

Becoming Cognisant of Research Informed by Kaupapa Māori in Early Childhood Education: Issues and Contexts

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Original Research Methodology Paper

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Abstract

*This paper outlines tensions existing within student teacher self-study action research projects undertaken as a requirement of a Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) at Te Whare Waananga o Wairaka Unitec Institute of Technology (Unitec). Whilst student teachers in our programme are expected to engage in Kaupapa Māori knowledge, the meaningfulness of this engagement is questionable for student teachers undertaking self-study action research. In response to these tensions a research framework is proposed which would serve to guide student teachers as researchers to engage more meaningfully with Kaupapa Māori knowledge. The framework draws on the seminal works of Rangimarie Rose Pere, *Te Wheke, a celebration of infinite wisdom* (1991), the bicultural curriculum for early childhood, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), and *Te whatu pōkeka: Kaupapa Māori assessment for learning: Early childhood exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2009). The kaupapa Māori research principles of mana, mauri and wairua are related to the action research cycle, as outlined by Cardno (2003), with examples of these principles in action within the research process.*

Key words: Kaupapa Māori knowledge; student teacher as researcher; action research; mana; mauri; wairua.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to highlight the challenges faced in the meaningful incorporation of Kaupapa Māori principles and values (L. Smith, 1999) within student teacher research projects. The paper begins with an overview of the place of Kaupapa Māori within early childhood education (ECE), leading into a detailed account of the situation within a Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) (BTchgECE) programme, and student self-study action research projects. Potential ways of overcoming the challenges faced in the meaningful incorporation of Kaupapa Māori research related principles and values will be presented. It is hoped that this paper will provide a launching point for on-going critical dialogue into the development of research methodologies suited to the bi-cultural field of early childhood education.

Kaupapa Māori and early childhood teacher education

In Aotearoa the curriculum document that informs teachers' work in ECE, *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa* (Ministry of Education, 1996), is underpinned and informed by tikanga Māori (Māori customary values and practices). In 2009 *Te whatu pōkeka: Kaupapa Māori assessment for learning: Early childhood exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2009) was introduced, breathing life in to the principles and strands that are embedded in *Te Whāriki*. Thus it can be seen that, by default teachers in the field of early childhood education are necessarily engaging in Māori knowledge. Therefore they need to be cognisant of this when undertaking research within the context of early childhood education.

Students in the BTchgECE programme at Unitec are required to engage with Kaupapa Māori research principles and values, which are considered by the programme to be essential to research integrity undertaken within the context of ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand. A challenge to meaningful engagement is the lack of clarity and consensus amongst students and teacher educators regarding which principles and values best uphold integrity within student teacher research projects. The depth of understanding that student teachers should have about Kaupapa Māori research principles and values, in order to make it meaningful constitutes a research tension (Pihama, 2001.)

Context of student teacher research

Within our programme, the BTchgECE at Unitec, students in the final year of study are required to undertake an action research project with a self-study focus. The overall aim of the research paper is for students to cast a critical gaze over an area of their own teaching practice, in order to improve a specific aspect of their practice. The research is situated within the student's teaching practice in their home based work-experience centres, where they complete a minimum of 12 hours per week teaching practice. This research paper is delivered over two semesters during which time students also undertake a number of other papers and alongside these complete a five week practicum where they are away from their home centres.

At present the student teachers are required to use an action research methodology based on the model developed by Cardno (2003) consisting of three phases: reconnaissance, intervention and evaluation. The action research methodology enables student teachers to hone in on a specific area of their own practice and, in the process of gathering data about their teaching practice from the perspective of others, develop an intervention plan to bring about change informed by literature and relevant professional documentation. The final phase of the action research process involves the gathering of further data to seek a formal measure of the effectiveness of the changes made within the student teachers' practice. Data at this final evaluation phase is sought from the

perspectives of others, and is related back to relevant literature and documentation pertinent to early childhood teaching.

Tensions within student teacher research

The research process is fraught with tension at various levels in the meaningful incorporation of Kaupapa Māori principles and values within practitioner focused research: the methodological level; the level of the research context; and the level of researcher.

Methodological tensions

Tensions at the methodological level relate to the following issues. Initial consideration goes to addressing the issue of which kaupapa Māori principles and values should be incorporated in practitioner self-study research and why. Whilst there are the principles of whakamana, ngā hononga, whānau tangata, and kotahitanga within *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) that are significant to the role of early childhood teaching practices, they are not aligned with the action research methodology required for the student teachers self-study projects. This article explores Kaupapa Māori principles and values which align with the phases of an action research processes involving articulation of current knowledge of practice, identification of better practices and the evaluation of such new practices for all involved.

A subsequent methodological challenge becomes that of knowing, and more importantly the depth of knowing required for students to meaningfully engage with Kaupapa Māori research principles and values, as highlighted by Ritchie & Rau (2008). In the research context the challenge becomes one of engaging in epistemological critique of relevance within the research process as an actualised experience, rather than a mere theoretical exercise. As such it is claimed that:

This requires teachers to shift from their traditional role of expert and become collaborators alongside children. In this paradigm, collaboration with whanau/parents extends throughout the entire early childhood programme and includes a willingness to incorporate different world views into everyday knowledge and practice. (Ritchie & Rau, 2008, p. 4)

Epistemological critique involves a theoretical consideration of Kaupapa Māori and ECE research, as well as critique of the actual research process as a lived experience. The incorporation of Kaupapa Māori values and principles that are already familiar to the student teacher enables this process.

A challenge to meaningful incorporation of Kaupapa Māori research principles and values is also associated with the context of student teacher research as an assessment activity. The assessment framework plays a determining role in terms of research scope, research methodology (associated also with ethical

approvals), time-frames for the phases of the action research cycle and the reporting of research findings. The framework proposed in Kaupapa Māori research (Pihama, 2001; L. Smith, 1999) requires more extensive commitment than the student teacher as researcher is able to provide due to the pressure from assessment and programme time-frames, and the depth of understanding required of Kaupapa Māori concepts. Identifying appropriate principles and values in keeping with the wider research process has the potential to enable students to engage more deeply and meaningfully with Kaupapa Māori, and in turn engage in more effective and sustainable practitioner research.

Contextual tensions

In this instance student teacher self-study action research projects are undertaken in early childhood centres where the student teacher undertakes weekly term based teaching practice as part of the field-based BTchgECE credential process. With the introduction of practitioner research the work context also becomes a research context. As research context it is observed that the student teachers experience tensions relating to the balancing of the responsibilities and relationships held as student, teacher, research participant and researcher.

The practitioner research process involves a time of intense self-focus, with the student teacher directing not only their own gaze but that of colleagues and sometimes parents onto their own personal teaching practices as an emerging teacher (Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, Friedman, & Pine, 2009). The research process involves the collection of formal research data, with participation typically being sought from teaching colleagues and occasionally children's caregiver's. Research data is therefore normally gathered during the teaching day. Time as well as role becomes a point of tension for those involved, when the student's need to meet assessment criteria associated with the research project impact on the demands of the teaching day and responsibilities therein. Time to provide data, for instance in the form of observations, questionnaires, group or individual interviews, can cause tension when colleagues are asked to take on dual roles as teacher and research participant at any one time. A further associated challenge is that of connecting the realities of practitioner research with the desired principles and values which uphold research integrity in terms of participant confidentiality, anonymity, reliability of data and the on-going relationships between researcher, colleagues and parents.

Despite the self-review processes required for teachers within ECE (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009) the obligation to undertake actual research is only placed on the student teacher during the credentialing process. As self-study action research is first and foremost about casting a critical gaze over one's personal teaching practice (Cardno, 2003; Sandretto, 2009). This process has the additional impact of extending the critical gaze to the research context of the early childhood centre. The culture of every centre is open to wide spread

variation. As such, the alignment of the critical gaze of the student teacher in their role as researcher may act to unveil centre practices which may be far from the desired. The research process becomes one of creating vulnerabilities as well as desired potential growth, with research processes potentially acting to empower or disempower those in its wake. The application of the Māori principles of mana, mauri, and wairua maintain care, uphold integrity and dignity of the research itself, the researcher herself or himself, the participants and the research site could enable the student teacher as researcher to mediate and manage these tensions.

Researcher tensions

So far tensions associated with student teacher action research projects have been considered in terms of methodology and context. The final area of tension to be discussed within this paper is that of researcher tensions. These are tensions experienced specifically by student teachers as they take on the role of researcher. For some students the initial challenge becomes that of looking inward, of casting the critical gaze over the self. For some this is about being self-analytical, for others it is about assumptions underlying quality research in general.

Being self-analytical is embedded within the reflective features of teacher education and even the self-review processes required of early childhood centres. The self-study action research process however, requires that students engage more deeply with self-critique. Students are also required to engage in the gathering of perspectives and feedback from others, as opposed to critiquing the practice of colleagues or centre routines, thus limiting othering-effects (Eikeland, 2006). This self-critique opens up the student teacher as researcher in terms of being responsive to the feedback from others, whilst also validating their teaching practices in terms of identifying and putting into action suitable plans for change. Through self-study action research the student teacher as researcher is positioned reflexively in examining their own practice from a new theoretical perspective (Edwards, 2010). As teaching practices within ECE are required to align with the bi-cultural framework of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) the student, as previously argued is required to be responsive to Kaupapa Māori forms of knowledge as they develop their intervention phase strategies, but it is unclear what this knowledge should consist of and consequently is at risk of misrepresentation and or tokenistic efforts (G. Smith, 2012).

Further tension exists when the desire to achieve high grades overtakes the intended action research outcome of meaningful change to teaching practice. This is associated with topic selection and the aspect of their teaching practice that student teachers seek to improve. Tension between issues of high grades and research outcome relates as much to professional integrity as it does to methodological matters. It is acknowledged that learning to become a

researcher is a pursuit that involves a range of emotions, raises a range of issues both personal and professional, and requires a range of skills that are not learned immediately. It is perhaps questionable whether or not it is possible to address the range of tensions outlined associated with self-efficacy, through a methodological approach to research. However, Rangimarie Rose Pere through her internationally acclaimed work, *Te wheke, a celebration of infinite wisdom* (Pere, 1991, 1997), has shown over and over that understanding and ascribing to the dimensions encompassed in her model of human consciousness is key to unlocking the potential that exists in each person (Pere, 2009). The inclusion of a set of Kaupapa Māori principles could enhance the self-awareness of the student teacher as researcher, which is a key goal of the action research projects. As well, it provides a lens for engaging in realities and perceptions of children and whanau in the centre, and honouring the position of the centre whilst maintaining academic and research integrity and rigour.

As teaching practices within ECE are required to align with the bi-cultural framework of *Te Whāriki*, the student, as previously argued is required to be responsive to Kaupapa Māori forms of knowledge (Rameka & Walker, 2012) as they develop their intervention phase strategies. But it is unclear as to what this knowledge should consist of or look like. This knowledge is intended to support the integrity of the research in terms of the action research cycle, and at present is not easily and meaningfully visible for students within current action research frameworks. The Māori principles of mana, mauri and wairua as outlined in *Te wheke* (Pere, 1997) are familiar to students as they are also essential principles and values embedded in other key early childhood documents such as *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) the early childhood curriculum document and *Te Whatu Pōkeka* (Ministry of Education, 2009).

A way forward

The following approach has been proposed to address the fore mentioned tensions associated with student teachers as researchers undertaking self-study action research projects. The response begins with an outline of kaupapa Māori research, moving on to explore how *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) with *Te Whatu Pōkeka* (Ministry of Education, 2009), can be used to inform the action research process for student teachers as researchers within the ECE sector.

Kaupapa Māori research

There are always going to be varying arguments about what Kaupapa Māori research is, who should conduct it, for whom is it appropriate and even in which language it should be conducted (L. Smith, 1999). There are also somewhat misinformed views from critics of Kaupapa Māori research concerned that it is not impartial, nor is it objective and may result in epistemological and methodological favouritism (Marie & Haig, 2006).

Furthermore, a critique of action research methodologies may or may not highlight research juxtapositions. However, Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) view that Kaupapa Māori is an approach to conducting research that informs, guides and protects the research, the researcher and the researched whatever the methodology being undertaken resonates best with the ECE bi-cultural framework. Russell Bishop and Ted Glynn (Bishop & Glynn, 1999) state that non-Māori have an ethical responsibility to undertake research based on the principles of partnership, participation and protection that emerged from *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*. Since students working in ECE must engage in Māori knowledge, they should be informed by a research methodology that includes Māori knowledge.

All research has an ethical duty of care. Research within ECE contexts involves particular consideration given the vulnerability of infants and young children, thus the protection of all infants and young children is paramount to meeting ethical codes of conduct. Kaupapa Māori research requires manaakitanga (or care and protection) at the level of the research, the researcher *and* the researched (L. Smith, 1999). There are some striking similarities between early childhood focussed research and Kaupapa Māori research, in terms of ensuring the protection, rights and sensitivities of the researched. Ngahua Te Awekotuku created a research framework which identified the responsibilities researchers have when working with Māori (L. Smith, 1999). The framework constitutes a set of ethical principles aimed at respect for and protection of the rights and interests of the researched. These have come to be seen as the guiding principles for Māori researchers. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's ground breaking book *Decolonising methodologies: Research and indigenous people* (L. Smith, 1999) advances knowledge of Kaupapa Māori research and outlines how Te Awekotuku's framework is prescribed for Māori in cultural terms that demonstrates and legitimates Māori ways of being, knowing and doing.

However a challenge remains in terms of what is required before a beginning researcher, often with limited prior knowledge of te reo me ngā tikanga Māori (Māori language and customary practices) can meaningfully apply Kaupapa Māori approaches within their own research. This puts further pressure on research required by student teachers in terms of time-frames, research integrity, and the preparedness of student teachers to engage in Māori knowledge.

Weaving Te Whāriki with Te Whatu Pōkeka

In 2009 the Ministry of Education launched the first Kaupapa Māori assessment document for ECE, *Te Whatu Pōkeka*. The writing team, headed by Rita Walker and Tony Walker made a critical contribution to further weaving tikanga Māori through the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*. The key concepts emerging from *Te Whatu Pōkeka* include scope for teachers to reflect on and assess how their involvement in the learning process has supported essential

characteristics, indicative of ways of being in children (ngā āhuatanga o te tamaiti). They are outlined by Rita Walker (2008, p. 7) as:

- Te wairua o te tamaiti: The child as an emotional being.
- He mana tō te tamaiti: The child has potential and power.
- He mauri tangata: The child as an energetic life force.

Wairua, mana and mauri are characteristics considered to be amongst the essential dimensions of healthy development (Pere, 1997). They form the basis of the human person. Over the course of three years student teachers in the BTchgECE programme at Unitec are introduced to and familiarised with these characteristics and other related tikanga through the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). This curriculum document is claimed to be the first bi-cultural curriculum document in Aotearoa. It has been informed by Kaupapa Māori and strongly influenced by the work of the great social scientist and world renowned Māori theorist Rangimarie Rose Turuki Pere (1991, 2009) as well as Mason Durie's (1985) model of healthy development, *Te whare tapa wha*. The Aotearoa / New Zealand early childhood sector itself is upheld as having an internationally unique approach, partly due to the fact that it has a bi-cultural curriculum (McLachlan, 2011). Teacher education programmes therefore have a key role to play in preparing and producing teachers with strong bi-cultural practices to implement kaupapa Māori appropriately in their teaching practice. In our own programme it is expected that by the time students undertake research they will have a sound grounding in the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) which is comprised of an interwoven set of principles and strands. When viewed closely and understood deeply, the principles and strands can be seen to uphold te mana, te mauri, te wairua o te tamaiti. This will be discussed further in the following section.

Foundational understanding of mana, mauri and wairua

Within kaupapa Māori children are acknowledged as heirs to several attributes including mana, mauri and wairua which are fundamental to their social, emotional and spiritual development (Mead, 2003). Whilst by no means comprehensive, this initial brief over view of each of these principles will demonstrate how mana, mauri and wairua can guide the research and the researcher within the ECE context.

Taha wairua or the spiritual dimension is considered to be inseparable from taha tinana, the physical dimension (Pere, 1997). Wairua is concerned with, but not limited to the spirit of a person, and also involves the energies and essences of the physical world. In ECE children are recognised as being spiritual beings (Ministry of Education, 1996). Each culture, and every person and child has their own unique way of responding to spirituality (Pere, 1997). Wairua

denotes the sanctity and unique intuitive intelligences that children are born with and are tuned in to (Walker, 2008).

Mauri according to Pere (1994) represents the life principle that protects energy, vitality and fruitfulness of people, lands, forests, buildings and so on. It concerns, but is not limited to human wellbeing, to a person's sense of self and how respected and accepted they may feel. Related to mauri is the principle of Tangata mauri, which deals with the essence of an organisation and the politics of the society in which a group operates (Pere, 1994, 1997). The mauri of a group is affected by decisions made. Similarly the mauri of the individual is affected by how they are challenged and are required to defend decisions made. According to Pere (1991), society is complex and children need insight in to how societies rule and govern. The whanau unit is the place where they may receive this insight. Perhaps involving whanau in research by sharing the topic under investigation, and journeying together in a meaningful and sustained dialogue (Bishop & Glynn, 1999) will provide children and whanau with the capacity to have that insight as definers of their destiny.

Mana is explained by Rangimarie Rose Pere as divine right, influence and prestige (Pere, 1997). Pere (1994) points out that mana is a complex concept that includes vested and acquired authority and influence. It may include being influential and possessing qualities that are able to influence, protect, and lead. Mana is associated with concepts of aroha (empathy) and utu (reciprocity). By analysing the different ways that mana is upheld and maintained, as described by Pere (1994), it is possible to see how the mana and therefore integrity of an organisation or group is maintained, protected, and upheld when individuals unite despite their differences.

Mana atua represents the absolute uniqueness of the individual. In the Māori world view everything across the universe from the smallest blade of grass to the spiders, trees, birds, forests have the same divine rights as people, who in turn all have the same divine rights as each other based on the principle of Mana atua (Pere, 1997). This demonstrates whakawhanaungatanga, the interconnectedness between people, place space and time (Heta-Lensen, 2005). In the same way Māori view knowledge as interconnected parts of a whole. Just as it is not possible to divorce the spiritual from the social or physical, it is not possible to divorce mana, mauri or wairua from each other. They co-exist to support and add to the power, prestige and influence of people, place, space and time. Therefore mana, mauri and wairua can provide a cohesive and holistic research framework for research that adds to the research dynamic and process in the same ways.

The basic foundational knowledge of the principles of mana, mauri and wairua specifically relate to the overall research process within ECE contexts in terms of:

- **Inclusion of the centre in the research process:** through sharing of research topic, negotiation in terms of data collection and how this process is managed and manageable within the centre environment. This is an example of the principle of mauri in action.
- **Acknowledgment of the child's voice within the research:** This is where the student teacher as researcher needs to consider how the child is considered within their research. How notions of 'the child' actually involve the many, and how each child comes with their own uniqueness. It is also important for student teachers as researchers to understand the process of 'othering' within research, and how location of the child voice is not synonymous with the act of data collection. This relates to the principles of mana, mauri and wairua.
- **Location of the student teacher as researcher within the child's journey:** This is where the student teacher as researcher needs to consider how the aim of the research, to improve an area of teaching practice, is also about the part that the student teacher as researcher plays in the child's journey, and how what the researcher wishes to achieve relate to and fit within this journey. This is an example of the teacher's mana meeting the mana of the child; it is a point of interconnectedness.
- **We do not arrive at our current point of being in isolation:** In terms of the child at the heart of ECE teaching this is about acknowledging that the child exists as part of a wider universe, past, present, and future (Ministry of Education, 2009). This is also about acknowledging and challenging those assumptions that we bring with us to our current way of being, doing and knowing. As student teachers as researchers this includes acknowledging the assumptions that underlie current teaching practices and also the assumptions underlying desired points of change. This relates to the principle of wairua.

Whilst these are examples of the principles of mana, mauri and wairua in action within the research process, they are by no means definitive nor prescriptive.

Action research, Te Whatu Pōkeka and Te Whāriki

A way of incorporating kaupapa Māori knowledge into the student teacher self-study action research projects could draw on the principles and values of *Te Whatu Pōkeka* (Ministry of Education, 2009) and *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). This paper proposes asking key questions at each phase of the research process. This action research process follows that outlined by Cardno (2003). At the reconnaissance phase this could involve asking:

- How does my current practice in this particular area of teaching support the mana, mauri and the wairua of the child?
- How does my current practice in this particular area of teaching support and uphold the mana, mauri and the wairua of the centre?
- How does my current practice in this particular area of teaching support my own personal mana, mauri and the wairua?

At the intervention phase this could involve asking:

- How do my proposed actions support the mana, mauri and the wairua of the child?
- How do my proposed plan of action support and uphold the mana, mauri and the wairua of the centre?
- How does my proposed plan of action support my own personal mana, mauri and the wairua?

At the evaluation phase this could involve asking:

- How has my teaching practice changed to support and uphold the mana, mauri and the wairua of the child?
- How has my teaching practice changed to support and uphold the mana, mauri and the wairua of the centre?
- How has my teaching practice changed to support my own personal mana, mauri and the wairua?

Through spreading the gaze of the researcher across the selected guiding kaupapa Māori research principles at every level of the action research process, the student teacher as researcher is encouraged to meaningfully engage with kaupapa Māori knowledge. Meaningful engagement is enhanced through the active process of questioning the practice against the identified kaupapa Māori principles, replacing the more frequent practice of treating engagement with kaupapa Māori knowledge as a predominantly theoretical exercise. Knowledge becomes associated more deeply with ways of being, doing and knowing as the student teacher as researcher actively engages in the research process. To be able to do this though a foundational understanding of the guiding principles of mana, mauri and wairua need to be developed.

Concluding comments

We are aware that within this article we have not addressed all the possible issues of other tikanga implicit within kaupapa Māori research. Such issues include research collaboration, spiritual guidance associated with research, and issues associated with iwitanga, that is tribal identity and knowledge. Within this paper we have also not necessarily explicitly explored the liberatory goals

of kaupapa Māori research. Nevertheless steps have been made to facilitate the development of a research paradigm within ECE which is cognisant of kaupapa Māori research principles and values.

Inclusion of the principles of wairua, mana and mauri in an action research model enables engagement in whakawhanaungatanga, which is concerned with the relationships between and across all people, place, space and time. Therefore the suggested model gives voice to the multiple perspectives inherent within education. Perspectives which are associated with diverse backgrounds, assumptions, and whakapapa are articulated as student teachers-as-researchers engage in critical analysis of their own practice. This critical analysis has the potential to expose how policies, practices, and theory impact on the research, the researcher and the researched; a requirement within Kaupapa Māori research (L. Smith, 1999). This exposure illuminates how to improve conditions and outcomes, which is the goal of all educational research.

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