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Bicultural development in early childhood education: Critical reflections and the Humpty Dumpty story

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Early childhood in Aotearoa/New Zealand has long been known for its commitment to biculturalism. This acknowledgement of two cultures is seen as a right of children of this country to be exposed to and know the dual heritage of our land. For teachers in centres without mentoring staff members with Māori knowledge and understanding of Māori world views this has often caused a problem. The concern was how they can implement biculturalism to a degree that does honour both cultures. It is not about being the other culture, but rather knowing about it. This would allow values and customs from both cultures to be included and celebrated through practices on the floor of early childhood centres. The purpose of this reflection is to look at means to achieve this in practical ways.

Children in early childhood centres in this country can still be heard to sing the nursery rhyme

*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king's horses and all the king's men, couldn't put Humpty together again*

It seems so English and far removed from Māori culture. It would seem an unlikely companion to link with bicultural development. However, Mead (2003) explains how this analogy by Professor Bruce Briggs describes "what happened to Māori society, its system and knowledge base" (p. 210). This author clarifies that this Humpty Dumpty analogy aligns with what has happened to Māori culture where the whole is scattered into many fragments. Some bits have been lost forever while other segments are no longer visible. This analogy will be used to explore the possibility of what seemed impossible in the nursery rhyme which is to retain something of value of the original from the broken pieces. Is what remains of Māori culture able to lead to the retention of the essence of this culture?

Biculturalism is often accepted as a term referring to two cultures in partnership. However partnership implies two parties having equal rights and input. O'Sullivan found the term biculturalism was fundamentally colonist as "it positions Māori in junior partnership" (O'Sullivan as cited in Jenkin & Broadley, 2013, p.13). Compared to the Crown Māori as the junior partner have less power to advocate and ensure change that will be advantageous to their people. Durie (2001) maintains that success for Māori in education is dependent on Māori ways being honoured and Māori being allowed to be Māori in a system that is essentially Pākehā. The history of colonisation of this country resulted in the disempowering of Māori in many situations including education (Smith, 1999). As a result of the colonisation process there was a loss of Māori ways understanding of their world view. Therefore the term biculturalism does not seem to capture this situation and O'Sullivan (as cited in Jenkin & Broadley, 2013) believes the wording "bicultural development" is more appropriate as it implies this is a continual journey, in both cultures and that it is still in progress (p. 13).

To retain what remains of Māori culture we need early childhood education policies and practices which reflect the importance of this. Then learners will be nurtured in their identity while able to discover their own unique ways of exploring and learning in mainstream early childhood settings. Educators can facilitate learning "by supporting deeper development of their student's ideas and growing sense of self as competent and unique bicultural teachers"

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(Wanerman, 2013, p. 3). Gibbs (2006) refers to this as “teaching in ways that honour cultural diversity” (p. 181). The graduating teacher standards (Education Council, 2015) require student teachers to have sufficient awareness of tikanga and te reo Māori to be able to practice appropriately within the bicultural contexts of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Finding the core parts of Humpty Dumpty’s soul

Ko taku reo taku ohooho, ko taku reo taku mapihi mauria

My language is my awakening; my language is the window to my soul.

Te reo Māori is often a problem for English speaking teachers because of the different vowel sounds and grammatical formations. Those that are not confident in languages often lack the confidence to use te reo Māori (Education Review Office, 2012). To be bi-lingual becomes a problem and fear of getting it wrong often hinders progress because “it is beyond their experience as monoculture speakers of English with little experience of Māori culture and values (Ritchie, 2003, p. 10). With rote learning many of the cultural contextualisation behind words is lost. For example, learning ‘kowhai for yellow’ tells nothing about the kowhai flower itself, and ‘kikorangi for blue’ does not share its full meaning, which is the sky father’s cloak. This can be a real barrier to teachers and affect their ability to explore other ways they can contribute to bicultural development. Teachers can find different ways they can expose the children in their centres to the use of te reo Māori in a range of different ways, given that “creativity – unique and divergent ways of exploring and thinking - is innate to human development” (Wanerman, 2013, p.130). It is within this context that teachers can creatively build on their own ideas to find ways to incorporate tikanga and te reo Māori into their daily practice within the context of learning environments within Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Having faith and exercising effort in the rescue

Ko te pae tawhiti whāia kia tata,

Ko te pae tata whakamaua kia tina.

Pursue the distant pathways of your dreams so they may become your reality.

Professor Joseph Sparling’s (2014) research suggests it is the interactive rich consistent language that is stimulating to learners and that “learning games is the most well-known element of this approach because you need to have something that’s interactive that goes back and forth” (p. 7). Mihaka (2008) research focused on how waiata can be used to teach te reo Māori. Teachers can build on story telling using local stories, and books such as *Nanny Mihi’s Rainbow* and *the Kuia and the Spider*. These incorporate Māori world views which forms part of bicultural development. Early readers in te reo Māori (supplied to primary schools) could also be used to expose the children to te ao Māori through a range of multi-literacies; language (oral, written and visual), visual art, drama, music and movement. Teachers with ability in these curriculum areas can use the wisdom of elders to draw on cultural knowledge resulting in children being allowed “to experience their own inner knowledge” (O’Loughlin, 2009, p. 35). This writer stresses the need for children to engage in the narratives of their culture and know the history of their ancestors to prevent a continuing integrational loss. Teachers need to be creative with ways to scaffold the gap between the use of te reo Māori they feel comfortable using on a daily basis in the centres and te reo Māori at a level they aspire to use. The use of props and technology like ‘YouTube’ can support this to build on their skills to expose the infants, toddlers and young children to Māori language and culture. Consequently, this can trigger staff to start on a combined journey towards a collective understanding of the concept of culture (Novitz & Willmott, 1989).

It is important for teachers to realise that bicultural development can be achieved by implementing a bicultural lens across all curriculum areas blending in te reo Māori me tikanga Māori into all aspects of their teaching. However the bicultural perspective is not just te reo Māori and tikanga but also includes concepts that are part of Māori world view (Jenkin & Broadley, 2013). Kaupapa Māori principles are the basis of the Māori world view and include “Ako – the culturally preferred pedagogy principle “and “whānau the extended family structure principle” (Rangahau, n.d.). One

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idea would be for teachers to use a cross-curricular approach to planning learning experiences for infants, toddlers and young children by taking the kaupapa Māori principles into different curriculum areas.

Saving the many pieces

Ko te whānua ko hau, ko hau ko te whānua

I am the whānua and the whānua is me.

Whakapapa is an important part of the extended whānau and integral to Māori (Pere, 1997). It is usually understood as genealogy. Ka'ai, Moorfield, Reilly and Mosley (2004) maintain that in the Māori world view whakapapa links all including the spiritual and physical besides giving life to Māori culture. By thinking of other ways to adapt a more cross-curricular approach to planning the concept of whakapapa can be applied in the natural environment to tell of the seeds growing into trees and shells coming from the beach. Recycling waste is another whakapapa story which has elements of science but also involves the Māori concept of care of Papatūānuku (Mother Earth). Whakapapa includes mathematical concepts of generations which include ideas of how many and sequencing in the understanding of how they follow each other. Visual art lends itself to capturing whakapapa as does family play and all literacy areas of oral, visual and /or written language. Thus when teachers use this concept in different curriculum areas they are not only teaching across the curriculum but they are also including treasured Māori values throughout the programme. This means bicultural development is enhanced in a sensitive and subtle way.

Looking for the missing pieces

He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!

What is the most important thing in the world? It is people! It is people! It is people!

Taking the central thread of people being of paramount significance reflects the values in this famous whakatauki. What is the most important thing in the world? I tell you it is people, people, people. Teachers tend to live by this maxim though the practice of whānaungatanga which means in a simplistic translation - relationships (Claiborne & Drewery, 2014). Sometimes there is not an exact word in one language that can capture the meaning in another language due to differing world views and cultural understanding surrounding that concept. However the deeper meaning and actions that keep this concept alive have been handed down through families.

Our families are now more ethnically diverse than ever before (Smith, 2013). Because of the history of our nation the combination often includes Māori. The Aotearoa/New Zealand family formation has evolved and been influenced by the extended Māori whānau system (Adair & Dixon, 1998). The traditional western nuclear family form that arrived with the European immigrants has changed with societal changes over time (May, 2009). Relationships with families is an integral part of early childhood centres operations and relationships need to be maintained and sustained (Sadikien & Ritchie, 2009). These authors explain "whānaungatanga can be seen in meaningful relationships based on mutual respect and reciprocity" (p. 6). Smith (2013) discusses how it is not the family that is important but the nature of the relationships within it. Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett and Farmer (2015) see relationships as being essential for teaching and learning. Pere (1997) expands on this showing that whānaungatanga has related notions such as aroha (love/respect), manaakitanga (caring and sharing), whakaiti (humility) and tuakana/teina (older caring for younger). These concepts about family have not changed across time in Māori culture although they have become harder to maintain because of the loss of the traditional supporting networks and the urban migration that have weakened family links (Adair & Dixon, 1998).

This Māori perspective of families aligns with the early childhood thinking in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Pedagogies based on the above Māori concepts are included in the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Dalli, 2012). These principles of whakamana /empowerment, kotahitanga/ holistic view, whānau tangata /wider world of the family and nga

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hononga/relationships are considered as important now as they were in ancient times of Māori (Hemara, 2000). Ritchie (2010) believes this framework is based on the importance of relationships and mutual respect. Early childhood educators need to have an in-depth knowledge of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) and the importance of acknowledging our bicultural beginnings and how this will shape our ongoing bicultural development. Relationships with Māori families is an important aspect of insuring positive education outcomes for Māori children (Education Review Office, 2010).

How can we put Humpty Dumpty together again?

Naku te rourou nau te rourou ka ora ai te iwi

With your basket and my basket the people will live.

The process of bicultural development needs to include using a diverse range of pedagogical skills to be inclusive of all cultures and being aware of how their interactions influence the learner's perception of their own culture (Gibbs, 2006). Teachers can recognise they are practising in a learning community and although it appears to give children the same experiences in reality the actual learning will be different due to the child's circumstances (Gee, 2008) because of the different funds of knowledge children come with (Arthur, et. al. 2015). Walker and Walker (2009) reminds us each child arrives with their own unique ways of knowing. Other non-western education systems "(notably Native North and Central American and Japanese)" use various forms of this type of community of learning to teach their young (Rogoff, 1994, p. 215). This discussion maintains that many traditional western investigators who did not understand what was involved in these communities had problems with how much learning was going on during the interactions. This is because it is not the usual instructional teaching of a teacher passing on knowledge but rather "learning is assumed to occur as children participate in the everyday activities of their community" (Rogoff, 1994, p. 217). Knowledge is constructed by doing everyday activities and this is still considered relevant for present teachers to know in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Smith, 2013).

Co-constructing is a teaching strategy that can be used to develop shared understanding and problem solving while giving children involved agency (MacNaughton & Williams, 2009). Ako is a traditional Māori concept of construction that "embraces the Māori perspective of learning and development" (Tangaere, 1997, p.45). It is where the teacher and learner do this together but are flexible and can change places with each other (Pere, 1997). Research into this concept has found although it has similarities to co-construction it also has other dimensions that make it different (Tamati, 2005). This writer found it opened up new opportunities for children to learn but noted the learning through this interconnectedness depended on the adults and especially the teachers.

Te Kōhanga Reo and Pasifika language nests are models of community of learners that have used this concept and been successful in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Tangaere, 2006; A'oga Fa'a Samoa Teachers, Management, and COI Focus Group, 2005). These cultures although different still retain some common traits regarding the community or collective as being of prime importance. A benefit here is the children develop a positive identity about their culture and their learning (Carr & Lee, 2012).

The need for extreme care, to avoid further damage

Ka kōhi te toj, ka whai te maramatanga

If knowledge is gathered, enlightenment will follow.

Hodges (1998) however holds that participation is linked to identity which can be problematic in learning communities. It can cause members to deny part of their own identity to fit into the beliefs system of the community. The Education Review Office (2012) found that centres have a generic perception of culture and identity. Children may feel the need to leave part of their culture behind to participate in centre activities that are based on the dominant individual

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western discourse (Ritchie, 2003). The Education Review Office (2013) found it important for programmes to include Māori ways of understanding and doing things as well as Māori “values and beliefs” (p.39). The role of the educator here is to ensure the learning includes culturally appropriate experiences that foster positive identity and to be aware of tensions between individual identity formation and different shared values.

Wenger (2010) feels the notion of learning and identity are intertwined and it is identity that allows learning to be transferred from one situation to another. Carr and Lee (2012) support this and feel the correct approach is a system that allows participants to be themselves in the different communities they are involved in. These two researchers, who have led much of this country’s research and have influenced early childhood education directions, developed learning stories as a narrative form of assessment available to educators to help connect with whānau while recoding learning in a family friendly way. Walker and Walker (2009) assert the importance of knowing what the child brings with them and making assessment fit the child rather than the child fit the assessment. Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2013) believe this can be taken further to become a funds of identity approach where what we learn influences our perception of our identity. These authors believe this understanding would help educators to ensure the content taught links to the funds of knowledge and affirms identity.

Humpty Dumpty and collective restoration

Ehara taku toa, he takitahi, he toa takitini

My success should not be bestowed onto me alone, as it was not individual success but success of a collective.

Another pedagogy that resonates with Māori culture is the project approach which is about teachers being responsive to not only the child but groups of children (Katz & Chard, 2000). This approach removes the power base of the teacher as expert and accentuates the involvement of children in every step. The project-based curriculum recognises creative expression as a fundamental mode of learning and explores and responds to the learner’s own natural ability to come up with original ideas and stimulate emerging skills (Wanerman, 2013). Māori like to meet and interact in groups and the need of individuals should be balanced with the goals of the collective (Durie, 2001). When Māori do work together tikanga tends to occur and becomes part of the process (Mead, 2003). It is important to promote bicultural development as children will pick up tikanga naturally through the activity.

Projects can be used to demonstrate correct procedures to maintain cultural safety. Demonstration is an effective strategy for children (MacNaughton & Williams, 2009) and it is valid for the bicultural processes involved in a project. The project approach would also allow staff and students to work together towards a shared understanding, with all voices being heard. This would be empowering for the students but at the same time align their ideas to the values and beliefs of the early childhood sector (Ministry of Education, 2017).

The key feature of a project, according to Katz and Chard (2000) is that it is an “*investigation* - a piece of research that involves children in seeking answers to questions they have formulated by themselves or in cooperation with their teacher” (p. 2). Unlike spontaneous play projects involve children from the start in planning and their interest is sustained over a period of time. They explain this involves children deciding, explaining, predicting, hypothesising, checking, interviewing, initiating, recording, reporting, and encouraging each other. The aim is educational to nurture the mind but it can be used to bring in awareness of Māori cultural ways of doing and being. Project work can be used to “stimulate emerging skills and it helps children to master them because it provides contexts in which they are applied purposefully” (Katz & Chard, 2000, pp. 7-8). They suggest that adults and children alike find the project approach engaging and challenging and they enjoy the sense of purpose. This gives opportunity for exploring the Māori perspectives on teaching and learning and evaluating the different ways that teachers plan for and create learning environments that support children’s participation and brings in a bicultural lens. Māori have a unique world view and

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although not all can comprehend the subtleties because they were not brought up in the culture it is important to acknowledge and include Māori concepts in the experiences children encounter in centres (Walker & Walker, 2009).

Saving what we can...

*Ki te kahore he whakakitenga ka ngaro te iwi
Without foresight or vision the people will be lost.*

To put the salvable pieces of Humpty Dumpty back together we need to take action because these speak for themselves and have impact whether groups are in a position of power or not. O'Brien and Salonen (2011) bring to our attention that the families most likely to be affected by the social cultural deprivation are Māori, Pacific Island and newly immigrated families. Mackey and Lockie (2012) point to the moral side of this issue and the importance of the rights of the children and the need for proactive action to ensure these rights are not diminished by the education system.

What did we learn from the story of Humpty Dumpty? We need silence to acknowledge the past and what is lost. We need to listen to the inner voices that tell us every child has a right to their heritage and to the heritage of the country they live in. Bicultural development is an important pathway to achieving this in Aotearoa/New Zealand and teachers have an important role in the ongoing process.

*Te timatanga o te matauranga ko te wahangū.
Te wāhanga tuarua ko te whakarongo.*

*The first stage of learning is silence.
The second stage is listening.*

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