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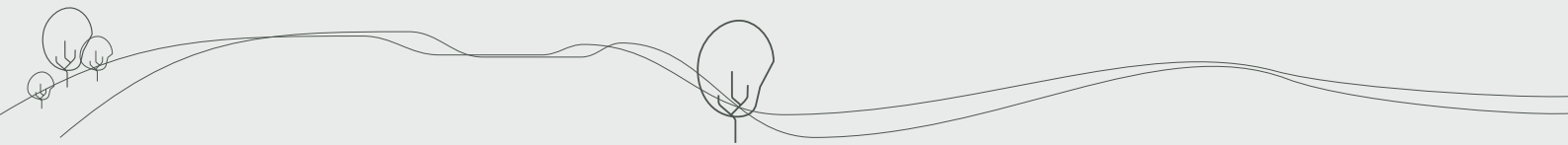
Narratives of beginning Māori teachers: identifying forces that shape the first year of teaching

Te Wānanga o Aotearoa offers a three-year primary teaching degree, Te Korowai Ākonga (Bachelor of Teaching). The first graduates completed their studies in 2003 and embarked on careers as teachers in 2004. Beginning teachers generally experience significant discontinuities in the transition from pre-service teacher education to first-year teaching (Loughran, Brown, & Doeke, 2001). Through this research project the teaching staff of Te Korowai Ākonga are seeking to better support new graduates.

It is assumed that beginning teachers will learn from experience in their first years of teaching, but current attrition rates problematise this notion. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is particularly so for Māori teachers. Besides those in “mainstream” schools, “there is no doubt that the workload of a primary bilingual or total immersion teacher is enormous” (Mitchell & Mitchell, 1993, p. 60). The inability of the profession to retain new Māori teachers is serious, yet there is little research that examines this crisis beyond presenting the statistics. Mitchell and Mitchell’s study suggests that many Māori teachers leave the classroom because of unreasonable expectations on their time and resources, and lack of structured support. More needs to be known about the reality of being a beginning Māori teacher in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 21st century.

This project sought to:

- explore these issues by chronicling the experience of being a beginning Māori teacher; and
- identify the forces that affect the first year of teaching and, consequently, how teacher education institutions and schools can provide ongoing support to address the attrition of beginning Māori teachers.



Objectives of the research

This research aimed to address directly the lack of evidence-based research within New Zealand that focuses specifically on making explicit and theorising the experiences of beginning Māori teachers in primary school classrooms. It sought to advance and extend the current body of knowledge on the experiences of beginning teachers in schools, and contribute to improvements in initial teacher education programmes generally.

The project:

- reported on selected beginning Māori teachers' professional experience and developing knowledge-in-action during the first year of teaching; and
- identified areas in which schools and pre-service teacher education institutions could contribute to the ongoing professional development of the beginning teachers.

Staff from the wānanga worked as a team to facilitate the project under the leadership of Paora Stucki, Director of the School of Education, with the assistance and mentorship of Ruth Kane, Professor of Secondary Education, Massey University. Pip Bruce-Ferguson of the wānanga's Research Support Centre provided ongoing research support.

Research design and methodology

The project draws on narrative inquiry to reveal and chronicle the lived experience of beginning Māori teachers. Narrative inquiry provides a means of ensuring that the authenticity of the beginning teachers' experiences is represented accurately through being grounded in a participatory design. There is precedent for the use of narrative inquiry in Māori research. Bishop and Glynn (1999) are strong proponents of this method and have defined a form of narrative enquiry called "spiral discourse" (p. 177). Since narrative inquiry enables all participants to talk their truths rather than present the "official" versions, it is suitable for use in Māori contexts (Bishop, 1998). The project draws on the work of narrative scholars to present and analyse the experiences of graduates of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa's Bachelor of Teaching programme.

Participants

Twenty-seven graduates of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa Korowai Ākonga in 2003 were invited to participate in this research project during 2004. Participants were divided into two cohorts, in Manukau and Rotorua.

Procedure

An initial hui on each campus brought together researchers and beginning teachers to facilitate the co-development of the project and discuss protocols, shared understandings, and responsibilities. Cohort groups met during their first

year of teaching (2004) to share, interrogate, and reflect upon their experiences. In Manukau, four full cohort meetings were held during the first half of 2004. Meeting attendance fell dramatically during the second half because of workload issues. The kaiako researcher visited three beginning teachers individually at their schools during the second half of 2004. The pattern in Rotorua was similar.

The researchers used the audiotaped focus group conversations, interview transcripts, notes made in situ, and emails to construct narratives of beginning teachers' experiences and identify common themes (reported below). The narratives are given in the full report.

Findings

Being the teacher of my "own" class

Many of the participants described the powerful effect of having their own class for the first time. When speaking about the children in their classes, participants' language reflected a sense of ownership, an ethic of care, and love, and a real sense of responsibility and protectiveness. Children were typically referred to as "my tamariki", or "my children". Some teachers were reluctant to take time off class as part of their 0.2 advice and guidance programme.

Some participants held unrealistic expectations of full-time teaching. They assumed that what was to be taught, and the resources to support the curriculum, were predetermined by the school or by their syndicate and that, as beginning teachers, they would "just go in and have everything set up", doing the same curriculum and activities as other teachers in the school.

While they enjoyed being classroom teachers, the participants also reported anxiety and frustration in changing from student teachers to classroom teachers. However, their relationships with the children eclipsed the challenging demands of the role. Participants reported that the rewards for their time and effort were significant, and related directly to the children's achievement in class.

Development as reflective teachers

Participants' accounts of classroom activity frequently showed commitment to reflecting critically on their work as teachers. They referred to work they had been introduced to in the wānanga, and how this informed their interactions with the children. Some showed that they carefully considered their own practice and how it affected the children's learning.

Relationships

It was clear that relationships, in terms of fitting into the school culture and environment, were very important to the beginning teachers. It sometimes took time to adapt

to how colleagues operate and interact. For most, establishing relationships with parents and the wider community was a positive experience, which some handled in unique ways—taking the initiative to venture “out and about”, and finding opportunities to talk with students and whānau in a variety of contexts.

Personal agency

Participants reported a number of wider issues that added to the anxiety and stress of transition. Trying to satisfy the competing demands of personal lives and full-time teaching led to conflict, lack of confidence, and further stress. Lack of confidence led some to avoid full-time positions for relieving positions or short-term contracts.

Despite the levels of stress and anxiety experienced by all the beginning teachers in this study, some found ways of rising above their anxiety and feelings of inadequacy to achieve high levels of confidence and personal agency.

Induction and support

Participants reported varying degrees of both informal and formal support. They tackled learning the procedures and expectations of their school contexts in a number of ways. They realised that, regardless of the level of support and assistance available from colleagues and others, the responsibility for seeking assistance rested primarily with them. Some taught in schools with well articulated and structured advice and guidance programmes and were assigned mentor or tutor teachers responsible for providing guidance, support, and assistance with professional areas that required further development. Informal support networks most often consisted of peers from the wānanga programme, or family and whānau.

Employment issues

Participants reported challenges in seeking and gaining employment. An important and recurrent issue was the tenuous credibility of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa as a provider of initial teacher education. As foundational graduates, the teachers felt responsibility for contributing to its credibility. They felt that the public, as represented by teachers, principals, and school communities, was waiting to see how they would perform.

Those who struggled to secure teaching positions were frustrated by what they perceived as unfairness when foreign-trained teachers were appointed to positions ahead of New Zealand graduates. Some felt that schools appointing more experienced international teachers were choosing not to provide the support beginning teachers need.

Some of the graduates were not ready to embark on full-time employment, choosing to work part-time as teacher aides (especially as a way into full employment) or moving

more slowly into teaching with the support of whānau already in teaching positions.

The graduates faced some structural barriers to employment as fully qualified, provisionally registered Scale A teachers. Some employers assumed that they were not in fact qualified until their degree had been conferred in the graduation ceremony. Te Wānanga’s graduation ceremonies were held in May 2004, the year after degree completions. Many of the beginning teachers were paid as teacher aides or unqualified teachers in the first five months of the year.

Discussion

Despite the anxiety and frustration typically associated with the transition from student teacher to classroom teacher, participants reported high levels of satisfaction and ownership. One of their key areas of concern was the initial struggle to obtain a teaching position. There is some evidence that these mainly Māori beginning teachers, from an identifiably Māori provider that is also new in the sector, had more difficulty than most in finding employment. This is supported by anecdotal evidence (from outside the study) that some within the sector and the profession regard the wānanga as a second-class provider. (The findings are discussed in the full report in relation to Giroux’s (1992) notion of border crossing, the act of moving from one’s own world into another’s.)

Another potential hazard extensively reported in the national and international literature is the ability of the beginning teacher to form successful relationships within the school community. The reports on induction and support in this study are typical in that they describe both strong and weak formal programmes within schools and less formal support networks among peers, family, and whānau. There were (possibly uniquely Māori) instances where whānau provided opportunities to work as relief teachers or teacher aides.

Reflection has long been seen as central to the development of a successful teacher. The findings of this study give some powerful examples of how important a beginning teacher’s ability to reflect is in successfully negotiating a challenging situation. Many of the studies in the beginning teacher literature point to the agency of the individual teacher, or the personal characteristics required. For the beginning teachers of this study, a sense of personal agency was significant in overcoming challenges. For one, it meant the difference between getting a job and not getting one. For others, it meant an ability to handle stress, anxiety, and lack of confidence, or to say, “I won’t put myself in a situation for which I don’t feel ready”. Some who had no sense of agency stumbled because of factors that did not impede others—not having a car, being older, and dealing with questions about the wānanga and the quality of their qualification.



Conclusion

This study aimed to inform the wānanga, its pre-service teacher education programme, and initial teacher education in general. Two central issues were:

- (a) the wānanga's status as a new provider of teacher education, its identity as a Māori provider, and the potentially negative impact of these two factors on employment for graduates; and
- (b) the extent to which an initial provider of teacher education is able to develop a sense of personal agency in its graduates.

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Paora Stucki is the Director of Korowai Manukura (the School of Education) for Te Wānanga o

Aotearoa. The school looks after the academic quality of five programmes in primary teacher education, early childhood education, and tertiary education that are delivered throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand. Paora is currently completing EdD studies in Māori pedagogy.



Massey University

Having recently moved from her position as Professor of Secondary Education at Massey

University, **Ruth Kane** is currently Director of Teacher Education at the University of Ottawa. In 2005 she led a national study of initial teacher education and a further study of people's perceptions of the status of teachers. Ruth continues to be active in research on the preparation and induction of beginning secondary teachers in New Zealand and in Quebec.

Pip Bruce-Ferguson is an educational consultant. Previously she was Research Manager at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa.

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