

**“It’s the Controlling Still”. Power effects in the implementation of  
the bicultural/bilingual early childhood curriculum in  
Aotearoa/New Zealand.**

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*ABSTRACT: Racism is an undelying current within educational practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This paper discusses some of the data from a doctoral study that explored a particular teacher education context. In Aotearoa, the early childhood curriculum, Te Whariki, has a bicultural paradigm that requires a degree of bicultural and bilingual competence on the part of educators. This paper explores some of the issues around preparing teachers to deliver this curriculum, with a particular focus on racism.*

**KEYWORDS: Racism, early childhood education, teacher education.**

Aotearoa/New Zealand is a country with a history of colonialism. After the 1840 signing of The Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi, between the indigenous Māori and the British Crown, along with the assumption of sovereignty by the Crown came denial of tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) to Māori.

The confrontation between two sets of values took place upon terms which became increasingly unequal as one culture’s economy obtained a stranglehold over the other through political control, military power and bureaucratic smothering (Ballara, 1986, p.168).

Simultaneous with this economic domination and marginalisation of Māori by Pākehā was cultural and linguistic domination, and an ongoing denial of the racism and the assumption of white superiority that underlies this (Ballara, 1986, p. 168-9). Racism underlies the pattern of uneven power relations created by British colonisers’ assumption and perpetuation of sovereignty, which has undermined Maori authority structures and debased their worldview (Ballara, 1986; Jackson, 1992; Smith, 1999; Walker, 1990). Assimilationist education policies were derived from this racist ideology and served to exclude Māori from decision-making power within structures such as the education system (Simon, 1989, p. 25). Māori have continually sought redress for the loss of land, language and opportunities, and recent legislative and policy changes have made some tentative moves in this direction.

Since 1998 early childhood educators in Aotearoa/New Zealand have been required to implement care and education programmes that are consistent with the early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996), the first bicultural/bilingual curriculum in the country. This has challenged early childhood teachers and teacher educators to reconceptualise their work, unsettling the status quo of Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent) dominance of mainstream early childhood centre and teacher education programmes. A recent doctoral study (Ritchie, 2002) found that although many Pākehā are committed to the professional

requirement of delivering a bicultural and bilingual curriculum, they lack both competence and confidence in this regard.

Qualitative and discourse analysis research has indicated that contemporary racist attitudes in both Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australia are subtle, flexible, ambivalent, and embedded in wider social values which support and legitimise racial inequalities (Sanson et al., 1997; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). These attitudes and inequalities have been reinforced by political and economic discourse that has focused on ‘individual responsibility’, and ‘the level-playing field’ (Sanson et al., 1997). Most individuals are not intentionally racist in their thinking or behaviour, but are nevertheless “dysconsciously” racist (King, 1994, p. 338):

Dysconscious racism is a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant white norms and privileges. It is ... an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example critical consciousness. Uncritical ways of thinking about racial inequality accept certain culturally sanctioned assumptions, myths, and beliefs that justify the social and economic advantages that white people have as a result of subordinating diverse others (King, 1994, p. 338).

A Maori colleague, responding to a draft of this paper, wrote that Maori are often positioned by Pākehā as 'honorary whites', a functioning of dysconscious racism which manifests in their treatment of Māori friends/colleagues as 'one of us or just like us'. She considers that “This non-recognition of Maori as Maori renders us invisible (Rau, 2003). Joyce E. King considers that “Dysconscious racism must be made the subject of educational intervention” (King, 1994, p. 342).

There are few Māori early childhood teachers working in mainstream early childhood centres. Early childhood educators are therefore reliant on building relationships with Māori whānau (families), whereby they can involve these families in delivering the Māori content of the early childhood programme. Similarly, Pākehā teacher educators are finding ways to work in partnership with Māori colleagues, in order to offer programmes that will prepare graduates to deliver the bicultural curriculum. This is consistent with a process of “bicultural development” (Metge, 1990, p. 18; Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1987, p.14), generated by a commitment to social justice and the Treaty of Waitangi. The term “development” implies an ongoing process of social change toward an equitable bicultural society (Metge, 1990). According to the Royal Commission on Social Policy (1987):

Bicultural development has been proffered as an important element of any programme which has as its objective the advancement of the social and economic status of Māori people. It is an option which derives from the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi (Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1987, p.14).

This generating of bicultural formations can be conceptualised as Māori and Pākehā co-constructing “a variety of interrelated social spaces that are constantly produced and reproduced through various contested and negotiated discourses and practices that also constitute relations of power” (Barclay & Liu, 2003).

This bicultural framework recognises the status of Māori as indigenous to this country, as equal Treaty signatory partners with the British Crown (Barclay & Liu, 2003). It differs from a multicultural focus in this recognition, although inclusive of the cultural diversity that exists due to Crown immigration policies.

One of the key dilemmas identified in the study was the experience of racist power effects by Māori colleagues. Pākehā participants, however, discussed racism as a societal syndrome, as negative attitudes rather than felt effects. Despite its impact, racism has not been positioned at the centre of educational research epistemologies and paradigms, since this is considered too controversial, situated or biased by members of the dominant majority culture (Lopez, 2001, p. 32). There is however, a growing body of literature that “argues that the silencing of indigenous ‘voices’ has been both a product and a mechanism of colonial oppression” (Barclay & Liu, 2003). This paper will discuss these findings and consider some implications for teacher education settings.

### **Brief Overview of the Study**

The doctoral study utilized processes that could be termed emergent, qualitative, ethnographic, and interpretivist (Barnhardt, 1994; Edge, 1996; Holliday, 1994; Miller, Nelson, & Moore, 1998), characterized by a philosophical stance grounded in critical pedagogy. This form of critical educational research “attempts to situate the construction of meaning within the lifeworlds of the participants themselves and the specificity of historical trends and cultural forms that shape the subjectivities of the participants” (McLaren, 1991). The research also drew on a critical multiculturalist paradigm in that it focused on racism and cultural identity (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 29-30), recognising that the pervasiveness of white supremacy within Western cultures has influenced outcomes for non-white children through ideologies such as deficit theories (Bartolome, 1994; Sleeter, 1992; Smith, 1999).

The approach is based in a recognition of the centrality of our roles as ‘researchers’ to the research process, in terms of determining the methodology, selecting and interviewing participants, and then interpreting or “restorying” their narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), thus ‘legitimizing’ knowledge (Bishop, 1997; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Limerick, Burgess-Limerick, & Grace, 1996; Scheurich, 1995). In an attempt to address these issues, participants were involved in various stages of the research process, such as, for example in checking through transcripts of the interviews, co-theorising sessions to discuss key meanings that are emerging, and in reading drafts of papers written. It is recognised that this type of research produces knowledge that is very specifically contextualised, and not necessarily generalisable, yet the intention was to make a useful contribution to the field of early childhood education sourced from the voices and experiences of early childhood practitioners (Edge, 1992).

The initial data came from 18 interviews with teacher education colleagues, other colleagues working in the area of providing professional development for early childhood teachers, and with graduates from our pre-service early childhood teacher education programme at the University of Waikato. Half of the participants identified as Māori and the rest as Pākehā. Although my research design aimed to privilege the voices of the participants, my perceptions and experiences also manifestly frame the

research, underlying its shape and interpretations. These experiences include deliberate attempts to inform myself through, for example, a series of observations undertaken of 13 different early childhood programmes noting aspects such as visible signs of biculturalism, use of te reo Māori resources; and activities. Other data came from samples of student assignments, an open-ended written survey of graduates of the early childhood teacher education programme; and a co-theorising hui with Māori participants to collaborate in data analysis through a mutually negotiated process, which enabled a form of collaborative grounded theorising (Strauss & Corbin, 1999). This process of creating shared meanings (Aubrey, David, Godfrey, & Thompson, 2000), of ‘making sense’ through “a complex back-and-forth process of negotiation” (Shotter, 1990) has been variously termed “co-exploration” (Noddings, 1995), “whitiwhiti kōrero” (Bishop, 1996), and spiral or koru discourse (Bishop, 1996; Bishop & Glynn, 1999). It is considered particularly important in qualitative early childhood research that the research data and findings are supported by the participants of the researched community (Aubrey et al., 2000).

### **Different Positionings**

During the initial scrutiny of the data racism had not been highlighted as a key consideration, yet a later, more careful analysis of the interviews revealed that in fact, nine of the participants had raised the topic of racism (and I had introduced it in two further interviews). For Māori participants, use of the term ‘racism’ often arose in reference to negative experiences of their own or of other Māori children. Two Maori colleagues attributed to racism the discomfort they had felt when involved with their children within the Playcentre movement.

*It was during that time while I was in Playcentre that I started to realise some of the things were... what I considered, very racist now. Things like, I remember M... one of the other Māori women, she wanted to teach me how to make Māori bread. So we thought it would be really neat to do this at Playcentre as an activity, and it caused a real problem. We brought in her mum and some of the other elders to help us and worked with the children and that caused a right kafuffle at the centre. “This Māori stuff. We don't want this Māori stuff” [CM1].*

*I also was confronted with issues of, I don't like the word, but I'll have to use it, racism during my years in Playcentre and I guess it hurt me quite a lot. Not so much for myself but for other Māori families that I saw coming to Playcentre, how they struggled with trying to fit into the system that we had going [GM2].*

Another had been upset by the subtle racism exhibited by teachers towards Māori children, when she had been working as a teacher aide in a new entrants’ class.

*But even those other Māori children..I could see the subtle racism with the teachers and that used to upset me. Māori children never got books to take home because “they didn't bring them back”, or “they didn't know how to handle them”. Māori children never got to read because the fastest readers got to read first. And I thought that was always unfair. I had a question, “If*

*Māori children didn't know how to use books by not giving them, well how were they going to learn anyway?" [PDFM3].*

Whilst working as a teacher, a Māori colleague had been concerned by the apparent discrimination when efforts were made to pronounce an immigrant child's name correctly, although this courtesy was never applied in the case of Māori children's names, an invisibilisation that she found offensive:

*Well I'll go back to my intermediate days of being up in the staff room being given lesson on how to pronounce a European child's name that had come from Switzerland correctly. You know, a fifteen minute lesson in the staff room just so we get her name right, and you know, I'm thinking, we haven't even addressed our bicultural kaupapa, but we are getting lessons here! So you know, I just find that totally inverted [PDFM1].*

As Ngahuia Te Awekotuku has pointed out, being visibly Māori in Aotearoa/New Zealand, means being exposed to racism on a daily basis (Te Awekotuku, 1984, p. 244). Racism is part of the fabric of our society, "a reality that leaks into the consciousness of every inhabitant of Aotearoa, as victim, or antagonist, acquiescent or aggressive" (Te Awekotuku, 1984, p. 244). A Māori colleague in the study clarified that she saw a key role of the teacher education programme to be to prepare future teachers who would not be perpetrators of damaging racist power effects on the children in their care, and those children's families:

*... many of the new students in the auraki [mainstream] intake pose a possible threat to these children and their whānau not to mention non-Māori. If this is my criticism of these students I also believe it is our duty to make sure that these people are safe by time they are ready to leave us [CM2].*

Māori participants in this study used the term "racism" in association with unpleasant experiences, such as feelings of discomfort which had led them to withdraw their children from an early childhood centre, for example. Racism in these situations is clearly a major factor in the powerlessness and frustration experienced by Māori. Choosing to work within kaupapa Māori settings affords the safety of a milieu in which they are less likely to experience these negative racist and power effects.

Pākehā participants discussed racism as a societal syndrome, as negative attitudes they saw Pakeha directing towards others, rather than something that they were exposed to personally. A Pākehā graduate described her shock at the extent of racist attitudes expressed as she included Māori content in her kindergarten programme:

*I knew there was plenty of red-necks out there, but I didn't realise how many educated people were still very racist.*

A Pākehā lecturer related her experiences when on assuming the position of director of an early childhood centre, she had encountered resistance from staff to her attempts to introduce positive attitudes to bicultural content:

*CP4: I think a lot of stuff's hidden, they knew I wanted to hear that, so they'd hide any racist remarks. At least it eliminated, out of the centre, obvious things that were happening.*

*JR: What sort of things?*

*CP4: Well there was a lot of remarks.*

*JR: Negative comments about Māori families or something.*

*CP4: Yes, yes. Parenting skills. Same sort of things I'd probably said eight or ten years before.*

This covert racism is characteristic of the ways in which Pākehā have historically enacted their beliefs in white racial superiority (Belich, 2001, p. 224).

Two of the Pākehā participants, a lecturer and a professional development facilitator, related their extensive involvement in anti-racism education. One of the Pākehā lecturers considered that her growing understanding of Māori culture had moderated her racist attitudes in general. A Pākehā lecturer identified racism as a possible barrier in her failure to integrate more te reo into her teaching:

*I know it's laziness on my part of it or prioritising, but I think there is an element of laziness and that's the basic racism I think that we can espouse one thing... but in practice we are somewhere else and that that's good enough. Well it's not good enough, I don't think. It's not good enough for me [CP2].*

### **Institutional Racism: It's "the Controlling Still"**

Racism through being enacted by individuals, becomes institutionalised at the structural level (Lewis, Ketter, & Fabos, 2001). Māori colleagues were frustrated by the gate-keeping of Pākehā decision-makers within the university:

*Yep, and we don't get led from above. More so you get these things put up so that they can't happen. I mean even senior positions above us put in these gate-keeping things so that you can't truly work along a model line. The Early Childhood Department's got really really committed people, but they have blocks all the time [CM1].*

One made the interesting observation that despite policy-level recognition of Māori aspirations, translating these commitments into practice was more problematic:

*Taking a stand on issues to do with tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) have been pretty pathetic. On entering into this debate I have found the persons really uninformed on the issue, a huge time waster. My attitude to this sort of ignorance is "Go away, get informed and let's discuss this later". I feel my time is too valuable to waste on this nonsense. Interestingly enough, I do not find many challenges on the issue of tino rangatiratanga as long as it remains rhetoric. I find the challenges come at the level of implementation. This is when I have experienced a mismatch of theory into practice... 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 [in parallel Kaupapa Māori<sup>1</sup> courses] “the quality has to be the same as...”, and “assessment has 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 [CM2].*

Interactions are sites of contestation, in which some voices are dominant, and others marginalised, and where effects may be felt but not often voiced (Gale & Kogan, 1996-7). Racism is one of the “most violent forms of human oppression” in society, and yet it is one of the most difficult for most individuals of the dominant culture to comprehend (Darder, 1991, p. 38), because they may never have experienced its negative effects, and are unaware of their role as perpetrators of these. People can disassociate from their actions, and actions can be contradictory to espoused discourse. As Jerry Gale and Steve Kogan have written, “A person can point to his/her intention and say, ‘I’m not a racist’ but in an interactional encounter, perform an act that has a demeaning effect” (Gale & Kogan, 1996-7, p. 5). Pākehā, who have not often been victims of the power effects of racism, may be unaware of the extent to which they are perpetuating racist power effects.

Pākehā lecturers “cushioned by the comfortable white privilege of whiteness within the academy,” (Lewis et al., 2001), were able to exercise choice as to the extent to which they included te reo me ngā tikanga Māori (Māori language and culture) within the courses they coordinated and taught. This authority arises from their institutional positioning as university lecturers, exercising the power and privilege and, to a certain extent, ‘academic freedom’ of that positioning. As Pākehā staff, they operate within a Pākehā dominated institution, where Pākehā/Western constructions are ‘normal’. These existing power relations may make it more difficult for Pākehā to move beyond this paradigm and imagine a different way of operating (Bell, 1992, p. 152).

My colleague Cheryl Rau responded that Māori, on the other hand

navigate the racist terrain utilising a range of strategies to determine whether or not a person or persons are acting towards them as an individual, Māori or both. Māori generosity often allows Pākehā the benefit of the doubt. However, the implication for Māori is that they are constantly operating within a consciousness that is wise and knowledgeable in order to understand indicators reflective of racism, and then implement ongoing strategies to respond with dignity and pride to that racism (Rau, 2003).

Several researcher/theorists emphasise the project of “unlearning racism” (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Ellsworth, 1989; hooks, 1994). Glenda MacNaughton has pointed out that the power of dominant discourses makes it hard to acknowledge one’s complicity

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<sup>1</sup> Kaupapa Māori refers to a Māori philosophical paradigm. The participant is referring to courses taught in the Ki Taiao programme, a parallel kaupapa Māori early childhood teacher education qualification.

and positionality (MacNaughton, 1998). Our beliefs and values are not only culturally derived, but are inextricably caught up in networks of power, desire and resistance (Gee, 1990, p. 9), and reflect our history of colonisation. Racism in this country has received little scrutiny, since it was easier to leave it buried below the ideologies of colonisation, which included egalitarian ideals and views that the status quo reflected a ‘natural’ order (Te Awekotuku, 1984).

Comments from Pākehā participants in this study indicated that they had made some (various) efforts at ‘unlearning’ their racism. The concern and respect expressed by these particular Pākehā lecturers for their Māori colleagues’ aspirations for Ki Taiao, a kaupapa Maori early childhood teacher education programme, indicated that at this level of interpersonal relationships, racism was not a major impediment to Maori enacting these aspirations. hooks, interested in friendships between white and black women colleagues, cites a white woman, who suggested that:

...the degree to which a white woman can accept the truth of racist oppression – of white female complicity, of the privileges white women receive in a racist structure – determines the extent to which they can be empathic with women of color (hooks, 1994, p. 106).

Māori lecturers in the study were bilingual and bicultural. Including Māori perspectives was considered a ‘normal’ responsibility for them. Bicultural development involves validation of te reo me ngā tikanga Māori (Māori language and culture) through the inclusion of parallel Māori perspectives. For monolingual monocultural Pākehā lecturers, Māori ways of being and knowing were not a ‘normal’ facility. It appeared to be a struggle for them to make ‘normal’ the inclusion of te reo me ōna tikanga within their teaching, aside from a reliance on collaborative teaching partnerships with Māori colleagues. A Māori colleague considered that non-Māori educators are reluctant to hand over to Māori the power and control that would enable them to make their own decisions. Pākehā, she believes, are:

*still not allowing Māori to determine, they’re still not handing over, they still want to have the control. They see the support as the controlling still.... they are not endeavouring to bring Māori forward and put Māori into those positions to actually determine their own pathway collaboratively [MPH1].*

Racism has served historically to normalise and legitimise Eurocentric dominance (Davies, Nandy, & Sardar, 1993). In focusing the study on exploring the concept of bicultural development, which emphasises the validation of Māori perspectives, te reo me ōna tikanga (language and culture), this discourse of cultural empowerment could have obscured the underlying power dynamics of which racism is a feature. The fact that the issue of racism was raised by so many participants indicates its salience as a consideration in any discussion of cultural issues in education.

Racism and other negative power effects were experienced by Māori participants as in the “racism in action” described by a Māori colleague [CM2], or through the ways in which their voices have been marginalised by the dominant discourses: “You can do all the fancy words, and I’m aware in the course programme that they have sections or whatever, but the rest of it Jenny, and that’s what I find quite hard at times” [CM1].

The study did not thoroughly explore the ways in which these negative power effects may have been experienced. It is clear that language is powerful (Lakoff, 1990), and that those in more powerful positions may be less motivated to examine their employment of language as an instrument of power, but power is expressed in other ways as well. People may be unaware of the subtle ways in which they exert power, such as the symbolic power exhibited in ways of looking, sitting, standing, and even keeping silent (for example ‘reproachful looks’ or ‘tones’, ‘disapproving glances’) (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 24) and the ways these messages are utilised by the powerful to reinforce existing power dynamics, and positions of privilege.

### **Implications for Teacher Education**

Pre-service teacher education is a crucial site for influencing the transformative power of education within the wider society. Learning to become a teacher is a powerful and formative experience (Marker, 2000). Universities have played a role in sustaining white privilege and dominance through perpetuating racist stereotypes within educational discourse (Marker, 2000).

Repositioning Māori epistemologies and pedagogies from the margins to the centre (Banks, 1996; hooks, 1984) of teacher education and early childhood programmes involves some major transformations. Central is the unlearning of racism (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Ellsworth, 1989; hooks, 1994), an ongoing process fraught with tension, contradiction, pain, and difficulty (Cochran-Smith, 2000). It was apparent in the wider doctoral study that the pre-service early childhood teacher education programme needed to focus strongly, initially, and in a consistent ongoing manner on raising awareness of racism and the ways in which it differentially constrains understandings and opportunities. This is an ongoing challenge for teacher educators, as we struggle on a daily basis to interrogate the terrain of knowledge and power embodied in our internalized desires and overt ways of being, and how these are expressed within the explicit and implicit messages of our teaching. We can benefit from constant scrutiny and dialogue regarding the racist sub-texts of our work, as they manifest within the privileging of knowledges, including what is made visible or rendered invisible, and subtle messages about identity, difference, and privilege that are conveyed in our responses to students’ questions and comments. We can be self-critical about the ways in which as members of the dominant culture we are complicit in sustaining the norms of our privileged position, “even as we attempt to disrupt those norms” (Lewis et al., 2001). Marilyn Cochran-Smith raises the important question of how we as teacher educators frame discourse, and to whom it is directed (Cochran-Smith, 2000). In the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand, as Pākehā lecturers we tend to frame our presentation towards a mainly Pākehā/mainstream audience in terms of the ways in which “We as Pākehā can try to learn to teach Māori language and culture”, a positioning that is problematic to students who identify as Māori (or as neither Māori or Pākehā). An alternative strategy is to endeavour to create communities of learning that embody a climate of respectful critical enquiry, whereby all participants can feel a degree of safety and support that enables them to interrogate their understandings and constructions of identity, culture, and difference, located within well-informed contextual understandings of historical, political, and cultural dynamics. We can model for our students ways in which, instead of relying on simplistic universalistic recipes or formulas for teaching, we are prepared to acknowledge, interrogate and respond to the complexities and troubling identities and

the dynamic and uneven positionings and power relations particular to each teaching context (Lewis et al., 2001).

Another reconceptualisation required is that of facilitating a shift from the traditional view of teacher as ‘expert’ to a notion of the teacher as a humble learner who is respectfully open to different worldviews and able to demonstrate willingness to responsively incorporate these into the everyday knowledges and practices within the educational setting. The role of the teacher educator is to supportively prepare students to “be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness” (Delpit, 1988, p. 297). The barrier of racist belief systems which position those from the dominant culture as ‘right’ and ‘normal’, consequently othering indigenous and other non-majority cultures, is one which needs to be overcome in order to facilitate this repositioning of the teacher role as one of a humble, respectful, receptive listener/learner.

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