

Enacting a whakawhanaungatanga approach in early childhood education

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The decline in Māori children's enrolment in kōhanga reo and the corresponding increase in the proportion of Māori children attending education and care centres (Ministry of Education, 2004) has major implications for both the majority of Māori children who are participating in early childhood education (ECE) and care settings other than kōhanga reo, and the providers of these services. Surveys of Māori families have indicated that even those parents who send their children to conventional early childhood centres and schools, rather than to kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa, still want their children to learn their language and expect that this aspiration will be supported within regular educational provision (AGB/McNair, 1992; Durie, 2003; Else, 1997; Te Puni Kōkiri/Ministry of Māori Development, 1998a,b). However, previous research (Ritchie, 2002) has identified that mainstream educators and teacher educators lack confidence and competence in delivering education programmes that are bicultural in content and process in line with the expectations of *Te Whāriki* and its commitments derived from Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Ensuing outcomes for Māori are highlighted in Rau (2002), which shows that impacting tensions for tamariki and whānau are evident when culture is not being validated.

This article reports findings from a recent Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) project, which explored strategies for encouraging the participation of whānau Māori within ECE settings and implementing commitments derived from Te Tiriti o Waitangi as expressed in the bicultural early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b), through the delivery of Tiriti-based programmes in early childhood settings other than kōhanga reo in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Our TLRI project aimed to:

- articulate how early childhood educators in settings other than kōhanga reo encourage whānau Māori to participate in ECE; and
- identify strategies by which early childhood educators are implementing their understandings of the Tiriti-based commitments in *Te Whāriki* by delivering Tiriti-based programmes.

Our project supported an approach termed “whakawhanaungatanga” (Ritchie, 2001, 2002, 2003), which focused on educators putting into practice their professional responsibility to build relationships with Māori families within early childhood centres and communities. Central to this relationship building is re-centring the position of Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing (Rau, 2002; Rau & Ritchie, 2005).

Whakawhanaungatanga approaches are in harmony with *Te Whāriki's* “principle” of Whānau Tangata—Family and Community that “[t]he wider world of the family and community is part of the early childhood curriculum” (Ministry of Education, 1996b, p. 14), and with the “strand” of Mana Whenua—Belonging (pp. 14–15). In the section “Ngā Taumata Whakahirahira”, *Te Whāriki* states that one of the key values within Te Ao Māori is that children are supported in knowing whanaungatanga: “Ko tetahi o ngā tino uara o te ao Māori kia mōhio ngā mokopuna ki te whanaungatanga” (p. 33). Furthermore, “[t]he strand of Belonging builds opportunities for social interaction with adults and other children and respects the achievements and aspirations of the child's family and community. Through these links, families and the community are empowered” (p. 54), “[a]ppropriate connections with iwi and hapū [are] established” (p. 55), and educators demonstrate support for tikanga Māori and te reo Māori.

Research design and methodology

Collaboration was central to our project's conception and implementation. The research design drew upon both kaupapa Māori methodologies (Bishop, 1996; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; G. H. Smith, 1997; L. T. Smith, 1999) and a collaborative, narrative Western paradigm (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Hauser, 1995; Richardson, 1997; Schulz, Schroeder, & Brody, 1997; Swadener & Marsh, 1995). Data were gathered from narratives of teachers, playcentre educators, professional development providers, an iwi education authority, specialist and teacher educators; individual and collective co-theorising hui; individual and group interviews; emails; and a website open to interested early childhood educators nationwide.

Whānau Māori aspiration and agency

A philosophical commitment to social justice, rights, and ethics

Recognising children's rights to their identities as cultural beings is a key concern of educators committed to Tiriti-based ECE. The co-researchers saw an ethical society as one that is founded in respectful relationships, honours individual rights, and uses collaborative dialogue to promote a shared vision of how people might treat each other. Respecting mana whenua implies a recognition of the intrinsic power of land to sustain life and contribute to people's wellbeing and security (Hemara, 2000). Riana, a Māori kindergarten head teacher, expressed her awareness of sensitivities around the mana whenua of the local hapū/iwi:

And it's like, because I'm not from here, I respect the kawa¹ of the iwi, so I know that and I absolutely respect that and know that when it comes in terms of knowledge and that they have the knowledge within this iwi and I don't, so I respect that and appreciate that. And the whole humbleness of, you know, they're good for me, they make me slow down.

Riana demonstrates a positioning of humility, in accord with her respect for the rights of the mana whenua. This recognition of mana whenua rights is an important paradigm for all early childhood educators, both Māori and non-Māori, as is Riana's modelling of a vantage point of humility.

Māori aspirations for early childhood experiences

Enactment of the bicultural curriculum *Te Whāriki* is only a decade old. Even as the early childhood profession struggles to enhance its knowledge and skills in order to meet its professional responsibilities in this area, our research identified that many Māori parents/whānau themselves may not be in a position to articulate their expectations of their children's early childhood setting. A Māori co-researcher reported that she had been taken aback at the findings of some of her previous research into aspirations of whānau Māori for their children in kindergartens:

The part that was the most surprising for me was probably that the parents didn't have huge expectations of the service and of the teachers, or didn't think they had a right to it, or even perceive themselves

as a group of people having particular needs—I'm going to use the word 'rights', but that's probably my take on it—as having rights as the first nation's people, as the Indigenous people.

(Karina)

As early childhood education professionals, it is our role to take the lead in implementing our mandated curriculum. Even if Māori families are not overtly requesting Māori content within the programme, we cannot assume that they would not value it if it were to be provided. Silence on the part of whānau Māori should not be interpreted as a sign of satisfaction with the extent of Māori content provided.

Key reasons for Māori non-participation in ECE reported by co-researchers of the Hei Ara Kōkiri Tuwaretoa Education Initiative were the prohibitive cost of some services as well as concerns regarding the limited use of te reo. Centres where only English was spoken, or the use of te reo was very limited, were not viewed favourably. A participant in their research surveys had related this aspiration:

I would like to see our tamariki being bilingual and being completely comfortable in either Māori or Pākehā settings—having an understanding of the protocols or expected behaviour in these, i.e., bicultural.

Tiriti-based programmes

Perceptions of current practice

Many coresearchers expressed concern about the limited implementation of the bicultural aspirations contained within both *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b) and the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (Ministry of Education, 1996a):

This often amounts to a veneer of biculturalism. It's an outward appearance only. There is often nothing more. I suppose that's called tokenism. (Anne)

Coresearchers made a distinction between employing superficial cultural icons, such as songs or dress-up clothing, and moving much further to include deeper signifiers such as enacting culturally-specific patterns of interaction and emotion, philosophical conceptions, and childrearing practices (Clark, 1995). When Māori content remains marginalised within an education setting, this perpetuates a perception of a de-valuing of Te Ao Māori that has been a cornerstone of the colonisation experience. Ramsden (1994)

warned that, "Colonisation is continued by the selective co-option of Māori ideas and rituals which become redefined, stereotyped and rigidified" (p. 21). Ongoing engagement of an active Māori community presence within the early childhood setting will enable Māori content within the early childhood programme to demonstrate "an appreciation of te reo as a living and relevant language" (Ministry of Education, 1996b, p. 76) and "a recognition of Māori ways of knowing and making sense of the world and of respecting and appreciating the natural environment" (p. 82) that is organic, fluid, and contextualised to the particular whānau/hapū/iwi.

Pedagogical strategies

The project identified a number of strategies for strengthening the delivery of te reo me ōna tikanga. Foremost was the effort by educators to generate a sense of whanaungatanga, so that all members of the centre community felt included as part of a caring collective with common aspirations and values and shared responsibility, inspired by educators demonstrating their willingness to identify and support the needs of all members of that collective. This in turn enabled a growing convergence between the values of Māori homes and ECE settings. Another element was the involvement of whānau (including kuia and kaumātua) in ongoing te reo and tikanga development, and parents of all ethnic backgrounds feeling welcome to participate and increase their own fluency in te reo alongside their children. Further inclusiveness occurred in the prioritising of extra learning support to meet individual children's needs, and enabling tuakana and teina (older and younger children in a whānau) to attend the centre together.

For Māori, acknowledgement of Te Ao Wairua (the spiritual dimension) and Ngā Atua (gods) is central to the enactment of values of manaakitanga and whanaungatanga through rituals of welcoming and farewell, sharing of kai, and other activities that reflect Te Ao Māori, in which children participate alongside adults. An important strategy for educators is to demonstrate their commitment to increasing their fluency in te reo to enable them to authentically model waiata and pakiwaitara, and incorporate knowledge of local iwi tikanga and kawa, involving the centre in wider iwi community activities. It was acknowledged that many educators felt that they needed support to enhance their competence in these areas.

Welcoming as ongoing

The importance of welcoming families into early childhood centres is being highlighted in the work of several contemporary early childhood researchers and theorists (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005), and is a particular feature of the Reggio Emilia approach (New, 1999). Coresearchers in our project also emphasised the importance of welcoming families into ECE centres. Penny, a Pākehā kindergarten head teacher, applied her centre's philosophy of "whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, and rangimarie"² by prioritising time spent with new families/whānau:

It's about just spending time with people. It's all very well to have the words on the wall, but whakapiripiri mai,³ manaakitanga, is about actually face-to-face and having the time to spend with people. So I think right from the beginning, we have time when anybody comes, at any time in the session, to talk to them ... To me it's about, people are the most important things, not the material things around us. And if we are all kind and respectful of all people then everything else just falls into place.

Coresearchers reflected deeply on how they were presenting themselves and their centre to new families. Tui, a Māori teacher educator, expressed her strategy of trying to equalise inequalities in hidden power dynamics between whānau and teachers:

I think it also does come down to being approachable, if you're not approachable then they're not going to see you as being someone they want to engage with, someone they want to talk to, someone they want to see as equal, giving them that validation.

Another Māori coresearcher, Katerina, considered that:

It's actually inviting the Other in, to be able to do that. So you put on your approachable, friendly ... at first it can be a mask, because you're not comfortable and you feel a little alien with it, but you're actually inviting the Other in and crossing those cultural divides in a sense.

Tui's and Katerina's analyses are consistent with the current theorising of Gunilla Dahlberg and her colleagues (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). Dahlberg (2000) considers the art of really listening and hearing what the Other is saying to be central to what she describes as "the ethics of encounter" (p. 23).

Enacting Māori values

Kaupapa Māori pedagogical processes emphasise the importance of fostering and promoting children's spiritual wellbeing (Durie, 2003; L. T. Smith, 1999). Coresearchers emphasised the importance of embedding tikanga and wairua through daily practices such as starting and ending with karakia. Two Pākehā kindergarten teachers related that Māori families in their centre commented in parent surveys on the sense of wairua they experienced within that programme. The concept of wairua is explained by Reedy (1995), one of the principal writers of *Te Whāriki*, as follows:

This dimension deals with power and a sense of oneness with the Universe. The student learns that all things are part of the Universe; that all matter is made up of the same forces. The past, present and future are sources of trust, confidence and self-esteem; that internal questions about atua/gods and their place in the Universe are challenges for the mind to explore; that tradition, religious beliefs, philosophy, and modern science are not necessarily incompatible (pp. 19–20).

For Māori, "Wairua is implicit in all aspects of life, both the seen and the unseen" (Goulton, 1998, p. 115). Māori and other Indigenous peoples' worldviews are imbued with a pervasive awareness of the spiritual relationships connecting the natural world and the universe (Knudtson & Suzuki, 1992; Metge, 1976).

According to Mead (2003, p. 29), "All tikanga are underpinned by the high value placed upon manaakitanga—nurturing relationships, looking after people, and being very careful about how others are treated." Demonstration of manaakitanga through hospitality and generosity enhances the mana (prestige) of the provider. The provision and sharing of kai as part of their centres' practices was highly valued by our co-researchers, with many instances of hāngi and other traditional kai Māori being shared. Riana, a Māori kindergarten head teacher, described how kai featured in her kindergarten:

Cooking is also an important part of our programme and especially some wonderful delicacies such as boil-up—pork bones and pūhā⁴ from the garden, fish heads, fried bread, kai moana⁵ galore, etc., etc. We grow lots of vegies in our gardens and the whānau and community are welcome to help themselves to this kai.

In this kindergarten, the teachers' enactment of manaakitanga, whereby one is obligated to

provide hospitality and sustenance to visitors, was reciprocated in kind by the centre whānau, who also provided kai that was shared by the collective. The preparation and serving of traditional kai affirms and nurtures the tamariki and whānau present, providing a tangible link to their culture, as well as physical and spiritual nourishment. Eating together is a celebration of the collective sustenance of life, providing affirmation of whanaungatanga.

Embracing change

Through her ongoing commitment to reflecting on her practice, Anne, a Pākehā kindergarten head teacher, recognised that, although her own values were precious to her, they could sit alongside her validation of Māori and other cultural values within her centre's programme and interactions. However, she also considered that as teachers we need to reflect upon and be open to changing our own attitudes; "to change ourselves" in order to change our practice. This realisation that "the process for real change and transformation begins with self" (Miller & Shoptaugh, 2004, p. 255) seems absolutely fundamental to the enactment of Tiriti-based practice. Anne's commitment to change includes a sense of responsibility to "work with other professionals to change their attitudes and practices" and "challenge the structure of the system and its operation". She values the role of organisations such as the New Zealand Educational Institute in supporting teachers, recognising that journeys of change can be challenging. She wrote: "You need to be able to parry the blows and to be strong in your beliefs to do this. It's often more comfortable to take the easy road."

As a result of her ongoing commitment to professional development opportunities, Anne's team of kindergarten teachers had initiated a hui for whānau Māori of their centre. This process was similar to the "co-enquiry" meetings practised in centres committed to a Reggio Emilia-derived philosophy of collaboration between teachers, children, families, and community, which enacts the principles of "listening" and "dialogue" (Abramson & Atwal, 2004, p. 87). At the suggestion of the whānau Māori of the kindergarten, this centre had devised and sustained a welcoming ritual that included a waiata composed by the children.

The commitment of Penny, a Pākehā kindergarten head teacher, to enacting a Māori philosophy within her centre meant that she had changed her kindergarten practice from what she saw as a "clinical Pākehā model" to

one which reflects “the Māori way of supporting each other”:

It does work here, and it only works because we treat everybody the same, as far as everybody gets welcomed, everybody is greeted in a Māori way regardless of whether they're Pākehā or not, whether they like it or not.

At first reading, this statement may seem to be a simplistic inversion of the *status quo*. However, when placed in the context whereby historically state education provision has normalised Western values and practices, thereby “Othering” and marginalising those of the tangata whenua, we may reconsider Penny's stance to be one of a respectful reinstatement of tikanga (what is right for Māori) and as a “re-normalisation” (L. T. Mead, 1996) of Māori ways of being and knowing.

Penny is mindful of the tendency for (albeit well-intentioned) non-Māori educators to “grasp” at Māori parents as sources for bicultural programmes:

I have no expectations of what a family should or should not give us because they have gifts and taonga⁶ that are not mine, and there's no way that I can make them give them to us, so all we can do is make this place as warm a place as possible where they would like to spend time and if anything comes because they're here, then that's an absolute blessing and a real treasure that they've shared. So we share what we have with them. Our joy is just that their children are here and that they're prepared to share their greatest treasure with us, and we want to show them how marvellous their children are. So I'm very wary of being pushy about ‘Can you come and do waiata with us?’, ‘Can you come and do that?’ ... To me that's the Pākehā grasping and I'm very, very conscious of that. We're trying to do it the other way: ‘What can we give to people?’

Penny's approach again inverts the colonialistic model of appropriation and assimilation, generating the paradoxical situation in which a seemingly Western model of early childhood provision, a kindergarten led by Pākehā teachers, is modelling Māori values of manaakitanga.

Sustaining commitment

Co-researchers were deeply committed to social justice for Māori in Aotearoa—honouring Te Tiriti was fundamental to their political and

educational focus, despite encountering some negative reactions along the way:

I have given a lot of thought to my analogy of becoming bicultural as similar to climbing a mountain. It's a mountain where the summit is shrouded in mist so you can't see the top. You climb very slowly, sometimes you can plan the route because you have read and thought about it, sometimes you need somebody who is familiar with it to show you the way. You have to be prepared to be a follower and be led by somebody who knows the route better than you do. You have to respect and trust other people's views and leadership. All the time you need encouragement. You also need your team to come with you. You are roped together so that you can help each other. Sometimes you will need to be the leader. Sometimes you get knocked back and discouraged ... You will need support to keep going and to have another try ... The trouble is that some people find it very hard to get rid of the baggage from past hurts that weighs them down and affects their attitude and behaviour. I would love to help to resolve this but don't have the skills. Is it our collective responsibility? (Anne)

Like Anne, we believe that this is a shared journey in which Māori and non-Māori can collaborate through honest dialogue, reflection, and compassion. Coresearchers considered that implementation of Tiriti-based programmes was more effective when the teaching team had a shared commitment to understanding and valuing the participation of whānau Māori. They valued opportunities to work with colleagues and management who shared these ideals.

Conclusion

The right of whānau Māori to in-depth engagement within early childhood education and care centres is enabled when educators move beyond conventional models of early childhood practice to enact values and practices that respect and reflect Māori ways of being, knowing, and doing as central to their pedagogies. A key strategy is building relationships that focus on the collective, generating a sense of warmth, welcoming, and manaakitanga on an ongoing basis. For Māori educators, the support of a Māori collective is integral to their sustenance and wellbeing. For non-Māori, the challenge is

to be open to shifting their operating paradigms in order to embrace and value Māori colleagues, whānau, and communities. Educators are enabled in this process when management, policies, and processes are committed to enactment of Tiriti-based kaupapa such as tino rangatiratanga.

The coresearchers in our project demonstrated their ongoing commitment to a journey of change toward being part of an early childhood community that honours the ways of being and knowing of the tangata whenua, the people indigenous to this land. For both Māori and Pākehā coresearchers this learning process has been challenging, yet support has been available and valued. *Te Whāriki* has provided a mandate that has been a milestone and road map along the journey. Coresearchers in our study are generating pedagogies that reflect their commitment to an emerging mosaic composed of ethics of respect, care, community, collectivity, responsiveness, humility, and openness, engagement with reflection, and preparedness to change. Through this ethical engagement, their early childhood education philosophies and practices are weaving programmes that enact Māori ways of being, knowing, and doing.

Acknowledgements

We wish to honour our research partners who have provided their endorsement, wisdom, support, and energy to this research project: Hei Ara Kōkiri Tuwaretoa Education Initiative, a partnership between the Ministry of Education and Tuwaretoa Māori Trust Board; early childhood colleagues from Unitec New Zealand; Hanna Clannad; the Waikato Kindergarten Association; and early childhood colleagues from the University of Waikato; as well as each one of the individual coresearchers, both within these partner organisations and from a range of additional institutions.

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Notes

- 1 Kawa are tribal protocols.
- 2 Manaakitanga is the act of showing respect, kindness, hospitality, and generosity to guests. Rangimarie is peace.
- 3 Whakapiripiri mai means "Gather closely together".
- 4 Pūhā is a green leafy vegetable.
- 5 Kai moana is seafood.
- 6 Taonga are treasures, both tangible and intangible, that are highly valued by Māori.

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