

Counter-colonial Research Methodologies drawing upon Postcolonial Critique and Indigenous Onto-Epistemologies

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Introduction

Researchers have been challenged by Indigenous scholars regarding the ongoing re-inscription of colonialist paradigms inflicted through research methodologies and later perpetuated through published work (L. T. Smith, 1999/2012). Within both education and educational research, “repressive structures of colonialism operate through an invisible network of filiative connections, psychological internalizations and unconsciously complicit associations” (Kaomea, 2004, p. 22). Throughout the eras of both colonisation and modernity Indigenous knowledges have been marginalised by the academy, rendered invisible, dismissed as inferior, and relegated to the status of historical relics. The education system in Aotearoa (New Zealand), like many other countries colonised by Great Britain, has explained Māori underachievement as being the result of the ‘deficit’ of Māori, rather than of the educational experiences that were provided for them. These ‘deficit theories’ “can be traced back to nineteenth-century ‘scientific racism’, which was itself a development of – and justification for – imperialism and colonialism” (Human Rights Commission, 2012, p. 15).

Māori academics in Aotearoa (New Zealand) have been cautious about ‘post-’ modern/structural/colonial paradigms, considering that more work is needed than mere neo-colonialist re-languaging of imperialism (Pihama, 1993; L. T. Smith, 1999/2012). “Decolonization, once viewed as the formal process of handing over the instruments of government, is now recognized as a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power” (Pihama, 1993, p.98). It is all too easy for researchers to ignore the underlying impacts of the legacy of colonisation and its discourse of Māori as ‘deficit’ within their research contexts, thus inadvertently perpetuating these effects. In Aotearoa, some Indigenous and Pākehā (European ancestry) educational researchers have worked collaboratively to illuminate decolonising possibilities (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Jones & Jenkins, 2008; Rau & Ritchie, 2014; Ritchie & Rau, 2010, 2012). This methodology has been described as ‘partnership research’ which “involves both indigenous and non-indigenous researchers working on a research project and shaping that project together” (Smith, 1999, p. 178). This paper reflects on some of the aspects, issues, and tensions arising from a series of research projects within the field of early childhood care and education which upheld a commitment to counter-colonial praxis.

Māori, the Indigenous people of Aotearoa (New Zealand), are the *tangata whenua*, the original people of this land. They are not a monoculture, but comprise many tribes and sub-tribes with complex inter-connections and histories. For the past thirty years, our country has been engaged in an official reconciliation process of addressing historical grievances, framed around the failure of the government to honour commitments outlined in the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi/Tiriti o Waitangi. This Treaty had allowed British governance and settlement in exchange for protection of Māori self-determination over lands and all things valued by Māori. Despite ongoing Māori activism since 1840, these commitments under the Treaty were repeatedly breached by the government. The current project of reconciliation takes place in the context of a history of educational discourse that has not only

marginalised Māori from achieving educational success, and jeopardised their language. It has also created a 'deficit' in the knowledge of those who are not Māori. There exists a vacuum of historical amnesia that is perpetuated by predominantly monocultural educational programmes and the mainstream/whitestream media.

The New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996) was ground-breaking in its recognition of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the need for parallel validation of te ao Māori onto-epistemologies. Yet, much work has been required to revisibilise these ways of knowing, being and doing within the early childhood care and education sector, and this remains an ongoing challenge.

Pedagogies and methodologies as political activities

"To propose a pedagogy [or methodology] is to propose a political vision" (Simon, 1982, p. 371, as cited in Darder, 1991, p. 76). A praxis of collective criticality is crucial for pedagogies and methodologies committed to social, cultural and environmental justice. Upholding these commitments as my "ultimate concern" (Neumann, 2011, p. 601) engenders a sense of responsibility to act in service of healing our relationships as human co-habitants of our planet. As a Pākehā (of European ancestry) educator, I have felt a particular responsibility to address the ongoing, multi-faceted impacts of colonisation in my country, Aotearoa. This has been the priority in my work. I am also aware that whilst I have consciously made this choice, many educationalists and researchers in Aotearoa have not shared this consciousness or made a similar choice.

For Māori, the Indigenous people of Aotearoa, there is *no choice* but to face on a daily basis the legacy of colonisation in the form of thinly veiled (and often blatant) racist assumptions and practices. For Māori, as with other Indigenous peoples, "there is no post-colonial" (Soto, 2004, p. ix). A recent study identified that teachers continue to blame Māori students and their families for their lack of educational success, have much lower expectations of their Māori students than of children of any other ethnic group, and continue to believe that treating all students 'the same' will somehow have equitable outcomes (Turner, 2014). Here Hana Turner's relates some material from her thesis:

One teacher who said that she held exactly the same expectations for all of her students contradicted this statement somewhat when she talked about some Māori being very smart but stated that they were using their brains for criminal activity, which in effect revealed a belief that 'smart' was not the norm for Māori and those Māori who were smart were in jail.

One teacher said, "I watch this Police 10/7... The suspects will always be Māori."

Teachers were asked why they thought there was an achievement gap. Most were able to identify numerous reasons and responsibility was primarily placed with the students, their parents and their home background rather than with teacher or school-related factors.

One surprising finding was that some teachers said that they did not know why there was an achievement gap. For example, one teacher was asked, "So why do you think

that students from minority groups do not achieve as highly as white students?” The teacher replied, “I wouldn’t know.” The researcher asked, “You don’t know? You’ve got no idea?” And the teacher firmly replied, “No” (as cited in Turner, 2014).

There is a tangible silence by the majority of Pākehā (New Zealanders of European ancestry), in the face of the ongoing, intergenerational, cumulative and current negative impacts of racism. Within our field of educational research in New Zealand, whilst ethical review boards will require ‘consultation with Māori’ with regard to any research that ‘may affect Māori or have Māori participants’, Māori researchers remain justifiably wary of the appropriation by non-Māori of *te ao Māori* [Māori worldview] conceptualisations (Hoskins & Jones, 2012; L. T. Smith, 1999/2012). The Māori project of reclaiming space in educational research for *kaupapa* Māori has been significant and radical. Scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Graham Hinangaroa Smith and Russell Bishop have been pivotal in staking this territory. Graham Smith, whilst acknowledging that Pākehā engagement within *kaupapa* Māori research is problematic, has also recently stated that some Pākehā have served to create space for Māori within the academy (G. Smith, 2012). It remains a challenge for researchers who are not Indigenous to shift from their western-centric epistemological frame to adopt a duo-epistemological orientation, one which reflects their relationality with the *tangata whenua*, the original peoples of the land which they now share with settler descendants, as well as an increasingly diverse range of recent immigrants. De-centring from a mono-cultural, universalistic Western lens via deep engagement with an Indigenous onto-epistemology is consistent with critical pedagogy. “Indigenous knowledge provides a provocative vantage point from which to view Eurocentric discourses” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 152), whereby a juxtapositioning of new/old imaginaries may enable us to reshape our understandings of our role as humans on this planet and provide us with a more substantial grounding from which to challenge the destructive impacts of rampant neoliberalist corporate capitalism on our planet’s wellbeing.

Addressing a global crises

In this current era of rabid corporate multinational capitalism being sponsored and subsidised by internationalised neoliberal governmental policies, climate change tipping points are being largely ignored. As Denzin and Lincoln have written: “The central tension in the world today go beyond the crises in capitalism and neoliberalism’s version of democracy” (2008a, p. 13). Underpinning these intersecting crises, is one that is more fundamental, it is a crisis in our relationality with the Earth. “For Indigenous peoples, the central crisis is spiritual, [residing] in the displacement of human’s inter-relationships within nature” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008a, p. 13). Localised, context-specific Indigenous onto-epistemologies have emerged over many centuries as each particular group of people learned to live closely in relationship within their specific ecologies. At the heart of this relationality is a sense of spiritual interdependence with the more-than-human world.

Indigenous peoples see rivers and mountains as sentient, spiritual beings, as ancestors, who are treasured and revered. In *te reo* Māori [the Māori language], the word *whenua* translates as both land and placenta. Both land and placenta nurture humans, humans are dependent on both for our existence and survival. For many Indigenous peoples, knowledge is also seen as spiritual, to be exercised in service of survival of both human and more than-

human co-habitators, the purpose of gaining knowledge being “to nurture and regenerate the world” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 151)

Indigenous onto-epistemologies are therefore a potential source for restoring our damaged relationship with the more-than-human world. Their knowledge about respecting and healing the Earth “can be used to counter the destructive effects of Western science on the Earth” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b, p. 26) (see also Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). This is because such an orientation reinstates the centrality of spiritual interconnectedness at the heart of our relationality with the more-than-human world. I believe that as scholars we have an ethical obligation to share responsibility for repairing the world, and that our local Indigenous knowledges are integral to this process.

There are a number of non-Indigenous critical scholars who have worked in partnership with Indigenous colleagues, to raise the profile of Indigenous knowledges within their research and methodologies. In the USA examples include Norman Denzin, Yvonna Lincoln, Beth Blue Swadener, Gaile Cannella, Shirley Steinberg and the late Joe Kincheloe and in Aotearoa, Ted Glynn and Alison Jones. Joe Kincheloe has written that, “As complex as the question of indigeneity may be, we believe that the best interests of indigenous peoples and nonindigenous peoples are served by the study of indigenous knowledges and epistemologies” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 137).

Taking this stance of opening one’s worldview to respectfully incorporate an Indigenous worldview is to engage in transformative social, cultural and ecological praxis. It is to move outside of a monolingual, monocultural focus, to embrace a multilogicality, which addresses both local and global histories of colonialist oppression, revalidating ways of being, knowing and doing that colonial ancestors dismissed as ‘inferior’ (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). It requires commitment to study knowledges and languages of Indigenous people, which have not been widely available in schools or in the academy, and to on-going decolonisation work. In offering this process to our students we foster transformation in their potentiality as teachers who “have come to understand the overtly cultural processes by which information is legitimated and delimited” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 137). This is a process of decolonisation that transcends interrelated individual and collective, personal, professional and political realms. It is also intensely emotional, since extending one’s paradigmatic interface to embrace a(n) Indigenous onto-epistemology/ies require(s) “the intimacy of an emotional connectedness that allows empathic passion” to enter one’s relationships (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 139). This may be difficult for some people, as we are required to shift our worldviews in seriously challenging ways: away from individualistic, linear, hierarchical, authoritarian, majoritarian, patriarchal, compartmentalised, catalogued, white-privileged complacency, to an unsettled, contingent, relational, spiritual and emotional space, to work within a “cultural interface” (Martin Nakata, 2007, as cited in McGloin, 2009). We also become allies in supporting the struggles of Indigenous students, colleagues, and community members against neo-colonialist re-assimilative processes and corporate multinational companies’ exploitation of the planet. If we are to be agents of social, cultural and ecological justice, we need to understand the dynamics of local/global Indigenous movements (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). We also need to position ourselves as being in service to Indigenous colleagues who are leading social, cultural, linguistic, economic and ecological justice struggles.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi 'partnership' models between Māori and Pākehā have been adopted in education and research in Aotearoa, particularly in the early childhood sector. The early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (1996) was developed via one such collaborative process. With my Māori colleague, Cheryl Rau, I have been involved in a programme of research, informed by kaupapa Māori, which has aimed at providing illumination to teachers in our sector, of ways in which they might more fully realise the Māori aspirations of the curriculum.

Throughout these projects we have drawn heavily on our backgrounds in critical theory, a foundation which allows us to scrutinise our motivations and purposes, to guard against the potential to over-simplify, essentialise, assimilate, reinscribe, dichotomise, and polemicise. Critical Indigenous methodologies allow for hybridities, complexities, contradictions, layerings, including a spiritual interconnectedness that transcends all these. Yet we know that we must always remain watchful, constantly on guard for the possibility that emergent power effects may re-submerge different positionings. We recognise that we are living and researching within a context that is layered with histories of pain, grief, anger and loss. A starting point for coming to a deep understanding of this context has been to research "the messy terrain" (Cary, 2004, p. 70) in which we operate, a social, cultural and geo-political milieu that has been messed up by our histories of colonization, a terrain in which we are all embedded. Knowledges of particular local histories of colonisation from the Indigenous people's perspective are often only obtainable through relationships with local Elders.

An ethics of relationality is central to our approach. We recognise the aspiration of Māori for *tino rangatiratanga* (ultimate chieftainship, self-determination), that was to be supported by Pākehā under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The Ngāti Whakaue kuia Maureen Jehly phrased this neatly at a previous early childhood convention. She said there should be "nothing about us without us" (Jehly, 2007). Fundamental for Pākehā working in relationship with Indigenous peoples, is to be guided by them, constantly exercising scrutiny of power effects that re-emerge within ourselves and our institutions, and to recognise that many Indigenous people are haunted by histories of colonisation-related trauma. One needs on-going attentiveness to exercising a disposition of listening (Rinaldi, 2006), whilst simultaneously operating an internal radar for apprehending one's tendency to make assumptions. A further commitment when working in this arena, is to employ Indigenous knowledges only in service of political, epistemological and ontological changes identified as priorities by Indigenous collectives with whom one is connected; this requires engaging in on-going consultation and accountability. Also required, is a critical awareness of the complex and powerful hegemonic forces that surround us and the research tools that are employed. It has been suggested that even within the field of *kaupapa* Māori research, there remains "little evidence of critical engagement with the question of how and why kaupapa Māori [Māori philosophical] ideas inform and strengthen the work" (Hoskins & Jones, 2012, p. 3).

Decolonisation at the individual, educational and wider societal levels underpins all these processes. This needs to be a focus of teacher preparation programmes, as well as research methodology courses. From this one learns to maintain a disposition of watchfulness, an alertness to the re-colonizing potential of one's actions and work. Underpinning this

process is the exercise of an ethics of uncertainty – working the Māori-Pākehā hyphen (Jones & Jenkins, 2008) - recognising the historically engraved emergent tensions, since to avoid these would be to be in denial of the profound ethical questions that arise from the complexities of dual or multi-onto-epistemological framings, necessitating a disposition of humility, tentativeness and contingency. For members of the dominant culture, a further challenge arising from a commitment to decolonisation is to a preparedness for learning to un-know all the stories, 'facts' and messages that have perpetuated racist perspectives, "un-thinking" our embeddedness in Western-ness (McGloin, 2009). Alongside this is the need to learn to stop seeking self-validation as per an individualistic paradigm, and instead see the well-being of the (Indigenous-focused) collective as the focus.

We also need to resist the "epistemological tyranny" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 144) of the dominant culture within our institutions. When I worked with Māori colleague to design and implement a Māori immersion early childhood teacher education qualification in the 1990s, we became very aware of powerful assimilative forces within the university structure. Whilst the 'Ki Taiao' programme was a potential model of *tino rangatiratanga* (self-determination), specific tensions were generated as described here by my colleague:

Somewhere within the centre of early childhood there is a tendency not to want to challenge or rock the boat within the wider university context. In reference to the Ki Taiao programme, course content and programme structure have generated many debates. I believe the conflict comes with the introduction of different knowledge codes, creating a panic-stricken reaction and a feeling of loss of control. The loss of control comes from lack of knowledge which puts the whole saying of 'knowledge is power' into reality for me. I have witnessed some bizarre coping strategies and weak arguments such as 'the quality has to be the same as...' and 'assessment has to be the same as...' And 'Ki Taiao courses have to be the same as...' What I see through these 'same as...' statements is the lack of acknowledging that there are genuine cultural differences that need to be addressed and validated and the insinuation that anything different can be doubted from a definition of quality by monocultural standards...I guess in a nutshell, this is racism in action. As a Māori staff member, having to cope with these issues can be tough, however there are two things I call on at times like this. My Pākehā colleagues to advocate for Māori rights, and for me to go ahead and do what I believe is right in terms of the kaupapa of Ki Taiao and the idealism of tino rangatiratanga. I have to work on the proviso that if they don't like it, well, fire me! It's about putting one's neck on the line. How's that for heroism? [CM2]. (as cited in Ritchie, 2002)

An ethic of relationality

In making the case for counter-colonial research methodologies to be informed by (local) Indigenous onto-epistemologies, I recognise the significant role of scholarship to influence and signal directions not only in the academy, but within the wider society, and in particular, within education settings of all levels. Indigenous colleagues such as the one quoted above, find themselves in a battle-ground on a daily basis. Despite the rhetoric which refers to equal opportunity in education, Indigenous scholars are grossly under-represented in the academy. For many, it is too emotionally draining to remain in places that fail to recognise

their cultural identity, their collectivism, their spirituality, their values, their ways of being, knowing and doing. And along with this lack of affirmation of their ways of being, knowing and doing, Indigenous scholars, teachers, children and families must face routinely repetitive micro-aggressions that are handed down by people oblivious to this abuse of their position (Rollock, 2012). The combined impact of invisibilisation of one's onto-epistemologies within the 'whitestream' education system along with being on the receiving end of a constant barrage of racist micro-aggressions is painful and soul-destroying.

Whilst deficit theorising has damaged relationships and trust, and contributed to many generations of exclusion of Indigenous peoples by the 'whitestream' education system, it can be argued that those in power, those with the 'moral authority' of their privileged status, are the ones in deficit. Those who have been instrumental or complicit in creating or maintaining policies and practices which have not only discriminated, but inflicted generations of pain and trauma on Indigenous peoples, are the ones who are in a position of 'deficit'. These 'whitestream' policy-makers, academics, and teachers who have yet to engage with the project of decolonisation, have a 'deficit' in their capacity as relational beings, who might be expected to behave with respect, with *aroha* (love, compassion) and with *manaakitanga* (caring, generosity) towards those people who are the original owners of the lands upon which they stand. This deficit in relationality is mirrored in a second deficit, that is, their ignorance of the languages, knowledges, histories and stories of the local Indigenous peoples.

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