-connect with educational processes.

The main audience that will benefit from my project are the alternative education tutors, managers, students and their whanau. To achieve my purpose, I undertook a qualitative research project. I used the scope of my own organisation, Te Ara Poutama Alternative Education Centre, to gather data. I also explored literature to examine best practices and ideas around alternative education. My literature review centred around aspects of school engagement, the classroom environment and student learning, instruction and authentic achievement, the importance of developing aspirations and hope, pathways and goals, the role of positive emotions, and how alternative education transforms systems.

I interviewed six past students from across different Te Ara Poutama centres, who have successfully completed their NCEA Level One and moved into higher education.



Four male students were interviewed and two female students. I used a standardized interview approach where the same questions were asked of each participant. I also used evidence from each student's Individual Learning Plans. These results were then analysed and conclusions and recommendations made. Please see Appendix one for my full Learning Agreement that was submitted prior to starting this project.

The following elements were identified by the interviewees as being keys to the success they experienced in the alternative education setting:

Relational learning - the students' learnt from each other and from their tutors through the sharing of ideas. The relationships they developed with each other and with their tutors was a key element.

The learning environment - the learning environment and smaller class size supported the students to achieve better. The students preferred learning via Te Kura over teaching from the front of the classroom.

Higher level of support - the students received a higher level of support in the alternative education setting than they received in a mainstream school.

Positive aspects leading to positive behaviours - students identified positive aspects like hope, goal setting and increased self-confidence that led to a change in their own behaviours.

Future aspirations - students had developed hope, and therefore were able to think more positively in terms of their future. Students were able to explore the possibility of their future self.

If alternative education providers are able to provide the student with the identified key elements, then those students will be able to achieve educational success and in turn become productive members of their communities and of society as a whole. Some of these elements are extrinsic like class size and other elements are intrinsic like fostering hope. Perhaps these findings can also be used to inform many of the practices within mainstream schools that currently contribute to the marginalisation of certain groups of young people.



Since the completion of my project, I have been able to make changes within my own practice. I have become more mindful of the classroom environment, I keep class sizes small but the biggest change has come from knowing that the relationship between us as tutors and our students is a vital element. We foster the hope that our students begin to develop, a hope for a more positive future. We as tutors also help our students develop realistic goals and offer a more meaningful curriculum.

In the next section, the Introduction, I will introduce what alternative education is and the Ministry of Education criteria that is applied to students entering this type of education.