



Mere Berryman: Māori educational research priorities

The government has put raising literacy levels as a high priority, and millions of dollars must have been spent in that area over the past few years. There's already been a lot of work on literacy strategies and they haven't made that much difference for Māori. I think there needs to be more research around developing a more culturally responsive pedagogy before introducing the literacy strategies. To do that we need to get a clearer picture of several things: What does a culturally responsive pedagogy look like? How do you develop it? What do culturally responsive relationships look like and who determines them? We need to take a look at ourselves and think about what schools need to do to engage with whānau. It's about the relationship and responsibilities between schools and their communities.

A case-study approach would be good. For example, Ōpōtiki primary school has made a significant, statistical difference to their students—over 90 percent of whom are Māori. Researchers need to be going into places where we know good things are going on and looking at what is happening between the school and the community, and looking at what role—if any—those relationships play in literacy learning. Otherwise I think we run the big risk of going out and working hard to provide more strategies that are imposed on schools and communities, and that hasn't worked well for Māori in the past.

Another area I think we can learn a lot from is kura kaupapa, and kaupapa Māori. I think we've just about exhausted the traditional mainstream responses. Te Kotahitanga—which develops teachers who look very similar to the effective teachers we saw in kura kaupapa and does this by applying kaupapa Māori processes and practices—is currently producing significant differences for all Te Kotahitanga students using NCEA Level 1 as a measure, and when compared to a decile-weighted comparison group of students. Knowing what specific aspects of kaupapa Māori understandings are helping to bring about these changes would be interesting.

I'd like to see some research exploring all the recent Māori PhDs—or at least the education ones. There has been an exponential growth in Māori PhDs, but the findings have not been brought together in any cohesive way. Until fairly recently, when they've become available electronically, there's been no way of bringing that all together. Some kind of synthesis of the findings for teaching and learning from these documents would be great.

There's been quite a bit of work done in early childhood education. I wonder about the transition points from early childhood to primary school, from primary school to intermediate, and then to secondary school. And also the transition from one language to another from Māori immersion to an English-language environment. Māori students who transition into an English-language setting are often put into a real deficit space in terms of their lack of English, rather than looking

at what they bring with them in terms of their Māori language competencies. We actually have more information about the needs of new migrants coming into English language settings. I'd like to know more about what's happening in schools for Māori students who transition from one language to another, Māori to English or vice versa.

It would be very interesting to see some work with parents on their choices and their motivation for choosing the medium of instruction and why they might choose to switch. Anecdotally, parents face real challenges knowing what to do. There is the situation of parents taking their child out of a mainstream setting and putting them into a kura because they feel they are being cared for more effectively, and then the kura is faced with a child who has very little Māori language. Or children are taken out of English-medium settings because they are identified as having behavioural problems. They might be looked after better in Māori-medium environments but it becomes very difficult for the students and teachers because they don't have the language.

There's been quite a lot of research already on Māori teachers in mainstream schools. We know they get all sorts of things dumped on them and they burn out quickly. What I'd like to see is some research in schools where young Māori teachers are continuing to thrive. Find some Māori teachers who are doing well and are able to be fulfilled and to contribute, and then look at the conditions that have enabled that to occur.

I would like to see something done on categorising Māori-language reading resources beyond the fluency level. We do have a coding system for Māori-language readers up to the fluency or whenu stage, but nothing beyond that, so there is just a great pile of books at whenu. It would be a specific, precise, and important research project to categorise books for different levels of fluency. You can't just take the English-language reading level and translate that to Māori. If you don't have five years of Māori immersion before you go to kura, then why would you expect to have a five-year-old reading age in Māori at five? There's a good range of books—the Ministry had made a real commitment to that.

Related to that is the need for some work on how Māori-medium teachers identify the reading and oral language levels of their students. How do they do that and what do they need to support them further? There's still too much of "I think the student is at about this level." We need some robust tools that have reliability and validity in the Māori-medium context. To develop them, you'd have to first look at what the practice is now, and then work with the teachers to develop a tool that meets their needs. People don't want something imposed on them.

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