Jenny Ritchie and Cheryl Rau

Whakawhanaungatanga—partnerships in bicultural development in early childhood care and education

Māori participation in early childhood education (ECE) still lags behind that of non-Māori (45 percent compared to 68 percent—Ministry of Education, 2004). The strategic plan for early childhood (Ministry of Education, 2002) contains "a focus on collaborative relationships for Māori", which seeks to "create an environment where the wider needs of Māori children, their parents, and whānau (families) are recognised and acknowledged" (p. 16), and where whānau, hapū and iwi can work with ECE services. ECE services are also encouraged to become more responsive to the needs of Māori children. This project was premised on findings of Ritchie (2002), that strengthening provision of the bicultural aspirations of the early childhood curriculum within ECE settings other than kōhanga reo is a central professional responsibility for educators, and that a key strategy for achieving this is to build relationships with the whānau Māori of children in their settings (whakawhanaungatanga). A further context for the study was the research of Rau (2002), that identified and employed key concepts in kaupapa Māori education and research theories, and focused on intergenerational transmission of Māori values through whānau relationships and practices.

Whakawhanaungatanga approaches have the potential to increase Māori participation in early childhood education, since Māori seek educational experiences that validate their identity and offer te reo and tikanga, including key values such as a sense of whanaungatanga. Even those Māori families who send their children to conventional early childhood centres and schools want their children to learn te reo, and expect these services to support this aspiration.

This research project aimed to address the problem identified by Ritchie (2002), that mainstream and teacher educators lack confidence and competence in delivering bicultural education programmes that meet the expectations of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b), and to consider enacted strategies validating Maori ways of knowing, doing, and being (Rau, 2002). The research kaupapa was also consistent with Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations to protect and sustain taonga[1] Māori and enable Māori to exercise tino rangatiratanga or ownership of their taonga.

[1]Taonga are things that are highly prized and include both tangibles (such as children and land) and intangibles (such as te reo Māori).

Aims and objectives

The project aimed to:

- articulate how early childhood educators in settings other than kōhanga reo encourage whānau Māori to participate in ECE; and
- identify strategies by which early childhood educators are implementing their understandings of the Tiriti-based commitments in the bicultural ECE curriculum by delivering Tiriti-based programmes.

Research design

The research design drew upon both kaupapa Māori methodologies and a collaborative, narrative Western paradigm. Data were gathered from: narratives of teachers, playcentre educators, professional development providers, an iwi education authority, specialist and teacher educators; individual and collective cotheorising hui; individual and group interviews; emails; and a website open to interested early childhood educators nationwide.

Findings

Part 1: Encouraging participation

Rights and ethics

Te Whāriki encourages the ECE community of Aotearoa to transform its practice by honouring the languages and cultures of the tangata whenua, the original people of this land. Recognising children's rights to their identities as cultural beings is a key concern of educators committed to Tiriti-based ECE. The coresearchers saw an ethical society as one that is founded in respectful relationships, honours individual rights, and uses collaborative dialogue to promote a shared vision of how people treat each other.

The idea of collaborative space includes reinforcing the right of whānau Māori to be in ECE settings:

> So I'm in my area when I work in Playcentre and I feel that I have certain rights because this is my area and then I'd go down to [another town] and work with Māori families—some of them are from other places. It's more than encouragement, that as Māori women they have rights in Playcentre. (Miria)

Ongoing welcome

The research emphasised the importance of welcoming families into ECE centres (particularly Māori families who might be coming for the first time) through inclusive greeting rituals. Pākehā educators had a responsibility to move out of their comfort zone:

> It's actually inviting the Other in, to be able to do that. So you put on your approachable, friendly … at first it can be a mask, because you're not comfortable and you feel a little alien with it, but you're actually inviting the Other in and crossing those cultural divides in a sense. (Katerina)

> I realised our attitude was: 'Here we are, these trained, experienced teachers who are offering you this great educational service, based on good values, a sound philosophy and good pedagogy, and we want you to benefit from it. Come and get it.' What we weren't considering was whether this was an environment in which Māori children and whānau felt comfortable. (Anne)

Anne saw that her own values (precious to her) could sit alongside her validation of Māori and other cultural values within her centre, but also considered that ECE teachers needed to reflect upon and be open to changing their own attitudes, "to change ourselves in order to change our practice". This realisation seems absolutely fundamental to Tiriti-based practice.

Core Māori values of whanaungatanga and manaakitanga (hospitality) were enacted through ritual processes such as welcoming and hui. These were part of Tiriti-based practice, affirming a Māori world view in which welcoming is ongoing.

Sustaining commitment

Our coresearchers were deeply committed to social justice for Māori in Aotearoa—honouring Te Tiriti was fundamental to their political and educational focus. This could mean grappling with situations that felt disempowering:

> I started to appreciate the differences between my world and the Māori world. I realised that my values and attitudes could sometimes cause hurt and discomfort. I looked at my behaviour in relation to other people. Now it was my turn to feel uncomfortable … I went about feeling very guilty. Relating to Māori families became fraught with danger ... I didn't know what to say in case I said the wrong thing, in case I was culturally insensitive. (Anne)

Other non-Māori educators (and researchers) may share these concerns, making them fearful of moving forward in terms of Tiriti-based commitments, despite the expectations of *Te Whāriki* and their own convictions about social justice and equity:

> I have given a lot of thought to my analogy of becoming bicultural as similar to climbing a mountain. It's a mountain where the summit is shrouded in mist so you can't see the top. You climb very slowly, sometimes you can plan the route because you have read and thought about it, sometimes you need somebody who is familiar with it to show you the way. You have to be prepared to be a follower and be led by somebody who knows the route better than you do. You have to respect and trust other people's views and leadership. All the time you need encouragement. You also need your team to come with you. You are roped together so that you can help each other. Sometimes you will need to be the leader. Sometimes you get knocked back and discouraged … You will need support to keep going and to have another try. (Anne)

This is a shared journey, in which Māori and non-Māori can collaborate through honest dialogue, reflection, and compassion.

Both Māori and Pākehā colleagues valued ongoing professional development and the networks that enabled them to express their concerns and gave them support. Coresearchers felt that implementation of Tiriti-based programmes was more effective when the teaching team had a shared commitment to understanding and valuing the participation of whānau Māori. They valued opportunities to work with colleagues who shared these ideals.

Part 2: Tiriti-based programmes

Perceptions of current programme delivery

Many coresearchers expressed concern about the limited implementation of the bicultural aspirations contained within both the early childhood curriculum and the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices*:

> This often amounts to a veneer of biculturalism. It's an outward appearance only. There is often nothing more. I suppose that's called tokenism. (Anne)

There is a difference between using superficial cultural icons (such as songs) within the ECE programme and including culturally specific patterns of interaction, emotion,

philosophy, and childrearing practices . When the Māori content of an ECE setting remains marginalised, Māori see Te Ao Māori, their world view, as devalued.

Māori aspirations for programmes

Many Māori parents/whānau may be unable to articulate their expectations within their children's ECE setting. This signals a need for awareness of the diversity of expectations within Māori communities. ECE professionals need to take the lead in implementing the mandated curriculum, rather than assume that silence on the part of Māori families means they are satisfied with the Māori content provided.

Key reasons for Māori non-participation in ECE were:

- the prohibitive cost of some services; and
- language issues—only English spoken, or use of te reo very limited.

Previous research confirms that support for their children to gain fluency in te reo within mainstream ECE settings is important for whānau Māori. As one participant said:

> I would like to see our tamariki 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.

Strategies for delivery

The project identified a number of strategies for strengthening the delivery of te reo me āna tikanga.

- Educators needed to be fluent in te reo; able to model waiata and pakiwaitara; demonstrate knowledge of local iwi tikanga and kawa; and involve the centre in wider iwi community activities. They needed support to enhance their competence in these areas.
- whānau (including kuia and kaumātua) should have ongoing involvement in te reo and tikanga development.

Other aspects included:

- a match between the values of Māori homes and the ECE settings;
- parents feeling welcome to participate and increase their own fluency in te reo alongside their children;
- a sense of whanaungatanga;
- being part of a caring collective with common aspirations and values;
- a willingness to identify and support the needs of all members of that collective;
- shared responsibility;
- inclusiveness for children needing extra learning support;
- tuakana/teina (older and younger children in a whānau) attending together;
- enactment of values such as: rituals of welcoming and farewell; sharing of kai; inclusiveness; and acknowledgement of Te Ao Wairua (the spiritual dimension) and Ngā Atua (gods).

Children's participation alongside adults in activities that reflected Te Ao Māori was particularly valued.

Enacting Māori values in centre practice

The findings showed that many Māori values were enacted in ECE settings in ways that derived from Te Ao Māori. Kaupapa Māori pedagogical processes emphasise the importance of fostering and promoting children's spiritual wellbeing. Coresearchers emphasised the importance of embedding tikanga and wairua through daily practices such as starting and ending with karakia.

Learning through everyday cultural rituals is also appropriate in early childhood teacher education:

> the only way that Pākehā are going to be able to participate in Māori things is to get involved, that is the only way they are going to deepen their understandings. They will never be able to understand where we're coming from until they get involved in our ceremonies, in our rituals, in our tangi, in our kai, in our hākari [celebratory meals], just become physically involved … And that's why I try my best to have as many opportunities in our programme for rituals to occur. (Rona)

Many coresearchers considered that aroha—the reciprocal obligation, loyalty, and commitment shared between kin that creates a stable social support system or whanaungatanga—underpinned their practice and expectations for early childhood provision. They saw whanaungatanga as central to building community:

> I think that's what it comes down to, is that relationship, because the Māori world, from what I observe, is so much about the family and about closeness and there's a lot of bonding there and it's a good lesson that we as Pākehā can learn … and really have that love and that compassion with our children, and with the families, actually creating communities within the centres. (Ariel)

The preparation and sharing of traditional kai within centre practice was highly valued. It affirms and nurtures the tamariki and whānau present, providing a tangible link to their culture as well as physical and spiritual sustenance. Eating together is a celebration of the collective sustenance of life.

Integrating te reo me ona tikanga

The coresearchers were committed to integrating te reo and tikanga into centre practice in meaningful ways, such as storytelling, art, and drama. Some researched aspects of tikanga, involving whānau Māori.

Many of the Pākehā co-researchers have worked for years to increase their competence in te reo, and continue to do so:

> Everything in the Māori world has a beginning and an end that follows in a cycle and that's kind of where we went from. So it's been a gradual process, questioning why we do things and then coming across some readings, or Māori students coming. Just learning bits, more from them, as they question or want explanations, 'How do you do things?' or 'why do you do things?' and having to explain and then thinking, 'Is that right? Should we be doing it a different way?' It's about … being open to learn from other people. (Penny)

Conclusion: journeys of change

Te Whāriki can be seen as a map for a Tiriti-based journey of change for all those working in the ECE sector, enabling each centre to weave its own programme for its own community. As a profession, early childhood educators remain committed to honouring the ethics of social justice, recognising a professional responsibility to implement the human right to language and culture and initiate change towards more democratic, culturally inclusive practices. Our journey becomes one of self-change as we seek to learn from Māori whānau what is important to them, and respond accordingly.

This requires teachers to shift from their traditional role of "expert" and become collaborators alongside children. In this paradigm, collaboration with whānau/parents extends throughout the entire early childhood programme, and includes a willingness to incorporate different world views into everyday knowledge and practice. Through their participation in this project, our coresearchers have demonstrated this willingness. We are in awe of their generosity, and acknowledge their readiness to share and reflect upon their insights.

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