The dilemmas of bicultural education policy in art education practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

SMI03182

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In this paper I report on research, undertaken for a Master of Education, which explored the dilemmas arising from bicultural education policy and art education practice in secondary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand (J. Smith, 2001).

In the research I took the position that biculturalism in this country is not so much a theoretical construct as a proclamation of a political stance. My aim was to uncover the interpretations of biculturalism which have guided state education and to investigate practices which respond to what I call the ‘bicultural imperative’.

The motivation for the research arose from my role as a teacher educator with responsibility for training secondary school art teachers. Bicultural policy requires that I prepare them in respect of teaching of Māori art. Research in 1996 made me conscious of the dilemma of firstly, a largely non-Māori secondary school teaching force required to fulfil bicultural obligations and, secondly, the comparatively few Māori holding the (western) qualifications requisite for entry to tertiary institutions and colleges of education, and subsequent employment in secondary schools (J. Smith, 1996). Awareness of the paucity of knowledge and experience that the majority of the predominantly non-Māori students have of ‘things Māori’ when they enter teacher training predisposes me towards affirmative action.

Two questions underpinned my research: What is the political and social agenda which lies behind New Zealand’s bicultural education policy? What are the perceptions, behaviours and performances of the participants in relation to the bicultural curriculum imperative?

I took as starting point Te Tiriti o Waitangi-The Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840 by Māori and the British Crown. My intention was not to research the treaty itself although the topic required an intensive search of the literature related to it and subsequent events. Although the treaty established the signatories as equal partners holding equal rights and privileges the interpretation of this declaration of equality and its legal status have been argued ever since. The literature revealed the treaty was obedient to the prevailing colonial policy of protection of the rights of the indigenous, but some such as Kawharu (1989), Orange (1987), Brownlie (1992) and Renwick (1991) claimed it was an expedient, if reluctant, solution adopted by the Crown to control unruly factions, Pākehā and Māori. Orange wrote of differences in interpretation by Māori and British colonists, not just in wordings in English and Māori, but in understandings of the concept of sovereignty (Orange, 1987: 1). She noted successive provincial government’s subversion of the original intentions of the treaty, which culminated in Chief Justice Prendergast’s ruling in 1877 that the treaty was a ‘nullity’. This declaration, which held sway until the 1970s, rendered the treaty and the protections Māori expected completely without force.

The literature suggested that Pākehā power and authority has prevailed. Despite some evidence of often paternalistic, humanist attitudes, assimilation has been overtly and covertly the prevailing policy. Orange maintained that “Europeans, in particular, have shifted their position on the treaty to suit their purposes” (Orange, 1987: 2). Māori scholar, Walker (1973), considered that “the assimilationist policies which contradicted the intention of the treaty inflicted on subsequent generations of Māori children an identity conflict that persists to the
present day” (Walker, 1973:111). He claimed that the destruction of their culture had developed both a defeatist and aggressive response from Māori who seek an identity outside Pākehā conventions.

Research by such as Jones, McCulloch, Marshall, L. Smith and G. Smith (1990), Pearson (1991), and Openshaw and McKenzie (1997), revealed substantial disaffection with such assimilationist policy amongst Māori, and some Pākehā. It was within such disaffection and in a climate of liberal humanism, fostered by the economic prosperity of the 1970s, that the seeds of ‘biculturalism’ were planted. An educated Māori middle class with a foothold in the professions could employ Pākehā stratagems. A Labour government, itself an outcome of working class rejection of the hierarchical power of the British ruling classes, and prompted by its own sense of ‘Pākehā guilt’, was responsive to growing Māori protest and affirmation of rights (Rata, 2000). In 1974 the government enacted, statutes establishing bicultural policy.

Biculturalism

The literature revealed substantial controversy over the definition of ‘biculturalism’. As example of secondary school curricula, the social studies curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1997) defined biculturalism as “describing the interactions, relationships, and sharing of understandings, practices, and beliefs between two cultures; in New Zealand, these cultures are Māori and Pākehā” (Ministry of Education, 1997: 56). Definitions of biculturalism, such as “the existence of two distinct cultures in one nation” (Longman, 1991), or “having or combining two cultures” (Tulloch, 1995) suggested little more than recognition of two different cultures coexisting in a nation. Such definitions were referred to by Clark (2002) as the ‘minimalist notion of biculturalism’ embraced by most New Zealanders. He claimed that there was unlikely to be “an equivalent measure of support for biculturalism in the sense of equality” (Clark, 2002: 96).

Māori groups, notably those within a tribal definition, rejected biculturalism as an expression of oppressive policies of a post-colonial government. Their future was seen as lying within an ethnic interpretation of culture, in which race marked both point of entry and disbarment. Māori artist and scholar Jahnke (1995), for example, claimed that biculturalism was a deliberate western construct, a means by which the power-holding sector could ameliorate discontent and salve conscience without surrendering supremacy. He stated:

For biculturalism to be more than a pathetic fallacy requires empathetic negotiation across the boundaries of cultural reality. To presuppose a priority of vision defined solely by Western perception merely perpetuates the cultural capital of the elite as the sole criterion of cultural legitimacy (Jahnke, 1995: 9-10).

There were Pākehā who resented what they saw as privileged treatment of Māori, arguing that within a democracy individual human rights should prevail over ethnic affiliations. Christie (1999), for example, claimed that Māori were given unfair advantages in terms of compensations negotiated under the Waitangi tribunal. These, he said, provoked dissent by claims for independence and sovereignty. In one of his commentaries, ‘Brainwashing in Schools’, he stated:

The situation is created in New Zealand where children with even a slight trace of Māori ethnicity, or none at all...are coerced into displaying ‘Māori culture’, into believing notions of kotahitanga, kingitanga, and rangitiratanga, and to assume a partisan ethnic stance... All such thinking, though based on bunkum, is taught in schools by government directive and
enforcement, with the support of academia from where it is piped throughout (Christie, 1999:71).

Pākehā scholar, Rata (2000), wrote of the white ‘humanist’ middle class sensing defeat and retreating in the face of increasing ethnification and indigenisation by Māori, who rejected the paternalism of biculturalism and multiculturalism.

There was throughout the literature marked difference of opinion about what constituted ‘biculturalism’. As an educator in a state institution I am bound to accept that a particular concept of biculturalism, one that appears to rest on an ethnic determination of culture (Rata 2003), is written into education statutes. The Ministry of Education’s The New Zealand Curriculum Framework (1993), which legislates ‘essential learning areas’, specifies a bicultural requirement for all schools:


Art education and ‘Māori art’

Under statute, schools are required to teach Māori art as part of art education. Analysis of education policy and curriculum documents indicated that prior to the 1950s Māori art had been systematically rejected from art education in New Zealand schools. This rejection was grounded in policies of a dominant Pākehā society which, even in its Native Schools, adhered rigorously to a British model of curriculum. Chalmers (1999: 176) believed that art education in colonial New Zealand was (and still is) “a major agent of colonisation and cultural imperialism”.

Although from the 1950s the then Department of Education provided some resources in Māori art to primary schools it was not until 1975 that a new School Certificate Art prescription, innovative in its time, required secondary school students to ‘study the form and significance of some examples of Māori art’ (Department of Education, 1975). The most recent curriculum statement, The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum (2000), declared that:

In Aotearoa New Zealand, all students should have opportunities to learn about traditional and contemporary Māori art forms (Ministry of Education, 2000: 71).

For NCEA, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement implemented in 2002, year 11 students are assessed in Visual Arts Achievement Standard 1.1 on their ability to:

Research art and artworks from Māori and European traditions and their context (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2000).

Statutes and curriculum documents are definitive. All students, and not just Māori, are to receive a bicultural interpretation of art education. Such statutes pose, however, a difficult question for the art educator – what is Māori art?

The literature revealed that ‘Māori art’ was seen to be as complex and differentiated as art of the western world. Evident as much in Māori scholarship as in Pākehā interpretation, there was a significant variety of opinions. At one end of the spectrum, Mead (1984), considered that ‘Māori art is made by Māori artists working within Māori stylistic traditions of the iwi for
the iwi" (Mead, 1984:75). Hakiwai (1996) supported Mead's view, explaining that what the Western world has called 'Māori art', Māori call taonga:

Taonga or treasures embody all those things that represent our culture...Our treasures are much more than objets d'art for they are living in every sense of the word and carry the love and pride of those who fashioned them, handled and caressed them, and passed them on for future generations (Hakiwai, 1996:54).

Taonga, thus, has the status of cultural property to be protected, in treaty terms, by the state which must take responsibility for it and ensure education about its meanings, origins and mana. To whom does the state give this responsibility? Do the interpretations above suggest that non-Māori can only look on and may not teach Māori art?

Contrasting with the views of Mead (1984) and Hakiwai (1996), Māori art curator Panaho (1987) denied the necessity for Māori art to remain rooted within customary practice. He claimed that Māori art had always been innovative and responsive to change and could quite properly employ western materials and techniques in interpreting Māori ideology. Walsh (1999), artist and curator at The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, believed that "Māori art is simply work by artists of Māori descent, regardless of how it looks" (cited in Poland, 1999: 2). Here the definition of Māori art was by ethnicity of the maker. Hotere (1976) took issue with being labelled a 'Māori artist': "I am Māori by birth and upbringing. As far as my work is concerned this is coincidental" (cited in Davis, 1976: 29). Hotere appeared to deny that his ethnicity had relevance for his art making. Jahnke (1995), in deference to Hotere, said, "I am a Māori. It is coincidental that I am an artist" (Jahnke, 1995: 17). Māori cultural commentator Parekowhai (1999) took another position, distant from Mead (1984), and one which did not specify making or ownership:

Māori art is art where Māori can see themselves in the picture, either through visual motifs, reference to history, or subject matter. If it speaks to Māori, of Māori, then it is Māori (cited in Poland, 1999: 2).

Such varied viewpoints of 'biculturalism' and of 'Māori art' heighten the dilemma for the art educator. They raised issues, significant for this research, of the relationship between definitive statements of law and the interpretations and implementations of them. According to May (1993):

> Documents do not simply reflect, but also construct social reality and versions of events....documents are not neutral artefacts...[they] are now viewed as mediums through which social power is expressed....They are approached in terms of the cultural context in which they were written and may be viewed as attempts at persuasion (May, 1993:138-139).

How then are curriculum demands to be met when art teachers are confronted with contradictory definitions of Māori art? Who may and can teach it? Who will fulfil this state curriculum requirement in a system that has a pitifully small number of Māori art teachers?

A declaration made by Jahnke (1995) has implications for teachers:

> Anyone can speak about a culture without an awareness of that culture. In order to speak for Māori one must earn the right. The right is not self-imposed but is decreed through genealogy, through acknowledgement or through deed. Even Pākehā may earn the right to speak for Māori but it is a right conferred by Māori not by Pākehā (Jahnke, 2995: 11).
Questions raised about the position of non-Māori teaching Māori art have impacted upon my role as teacher educator. Despite a hardening of attitude towards the protection of Māori traditions and knowledge, and towards limiting access to those traditions and knowledge by non-Māori (Whitecliffe, 1999), I have continued since the 1980s to develop strategies which support non-Māori (and Māori) art teachers to learn about and teach about Māori art (J. Smith, 2003).

Whatever stance taken, however, I am still faced with the dilemma - May I teach Māori art? It is, I believe, a national dilemma and is the raison d’être of my thesis.

Realities of practice

My research did not seek to resolve the dilemma. Instead, I sought to evaluate what was happening in a sample of secondary schools in response to the bicultural curriculum requirement. Using qualitative research methodology I conducted an interpretative case study "to raise issues and inform dialogue about some institutional practice or innovation" (B. Smith, 2000:112).

The research was located in my specialist territory of secondary art education. The settings comprised Nga Kura Tuarua, three secondary schools, varied in physical and environmental contexts. To protect their identity I named them Te Kura Hine (the girls’ school), Te Kura Tama (the boys’ school), and Te Kura Hine-tama (the co-educational school). The selection, based on Patton’s (1990) criterion sampling, included low to high decile classification and ethnic composition. One school had up to 50% Māori and/or Pasifika students, another a wide range of student ethnicities, and a third was predominantly ‘white’ mono-cultural.

Twenty-seven participants, nine in each school, and myself as the ‘key instrument’ (Eisner, 1991), were involved in the research. Participant perspectives were gained through qualitative methods suggested by Wolcott (1992) – ‘examining, enquiring and experiencing’. ‘Examining’ required analysis of curriculum documents, school charters, mission statements and art department schemes; ‘enquiring’ involved interviews with principals, art teachers, and students at years 10, 11, and 13; and ‘experiencing’ was achieved through school and art room observations.

The data provided by the inquiry formed the substance of ‘narrative vignettes’ (Erickson (1986) in which I described events as vividly as possible to give the reader a sense of ‘being there’. To add credence to my research I adopted Eisner’s (1991) ‘structural corroboration’, multi-method techniques and analyst triangulation. The coding and categorising processes recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) and Tolich & Davidson (1999) were used to focus on the interpretations which the principals, art teachers and students gave to their own actions.

Interpretivist case study methodology requires scrupulous documentation, cross-referencing, referral of field notes back to those interviewed, and a great deal of what Wolcott calls ‘healthy scepticism’ (Wolcott, 1994:21). The issues of biculturalism raised ethical concerns. Not only was I required to satisfy the Auckland College of Education and University of South Australia’s ethical protocols, I had a self-imposed ethic to respond to. As a Pākehā teacher educator I am sensitive to Māori attitudes towards Pākehā intrusion into Māori cultural territory. Throughout the research I scrutinised my own involvement with both Māori and Pākehā participants, aware of Stake’s reminder that researchers “are guests in the private spaces of the world” (Stake, 1998:103). I valued Tolich and Davidson’s advice about the ethical principle that must override every piece of social research in New Zealand - to think
of New Zealand as a small town in order to protect the people in the study (Tolich & Davidson, 1999: 77-80).

‘Examining’ – Analysis of documents

The Thomas Report, The Post-Primary School Curriculum (1942), contained only one reference to Māori, not in respect of art education but Social Studies. Since 1945 Department of Education and Ministry of Education documents showed a growing awareness of bicultural responsibility and a move from ‘should’ to ‘must’. From the 1970s all art curriculum documents included requirements to offer Māori art in programmes, culminating in The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum (2000). In successive documents there was increasing use of te reo, albeit with English translations.

Analysis of the three schools’ documents – their charters, mission statements and art department schemes – showed a strong link between the documents and the nature of the schools and communities in which they were socially and economically located. Two sets indicated strong emphasis from Boards of Trustees and principals upon bicultural policy, while the third made no reference to biculturalism.

How Ministry and school documents were interpreted and acted upon by principals, staff and students varied substantially and revealed much about school policy making. The comments of two principals illustrated this variance:

Principal, Te Kura Hine: The Treaty of Waitangi has had a substantial influence. The school’s policy is called Tiriti o Waitangi…and it talks about Te Reo me nga Tikanga (J. Smith, 2001: 82).

Principal, Te Kura Tama: There is no monitoring of inclusion of bicultural imperatives…Heads of departments are not required to report on whether the Treaty of Waitangi is referenced in schemes, a task I would not agree to personally (Ibid: 83).

‘Enquiring’ - The interview process

Interviews and their documentation and analysis represented a major dimension of the research. The following comments from the three schools indicated the variety of responses:

Principal, Te Kura Tama: I actually don’t give a toss about the partnership (Ibid: 108).

HOD art, Te Kura Tama: A lot of boys from this school come from backgrounds where that prejudice is part of their culture at home… it’s a very hard thing to fight against. I’ve had a letter from a parent saying I do not want my son to be taught Māori art and I want him to be taken out of the class when anything to do with that happens (Ibid: 93).

Principal, Te Kura Hine-tama: The school schemes would say the right things but what I am interested in is not what they’re saying but what they are doing...putting subjects into a meaningful context. If you talk to Māori teachers they feel like they’re carrying this huge burden… (Ibid: 82).

HOD art, Te Kura Hine-tama: I feel confident with the Māori students … but I would feel very inadequate if asked to present my findings on teaching Māori art to Māori educators… Māori are hard on Māori… they would eat me alive (Ibid: 93).
Principal, *Te Kura Hine*: …what actually has to happen is a change…that is both intellectual and emotional… so first you have to know your history and…the sociology of indigenous peoples…and about the impact on a culture of a dominant culture (Ibid: 84).

HOD art, *Te Kura Hine*: I would like to think we are very explicit about the significance of Māori art. It’s not just about looking and drawing but the idea of knowing and understanding…we have made great effort to ensure that it isn’t tokenism (Ibid: 88).

A major aim of the interviews with the nine Māori and nine Pākehā students was to discover their awareness of ‘bicultural imperatives’ in the art programmes in their schools. The majority demonstrated little knowledge of the Treaty of Waitangi. Comments indicated that the depth and kind of study of Māori art they received reflected the nature and policies of their schools:

Year 10 Pākehā girl, *Te Kura Hine-tama*: We look at the work at the marae. Our teacher takes us there, we look at the panels and she tells us some things about the meaning…we do a lot of cultures. We’re doing African… (Ibid: 101).

Year 10 Māori boy, *Te Kura Hine-tama*: We’re lucky, people get to study whatever kind of art they like, their kind of art… I just love to take up more Māori than anything else (Ibid: 101).

Year 10 Pākehā boy, *Te Kura Tama*: Our course doesn’t really include Māori art. For the last exam we had to sketch a tapa cloth (Ibid: 102).

Year 13 Māori boy, *Te Kura Tama*: I don’t know anything about my Māori background…I’m happy using European models (Ibid: 107).

Year 11 Pākehā girl, *Te Kura Hine*: In the work we’ve just done we had to incorporate both Māori things and European aspects…incorporated together, an equal amount of Māori things. Our course is bicultural, incorporating half European and half Māori – bicultural as in two cultures. I feel as if the Treaty of Waitangi sort of comes across in my work (Ibid: 104-105).

Analysis of the student interviews suggested that a school’s circumstances affected the confidence and responsiveness of students. Where the art programme was focused within a bicultural context, this was transmitted to students whatever their ethnic identity. Where tikanga Māori and Māori art had an insignificant place in a school’s programme, in school policy, and in the school community, this was similarly reflected in students’ responses.

**‘Experiencing’ – Observational evidence**

The art classes observed (which included the majority of the 18 students interviewed) revealed strong correlation between the data collected through analysis of school charters, art department schemes, interviews, and the observations. This correlation helped support the validity of the triangulation of data-collecting techniques used in the research.

Observations also revealed information not apparent in the document analysis and the interviews. I concluded that the quality of student performance in biculturally–oriented art programmes depended as much upon economic circumstance, teacher knowledge and understanding of Māori art, the degree of teacher direction, and the resources available to students, as it did upon school policy.
Student ethnicity was not a major factor affecting attitude or performance. Some Māori students appeared disaffected in respect of Māori art. Others saw their art programme as an opportunity to find and reclaim their cultural heritage. Some Pākehā students showed considerable empathy with, and knowledge of Māori art and its significance. Others were singularly lacking in knowledge or interest in any aspect. I detected too, that the artistic merit of students’ work did not necessarily correlate with cultural understanding. So-called ‘good’ Māori art work could be executed in ignorance of its cultural relevance. Correlation or connection, when it existed, arose from teaching approaches which incorporated knowledge of the cultural base.

Observations revealed that the mandatory inclusion by the Ministry of Education of a bicultural dimension in the art curriculum in no way guaranteed that all students gained some understanding of “the unique position of Māori in New Zealand society” or were brought to “acknowledge the importance to all New Zealanders of both Māori and Pākehā traditions, histories, and values” (Ministry of Education, 1993:7).

**What did I conclude from the research?**

The search for answers to the two questions - what is the political and social agenda which lies behind New Zealand’s bicultural education policy? What are the perceptions, behaviours and performances of the participants in relation to the bicultural curriculum imperative? - revealed that my task was complicated by many factors – historical, sociological, anthropological, economic, racial, political and educational. I arrived at several conclusions:

- The Treaty of Waitangi, though not itself binding in law, has influenced the shape of New Zealand society and its policies for education. Subsequent legislation has not protected Māori from policies of colonial imperialism and assimilation that contradict the intent of the Treaty. Their low status in economic, social and cultural terms denotes cultural inequality with Pākehā.

- Liberal humanist doctrines of the 1970s have led to government policies which endorse a species of biculturalism rather than multiculturalism. It is policy derived from a specific political and ideological stance not shared by all New Zealanders.

- Māori belief that their ‘arts’ are the central vehicle of their culture make art education a significant dimension of curriculum if true bicultural policy is to be sustained. What might constitute appropriate practice in terms of bicultural art education was not well-defined and resulted in variable practice, from tokenism to informed comprehension about ‘things Māori’.

- The imposition of current bicultural requirements may place unrealistic burdens upon teachers. The mandatory inclusion of a bicultural dimension in the visual arts curriculum did not ensure that all students gained some understanding of Māori in New Zealand society or the importance to all New Zealanders of both Māori and Pākehā traditions, histories, and values.

- The ideological bases of bicultural policy require scrutiny, not least by those involved in teacher education and school reform. Existing bicultural policy may rest on a faulty premise regarding ethnicity and culture.
I did not seek and have not achieved solutions. I was left with the sobering knowledge that what to begin with I thought of as an enlightened government policy in a liberal climate towards the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, may not be more than yet another piece of paternalism (J. Smith, 2001:146). This reaction is well summed up by B. Smith (2000):

It is axiomatic that our social world is epitomised by injustice, exploitation and political and economic domination. Not a day passes when we do not experience, read about or discuss local, national or global examples of corruption, prejudice, political violence, environmental pollution and the like – all motivated to realise or maintain the advantage or profit of some at the cost or loss of others. Advantage and disadvantage are not natural events. They are human constructions (B. Smith, 2000: 209).
References


