Chalk-Face Confessions: The Narratives of Six Māori Teachers Working in Eurocentric Primary and Secondary Schools in Canterbury

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ABSTRACT

This article draws on data from a research study (Torepe, 2011) that investigated the lived experiences of six Māori teachers who had recently graduated from the Hōaka Pounamu (Graduate Diploma in Immersion and Bilingual Teaching) course at the University of Canterbury. The primary objective of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and various challenges confronting this group of experienced Māori teachers working in English-medium, state-funded schools. This article discusses the key themes that emerged in the participants accounts of their teaching experiences. This article describes the qualitative research methodology that was underpinned by a Kaupapa Māori narrative research philosophy. Most notably, these themes draw close attention to Padilla's (1994) concept of cultural taxation.

Research paper

Keywords:
cultural taxation, Kaupapa Māori, Māori teachers

INTRODUCTION

This research explores the lived experiences of six Māori teachers, who had recently graduated from Hōaka Pounamu and were teaching in the Canterbury region. It aims to bring about a greater understanding of the overall realities of Māori teachers teaching in English-medium schools and provides a range of cross-sectoral insights into the challenges faced as they strove to introduce Māori epistemologies and ontologies into their schools and their teaching praxis. It also contributes to a small body of literature that attempts to identify and address the unique workload and cultural pressures that are placed upon Māori teachers by their Boards of Trustees, principals, colleagues and wider community.

METHODOLOGY

The research was shaped by a qualitative research methodology underpinned by a Kaupapa Māori narrative research philosophy. As a Ngāi Tahu researcher working with Māori teacher participants from different iwi backgrounds, it was important to develop a methodology aligned with a Kaupapa Māori philosophical framework. The methodology was, accordingly, informed by the works of Bishop (1992; 1996; 1998), Bishop and Berryman (2006), Irwin (1994), Kana and Tamatea (2006), Smith (1992a;b), Smith (1999), and Te Awekotuku (1991). Embedded within this framework was the process of legitimisation. This process, within the constructs of a Kaupapa Māori methodology, recognises and allows cultural difference such as the pan-tribal perspectives of the participants and legitimises their respective tribal affiliations, histories and tikanga. Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Canterbury before the research began. All precautions to protect the privacy of the participants and their schools was taken and statistical data relating to each participant and their school was also aggregated to minimise the risk of identification.

The research process was characterised by two overlapping phases of data collection. The first consisted of the collection and analysis of a detailed written questionnaire that contained a combination of factual, dichotomous and open-ended questions. The second phase was characterised by individual interviews supported by a semi-structured interview schedule. The primary objective of this second phase was to conduct further investigation into the challenges and opportunities the interviewees identified in their classroom practices following the completion of their study.

Participants

Six teachers of Māori descent were recruited to participate in this study and all respondents identified with at least one iwi. The age distribution was from 25-59 years. The participating teachers, two male and four female, taught in schools in the wider Canterbury region and included two primary and four secondary schools. The numbers of years of teaching experience ranged from five to 22 years.

Analysis

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed for data analysis with pseudonyms used to protect anonymity. Each transcript was read and patterns of recurring themes were noted. Findings were compared and a number of dominant themes in the interview narratives were identified. Full interview transcripts were developed and given to the research participants to check in accordance with the Kaupapa Māori principles of utu (reciprocity) and whakapono (integrity). The principle of utu, when framed by tenets of Kaupapa Māori research, allows for participants to benefit from the research process whether by acknowledgement or tangible outcomes such as future publications, while the notion of whakapono allows the participants to share their stories in a manner where trust and integrity is understood and the personal nature of the narratives are appreciated and respected. Furthermore, the principle of whakapono allowed the participants to reflect upon their responses from the interviews and enabled them to make amendments to the transcripts they deemed necessary.

FINDINGS

Six themes emerged from the data and each is discussed in the following sections. A number of these themes draw close attention to Padilla's (1994) concept of 'cultural taxation'. What constitutes cultural taxation can be as varied as it is diverse and is used to describe the additional responsibilities and expectations that are placed on ethnic minority academics because of their ethnic or cultural backgrounds with, either little or no recognition of. this additional burden. Padilla (1994) defines cultural taxation as:

> The obligation to show good citizenship toward the institution by serving its need for ethnic representation on committees, or to demonstrate knowledge and commitment to a cultural group, which may bring accolades to the institution, but which is not usually rewarded by the institution on whose behalf the service was performed (p. 26).

The participants, irrespective of the sector they taught in, all experienced some form of cultural taxation. It is to be noted that while there are distinct organisational and cultural differences between secondary and primary schools, the participants for the most part were aligned in their experiences and narratives. The exception to this is highlighted in the first theme.

Teaching in Eurocentric Institutional Cultures

The participants identified a number of issues that related to the inherent eurocentric nature of the workplace environments that they worked in. While some participants emphasised challenges associated with the attitudes and beliefs of some (non-Māori) staff, students, and their wider (non-Māori) communities, others were more focused on the ramifications of their respective schools' institutional cultures.

For participants in secondary schools who taught subjects other than te reo Māori, the difficulties of implementing Kaupapa Māori in their classroom and school seemed to be much greater than their primary school colleagues. This, in part, is due to the framework of a secondary school where students move in and out of subject classes rather than staying with a single teacher as in a primary school context: for these teachers attempting to incorporate te reo Māori into wider curriculum subjects often proved challenging. In some instances, a level of justification was required as Pākehā students frequently challenged the use of te reo Māori in non-te reo Mā ori subjects. This problem was best encapsulated by one interviewee who explained that:

> You have to have a certain amount of justification for certain children, because they start to challenge it [te reo Māori] … you'd get one or two kids that want to know why are we doing it [te reo Māori] in Māori, why aren't we doing it in English? (Torepe, 2011, p. 55)

In addition, the research participants felt that protocols and practices that are inherently Māori (i.e. tikanga Māori) - an intrinsic component of these teachers' senses of identity - were not valued in the schools. Thus a conflict existed between these teachers' senses of culture and identity and the systemic constraints of their respective schools' Pākehā institutional cultures. This culture, as described by the participants, was centered either around the rigid and inflexible nature of the schools' systems and structures, or more predominantly the ethos and attitudes of their non-Māori colleagues. The participants were repeatedly challenged by the general lack of cultural understanding and ignorance around matters of tikanga Māori within their school community as well as being exposed to judgmental and antagonistic comments from their peers. These patterned ways of thinking and behaving have created a eurocentric institutional culture which, as a consequence, has left these teachers feeling culturally alienated. This finding recalls an earlier New Zealand study that looked at Māori teachers who left the teaching profession. Mitchell and Mitchell (1993) noted that: "School demands meant that they were required to operate in a very Pākehā way,

Māori values were disregarded, there was no Māori dimension to the organisation or climate of the school" (p. 75).

Workload

It is widely accepted that an increase in teacher workloads has occurred since the New Zealand education reforms of the 1980s (Alison, 2005; Baker, 2002; Bloor, 1996; Bridges, 1992; Wylie, 1992). However, the added workload expectations placed upon Māori teachers often appears to be overlooked or underestimated in educational literature. The issue of additional workloads for Māori teachers was first noted in a report published in 1993 by Mitchell and Mitchell. Nearly two decades later, Cooper et al. (2010) also identified this cultural dilemma facing Māori teachers. They stated that:

> Teachers and leaders, who work for the benefit of Māori, have a hard job to do. When these [Māori] teachers and/or leaders have to please two different communities, their workload increases and they face challenges on both sides. (p. 23)

This is further supported by a recent study by Macfarlane, Macfarlane, Graham and Clarke (2017) identifying that increased demands on teachers' time and energy is becoming more onerous.

A further factor contributing to workload pressure was the nature of the curriculum area itself. More often than not, the participants were the sole teachers of te reo Māori. Thus, they were required, within their schools' wider languages departments, to manage tasks relating to all things Māori (such as planning and reporting, organising the school's Māori language week programme, and leading professional development activities for colleagues). Moreover, they ordinarily fulfilled the responsibilities of a head of department, such as being held responsible for curriculum design, delivery, assessment and evaluation processes, all of which occurred without recognition or remuneration.

The increased workload, coupled with the additional cultural demands (or cultural taxation) placed on Māori teachers, led to these same teachers identifying high levels of professional stress. The notion of cultural taxation is used to describe the additional expectations, roles and responsibilities that are placed on ethnic minority individuals because of their ethnic or cultural background with either no, or little, recognition of the additional burden. This concept according to Padilla (1994) can be defined as:

> The obligation to show good citizenship toward the institution by serving its need for ethnic representation on committees, or to demonstrate knowledge and commitment to a cultural group, which may bring accolades to the institution but which is not usually rewarded by the institution on whose behalf the service was performed. (p. 26)

All of the Māori teachers interviewed identified feelings of exhaustion and 'burn-out'. Their feelings of extreme emotional and physical fatigue coincided with earlier research produced by Bloor (1996), Mitchell and Mitchell (1993), and the Ministry of Education (1999). This notion of burn-out and work overload is also identified in a study by Kuntz, Naswall, Beckingsale and Macfarlane (2014) that investigated the relationship between the espousal of Māori values and the organisational commitment and behaviours of Māori employees. The researchers concluded that Māori employees who engage in behaviours and additional tasks to support the adoption of Māori values do so often at the expense of their own job performance thus leading to an increased workload and subsequent burn-out and stress.

Additional Cultural Expectations

While the participants in this study did not literally define themselves as being the 'one-stop-Māori-shop' in their school, as described by Bloor (1996), their narratives suggested that this was indeed how they perceived their professional roles. They each believed that their professional roles involved additional tasks which took many forms and often went unrecognised either financially or by written or verbal acknowledgement. The cultural expectations of non-Māori teachers emerging from this research clearly aligned with previous studies conducted in New Zealand (Archie, 1993; Bloor, 1996; Manning, 2008; Ministry of Education, 1999; Mitchell & Mitchell, 1993).

The participants in this research were emphatic when they stated that they were conscious of an unwritten expectation within their schools that they (Māori teachers) should fulfil the dominant culture's perceptions of what constitutes authentic (indigenous) cultural requirements. This, they concurred, results in a mechanical and decontextualised 'dial-a-pōwhiri' school culture identical to that described by Manning (1998) and Whitinui (2007; 2010). The participants were frequently expected, by their employers and colleagues, to organise and facilitate Māori cultural events in their schools and to attend to issues involving Māori cultural activities. Participants were often expected to organise and facilitate ceremonial roles such as kaikaranga (female caller of welcome) or kaikōrero (speaker) in pōwhiri (a formal ritual of

encounter) that were often constrained by the requirements of mechanical school timetables. Hence, they believed that they had been culturally 'taxed' in ways which absolved their non-Māori colleagues and professional leaders from exercising their own professional responsibilities to be 'bicultural' practitioners – as required by the New Zealand Teachers Council's (2010) *Registered Teacher Criteria for registered teachers and school leaders.*

A further obligation frequently identified by the participants was the expectation placed upon Māori teachers to up-skill their non-Māori colleagues in relation to official Māori education policy guidelines and/or Treaty of Waitangi-related matters. One participant characterised these concerns saying:

> I'm kind of reluctant to do everything, to run, to do critical awareness on stuff that should actually be senior management's job and I guess this year, I have done most of the things, not because I thought I should but I knew that if I didn't, I knew that nobody else would and I knew that other people weren't ready to run stuff or didn't have the skills or the confidence to say well this is what happens in a pōwhiri. (Torepe, 2011, p. 58)

Padilla (1994) labelled this practice as a form of 'cultural taxation', whereby 'ethnic' and 'indigenous' educators are called upon to educate their ethnic majority (i.e. white) counterparts. The concept of cultural taxation therefore suggests that situations are often imposed upon indigenous and other ethnic minority teachers by school management teams who assume that 'ethnic' and 'indigenous' teachers are best-suited to perform specific cultural tasks because of their assumed cultural knowledge. As Padilla (1994) observed:

> Often I, like many ethnic scholars, have responded to these and similar situations out of a deep sense of 'cultural obligation'. However, I have experienced annoyance about having to take on these responsibilities, which tend to be very time consuming and often emotionally draining, when my non-ethnic colleagues are seldom affected by similar obligations. (p. 26)

Cultural Misunderstandings

The Māori teachers who participated in this research felt compelled to challenge the attitudes shared by some of their non-Māori students and teaching colleagues. This sometimes led to conflict with those non-Māori teacher colleagues comfortable with the status quo of Pākehā cultural dominance. One of the participants in this study remarked that she experienced negative remarks and resentment after a female member of the school's senior management team was required to sit in the second row at a school pōwhiri to welcome official guests. Some of her colleagues felt that this senior colleague's status at the school deserved a front row position. A number of authors have written around Pākehā notions of feminism, particularly with regard to the view that women are denigrated by not being able to speak during the initial rituals of encounter typical of pōwhiri (Awatere, 1984; Salmond, 2004; Tauroa & Tauroa, 1993). According to Tauroa and Tauroa (1993) this misunderstanding arises from a difference in cultural values:

> In the Pākehā context, one defers to the 'office' of a person – such as principal, a board chairperson, or a mayor. In the Māori context, the 'person' is placed before the office they hold. Tapu [sacred] and mana [prestige, authority] are related to the person not to any prestigious position that they may hold. (p. 59)

The Māori teacher concerned added that she believed some Pākehā teachers felt 'left out' as they did not understand what was happening and suggested that, "it's just a fear of not really understanding what's going on, it [is] not so much that they don't support it but they can't understand why it is done that way" (pp. 60-61).

Professional Isolation

Another theme that was evident throughout the participants' narratives was the feeling of professional isolation. These feelings of isolation typically stemmed from: (i) the lack of opportunities they had to team-teach with other Māori teachers; (ii) the lack of opportunities to use and further develop their own te reo Māori proficiency and, (iii) the difficulty of maintaining positive social interactions with many non-Māori colleagues.

Fueling the feeling of isolation was the lack of ongoing positive social interactions with non-Māori colleagues. A participant illustrated this shared experience when she commented that, due to her workload and the negative talk that often took place in her school's staffroom (about Māori students and community issues), she often avoided the staffroom. This avoidance strategy only served to further isolate her from her colleagues.

However, the participants' feelings of isolation were not limited to the performance of professional duties. The inability to speak te reo Māori outside of the classroom posed cultural challenges for each of the participants as well. Being the sole te reo Māori speaker in the school meant that the participants' opportunities to speak te reo was limited to classroom conversations with students who were normally responding with a

beginner's level of proficiency. Consequently, the ability to further develop their personal levels of language proficiency was limited. One participant highlighted this by saying:

> I felt really lonely. I had no other teachers who are Māori, [teachers] to kōrero te reo Māori [with]. I had no one who I could talk to … there was no one there who I could really look up to or talk to for advice within the school setting. (Torepe, 2011, p. 63)

Support

Another issue raised by the participants was the collegial support they received from their Hōaka Pounamu cohort peers. All participants had previously completed the Hōaka Pounamu programme (Graduate Diploma in Immersion and Bilingual Education), a one-year full-time Māori language immersion programme, and found this support significant once they returned to their schools and classrooms. While often not forthcoming from their respective school colleagues, the participants relied on their Māori cohort peers for professional teaching and culturally-related advice. According to one participant, the support provided by her peers had, "been the biggest benefit of the *Hōaka Pounamu* course" (p. 63). This statement, like many others collated from the data, identified the overwhelming importance of the relationships that had developed and been maintained during, and after, the completion of the course.

The participants formed an informal local Māori teachers' network which fulfilled their need for emotional and professional support. The participants commented that this network helped them to alleviate the feelings of isolation they were experiencing within their respective schools. This informal network provided the opportunity to collaborate with peers, to seek guidance and share resources. More importantly, it enabled this particular cohort of Māori teachers to continue to speak te reo Māori outside of the classroom, long after they had completed their post-graduate studies. Participants worked to maintain these relationships by meeting regularly, organising a te reo Māori language group (which also met periodically throughout the year), as well as serving as moderators for each other's National Certificate of Education Achievement (NCEA) internal assessment procedures.

CONCLUSION

The Māori teachers who participated in this research experienced challenges working in school environments dominated by a eurocentric ethos. Moreover, these difficulties arose from an over-arching problem that can best be defined as reflecting various forms of 'cultural taxation'. However, an examination of New Zealand and international research literature revealed that this was not a new problem, or unique to New Zealand. In Australia, Reid and Santoro (2006) and Santoro (2007) also found that many indigenous teachers felt marginalised in eurocentric schools due to the relatively low status afforded to their indigenous knowledge in school decision-making processes such as timetabling.

While te reo Māori is an official language of New Zealand, the participants believed te reo Māori was being covertly and overtly disregarded in their workplaces, irrespective of official policy guidelines. They commented that te reo Māori is not given the status it deserves and that their schools were not giving adequate effect to the Crown's principle of 'active protection', central to the New Zealand Government's own 'principles for Crown's action on the Treaty of Waitangi'. The research participants often felt professionally isolated by their peers and contended that they were subjected to forms of cultural taxation in ways that resonated with the findings of Australian researchers (Reid & Santoro, 2006; Santoro, 2007).

These additional cultural tasks placed considerable pressure on the Māori teachers who participated in this research. Cultural taxation increased their workloads in ways they considered harmful to their physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. Frequently, the participants felt that they fulfilled the duty as the 'ambassador-at-large' or a 'one-stop-Māori-shop' within their school community yet they still felt 'culturally-obliged' to tautoko (support) the Māori students they taught and to support their schools' respective Māori communities. This deep sense of duty, however, significantly increased their likelihood of feeling 'overwhelmed', 'stressed', 'tired' and 'burned-out'.

The professional isolation of the teachers in Torepe's research (2011) left them feeling that their Māori students were in danger of experiencing the harmful effects they felt can be caused by experiencing their language and culture being ignored or trivialised by teachers from the dominant (Pākehā) culture. The cultural taxation and isolation of these teachers also raised questions about how widespread the problem remains on a national basis given the similar research findings of Mitchell and Mitchell (1993) and the Ministry of Education (1999).

It should also be noted that since the completion of this research, three of the six research participants have left the teaching profession. This indicates the intensity of the challenges identified by the participants. It will therefore be New Zealand

political leaders, policy planners and school leaders who have the greatest influence to alter the institutional cultures, and teacher dispositions, that shape the distinct challenges facing Māori teachers in New Zealand schools.

He moana pukepuke e ekengia e te waka
A choppy sea can be navigated

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