A Critique of the Best Evidence Synthesis with relevance for Māori Leadership in Education

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Abstract:

The Government's broad goals for te reo Māori include the people of Aotearoa/New Zealand recognising the intrinsic value of our national language and its acquisition being fully supported and promoted through national education and other industries and networks. Current trends show that culturally-appropriate early childhood services and schools are an important factor for Māori parents' decisions to participate and engage in the national education system.. Māori children are achieving in Māori medium education. However, there is room for improvement of provision for Māori children and young people in the English (general) stream, where most Māori are positioned. The leadership dimensions conceptualised in the Best Evidence Synthesis (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009) shift leadership issues away from teachers to a focus on what and how teachers are teaching, and what and how children and young people are learning and achieving. This is termed *pedagogical leadership.* That is, what is happening at the interactional and relationship levels to make a difference in educational outcomes. The inclusive style of pedagogical leadership embraces all who are able to make a difference in student outcomes. The kōhanga reo movement and Māori-medium primary school extension, kura kaupapa Māori, have played (and will continue to play) crucial roles in challenging the colonial structures of the state, and making a difference for Māori. Why, because they have been initiated by Māori parents, whānau, hapū and iwi, committed to the cause of Māori language revitalisation and successful educational outcomes. What is good for Māori is good for the nation!

Introduction

The recent United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation Report (2010) describes how the kōhanga reo (Māori language nests) movement demonstrates what a powerful force indigenous language revitalisation can be, not only for education but also for social cohesion. Māori students who have come through kōhanga reo and into Māori immersion schools have recorded significantly better achievement rates than their Māori peers in English-medium schools. Because Māori leadership is bound up with Māori language and culture, it makes sense then that the Māori-medium education sector plays an important role in continuing to shape and define Māori leadership. This paper discusses this idea further with reference to policy and to the latest Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why – Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration [BES]* (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009). The BES focuses on the compulsory sector (schools). However, this paper includes discussion relevant to the non-compulsory or early childhood education (ECE) sector. There are crossovers, parallels and implications for both ECE and schools. The following questions frame the discussion and critique of the BES;

1. To what extent does the BES consider issues of leadership in Māori education contexts?

2. How relevant is the BES for Māori-medium education in early childhood education contexts?

In order to consider issues of leadership and relevance of BES in Māori education contexts it is necessary to background the Māori medium sector with an overview of wider government Māori language policy together with some historical and current trends in Māori language education.

Contextualising Māori-medium Early Childhood Education

Broader Māori Language Education Context

The overall goal of Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori (Māori Language Commission) is for te reo Māori to be a living, thriving, valued community language which includes nationwide educational involvement. The Commission's broad goals include;

➢ A range of active, self sustainable Māori language domains exist.

➢ Te reo Māori is an everyday language of interaction in homes and communities.

➢ Traditional and contemporary reo Māori is maintained in an authentic cultural and linguistic framework.

➢ The people of Aotearoa recognise the intrinsic value of te reo Māori.

➢ Te reo Māori acquisition is supported and fully promoted through national education, broadcasting, culture, heritage, creative and information technology industries and networks (Māori Language Commission, 2008, p. 11).

Kōhanga Reo (Māori language nests)

The article titled *The rise and decline of te kōhanga reo: The impact of government policy* (Skerrett-White, 2001) overviews the rapid expansion of the kōhanga reo movement within its first 10 years of establishment. Māori leaders, concerned at the prospect of language loss, and in response to Māori community, proposed that iwi Māori should start teaching the very young through the medium of te reo Māori (the Māori language). Māori were keen to bridge the language gap between the ageing native speaking elders and the very young. The excitement of the time and early success buoyed many around the country into further action, culminating in the growth of over 847 licensed centres by 1993. The next decade paints a very different picture. Within 10 years approximately 200 kōhanga reo were to close down. Skerrett-White concluded that the government 'hands-off' approach to advancing kaupapa Māori initiatives ostensibly amounted to little more than institutionalised

racism, perpetuating disadvantage. In spite of the Ministry of Education's strategic plan for early childhood education (ECE), *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002) not much has changed for kōhanga reo. The plan promised much; with "…opportunities for the Government to work more collaboratively with the Trust, whānau and iwi. This will help support quality and participation in kōhanga reo in a way that supports the kaupapa of the kōhanga movement" (p. 7). The same pattern of decline from 1993 continued into this century, so that in 2010 we now have only 467 licensed kōhanga reo (Ministry of Education, 2009a).

Current trends for Māori in early childhood education

In 2006, the Ministry of Education (MOE) published a report by New Zealand Council for Educational Research and Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust (cited in Ministry of Education, 2009a) that looked at quality for children and whānau involved in kōhanga reo. They found that the kōhanga reo that rated 'stronger' on the study's quality rating items were more likely to have:

- teachers fluent in te reo Māori

- one or more kaumātua present in the programme

- teachers with Tohu Whakapakari qualifications or in their final year of training

- whānau who attend wānanga about language and culture

- very good or satisfactory te reo Māori resources.

*Ngā Haeata Mātauranga (*Ministry of Education, 2009a*)* provides an overview of the early childhood education (ECE) sector. Data shows that Māori children are still less likely to attend ECE services for sustained periods of time than their non-Māori peers. Of interest is the research which shows that for parents of Māori children, the availability of culturally-appropriate services is an important factor in deciding whether to participate in ECE. Actual percentages illustrate 44% of parents with Māori children

rated this as *important* or *extremely important*, compared to 18% of parents with Pākehā children. The Report states that the MOE will continue to focus on the area of *quality* in early childhood education. Further, that high-quality ECE is marked by adults' responsiveness to children; and intellectually stimulating, language-rich environments where children have the opportunity for dialogue and to use complex language. High quality also involves problem-solving, open-ended questions and adult–child interactions which lead to young children's extended thinking through sustained interactions.

Most Māori children attend English-medium ECE services. Those services, however, operate within a bicultural curriculum frame - *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). According to the curriculum Māori language is to be made visible and audible in all licensed centres. Settings should promote Māori language and culture, through meaningful activities, affirming its value for children from all cultural backgrounds, in spite of the numbers of Māori children attending. The curriculum states that adults working with children should demonstrate an understanding of different iwi and the meaning of whānau and whānaungatanga. Early childhood education service employees must also respect the aspirations of whānau for their children. Language rich environments are a feature of 'quality' in Māori language domains in both the general stream (English-medium) and Māori-medium sectors. However, evaluation research paints a rather mixed picture of culturally-appropriate practice, and high quality adult responsiveness to children in terms of Māori language education. In spite of the broad goals of the Māori Language Commission and those of *Te Whāriki* bicultural and bilingual aims remain somewhat illusive in general education in Aotearoa.

The stage one evaluation of *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002) reported that of the 46 services evaluated, those services with over 12% Māori children attending (24 services) were more likely to be rated highly for implementing a bicultural curriculum and meeting cultural and language aspirations of parents. An evaluation by the Education Review Office (2008) of a pilot study of English-medium services found that in just over half of the 16 services, Māori children had opportunities to develop as confident and competent learners through

programmes that included aspects of Māori language or culture. There is clearly room for improvement with respect to implementing the bicultural curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. What does the BES offer?

How leadership is conceptualised in the BES with Māori-medium implications

There are eight leadership dimensions which came about via a meta-analysis in the Best Evidence Synthesis (BES)(Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009, p.39) involving a more detailed analysis of the impact on student outcomes. These dimensions are;

  i.   Establishing goals and expectations;
  ii.   Resourcing strategically;
  iii. Planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum;
  iv.   Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development;
  v.   Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment;
  vi.   Creating educationally powerful connections;
  vii. Engaging in constructive problem talk; and
  viii. Selecting, developing, and using smart tools.

The dimension with the greatest effect size is the fourth dimension (promoting and participating in teacher learning and development) but all are important.

BES distinguishes between transformational leadership and pedagogical leadership, with the proviso that it is important not to set up an artificial opposition between the two (see p. 38). The former, transformational leadership has traditionally emphasised vision and inspiration and is a model that has been borrowed from the business sector. It is hierarchical, adult-centric and somewhat inappropriate as an education leadership model. Pedagogical leadership has a different focus – that of improved educational outcomes for children and young people. It emphasises the importance of establishing clear educational goals, planning the curriculum and evaluating teachers, teaching and learning. Pedagogical leadership is distributed in such a way as to focus on, and maximise, pedagogical outcomes. The inclusionary style of leadership championed in BES recognises how leadership may be exercised by *anyone* whose ideas or actions are influential and which make a difference to teaching and learning in the context of specific tasks and activities.

Māori Leadership is Distributed Leadership

An example is given in the BES where Māori parents, whānau and other community members have typically played crucial leadership roles in the establishment of Māori-medium educational institutions, such as kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa Māori (see p. 67). This is an important feature of Māori leadership which largely continues to be unacknowledged in education environs. Typically, in the establishment phases of kōhanga reo, kura kaupapa Māori (Māori-medium primary school option) and wharekura (Māori-medium secondary school option), Māori parents (in league with their elders) are the movers and shakers. Māori communities provide the educational leadership to establish viable educational alternatives – largely due to the shortcomings of state-funded centres and schools to provide equitable outcomes for Māori children and young people. These are also funded by Māori communities in the establishment phase. However, the key roles played by parents/elders/whānau in community are often usurped once funding, status and *qualified* teachers institute themselves. The challenge is to maintain the impetus provided by parents/elders/whānau in the establishment phase to sustain the relationships so that they become enduring, valued leadership relationships between educational settings and communities.

Professional Development

BES cites Education Review Office (ERO) research into the determinants of schools' effectiveness in managing teaching and learning; that is the extent to which school leaders know that their investment in professional learning and development is necessary to change teacher practice and improve student outcomes. Such professional learning and development is not mutually exclusive. However, ERO finds that for leaders in Māori education, this becomes a difficulty "…often exacerbated by the roles that they are expected to take in the wider community and by expectations that may deflect them from their role as educational leaders" (p. 26). They found that effective educational leaders are those who are able to manage this complexity through being clear about their fundamental goals. They make the

necessary connections between school governance, management, and community while maintaining a strong focus on providing optimal conditions and support for their students. Such leaders have a zero tolerance for failure and do not allow low expectations or organisational barriers to get in the way. They focus on learning and achievement.

Although all the eight BES dimensions are important, the dimension with the greatest effect size is the fourth dimension - promoting and participating in teacher learning and development. This is of particular importance to the ECE sector. Mitchell and Cubey's (2003, p.viii) findings of the impact of professional development have been summarised into three categories; enhancing pedagogy; contributing to children's learning; and building linkages between early childhood education settings and other settings. Among other things, professional development in ECE can make significant contributions to enhancing pedagogy through challenging teachers/educators' beliefs and assumptions from a deficit view to one of valuing young children and their cultural backgrounds "…so that the knowledge and skills of families and children are acknowledged and built on…" (p. viii) for improved outcomes.

Policy Development

According to the BES, important pedagogical and cultural goals need to be underpinned by crucial pedagogical and cultural policies in education. The research shows the successes gained for Māori children from the Māori medium sector. What is good for Māori is good for the nation. Te reo Māori is an official language. Why, in a country that has two official languages, is English privileged in the curriculum? Although language educational policy is not explicitly discussed in the BES, it is interesting to note the research on sense making (see p. 138) shows that the ways in which teachers interpret policy documents is strongly influenced by their prior understandings and by the prevailing norms and understandings in education. New policies need to connect with existing understandings and theories, making explicit the ways in which the new policy is similar to and different from the old. This is why it

is important, when formulating policy, not only to gain stakeholder agreement with the proposed policy but also to inquire repeatedly and thoroughly whether it is understood. The proposed policy can then be revised in ways that increase the chances both of acceptance and faithful implementation.

There is a distinct lack of understanding; it seems, in terms of the importance of tracing the antecedents of education and social policy which impacts on Māori, on te reo Māori, and Māori culture. New language policies also need to connect with, and critique, existing understandings and theories, making explicit the ways in which English language policies have shaped education and the ways in which newer Māori language policies will continue to do the same. However, Aotearoa still suffers from a monocultural hangover of the inebriating colonising policies of the 1800s, starting with Clause 3 of the Education Ordinance of 1847 which stated

> *In every school to be established or supported by public funds under the provisions of this Ordinance, religious education, industrial training, and the instruction in the English language shall form a necessary part of the system to be pursued therein…(cited in White, 1995, p. 15).*

The Ordinance triggered a series of English only policies which have become deeply embedded in educational policy, practice, theories and attitudes in Aotearoa. The net effect has been the ongoing marginalisation of te reo Māori in education. Even today with a successful Māori-medium sector, it is difficult to shift attitudes which position Māori children and young people as 'deficit' (see Mitchell & Cubey, 2003) and te reo Māori as something 'foreign' with little value. The discourse often resorts to 'but aren't we a multicultural country!'

Hornberger (2008) points to two certainties about multilingual education. One is that multilingual language education policy opens up ideological and implementational spaces for multilingual education. The other is that local actors may open up – *or close down* – agentive spaces for multilingual education as they implement, interpret, and perhaps resist policy initiatives. She argues that top-down policy is not enough: any policy may fail if there is no bottom-up local support and cites the case in

Bolivian schools where untouched stacks of bilingual education reform texts remain in locked cabinets in the director's office with little effort to implement. The BES is advocating a similar approach to policy development with stakeholder agreement a given and increased understanding an outcome.

Hornberger (2008, p. 198) provides further ideological clarification around the terms multilingual/multicultural education. At its best it is

1. Multilingual in that it uses and values *more than one* language in teaching and learning;

2. Intercultural in that it recognises and values understanding and dialogue across diverse lived experiences and cultural worldviews; and

3. Education that draws out the knowledge/s students bring to the educational setting.

Māori-language education is multilingual/multicultural as its aims are, at the least, to use *more than one* language in teaching and learning, using different approaches to Māori language revernacularisation than English-medium settings. English-medium settings have historically employed subtractive approaches to Māori language development as Māori children and young people have been assimilated into Pākehā culture through the English language. This trend is difficult to reverse.

According to Annamalai (2006) indigenous language (mother tongue) education should be supported on ideological and pedagogical grounds. Ideologically, it is an aspect of language rights, which are a component of human rights and a way of protection from discrimination by language. Pedagogically, it aims to make seamless the progression of children and young people through the education sector without disadvantage. It also aims to improve academic performance and to develop positive attitudes in speakers about their linguistic and cultural heritage. Intergenerational transmission of language motivated by the pride of minorities in their language by use in a public domain is critical for the maintenance of language and cultural diversity in the world. Public schools are public domains. The view gaining greater acceptance among linguists and language activists is that the rights and desires of

the linguistic community about the introduction and duration of language/s in education must outweigh other curricula concerns of the state. The apprehension about the cost of provision often entertained by governments does not count the social cost of *not* doing it, of which the educational failure of the minority students is only a part.

Strategic Resourcing

In English-medium schools, the commitment of leaders is a major determinant of the priority given to purchasing or developing resources for Māori-medium teaching. A small-scale research project cited in BES found little commitment on the part of senior leadership to assessing and reporting the reo Māori achievements of students from Māori-medium programmes. Māori medium teachers from two of the schools described how they fitted bilingual outcomes into the English-medium report template as best they could. In one, teachers had to attach a separate reo Māori report to the standard report. In these schools, resources for assessing and reporting were not aligned to important pedagogical and cultural goals. Furthermore, concern is often expressed that to sustain new practices and gains in student outcomes, continued access to resources is required. However, according to BES, pedagogical leadership ensures sustained funding for pedagogical priorities and resources linked to outcomes.

When there is no reo Māori reporting for te reo Māori achievements, it is not surprising to find a wavering commitment to improved educational outcomes or the improper (often no) alignment of resources to Māori language education. Access to resources in Māori language education has clearly been inadequate and inequitable (Ministry of Education, 2009b). The BES has identified strategic resourcing generally as a key dimension that links to improved outcomes for students and likewise needs to be prioritised for and in Māori medium education contexts. Professional development on understanding how resources align with the curriculum, link to improved outcomes and address teacher capability to promote Māori language

literacy and language skills will support the goals of Māori language education and assist with the broader goals of reversing language shift in Aotearoa.

Conclusions

In spite of the decline of kōhanga reo, according to UNESCO (2010) the movement has played a crucial role in challenging discrimination and, forging a more multicultural national identity. The broad goals of the Māori Language Commission particularly with reference to te reo Māori acquisition being supported and fully promoted through national education are consistent with the goals of te kōhanga reo and the rest of the Māori medium sector. They are also consistent with national curriculum documents. However, there is a disconnection between the stated policy goals and the practice. Inequities in provision continue to disadvantage Māori children and young people who face discriminatory practices in education (Ministry of Education, 2009b).

The BES provides ideological clarification around strengthening pedagogical leadership, thus enabling cultural identities to flourish at the interface between cultures. Te Reo Māori is a cultural identifier. Therefore this fresh view of pedagogical leadership enabling cultures has implications for cultural identifiers - languages. BES centres attention firstly on the central purpose of school leadership—to improve student outcomes—and secondly, it implies the existence of shared and collaborative distributive leadership which is inclusive of the leadership found in communities. Leadership based on dominant discourses and adult-centred hierarchies are no longer relevant nor appropriate in education.

The notion that Māori educational leaders are often expected to work as change agents—challenging existing power structures in their organisations; advocating for Māori young people; organising the cultural, linguistic and community aspects of their schools whilst remaining focused on successful outcomes for students—was raised as a challenge for Māori educational leaders. However, if this became a shared pedagogical leadership attribute, with the expectation that all educational leaders work as change agents in the same manner, then pedagogical leadership

will be the cursor to break through the armour of colonialism in Aotearoa. What is good for Māori leadership is good for national leadership.

Aotearoa's bilingual/bicultural imperatives underpin multiculturalism in all its interfaces. The interface opens up the spaces for creation and innovation. Of the many determinants of educational success Durie (2001, 2003) argues the factor that is uniquely relevant to Māori is the way in which Māori world views and the world views of the wider society impact on each other. Skerrett White (2003) discusses how kōhanga reo operates to promote Māori world views through a language-in-culture pedagogical approach. However, kōhanga reo and kura are not the only spaces where Māori language can grow. Indeed they must not be. Language occupies physical space – in the mouths and on the tongues of the people who speak those languages. Therefore, the BES is a timely reminder to focus learners in all educational spaces, on what counts in the curriculum and the multiple significant policies and pedagogies which create the conditions for success for learners.

Māori language education is relatively recent in Aotearoa (approximately 30 years) and seriously under-funded and under-resourced when compared to English language education. It is in a state of *crisis* as teacher shortages remain high, resource development low and professional development practically non-existent. Annamalai (2006) argues that while governments have supportive policies, the suggestion that the *actual* costs of indigenous language/s revitalisation and maintenance should be borne by the minority community is discriminatory and one which international declarations prohibit.

Policy and professional development programmes need to be tailored to the curricula and resource needs of kōhanga and kura accordingly, to ensure they are effective, timely, and relevant. A strategic approach to in-service professional development needs to be designed and resourced nationally. May, Hill and Tiakiwai (2004) sum up the policy, resource and professional development implications when they argued that there are widespread misperceptions in Aotearoa/New Zealand about bilingual/immersion education. The provision of exactly the kind of robust research

evidence required for the ongoing development of informed educational policy, resources and in service professional development, and the further promotion and development of good bilingual/immersion education practices for Māori medium education can counter those misperceptions.

Whānau, hapū and iwi Māori have made, and must continue to make, major contributions to the education system as a whole, through the Māori medium education sector. The birth of the kōhanga reo movement, and its progressions, was a monumental move as iwi Māori became proactive to preserve Māori language and insistent on improved educational outcomes. Woeful policies, developed in isolation of stakeholder agreement and understanding, have created false divides (e.g., the parent led/teacher led divide) with funding implications. Those who forged the pathways into Māori-medium education in this country did so by stepping outside the general mainstream. Their efforts were valued. Now considered a legitimate stream of education, the positive advancements made in Māori medium educational settings continue to be overshadowed by a mismatch between policy and practice, inadequate provision, the scarcity of resource and the paucity of research. The challenge for the future is to overcome these mismatches and build on the successes experienced in the Māori-medium sector. These successes are able to be shared and capitalised on for children and young people positioned in the general stream of education.

The BES identifies how Māori parents, whānau and wider community members have typically played crucial leadership roles in the establishment of Māori-medium educational institutions. The Māori-medium sector continues to play an important role in shaping and defining Māori leadership through ongoing ideological clarification around what it means to be bilingual and bicultural in a country with two official languages. Whilst it is up to the whole education community to make a difference for children and young people in Aotearoa, the BES has identified the Māori pedagogical leadership that arguably can lead the way—through leadership the that is embedded in whānau, hapū and iwi.

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