Māori Potential: Barriers to Creating Culturally-Responsive Learning Environments in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Te Timatanga O Te Ara – Kei Whea Te Ara?

Lesleigh Henderson
Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour, Te Rohe Potae/The King Country

ABSTRACT

New Zealand Education reforms aligned with raising Māori student success are yet to result in Māori students reaching their educational potential (Howard, 2010; ERO, 2008; 2010). Why do many New Zealand teachers struggle to create and deliver programmes which allow Māori learners to succeed as Māori? What barriers and enablers exist today in New Zealand classrooms which impact on Māori success? The literature both from New Zealand and internationally regarding culturally-responsive practice is formidable in both its volume and scope. The Māori Education Strategy, Ka Hikitia (Ministry of Education, 2008), the Registered Teacher Criteria (RTC) (New Zealand Teachers' Council, 2010) and the teacher guidelines for cross-cultural competency, Tātaiako (New Zealand Teachers' Council, 2011) provide excellent underpinnings for reshaping New Zealand education into a cross-culturally inclusive and effective environment. The RTC are explicit in the expectation that teachers will practise within cross-culturally competent paradigms. This article examines possible reasons why, in 2013, Māori students in New Zealand schools are often still not reaching their potential.

Position paper

Keywords: *Culturally-responsive, Ka Hikitia, Māori*

INTRODUCTION

According to the Auditor-General, the current statistics for achievement suggest that although there is an improvement in Māori student achievement, significant numbers of Māori students are still under-served by the education system in New Zealand, with a disproportionate amount leaving the schooling system without the qualifications they need (Auditor-General, 2012). The Government introduced the Māori Education Strategy Ka Hikitia in 2008 (Ministry of Education, 2008), recognising the need to improve achievement outcomes for Māori students. The Ministry of Education described the overarching strategic intent of Ka Hikitia as "Māori enjoying educational success as Māori."

Key evidence underpinning Ka Hikitia draws on a huge range of research and literature.[1] This Maori Education Strategy was evaluated and an updated version, *Ka Hikitia – Accelerating Success 2013–2017*, is presently being introduced.[2] As part of this renewed strategy, the Measurable Gains Framework (MGF) will be used by the Ministry of Education to monitor progress in implementing Ka Hikitia and annual reports of progress will be published. It is anticipated that this information will deliver better understanding about what works for Māori learners so that continued progress can be strengthened and enhanced. Such evidence is eagerly awaited. Until these annual reports are made available, it may be profitable to consider a range of reasons why, with all of the work done over the last two decades, and since the implementation of Ka Hikitia in 2008, many Māori students in New Zealand schools are still suffering disappointing outcomes. Whilst accepting these reasons are likely to include some factors which lie beyond the influence of schools, let us think about the factors which teachers and schools do have within their control.

ENABLERS

There are many enablers to consider which have been identified in various ways by a range of researchers and educationalists (Bevan-Brown, 2003; Bishop, O'Sullivan & Berryman, 2010; Cartledge, Gardner & Ford, 2008; Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009; Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005). These enablers make, I believe, the critical difference between success and failure when aspiring to achieve improved outcomes for Māori learners. Enablers of teaching include professional development which expand teacher capability and result in increased tauira (student) Māori outcomes. The involvement of whānau and iwi in education and their openness to learning from educators, and educators' openness to learning from whānau and iwi are vital. Other enablers recognise the professional learning and capability of teachers and their ability to provide high-quality teaching as imperative. Professional leadership by

principals and school leaders which is responsive, accountable and majorly centred on teaching and learning are further key enablers (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009). Where schools are achieving significant success for Māori students it is likely that enablers are present which support this success. Whilst implementing professional learning models which include guidelines for effective teaching and learning, self-review and school-wide reform can, and do, improve results. It is my belief that where enablers, which are specific for cross-cultural competence exist, the possibility of sustainable change is enhanced.

It might be assumed that if the enablers which improve outcomes are implemented then barriers to progress will be overcome. Research-based interventions, initiatives and approaches such as Te Mana Korero, Te Kotahitanga and He Kakano (to name a few) were all designed and implemented in New Zealand schools with significant yet varying success (Bishop, 2011a). So with such clarification of causes and effects, the huge work put into suggestions for school self-review and change (Bevan-Brown, 2003; Bishop, O'Sullivan & Berryman,2010) surely we could reasonably expect the dramatic improvement which still eludes us? The Effective Teaching Profile from Te Kotahitanga is one example of a systematic and controlled attempt to affect school-wide reform of practice by teachers and school leaders (Bishop, O'Sullivan & Berryman, 2010). Yet with all these tools the results are still varying tremendously from school to school and indeed from classroom to classroom (Bevan-Brown, 2003; Bishop, 2011b; ERO, 2008; 2010).

Many learned people have eloquently described the key indicators for success required to manifest indigenous potential and explicitly Māori potential (Bevan-Brown, 2003; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Cartledge, Gardner & Ford, 2008; Smith, 1996). Here then is the challenge; whilst accepting that this rich range of academic thinking, both within New Zealand and internationally, is accurate, I suggest we also interrogate the continuing unsatisfactory results for some simple explanations. In as much as research, Teachers' Council professional standards and New Zealand education documents and legislation make specific what is needed, teachers cannot realistically be ignorant of expectations. Why, then, are some teachers and schools finding it difficult to implement the concepts outlined within Ka Hikitia? Perhaps once the resources are made available it is assumed that those of us with little experience of the Māori world will be able to apply these resources effectively. It is my belief that without support from those with cross-cultural expertise, this assumption is unlikely to be realised.

BARRIERS

Assumptions

Such assumptions are detrimental to the improvement of present outcomes; assuming that providing a resource will ensure the effective implementation of said resource presupposes that one knows how to get from 'here' to 'there'. If teachers and/or schools live in a mono-cultural world of their own cultural norms and values, how do they change thinking, awareness and ultimately practice? If we accept that most teachers would engage effectively with things Māori if they knew how, what motivation exists for teachers to begin the challenging and unpredictable journey across the cultural divide which is New Zealand? (Harris, 2013).

Barriers were identified by analysis across the Best Evidence Synthesis[3] and recognised the inequitable nature of the education system performance for Māori learners. Barriers included:

> Low inclusion of Māori themes and topics in English-medium education, fewer teacher-student interactions, less positive feedback, more negative comments targeted to Māori learners, under-assessment of capability, widespread targeting of Māori learners with ineffective or even counterproductive teaching strategies (such as the 'learning styles' approach), failure to uphold mana Māori in education, inadvertent teacher racism, peer racism, mispronounced names and so on (Harker, 2006).

Disconnection with the Māori World and Lack of Basic Cross-cultural Skills

If one cannot cross cultural norms and engage with an 'other' in a cultural partnership, it is highly unlikely that the needed "whānau and community engagement" (Durie, 2001) is going to occur. No matter how adept in their discipline a professional is, or how well they implement teaching and learning tools, without involvement in the dual cultural heritage of this land, they will not see the cultural differences, far less bridge them to form healthy, effective relationships with Māori learners and whānau. The resulting potential clash of cultural values creates a huge barrier to establishing authentic relationships (Cartledge, Gardner & Ford, 2008; Howard, 2010). Additionally, some teachers and school leaders do not see that it is their role or responsibility to work through cultural norms which are not their own (Bishop & Glynn, 2003) which leads us to the point of discussion below.

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3 Information about the Best Evidence Synthesis project and publications can be found at http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/topics/BES

Mono-cultural Perspective and Ignorance

The generally mono-lingual and Eurocentric structure of New Zealand means that, for a large number of people, there is one language and one culture existing in their reality. One can live in New Zealand without stepping outside the dominant culture, customs or language (McNally & Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, 2009). Those unmotivated to engage in cross-cultural experiences often remain unaware of their own 'cultural lens', ignorant of the fact that it affects everything - the way they live, relationships, and professional practices. Such people may easily remain unaware that their values, practices and professional approaches are alienating and/or damaging those from other cultural perspectives (Howard, 2010; Smith, 1996). In order to avoid this, reflective practice is a major priority for educators wishing to become cross-culturally competent:

> The product of long-term power imbalances needs to be examined by educators at all levels, including their own cultural assumptions and a consideration of how they themselves might be participants in the systematic marginalisation of students in their classrooms, schools, and the wider system. (Bishop, O'Sullivan & Berryman, 2010)

Equality or Equity?

It is not uncommon for teachers in New Zealand in 2013 to describe themselves as 'treating all students the same'. Perhaps this statement arises from a lack of understanding that cultural identity is an indisputable part of a person's access to learning (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005). Helping a teacher to reposition their cultural lens when they believe that equal treatment is fair is a challenging task, and not a new one. Suffice to say, when put into the cultural context, this specific ignorance is one for which the only remedy is education, not coercion (Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005). The Advisory Group for the Auditor-General's work on Māori Education in 2012/13 suggests that the appropriate action may be to have 'courageous conversations' with educators who use the language of equality "to justify a refusal to move to culturally responsive teaching" (Auditor-General, 2012). Whatever action is taken to address this lack of shift, what we do know is that we cannot continue to ignore this perspective and allow it to go unchallenged.

Arrogance

Ignorance is, of course, not to be confused with arrogance. Ignorance is when one is unaware of how little one knows. Once we are aware of this and choose not to believe that it is our responsibility to improve our cross-cultural competency as professional educators, then we are exhibiting arrogance (Harris, 2013). The deliberate choice to not undertake cross-cultural learning may stem from views which consider the 'other' culture to be less desirable and even irrelevant in the educational context (Howard, 2010; Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005). Some teachers have refused to participate in such learning to the extent of feigning illness or even changing schools to escape the imperative. In cases where this arrogance is excessive, it then is possibly best described as racism (Shields, Bishop & Mazawi 2005).

Racism

Within education, as within health, racism paradigms which adhere to stereotypes and victim-blaming are a factor in slow changes within some schools (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Perso, 2012). Racism may be blatant or subtle, and the subtleties of institutionalised racism are hard to eliminate in national institutions (Howard, 2010; Loomis, 1990; Prasad, 2000). Some schools recognise, acknowledge and actively work to disempower and eliminate racist influences in their school communities. In many others, the 'politically correct' backlash is alive and well and various kinds of organised and deliberate acts of racism occur in staffrooms and classrooms (Howard, 2010; Perso, 2012). I believe that anti-racism workshops are under-utilised in education in New Zealand and many 'low level' instances of arrogance/racism go unchallenged and allow the deficit view to endure.

Fear

Fear is a very real barrier to teachers changing their practice. When one reads research and theses such as "Pākeha teachers, Māori students" (Lang, 2013) or "Understandings of being Pākeha" (Mitcalf, 2008), the risks awaiting Pākeha who step out of their own culture into that of Māori are very evident. Whether operating within dual cultural heritage, or surrendering one's own cultural identity to construct a 'blended identity', if such a change in cultural positioning risks surrendering one's cultural safety (Harris, 2013) it may engender what Tolich (2002) terms 'Pākeha Paralysis' instead. Despite having Māori whakapapa, my own fair-skinned appearance has certainly led to my experiencing name-calling, judgement and exclusion whilst endeavouring to operate authentically in a dual-cultural heritage paradigm. The phrase 'getting shot from both sides' well

describes these experiences and I am consequently only too aware of the fear such positioning generates. Whilst the rewards are eventually great, fear is a very real influence and the process to develop cross-cultural competency, once begun, can bring huge personal changes. Having once learnt another way of being and doing, it may prove hard to revert to a previous place in one's own cultural paradigm. With adequate support from those who have experienced such fear, I believe this barrier can be overcome. Often, however, such support simply does not exist.

Class Difference and Socio-economic Status

Class difference is also a factor along with cultural difference when considering effective cross-cultural teaching (Chapple, Jefferies & Walker, 1997; Wood, 1992). Differences in the degree of perceived self-empowerment may affect motivation, engagement and expectations of success. Class and/or cultural mismatches between teacher and student may create barriers to success. Although any socio-economic difference is discounted as a major factor for the disparity in education by some (Harker, 2006; Hattie & Australian Council for Educational Research, 2003), it is still acknowledged as an influence by others (Durie, 2006).

Social Justice Construct

The acknowledgement that disparities exist and need to be redressed is widespread (Durie, 2006; Kokiri, 2000). Successful educators have a stake in the success or failure of their learners and this stake is often born from their awareness of historic and current societal factors which impact negatively on learners (Cartledge, Gardner & Ford, 2008; Smith, 2012). This is a key component to successfully improving outcomes for Māori. Awareness of inequity, coupled with a commitment to reversing disparity, are powerful motivators for educators to strive to create an inclusive and equitable educational environment (Kokiri, 2000).

Empathy/Experiential Learning

Recognising that knowledge alone is not enough to create change, we know that if the heart is authentically engaged, and a sense of social justice (and possibly class empathy also) exists within a teacher's cognisance, we are likely to achieve a shift in teacher positioning (Cartledge, Gardner & Ford, 2008; Gibbs, 2006; Lang, 2013; Schon, 2005; Wood, 1992). One of the most powerful ways to develop this is to immerse oneself in real-life experiences which allow heart-level engagement in cultural richness which creates connectedness and understanding at a deeper level

than can ever be attained from books and readings (Ashton-Warner, 1964; Lang, 2013; Mitcalf, 2008). Relationships which are genuine and heartfelt offer a key to the crossing of all kinds of boundaries, cultural ones included (Rogers, 1969). Conversely, without genuine relationships, one is unlikely to connect across, and despite, difference (Bishop & Glynn, 2003). No matter how much one reads or thinks about cross-cultural competency, my own experience tells me that there is nothing like being part of something culturally special to open the heart and inform the mind. Being invited, being included and being willing to accept such opportunities are all valuable ways to grow one's cross-cultural competency.

Deeper Knowledge of Cultural Concepts/Values/Language

Understanding that ways of being and doing are culturally located is central to being able to operate cross-culturally. One must find ways to learn how to 'read' difference and diversity in order to successfully engage with those from other ways of being. To build upon the experiential learning discussed above, it is imperative to engage with unfamiliar cultural contexts through humility and openness to learning (Bevan-Brown, 2003; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Durie, 1998; Pere, 1997; Salek & McFarland, 2008). If we can learn about and work within the traditional Māori concepts of learning we have an enhanced chance of nurturing not only the teachers and the learners but the overall kaupapa (philosophy) as well (Durie, 2011).

CONCLUSION

The formidable body of literature which exists regarding culturally-responsive practice and which has been reviewed here, contains rich resources: performance indicators, success criteria, cultural competency benchmarks and suggested models for reform. No matter the continent, ethnicity or culture, they agree on the fundamental conditions which underpin successful cross-cultural education. While differences in opinion about socio-economic status and class as influencing factors on student success exist, overwhelmingly the findings agree on what needs doing. This still leaves us, however, with the problem of doing it. I have endeavoured to glean from the barriers and enablers some analysis and tentative conclusions presented throughout this paper.

Growing up in New Zealand is no guarantee of authentic connection with things Māori. Knowledge alone will not create cross-cultural competency. Connecting the heart with the head is vital in the establishing of genuine cross-

cultural partnerships. Once we apply the praxis of identified success factors to the heads and hearts of teachers and work from and through the obstacles without applying deficit models to our thinking about learners, we may see a change.

It is interesting to note that the first audit topic for the Auditor General's Office over 2012/13 is that of the implementation of Ka Hikitia. It is of no surprise to the author that the obvious question "Are there proper processes and practices in schools and other educational agencies to support that strategy?" is being asked (Part 4.7, Auditor-General, 2012). Perhaps the wider question is how we show schools and other educational agencies the way to build capacity so they are able to construct proper processes and practices to support the strategy; if they do not know what to do they cannot support it, no matter how well-intentioned they may be.

So as educators, how do we empower teachers to create learning environments which allow Māori students to succeed as Māori? I believe the challenge is to provide a learning experience for teachers, which empowers them to begin and/or move forward on this journey of effective cross-cultural teaching and learning, to provide them with a learning experience which develops capacity, diminishes fear and enables them to create a professional and personal future as inclusive, culturally-aware and competent citizens of New Zealand. It is my contention that we can only do this if we work within the recognised values that underpin Māori values themselves, within ako (learning and teaching), manaakitanga (kindness), and aroha (compassion). If we are to encourage teachers to embark upon a journey of cross-cultural discovery which may result in an abiding shift in their personal values, we must ensure we do everything to understand their risks and hurts, to gently support and challenge, and most of all, to walk alongside them when it gets tough. We need people who have experienced this pathway and know the road to guide the way through with persistence and aroha.

As Ashton-Warner once said "Love has the quality of informing almost everything - even one's work" (Ashton-Warner, 1964). So as we seek the beginning of the path, te timatanga o te ara, we look back and reflect on where we are travelling from:

> Ka titiro whakamuri, kia ahu whakamua, ka neke.

> *By looking into the past our current practice can be informed to create a pathway forward* (Johnson, Himiona-Hyland, MacLean & Te Atatu, n.d.)

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AUTHOR PROFILE

Lesleigh Henderson

Lesleigh Henderson is an RTLB from Cluster 17 in Te Rohe Potae/The King Country who has recently taken a Lead Practitioner role within the cluster. Having previously worked for five years as an Education Advisor for the University of Waikato, Lesleigh was engaged in working with secondary school teams to implement Te Kotahitanga across phases three, four and five. With a background in both primary and secondary teaching, an advisory role with Pathways Development was also part of the contracted work Lesleigh was engaged upon as an advisor. She is currently studying for the Postgraduate Diploma in Specialist Teaching.

Email

lhlesleigh@gmail.com