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Living The Treaty of Waitangi through a bicultural pedagogy in early childhood

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“If you know whence you came, there are absolutely no limitations to where you can go” (Baldwin, n.d.). This quote aligns with Ka Hikitia (Ministry of Education, 2008, p.9) when it positions The Treaty of Waitangi as being “symbolic of our past” and “central to our future”. It captures the essence of The Treaty explaining why a treaty-based education should be integrated in the curriculum from the early years itself especially with regards to tamariki Māori to acknowledge their place as tangata whenua (Ritchie & Rau, 2006). Te Whāriki emphasises that all children be provided with opportunities to develop a knowledge and understanding of the heritages of both partners of the treaty (Ministry of Education, 1996). This makes it paramount for me, as a teacher, to provide a bicultural learning environment for children. This article draws upon the significance of The Treaty with regards to its relevance in the early childhood education [ECE] context and discusses initiatives that were developed to provide equal opportunities for Māori. In line with these aspects, I highlight how my practice reflects/can reflect the treaty and its principles aligning with kaupapa Māori and Te Whāriki.

In 1988, the Royal Commission on Social Policy suggested three principles relevant to education and derived from the treaty-partnership, participation and protection (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). These principles were developed further for education purposes to provide high-level standards, inform treaty partners (teachers/children/family) how to communicate with each other and interpret the treaty as a whole (implementing and being committed towards a bicultural curriculum and development) (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

Partnership and participation imply interactions, commitment, honour, faith, respect towards each other and sharing of rights between both parties of the treaty (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2001). Within ECE, these principles involve developing partnerships and positive relationships with whānau, caregivers and Māori organisations (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2012; Ritchie & Rau, 2006) and involving Māori whānau and community in policy-making, planning and review of the centre’s programme (Bevan-Brown, 2003; Ritchie, 2001; Ritchie, 2003). These principles mean collaborating and communicating with the family/whānau of the children, especially, the Māori tamariki and involving whānau within decision-making by listening to and incorporating their voices. I believe building relationships of trust with whānau will lead to their involvement within the centre’s programmes. Protection of Māori people, their property and culture is linked to the third article of the treaty (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2001). Respecting tamariki for who they are and acknowledging their cultural identity reflects protection.

Te Kōhanga Reo movement was born out of the concern that the kaumaatua had for the survival and revival of te reo Māori (Tangaere, 2000). Thus, the first Kōhanga Reo was set up in 1982 with the idea of involving whānau and teaching children te reo Māori within an immersion environment (Tangaere, 2000). This initiative redresses the treaty by reflecting tino rangatiratanga and restoring the value of the Māori language and culture. There are four significant components of kaupapa Māori relevant to Te Kōhanga Reo – total immersion in te reo Māori, accountability, whānau decision-making, management and responsibility and health and well-being of the mokopuna and the whānau (Tangaere, 2000; Ka’ai, 2004). I believe, supporting this initiative and the kaupapa associated with it means building a rapport and involving whānau in decision-making and planning of programmes, setting transparency and clear lines of communication between myself and all members of the learning community.

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Implementing treaty-based pedagogy is implementing the treaty principles and upholding kaupapa Māori within the everyday ways of being, knowing and doing (Ritchie, 2012; Hill & Sansom, 2010). It means respecting the bicultural nature of *Te Whāriki* and implementing its principles and strands (Taniwha, 2010).

Through my practice, by implementing the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*, as Macfarlane and Macfarlane (2012) put it, the principle of participation is reflected. In practice, I make it a point to build effective relationships with whānau believing they play an important role in the lives of children. I initiate conversations with them about children's interests and the aspirations that they have so that I can deliver the best possible outcomes for the children. I believe this reflects whanaungatanga and partnership (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2012). This also reflects the Family and Community, Relationships and Empowerment principles; and the Contribution and Belonging strands of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). I also engage in conversations with tamariki Māori and whānau in te reo and include waiata, pūrākau and use of arts like the poi and story-telling to children to promote te reo Māori, tikanga and the Māori culture. These practices are underpinned by the Family and Community principle and Communication strand of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). These state that curriculum should promote te reo Māori, ngā tikanga Māori and Māori creative arts and help children develop an appreciation and value for them. This recognises and reflects the protection of Māori language and culture (Waitangi Tribunal, 2012). In view of this principle, I also ensure that learning happens through the child's lead. I make use of teachable moments to assist children in their learning. I believe this reflects a Māori pedagogy (Ka'ai, 2004) and the concept of akoranga and whakaakoranga (Ako Aotearoa, 2011). It also reflects the wholeness of *Te Whāriki* as it is a child-centred and child-directed curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996). In supporting kaitiakitanga and manaakitanga towards our environment (O'Connor, 2011), I encourage tamariki to put rubbish in the appropriate bins- whether recyclable, compost, reusable or general waste. I also make sure that the bins are properly labelled and placed for the children to have access to.

While these are some efforts on my part in implementing bicultural pedagogy and kaupapa Māori, believe this journey of bicultural development will never cease. Surveys on Māori families have revealed that Māori parents want their children to learn te reo and expect opportunities for this within educational settings (Lee, Carr, Soutar, & Mitchell, 2013). As an educator, I believe in developing my fluency in Māori so that I can create such opportunities for tamariki making te reo Māori a part of the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2013; Ritchie, 2012). I have made a resolution to learn a new word/phrase per day thus stepping out of my comfort zone of restricting to the common phrases like *E noho* and *Horoī o ringa*. I wish to recognise the significance of whakapapa, show children the importance for it by introducing them to mihi and develop one for myself. Such an initiative will shape their attitudes and understanding of their identity as Māori and the importance of whakapapa (Ritchie & Rau, 2010).

The Treaty of Waitangi, which is the founding document of Aotearoa (State Services Commission, 2005), reflects three principles which are relevant to education today – partnership, protection and participation. The treaty thus acts as a driving force for revitalising the Māori language and culture. In being committed towards a treaty-based pedagogy, the principles need to be reflected in my practice along with the philosophies/ kaupapa Māori rooted in the early childhood curriculum- *Te Whāriki*. This would mean working in partnership with Māori whānau to provide for the holistic learning of children (Jenkin & Broadley, 2013). It also means that it is binding on me to provide for a curriculum which reflects the unique place of Māori as tangata whenua where children learn and understand the cultural heritage of both parties of the treaty (Ministry of Education, 1996). Thus, for me, being committed to bicultural development means implementing these aspects while making an on-going effort to reflect *Te Whāriki*, kaupapa Māori and principles of the treaty in my practice.

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Practice

The Māori language and culture have their roots in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Therefore, as stated in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), all children should have access to te reo Māori and ngā tikanga Māori in their educational settings. In view of this, as an attempt to promote and support the children's learning of te reo Māori me ngā tikanga Māori in my centre, I engaged them in a learning experience which involved the preparation and the use of the poi while learning about the whakapapa and significance of the poi.



Figure 1: Making poi

To make the poi, we used bubble-wrap, cloth and plastic table-cover for the ball and wool to make the strings by plaiting them together. While keeping the tamariki engaged, I explained the origins and genealogy of the poi to them which traces back to Tāne-Mahuta and his children - Harakeke (flax) and Raupō (bulrush) who together created the poi (Huata, 2000; Matthews & Paringatai, 2004). While making the poi and discussing its whakapapa with regards to the separation of Rangī and Papa, I showed the children how the poi also symbolically represents Tāne-Mahuta with the ball being his head and the cord his feet (Huata, 2000). After our poi were ready, bringing the children together, I explained the lyrics of the waiata - 'E rere taku poi' to them and taught them movements to go with the lyrics when it was played. I also introduced another waiata - 'E rere taku poi Mauria atu rā' to the tamariki and explained it to them from Papatūānuku's point of view where she is waiting to reunite with Rangī. I showed them some movements which included making a sound/beat with the poi for a rhythm resembling the heartbeat of Papatūānuku (Poi360, 2016; Flintoff, 2014).



Figure 2 Tamariki working together on making their poi

In implementing this experience, my aim was to introduce and teach the children some new words in te reo Māori, make them aware of some aspects of tikanga Māori and enlighten them about the significance and symbolism of the poi.

The tamariki seemed to be very interested and cooperative in this learning experience as they learnt about the whakapapa, mana and significance of the poi. They were able to grasp and understand the words of the waiata thus expanding their te reo vocabulary. The children were also able to use the poi to develop movement skills. The poi has its own story to tell which is why what is being said/sung should reflect what the poi is doing and vice versa (Huata, 2000; Hemana, 2003).



Figure 3 The completed pois

This is what I tried to implement. The poi needs to be treated with respect for it to deliver fruitful results (Huata, 2000). Acknowledging this, I was able to help the tamariki follow simple tikanga to care for the poi and explain to them how this care and respect for the poi can be extended towards caring for Papatūānuku as she is the source of everything we need and use (Williams, 2004) thus reflecting the value of Kaitiakitanga (Ako Aotearoa, 2011; Rangatahi Tū Rangatira [R2R], 2016). With all the children twirling and swinging the poi together, I was able to promote Kotahitanga (Ako Aotearoa, 2011; R2R, 2016) where I encouraged them to cooperate and collaborate with one another as well as respect the space and position of others around them.

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I approached one of our Māori parents to show me some basic movements of the poi in accordance with the lyrics before implementing this experience. This gave me a deeper understanding and helped me pass down the knowledge to the children. I could relate this to the aspect of Tuakana - Teina (R2R, 2016). I also had the privilege of learning few poi movements from two Māori tamariki during this experience. Thus, planning and implementing this experience was a teaching and learning journey for me which reflects the concept of ako.



Figure 4 Tamariki learning to use their pois

This experience helped me to promote the children's learning of te reo Māori me ngā tikanga Māori according to the goal I had in mind. In future, I will encourage the children to develop rules and guidelines (tikanga) to do the poi collaboratively (Te Kete Ipurangi, n.d.). This reflects *Te Whāriki's* strand of Well-being where children respect tikanga and rules about not harming others and the environment and understand the reasons and context for such rules (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Moving forward, I would like to introduce the children to the practical aspect and use of the poi highlighting how flax baskets (ki) were used to carry and protect the moa eggs and how the poi were gradually used for training purposes, improving muscle strength, flexibility and coordination (Hemana, 2003). In order to expand my te reo vocabulary, I would like to learn some more waiata poi and learn to swing the poi according to the lyrics. In supporting Whanaungatanga (Ako Aotearoa, 2011; R2R, 2016), I will try and encourage maximum involvement of Māori families within planned experiences. This is in accordance with my teaching philosophy and also supports *Te Whāriki's* principles of Relationships and Family and Community (Ministry of Education, 1996).

As highlighted in my philosophy, I believe in the importance of knowing and valuing the native culture of the place that one is in. Therefore, in being committed to The Treaty of Waitangi as a professional teacher and in accordance with *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), I wish to use te reo Māori and tikanga Māori in my daily practice modelling the same to the children and promote the Māori culture and values like documented here and wish to continue to do so on a regular basis.

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