

"We may be diverse in our cultures, but it is in our shared humanity, our common need to feel both valued and connected, where there lies the potential to engage in a Just education for all."

Culturally Sustaining and Revitalising Pedagogy: Towards a Just Education for all.

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Unpublished essay submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Contemporary Education.

DEDICATED TO LYNLEY SCHOFIELD,
WHO LED FROM THE HEART.

Culturally Sustaining and Revitalising Pedagogy - Towards a “Just” Education for all.

Kārena Ngata

The pattern of marginalising Māori culture and knowledges in New Zealand state schools is well established. The resultant disenfranchising, disempowerment and disengagement of many Māori from “mainstream” education is evidenced in the long standing disparities in educational outcomes between Māori and Pākehā (non-Māori New Zealanders of European descent). This kind of inequality has a flow on effect into adulthood where we see the negative over-representation of Māori across all social indicators (McFarlane, 2015; Sullivan, 1993; Walker, 2016). Such inequality, particularly in the New Zealand context, raises economic, political and ethical challenges.

This essay proposes that a possible solution to the historical disparity in educational achievement may lay in the widespread, sustained adoption of a more culturally sustaining pedagogical approach to teaching in “mainstream” schools. The theory being that equity in education will lead to greater equity in society.

McFarlane (2015) uses the well know axiom of “Ngā tapuwae o mua, mō muri’ respecting the past while simultaneously making a difference for the future, to speak to the opportunity Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy may provide as a solution, not just for us here in New Zealand, but for all nations seeking to enable educational relevance and efficacy for minoritised groups in their increasingly diverse communities.

Historical context

Despite possessing the legal status of an independent nation under a confederacy of The United Tribes of New Zealand, and regardless of a huge advantage in population numbers, Māori leaders engaged in an act of good faith by signing Te Tiriti o Waitangi in 1840. Reassured that their “Tino Rangatiratanga” (the absolute authority of their Chieftainship) was affirmed, their key motives for granting a limited form of authority to the Crown was to enable British to regulate land sales and maintain law and order amongst the growing numbers of colonists in Aotearoa. Their good faith was dishonoured. The English treaty document was worded in such a way as to purport the cession of Māori sovereignty. Since the Waitangi Tribunal released its 2014 Te Paparahi o te Raki Stage One Report, residual debate around whether sovereignty was in fact ceded by Rangiatira in the treaty making process has been rendered deliberately obtuse. Nevertheless, the perpetuation of this particular colonial myth has bound the participants in a contest of power that continues to define Māori and Pākehā race relations today.

The well-honed colonial assimilation machine, fuelled by a firm belief in British superiority and driven by an imperialist agenda, wrought systematic, crown sponsored, devastation upon traditional Māori society. Populations were decimated, political power marginalised and iwi (large, political groupings with common ancestry) became largely alienated from their social, spiritual and economic base – their whenua (land). For Māori, the profoundly negative ramifications of this violent dispossession entered our whakapapa (genealogy) and its effects, having been passed through generations, are still being experienced today.

The New Zealand Government sought to reconcile the differences in the so called treaty “versions” by professing the fairness in honouring both documents *in principle*. The notion of Biculturalism in New Zealand was predicated on the treaty principles of “Partnership” and “Protection”, concepts which infer a collaborative and equitable arrangement enabling both parties to work together to protect and advance each other’s interests. The decades of disparity experienced by Māori

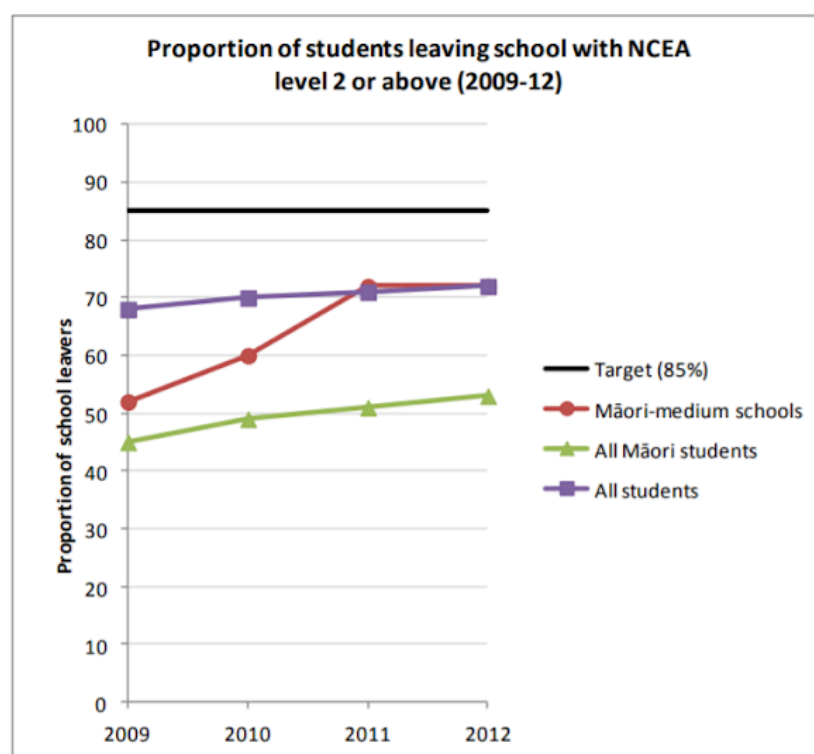
subsequent to the signing of Te Tiriti provides testimony to a denial of these principles. Captured in multiple official surveys and reports spanning decades, the fact that these disparities between Māori and Pākehā across all social indices are not only persistent, but escalating (Marion & Sim, 2015), evidences the now structurally entrenched position of Pākehā privilege and dominance over a marginalised Māori populace (Blank et al., 2016; Little, 2019; Walker, 2016).

This entrenchment was aided by an introduced education system initially designed to assimilate Māori into the roles of good farmers and good farmers' wives (Walker, 2016). The pursuit of a more academic education for Māori students was actively discouraged through racist policy (Walker, 2016) which served to explicitly instil an enduring tendency for deficit thinking regarding the capabilities of Māori students (Blank et al. 2016). The 1867 Native Schools Act established an intolerance for Māori culture, language, and values in the school grounds. Not surprisingly, these monocultural schools very quickly became a contentious and disparate space for Māori children.

Reclaiming Māori Education

In the latter part of the 20th century, Māori Kohunga Reo (play centres) and later, Kura Kaupapa (primary and composite schools) appeared on the scene. Kohunga and Kura successfully create educational settings that validate and legitimise cultural values, perspectives and knowledges while actively nurturing Te Reo (language) and Tikanga (cultural practices) Māori. NCEA results within Māori Medium schools provide evidence that this approach successfully addresses disparity in education (see Figure 1. taken from the Ka Hikitia Demonstration Report: Effectiveness of Te Kotahitanga Phase 5 2010-2012 where “All Māori students” refers to those Māori students in mainstream education settings) (Alton-Lee, 2014).

Figure 1. Proportion of students leaving school with NCEA level 2 or above: All Māori, Māori in Māori-medium schools, and all students.



Alton-Lee's (2014) provides further insight into the difference between Māori – medium and “All Māori” mainstream achievement evident in Figure 1 when she discusses the impacts of mainstream education on Māori children: *“For example, curriculum bias, a failure to recognise the crucial role of culture in education, and traditional teaching approaches can all trigger peer racism, bullying, negative classroom interactions, and student failure...”*. In addition, the prevalence of

mainstream teachers' deficit thinking regarding Māori students' abilities, results in a lowered expectation of performance. This impacts on a Māori students' self-belief, creating a "self-fulfilling prophecy" of underachievement (Blank et al. 2016).

In 2001, Bishop & Berryman saw the potential to address inequity in New Zealand education through the application of a more culturally relevant pedagogy. Drawing from previous Māori initiatives and stakeholder narratives, they developed the highly structured, research based, teacher development programme "Te Kotahitanga" (TK). The programme's Culturally Responsive and Relational Pedagogy" (CRRP) reflects a critical response to Ladson-Billings original concept of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (1995), by placing equal emphasis on the necessity of developing positive relationships for learning with the student and whānau.

Te Kotahitanga deliberately sought to raise Māori achievement by challenging teachers to positively reject deficit theorising which characterises factors such as student's attitudes, socio-economic status and poor parenting as the causes of under-achievement. The TK facilitators encouraged teachers to reposition themselves more agentically, supporting them in developing their understandings of CRRP, and filling their kete (basket) with culturally congruent and relational methodologies that served to effectively bridge the theory to practice divide (Bishop et al., 2007).

Research into the impact of the Te Kotahitanga programme Phase 5 showed dramatic improvements in achievement for Māori students attending participating schools. Consider the NCEA achievement gains for Māori in Figure 2 below also taken from the Ka Hikitia Demonstration Report: Effectiveness of Te Kotahitanga Phase 5 2010-2012 (Alton, 2014).

Figure 2. Achievement gains for Māori in the Te Kotahitanga Phase 5 and a comparison group (2009-12)

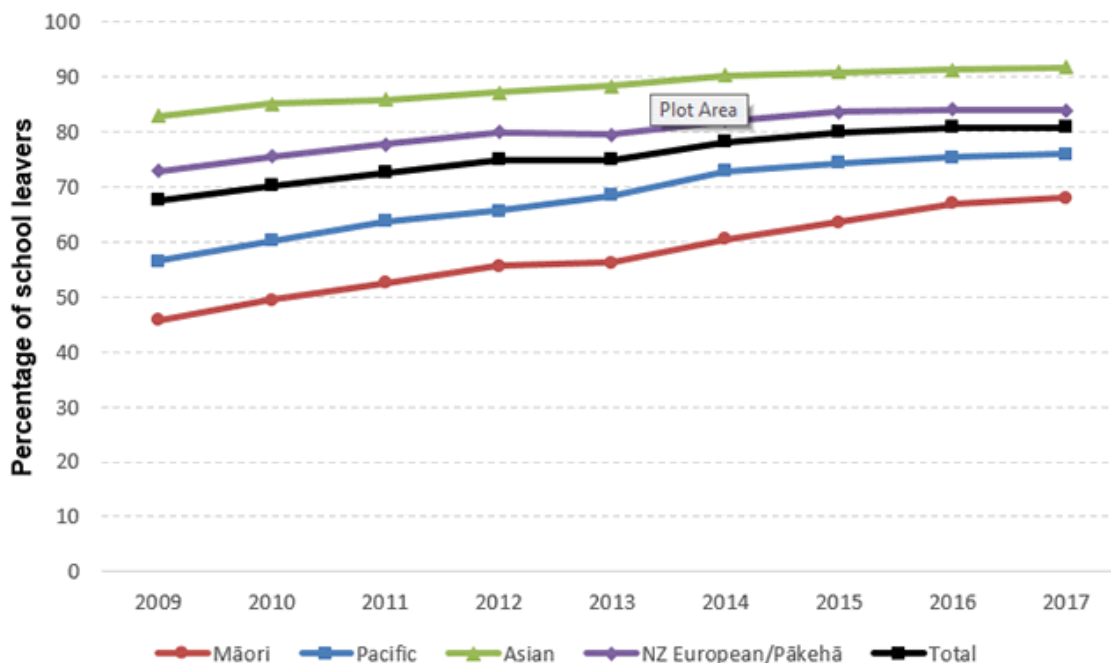
Table 10. Achievement gains for Māori in Te Kotahitanga Phase 5 and a comparison group (2009–12)⁶²

	Achievement as %		Difference as %
	2009	2012	
NCEA level 1			
Te Kotahitanga Phase 5	41.6	52.4	10.8
Comparison group	42.1	46.1	4.0
NCEA level 2			
Te Kotahitanga Phase 5	44.9	59.6	14.7
Comparison group	44.1	48.9	4.8
NCEA level 3			
Te Kotahitanga Phase 5	32.3	42.3	10.0
Comparison group	30.0	33.4	3.4
University Entrance			
Te Kotahitanga Phase 5	22.9	26.0	3.1
Comparison group	21.2	23.9	2.7

Despite both Teachers and Principals accrediting the gains shown above to the Te Kotahitanga programme in their school (Alton-Lee, 2014), the New Zealand Government decided to cease funding for the programme in 2012, redirecting the teacher professional development budget towards improving outcomes in science, maths, literacy, digital literacy, health and wellbeing (Roberts as cited in Garcia, 2016). Ministry of Education "Education Counts" (2017) data below shows that disparity continues, suggesting that inadequate resourcing has negatively impacted

on the ability of schools to sustain the gains that the Te Kotahitanga model offered towards achieving equitable outcomes. The evidence also suggests that subsequent initiatives to address inequitable outcomes in education, such as the Ministry of Education's Māori Education Strategy "Ka Hikitia: Accelerating Success 2013-2017" have similarly not met their goal.

Figure 3: Percentage of school leavers with at least an NCEA Level 2 qualification or equivalent, by ethnic group (2009 to 2017)



Cumulatively, initiatives, strategies and national directives such as those discussed above, have equipped mainstream New Zealand schools with the rationale, knowledge and tools required to deliver the curriculum in a way that values the learner, fosters learner agency, is responsive to culture and encourages caring, productive learning relationships. Furthermore, extensive research evidences a CRRP approach as being counter hegemonic and highly effective in raising achievement, particularly for Māori. When you consider that the Ministry for Social Development (2004) declared educational failure as having wider significant costs to society across social indicators such as health and justice, the idea that Te Kotahitanga was too expensive doesn't hold up. So why then does significant educational disparity persist? The answer does not offer a critique of CRRP, instead it identifies a barrier: racism.

This writer argues that the disparity and its continued presence in educational outcomes, is rooted in and perpetuated by the physiological, psychological and social conditions which issue from our colonial history. This was acknowledged earlier this year by New Zealand's Minister of Justice Andrew Little who, in delivering New Zealand's Human Rights report to the United Nations at Geneva, stated that, "*The impacts of colonisation continue to be felt today, through entrenched structural racism and poorer outcomes for Māori*" (Little, 2019). Whether the racism underpinning this continuing disparity is internal, interpersonal, institutional or societal; whether it is deliberately subversive, or completely unintentional, racism in all its forms exists in New Zealand – it has a history here, an enduring legacy, and a debilitating presence in our society today.

Reflecting on how your own inaction, action, beliefs and values as a Pākehā Teacher may perpetuate Pākehā privilege and contribute to race based disparity can be confronting and uncomfortable. I am therefore grateful to several Pākehā colleagues who were prepared to engage with me around this topic. In our discussions I came across a range of perspectives: some denied

New Zealand to be a racist country and argued that disparity is along socio-economic lines, not racial ones. My pointing out the racial patterns in the socio-economic disparity was met with neo-liberal rhetoric focusing on the need of individuals to take responsibility for their own circumstances, without regard for the historical systemic and structural conditions which foster inequality. Another colleague lives under the perception that treating everybody the same is fair, blind to the racism inherent in “sameness”. Another was happy with the status quo, categorising herself as “neutral” on the matter, and had a “penny drop” moment when I shared the Freirean proposition that complacency, in the face of such enduring disparity, serves to perpetuate the causal hegemony, and so her “neutral” positioning does not have neutral outcomes at all.

While this discussion does not intend to blame teachers, it does intend to make us all think about our own positioning in all this. I suspect that more than a few Pākehā who comprise 69% (Ministry of Education, 2018) of our teaching profession in New Zealand, as well as colonised Māori like myself are what Blank et al. (2016) refer to as “unconsciously bias”, that is, we have been enculturated into a system that is inherently flawed and like fish who don’t consider the water they’re swimming in, we don’t initially see, feel or hear the racism. And yet, like the water, it is all around and even within us. To us, the way we are teaching is just “normal” and it is not until someone disrupts our thinking by challenging us to reflect on whose culture and knowledge is marginalised as a result of what we consider “normal”, are we likely to make the necessary shifts in our thinking and practice.

In contrast to the idea that Māori are disadvantaged by racism in New Zealand society, is a concept that had significant support in one forum. Essentially, the notion was that Māori development initiatives are examples of race based Māori *privileging*. In the context of how devastating our country’s contact history was for Māori and how thoroughly evident the subsequent entrenchment of Pākehā privilege is in our nation’s enduring statistics of disparity, the idea of public policy being appropriately directed towards addressing disparities could somehow be regarded as *privileging* Māori, seems illogical to my sensibilities. Is it a privilege to address the consequences of injustice? Is it a privilege to challenge your treaty partner for centralising (and therefore normalising) their priorities, their values, and their epistemologies within our nation’s education system? Is it not reasonable for Māori to be able to achieve success in New Zealand education, as Māori, that is, without having to suspend Māori beliefs, values, language and cultural knowledges at the school gate, in order to “achieve”. Gaining an education should not have to come at the cost of losing who you are, and that applies to all people, regardless of ethnicity.

Towards a Culturally Sustaining and Revitalising Pedagogy: Creating a “Just” educational experience for all students.

In 2012, Professor in Multicultural Education at the University of Washington Django Paris began to question the adequacy of the terms “Responsive” and “Relevant” when seeking to ensure the “valuing and maintenance of our increasingly multiethnic and multilingual society.” Paris argues that responsiveness and relevance may not be enough to support marginalised students and their families (both long standing and newer arrivals) in maintaining their cultural languages and practices while “*in the process of gaining access to dominant ones*” (Paris, 2012). Furthermore, Paris queries if these terms sufficiently speak to the need for the critical stance and action required to address unequal power relations. Instead, Paris offered the term “*Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy*” contending that such a pedagogical approach would more appropriately encompass the complex issues related to the education of marginalised groups in an increasingly cultural pluralistic society (Paris, 2012).

The 2018 research findings of the “Warrior Scholars” from the Kia Aroha College of Auckland about how racism impacts on their daily lives was presented at no less than three national adult conferences, a counter-hegemonic learning outcome consistent with an emerging evolution of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy into the more social action orientated “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy”. The Kia Aroha College website (2018) states, adopting such an approach

“...goes beyond thinking we just have to have better relationships. It raises fundamental questions about the purpose of schooling, and the responsibility of schools to sustain and, in indigenous communities, to also revitalise culture, instead of ignoring, assimilating, and eradicating it as they have done in the past – and still do currently.”

In her post Christchurch Mosque shooting blog entitled “White Supremacy in our Classrooms”, former Kia Aroha College Principal Anne Milne (2019) asserts that educators have the potential to help dismantle white supremacy. Milne goes on to provide a list of critical planning questions for Teachers to consider. The following questions are derived from her blog:

- *Whose norms, values and worldviews are implicit in this learning? Whose norms, values, and worldviews are left out?*
- *How does your topic reflect those with mana whenua relevant to your school, community, iwi, whānau, and in Aotearoa New Zealand?*
- *Where do learners have agency in this learning? Does the learning legitimate their experiences, realities, and cultures?*
- *How does your choice of content teach Pākehā children about injustice, power, and privilege?*
- *How is your choice of content and delivery intentionally anti-racist?*

These critical questions provide an excellent prompt for teachers to notice, perhaps for the first time, the water they are swimming in. Not only do they force us to consider our own complicity in perpetuating structural racism and historical disparity in education, but they also importantly lead us to reflect on our own potential to meaningfully contribute to cultural revitalisation. This could be particularly empowering for those students whose post-colonial or post-migrant realities reflect an alienation from what should be their cultural inheritances. In this context, McCarty & Lee’s proposition of a “Culturally Sustaining and Revitalising Pedagogy” (2014) highlights the importance of not merely sustaining culture, but also actively fostering engagement in language and cultural reclamation, arguably a powerful and complimentary companion to the social action approach in the pursuit of a “Just” education.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in building 21st Century and Global Competencies

A burgeoning middle class means populations are becoming increasingly diverse as more and more migrants can afford to seek improved opportunities away from oppression, civil unrest and the effects of climate change (Burns et al. 2019). This reality is evident in the increasingly diverse student demographic of New Zealand schools (ERO, 2018), but not the teacher ethnicities who are 69% Pākehā (Ministry of Education, 2018). This speaks to the need of moving towards Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, which starts with the act of inward gazing, and is then followed by deliberate outward actions designed to not only meet the diverse needs of all students, but empower them to positively invest in their own futures.

Furthermore, increased interconnectivity driven by technology, new ways of working, and issues requiring global solutions, require people to develop global competencies as they engage with increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) groups (Burns et al., 2019). CSRP has the potential to be instrumental in establishing the foundations for these global competencies. As an approach to teaching that connects with, validates and builds on a student's prior and cultural knowledge through a pedagogy of positive relations, CSRP orientates teachers and learners towards the need to closely examine intercultural issues, develop an appreciation for varied perspectives and interact effectively with people from other cultures – all characteristics of globally competent students (Colvin, 2018).

Similarly, CSRP also resonates with contemporary practices in education. In fostering learner agency, strengthening relationships with students and whānau, and networking with the wider community, CSRP closely aligns with the contemporary practice of Personalised Learning. Technology will no doubt play a role in enabling communication and access to resources in a CLD classroom. However, it is crucial that technology's application in CSRP practice is appropriately critiqued as it has the capacity to normalise culturally homogenising messages, perpetuate stereotyping, and support hegemony. 21st Century skills such Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking and Creativity (Battelle for Kids, 2019) are central to a Culturally Sustaining and Revitalising Pedagogical approach, and are skills that are arguably valued in cultures globally.

Conclusion

The impetus to adopt Culturally Sustaining and Revitalising Pedagogy to inform educational reform in Aotearoa New Zealand is multifarious. This essay looks at how Te Tiriti, addressing historical justice and challenging racism underpins a moral impetus; I have discussed how a CSRP approach is not only fiscally responsible, but addresses the need to build more cohesive societies through fostering equitable outcomes and therefore equitable life opportunities for all members of our diverse society. Furthermore, as teachers, CSRP assists in meeting our professional responsibility to be more than just cognisant of our Ministry's educational priorities and strategies, but to actually *deliver* on their objectives, for example, giving expression to the Principles of Future Focus, Te Tiriti and Cultural Diversity in the New Zealand Curriculum, and facilitating the Ka Hikitia aspiration of Māori achieving success as Māori. Increasingly required global competencies and intercultural skills are also explicitly developed in a culturally sustaining approach to education. Finally, if the student is truly at the heart of what we are doing as educators, then employing a pedagogy that supports student wellbeing and achievement through building positive, respectful and empowering learning relationships, makes complete sense. We may be diverse in our cultures, but it is in our shared humanity, our common need to feel both valued and connected, where there lies the potential to engage in a Just education for all.

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