
Honouring Māori Subjectivities within Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa

JENNY RITCHIE

*Te Whare Wānanga o Wairaka –
Unitec New Zealand, Auckland, New Zealand*

ABSTRACT For the past decade educators working within early childhood services in Aotearoa have been challenged to deliver a curriculum that requires inclusive representation of Māori, the indigenous people, their language and culture. This article reflects on some responses to the challenge of this 'bicultural' curriculum, drawing upon research which has sought to identify some pathways which are enabling and honouring of this indigenous representation.

Introduction

In Aotearoa, discourses seeking to address/redress the imbalances of the legacy of colonisation have often been couched in terms of 'biculturalism', terminology cognisant of the two main cultures in this country: the indigenous Māori and the settlers of predominantly European ancestry, the Pākehā. This binary framing represents a colonial relationship (O'Sullivan, 2007) whereby notions of 'partnership' (Waitangi Tribunal, 2001) have disguised ongoing recolonising by the dominant Pākehā. Early childhood services in Aotearoa have historically been a community-derived and responsive, ideologically progressive and somewhat anarchic 'poor cousin', marginalised and positioned outside of the compulsory state education sector. The sociocultural paradigm underpinning our early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, presents not only a 'field of action', but a 'meadow of opportunity' (Duhn, 2007) for identifying post-colonial strategies that disengage us from the constraints of bicultural dichotomies, moving into terrain that validates and legitimises multiple subjectivities which enrich the possibilities for Māori to live as Māori (Durie, 2001), whilst simultaneously affirming the cultural particularities and meanings of all participants in the early childhood setting. The extent to which this meadow flourishes depends on the will to relinquish responses framed by the colonialist crutches of normalising 'truths' defined and determined from the assumption of the power to define (Jackson, 2007). This article will reflect on layerings of stories from recent research that contribute to journeys of post-colonial early childhood education practice within Aotearoa, demonstrating movement beyond limited incorporation of the Māori language defined and imposed by 'well-intentioned' Pākehā educators (Simon, 1996) to enactment resonant of deeper understandings of Māori ways of being, knowing and doing (Martin, 2005).

Colonised Histories

The *tino rangatiratanga* ('self-determination') that the 1840 Te Tiriti o Waitangi [1] stated was to be retained by Māori has been continuously undermined by the Crown's assumption of sovereignty, the imposition of colonial rule denying Māori aspirations. During the last three decades, we have seen long-standing Māori attempts to seek recognition and legitimacy for their languages and

traditions finally gain some traction through legislative and policy initiatives. Yet the damage wrought by two centuries of colonisation is extensive (Skerrett, 2007). Moana Jackson writes that

Destroying the world-view and culture of indigenous peoples has always been as important as taking their lives, because the actual process of disempowerment, the key purpose of any colonisation, has to function at the spiritual and psychic level as well as the physical and political. (Jackson, 2007, p. 178)

The power of the colonisers has rendered access to Māori subjectivities problematic, as core components of identity such as *whakapapa* (genealogical), connections to ancestral lands, values, language, stories and songs, knowledge of tribal histories, epistemologies and technologies, and daily spiritual enactment were devalued and invisibilised by the hegemonic dominant culture, with education settings playing a key role in this process (Durie, 1997). By the 1970s, Te Reo Māori was considered a dying language, having been inaccessible to several generations of Māori in most communities. Recent initiatives to revitalise the language have increased the numbers of Māori who speak their own language 'well or very well' to 9% (Te Puni Kōkiri – Ministry of Māori Development, 2007). The loss of language is inseparable from the loss of *tino rangatiratanga* and, consequently, 'revernacularisation of te reo Māori ... linked as it is to identity and rights to define and redefine' can be viewed as 'the linguistic component of *tino rangatiratanga*' (Skerrett, 2007, p. 8).

The Māori language is even more inaccessible, and largely invisible, to the non-Māori population. Fewer than 1% of the non-Māori population speak the language (Te Puni Kōkiri – Ministry of Māori Development, 2004), although there has been notable appropriation of Māori iconography over the years, such as the koru emblem on our national airline, and the symbol being adopted without appropriate consultation by a national sports team, The Warriors. This grasping has been ongoing despite the protestations of Māori, who have largely failed in their attempts to highlight the ongoing recolonising impact of these assimilationist practices (Smith, 1990; O'Sullivan, 2007). As Levinas (1987, p. 90) has warned: 'If one could possess, grasp and know the other, it would not be the other. Possessing, knowing, and grasping are synonyms of power.'

Accusations of tokenism have been levelled at many attempts to reflect *taha Māori* (Māori content within educational programmes), since this has been done poorly due to its grounding in deficit ideology, and without the necessary relationships with Māori (Smith, 1986, 1990; O'Sullivan, 2007). Most (93.1%) early childhood teachers working in services other than *Kōhanga Reo* (Māori-medium early childhood centres) are not Māori (Ministry of Education, 2004) and do not speak Māori or have an in-depth understanding of *tikanga Māori* ('Māori culture and values'). Only 1% of non-Māori early childhood teachers report using the Māori language more than 30% of their teaching time (Harkess, 2004). Although 75% of Pākehā early childhood teachers use some Māori whilst teaching, 70% of these teachers defined themselves as speaking Māori 'not very well' (Harkess, 2004). Whilst facility in their language is an aspiration for their children widely desired by Māori families, subjectivities available to children are constrained by the (in)competence of the educators who determine the education programme's learning experiences.

The socioculturally framed early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, albeit under-layered by its historical roots in Western early childhood theories including undercurrents of developmentalism (Duhn, 2007), holds potential for generating early childhood practices that reflect ethical possibilities for moving beyond historical imbalances (Gandhi, 1998). *Te Whāriki* is clear in its mandate that:

- New Zealand is the home of Māori language and culture: curriculum in early childhood settings should promote te reo and ngā tikanga Māori, making them visible and affirming their value for children from all cultural backgrounds. Adults working with children should demonstrate an understanding of the different *iwi* [tribes] and the meaning of whānau and whanaungatanga ['relationships']. (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 42)
- The curriculum should include Māori people, places and artefacts, and opportunities to learn and use the Māori language through social interaction (p. 43).

Despite these and other requirements of the early childhood curriculum, non-Māori teachers have struggled to offer more than token smatterings of Māori language and other content, some mindful of the potential to offend Māori with inaccurate offerings (Ritchie, 2002). Radhika Viruru

(2005, p. 7) laments the as yet unrealised potential of post-colonial theorising for unmasking ‘the will to power’, the hegemonic invisible power effects that are the ongoing legacy of our colonial history. Iris Duhn (2007, p. 3) has recently enquired as to how teachers can use sociocultural and Foucaultian theory to “‘structure the possible field of action” (Foucault, 1983, p. 221) in such a way that the field of action becomes a meadow of opportunities rather than a barren wasteland?’ This restructuring requires a reconsideration and revocation of our role as recolonising educators, who have historically viewed ourselves as repositories of knowledges, as programme determinators, to a reconceptualised relinquishment of our mandate as ‘experts’ (Ritchie, 2002). In our endeavour to shift our horizons beyond the constraints of the colonising gaze assumed by Western academics (O’Loughlin, 2006), we may begin to unshackle ourselves from the sense of security derived from the positivistic scaffolds that have provided our foundations, instead embracing intuitive holistic ways of (un)knowing that transcend concretised representations and categorisations.

Previous Research

As part of a wider study focusing on the implementation of a commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi within early childhood teacher education (Ritchie, 2002), on observing early childhood practice in a range of centres, I was concerned not only at the paucity of Māori language being utilised by the teachers, but also at the colonised/ing nature of the models of Māori language being employed (Ritchie, 1999). The main use of the language was in simple command formats: ‘*Haere mai ki te kai*’ (‘Come and eat’); ‘*E tu tamariki*’ (‘Stand up, children’); ‘*E noho*’ (‘Sit down’); ‘*Haere mai ki te whāriki*’ (‘Come to the mat’); ‘*Horoi o ringaringa*’ (‘Wash your hands’). There were also examples of counting and naming colours in Te Reo Māori, and other instances of the insertion of single Māori words within some of their regular English sentences, such as in this example: ‘Do you want some fruit? Some *panana* [‘banana’] or some *āporo* [‘apple’]? Turn on your *taringa* [‘ear(s)’], zip up your *waha* [‘mouth’].’ I reflected that the teachers were in need of support and encouragement to broaden their ‘comfort zone’ beyond single words, to using complete and more complex phrases that represented linguistically authentic Māori structures as opposed to inserting token Māori words into English grammatical frameworks, which I viewed as colonising. I suggested that teachers consider widening the range of formats in which they used Māori phrases, in order to avoid the sense that they were delivering recolonising, sanitised, negative and narrow models of Māori language.

In 2006, my colleague Cheryl Rau and I completed a study (Ritchie & Rau, 2006) which involved early childhood educators, teacher educators, specialist educators from an *iwi* education initiative and professional learning providers.[2] Using narrative and kaupapa Māori methodologies (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Bishop, 1996; Schulz et al, 1997; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Smith, 1999; Rau & Ritchie, 2005; Ritchie & Rau, 2005), we aimed to articulate some ways that early childhood educators were encouraging the participation of *whānau Māori* (‘Māori families’) within early childhood education settings, as well as to identify strategies by which these educators were implementing their understandings of commitments derived from Te Tiriti o Waitangi and expressed in the bicultural early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, through the delivery of Tiriti-based programmes.

Māori parents in this project sought early childhood services that delivered the Māori language as part of the everyday programme. An aspiration for not only Tiriti-based early childhood education, but for our future communities was expressed as: ‘I would like to see our *tamariki* (‘children’) being bilingual and being completely comfortable in either Māori or Pākehā settings – having an understanding of the protocols or expected behaviour in these, that is, bicultural.’ This vision transcends political or policy statements in the simplicity of its expectation as a lived enactment. It also reflects the commitment to honouring the Māori language and knowledges that is stated elsewhere in *Te Whāriki*, but not evident in the curriculum’s aspiration for children ‘[t]o grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society’ (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9).

Respondents in data contributed to the study by Hei Ara Kōkiri Tuwharetoa Education Initiative viewed the Māori language and cultural practices as being holistically and simultaneously

enacted. Strategies for strengthening the delivery of *te reo me ōna tikanga* (Māori language and culture) in the local early childhood services included educators fluent in Te Reo Māori, *waiata* ('songs') and *pakiwaitara* ('stories') familiar with local *iwi tikanga* and *kawa* ('customs', 'tribal protocols') and able to involve the centre *whānau* in wider *iwi* community activities (such as *kapa haka* festivals).[3] A priority was the need for support for educators to enhance their competence in these areas, and the valuing of ongoing *whānau* involvement, including that of *kuia* (elder women) and *kaumātua* ('elders'), in centre Te Reo and *tikanga* implementation.

Māori parents and *whānau* within the study sought a match between their values and those enacted within educational settings. They valued a sense of *whanaungatanga* generated and enacted within the early childhood centre, whereby *tamariki* and *whānau*, *kuia* and *kaumātua*, and 'aunties' participate as a collective, learning and teaching alongside the teachers and children, and where educators share responsibility and demonstrate a willingness to identify and support the needs of all members of that collective. In this vision, Te Reo Māori is modelled throughout the programme, included in daily rituals and activities that reflect and resonate integral Māori values such as rituals of welcoming and farewell, sharing of *kai* ('food') – a value of inclusiveness – reference to Te Ao Wairua (the spiritual dimension) and Ngā Atua ('supernatural beings' or 'gods'), and annual celebrations such as Matariki.[4] These rituals not only provide learning of language(s) that is meaningful and contextual for both children and families, but are an enactment of the Māori value of *manaakitanga*, the obligation to care for others.

At her Māori-focused play centre, Ana [5] provided opportunities for working with natural materials such as *harakeke*, the weaving of flax affording a source of learning of traditional knowledges:

Harakeke became a vehicle to disseminate education about Māori values about our *Atua Māori*, about a way to behave, *tikanga*, *ae* ['yes'] everything. And our *tamariki* learned alongside of us, we just provided opportunity for them too, they could do it just like us.

Thus, in Ana's play centre, the *whānau* offered a process of 'guided participation', children and adult participants working alongside one another, extending their understandings together through shared involvement in culturally meaningful activities (Rogoff et al, 1993), Māori values such as spiritual protection being enacted implicitly.

Tui, a Māori kindergarten teacher, reflected on how she incorporated Te Reo Māori in both her planning and teaching, modelling its use within contexts such as mat times, an uncompromising, brave and almost defiant stance within the Pākehā-dominated world of kindergarten teaching:

I made a point to do most of my mat-time in te reo Māori, so that's what I was wanting to do. I made a point of doing my planning in te reo Māori and had it up on the board. That was more for myself really, that planning part, because that's what I wanted to focus on, but in terms of mat-time I wanted to be able to show that even though it is in a different language, all children can follow, it's not necessarily about what's coming out, it's how you deliver it, and that you can still get everyone on board, and it's still okay.

Tui's work demonstrates a renormalising (Smith, 1999) of Te Reo Māori as a pedagogical medium, a rare occurrence in early childhood centres other than Kōhanga Reo, which offer Māori immersion *whānau* development programmes. Tui proactively asserts her *tinu rangatiratanga*, an 'affirmation and reformation of Māori identity, indigeneity, self-definition, and self-decision by Māori, in Māori, for Māori, for the nation' (Skerrett, 2007, p. 8).

A respondent from the Hei Ara Kōkiri Tuwharetoa Education Initiative data felt strongly that early childhood services can only provide quality models of Te Reo Māori if this is modelled by the teachers:

To be fully bicultural and therefore bilingual all children in Aotearoa/NZ [New Zealand] should have the opportunity to learn to be fluent in Māori and English and develop understanding of both cultures' world view. We need proficient Māori-speaking teachers in all ECE [early childhood education] learning environments. It is not enough to use Māori language in directives – information – acknowledgment contexts. We need to work towards providing environments where children can use the target language, be completely immersed in te reo Māori. We need to promote environments where the conscientisation of language is constructed as normal to

prevent dialogue being used by teachers to act on children. Teachers and children need to be using dialogue to work with each other – co-constructing. In order to reflect this, we need to provide environments rich in Māori language. We need proficient speaking Māori teachers! Regurgitating learnt phrases will not provide the opportunities for children to really conscientise their experiences, that is, thinking in Māori. Only a very high level of exposure in Māori will do that.

This, then, is the challenge to early childhood services in this country – to move beyond complacent, tokenistic, colonised and recolonising discourses. It is an inclusive vision, whereby bilingual/bicultural understandings are subjectivities offered to *all* children, not only Māori. It also posits a view of children as active collaborators in the co-construction of shared understandings, children who exercise their *tino rangatiratanga*. Mere Skerrett (2007, p. 6) sees this as the capacity 'to think critically and respond collectively in order to mediate external influences and the rate of change which impacts upon our lives and resources'. The commitment of educators to building relationships with Māori families and communities, and engaging in critical dialogue are central factors for transcending the dominant early childhood discourses, bridging between envisioning and enactment of programmes where Māori aspirations are prioritised and thus renormalised.

Te Puawaitanga

In our 2006-07 Teaching and Learning Research Initiative project [6], Cheryl Rau and I worked with early childhood educator co-researchers, again utilising both narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Clandinin, 2007) and kaupapa Māori methodologies (Smith, 1999, 2005; Bishop, 2005) to elicit the perspectives of children and families within early childhood centres that were committed to programmes that honoured Māori knowledges, values and language(s).

In one kindergarten, where the teachers have a long-standing commitment to enacting a Māori philosophy in daily rituals and practice, the teachers enquired from a Māori child's father, Leonard, as to why he and his partner continued to bring their children to this early childhood centre. Leonard considered that the kindergarten

Fosters an atmosphere where children are encouraged to reaffirm their identity through:

- Karakia –
 - timatanga
 - mo te kai
 - whakamutunga [7]
- Waiata which establish links with mana whenua and tangata whenua [8]
- Introduction (formally) to new children in class and establishing links with other children already engaged in class (Whakawhanaungatanga)
- Field trips to make connections with local rohe [area] recognising importance of Te Taiao ['the wider environment'] (e.g. Te Winika [9] visit and Roger Hamon Bush)
- Recognition of the importance of each individual child and their contribution to the wairua ['spiritual interconnectedness'] and mauri ['life force'] of the group.
- Strong use of Te Reo and Mātauranga ['knowledge'] throughout learning and non-learning situations

Leonard wrote that:

All of the above mentioned items have (I believe) a profound effect on breaking down perceived barriers which often hinder Māori parents' full involvement in their children's education due to being 'whakamā' or shy. The above mentioned points in fact reinforce kaupapa Māori by observance of tikanga and kawa whilst not impinging on the needs of non-Māori children and families.

Leonard is confident in his articulation that this kindergarten is affirming of his aspirations for his children's identity and spiritual well-being as *tamariki Māori*. This is significant, since, as Arohia Durie (1997, p. 161) writes: 'The persons we believe ourselves to be will continue to be related to time and place, governed by an essential core of self-perception established in the earliest years of life.'

This kindergarten employs a Māori educator, Pania, who has very close links to Tainui, the tribe that in 2006 lost their much-loved Queen, Te Arikinui Dame Te Atairangikaahu. During the extended period of the *tangi* ('funeral'), the kindergarten's head teacher, Penny, focused on enabling their children to understand why Pania, the other teacher, was away supporting the events at the *tangi*. Children expressed their understandings through art and discussion, and sharing newspaper clippings that they brought along and displayed. A year later, through their long-standing relationships with tribal members, the kindergarten *whānau* were invited to attend the Tainui commemorations for Te Arikinui Dame Te Atairangikaahu, the mostly non-Māori children and parents participating alongside tribal members in a ritual that is not often part of non-indigenous experience.

During the Te Puawaitanga study, Margaret, the head teacher at a different kindergarten, had engaged in in-depth discussions with parents of children attending the centre as part of her involvement in the research. This had led to reflection regarding the dispositions of teachers in that centre:

An interesting comment that one of our Pākehā mothers through the interview was saying how wonderful and warm and welcoming and inclusive the place was and she said, 'Tell me is that because you are trying really strongly to deliver a bicultural programme here in this kindergarten, or is that because it's you guys?' And we found it interesting to stop and think: 'Okay now, is this about our personalities, is this who we are?' And after lots of discussion I was excited and kind of encouraged to be able to say to the team, 'Yes, there's an openness there, and that openness people recognise as an embracing, and that actually we want to know who you are, we want to share who you are and this is who we are.' Yes, it's kind of a dovetailing of a person who's growing and is open and is understanding and is inclusive, but it's also that person has embraced an understanding and is trying to represent that in a way that is visible, not only on the walls, but is visible in life. Actually, it's not about who I am, it's because I'm committed to delivering that, and so I will behave like this to do that and I will reflect like this to do that.

Margaret had also noticed how her team of Pākehā teachers had shifted in their practice during their participation in the study:

The spin-off has been in our team is that when we're looking at self-review on any aspect of the programme or the routines or what's happening in the kindergarten and all aspects of it, it is now a question that's always asked: 'How will this impact on Māori? How will this impact on how we will deliver this? What will we need to say about that?' And I'm not saying that we're good at that yet, but I'm excited to say that actually now my team think about that and so I think that's been a shift for us, and I have seen growth in the way the team welcome new Māori families that come into kindergarten, and so that's really encouraging for me to see, because they are growing...

Reflections: the journey continues

Over the course of these various studies, we have sensed an (in)tangible quality in these educators whose commitment to enacting what we have been terming 'Tiriti-based practice' resonates as an *ahua hūmarie*, an 'ethical and spiritual way of being', which is less visible in the practice of those for whom Māori content is a compliance inserted within a dominant paradigm. Our research lenses, and those of the educators who have been integral to our studies, have shifted from a more critical focus on the quality of the Māori language and content delivered within programmes, to a consideration of the integrated enactment of Māori values, such as rituals of welcoming and spiritual well-being. In Aotearoa, the colonialist project, in attempting to avoid some of the constraints of the British 'motherland', such as the rigid class system and state religion, nevertheless struggled with the notion of secular education espoused in the 1877 Education Act. The dominant paradigm of rationalistic, positivist, techno-scientific knowledge further eroded possibilities for spirituality to be celebrated outside of religious doctrine, Māori notions of *wairuatanga* ('spiritual interconnectedness') being ignored by the dominant Western culture along with other core Māori values. Early childhood education, steeped in a historical discourse of care, and progressive in its

validation of Māori, is beginning now also to reaffirm spirituality as intrinsic to well-being, seeking pathways of spiritual 'witness' (Bone, 2007).

Post-colonial theory, in offering us the challenge of theorising 'a process of disengagement with the whole colonial syndrome' (Hulme, 1995, p. 120, in Loomba, 2005, p. 21), seeks to uncover or discover patterns of knowing, being and doing that refute the will to reinscribe the colonising mindset. Modernist, secular, positivist assumptions give sway to respectful engagement with opportunities that create the 'meadows of possibilities' (Duhn, 2007), allowing for subjective positionings that are validating of Māori identities and knowledges. Penny's commitment and support in enabling Pania to fulfil her obligations to her *iwi*, and Margaret's leadership within her team, modelling a respectful openness to embrace the Other, have resonance with Levinas' statement that 'to take on responsibility for the Other, ethics, and to take on the Other's responsibilities, justice, is to enter into a *sacred* rather than an ontological or epistemological history' (Cohen, 1987, p. 24). These teachers' philosophical commitment and enactment are in contrast with Western positivistic secularity and individualistic endorsement of egocentrism, their focus shifting instead to 'my responsibility for the other person, without concern for reciprocity, in my call to help him gratuitously, in the asymmetry of the relation of *one* to the *other*' (Levinas, 1988, p. 165). Generating these shared spaces represents a movement beyond colonised binaries of coloniser/colonised subjectivities, yet at the same time operates in a place which remains deeply mindful of the pain and trauma still reflected profoundly in the negative social statistics for Māori (Ministry of Health, 2006) that is the ongoing legacy of colonisation.

Correspondence: Jenny Ritchie, Box 184, Raglan, New Zealand (jritchie@unitec.ac.nz).

Notes

- [1] This treaty, signed by Māori tribal chiefs and the British Crown, was initiated by the Crown in order to legitimate the presence of immigrants, initially from Britain, alongside the *tangata whenua* Māori, the indigenous 'people of this land'. Whilst allowing British settlement, the treaty also promised that Māori would retain their *tino rangatiratanga* ('self-determination') of everything of value to them.
- [2] This project was funded through the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative, a fund provided by the New Zealand Ministry of Education and administered by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. We gratefully acknowledge the support and participation of Hei Ara Kōkiri Tuwharetoa Education Initiative in the study.
- [3] *Kapa haka* are performances involving song and dance.
- [4] Matariki is the constellation whose arrival announces the Māori New Year.
- [5] Names have been changed.
- [6] 'Te *puawaitanga* - partnerships with *tamariki* and *whānau* in bicultural early childhood care and education', was funded by the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative, administered by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- [7] *Karakia* are spiritual incantations. *Karakia tīmatanga* are utilised at the start of the day or gathering; *karakia mo te kai* take place before eating; and *karakia whakamutunga* take place at the close of the day or gathering.
- [8] *Mana whenua* are the people who hold *mana* ('prestige') because of their ancestral connections to a particular *whenua* ('area of land').
- [9] Te Winika is a historical *waka* ('canoe') of the Tainui tribe, which is cared for by a local museum. Roger Hamon Bush is an area of native forest in close to the kindergarten's urban setting.

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