

Becoming bicultural: Approaching Tiriti-based practice as tauira.

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In recognising the bicultural nature of early childhood education (ECE) within Aotearoa New Zealand, there is a body of professional knowledge that provides guidance to the sector to acknowledge Māori as tangata whenua and prepare graduating kaiako who embrace Tiriti-based pedagogy. This article investigates the expectations of tauira (students) regarding bicultural teaching and learning throughout their Initial Teacher Education (ITE) experience. The core documents that pave the way for biculturalism within ECE are considered in relation to their intentions and the direction they provide for graduating students. Sharing their unique perspectives, the authors identify tauira who are regarded as having exemplary skills in one or more facets of te ao Māori, demonstrated either through te reo Māori competency exit assessments or observed practice during practicums. Through discussions with these tauira about their practice, the authors reflect on common factors that contribute to their bicultural ‘success’ and readiness to teach.

Kupu whakataki - Introduction

Biculturalism as a notion evokes a range of diverse perceptions, theories, and assumptions, making this a highly emotive concept challenging to specify, both within Aotearoa New Zealand and indeed globally. Although the definition of biculturalism appears relatively straightforward: “the fact or practice of including or representing two different cultures” (Cambridge Dictionary n.d.), there still lies significant space for an assortment of unique and individual interpretations, often dependent on personal experience (Chaffey et al., 2017; Gordon-Burns & Campbell 2014; Jenkins, 2016; Lourie, 2015, Ritchie et al., 2014; Skerrett, 2018). The word ‘bi’ is a prefix used to indicate ‘two’ of something, and therefore ‘biculturalism’ pertains to two cultures in partnership. ‘Partnership’ may imply equal parts, or ownership, or on the other hand may signify a division of parts that is not necessarily balanced. As a result of such variances, regardless of how slight, approaches to the successful, (or unsuccessful) implementation of partnership are subjective, and therefore open to scrutiny.

Early childhood education within Aotearoa New Zealand has long prided itself for pushing the envelope towards becoming genuinely bicultural. This intent is reflected in current curriculum assessment

practices and policies, both of which align to the Principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document (Gordon-Burns & Campbell 2014; MacDonald, 2022; Skerrett, 2018). Recognising Māori as tangata whenua (Indigenous inhabitants), of Aotearoa New Zealand has fostered significant progress towards biculturally responsive practice within the past few decades. Overseen by the Ministry of Education – Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand – Matatū Aotearoa, and the Education Review Office – Te Tari Arotake Mātauranga, the sector strives to ensure that cultural and bicultural competencies are met by not only educators, but also by the initial teacher education providers. Incorporating both cultures, Māori and Pākehā, equally and respectfully is an ongoing commitment, involving continuous reflections of strategies and outcomes. This article contemplates the strengths and weaknesses of bicultural responsiveness within the early childhood education landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Ngā whare wānanga whakangungu kaiako hou - Bicultural intent of ITE providers

High-quality teacher training within Aotearoa New Zealand sees a distinct emphasis on the ability to produce early childhood education teachers who not only understand what biculturalism is but also recognise and appreciate how biculturalism manifests in everyday teaching practice (Education Council, 2017; Ministry of Education, 2020). It is hoped that not only will graduating students have sound knowledge regarding Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the equal status and rights afforded both Māori and Pākehā, but they will also understand the vital part they play as educators in ensuring successful educational outcomes for all tauria (Education Council, 2017; Ministry of Education, 2017). Therefore, to be kaiako within Aotearoa New Zealand comes with an obligation to illustrate cultural competency and bicultural responsiveness.

Ngā tuhinga matua - Guiding documentation

The Education Council Aotearoa New Zealand – Matatū Aotearoa clearly outlines expectations of graduates throughout the Standards for the Teaching Profession (Education Council, 2017). These guidelines ultimately place responsibility on the tertiary education provider to ensure that these standards are met by tauria before graduating (Chaffey et al., 2017; Education Council, 2017). Such directives include an understanding and recognition of the unique status of tangata whenua (Māori), acknowledgment and demonstration of commitment under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and the ongoing practice and development of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga (Education Council, 2017; Ministry of Education, 2017; Teaching Council, 2022). Such a firm grounding in the participation of practice establishes a strong and justified expectation of partnership between all educators, regardless of which signatory of Te Tiriti o Waitangi they identify with (Gordon-Burns & Campbell, 2014; Jenkins, 2016; Ritchie et al., 2014; Skerrett, 2018).

The early childhood education curriculum of Aotearoa New Zealand, *Te whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum (Te Whāriki)* (Ministry of Education, 2017), has long been regarded as an expression of biculturalism. Since the release of the first edition in 1996, *Te Whāriki* has enjoyed critical acclaim (Farquhar, 2015; Gordon-Burns & Campbell, 2014; Rameka, 2011; Ritchie et al., 2014). These accolades are mainly due to the creation of a ‘landmark’ curriculum that not only honours the country’s founding document of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the articles of Protection, Participation, and Partnership, but also clearly presents a framework based on the traditional practices of the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand (Māori) (Farquhar, 2015; Jenkins, 2016; Ritchie, 2013; Skerrett, 2018). The Government of Aotearoa New Zealand regards its “...education system to be world class in respect to bicultural relationships and understanding between Māori and non-Māori” (Gordon-Burns & Campbell, 2013, p. 22).

Te Whāriki is written in both English and te reo Māori, with Principles, Strands, Goals and Learning Outcomes aligning with traditional indigenous values (Ministry of Education, 2017). A holistic view of the child is fostered, one that acknowledges what the child brings with them, past, present and future (Ministry of Education, 2017). Duhn (2012) discusses the introduction of the ‘bicultural child’ that was envisioned and assembled within the creation of *Te Whāriki*, where the construct of childhood revolves “...around the idea of partnership between Māori and Pākehā to achieve the bicultural vision for New Zealand” (p. 91).

Currently sitting alongside *Te Whāriki* are the supporting publications for teaching Māori tauria - *Tātaiako: Cultural competencies for teachers of Māori learners* (Education Council, 2011), *Te Whatu Pōkeka: Kaupapa Māori assessment for learning: early childhood exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2009), along with *Ka Hikitia: Accelerating Success: The Māori Education Strategy* (Ministry of Education 2020). These tools were created with the aim of supporting kaiako as they navigate a bicultural landscape. The goal is to both challenge what they already know about their Māori students and to guide them as they seek further knowledge.

One of the last sections in *Te Whāriki* is titled ‘Responsibilities of kaiako’ which states one of the capabilities required for kaiako is that they are “...developing increasing proficiency in the use of te reo and tikanga Māori and able to form responsive and reciprocal relationships with tangata whenua” (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 59). This directive is a reminder of not only the bicultural nature and resolve of the early childhood education curriculum, but that bicultural responsiveness and learning is a continuous process.

Whakapiki i te reo Māori - Māori language progression

To help benchmark teachers' competency in te reo, ITE providers were tasked with establishing Te Reo Māori Competency Entry/Exit Assessments. The purpose of these tests as outlined by the Education Council New Zealand (2019) is that it should be:

... a formative assessment of a student teacher's competency in te reo Māori soon after entry to an English medium programme [that] will enable providers to establish a starting point for te reo Māori competency so that they can measure growth over a student teacher's time in the programme. (p. 45)

Although a numerical grade of one's language competency cannot be the sole indicator of what constitutes Tiriti-based practice, Williams et al. (2023) highlight that "te reo Māori is the catalyst that supports and authenticates our understanding of tikanga" (p. 273). This affirms the idea that language serves as a gateway to culture (Lincoln, 2023) and suggests that explicitly supporting students in developing te reo will have multiple benefits beyond just language acquisition. To explore student success in applying te reo to their practice, the authors have identified tauira who have either shown significant progression in te reo Māori during their teaching programme or have demonstrated considerable improvement in te reo Māori competency assessment.

Te reo o te tauira - Student voice

So why do some tauira succeed more than others? The following discussion draws on responses from a sample of tauira who have shown meaningful growth with aspects of Māori culture in their mahi. For many learners, success is closely linked to language, as it informs their understanding of tikanga Māori, a level of understanding that cannot be fully acquired through the English language (Mead, 2001, as cited in Williams et al., 2023). A sentiment declared within the whakataukī,

Ko te reo Māori te tatau ki te ao Māori

Te reo Māori can be seen as the door to the Māori world

This affirms the mana of te reo in informing a deeper, more meaningful understanding and engagement with te ao Māori. Naturally, diving deeper into language will be more attainable for some learners more than others, particularly for those tauira and kaiako who are new to the Māori language or are in the early stages of their reo journey. However, post-assessment kōrero with tauira who demonstrated significant reo Māori progression in their Exit Assessment revealed that a supportive workplace environment and the encouragement of colleagues in fostering their commitment and positive attitude toward learning and using te reo Māori were crucial. In addition, experiencing a variety of ECE settings

allowed taura to more fully reflect on their practicum experiences and consider the contrast in the learning and use of te reo Māori between the different centres. Student teachers also reported the utilisation of Māori language resources such as He Taonga mō ā tātou mokopuna (Rokx, 2016) and Māori language apps such as ‘Drops’, ‘Kōrerorero’, ‘Kupu’ and ‘Te Aka - Online Māori Dictionary’ as being a prominent feature in supporting ākongā with language learning.

Mōhiotanga ki Te Tiriti o Waitangi - Knowledge of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi

In guided discussion about engagement with Māori culture, both domestic and international taura revealed several common factors. Most reported having limited knowledge or exposure to Māori culture prior to their early childhood studies. Those students who were already in ECE settings had observed a lack of Māori kaiako and engagement with tangata whenua. These taura also acknowledged they had only a general understanding of Tiriti-based and bicultural practices. One student commented, “I had heard various things about Te Tiriti but again I wasn’t aware of how this should be interwoven in my practice and its significance. As I recall, it wasn’t really evident in the centres I worked in”. However, after being enrolled in courses to support bicultural practice, students reported that their understanding and practice of Te Tiriti-based practices was significantly enhanced, one student commenting:

Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the history and significance of the Treaty of Waitangi. ... learning about the historical context of the Treaty and its implications for Māori and Pākehā relations. ... understanding the Treaty’s articles ... has informed how I address historical grievances and promote equity in my practice.

Ka whai hononga - Connection through history

The authors found it reassuring that many of the international students who responded to the prompts reported finding common ground between aspects of Māori culture and their own cultural identity, which significantly motivated them in their ao Māori learning journey. By adopting a historical lens, taura identified parallel experiences of oppression and colonisation between Māori and their own histories of suppression. For many, this evoked a profound empathy for tangata whenua, which was evident in their demonstrated commitment to upholding te reo Māori me ōna tikanga. Taura also made connections to a shared ecological and belief system, finding there were “deep similarities in the fundamental views of nature, the world, and humanity between the Māori and Korean cultures, which enhanced my receptivity and connection to the teachings of the course”. Highlighting this sentiment, one taura expressed “...I believe that culture is deeply connected with history. By learning the history, you can understand the culture better, making your practice more organic”. While the starting points of

Tiriti-based learning for students are varied, taura shared similar whakaaro (ideas), expressing that having a foundation of understanding the historical context of Aotearoa was significant.

Ngākau hihiko - Proactive commitment

Furthermore, many taura involved in the discussion when asked about factors contributing to their own success identified that being proactive in their own learning journey was key. They emphasised the importance of taking the initiative to deepen their understanding independently. This included both sourcing professional development opportunities and building genuine relationships with Māori communities and educators. Māori colleagues, friends and whānau were seen as an invaluable resource. However, we were reminded in the discussion that it is important for the inquiring taura to be mindful of how to reciprocate ako (shared learning), as this exchange of knowledge is a vital aspect of te ao Māori and manaakitanga. Making connections with tangata whenua a priority was mentioned by many, emphasising the importance of the localised 'place-based' curriculum. This included knowing not only local iwi, but the importance of their pūrākau, waiata, karakia, and reflecting on how this was evident within the ECE setting (Education Council, 2011).

Mahi huritao - Reflective Practice

Ongoing self-reflection on progress and implementation of Tiriti-based practice was recommended by taura. Responses highlight how this benefitted of all cultures within Aotearoa, observing Te Tiriti o Waitangi. One student reported:

True bicultural education compels us to deeply reflect on how we perceive and engage with different cultures. By promoting respect and understanding in our teaching methods and personal interactions, we cultivate an environment where mutual respect is not only taught but is deeply ingrained in our daily actions and relationships.

Acknowledging all aspects of Tiriti-based practice, rather than just te reo Māori, was also key for taura. They believe this approach allows stronger feelings of 'community' to develop, as consideration for other cultures becomes more focused, which is reflected in practice. This aligns with *Te Whāriki*, which provides questions for reflection for kaiako, such as, "How do kaiako learn about the languages and cultures of all families and in what ways are these affirmed in the setting?" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 35).

Kupu whakakapi - Conclusion

In conclusion, the bicultural nature of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand is supported by a robust body of professional knowledge aimed at preparing graduating kaiako to embrace Tiriti-based pedagogy. This investigation into the expectations and experiences of tauira during their ITE experience sheds light on the importance of foundational understanding, historical context and active engagement with Māori culture. Core documents that guide ECE are instrumental in shaping these outcomes, providing clear intentions and direction for graduating students. By identifying tauira with exemplary skills in te ao Māori and examining the factors contributing to their success, this article underscores the significance of comprehensive education that not only highlights te reo Māori but also encompasses a broader practice of Tiriti-based principles. Discussion with tauira reveal opportunities for ITE providers to support greater connectedness and understanding of Māori ways of being.

Mā te huruhuru te manu - Adorned with feathers, the bird is able to fly.

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