

Issues affecting the education of Indigenous, other Minoritized and migrant students in New Zealand.

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I. Introduction

A seemingly intractable problem that besets modern education is how to raise the achievement levels of indigenous and other minoritized students so that the educational disparities that afflict these students can be addressed. The term *minoritized* refers to a people who have been ascribed the characteristics of a minority (Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005). To be minoritized, one does not need to be in the numerical minority but only to be treated as if one's position and perspective are of less worth; to be silenced or marginalised. Hence, for example, in schools on the Navajo reservation with over 95% of the population being Navajo or in Bedouin schools, we find characteristics of the

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students similar to those we may find among Māori in mainstream schools in which they are actually in the numerical minority. Also included in this category are the increasing number of migrants into European countries, populations of color or poverty, and those whose abilities and sexual persuasions do not belong to the perceived mainstream.

There are numerous explanations about why indigenous and other minoritized groups from around the world continue to suffer from the immediate and long term effects of educational disparities on employment, social well-being, and health. These theories range from deficit notions about the paucity of literature in the children's homes; the lack of positive educational experiences and expertise among their families; lack of motivation among particular groups of students; the negative impacts of peer cultures; the impact of the generally low socioeconomic status of the families; the impact of child poverty and abuse; the lack of positive role models (including those of successful members of indigenous and other minoritized groups in schools); and the neocolonial nature of the school system. It is a feature of most of these theories that they focus either on the problems that the child and their families present to the school or that the school presents to the families. Less common are explanations that focus on what actually happens between the participants of education; that is, the relationships that exist within the school's classrooms and between the school and

the families within the wider society; or the impact of the power imbalances that exist in the wider society that are reflected and reproduced within the nation's classrooms.

II. Research Evidence

Fundamental to this analysis of explanatory theories about the phenomena of low achievement among indigenous and other minoritized students is the understanding that when teaching occurs, progress is decided upon and practices are modified as “a direct reflection of the beliefs and assumptions the teacher holds about the learner” (Bruner, 1996, p.47). This means that “our interactions with others are deeply affected by our everyday intuitive theorizing about how other minds work” (Bruner, 1996, p.45). To Foucault (1972), such theorising is seen in the images that teachers create in their minds when explaining their experiences of interacting with indigenous and other minoritized students. These images are expressed in the metaphors they use that are part of the language or the discourses around education that already exist for considerable periods of time and which struggle against each other for explanatory power. It is through these metaphors that teachers subsequently organise classroom relationships and activities. Hence, discourses have a powerful influence on how teachers, and those with

whom they interact, understand or ascribe meaning to particular experiences and what eventually happens in practice. In short, particular discourses will provide teachers with a complex network of explanatory images and metaphors, which are then manifest in their positioning, which then will determine, in large part, how they think and act in relation to indigenous and other minoritized students.

The impact of teachers' discursive positioning on indigenous and other minoritized student achievement is seen when it is understood that some discourses hold solutions to problems that affect these students, while others do not. For example, if the discourse that the teacher is drawing from explains indigenous and other minoritized students' achievement problems in their classroom as being due to inherent or culturally based deficiencies of the children or of their parents and families, then the relationships and interactions that teachers develop with these children will be negative and they will engage students in low quality pedagogic content and skill programmes such as remedial activities or resort to traditional transmission strategies. In addition, and perhaps not surprisingly, indigenous and other minoritized students will react to this experience negatively with consequent negative implications for their attendance (they will often vote with their feet), engagement and motivation for learning (they will be met with behaviour modification programmes and assertive discipline), and achievement (which remains lower than children of the majority cultural groups in the classroom,

and in many cases in the world, the gaps continue to widen). Conversely, if the discourse offers positive explanations and solutions, then teachers will more likely be able to act in an agentic manner, seeing themselves as being able to develop quality caring and learning pedagogic relationships with indigenous and other minoritized students. When such contexts for learning are developed, as evidenced in the Te Kotahitanga project (Bishop, Berryman, Powell, & Teddy, 2007; Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003) that focuses on improving the achievement of indigenous Māori students in mainstream, public secondary schools in New Zealand, Māori students respond positively with measurable increases in engagement, attendance, retention, motivation (Bishop, Berryman, Powell et al., 2007; Meyer et al., 2010), and achievement (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, Peter, & Clapham, 2011; Meyer et al., 2010).

Further studies support this conclusion. The first example considered the determinants of student leadership in schools thereby determining the keys to improving student achievement (Dempster, 2011). The argument is that “it is the immediacy of the sense of connection and belonging they experience with their teachers and their peers that governs the sense of identification students have with their schools. Only then is engagement in all aspects of learning, curricular and co-curricular, enhanced, and once this occurs, the desire to take on leadership responsibilities in matters of school citizenship is elevated (p.

97)”. Dempster continues by suggesting that

how well children and young people are treated by their families, teachers and peers is a fundamental influence on how well they become connected to their schools. Furthermore, there is support for the proposition that experience of reasonable empowerment and a climate of participatory social engagement (both factors influencing leadership), are known to develop in students the very social, emotional and cognitive attributes that facilitate improvements in academic achievement (p.97).

The second example is a meta-analysis by Cornelius-White (2007 cited in Hattie, 2009) based on 119 studies with 1,450 effects, which was based on 355,325 students, 14,851 teachers, and 2,439 schools. In this analysis, there was a correlation of 0.34 ($d=0.72$) across all person-centered teacher variables and all student outcomes (achievement and attitudes). Hattie (2009) uses these results to argue that in classrooms “with person-centered teachers, there are more engagements, more respect of self and others, there are fewer resistant behaviours, there is greater non-directivity (student initiative and student-regulated activities), and there are higher student achievement outcomes” (p.119).

The third example is our own research into means of changing teacher theorising and practice in ways that will bring about

improvements in the schooling experiences and achievement of Māori students in mainstream, public schools. In 2001, we began the research for Te Kotahitanga by talking with groups of Years 9 and 10 Māori students, together with members of these students' families, school principals, and teachers, about their collective schooling experiences. From these interviews, a series of narratives of experience were developed (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). In contrast to the majority of their teachers who tended to dwell upon the problems that the children's deficiencies caused them, the children clearly identified that the main influence on their educational achievement was the quality of the in-class relationships and interactions they had with their teachers. They also explained how teachers could create a context for learning in which Māori students' educational achievement could improve by teachers changing the ways they related and interacted with Māori students in their classrooms. It was clear from their experiences that if Māori students are to achieve at higher levels and educational disparities are to be reduced, then teachers must relate to and interact with these students in a different manner from the most commonly occurring approaches.

From these interviews, we developed an Effective Teaching Profile (ETP; Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai et al., 2003) that formed the basis of the Te Kotahitanga professional development innovation, which is now running in 49 secondary schools in New Zealand. In these schools, the

most effective implementers of the ETP are those who see Māori student schooling experiences improve dramatically and achievement rise to the highest levels in norm-referenced standardised tests.

Fundamental to the ETP are teachers' understandings of the need to explicitly reject deficit theorising as a means of explaining Māori students' educational achievement levels and their taking an agentic position in their theorising about their practice. In order for teachers to attain these understandings, teachers need to be provided with learning opportunities for critically evaluating where they discursively position themselves when constructing their own images, principles, and practices in relation to Māori and other minoritized students in their classrooms. They also need an opportunity to consider the implications of their discursive positioning on their own agency and for Māori students' learning. Practitioners need to be able to express their professional commitment and responsibility to bringing about change in indigenous and other minoritized students' educational achievement by accepting professional responsibility for the learning of all of their students, not just those who they can relate to readily. These central understandings are then manifested in these teachers' classrooms when effective teachers demonstrate on a daily basis: that they care for the students as culturally located individuals; they have high expectations for students' learning; they are able to manage their classrooms and curriculum so as to promote learning; they are able to engage in a range of discursive

learning interactions with students or facilitate students to engage with others in these ways; they know a range of strategies that can facilitate learning interactions; they collaboratively promote, monitor, and reflect upon student's learning outcomes so as to modify their instructional practices in ways that will lead to improvements in Māori student achievement; and they share this knowledge with the students.

III. Impact of teacher's discursive positioning on educational success of migrants.

The children of voluntary migrants (as opposed to refugees and other involuntary migrants) tend to fall into two groups. The first are the children of peoples from the Pacific Islands who moved to New Zealand in the decades following World War Two, a time when many Pacific Island peoples (such as Samoans, Niueans, Cook Islanders and Tokelauans) moved to New Zealand during the post World War II economic boom in search for employment and a better education for their children. These children clearly fit into the pattern of minoritization that afflicts Maori children in New Zealand schools in that, while these children tend to remain at school longer than do Maori children, their achievement levels are actually lower than those of Maori children which are in turn consistently lower than those of the

majority of European descendent New Zealanders. Lower educational attainment of this group is a major determinant of labour market outcomes, consequentially, unemployment for people of Pacific Islands origins, despite many, if not most now being born in New Zealand, is high at 16% (Maori at 14% - Maori youth 35%), compared to ‘all’ unemployment at 6.7%.

The other group of voluntary migrants are those who have migrated more recently from Western Europe and Asia. Most migrants from Asia tend to have arrived in recent times, are of a highly selected group because of the new ‘points’ system and mostly have both parents born overseas. In comparison to migrants who have one parent born in New Zealand, such as those of Pasifika descent, or citizens who have both parents born in New Zealand, this group is more likely to own their own home, and are less likely to have low household income. They are less likely to be the victims of crime. However, they report having “four times the odds of feeling that they do not belong to New Zealand compared to the native population” (Woolf, n.d. p.5).

Here again, educational attainment is a major indicator of labour market access. An OECD (2009) report using PISA results shows that in those OECD countries that changed their entry criteria to select their immigrants on the basis of high levels of educational qualifications, wealth and the host countries labour market needs, such as New Zealand, Australia and Canada, the average attainment level of the

children of migrants is about the same as for others in the population. This contrasts to most EU countries where children of immigrants are experiencing difficulties accessing the labour market (OECD, 2009). Hence, children of Korean migrants in New Zealand are reported as experiencing educational success and ready labour market entry.

However, New Zealand schooling poses problems for this group of migrants. Just as minoritized students are stereotyped by the predominance of traditional transmission instructional practices in classrooms that maintains cultural 'disguises' in comparison to socio-cultural pedagogies that allow the cultural experiences of students to be the base for further learning, so too are the children of migrants from Continental Asia. Such pedagogies support the persistence of stereotypes of 'Asian students being good at maths', for example. In addition, inclusive pedagogies would improve feelings of belongingness, that measure that Woolf (n.d) identifies above as one of the major factors affecting satisfactory integration.

A major outcome of the political and economic colonisation of New Zealand by English speaking Europeans is that unlike what happened in many other parts of the world, the level of bilingualism in New Zealand is low, particularly among first language speakers of English, who predominate politically and economically. Where bilingualism occurs, it is mainly found in minority language groups; among Maori speakers and among minority ethnic communities including new settler language

speakers. Bilingualism is rare among the majority of the population, which consists primarily (82%) of New Zealanders of European descent and expecting schools to maintain other languages is not practicable as no language other than English features in the top ten most popular subjects at secondary school.

The low incidence of bilingualism among first language speakers of English in New Zealand is being fostered by the somewhat erroneous impression that English is *the* international language and is therefore “all that we need”. As a result it is felt that New Zealanders on the whole have little need to learn other languages for other than purely utilitarian (economic and trade) reasons. Hence, much is made of the benefits for trade and tourism of learning the language of, for example, our trading partners, the Japanese, the Koreans and increasingly the Chinese. The non-utilitarian reasons for language learning; intellectual benefits, personal pleasure, access to cultural understanding, and language and cultural maintenance are not easily promoted from with a monolingual/utilitarian approach. Yet most migrant groups have strong aspirations for the maintenance of the home language for their children. Despite attempts to develop language maintenance programmes for languages other than English, survival of these languages among New Zealand language communities has to contend with the continued dominance of English as a medium of instruction and the near total dominance of English in the electronic and print media.

Monolingualism has a remarkable impact on community languages in New Zealand. In a study undertaken over twenty years ago of community language loss in Wellington (the capital city of New Zealand), Janet Holmes (1990) identified that “language shifts to English occurs over at most four generations, and is sometimes completed in as few as two. The rate of shift appears to be greater for some than others, but the fact of shift and the direction of the shift seem inevitable” (p.19). While this study was undertaken some time ago, there has been little change in New Zealand that would signal that these findings are not just a relevant to present day New Zealand as they were then.

Holmes’ (1990) meta study covered three community language groups; the Chinese community who first came to New Zealand in significant numbers in the 1880’s. The Greek community in Wellington which was established in the 1920’s and the majority of the Greek community are therefore second and third generation Greek New Zealanders. The third group was the Wellington Tongan community which is the most recent, dating largely from the 1960’s. Most adults of these Pacific Island communities are first generation New Zealanders. These three communities were used to trace language shift in an immigrant population over four generations.

Community languages do not disappear easily. What tends to happen is that the “language slowly retreats from more public settings to more

private ones, as the number of proficient speakers diminishes” (p.20). The current pattern of language use among the three communities illustrates this clearly. In the Tongan community, people in the community still safely assume that a person who is Tongan will speak Tongan. By keeping close contact with one another, at home, socially and even at work Tongans are able to use their language often. Whereas in the Greek community, despite a relatively close residential and occupational proximity, young Greeks find it easier to speak English, yet will speak Greek to older people of the community, irrespective of the location. This situation also pertains in the Cantonese Chinese community. Chinese is generally spoken to and by older Chinese but significantly mainly in Chinese domains with a marked decline of proficiency among the younger generations.

The message here for new migrant groups is that, despite most migrants having aspirations that their children and grandchildren will continue to be able to communicate with their wider families, the reality is that the assimilationist ideology is such that such aspirations are unlikely to be met, especially when intermarriage becomes a reality.

IV. Summary and Recommendations

Positive classroom relationships and interactions are built upon

positive, nondeficit, agentic thinking by teachers about students and their families. Agentic thinking views the students as having many experiences that are relevant and fundamental to classroom interactions. This agentic thinking by teachers means they see themselves as being able to solve problems that come their way and as having recourse to skills and knowledge that can help all of their students and they believe that all of their students can achieve, no matter what. Agentic thinking is fundamental to the creation of learning contexts in classrooms where young Māori people are able to be themselves as Māori, to bring whom they are into the classroom, where Māori students' humour is acceptable, where students can care for and learn with each other, where being different is acceptable, and where the power of Māori students' own self-determination is fundamental to classroom relations and interactions. Indeed, the interdependence of self-determining participants in the classroom creates vibrant learning contexts, which in turn are characterised by the growth and development of quality learning relations and interactions, increased student attendance, and engagement and achievement both in school and on nationally based measures.

Fundamental to these classrooms is teachers' discursive (re)positioning, which is a necessary but often overlooked condition for educational reform; the sufficient conditions are the skills and experience teachers need to develop effective caring and learning relationships. In this way,

theorising from within a relational discourse addresses the limitations of the culturalist position that promotes quality teaching but gives limited consideration to the impact of power differentials within the classroom, school, and society such as those that manifest themselves in teachers drawing upon deficit discourses to explain their use of ineffective pedagogies. It also is preferable to the structuralist position that promotes a redistribution of resources and wealth in society, yet gives only limited consideration to the agency of teachers and school leaders and policy makers at all levels of education, allowing them to abrogate their responsibilities. While both of these considerations are necessary, what is missing from much current debate about the influences on (indigenous and other minoritized) students' achievement is a model that promotes effective and sustainable educational reform drawn from a relational discourse.

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