

An overview of early childhood care and education provision in ‘mainstream’ settings, in relation to kaupapa Māori curriculum and policy expectations

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Te manu ka kai i te miro, nōna te ngāhere; te manu ka kai i te mātauranga, nōna te ao.

The bird that feeds on miro berries reigns in the forest; the bird that feeds on knowledge has access to the world. (Mead & Mead, 2010, p. 74)

Abstract

This paper provides a brief overview of the history of early childhood care and education (ECCE) in Aotearoa New Zealand, before proceeding to discuss the range of documents produced by the New Zealand Ministry of Education in relation to the sector, from the inception of the national early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki. He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa*: (Ministry of Education, 1996a) up to the present day. From the point of its promulgation in 1996, *Te Whāriki* set in place the expectation of a radically different notion of curriculum, in its non-prescriptive philosophical, sociocultural, holistic and ‘bicultural’ nature (Nuttall, 2003). Not the least of these challenges was the delivery of a curriculum inclusive of the Māori culture, values and language by a predominately non-Māori teacher workforce. This is followed by discussion of ways in which the promulgation of *Te Whāriki* formed part of a groundswell of change and led to an enhancement of pedagogies in support of its ‘bicultural’ expectations. The paper concludes with examples from recent research of modes of pedagogical practice that reflect such programme delivery.

Background

Despite the initially honourable intentions of the British Crown as expressed in the 1840 *Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi*, which allowed for British settlement of Aotearoa, entrenched attitudes of white supremacy led inevitably to a legacy of colonisation. Through this process Māori were divested of their lands, self-determination, and their traditional values, knowledges and language threatened to the point of extinction, despite the *Tiriti/Treaty’s* explicitly expressed intent of protection of these (Orange, 1987; Walker, 2004). The colonial education system was dismissive of traditional Māori childrearing practices. Māori traditionally had great respect for children, who were encouraged and supported by the wider collective in a shared parenting model. They were treated with great indulgence and seldom punished (Jenkins & Harte,

2011; Papakura, 1938/1986; Pere, 1982/1994; Salmond, 1991; Smith, 1995). The colonial system reflected its roots in Great Britain, where punishment was routine. This unfortunately resulted in generations of Māori students being beaten for speaking their own language, with the result that many stopped speaking Māori with their children, in order to protect them. Curriculum for Māori students reflected the dominant Pākehā society, with Māori knowledges consciously and unconsciously denigrated, and was intended to prepare Māori for working-class employment (Simon, 2000; Waitangi Tribunal, 1999). The outcome of these policies is not surprising. Deficit discourses became deeply embedded within ‘mainstream’ and to a lesser extent, Māori communities. Māori have consistently been over-represented amongst the students who leave school with few or no qualifications, as well as consistently featuring negatively within the justice, health, and economic statistics (Ministry of Health, 2006; Policy Strategy and Research Group Department of Corrections, 2007).

From the late 1800s onwards, a range of grass-roots early childhood care and education organisations came into being, each born out of a response to particular community circumstances, and with influences of Froebel, Montessori and Deweyan philosophies as each of these were in turn promulgated internationally (May, 1997). These services remained outside the compulsory education sector, the lack of government intrusion having the effect of allowing for freedom and responsiveness to the community, but which simultaneously meant that the services were under-funded and under-resourced. In the late 1900s, responsiveness to community interests was particularly evident in the recognition of the various early childhood care and education services of Māori demand for the promises of the 1840 *Tiriti/Treaty* to be acknowledged. This sensitivity informed the development of *Te Whāriki*, which modelled a process of partnership (between Crown representatives and Māori) amongst the writers. Helen May and Margaret Carr of the University of Waikato led the writing and consultative process along with Tamati and Tilly Reedy who had been nominated by the National Te Kōhanga Reo Trust.

The first national ECCE curriculum was also the first ‘bicultural’ and bilingual curriculum for the country. The introduction of the document contains the commitment that “In early childhood settings, all children should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritages of both partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi” (Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 9). It contains a section written in the Māori language intended for Māori medium settings (pp. 31-39), as well as the integration of expectations pertaining to inclusion of Māori language and content interspersed throughout the entire document. An example from the Māori section of *Te Whāriki* reads “*Mā te whai mana o te mokopuna ka taea e ia te tū kaha i runga i tōna mana Māori motuhake me tōna tino rangatiratanga*” (Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 32). [‘Through the pursuit of pride, prestige and authority the child will be able to stand strongly in her/his sense of Māori independence and self-determination’ - author’s translation]. The curriculum was ground-breaking not only for Aotearoa, but also internationally, in the prominence given to recognition of Indigeneity within mainstream educational provision.

In addition to and in accordance with the affirmation of the status of Māori as *tangata whenua*, *Te Whāriki* is strongly sociocultural, rather than purely developmentalist. It

requires educators to acknowledge and represent the values and belief systems of not only Māori and Pākehā (those with European ancestry) but of **all** children and their families attending that ECCE centre, recognising their identities and learning as being sourced in their nature as **cultural** beings (Rogoff, 2003). *Te Whāriki* is strongly child-centred, with the foundational principles of empowerment, and relationships as central, as well as a key strand of ‘wellbeing’ which takes a holistic, integrative focus of emotional and spiritual as well as physical wellbeing. A theoretical foundation evident within the document is that of constructivism, as evidenced in the key strand of exploration, the discovery/enquiry-oriented approach emphasising learning dispositions and processes rather than predetermined developmental milestones. A further integrative aspect of the curriculum is that mathematics, language, and science are to be learnt through emergent, responsive pedagogical projects rather than prescriptively teacher-directed discrete learning units. Inherent within the document is an understanding of the importance of narrative, and that this can be the result of collaborative processes of co-constructive meaning-making. Learning, from this view, is a process of storying, reified through careful and respectful documentation.

Educators were widely consulted in the development of *Te Whāriki*, and were largely supportive, yet there was concern expressed about the preparedness of a sector, which was at that time dominated by unqualified teachers, to deliver such a complex and challenging curriculum (Cullen, 2003; May, 2001). Furthermore, the sector was dominated by Pākehā educators, the vast majority of whom had only a superficial knowledge of Māori language and culture. A sociocultural critique of the delivery of programmes both in the late 1990s and today could well ask a range of questions as to: Whose cultures and languages are being represented? In what ways and to what degree of authenticity are these represented? And, how deeply are educators engaging with the specificities of individual children and families regarding their histories, values, and passions?

Guidance from further Ministry of Education documents

The sector has benefited from the support of provision of a programme of government funded professional learning, as well as a range of Ministry of Education documents in support of curriculum enactment. Subsequent to the promulgation of *Te Whāriki*, the Ministry produced a *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs) for Chartered Early Childhood Services in New Zealand* (Ministry of Education, 1996b). This publication was followed by a supporting document “*Quality in Action. Te Mahi Whai hua*” (Ministry of Education, 1998), which contained an integrated series of “Bicultural Approaches” throughout its series of explanations of ‘desirable’ practices. The 2002 strategic plan for the sector instigated and promoted by the Labour-led government, “*Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki*,” contained reinforcement of the need for educators to work in partnership with families, in particular Māori and Pacific Island families. It also outlined a staged programme of requirement for teachers to become qualified, so that by 2012 all teachers were expected to be fully qualified. This plan has subsequently been reduced to a 50% minimum by a National-led government. Further documents produced by the Ministry for the

sector, and reinforcing the ‘bicultural’ stance of *Te Whāriki*, include a series of booklets of examples of assessment, which follow a narrative paradigm, entitled *Kei Tua o te Pae. Assessment for learning: Early Childhood Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2004/2007/2009), see in particular Booklet Three, “*Bicultural Assessment*” (Ministry of Education, 2004). Subsequently, a document outlining processes for centre review was produced, which continued the *Te Whāriki* metaphor of weaving the curriculum, “*Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua. Self-review guidelines for ECE*” (Ministry of Education, 2006). And more latterly, a further assessment document was published, with a focus on the assessment of Māori children, “*Te Whatu Pōkeka*” (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Shifts seen in recent research

The term ‘bicultural’ is used within *Te Whāriki*, and elsewhere, to refer to the two main cultures within Aotearoa New Zealand. In this instance, the term refers to the institutional level, although it can also be applied to individuals who are steeped in both Māori and Pākehā cultures. It has, however, been critiqued as ambiguous, and also as having been coopted by the dominant culture, in service of retaining its dominance and power (O’Sullivan, 2007). From this view, institutions and practices that profess a ‘bicultural’ intent have sometimes been criticised as failing to adequately acknowledge and uphold the status and rights of Māori as *tangata whenua* (original people of this land) as articulated in *Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi*. Within early childhood care and education, ‘bicultural’ practice has been applied to programmes where small token expressions of *te reo* Māori, songs, dress-ups, and posters have been added in to a regular mainstream programme. Through a series of four studies, the latter three funded by the New Zealand Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (Ritchie, 2002; Ritchie, Duhn, Rau, & Craw, 2010; Ritchie & Rau, 2006, 2008), we have been able to identify pedagogies that we have termed ‘*Tiriti*-based’ ECCE. In these settings, educators intentionally integrate *kaupapa* Māori (Māori philosophy) understandings inclusively within the everyday ways of being, knowing and doing, through incorporating and enacting a sense of *whanaungatanga* (relationships), *wairuatanga* (spiritual interconnectedness), *manaakitanga* (caring, generosity and hospitality), and *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship and caring for the environment).

In the first of the series of studies (Ritchie, 2002), Pākehā teachers reported their anxiety about ‘getting things wrong’, in relation to using *te reo* Māori. Their use of *te reo* was limited to tokenistic insertion of single Māori words into English grammatical structures as well as a few formulaic phrases, generally commands such as ‘*Horoi o ringaringa*’ (Wash your hands). Māori educators were emphatic that it was important for all teachers to be committed to working at their fluency on a longterm basis, and that this could be supported by building relationships with Māori families in their centres. Although some songs were sung in Māori, there was little evidence of *kaupapa* Māori practices such as *karakia* (prayer, grace, ritual incantation).

In the second study (Ritchie & Rau, 2006), some Māori educators expressed disappointment regarding the lack of progress in regard to implementation of the ‘bicultural’ expectations of *Te Whāriki* (Ritchie & Rau, 2006). It was evident that for Māori at least, there was a vision of what this kind of pedagogy might look like, as seen

in this statement: “I would like to see our *tamariki* [children] being bilingual and being completely comfortable in either Māori or Pākehā settings—having an understanding of the protocols or expected behaviour in these i.e., bicultural” (as cited in Ritchie & Rau, 2006, p. 24).

In our next study (Ritchie & Rau, 2008), we explored these issues further, along with a group of co-researchers who were all ECCE educators who were strongly committed to ‘bicultural’ practice within their programmes. A teacher from Papamoa Kindergarten, in the North Island near Tauranga, reflected on their pedagogical processes during the study:

We questioned ourselves on the integration of Māori culture into the curriculum, where was it visible? We found it was visible in the children, their relationships and identifying what is ‘Māori’, naturally integrating te reo, their understanding of concepts and tikanga. We were aware of not only approaching a bicultural programme superficially—it was for us about the feeling of the place, a sense of the place, more abstract than tangible. As teachers we needed to reflect on how to identify the aspects that become important to us (like families present during the kindergarten session, sharing with us their aspirations for their tamariki, and truly feeling that this is their place, a shared partnership). (as cited in Ritchie & Rau, 2008, p. 81)

In a similar vein, a teacher from Hawera Kindergarten, from the small central North Island town of Hawera, contemplated her teaching team’s journey during the course of their participation in the study, and the way in which they had come to focus more strongly on building relationships with families as the heart of the ‘bicultural’ focus of their programme:

For the children, the reflection of a bicultural environment is even more evident. I have thought more about how the child voices his/her culture and belonging. We know that being honest and committed, and reflecting this genuinely in the programme has brought us the best of outcomes. Our team has had lots of very in-depth discussions regarding our beliefs and practices. This has taken us on a very positive journey, encouraging us to voice our views, feelings and ways of improving our programme, respecting and sharing the rich culture we all have to share... We have reviewed our team philosophy—we are very clear that the relationships we nurture, support and sustain underpin the bicultural programme in our centre. Today, I am aware of the relationships we have with our families and foster their sense of belonging into our centre. I value and support their culture and the things they bring to our centre as it enriches all. Treating people equally—giving everyone the same thing—is very different from treating people equitably—giving everyone what they need. We endeavour to treat people equitably. (as cited in Ritchie & Rau, 2008, p. 81-82)

The fourth, and most recent study (Ritchie et al., 2010), extended the notions of *manaakitanga* (caring, generosity and hospitality), and of a commitment to social and cultural justice to include environmental concerns. The sub-title of the project “*We are the future, the present and the past: caring for self, others and the environment in early years’ teaching and learning*” indicates this focus. Again, working closely with teacher co-researchers in ten different early childhood centres from around the country, we aimed to identify ‘pedagogies of place’ (Gruenewald, 2003; Penetito, 2009) that foster communities of caring. Māori worldviews were central to the project, as teachers employed notions such as *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship of and caring for the environment) within their programmes. It was interesting to observe during the two year period of the project (2008-2009) how the growing national and international consciousness in relation to climate change and other environmental issues (Hansen, 2009; McIntosh, 2008; Sustainable Aotearoa New Zealand Inc, 2009; United Nations, 2009), led to a reciprocal flow of ideas and practices around ecological sustainability between teachers, children, families, and their local communities. In addition, it was pleasing to see young children readily demonstrating their advocacy on behalf of *Papatūānuku* (Earth Mother) and *Ranginui* (Sky Father). For example, a teacher from Richard Hudson Kindergarten in Dunedin in the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, described how the children re-named ‘glad-wrap’ to be instead, ‘sad-wrap’:

Petra has used the information given to her at mat times to add depth and concern to what she knows of the world. She has spontaneously decided to pick up rubbish in her neighbourhood because of her concern for the earth mother. The personification has allowed her to deduce that the smoke from chimneys would not be beneficial to Rangi’s [Ranginui – the Sky Father’s] lungs, making it hard for him to breathe. Petra is thinking further afield too. She wants to go to the beach and do a clean up with her family. She has thought a lot about these things. She has also talked about ‘Sad Wrap’ at kindergarten recently, [saying as she considered her lunch wrapping] ‘I have sadwrap. This is not good for Mother Earth. (as cited in Ritchie et al., 2010, p. 95)

From our body of work, it is possible to identify some possible dispositions for ECCE educators in relation to delivering practice that reflects a commitment to *Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi* as well as to social, cultural, and environmental justice. Fostering these dispositions might require particular approaches within initial teacher education programmes, to generate awareness and understanding of these issues, followed by a commitment to positioning these issues as central to quality ECCE provision and professionalism (Samuelsson & Kaga, 2008; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2005). Some of these dispositions might include sensitivity and clarity (both intra- and interpersonal awareness); compassion (an ethic of care, *manaakitanga*); collaboration and reciprocity (openness, humility); reflection (honesty, sensitivity); and respectful acknowledgement of the centrality of culture(s) to identities and learning. Furthermore, our research has affirmed that in shifting away from monocultural Western-dominated pedagogies, openness and

respect for Māori culture extends to the inclusion of the home cultures of all those attending a centre, since *kaupapa* Māori values require the enactment of *manaakitanga* (caring, generosity and hospitality) to all ethnicities present. This situation is confirmed by a national report into ECCE practice in relation to diversity, by the New Zealand Education Review Office, which noted:

There was a strong correlation between the quality of provision of te reo and tikanga Māori [Māori language and cultural practices] and the provision for the differing cultures of families contributing to services. Rather than biculturalism and multiculturalism being alternatives, it appears that attention to one had positive benefits for the other. (Education Review Office, 2004, p. 11).

The Education Review Office has subsequently produced a series of national reports for the ECCE, which are intended to support educators implementing the aspirations of *Te Whāriki* by providing culturally responsive pedagogies for Māori children (Education Review Office, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2012). These reports provide further challenges along with support and guidance for committed ECCE professionals, and are in alignment with the current Ministry of Education strategy for Māori education, discussed in the following section.

Māori identity as a source of potentiality

The legacy of our colonialist history continues to manifest in the poor status of *te reo* Māori (the Māori language), still considered to be seriously threatened, in the under-achievement of Māori and Pacific Islands children in education and in the over-representation of Māori and Pacific Islands peoples in poorer communities (White, Gunston, Salmond, Atkinson, & Crampton, 2008). Yet Māori in general are determined to preserve their culture and language, and expect this to be reflected in the ECCE settings that their children attend. In fact, the availability of Māori values, cultural practices and languages, is a key factor in Māori participation within the sector (Dixon, Widdowson, Meagher-Lundberg, McMurchy-Pilkington, & McMurchy-Pilkington, 2007; Robertson, Gunn, Lanumata, & Pryor, 2007). Current Ministry of Education policy aims to shift educational discourse away from deficit thinking (seeing Māori as ‘the problem’), towards seeing culture(s) as an asset, as the heart of learning (Ministry of Education, 2008). The expectation is that educators (and the education system) accept responsibility for ensuring Māori success, rather than perpetuating the historically embedded discourse of blaming Māori children and families for the lack of achievement. Instead, being Māori is to be viewed as an inherent cultural capability, and foundation for **success as Māori**. ‘Success’ is to be defined by students, *whānau* (families), *hapū* (subtribes), and *iwi* (tribes), in negotiation with education professionals and providers, so that Māori learners excel in the realisation of the cultural identities, so that they can enjoy full participation in and to contribute within their multiple sites of their Māori communities, Aotearoa/New Zealand and the wider world. The Ministry of Education also recognises the early childhood care and education sector as crucial in establishing positive foundations for young learners, and sees *Te Whāriki* as

providing “a strong basis” for high quality culturally responsive teaching and learning environments (Ministry of Education, 2012b, p. 14).

The work of Māori academic Mere Skerrett has reinforced the centrality of repositioning *te reo* Māori (the Māori language) at the heart of the early childhood provision (Skerrett, 2007). She considers this process of reinstatement of the language or ‘reversing language shift’ to be a key aspect of decolonisation, whereby Māori through the assertion of their mother tongue, are enabled to further their aspirations for *tino rangatiratanga* (self-determination), as promised in Article Two of *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*. Māori, through this reclamation of their language, are able to lead the process of “revisiting of a bicultural, bilingual Aotearoa” (Skerrett, 2007, p. 6). *Tino rangatiratanga* in this educational context is the ability to critically mediate one’s sense-making and learning from the position of being Māori. Language is central to culture and identity (Darder, 1991; Pere, 1991). Through having confidence in their own language, Māori children will be able to step up to function as *rangatira* (leaders) within their particular *whānau* (extended families), communities and as caring citizens of the planet.

Challenges remain for our sector. Currently (in 2011), only 9.1% of the total 20,644 teachers in the ECCE workforce are Māori (Ministry of Education, 2012a). Whilst 24% of Māori reported in the most recent population census of 2006 that they were speakers of the Māori language, only 1.6% of Pākehā responded that they could speak Māori (Statistics New Zealand. Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2010). High quality models of language are required for language learning, rather than token minimal amounts. Only 21% of Māori children who attend early childhood care and education services are enrolled in *kōhanga reo* (the Māori immersion family development and early childhood education movement) (Ministry of Education, 2011). As a research participant made clear:

Teachers and children need to be using dialogue to work with each other – co-constructing. In order to reflect this, we need to provide environments rich in Māori language. We need proficient speaking Māori teachers! Regurgitating learnt phrases will not provide the opportunities for children to really conscientise their experiences, that is, thinking in Māori. Only a very high level of exposure in Māori will do that. (unpublished data from the Whakawhanaungatanga study, Ritchie & Rau, 2006)

This places the onus back on initial teacher education providers to ensure that their graduates leave those institutions prepared to deliver on their professional responsibilities in relation to cultural, linguistic, and environmental sustainability.

Final thoughts

The early childhood care and education sector in Aotearoa New Zealand has for the past two decades, and particularly prompted by the 1996 promulgation of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996a), and with the support of the 2002 Strategic Plan, *Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002), demonstrated an ongoing commitment to fostering pedagogies that represent the *tangata whenua* (people of the land), the

Indigenous Māori. It is clear that whilst the delivery of high quality (which must be inclusive of being culturally responsive) ECCE remains a challenge for the sector (Education Review Office, 2008, 2010a). Our research has demonstrated that there are, in fact, many educators and centres committed to ongoing enhancement of ‘bicultural’ or *Tiriti*-based pedagogies in alignment with Māori and Ministry of Education aspirations.

Providers of initial teacher education have a significant role to play in generating within their graduates an understanding of the history of colonisation in this country, which has necessitated the current situation of an imperative for pedagogical redress (Ritchie, 2002), most critically expressed in the need to shift from a ‘deficit’ to a capability orientation (Ministry of Education, 2008, 2012b). Rather than treating all children ‘the same’ (Education Review Office, 2008, 2010a; Simon, 1996), that is, producing pedagogy dominated by a middle-class Pākehā perspective, graduates need to be prepared to act as agents of transformation when, once they graduate, they encounter centres with monocultural approaches and lacking in commitment to implementing the kaupapa Māori expectations of *Te Whāriki* and the Ministry of Education. Mentoring these new graduates in order to support them to maintain the commitments that they have gained during their period of studying for their qualifications is a challenge that has been recognised by the relevant institutions, the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Teachers Council, who recently released a jointly produced document, *Tātaiako: Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners* (Ministry of Education & New Zealand Teachers Council, 2011). (However, since all teachers in Aotearoa will inevitably be teaching Māori learners, I suggest that the document would have been better titled *Kaupapa Māori Competencies for Teachers*). Ongoing support and professional learning for both beginning teachers and their mentors is crucial to maintaining these professional commitments, particularly in teaching settings that are unsupportive of these philosophies (Aitken, Piggot-Irvine, Bruce Ferguson, McGrath, & Ritchie, 2008; Piggot-Irvine, Aitken, Ritchie, Bruce Ferguson, & McGrath, 2009). The New Zealand Teachers Council, the body that oversees both the initial teacher education providers and the teacher registration process is currently being reviewed, and it will be interesting to see if the review highlights ways in which these dual functions can be enhanced in regard to strengthening kaupapa Māori provision within mainstream education settings. We also await with interest the report of the recent Waitangi Tribunal hearing into a claim by the National Te Kohanga Reo Trust.

It is clear from the overview offered in this paper, that the ECCE sector in Aotearoa has made and continues to be engaged in a considerable shift, away from an uncritiqued perpetuation of colonising monocultural dominance, towards a culturally respectful and responsive pedagogy, in which relationships with *whānau* Māori are forged as the cornerstone of the localised centre practice. Furthermore, this shift towards cultural responsiveness and reciprocity extends to enrich and include all the diverse families attending that setting. This sea-change in ECCE in Aotearoa has been well supported by the provision of a range of relevant documents from the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office, as well as by a programme of professional learning opportunities funded and overseen by the Ministry. Whilst the scope of three-year programmes of initial teacher education may not be long enough to develop in their

graduates a high degree of proficiency in the Māori language, it is certainly long enough to foster an understanding of, and commitment to the key professional responsibilities outlined in *Te Whāriki, Ka Hikitia*, and other documents, in relation to the expectation to deliver high quality (culturally responsive) *Tiriti*-based ECCE programmes.

E kore au e ngaro he kākano i ruia mai i Rangiatea

This whakatauki refers to the original seed from Rangiatea, the spiritual homeland for Māori, stating that this seed will not be lost. It thus asserts both continuity and resilience, and implies that for Māori, their language and culture are the sustenance of this resilience. (Grace & Grace, 2003, p. 29)

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