

Grow
Waitaha

Kua takoto te mānuka

Growing culturally responsive practice
in Innovative Learning Environments

Contents

Introduction	02
Quick Guide	05
Definitions and assumptions	06
Whakaaro: Thinking	08
Essentialising culture	09
Learning about and celebrating culture	09
Being aware of your own culture	10
Whakawhanaungatanga: Relating	12
Recognising students as culturally-located individuals	13
Recognising students as embedded in a whānau / aiga	14
Āhuatanga: Feeling	16
High expectations	17
Student agency	17
Mutual accountability	18
Mahia: Doing	19
Collective learning	20
Co-construction of content	20
Cultural visibility	21
Presence throughout the space	23
Tuakana-teina	23
Conclusion	25
References	26



Introduction

Innovative learning environments can provide a culturally rich learning atmosphere due to both physical design and the flexibility to configure spaces to support a range of culturally responsive pedagogies.

In greater Christchurch, cultural narratives developed by Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tūāhuriri and Te Taumutu Rūnanga have supported schools to ensure that the cultural history of schools' grounds and geographic surroundings can be incorporated into the redevelopment or rebuild of school buildings and sites.



However, realising a learning space's full potential to support a culturally responsive teaching and learning environment is an ongoing journey for many teachers and schools. A culturally responsive learning environment is one in which students can experience success as culturally-located individuals. In order for this to occur, students' identity, language and culture must be recognised, valued and reflected both in the physical aspects of the learning space, and in all teaching and learning that occurs within the space.

This approach must go beyond (physically and metaphorically) the physical confines of the learning space, to recognise that the students' culturally-embedded skills, knowledge and experience are largely gained outside the learning space. These are then brought into the learning space as a central part of each students' identity. Likewise, the relationships built with the student and their whānau must extend beyond the walls of the teaching and learning environment.

This study presents themes collated from the analysis of interviews with 13 principals and teachers, and focus groups with 28 Māori and Pasifika primary and secondary school students. These findings were combined with secondary research obtained from relevant studies in this area.

It also provides recommendations and considerations for creating more culturally responsive learning environments. It is designed to be read in conjunction with *Māui Whakakau, kura whakakau: The impact of physical design on Māori and Pasifika student outcomes*, which can be accessed on the Ministry of Education website.

“The teachers always say they believe in me. It gives me courage to take risks and become a higher achiever.”

– Primary student participant



Quick Guide

10 tips for increasing culturally responsive practice

1

While students' culture must be recognised and valued, students must be regarded as culturally-located individuals rather than members of a homogenous cultural group.

2

Consciously examine and acknowledge the role of your own culture in influencing interactions or perceptions.

3

Creating trusting relationships involves investment from all involved. So encourage reciprocity by sharing out-of-school stories and information with students, and create an environment where it is safe for them to do the same.

4

Build genuine relationships with students by getting to know their whānau, their whakapapa, their strengths and their interests

5

Be flexible, and know your plan will (and should) change: Rigidity and deterministic planning is an inefficient use of time and impairs the effectiveness of leadership.

6

Have high expectations of your students and communicate these expectations as specific outcomes or purposes of their learning.

7

Support your students in developing their ability to control their own learning, and teach them strategies rather than just content. This should include involving students in the creation of content and learning approaches or activities.

8

Use collective learning as more than just a pedagogy: use it to create an environment and community in which everyone is responsible for their own success and that of others.

9

Demonstrate the value of culture—and cultural diversity—by visibly showcasing elements of culture throughout a range of media in the learning space – with artworks, iconography, photographs, language and student work.

10

Create structures and physical spaces that support organised pair or group work, with clear roles (these may include the role or tuakana and teina) and specific tasks or outcomes.



Culturally responsive practice: Definitions and assumptions

There are multiple definitions for what constitutes culturally responsive practice.

Because this study focuses on the 'how' of culturally responsive practice rather than the 'why', it applies definitions that are more relevant to teaching and learning, rather than those more appropriate for systemic or political contexts. This is not to undervalue or disregard the importance of a culturally responsive society or education system, but instead to reflect the primary intended audience for this document: teaching practitioners.

To that end, Gay (2010, p.2) defines culturally responsive practice as utilising students' 'personal and cultural strengths, intellectual capabilities and prior accomplishments'. It recognises, respects and utilises students' backgrounds and identities as a meaningful way of creating an enhanced learning environment (Klump & McNeir, 2005). More broadly, culturally responsive practice can be viewed as teaching and learning that 'makes sense' to students who are not part of the majority or dominant culture (Klug & Whitfield, 2003, p. 151).

It is important to note that practical implementation of the strategies discussed cannot be accomplished effectively with a checklist-type approach. Another study found that teachers of minority students who described themselves as culturally responsive often tended to follow a step-by-step or checklist approach to delivering on their vision of responsiveness, which was generally ineffective as an approach (Sleeter, 2012).

Similarly, the interviews conducted for this study demonstrated that until teachers have undertaken sufficient reflection and foundational work to understand their own knowledge and construction of cultures - their own and that of others - the successful implementation of the strategies discussed in this study will be limited. Interview participants discussed how their schools' teachers had undergone challenging self-reflection as part of their journey towards creating a more culturally responsive environment.

Some of the required foundational work will cause discomfort for teachers, as they re-examine their underlying views of culture and how these manifest in the teaching and learning environment that they create. Implementation of strategies is also likely to be iterative in nature, with substantial reflection and multiple attempts likely to be required.

"It's making sure that everything we do is drawing on the child's previous experiences and what they bring to it, their own family experiences, their own cultural experiences, their church background; making sure our teaching and learning programmes reflect beliefs the children are already bringing to the programme."

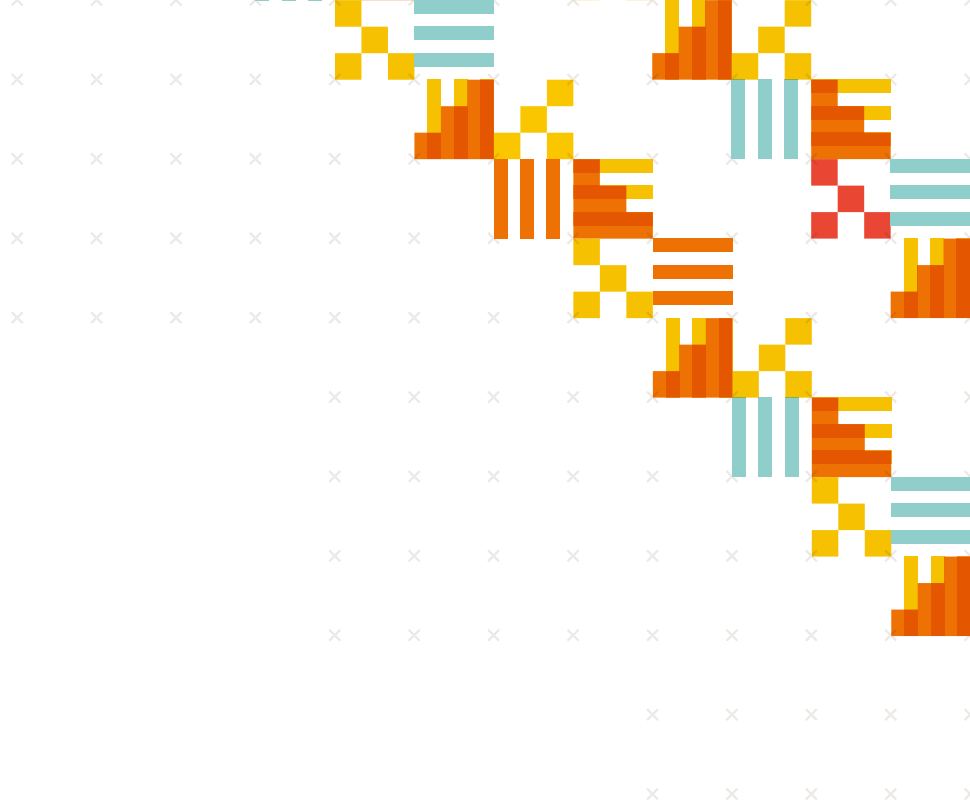
– Interview participant



Whakaaro: Thinking

Te tīmatanga o te matauranga ko te wahangū, te wāhanga tuarua ko te whakarongo.

The first stage of learning is silence, the second stage is listening.



Essentialising culture

Essentialist thinking incorrectly assumes that groups share biological or natural characteristics, which are also central to groups' individual members. Essentialising culture first involves viewing culture as fixed and homogenous, then assuming that individual members of an ethnic or racial group will identify with that homogenous concept of their culture (Sleeter, 2012). This could be, for example, when a teacher assumes that knowing a student's race or country of origin gives sufficient insight into that student's culture—a superficial and potentially damaging conclusion (Dutro, Kazemi, Balf, & Lin, 2008).

This is an important lens through which to read and consider this study. While students' culture must be recognised, included and valued, you must also regard students as culturally-located individuals rather than members of a homogenous, cultural group. To regard the described strategies as universally applicable to all Māori and Pasifika students oversimplifies culture and undervalues student identity (Rata, 2012).

Learning about and celebrating culture

The literature draws a distinction between learning with or through culture, and learning about culture. There can be a tendency for teachers (and schools more broadly) to view culturally responsive pedagogies as the act of learning about a culture (Sleeter, 2012), rather than the act of learning through the application of their cultural knowledge.

The former tendency is sometimes referred to as a 'tourist approach', in which students are 'toured' around the food, dress, music or other aspects of a particular ethnic group (Hirsh & Scott, 1988; Jones and Derman-Sparks, 1992). While learning about other cultures is undeniably relevant as a component of a school's curriculum, it is important that this component does not mispresent or oversimplify that culture, which may lead to a loss of belonging or identity for students of that culture (Ellington, 1998).

This negative consequence can be especially pronounced for Pasifika students, where a 'small island approach' to learning about Pasifika cultures can encourage a tourist approach (Ferguson, Gorinski, Samu & Mara, 2008), and may be viewed as belittling Pasifika culture (Hau'ofa, 1993).

Cultural celebrations are an important part of many school communities, and student and adult participants listed a range of ways in which culture is celebrated in their schools. Some examples were events such as hangi, performances, hui and language week events, while others were embedded in schools' processes, such as verbally acknowledging students' iwi or village when announcing certificate recipients.

It is also important to note that cultural celebration is only one aspect cultural responsiveness. You must not view these as a substitute for utilising students' prior knowledge and experience as part of teaching and learning, with one researcher noting: "One of the major reasons why minority students... perform poorly in schools is that their home cultures, while being 'celebrated,' are not sufficiently utilised as a resource for their own learning" (Nykiel-Herbert, 2010, p. 2).

Being aware of your own culture

Particularly for teachers of the dominant culture, it may be difficult to explicitly recognise and give visibility to your own culture. This is, however, a necessary step to allow you to understand your students from other cultural backgrounds. Teachers and schools that visually or systemically reflect the dominant culture can privilege students of the dominant culture—even if only subconsciously—and disadvantage students from different cultural backgrounds (Savage, Hindle, Meyer, Hynds, Penetito & Sleeter, 2011).

"It's acknowledging, valuing and using the knowledge they bring to the school. It's looking at where they come from, and including that in our learning, and providing a cultural context. When we do mihimihi, our Samoan kids are doing it in Samoan, others are doing it in French or in Filipino. We use their own language."

– Interview participant

Much of the existing education-related literature on cultural identity focuses on understanding and valuing the culture of others. But in order to do so, it is also important to examine your own culture and understand the ways in which your cultural background and experiences may differ from those of your students. One in-depth study of teachers identified three themes for transforming culturally responsive practice, the first of which involved teachers becoming aware of their own culture, and how it impacts on that of their students (Hale, Snow-Gerono & Morales, 2008).

Participants in the current study spoke of the importance of teachers understanding and acknowledging their own culture, particularly if they were Pāhekā, since there were implications for a potential power imbalance due to being part of the dominant culture.

“Teachers carry into the classroom their personal cultural background. They perceive students, all of whom are cultural agents, with inevitable prejudice and preconception. Students likewise come to school with personal cultural backgrounds that influence their perceptions of teachers, other students, and the school itself. Together, students and teachers construct, mostly without being conscious of doing it, an environment of meanings enacted in individual and group behaviors.”

– Spindler & Spindler, 1994, p. xii

“As a person and a professional, you can acknowledge your own culture and you can acknowledge other people’s culture, so it’s not just about the other, I think it’s about acknowledging your own culture and the impact it has on people.”

– Interview participant



Whakawhanaungatanga: Relating

Ia ifo le fuiniu I le lapalapa.

As each coconut leaf belongs to a cluster
of young nuts, so each individual belongs
to a family.



Recognising students as culturally-located individuals

Alton-Lee (2003) suggests teachers have a critical role to play in creating culturally inclusive classroom environments that meaningfully involve all members, whatever their cultural identity. Students and whānau interviewed as the basis for the Te Kotahitanga project spoke about the importance of teachers demonstrating that they recognised their students as having cultural understandings and experiences that differed from those of other students (Bishop, 2010).

This included students' ability to act in line with their own individual and cultural identity – to have their own voice, and to have the freedom to be who they are (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai & Richardson, 2003). One study found that students were appreciative of their teachers acknowledging their identity as both Māori and as individual learners (Savage et al., 2011).

Validating students' cultural identities and valuing the knowledge and experience they bring into the learning environment creates a culturally-rich environment in which students can achieve success as themselves (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Sleeter & Grant, 2008). Validating students' experiences can directly improve educational practice by motivating students and allowing teachers to understand students' perspectives (Cook-Sather, 2002).

This means that teachers should continue developing their cultural knowledge, but that you should also remember the word individual when acknowledging your students as culturally-located individuals. A level of cultural knowledge is both necessary and valuable when forming genuine relationships, but should only be the starting point of getting to know your students on an individual basis.

Building genuine relationships

The literature emphasises the importance of teachers caring for Māori students, both as Māori and as individuals (Bishop, 2010). Māori students wanted their teachers to understand that they see and interact with the world in different ways than other students (and their teachers) do. Aesthetic or surface expressions of caring can be distinguished from deeper authentic caring (Valenzuela, 1999). Authentic caring involves getting to know the students as culturally-located individuals, valuing the identity and knowledge contributed from outside the learning environment, and genuinely seeking input from students about teaching and learning processes and contexts (Savage et al., 2011).

A number of adult participants also emphasised the importance of building strong and trusting relationship with their students. Once teachers knew their students as individuals, they were better prepared to construct learning contexts, topics or activities that the individual students found engaging. It also helped teachers grow student agency, by supporting students to gradually develop their self-management skills without prematurely placing them in an environment that required too great a level of self-management.

This message was echoed by student participants, who valued teachers being friendly and getting to know them. Participants made clear the distinction that, while they valued teachers getting to know them, they did not necessarily expect teachers to share their same interests. That is, the primary value from the students' perspectives was in teachers wanting to find out about students' interests, with the focus being on the student, rather than on establishing a shared interest.

Reciprocity is an important part of creating meaningful and genuine relationships, which involves the teacher and student getting to know each other, rather than a one-way transmission of knowledge of the student by the teacher (Valenzuela, 1999). This involves teachers sharing out-of-school information and experiences with students, and being visible outside the learning environment in the wider community (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Studies also identified that the use and acceptance of humour in the classroom was important. Teachers did not have to share or emulate their student's particular sense of humour, but they did have to accept it (Savage et al., 2011). Student participants uniformly highlighted the importance of their teacher being fun. Many participants enjoyed humour in the classroom, whether the teacher personally supplied the humour, or the teacher created an environment in which humour was understood and accepted.

Recognising students as embedded in a whānau / aiga

Participants in the study (both adults and students) emphasised the overwhelming importance of knowing about students' whakapapa in order to build a genuine relationship with the students and their whānau.

It is important that you create a space (physically and temporally) for whānau members to be received in the learning environment, where whānau are actively welcomed into the learning space. Some participants explained strategies that are useful in creating a culture of welcoming whānau and students to school, such as having a table in the entrance to the learning space where the teaching staff meet to plan the day in the morning. In this case, the teachers are able to be calm and present to greet and welcome students and whānau as they arrive.

“We know what works well with our Māori kids works well with everyone and a lot of that comes down to relationships and knowing our kids really well, what makes them tick and their families and what their influences are.”

–Interview participant

“If a teacher does not understand the student's whakapapa and their values, then they will struggle to get the best out of that child.”

–Interview participant

The relatively larger size of many innovative learning environments better supports whānau involvement in student learning. Indeed, whānau and community involvement with more formal aspects of school life, such as attending ceremonies, hui and performances is important; however, whānau involvement and support of their children's education by being present and involved in less formal ways is just as important. The positive impact of parental involvement on student outcomes is undeniable (see Brownlee, 2015, for a review of findings), and emphasises the need to generate whānau engagement and involvement (Hall, Hornby & Macfarlane, 2015).

Creating an environment in which whānau feel welcome and involved allows the school to learn more about the school and local community's story and heritage. Additionally, it allows the school to reach a shared understanding of whānau and community aspirations for students. When whānau are familiar with the school environment, there tends to be improved interactions and involvement between whānau and school. Participants spoke about the importance of whānau being involved informally in the life of the school, so that the school is viewed by students as an extension of the home. This includes aspects such as creating spaces and systems so that whānau can be on the school site using the café or other school resources. The ERO evaluation framework for Māori student success also recognises the importance of whānau involvement (Education Review Office, 2012).

“Someone who is culturally responsive weaves that identity, language and culture through everything they do. Through the programme they provide, through the interaction they have with ākonga and their whānau. They involve the whānau, not just the student.”

–Interview participant

“We’ve done a lot about the teachers sharing their own culture, their own stories, and that makes the children comfortable to share theirs, and recognising that we all come with different stories. That builds an environment where the children are happy to share their story and build that relationship. A warm, friendly, caring environment, where they trust and feel valued.”

–Interview participant



Āhuatanga: Feeling

Mauria ko ōku painga, waiho ko ōku whengū.

Highlight my strengths, leave behind my weaknesses.



High expectations

The Māori potential approach sees Māori children as being culturally advantaged and able to achieve at the highest levels, with an emphasis on partnership, working together and sharing power (McNaughton, 2011). A number of studies have identified the importance of teachers having high expectations for their students (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Glynn, Cowie, Otrell-Cass & Macfarlane, 2010; Morrison, Robbins & Rose, 2008), with research showing that if educators think of students as having deficiencies, then educators will treat them as deficient (Bishop, 2010).

Consequently, when students realise there are low expectations for them, the relationship breaks down and students disengage (Bishop, 2010). Positive relationships between teachers and students require teachers to avoid deficit thinking, and see students as having valuable relevant experiences and the power to self-determine and achieve (Savage et al., 2011). Adult and student participants discussed the importance of teachers believing in the students' ability and potential, and in positively communicating this belief on an ongoing basis.

It is also important that these expectations are translated into specific outcomes, which are shared with students. In an evaluation of Te Kotahitanga, Meyer and colleagues (2010) found that, while many teachers' academic expectations for Māori students had improved as a result of the Te Kotahitanga project, a large portion of the teachers were still vague about what their actual academic expectations were.

To be effective, expectations must be high, but also have to be known, specific and communicated to students. Feedback and feed forward on both student learning and student behaviour are effective for crystallising expectations (Averill, Hynds, Hindle & Meyer, 2015), and numerous studies exist on the value of feedback for student learning and progress (Hattie & Anderman, 2013). Many student participants expressed a preference for knowing the outcomes or purpose of their learning, and there were many comments expressing appreciation of knowing: "What I'm going to do and how I'm going to do it."

Students also positively value when teachers are organised and clearly able to focus, undistracted, on the students in front of them, (Savage et al., 2011). This sentiment was echoed by students in the current study, who placed a value on their own learning time and did not like it being compromised due to their teachers' disorganisation or unpreparedness.

Student agency

Agency is the inclination of students to take control of their own learning, and may include aspects such as what, how and where to learn. Flexible learning environments can support the development of student agency by giving students a range of learning opportunities across these aspects. Learning environments can be designed and furnished with ample flexibility to allow students to choose whether to work independently or collectively, or in different areas or types of seating.

Students in the current study discussed a range of ways they control their own learning, and showed an awareness of when working collectively would be beneficial, and when it was distracting or slowed their progress. They explained their preferences for different locations in the learning space, and how this varied depending on the learning activity or topic.

There is a suggestion that teachers' high expectations for their students support the development of positive, agentic thinking by students – that they see themselves as being able to solve problems that arise, and able to achieve despite potential obstacles (Savage et al., 2011). Castagno and Brayboy (2008) state that: "When students feel empowered and have greater agency within their schools and communities, education is both more meaningful and socially responsible" (p. 963).

Student participants valued the involvement and support of their teachers, and appreciated being able to discuss a task with their teachers when they became stuck. However, they also praised the teachers who challenged them and encouraged them to take risks. Students found it particularly beneficial when teachers gave them strategies rather than answers, as they could apply the strategies to future situations and thereby develop more control over their own learning.

Mutual accountability

While culturally responsive practice requires a teacher to take responsibility for student learning and success, it is not reasonable to expect that this responsibility should rest solely with the teacher. Not only would this be an unrealistic pressure, but it lessens students' agency to be in control of their own learning.

Kaupapa Māori pedagogy is based on kinship, where everyone shares responsibility for education through ties with extended family. In a school setting, this is equivalent to classes working together as a whole cohesive unit (Rata, 2012). Māori students typically excel as individuals when they feel connected to a larger group—a secure hapū—and when they view their learning environment as an extended whānau group (Rata, 2012).

Culturally responsive teachers create an environment of mutual accountability, in which teachers adopt and use culturally responsive strategies, and students are empowered and motivated agents of their own learning. Some literature suggests that this view should be wider, and that collective learning does not merely refer to collaborative or group activities, but also to students being collectively responsible and accountable for the learning success of fellow class members (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In this view, a learning environment becomes a collective community of learners. This is a richer, more nuanced view of collective learning, rather than a dependency on using / viewing group work as a culturally responsive pedagogy.

“Giving us harder things, and telling us we can do it.”

“Yeah, supporting us and telling us to keep going.”

– Primary student participants

“Let’s talk about deficit theorising... Can we label these kids as the bad kids? Is that what we are saying? Are the Māori kids the bad kids? If you think your kids don’t know you’re thinking that, you’re wrong.”

– Interview participant



Mahia: Doing

Whāia te mātauranga hei oranga mō koutou.

Seek after learning for the sake of your wellbeing.



Collective learning

It is important not to assume that all Māori and Pasifika students will enjoy or find group activities an effective learning technique. Focus group participants expressed preferences for a range of different learning groupings, ranging from individual learning through to group learning. Some expressed a preference for working in groups so that they could receive support if needed, while others simply enjoyed sitting with peers or friends even if they were working on independent tasks.

Group work tends to be more effective where there are clear role assignments and specific tasks and outcomes. During group activities in culturally responsive classrooms, there will be less discussion or socialising unrelated to learning than in less culturally responsive spaces (Savage et al., 2011).

It is important for activities that involve discussion or debate, whether in groups or pairs, to include mechanisms for thinking critically without having to disagree with or contradict a classmate. Some studies indicate that students, particularly Pasifika students, would prefer to agree with others, believing disagreement to lessen group unity (Jones, 1991). Prompts which depersonalise dissenting viewpoints may be of value (for example: 'What reason might someone who had an opposite viewpoint give for their opinion?', or: 'What other ways to look at it are possible?'). This is also beneficial when it comes to activities that may otherwise be uncomfortable for Māori or Pasifika learners. For example, one study found that setting up learning activities that were competitive, either individually or between groups, can be contrary to a preference for cooperation (White, 1997).

Innovative learning spaces can often support larger numbers of students being able to come together for activities such as kapa haka, karakia or waiata, without having to relocate students to a hall or larger space. This means that these activities can be carried out as a more responsive part of the learning programme, rather than only on a scheduled basis.

Co-construction of content

It is of foremost importance that this section is read in the context of including culture and cultural concepts, not teaching about culture. In this context, it refers to creating learning contexts or learning interactions where students' cultural knowledge and identity is of fundamental relevance (Bishop, 2010). When teachers assume the power for content and process, this can undermine the ability to be culturally responsive, as it may essentialise culture by, for example, assuming all Pasifika students enjoy group work (McDowall, Boyd, Hodgen & van Vliet, 2005).

In evaluations of Te Kotahitanga, more culturally responsive lessons included the meaningful use of te reo Māori and concepts from te ao Māori (Averill et al., 2015). Furthermore, such lessons included genuine co-construction of learning processes and content (Averill et al., 2015). For co-construction to be genuine, students must feel that the knowledge and perspective they contribute is valued (Cook-Sather, 2002). This in turn leads to empowerment and motivation to participate meaningfully in constructing their own learning (Cook-Sather, 2002; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2009).


The genuineness of co-construction is of central importance, as the content and context determine whether Māori and Pasifika students' cultural identities are included or valued in the learning environment. When teachers recognise students as culturally-located individuals, and validate students' perspectives and knowledge, this both addresses power imbalances and makes way for meaningful co-construction within the learning environment (Cook-Sather, 2002). Student participants enjoyed the ability to control or influence content and activities, and adult participants spoke of how their own learning benefited when students had input into determining contexts for learning.

Cultural visibility

The display of language, artworks or other cultural artefacts in the learning space is a strong signal to students that their culture is welcomed and valued. This practice could include photographs of current and future students, or of prominent Māori and Pasifika role models (Hill & Hawk, 2000). Nakhid (2003) likened a lack of visible cultural artefacts to students being given a school photograph and noticing their own absence from it. Cultural artworks, symbols and artefacts should be present throughout the learning space. However, it is important that this is not tokenistic, such as having the days of the week displayed in Māori but only ever used in English (Sleeter, 2012).

Adult and student participants in this study spoke about a range of ways that culture is made physically visible in the classroom, including through the display of artworks, sculpture and patterning, and the display and use of language. This was important for both groups as a visual symbol that students' culture is valued and acknowledged.

An important aspect of creating a culturally responsive learning environment is critically analysing and explicitly addressing imbalances of power between school, teachers and students. For instance, if a teacher is the individual who makes all decisions about the visual representation of culture in the learning space, it can perpetuate the role of the teacher as the sole decision-maker, who therefore holds unequal power (Bishop, 2012).



Likewise, the implementation process for Te Kotahitanga indicated that teachers tended to view culture as being static and represented by visual iconography such as cultural patterns or artworks, or the use of te reo Māori in the classroom (Bishop, 2012). The concern with this view of culture is it suggests culture starts off external to the learning space, and is visually or symbolically ‘imported’. This can appear as insincere, and can perpetuate the power imbalance between teacher and student (Bishop, 2012).

Cultural and language can also be visible through other media, and this can be a valuable component of whakawhanaungatanga. For example, teachers could display their mihimihi within the learning space or on the school website, as a visual demonstration of their identity, and a way to start forming relationships with students and whānau.

“To assume that a building and its spaces are culturally neutral is the biggest barrier. If we have our spaces filled with what is representative of who is here, then what could that be? Because at the moment the status quo is usually that it’s not culturally neutral, it’s usually representing the dominant culture.”

– Interview participant

“I prefer learning in a space with people who have the same passion as me, know what subject I’m on, and are on the same pathway.”

– Secondary school student

Presence throughout the space

The Te Kotahitanga programme included a measure of the amount of time the teacher spent at the front of the learning space as an indicator of student-centred discursive practice (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, Peter & Clapham, 2011). Teaching was more culturally responsive and student-centred when the teacher spent more time interacting with students by them travelling throughout the learning space to the students' location, rather than vice versa.

Flexible learning environments can support this by creating multiple points for direct instruction to occur when required, and by dis-establishing a formal, teacher-owned 'front' of the learning space. The range of furniture and equipment configurations in the learning space can further support more discursive, student-centred interactions.

This was also emphasised by participants in this study, with participants describing how teachers should be physically 'down at the level' of younger students, and sitting or working alongside students throughout the learning space. A number of participants described how it could be difficult to visually locate the teacher within the learning space immediately upon entering the room, since teachers were usually seated alongside students. Some participants used observing the teacher at the front of the room as a quick visual indicator of the degree to which the teacher was using culturally responsive, student-centered learning opportunities.

As part of this, some participants discussed how they had removed the teachers' desks and removed features of overt indicators of the teachers' 'ownership' of the learning environment. By doing so, it created a culture and a learning space that was jointly owned by the students and the teacher.

Tuakana-teina

Innovative learning environments can support tuakana-teina relationships, which are learning interactions between those with a higher degree of knowledge in a particular area (the tuakana), and those who are less knowledgeable (the teina). In one study involving successful teachers of minority students, students were expected to develop their expertise in particular learning areas, and then share this expertise through supporting other students (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

This may be encouraged through provision of a particular type or configuration of furniture, such as one school that used paired seating configurations to support paired interactions. Tuakana-teina interactions were scaffolded and encouraged by asking students to add their names to different posters on the wall of the learning space to show areas where they were just starting out, or were still developing (their 'teina' areas), and to show the areas where they had a degree of confidence or expertise and were able to help others (their 'tuakana' areas).

By incorporating a number of areas in the display, students were able to see that they could be both the teina and the tuakana depending on the area of learning. In this way, students were being encouraged to have a growth mindset about their own ability to develop their knowledge or skill level, and their own ability to develop the skill level of another.

While tuakana-teina relationships are generally thought of as involving direct interaction, this relationship is also of value when students are simply occupying the same space as students who can offer them support or encouragement if needed. This could involve the simple ability to see an older sibling or friend within the learning space, and for older siblings or friends to be able to provide kaitiakitanga (guardianship) for their siblings or friends.

A number of student focus group participants spoke of the importance of being able to sit with and work with their friends. While students valued the explicit support friends provided when needed, they appeared to value even greater the mere presence of friends whom they knew had the potential to support them if needed.

“When teachers shift from being all-powerful to being power-sharing ... young Māori people are able to bring their meaning and sense-making processes into their classroom interactions.”

– Bishop, 2012, p. 44

“Your friends can teach you something you might already know, but they can give you a deeper explanation of it.”

– Primary student participant

“One of the things I love about going through this school with a parent is that it’s hard to find a teacher, and it’s often because they’re alongside the student.”

– Interview participant

A photograph of two women sitting at a desk, looking at a laptop. The woman in the foreground is wearing large black headphones and has her hair in braids. The woman behind her is wearing a patterned scarf. The scene is lit with warm, natural light from a window in the background. The word 'Conclusion' is overlaid in large white text on the right side of the image.

Conclusion

This study outlines a number of foundational considerations for teachers who want to create a more culturally responsive learning environment. It then describes approaches and strategies that teachers can practically implement to achieve this goal. The successful implementation of these approaches or strategies requires an up-front investment in self-reflection and cultural acknowledgement by the teacher, as well as an ongoing investment in challenging any assumptions or blind spots that are created by the teacher's own cultural lens.

In addition to this requirement, teachers must realise that the effective use of these strategies will be variable, and that recognising students as culturally-located individuals means that different combinations, applications or iterations of these strategies will be required to meet the needs of individual students.

However, in the same way this study encourages teachers to have high expectations and challenge their students, the successful development of a culturally nurturing space for students to learn as culturally-located individuals requires teachers to similarly challenge and have high expectations of themselves and their potential.

References

- Alton-lee, A. (2003). Quality teaching for diverse students in schooling: Best evidence synthesis. Wellington: New Zealand.
- Averill, R., Hynds, A., Hindle, R., & Meyer, L. (2015). Every teacher has to come on board for our Māori students. *Set*, 3, 3–11.
- Bishop, R. (2010). Effective teaching for indigenous and minoritized students. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 7(2), 57–62.
- Bishop, R. (2012). Pretty difficult: Implementing kaupapa Māori theory in English-medium secondary schools. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 47(2), 38–50.
- Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Cavanagh, T., & Teddy, L. (2009). Te Kotahitanga: Addressing educational disparities facing Māori students in New Zealand. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25, 734 – 742.
- Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Tiakiwai, S., & Richardson, C. (2003). Te Kotahitanga: The experiences of year 9 and 10 Māori students in mainstream classrooms. Hamilton: Māori Education Research Institute, School of Education, University of Waikato.
- Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Wearmouth, J., Peter, M., & Clapham, S. (2011). Te Kotahitanga: Maintaining, replicating and sustaining change: Report for Phase 3 and Phase 4 schools: 2007 – 2010. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Brownlee, L. (2015). Parental involvement in school benefits students and develops teacher-parent relationships. *Journal of Initial Teacher Inquiry*, 1, 54 – 56.
- Castagno, A.E., & Brayboy, B.M.J. (2008). Culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous youth: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 78, 941–993.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Authorizing students' perspectives: Towards trust, dialogue, and change in education. *Education Researcher*, 31(4), 3 – 14.
- Dutro, E., Kazemi, E., Balf, R., & Lin, Y. S. (2008). "What are you and where are you from?" Race, identity, and the vicissitudes of cultural relevance. *Urban Education*, 43, 269–300.
- Education Review Office. (2012). Māori Success: A complementary evaluation framework. Wellington: Education Review Office.
- Ellington, L. (1998). Multicultural theorists and the social studies. *The Social Studies*, 89(2), 57–60.
- Ferguson, P. B., Gorinski, R., Samu, T., & Mara, D. (2008). Literature review on the experiences of Pasifika learners in the classroom. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- Gay, G. (2010). Culturally responsive teaching (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Gay G. (2013). Teaching to and through cultural diversity. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 43, 48–70.
- Glynn, T., Cowie, B., Otrrel-Cass, K., & Macfarlane, A. (2010). Culturally responsive pedagogy: Connecting New Zealand teachers of science with their Māori students. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 39(1), 118 - 127.
- Gutiérrez, K. D., & Rogoff, B. (2003). Cultural ways of learning: Individual traits or repertoires of practice. *Educational Researcher*, 32(5), 19–25.
- Hale, A., Snow-Gerono, J., & Morales, F. (2008). Transformative education for culturally diverse learners through narrative and ethnography. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24, 1413–1425.

Hall, N., Hornby, G., & Macfarlane, S. (2015). Enabling school engagement for Māori families in New Zealand. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(10), 3038-3046.

Hattie, J., & Anderman, E. M. (Eds.). (2013). *International guide to student achievement*. Routledge.

Hau'ofa, E. (1993). 'Our sea of islands'. In E. Wadell, V. E. Naidoo, & E. Hau'ofa (Eds.), *A new Oceania: Rediscovering our sea of islands* (pp. 2-16). Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific.

Hill, J. & Hawk, K. (2000). *Making a difference in the classroom: Effective teaching practice in low decile, multicultural schools*. Auckland: Institute for Professional Development and Educational Research, Massey University.

Hirsh, W., & Scott, R. (1988). *Getting it right – Aspects of ethnicity and equity in New Zealand*. Auckland: Office of Race Relations Conciliator.

Jones, A. (1991). *At school I've got a chance – Culture/privilege: Pacific Islands and Pākehā girls at school*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.

Jones, E., & Derman-Sparks, L. (1992). Meeting the challenge of diversity. *Young Children*, 47(2), 12-18.

Klug, B., & Whitfield, P. (2003). *Widening the circle: Culturally relevant pedagogy for American Indian students*. New York: Routledge.

Klump, J., & McNeir, G. (2005). *Culturally responsive practices for student success: A regional sampler*. Portland, Oregon: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491.

McDowall, S., Boyd, S., & Hodgen, E., with van Vliet, T. (2005). *Reading recovery in NZ: Uptake, implementation, and outcomes, especially in relation to Māori and Pasifika students*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

McNaughton, S. (2011). *Designing Better Schools for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Children*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Meyer, L. H., Penetito, W., Hynds, A., Savage, C., Hindle, R., & Sleeter, C. E. (2010). *Evaluation of the Te Kotahitanga programme, Final Report*. Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Education.

Morrison, K. A., Robbins, H. H., & Rose, D. G. (2008). Operationalizing culturally relevant pedagogy: A synthesis of classroom-based research. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 41, 433-435.

Nakhid, C. (2003). "Intercultural" perceptions, academic achievement, and the identifying process of Pacific Islands students in New Zealand schools. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 72(3), 297-318.

Nykiel-Herbert, B. (2010). Iraqi refugee students: From a collection of aliens to a community of learners. *Multicultural Education*, 17(30), 2-14.

Rata, E. (2012). Theoretical Claims and Empirical Evidence in Māori Education Discourse. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 44(10), 1060-1072.

Savage, C., Hindle, R., Meyer, L. H., Hynds, A., Penetito, W., & Sleeter, C. E. (2011). Culturally responsive pedagogies in the classroom: Indigenous student experiences across the curriculum. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 39, 183-198.



Sleeter, C. E. (2012). Confronting the marginalization of culturally responsive pedagogy. *Urban Education*, 47(3), 562–584.

Sleeter, C. E., & Grant, C. A. (2008). *Making choices for multicultural education: Five approaches to race, class, and gender*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Spindler, G. & Spindler, L. (Eds). (1994). *Pathways to cultural awareness: Cultural therapy with teachers and students*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: US Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Wall, G. (2016). *Māui whakakau, kura whakakau: The impact of physical design on Māori and Pasifika student outcomes*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

White, C. (1997). *Cultural continuity and discontinuity between the home, the school and the peer group and their impact on academic performance: The ‘multiple worlds’ of Fijian students*. Unpublished D. Phil dissertation, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri.

