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Maori Pedagogy and Its Effects on Student Achievement

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Theology & Education in New Zealand

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Abstract

Historically, Europeans used schools as a way to assimilate Maori people into mainstream society. Missionaries established schools in the 19th century in New Zealand to convert Maori from “barbarians to civilized people”. Ordinances were passed by the government in the mid- to late 19th century to ensure that Maori learned and used English as their primary language of communication. However, Maori schools were established in the mid-20th century with the intent of implementing Maori language and pedagogy. In this paper, I argue that pedagogy based on Maori beliefs and practices, including *whanau* (family), “*Te Ao Maori*” (I am Maori), *tino rangatiratanga* (self-determination), and *ako* (reciprocal learning), empowers and uplifts a historically oppressed people. These pedagogical practices affirm the Maori people’s history, language, and identity, as they give agency to Maori students for their own learning and place importance on the quality of the teacher-to-student and student-to-student relationships in the classroom.

I. Introduction

In New Zealand, Europeans used schools as a means to assimilate Maori people into mainstream society. Maori schools were established in the mid-20th century with the intent of implementing Maori language and pedagogy. In this paper, I investigate Maori pedagogy through the lenses of Maori values, beliefs, and culture. Furthermore, I argue that Maori pedagogy uplifts and empowers a historically oppressed people, as it affirms their history, language, and identity.

II. History of Maori Education

1. Early Maori Schools and Missionary Schools in New Zealand in the 18th Century

Prior to the colonization of the Maori, the Maori had their own schools, called *whare wananga*, which translates to the “house of learning” or “house of teaching” (Whatahoro, 1913, p.80). Regarded as an “extremely sacred institution”, the *whare wananga* was reserved for young men who were considered by their tribe to be “suitable for learning”, “intelligent and alert”, and displayed “perseverance in learning what is taught them” (p.86). These young men learned *whakapapa*, or their genealogy, that included the heavens and the origins of humanity, their *hapu* (sub-tribal group), and *iwi* (tribe) (Whatahoro, 1913). *Whakapapa* also included understanding the relationship among humankind, birds, and the environment, such as birds, fish, animals, trees, soil, rock, and mountain (Lilley, 2015). By learning about one’s origins and relationship to the physical and human world, the *whare wananga* enabled young men to claim their place in the world and legitimized their position with their sub-tribal and tribal groups.

When Anglican missionaries arrived in New Zealand in 1814, they opened schools with the purpose of converting Maori from barbarians to civilized people. Samuel Masden, an Anglican missionary from England, described Maori in 1814 in his journal as “cannibals”, “a

savage race”, “full of superstition”, and “wholly under the power and influence of the Prince of Darkness”. (Marsden, 1932, p.60). The only way to free them from their “cruel spiritual bondage and misery”, Marsden posited, was through the “Gospel of a crucified Savior” (p.60).

Consequently, missionaries built schools as a means to convert Maori to civilized people, and instruction was solely limited to the scriptures (Walker, 2016).

When Governor George Grey came into power, he used education as a means to subvert the Maori people in New Zealand. He passed the Education Ordinance of 1847, which enacted that “religious education, industrial training, and instruction in English language shall form a necessary part of the system to be pursued therein” (Didsbury, 1847, para. 3), and teachers were to be selected by the superintendent (Didsbury, 1847, para. 5). The ordinance prohibited Maori children from speaking their language; the goal, then, was to assimilate Maori children into European culture and to prepare them for the working class (Simon, 1998).

In 1880, the Native School Code passed. While the Native School Code allowed the junior grades to use Maori language, it aimed to have students transition fully into English in the upper grades (New Zealand Education Department, 1880). All standards were English reading and writing standards. While the curriculum specified that students learn about Maori tradition and customs, it also specified that students learn about the European settlement of New Zealand and the Bible. Music and sports curriculum focused on European traditions, such as learning to play “croquet, football, lawn-tennis”, and the “harmonium” (New Zealand Education Department, 1880, para. 5). Furthermore, Maori females were sent to schools to be trained as domestic laborers, learning general housekeeping, laundry work, and gardening (New Zealand Education Department, 1880, para. 10). Consequently, while the Native School Code of 1880 provided some room for Maori children to learn a little bit about their language and culture, its

primary focus was on exposing Maori children into European religion, language, and values, and to ultimately prepare Maori for the working class.

2. Development of Maori Schools in the 20th Century

In the 20th century, Maori made progress to reclaim and control their education. In 1960, the Hunn Report on Maori Affairs revealed the discrepancies in educational achievement, unemployment, and mortality rates between *Pakeha* and Maori (Hunn, 1961). Maori life expectancy was significantly below that of the *Pakeha*; Maori had significantly lower rates of high school graduation compared to *Pakeha*, and the Maori people's unemployment rate was three times higher than that of the *Pakeha* (Hunn, 1961). In response to these findings, the Ministry of Education established the Maori Education and the National Advisory Committee on Maori Education (NACME). This committee introduced a state educational policy and initiative called *Taha Maori* in 1975. This policy was initially endorsed by Maori people, as it sought to incorporate Maori language and culture into the curriculum (Waitere, 2009). However, these initiatives were managed by *Pakeha* teachers and officials who had limited knowledge of Maori culture and language, which consequently led to limited successes of the initiative (Walker, 2016).

This tension ultimately led Maori to develop their own alternative and parallel programs for education (Waitere, 2009). They established the *Kura Kaupapa Maori* movement in the 1980's. This movement established independent Maori primary schools with the objective of preserving Maori language and culture in the children (Walker, 2016). This initiative expanded to 71 schools in the next 17 years and went on to include secondary schools. As of July 2018, according to the New Zealand Ministry of Education, there were 278 schools with students enrolled in Maori medium, consisting of 20,511 students. Although Maori pedagogy looks

differently across schools and regions, the next section of this paper examines common Maori pedagogical practices in Maori schools and mainstream schools.

III. Influence of Maori Values and Beliefs on Pedagogy

Maori pedagogy is not simply an English-language curriculum that is translated into Maori but rather an incorporation of Maori values, goals, context, and customs. Consequently, I discuss prominent Maori values and beliefs and the roles that they play in influencing Maori pedagogy.

1. Importance of *Whanau*, *Whakapapa*, and *Whanaungatanga* to Maori Identity

Maori culture places central importance on *whanau* (family), *whakapapa* (genealogy), and *whanaungatanga* (maintaining high quality relationships). *Whanau* translates into “family” but is more complex in that it includes “physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions and is based on *whakapapa* (genealogy)” (Taonui, 2014, para. 1). Traditional Maori society relied heavily on *whanau*, as responsibilities were shared and maintained within the extended family (Durie, 1997). Unlike their European counterparts, Maori identify with symbols that represent their family background, such as *waka* (canoe) and *iwi* (tribe) (Durie, 1997). Furthermore, Maori tribal location and tribal markers such as mountains and rivers became an intrinsic part of their identity (Moeke-Pickering, 1996).

Whanau and *whanaungatanga* are translated into the classroom in that Maori pedagogy places importance in the relationships between the teacher and students and among the students (Bishop, 2003). In one case study, one teacher spoke of how her students come to her about topics outside of schoolwork. Teachers in this research study also spoke of the importance of spending time to develop strong, positive relationships with the students; in fact, researchers

from this study never witnessed anger from the teacher towards the students, and the strongest negative comment coming from the teachers towards the students was “*Kia tupato!* (careful!)”.

When researchers asked the teachers what means would improve Maori student achievement, the most commonly mentioned response was through building effective partnerships between the student and teacher (Stucki, 2012). The teachers mentioned the importance of working to develop a positive relationship with the students and respect for who they are and their culture.

Within students, *whanau* pedagogy is evidenced in the collective learning mentality among students, where learning in groups is valued over independent work. Students work in rotating stations, and while the teacher is working with one group, students work with each other in other stations. When newer children enter the school, they are looked after by older children (Bishop, 2003). Furthermore, during group interviews, children in the classroom expressed that they understand the importance of modeling positive behavior for other children who may be new to the school or having a difficult time.

In the Kaupapa Maori in Mainstream study, explained in more detail in the next section of the paper, Maori students with teachers who practiced culturally response pedagogy identified that the main influence on their educational achievement was the quality of relationships with their teachers (Bishop, Berryman, & Ladwig, 2014). On the other hand, teachers who did not practice pedagogy centered on *whanau* and *whanaungatanga* continued to produce power imbalances, reflective of the larger society, by justifying that lower achieving Maori students were the results of their negative behavior. It also led teachers to develop lower expectations for their Maori students and as a consequence, resulted in Maori students behaving inappropriately. Hence, pedagogy centered on the concepts of *whanau* and *whanaungatanga* empower Maori students as teachers understood the negative impact of negative and deficit theories toward their

students and instead, channeled their actions in ways that would focus on their energy on the teaching-learning relationships with their students.

2. Incorporating “*Te Ao Maori*” Worldview into Curriculum

Although each Maori tribe has a variation of the Maori worldview, a general Maori disposition towards the one is “holistic and cyclic, one in which every person is linked to every living thing and to the atua... connections between humans and the universe (Ka’ai & Higgins, 2004). It includes preserving Maori stories, myths, and legends, and respecting Maori customs, values, and protocols. *Te Ao Maori* (I am Maori) worldview is also holistic; the whole person is valued, and the mind and body are connected. Maori belief holds that one’s physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions are part of a person’s wellbeing. The *wairua* (spiritual dimension) is complementary to the *taha tinana* (physical dimension).

In one research, one teacher comments on the importance of *wairua* in the classroom (Stucki, 2012). The teacher notes that the *wairua* of the teacher and students has to be good. For example, she notes that students who sit in the back means that their *wairua* (spirit) is “not good” (Stucki, 2012). Therefore, she takes them through *whakarite* (prayers) so the whole class can discuss what is on their minds. During prayer, the students and the teacher together acknowledge the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual world.

In the traditional Maori schools of learning before European colonization, students and priests assembled at the beginning of every session to recite *karaia* (prayers and incantations) about gods and the Heavens (Whatahoro, 1913). *Karaia* is a traditional practice dating back from the time when Maori myths and cosmologies were created, and it is used for thanksgiving for ancestors, strengthening relationships between teachers and students, source and identity, and stress relief (Stucki, 2012). Similarly, in modern-day Maori schools established in the second

half of the 20th century, learning activities are linked to traditional Maori practices, stories, people, and places, in order to create a connection between the students and their history. For example, *Karaia* is recited at the beginning and end of every day and at meal times (Stucki, 2012).

3. *Tino Rangatiratanga* (Self-Determination) in Creating Agency and Empowerment among Students

Maori schools were established under the principle of self-determination, or *tino rangatiratanga*. Despite a long and difficult struggle, Maori people came together to form schools that would be under their own control. *Tino rangatiratanga* means “the right to determine one’s own destiny, to define what destiny will be and to pursue means of attaining that destiny” (Bishop, 2001).

This word translates into Maori pedagogy in several ways. One, teachers see their role as helping Maori children attain higher levels of educational achievement despite institutional and economic barriers, educating Maori children about the past so they can meet their potential, giving privilege to the children who have not been privileged by the mainstream system, and preserving Maori culture through their teaching (Stucki, 2012).

In one study, teachers in Maori schools displayed a passion and concern for educating students about the disparities in job unemployment and criminal conviction rates between *Pakeha* and Maori, and educating students about institutionalized racism. *Tino rangatiratanga* creates an atmosphere of self-empowerment for the students, as children are responsible for their own learning as much as their teachers. Instead of Maori children subscribing to dominant perceptions of Maori people, teachers create an environment where Maori students can determine who they are in the classroom, allowing them to present the “complexities” and

“multiplicities” as individuals and as collectives, rather than perpetuating teacher images of these students (Bishop, 2003). Students are seen as co-creators, co-inquirers, and interact and take part in the learning process, such as choosing a style of learning that works best for them.

4. *Ako* (Reciprocal Learning)

A central component of Maori pedagogy is *ako*, or reciprocal learning. *Ako* connotes that teachers do not have to be the fountain of all knowledge but rather “a partner in the conversation of learning” (Bishop, 2003). Teachers and students take turns in conversations, and students engage in an active learning approach as opposed to passively receiving information.

Students also address teachers by their first names, which creates a more egalitarian and mutual relationship for learning, as opposed to a hierarchical one. In one case study, teachers recognized skills of children at times that would make them the teacher and other times a student (Bishop, 2001). For example, teachers noted that some children might be a role model; they teach each other, and teachers learn from students. Another student in this research study commented that their classroom is a “learning community” (Bishop, 2010). Collective learning and teaching are practiced, as this is central to seeing the learning environment as a mutual one (Smith, 1998).

IV. Role of Maori Pedagogy on Student Achievement

1. Defining and Measuring Success in Maori Schools

Educators and policymakers disagree on a single definition of student success in schools. Graduation rates and test scores do not fully capture the impact of changes in curriculum and school environment to a student’s success. In fact, measuring student success based solely on these factors do not necessarily reflect the Maori definition of success (Tuuta, Bradnam, Hynds, Higgins, & Broughton, 2004). Some researchers in the field have suggested that Maori definition

success is collective. They are “co-operative” and “whanau-based” and include the “physical”, “emotional”, “spiritual”, and “intellectual” (Hirsh, 1990). In an effort to measure the outcome of Maori schools on Maori students, I will look at specific examples of the results of two projects: te Kauhua in Mainstream Pilot Project from 2001 to 2002, phase 1, and te Kotahitanga: Improving the Educational Achievement of Maori Students in Mainstream Education, phase 2.

2. Te Kauhua in Mainstream Pilot Project, Phase 1

The Te Kauhua in Mainstream Pilot Project from 2001 to 2002 provided professional development opportunities for clusters of teachers at selected schools to reframe the mainstream school experience for Maori students (Tuuta et al., 2004). Throughout the school year, the clusters of teachers were provided with professional development opportunities to enhance their effectiveness in working with Maori students by implementing Maori curriculum and pedagogy, including in-school workshops by facilitators, in-class support, and off-site workshops and seminars (Tuuta et al., 2004). Teachers then implemented a curriculum that incorporated *tinorangatiranga* and established processes and procedures that enabled the development of *whanau* in the classroom (Tuuta et al., 2004).

Quantitatively, the Te Kauhua Pilot project led to an increase in student learning and outcomes. 92% of facilitators and 65% of teachers stated that the project made a positive difference to Maori students (Tuuta et al, 2004). Table 1 describes other outcomes that facilitators and teachers saw during this one-year pilot project.

Table 1. Facilitator and Teacher Perception of Student Improvements

	% of Teachers and Facilitators Who Agree
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Project led to an increase in student confidence.	25%
Project led to an increase in student cultural knowledge.	22%
Project led to an increase in students' social skills.	15%
Project led to an increase in student achievement.	14%

Source: Tuuta, M., Bradnam, L., Hynds, A., Higgins, J., & Broughton, R., 2004. *Evaluation of the Te Kauhua Māori Mainstream Pilot Project*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

Nevertheless, we must be careful how success is defined in this project, as certain metrics were not measured. As noted above, success can also be defined in the relationships in the classroom and connection to the spiritual and physical realm, which can be hard to measure. Other researchers have noted positive qualitative outcomes for incorporating Maori pedagogy for Maori students in this study. Forsyth (2006) has noted that incorporating pedagogy of *whanau* in the classrooms led to a greater sense of connectedness, relatedness, empowerment, and respect for students. Others have noted that the *tinu rangatiratanga* brought greater commitment to learning for students, as they feel empowered to take charge of their own destinies (Bishop, 2001).

3. Te Kotahitanga: Improving the Educational Achievement of Maori Students in Mainstream Education Phase 2

The Te Kotahitanga: Improving the Educational Achievement of Maori Students in Mainstream Education, continued Maori research and professional development project that began in 2001. Unlike the phase 1 project, phase 2 expanded to include whole school settings as opposed to clusters of teachers in schools. Similarly, this project incorporated *tinu rangatiratanga* (self-determination) and *whanau* (family) in classrooms and schools in an effort to reduce student absenteeism and improve student achievement. Teachers and principals were

trained on developing quality relationships with the students (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanaugh, & Teddy, 2007). Furthermore, *ako* was incorporated in the classroom as students were taught that they were the co-creators of new knowledge.

Quantitatively, the students of Te Kotahitanga teachers saw improvements in numeracy and literacy gains (Bishop, 2007). In 2006, when the first cohort of Te Kotahitanga students reached Year 11, the number of Maori and Pacific Island students who gained National Certificate of Educational Attainment (NCEA) from the first twelve Te Kotahitanga schools was greater than the increase for Maori and Pacific Islands students from non-Te Kotahitanga schools. However, it is important to note that quantitative studies have their limitations, as qualitative gains are hard to measure, such as the quality of the relationships in the classroom and students' spiritual and physical development.

V. Conclusion

The history of a racist educational system in New Zealand developed by colonizers who sought to control and assimilate Maori people by promoting English language and curriculum as the primary methods of instruction. However, the Maori sought to reclaim their education in the 20th century by developing their own schools. Pedagogy based on *whanau*, "*Te Ao Maori*", *tino rangatiratanga*", and *ako* empowers students to be agents of their own learning and prioritizes the quality of the student-teacher and student-teacher relationships in the classroom.

VI. Personal Reflections and Acknowledgments

My two-week immersion to Maori culture, faith, and education taught me the power of Maori pedagogy in empowering and affirming a marginalized people's identity and history. Similar to the findings in this research paper, I found a prevailing sense of *whanau*, *ako*, and "*Te*

Ao Maori” in the classrooms, as teachers and students worked together to learn, and students were empowered to learn about their people’s history, language, and traditions. In my own reflections as an educator in the U.S., Maori pedagogy provides valuable insight and are steps ahead of what education in the U.S. might look like to address deficit power relations between students of under-represented backgrounds and the education system. The concepts of *whanau* and establishing the quality of relationships in the classroom must take place before any meaningful learning and interactions can take place. The “*Te Ao Maori*” worldview, which is the idea of looking at students holistically, including the spiritual, mental, social, and physical, is of essential importance as students are more than just their academic abilities. Lastly, I strive to include *ako* in the classroom by creating an environment where students feel that they can contribute to knowledge and learning as much as I, the teacher, can.

I would like to thank everyone for making the New Zealand trip possible. Thank you to everyone, especially the Maori family, for their complete and genuine embrace of me as their family. In addition to taking these lessons with me as a student and as a teacher, I thank you for teaching me the value of *whanau* and *whakapapa*, the importance of my connection to my past and my ancestors, and most of all, being proud of who I am.

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