Restorying the individual: The cultural dimension of special education in three Te Arawa sites

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Abstract

On the basis of observation of three Te Arawa educational sites, it is argued here that a central characteristic of successful programmes that attend to Maori students with special needs is cultural-centredness. Significant aspects of that culture-centredness are outlined here, aspects that, it is argued, are fundamental to the process of restorying that is, it is argued, critical to the success of many Maori students, particularly those with special needs.

Introduction: Three programmes and their commitment to relationship-based pedagogies

Schooling under colonial policies became a powerful vehicle for the assimilation of indigenous peoples. In recent years, however, some indigenous communities have gained considerable control over their schools, thus ushering in a new era in terms of relationships between these peoples and surrounding dominant cultures. According to Lipka and Stairs (1994), the negotiation of new forms of schooling of this type reflects unique socio-historical contexts which are demonstrated in "indigenous ways of going to school" (p 65). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, these new approaches to schooling have emerged out of the struggle of Māori people to balance two important objectives - being full participants in the contemporary world and, at the same time, maintaining their cultural identity as Maori (Durie, 1997).

Exploring these new ventures requires educators to change their understanding of schooling so that it encompasses school, culture, and whānau as a coherent unit. Understanding of cultural differences and how they impact on learning requires mutual respect between majority and minority cultures in all their aspects – customs, language, values and belief systems, and the achievement of equitable power relationships (Bishop, 1996). In schools where cultural negotiation is profound and meaningful, there is hope of adopting pedagogical approaches that will assist Māori students who have learning and behavioural difficulties.

According to Bishop and Glynn (1999), power sharing is a necessary condition for relationship-based pedagogies. Interactions involve sequential revisiting of experiences and their cultural meaning in ways that encourage teachers and students to become committed both to one another and to the learning process. In a paper presented at the 2001 national conference of the New Zealand Association of Research in Education (NZARE), I described three different educational programmes.[1] Each of the three programmes is located in the rohe (district) of Te Arawa, mai i Maketu ki Tongariro (geographically between Maketu and Tongariro), in the central North Island of Aotearoa/New Zealand. One of the programmes, located in a traditional Maori context (te ao tawhito), is the Mokoia wānanga, a school

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which has a focus on traditional Māori arts and humanities. Another programme is in Rotorua's urban area. It is a special school for at-risk adolescents and is sited in proximity to Rotorua Boys' High School and the city centre. The third programme is located within a mainstream state primary school at Ngongotaha, and attends to improving literacy and numeracy skills for Maori students.

Although each of these programmes operates in a different context, what they have in common is that their pedagogic approaches are culturally-rooted and take full account of the issue of power relations. At the centre of each is a power-sharing agenda that has the potential to emancipate Māori students, particularly those who have special needs. Here, the characteristics of these programmes are outlined in a way that highlights their commitment to relationship-based pedagogies underlying which is what I refer to here as 'the psychology of mana'.

Relationship-based pedagogies and the role of narrative

Alive in every culture is a rich and vibrant tradition of storytelling. Shared within families and communities, stories often serve to anchor and enrich human pathways. For example, historians of the Te Arawa tribe tell of the time when Ngati Ohomairangi (the parent tribe in the distant homeland of Hawaiki) decided that the time had arrived to migrate to new homes and islands that were less crowded. At that time, Ngatoroirangi was the high priest of the principal tribe, of which Ngati Ohomairangi was a division. Houmaitawhiti was the paramount chief of Ngati Ohomairangi and the tribal priests were two brothers, Tia and Hei. When it came time for Ngati Ohomairangi to move on, the canoe builders were assembled, the commander of the Te Arawa canoe being Tamatekapua. According to Stafford (1967) and Grace (1995), Tamatekapua was a chief who was endowed with great courage and prowess, one who possessed a gift for leadership which raised him to pre-eminence in the tribe. Tradition indicates that he was, at times, mischievous. Nonetheless, his boldness and strong personality won him the loyalty, affection and admiration of his people. Tamatekapua is the ancestor of the Te Arawa tribe. His memory is preserved for all to see in the beautifully carved and ornamented meeting house of the same name at Ohinemutu, Rotorua. In hearing stories of this kind, young Māori learn that they, too, have a place in history and tradition, a place that provides security and continuity.

The unfolding of history is fraught with intrigue and wonder. Not all such stories settle peacefully in our ears, our hearts, and our minds. Nevertheless, whether we weep, or laugh, or become quietly meditative, these stories are part of our past and give us a sense of continuity and location. Thus, according to Robinson and Ginter (1999), all such stories can serve as gifts for the present if we are open to these gifts.

Bishop and Glynn (1999) propose narrative pedagogies as a means of providing and creating power-sharing relationships in classrooms. They maintain that the aim of narratives as pedagogy is to create in the minds of those who are participants in the pedagogic process "an image of relationships that are committed, connected and participatory . . . and where possible an holistic approach to curriculum is fundamental to the practices developed" (p. 176).

The programmes observed at Mokoia, Awhina and Ngongotaha subscribe to the creation of power-sharing relationships and a holistic approach to curriculum

development is adopted. Ironically, however, many of the students referred to the sites have themselves been storied in unfortunate ways, ways which locate them in terms of deficit. As Bishop, Berryman, Glynn, McKinley, Devine and Richardson observe, teachers who lack the means to critically revisit their own practice are at risk of believing in the stories that have been created about these students, stories that centre on deficit and inadequacy.[2]

At Mokoia, Awhina and Ngongotaha, the approaches can be described as 'ecological' in that they each locate student achievement within the quality of the interactions they experience within their living environments. At the heart of assessment and intervention is a focus on improving the quality of the teaching and learning contexts available for students with special needs. Fundamental to this is the process of restorying the individual as an antidote to stigmatisation. The restoried individual can then move forward in positive new directions. Central to this process of restorying in all three of the educational sites to which reference has been made are three significant knowledge sources: experience, sound pedagogy, and reason.

Experience, reason and sound pedagogy as sources of knowledge in the restorying process

Since experience and reason are primary sources of knowledge, Johnson and Christensen (2000) emphasise their importance in providing students with opportunities to progress. For Tate (1990), the pathway to reason is through experience of tika (fairness), pono (integrity), and aroha (inclusiveness). These are important for all students. For students with behavioural problems who may have been deprived of aroha, the pathways to reason outlined by Tate are likely to be of particular significance.

Students who have had negative experiences are unlikely to revise their views of themselves and of their potential simply because they are invited to do so by their teachers. If, however, their experiences of themselves, of others and of the learning environment are positive, then it becomes possible for them to believe that it is reasonable to revise these views. Hence, experience and reason, accompanied by sound pedagogy which is relationship-based, are critical to the process of restorying. *Table 1* indicates how the trilogy of experience, reason and sound relationship-based pedagogy are realised in the case of the three educational sites to which reference has been made. It suggests that there are four key elements to sound pedagogy:

- engaging students in studying their own community;
- promoting an approach which is participatory and engaging;
- becoming involved phenomenologically through style, spirit, and content; and
- drawing from theory, ancient or contemporary, or both, to enrich practice.

Table1: The role of experience, reason and sound relationship-based pedagogy at three educational sites

<table>
<tr><th>Sources of knowledge</th><th>Mokoia Wananga</th><th>Awhina High School</th><th>Ngongotaha Primary School</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Experience
How we interact with people and generate our personal knowledge;
How we are influenced by institutions around us (Johnson and Christensen, 2000).

Sound Pedagogy
Curriculum as the constructed and lived experiences of students and teachers (Beane, 1995);
Curriculum as working to establish relationships in a whanau manner. (Smith, 1995; Macfarlane, 1995; Bishop and Glynn, 1999).

Reason
Involves thinking about something and developing an understanding of it (Johnson and Christensen, 2000). Operates through tika (fairness), pono (integrity) and aroha (acceptance) (Tate, 1990);
Some truths are knowable independent of observation (Johnson and Christensen 2000).</td><td colspan="3">Skilled leadership
Home, school community links
Assuming a multiplicity of roles
Mana, withitness and demeanour →</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Engaging students in studying their own community
Participatory and engaging
Being involved phenomenologically, i.e. methodically, spiritually, cognitively
Engaging the notion of praxis →</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ko au ko koe
Ko koe ko au,
Ko tāua</td><td>Mana tū, mana ora,
Mana noho, mana mate</td><td>He aha te mea nui o te ao?
He tamaiti, he tamaiti, he tamaiti</td></tr>
</table>

Table 2 outlines four compelling facets which help explain how experiences at Mokoia, Awhina and Ngongotaha can become quintessential sources of knowledge. Following *Table 2,* two elements of the trilogy of knowledge sources are discussed in more detail. These are experience and sound pedagogy.

Table 2: Experience as a source of knowledge: compelling aspects of the programmes at Mokoia, Awhina and Ngongotaha

Compelling facets	Mokoia Wananga	Awhina High School	Ngati-Whakaue Enrichment Class
Skilled readership	Respect for Maori knowledge, language and customs; Appeals to the best in each person; Manifests qualities of tika, pono, aroha and ihi.		
Home, school and community links	Reaches out to community; Encourages community to reach in; Views the notion of whanau as paramount.		
Roles assumed by teachers	Models the desired behaviour; Propounds Maori epistemology (Maori knowledge having great integrity); Skilled in Maori communication; has cultural competence.		
Style adopted by teachers	Participatory and engaging; Holistic and flexible; Assertive and warm.		

Experience

Central to experience is how we interact with people to generate our personal knowledge and how we are influenced by institutions around us (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). According to Tietjen (in Lonner and Malpass, 1994) a comprehensive approach to studying children's relationships needs to take account of social networks and social supports. A social network consists of the ties and linkages that connect individuals, and sometimes groups or institutions. Social support may be defined as those resources that are provided by other people and that arise in the context of interpersonal relationships. Supportive resources can include information, material assistance, affection, assistance in problem solving, and comforting (Belle, 1989 cited in Lonner and Malpass, 1994). Belle (1989) and Rogoff and Morelli (1997) have found that children's social networks vary in relation to the age, gender and social class of the child as well as in terms of the number of parents in the child's home. They have also found that children who have supportive networks are more competent and cope better with stress. The patterns of relationship that children have with others differ among cultures according to values, beliefs and social organization, that is, according to a range of factors that are fundamental to the development of cultural identity (Tietjen, 1994; Smith, 1995). According to Durie (1998), access to key cultural institutions and resources (such as land, whanau, language, and marae) is also of significance in the development of cultural identity (from a culturally generic perspective). Thus, from an educational perspective, all of these things are relevant and significant experiences. As well as encouraging and supporting home, school and community links, educational programmes need to incorporate skilled leadership and teachers need to have mana (authority, charisma, demeanour) and be sufficiently flexible to assume a multiplicity of roles.

Sound pedagogy

As a term in educational discourse, 'curriculum' is used in a wide variety of ways. Broadly, it refers to what schools teach; more specifically, it can be used to refer to

particular planned activities. Thus, Eisner (1994, p. 31) defines curriculum as "a series of planned events that are intended to have educational consequences for one or more events" and conceives of educational activities as involving much more than is intended and as influencing people in a wide variety of ways. This way of viewing the curriculum can be related to the Maori concept of mana in that mana can move people in ways that make change inevitable (Tate 1990). Redirected positive change is a highly sought outcome for students experiencing behaviour difficulties, and an essential element in restorative practices in schools.[3]

Curriculum and sound pedagogy are closely related. The latter involves making the teaching and learning processes both scientific and artistic. Beane (1995), in proposing an alternative to traditional frameworks in which culture provides curriculum coherence, observes that children need to see both themselves and others in the curriculum, something that can be achieved as the student moves outward from the self and the immediate community, through a study of people and events in their province and their country, towards the world at large. Bishop and Glynn (1999) take this a step further by emphasising the fact that the establishment of relationships should be done in a whanau manner. Such an approach implies that when whanau-type relationships are established, commitment and connectedness become paramount and, in this way, responsibility for the learning of others is fostered.

Conclusion

Careful observation of the three educational sites to which reference has been made reveals a high degree of correspondence in terms of educational theory and practice, something that is very unlikely to be simply coincidental. Since all three of these sites appear to have been successful in providing students with a positive sense of self worth, a positive sense of cultural relatedness and a positive view of their own potential, they can be seen as providing models of good practice that are worthy of imitation. In all three cases, culture is central; in all three cases, there is a movement outwards from child and whanau; in all three cases, curriculum and pedagogy are informed by authentic cultural perspectives, that replaces cultural mismatch by cultural cohesion. As Byrd (cited in Ford, Obiakor and Patton 1995: 140) notes, "[the] challenge is to orchestrate a student curriculum in which there is consonance, not dissonance". Thus, "after determining the appropriate cognitive and cultural maps and matches, the teacher may implement a curriculum model that gives consideration to these factors".

Clear differences were observed in the contexts of the programmes at Mokoia, Awhina and Ngongotaha, differences relating to natural and physical settings, age, level, teaching style, specific educational goals. Nevertheless, each of them was observed to be succeeding where others had sometimes failed. What each of them had in common was a view of the curriculum that is contextually specific, time-situated, and culturally bound (Beane, 1995). What they also had in common was a belief that the curriculum should affirm the validity and legitimacy of Maori knowledge and culture by acknowledging the importance of the notion of whanau (Graham Smith, 1995). Each of these programmes recognised that their pedagogies needed to be informed by Maori metaphors, concepts, and principles (Bishop and Glynn, 1999). The effect of this was observed to be the type of restorying that is often so fundamental to the success of students, particularly students with special needs.

Overall, the educational experiences observed at the three Te Arawa sites provide some responses to issues relating to Maori students who are experiencing difficulties at school. These sites, like many other successful educational contexts in New Zealand and around the world, provide a platform for educators to begin to see how it is possible to "listen to culture". It is hoped that those involved in the professional practice of teaching will seek to refine their approaches by learning more about diverse groups through professional development, research dissemination, and fully inclusive practices (Cross, Bazron, Dennis and Isaacs, 1989). This may require boldness and a strong will. But remember, the renowned ancestor Tamatekapua had strength of character, strength of personality and a tendency to take risks . . . which won him the affection and admiration of his people.

Endnotes

1. Discussed in the following unpublished paper: Macfarlane, A. (2001). Know me, know my culture . . . Maori students' plea to educators. Paper presented at the *New Zealand Association for Research in Education*: Annual conference - December 6 - 9, Christchurch, New Zealand.

2. Discussed in the following unpublished paper: Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Glynn, T., McKinley, E., Devine, N. and Richardson, C. (2001). The experiences of Maori children in the year 9 and year 10 classroom: Part 1 The scoping exercise. Paper presented to the Research Division of the *Ministry of Education*.

3. Discussed in an unpublished paper: Hooper, S., Winslade, J,. Drewery, W., Monk, G. and Macfarlane, A. (1999). School and family group conferences: Te Hui Whakatika (a time for making amends). Paper presented at the Keeping Young People in School Summit Conference on Truancy, Suspensions and Effective Alternatives, Auckland.

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