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Ko tēnei te wā.... Te Tiriti o Waitangi education, teacher education, and early childhood care and education

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Abstract

This paper offers a brief personal reflection on some leadership related observations from work as an early childhood teacher educator over the past thirty years. Te Tiriti o Waitangi education is a specific area that has previously not been sufficiently prioritised and has only comparatively recently been affirmed in government policy as a key focus of education henceforth. This paper reflects on some of the underlying reasons for this omission within education, pointing to notions of white supremacy in the colonialist assumption of sovereignty and ongoing racism that has negatively impacted on educational experiences and outcomes for Māori in Aotearoa and has also resulted in the degradation of our environment despite Tiriti o Waitangi assurances about the sustenance of rangatiratanga and protection of taonga which should have supported ongoing kaitiakitanga of te taiao. Some hopeful recent policy initiatives are acknowledged. It finishes with recognition of the current climate emergency and the need for urgent educational leadership required in response.

Keywords: *Tiriti o Waitangi education; anti-racism; social justice; climate crisis*

Te Tiriti o Waitangi

It could be argued that the early childhood care and education sector has led the way in recognising the foundational and ongoing significance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Prior to the 1990 sesquicentennial of the treaty signing, many early childhood care and education organisations had stated a commitment to the treaty (Cooper & Tangaere, 1994) as was later stipulated in the first national early childhood curriculum for Aotearoa, *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1996) which was also the nation's first “bicultural” curriculum. *Te Whāriki 1996* not only stated that “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” (p. 9), it also posed this question for teachers’ reflection: “In what ways do the environment and programme reflect the values embodied in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and what impact does this have on adults and children?” (p. 56). This in turn required early childhood teacher education programmes to prepare future teachers to be able to deliver this “bicultural” and arguably Tiriti o Waitangi based curriculum.

Acknowledging mentors

It is likely that many personal leadership stories acknowledge those leaders who have previously served as mentors, sharing wisdom and providing inspiration. Whilst gaining a kindergarten teaching diploma and a social science degree at the University of Waikato in the 1980s I completed a number of Māori studies and te reo Māori papers taught by Hirini Melbourne, Wharehuia Milroy, Timoti Karetu and John Moorfield (Murumāra). Later after a period of kindergarten teaching, whilst working as a Parentline counsellor I completed a Master of Counselling degree, writing my dissertation on the work Project Waitangi colleagues and I had been doing in the area of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and anti-racism education. I have continued to work in this area of Te Tiriti o Waitangi education, often working with my colleague Associate Professor Sandy Morrison of the University of Waikato in this regard. The era of the early 1990s marked the transition from two-year kindergarten diplomas to new three-year early childhood care and education qualifications which applied to teaching in both childcare and kindergarten services and recognised that all these services for young children from birth to school-age necessarily provided both care and education.

February 6th, 1990, marked 150 years' anniversary of the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. I arrived back from protesting at Waitangi about the lack of government recognition of treaty breaches and jumped straight into my new role as a lecturer in early childhood care and education. As a young lecturer at the University of Waikato I was fortunate to have been guided by several visionary leaders of our early childhood teacher education programme: Jill Mitchell, Helen May and Margaret Carr. All three were committed to including a strong focus on the implications of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in our programme, at a time when such matters were generally not well understood. I was immediately tasked with designing several new courses for the brand-new three-year programme and felt completely out of my depth. My colleagues were very solicitous, saying, "feel free to ask us any questions". An important learning for me at this time, and one that leaders might do well to note, is that it is very difficult for people to ask questions when they don't have enough information to know what questions they need to ask.

At this time, we specifically referred to our field as "early childhood *care and education*", not only out of respect for the childcare sector, but due to the implicit recognition that care is an important component of work in this sector, since it is only once children's spiritual, emotional and physical wellbeing is cared for that they will be fully receptive to the learning opportunities on offer. In recent decades a "schoolification" agenda in our Ministry of Education shifted its languaging and therefore its emphasis to "early childhood education", and more recently to "early learning" with the focus on "the learner" as opposed to the holistic wellbeing, growth and development of tamariki and whānau (Alcock & Haggerty, 2013). Given the current government's espoused focus on "wellbeing" perhaps we will soon return to describing and acknowledging our sector as being focussed on early childhood *care and education*.

Identifying Tiriti o Waitangi based practices

After achieving the parity of the three-year teaching qualification, a second momentous development for our sector followed shortly afterwards when my colleagues Helen May and Margaret Carr, along with Tilly and Tamati Reedy on behalf of the Kōhanga Reo National Trust, worked with a wide range of early childhood care and education whānau and professionals to produce *Te Whāriki 1996* (Nuttall, 2003).

In our early childhood teacher education programme at the University of Waikato, ensuring that our students received a two-day long Tiriti o Waitangi and anti-racism workshop prior to beginning their early childhood teacher education programme was an important consideration. Learning about pre-treaty, Te Tiriti, and post-treaty history including the history of colonisation, treaty breaches and the impacts of racism along with exploring cultural identities established a foundation from which they could recognise their ongoing obligations as teachers in relation to Te Tiriti o Waitangi commitments (Ritchie, 2002). These include honouring te tino rangatiratanga and respecting taonga katoa (Article 2); ensuring equal rights for Māori (Article 3); and respecting Māori spiritual beliefs (Article 4). Carrying forward these initial understandings, expanding them further during their university studies and applying them in teaching practice enables a deeper integrity than is often seen in superficial references to the oft-cited principles of partnership, protection and participation (Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1987). The ongoing traction of this over-simplification of Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations can perhaps be explained in that it makes an (unfortunately limited) understanding of the treaty accessible. However, this explanation of treaty “principles”, in ignoring the wording of Te Tiriti *articles*, also unfortunately obscures more nuanced understandings and implications derived from exploration of the historical context of Te Tiriti and the impacts of subsequent treaty breaches. It furthermore ignores the significant body of work from the Courts and Waitangi Tribunal which outline a complex array of treaty related principles that have been identified over the years (Hayward, 2004; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2001).

One of the dilemmas that became apparent in relation to what my colleague Cheryl Rau and I later came to call Tiriti o Waitangi based (or in short, Tiriti based) early childhood care and education practice (see, for example, Ritchie and Rau 2006b), was that since the explicit expectations contained within *Te Whāriki* were radically new, our students were often expected to demonstrate leadership in relation to the inclusion of te reo me ōna tikanga in early childhood services. Such expectations (as well as requests not to do so) can be somewhat daunting to young teacher education students and beginning teachers. A leadership-related learning here is that it is important to validate and support the leadership contributions of those who are younger or lower on professional hierarchies, rather than viewing them merely as leaders-in-waiting.

When Cheryl Rau and I conducted research in the area of Tiriti o Waitangi based practice (Ritchie & Rau, 2006a, 2008), what became apparent was the incredible leadership of many early childhood teachers in this regard. In a sector with noticeably fewer tiers of hierarchy than

elsewhere and which features teachers working together in teams within the same classroom, it was exciting to see clusters of teachers working collectively to build their confidence and competence with regard to enhancing their delivery of te reo Māori, to instilling and enacting te ao Māori values throughout their programmes, and to including whānau Māori in the work of their centres. I recall during one of our Teaching and Learning Research Initiative projects, one of the Māori parents who had been interviewed by teachers for the study turned around and said *she* would like to interview the teachers. She was curious as to how this group of Pākehā teachers managed to create such a feeling of wairuatanga, of warmth and acceptance within the kindergarten; whether the teachers thought that was due to the inclusion of te ao Māori in the programme; and whether this would have happened without the impetus of *Te Whāriki*. In our research reports and papers we noted the importance of teachers creating opportunities for Māori contributions (i.e. leadership) within early childhood care and education, which required teachers to consider the hidden power effects attached to their role, and recognise whānau Māori as the experts in relation to their own tamariki (Rau, 2007; Rau & Ritchie, 2003, 2005, 2011; Ritchie & Rau, 2006a, 2006b, 2008).

We observed how, on occasion, the modelling of a committed leader within a teaching team consistently upholding and deepening Tiriti o Waitangi based practice not only affirmed tamariki and whānau Māori, it also brought other members of the teaching team to a deeper engagement with te ao Māori. Ramila Sadikeen, who is of Sri Lankan Malay ancestry, was a kindergarten head teacher who demonstrated such a commitment. Ramila wrote that:

Building and sustaining relationships within the centre community has been an ongoing commitment. It has required leadership qualities that could withstand the test of time. It has tested the unwavering vision to see a philosophy consolidate while managing aspects of an ethical, moral conscience that has tapped on the discomfiting, sensitive and challenging nature of cultural issues and their underlying power effects. (Sadikeen & Ritchie, 2009, p. 6)

The inversion of the assumption of power hierarchies, when Pākehā teachers are most often not experts in te ao Māori, was clearly a challenge to the leadership of many teachers early on. And despite the fact that ongoing Ministry of Education (see for example, 2002) and Education Review Office (see for example, 2012) documents have reinforced the notion of “partnership with whānau Māori”, this remains an ongoing issue. It is difficult not to consider the inscription of long-embedded colonialist notions of white superiority as one factor impeding progress in this matter.

Challenging racism

In writing this paper I have been reflecting on the extent to which early childhood care and education, and education more widely in Aotearoa is currently better placed in relation to the acknowledgement of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the anti-racism issues with which I began my

academic career. Whilst our research identified many strategies for addressing historically embedded inequities, the narrowly focussed education policies of the nine years of our previous government did not allow for significant progress to be made, regardless of many good intentions within the broader education sector.

There has recently been an increased acknowledgement of the racism, sometimes softened to be termed “unconscious bias”, of our education system (Blank, Houkamau, & Kingi, 2016; Murfitt, 2019). Moana Jackson (2018) has pointed out that euphemisms such as “unconscious bias, casual racism, or unintended prejudice” may not only “excuse the perpetrator” but also “fail to address the usually unarticulated distress that racism causes” (para42). A study incorporating the voices of 1,678 New Zealand children and young people reported that: “Many rangatahi and tamariki told us they experience racism at school. We also heard from many who described feelings of being treated unequally because of their culture. This is a significant and disturbing insight” (New Zealand School Trustees Association & Office of the Children’s Commissioner, 2018, p. 19). Similar concerns were expressed when the Ministry of Education conducted nation-wide consultations with Māori about their expectations for the education of their tamariki (Ministry of Education, 2019a). Ongoing implications of racist education policies are evident in that whilst “Maori communities have over a long period made claims to the establishment to include their language, knowledge, history and practices into the curriculum” (Penetito, 2002, p. 28), only 11% of Māori report that they can speak te reo very well or well (Ministry of Social Development, 2016), and 4% of our total population are speakers (Statistics NZ, 2019).

The Teaching Council now visibly acknowledges racism to be unprofessional and unacceptable within teaching practice (Teaching Council | Matatū Aotearoa, n.d.) and is working with the Human Rights Commission to develop a teacher-oriented version of the “Give nothing to racism” campaign (Human Rights Commission, 2017; Teaching Council | Matatū Aotearoa, 2019). Furthermore, the Ministry of Education is about to begin the roll-out of a sector-wide programme Te Hurihanganui, which in building on the previous Te Kotahitanga model (Bishop & Berryman, 2009, 2010), aims to address “the racism and bias inherent in our system” (Ministry of Education, 2019b).

Whilst the revised early childhood curriculum fails to acknowledge racism or discrimination (Ministry of Education, 2017), it is pleasing to see that the current government’s recently released Early Learning Action Plan states that:

This action plan recognises that not all children and whānau have equal access to resources within their community, and that for every child to thrive it is necessary to ensure that provisions are in place that respond to specific and variable needs. Among other things, this means that access to early learning services needs to be barrier-free and free from racism, discrimination and stigma. (Ministry of Education, 2019c, p. 13)

Perhaps we are finally as a nation beginning to “unlearn” our blindness to racism.

One thing that has been consistent over my three decades of teacher education is that, associated with a lack of understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, is a general lack of historical knowledge in our teacher education students. Prime Minister Ardern and Minister of Education Chris Hipkins announced in 2019 that New Zealand history is about to be mandated to be taught across the curriculum by 2022 and will include:

- The Arrival of Māori to Aotearoa New Zealand
- First encounters and early colonial history of Aotearoa New Zealand
- Te Tiriti o Waitangi / Treaty of Waitangi and its history
- Colonisation of, and immigration to, Aotearoa New Zealand, including the New Zealand Wars
- Evolving national identity of Aotearoa New Zealand in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries
- Aotearoa New Zealand’s role in the Pacific
- Aotearoa New Zealand in the late 20th century and evolution of a national identity with cultural plurality (Ardern & Hipkins, 2019).

In addition, the recently introduced Education and Training Bill 2019 positions the “Treaty of Waitangi at the centre of education” (Radio New Zealand, 2019). Leadership across the education sector will be important to ensure that these two long overdue education initiatives are successfully introduced, and if so it is likely that this will contribute to both a greater respect for tangata whenua and a stronger sense of national identity. This then creates the possibility that we may eventually overcome the historical and cultural amnesia that has been so problematic within our education system and wider national discourses, and that has contributed to racist ignorance and discrimination (Jackson, 2019; Shadbolt, 1999).

Interconnectedness of social, cultural, economic, and ecological justice

A study we conducted in 2008–9 with ten early childhood settings demonstrated ways in which a commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi can manifest in supporting young children and whānau to exercise kaitiakitanga, care for te taiao (Barker, 2010; Ellwood, 2010; Ritchie, Duhn, Rau & Craw, 2010). My final reflection is an urgent call for strong leadership across the entire education sector in relation to the planetary crisis we are currently facing with regard to the increasingly exponential impacts of global warming, which include the extreme frequency and intensity of fires, droughts and cyclones along with concomitant biodiversity loss, including physical and mental health impacts and endangerment of many children and families, particularly those who reside on low-lying Pacific Islands (Burton, Mustelin & Urich, 2011; Lawler, 2011; Littlejohn & Coleman, 2019; Royal Society of NZ, 2017; Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2019; United Nations, 2019). As I write, state parties to the United Nations are meeting in Madrid for the COP25 negotiations, with

the hope that all nations will agree to take urgent steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In the past year, an international youth-led “school strikes for climate” movement initiated by Greta Thunberg has called attention to these concerns (Binnie, 2019). There is now growing recognition that the climate emergency is a crisis in relation to the rights of children to stable, secure futures (Harvey, 2019) and that Indigenous and traditional ecological knowledges (TEK) are sources of sustainability practices that can inform our future transition to living sustainably within the finite constraints of our planet (Skerrett & Ritchie, 2018; Williams, Bunda, Claxton, & MacKinnon, 2018). Providing young people with understandings and strategies for facing the climate emergency and managing a just transition is clearly a priority: this has yet to be underscored by our education authorities, and thus remains a challenge to educational leadership across the sectors. It is pleasing that the Ministry of Education has recently released several new resources focussed on sustainability education. One is Pūtātara: A Call to Action, which focuses on ‘sustainability and global citizenship across the curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand’ (see: <https://putatara.education.govt.nz/#/home>). There is also a programme focussed on climate change with resources for teachers accompanied by a wellbeing guide (see: <https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-resources/Education-for-sustainability/Tools-and-resources>). Given the multiplying impacts of both the climate crisis and global Covid-19 pandemic, it is imperative that all educators take up the challenge to focus on the interwoven issues of social, cultural, economic and ecological justice in their work and foster the leadership of their students in facing these challenges.

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