Partners For Success: Grappling With New Concepts That Challenge The Old

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ABSTRACT

This is a reflection on co-teaching Te Tiriti ō Waitangi in Action, a course for beginning teachers in Early Childhood Education. This includes a discussion on teaching strategies (including caucusing) for this topic.

A journey of reflection on our teaching prompted us to question our practice as tutors of beginning teachers. We have co-taught on a Diploma of Teaching Early Childhood Education field base course, *Te Tiriti ō Waitangi in Action* for the past five years at Te Kuratini ō Waikato/ WINTEC. This involved teaching approximately 60 students for 30 hours over a ten week period per year. Because we wished to be as clear as possible on our role in teaching the topic, we undertook a research project to identify ways to become more effective teachers.

This article has come about from a cycle of reflection on our teaching practice and pedagogy and challenged us to make our pedagogical values explicit: first, transformative education engages students in issues of equity; second, anti-racism education creates space for 'counter–hegemonic' practices; and third, we believe that race is a socially constructed concept. This article will describe our reflections on our co-teaching based upon these values.

Te Tiriti ō Waitangi is a controversial topic and stimulates much discussion and debate around issues of the loss of land, of language, and the view of its importance by authorities within Aotearoa. It is seen by many as being central to the identity of both Māori, the indigenous people of Aotearoa and Tauiwi/Pākehā, the later comers. The purpose of this course was to increase students' awareness of the implications and responsibilities of Te Tiriti ō Waitangi when working in partnership with Tāngata Whenua in Early Childhood Education, and to be clear about the early childhood 1998 charter requirements. These state: 'Management and educators should implement policies, objectives and practices which ... reflect the unique place of Māori as Tangata Whenua and the principle of partnership inherent in Te Tiriti ō Waitangi' (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 67)[1]. In many centres this remains an aspirational statement. We aimed to introduce strategies to enhance beginning teachers' knowledge of Te Tiriti responsibilities in day-to-day practices in centres.

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[1] As ECE centres move in transition to new licensing requirements and charters are being phased out this document is being replaced. Management responsibilities are not so strongly articulated in these new regulations and supporting documents.

Academics Scheurich and Young (2002) suggest that our very epistemological certainties are based on an insecure foundation. They have developed schemata showing the relationship between individuals, institutions and our society; of overt and covert institutional racism which operates in a milieu that creates such individual attitudes and beliefs. It is these deep-seated values that we hoped to challenge. Non-governmental community educators have long known that teaching strategies such as we introduced are essential to changing attitudes in developing more complex skills (Glover, Dudgeon & Huygens, 2005; Huygens, 1999; Huygens et al., 2004; Kirton, 1997; Martin, 2006; Snedden, 2004).

Things our tutors agreed upon were that we wanted to change the attitudes of student teachers in supporting them to be strong in their cultures and to acknowledge the identity of children in their early childhood centres. It was essential for students to know themselves – the forces that had formed them and how these forces were different for Tangata Whenua and Tauiwi/Pākehā. In acknowledging that the content required the students to grapple with new concepts, we deliberately moved from the traditional expert-teacher 'in front of the class' model, to one where seating arrangements were positioned in a semi-circle fashion without desks. As the student-journey continued we introduced strategies such as placing themselves on continuums and socio-positions on a range of topics, and role plays. Our annual fieldtrip to places of significance in the Waikato included visiting pre-European pā and battle sites, places where taonga have been found and museums. By introducing them to a range of alternative voices and stories we hoped that students would be able to identify and reflect on their cultural perceptions.

The most significant strategy was the introduction of 'caucusing'. This term was borrowed from the Six Indigenous Nations Council system in the United States (personal communication, Huygens, 1 July 2010). Caucusing was then adopted in the 1960s as a consciousness-raising strategy by the American Civil Rights movement. We used it to provide a safe space for collective reflection by students from the two main cultures where they could ponder on the differing histories and institutional outcomes for the two peoples.

We struggled with the implementation of this, as we too had to address the issue of separation. The Māori tutor wanted to provide a safe space for Tangata Whenua students but was concerned for other indigenous students such as those from the Pacific Islands. Although having an intellectual understanding of the caucusing concept, she also had anxieties about the Tauiwi/Pākehā response to an apparent 'separation' within the class. The Pākehā tutor had to take stock, step back, and acknowledge that this was a very different context from working with non-governmental organizations on Treaty education. People coming for such education outside an institutional setting had a largely self-motivational commitment. Working with a group of students enrolled in a course to gain qualifications was very different; students were to be in the course for a period of over three years and this was merely one topic among others.

Because we were still developing our pedagogical values we attempted to soften the division by allowing some students 'non-indigenous to Aotearoa' to participate in the Māori caucus group to cater for their cultural safety. The effect of this was not what we intended and left Māori students feeling insecure with feelings of vulnerability. The history of land loss, language and identity, while

having been experienced by other indigenous peoples is unique in its effect on Māori in this country. It was these students who felt most vulnerable, and we concluded, after struggling with the issues, that the cultural safety needs of Tangata Whenua was our primary concern. This was a crucial learning point for us. The following year, we restructured the caucus groups as 'Māori' and 'Tauiwi/Pākehā'.

Having witnessed the positive effects experienced by both caucus groups we both now strongly endorse this strategy. Robert and Joanna Consedine discuss the benefits of caucusing for Pākehā where they 'are …brought together in a safe, non-confrontational environment. …. [They] can explore together their own cultural journeys, investigate New Zealand's colonial history and examine issues of personal, institutional and cultural racism from a Pākehā perspective' (2001, p. 187). Caucusing, however, for Māori, has always been a positive experience which has allowed them 'to disconnect themselves from the majority Pākehā culture in order to explore their issues in an appropriate environment' (ibid).

Both tutors agree that in order to resolve student controversy and misunderstandings, that both Treaty partners need to be represented when teaching Te Tiriti ō Waitangi. This provides support for both Tauiwi/Pākehā and Māori caucuses as well as models collaborative partnerships. As we debated appropriate teaching strategies, we tutors became stronger in our beliefs about the pedagogical processes, dealing with power, racism and attitudinal change. These pedagogical practices include critical reflection and catering for diverse learning styles, respect for Tangata Whenua and operating within a 'bicultural' model of partnership. Our journey in building a strong relationship has involved the steps of getting to know each other, building trust, and coming to shared understandings. It has also involved a listening, a doing, then a re-evaluation of what would change students' attitudes. Knowing each other better, we support each other more effectively. Our journey has made this partnership possible.

CONCLUSION

We maintain that teaching which involves challenge, some risk and tension is central to Te Tiriti dialogue. There is a risk that involves psychological discomfort which we believe is part of assimilating new ideas. However, as students engage more deeply with such ideas, they begin to listen and to understand differently.

Te Tiriti partners need to be represented when teaching Te Tiriti ō Waitangi as they support both Tauiwi/Pākehā and Māori caucuses and model collaborative partnerships. In doing so, we maintain that tutors' responsibility is to provide an environment where students can freely confront issues on differing world views.

For us, the key question is whether pedagogical strategies are sufficient to change all students' attitudes about deeply seated issues. We have discovered that dialogical processes (i.e., caucusing) encourage a deeper engagement between groups who identified differently when difference is affirmed and named.

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