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WHAT IS CURRENTLY HAPPENING ABOUT TE AO MAORI IN NEW ZEALAND GENERAL ECE SERVICES?

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INTRODUCTION

Around 36% of Maori children who are involved in early childhood in New Zealand attend kohanga reo. This means that 64% of Maori children who go to any early childhood service are involved in general services such as a childcare centre, playcentre, kindergarten, or a family daycare service.

There is a sound policy and requirement framework about Maori in New Zealand early childhood education. Te Whaariki (New Zealand early childhood education curriculum guidelines) says and expects that any Maori child and their family, whanau should feel comfortable in any service they choose to attend. It also states that all children, and their families, should experience and gain some understanding of things Maori.

The Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs) require managers and educators to implement policies, objectives and practices which:
"Reflect the unique place of Maori as tangata whenua and the principles of partnership inherent in Te Tiriti o Waitangi;
Are equitable, inclusive and culturally appropriate."

It goes almost without saying that each early childhood educator has her or his own cultural background, and beliefs and values — all influenced by their own childhood and family experiences. However, each educator also needs to be able to work with, respect and extend the thinking and learning of children of Maori descent, plus ensure that all children are "given the opportunity to develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritages of both partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi."

All this requires a lot of skill and maturity in all managers and educators, and can seem daunting. The most useful and important starting point would seem to be the best possible provision for current Maori children and possible Maori children. However, because what is

good for Maori children is also good for all children such a framework would be beneficial for every child involved in New Zealand general early childhood services.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Te Puni Kokiri (2001) using a literature review associated with an audit of how well teacher education programmes prepare students to work with and teach Maori students concluded that teachers, to ensure the best learning environment for Maori children, need to:

- Make the service environment welcoming, inclusive and culturally appropriate — because how the service looks shows whether cultural diversity is valued.
- Behave in ways that validate every child and their background — regardless of their colour or culture or differing abilities.
- Have high standards and expectations for every child — particularly if they are of an indigenous or minority culture
- Be passionate about learning and learners — all the time and for each child
- Develop a propensity and ability to involve parents and whanau — whether they have the same world view as the educators or not, and especially if they have had negative educational experiences themselves and may lack confidence about discussing learning and/or not be successful readers and writers.

~~Greater appreciation and understanding of Maori tikanga~~ and thought about the impact of the practices of early childhood services on Maori children and their families would ~~increase the likelihood of Maori participating in services that they regard as good quality~~. Building knowledge and understanding depends on an interplay of the following:

a) Attitudes

Many research studies show that the ~~expectations adults have of them affect children and their development~~. If Maori children are ignored, blamed, patronised and/or overlooked, this will have a big ~~impact on them on how they feel and therefore on their learning and development~~. *Security doesn't*

b) Knowledge and Understanding

An "honest effort to ascertain the facts" (Richardson J NZMC at 682,683) flows from the honesty of purpose and good faith characteristic of partnership. Not only does this require a developed appreciation of the relative entitlements and obligations flowing from the Treaty of Waitangi, it also demands knowledge of those environmental factors that impact upon Maori people and communities. An appreciation of Tikanga Maori and of issues and concerns relevant to Maori, regionally as well as nationally, is critical.

International research has tended to link cultural characteristics to learning styles. However, the learning needs of Maori are as multi-faceted and as varied as those of non-Maori.

c) Experiences and Relationships with Maori

There is a wealth of research which documents that good principles of teaching and learning can be applied across all groups of people. Notwithstanding this, traditional concepts, values and protocols do shape the beliefs, behaviour and decisions of Maori.

Awareness and understanding of cultural differences can only happen through experiencing real relationships with Maori people and communities. Acknowledge and honour (rather than celebrate) "Things Maori." A commitment to Maori as tangata whenua (first people of this land), however, does not mean that the onus for doing this should fall on Maori staff members. It needs to be part of the psyche of the whole team with everyone learning from any individual and collective mistakes.

d) Consciousness about own culture

Pakeha - like Maori people - come from many different roots. They come from tribes scattered across Europe — from, for example, Ireland, Scotland, England, Holland, Wales, Yugoslavia. Like Maori they have emerged with some common patterns in the way they live and think and run their lives and see the world, that is, they have a culture. However, as immigrants it is taking them at least two generations to really appreciate or explore their past, heritage and culture. Like settler people tend to do, Pakeha have protectively thought of themselves as normal and other people (such as Maori) as different, ethnic or having a culture.

The following excerpts from a paper given by Dame Sian Elias (New Zealand's Chief Justice) at a Legal Research Foundation conference (1993) illustrates the effect of 'settlerism'.

"To the British Crown the Treaty of Waitangi was a serious document, valid and binding. When in 1846, Governor Grey asked the Colonial Secretary, Lord Stanley, how far he had to abide by the Treaty, the unequivocal reply in the name of the Queen was: 'You will honourably and scrupulously fulfil the conditions of the Treaty of Waitangi'."

"For more than a decade following the Treaty signing, this official attitude prevailed and the Treaty was recognised and observed as a contract binding on both parties. The influence of this attitude, however, diminished considerably as the administration of New Zealand passed to a Settler Government under the Constitution Act of 1852. By 1877 recognition of the Treaty by settlers had declined to the point where Chief Justice Prendergast was able to say that the Treaty was a 'simple nullity.' Until 1975, NZ courts continued to hold that the Treaty had no legal status in domestic law."

"However, we need to realise that the Treaty is a Bill of Rights for Pakeha as well as Maori. "We must not forget that the Treaty is not just a Bill of Rights for Maori. It is a Bill of rights for Pakeha too. It is their Treaty that gives Pakeha the right to be here. Without the Treaty there would be no lawful authority for the Pakeha presence in this part of the South Pacific" - Chief Judge Eddie Durie."

The main aim of the Treaty (particularly the Maori version) has to have been one of ensuring that Maori people retained (or in today's reality get) full possession of their language and tikanga, and that all other people in New Zealand at least develop knowledge and

understanding, and value Maori language and tikanga.

At the time of the signing of the Treaty Maori was the common language for all participants except for Hobson. Maori were already literate in 1840 because of their oral traditions and signs and symbols. They also took to reading and writing with alacrity in the mission schools where teaching was in te reo Maori. Maori were soon proportionately more able to read and write than the early European settler population. There were many Maori newspapers printed between 1842 and the end of the century.

So the intention was that we would be a bicultural nation, and if the following description was exemplified by all, many or even some early childhood educators the Maori children in general early childhood services would really feel they belonged.

As Eric Schimmer (1970) points out "A bicultural teacher is a person who is reasonably able to predict how a child of another culture will perceive what happens in the classroom. Such a teacher will visualise the emotional background out of which the Maori child's perceptions arise, but at no point will s/he believe that s/he "knows" that background. Biculturalism is a mode of interaction where one side never pretends to "know" the other."

However, it is Maori who are bicultural in New Zealand. Every Maori woman, man and child speaks English. Less than 2% of Pakeha in New Zealand speak Maori. And many Maori operate in both so called 'mainstream' society and their own Maori world. The vast majority of Pakeha know only their own world, and ways of thinking, doing and behaving. Very few Pakeha take part in tangi or hui, or attend kapahaka competitions, listen to Maori radio stations, support or help at a local marae, or feel comfortable in Maori contexts or protocols.

REFLECTING ON CURRENT SITUATIONS

Putting the above together, it seems to us that the following are some aspects of any early childhood provision that need reflecting about - if Maori children and whanau are to feel welcome and comfortable, and all children and families are "to develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritages of both partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi."

a) Evaluating where you are at now.

What tikanga Maori is integrated into how your service operates?

b) Staffing and staff relationships

Do job advertisements encourage Maori to apply?

Is the selection and appointment process Maori friendly? What tikanga Maori values are practised in selection and interview processes?

Are any Maori staff who undertake liaison and 'pastoral' work suitably recognised and rewarded and supported?

What is the format of your staff meetings?

Any established procedure for welcoming staff?

c) Enrolment processes

Do you use any Maori on your letterhead?

What happens when people come to visit or enrol?

Is your service's entrance area welcoming to both Maori and Pakeha?

How are visitors greeted and introduced to others?
Is any history of the service shared with them?
Is there any provision for food and drink for visitors?

d) Service/centre atmosphere and physical appearance

Are there posters/pictures of Maori people on the walls?

Any use of Maori design?

Any use of natural materials and native plants?

How much use is there of te reo by adults? by children?

Do all educators make real efforts to ensure the names of Maori children and their parents, and local place names, are all pronounced correctly? Does each educator form relationships with Maori children and their whanau?

Any maps, books, photos of local places important to Maori?

How often do we see the Mana magazine in staff rooms or Pakeha educators using Maori websites?

Are there clear and used strategies in your service to deal with racism and racist comments?

How are any resentments expressed by Pakeha parents about Maori issues dealt with?

e) Routines

Are watercrress, puha, rawena bread ever on the menu?

How often do adults sit down and eat with children?

Is care taken not to pass food over children's heads?

Can children be walked around rather than over in the sleeping space?

f) Programme

Are "activities, stories, and events that have connections with Maori children's lives an essential and enriching part of the curriculum for all children"?

Are differing learning styles all catered for?

A Ministry of Education Discussion Paper on Maori Education (2001) suggests that to meet the learning styles of all children a wide range of teaching strategies is necessary. These include cooperative learning opportunities, problem solving, peer teaching/support of learning, child generated questions, and increased educator 'wait time' for child ideas or responses.

Do you use a wide range of strategies to encourage learning - including support of cooperation, problem solving, older children playing with and supporting younger children; listening to children's questions; increased 'wait time' for child responses and comments?

Does your service organisation encourage family groupings or only interactions in narrow age bands?

How many ways of seeing the world are included in your programme? Often there is an assumption that a particular (one) way of viewing the world is superior. What local contexts and cultural knowledge such as hangi, the marae, navigational expertise, legends about landmarks and natural events are used?

Is there respect for and use of natural environment and natural materials?

CONCLUSION

Wally Penetito points out that there is no one way of being Maori, that being Maori means different things to different people, and that there is no such thing as a generalised Maori knowledge - only whanau, hapu and iwi knowledge. He also says "A lot of people tell me they are scared of working with Maori. They say, 'We might get it wrong.' Well, stiff. Get it wrong. But do it, because next time you might do it better."

Te Tōrino haere whakamua whakamuri.

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