Providing for Māori with special needs:
within an ecological and culturally relevant framework

Jill Dinniss

Formerly a student teacher with The University of Waikato at Tauranga.

Now teaching in the Tauranga area in a primary school that has a long history of equitable educational opportunities for Māori children

The New Zealand Curriculum Framework (1993) which is the official policy for teaching, learning and assessment in all New Zealand schools, including kura kaupapa Māori, and special education schools, acknowledges the significance of the Treaty of Waitangi and the bicultural nature of New Zealand society. This document also comments on inequities within previous educational systems whereby Māori students, and students with different abilities and disabilities, "were found to be disadvantaged" (Ministry of Education, 1993, p. 27).

Reports of New Zealand children experiencing learning and behavioural difficulties (Te Puni Kokiri, 1999) have established that Māori are the most prominent disadvantaged ethnic group. For instance, *Nga Haeta Matauranga* the annual report on Māori Education 2000/2001 provides statistics that confirm a combined rate of suspensions and stand-downs for Māori students of 62.2% compared with 23.6% for non-Māori students.

MacFarlane (2000) comments that "Māori over-representation in referral for special education provision has long been a talking point in education". The author also says that, "little has been said about the under-representation of a real presence of Māori cultural principles and practices in mainstream classrooms and schools" (p. 23).

In mainstream schools Māori 'success' or achievement has been predominantly measured within the discourse of the dominant culture and subsumed within the ethnocentric context of that culture. It has been suggested (Salter, 2000; Glynn, 1997; MacFarlane, 2000) that Māori experience success at the cost of their own identity, language and culture. However, upholding the ideology of inclusive education necessitates an acceptance of difference as a 'normal' facet of human development, socio-cultural values and customs, and educational practice. In a New Zealand context, this requires knowledge and understanding of a Māori worldview (Te Ao Māori) accompanied by a means of transferring this knowledge into classroom practice. The intention is to create contexts where to be Māori is normal, and where a Māori pupil with special needs is normal too. This article aims to increase both an understanding and appreciation of major concepts and metaphors within a whanau context, and the implementation of this ideology through an ecological perspective.

Te Ao Māori can be perceived as a holistic worldview where body, mind and spirit are integrated to form the whole being (MacFarlane, 2000). Durie (1994) developed a model based on the four complementary sides of a house, whare tapawha, which incorporates the concept of whanau as the fourth side. Ritchie (1992) places wairuatanga at the centre of his model – "the highest or deepest level" and describes whanaungatanga as "the base cement that holds things Māori together" (p.67). Also integral in this model are the principles of manaakitanga, rangatiratanga, and kotahitanga. The tradition of whanaungatanga as a central and integral role in terms of defining cultural identity continues in present day Māori society.

Loyalty, obligation, commitment, an inbuilt support system made the whanau a strong stable unit, within the hapu, and consequently the tribe. — The mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well being of the group depended on how well both sexes, and the generations, complemented and supported each other (Pere, 1994. p. 26).

Bronfenbrenne (1979) develops an ecological - environmental model of human development that corresponds closely to the above epistemology. This model centrally positions the child within a series of interconnecting environmental systems. Factors affecting the child in one setting will influence the child's well
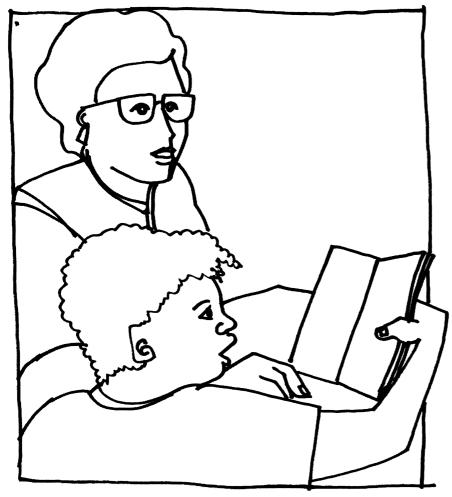
Jill Dinniss

being in other settings. Reciprocal interactions may occur between any combination of systems in which the child is embedded.

Bronfenbrenner states that only in relationships where there is a balance of power can development occur. This statement has significant implications for all children with special needs, and for Māori children with special needs in particular. By using an ecological perspective to define causal factors of behaviour problems, the child is not seen as 'the problem'. The 'deficit' approach is replaced by investigating the environmental setting(s) that may be impacting on the child in a detrimental manner.

> The ecological model is a child-focused, whanau-focused and classroom-focused model, as distinct from a deficit model. ... it also recognises the important implications of the wider social and cultural contexts of the home community (Berryman, Walker, Reweti, O'Brien & Weiss, 2000, p.37).

Kaupapa Māori educational initiatives such as kohanga reo and kura kaupapa Māori take place within ecological settings that are based on Māori cultural preferences and practices, and employ te reo Māori. Whilst these may contain the most relevant of culturally responsive ecological perspectives for Māori students with special needs, our mainstream schooling system where the issue of inclusive practice is most pertinent is the setting where the majority of Māori and cross-cultural students are educated. As such, the focus of this article relates to that system.

It is axiomatic that unconditional acceptance by the teacher of each student's 'humanness' is a pre-requisite for the development of truly trustful relationships. This emphasises the student as central in the ecology of the classroom/school setting. A teacher needs to respect the tapu and mana of each child in their classroom in the process of getting to know students, and allowing them to know her. This personal respect needs also to extend to the primary caregivers and include the extended family, (whānau, hapū, and iwi) of the child. By using whanaungatanga as a primary concept when forming classroom relationships the teacher becomes aware that "power-sharing is a necessary condition for relationship-based pedagogies" (Bishop & Glynn, 1999. p.176) and that these partnerships will be interactive across ecological systems. The ecology of the classroom learning context needs to be culturally appropriate and based on participatory partnerships. Historically, teacher/parent relationships have been based on transmission of information from teacher to home. To develop collaborative partnerships within the ecological perspective, multiple components will be addressed within diverse classroom programmes and exist as continua, rather than being categorically separated.

Bishop & Glynn (1999) make an interesting observation with respect to differences between Māori and Pākehā groups when establishing a starting point for curriculum development. Pākehā groups ask what sort of knowledge is to be included, whereas Māori groups begin by listing principles that guide people's lives.

> Ako, as a metaphor, describes a process of reciprocal learning where the relationships of learner/teacher are interchangeable and mutually supportive. The concept of tuakana/teina is derived from two principles: whanaungatanga and ako. The tuakana/teina relationship can involve students with special needs in the same activities as their peers. "This is the essence of love and care for one another in the whānau" (Tangaere, 1996, p. 114).

As children learn to talk through their social interactions with significant members of their family and community, this may be seen as learned behaviour that is developed within and by the rules of the socio-cultural community the child belongs to. Ballard (1998) states that "children's development occurs within the culture and circumstances of the family" (p. 297). Consequently Māori students who experience learning and/or behavioural difficulties may encounter cultural mis-match in certain

schools or with particular teachers.

> Classrooms are places where learners can bring who they are to the learning interactions in complete safety, and their knowledges are acceptable and legitimate (Bishop, 1999, p. unknown).

Simple teacher strategies may include correct pronunciation of names, familiarisation with whanau members, searching for appropriate resources, learning Māori protocol, and seeking assistance from a Māori advocate within the school community and beyond. The teacher has a responsibility to initiate collaboration between ecological settings, not in the role of 'expert, or leader, but as a means to further his understanding and knowledge of the student's special needs. The *Pause, Prompt, Praise* reading tutoring programme (Glynn, McNaughton, Robinson & Quinn, 1979) is an example of tuakana/teina between teachers and caregivers and their children. The reciprocal nature of this programme develops shared understandings and allows the teachers to gain specific knowledge of special needs within the families. This programme has been developed in te reo Māori as Tatari Tautoko Tauawhi.

Linking these concepts for learning and development involves scaffolding as in relation to the 'zone of proximal development' proposed by Vygotsky, (1978), and described as 'the poutama', (Tangaere, 1996). Active and interdependent participation with peers can assist learners with special needs to experience a greater rate of success than they may achieve on their own, thereby "gain a sense of identity and a sense of effectiveness as learners" (Quinn & Ryba, 2000. p. 67).

Collaborative group work and collaborative assessment also provide settings conducive to inclusive participation. The present writer experienced a meaningful moment for a Māori student with difficulties in learning and behaviour during an algebra lesson. The group was attempting to grasp the concept of finite/infinite with little success. We moved outside to change the environment and continue the discussion. This student proceeded to use the tree and production of leaves as a context to explain the magnitude of infinite. The entire group understood. Teachers probably do need to vary environmental settings so that different learning styles, and the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of all students are supported.

Inclusive classroom practice is undoubtedly facilitated by integration of curriculum areas that enable students to acquire knowledge and skills in a more holistic manner and where their own life experiences can be valued. This can be especially empowering for a Māori learner with special needs, as it allows for direct participation within a meaningful context that can be self-chosen. Experiential learning using relevant environmental settings and implementation of natural materials in classrooms can also reflect and 'normalise' classroom diversity. Again, the present writer experienced the power of narrative pedagogy whilst attending a lecture by a teacher from a kura kaupapa Māori. The entire lecture was conducted as a series of stories, culturally and socially situated, interactive, and powerfully transmitting knowledge. Although this was a shared experience with peers, each of us were able to interpret the stories in a way that made sense to ourselves, make connections with the perceptions of others, and explore differences in these.

> The aim of narratives as pedagogy is to create in the minds of those who are participants in the pedagogic process an image of relationships that are committed, connected and participatory (Bishop & Glynn, 1999, p.176).

In using narrative pedagogy a teacher is able to take an 'unknowing' position which allows power-sharing relationships to develop. Storytelling, singing, poetry, chanting, all normally treated as 'add-ons' in a traditional classroom and sometimes referred to as a hidden curriculum, can be easily integrated. 'Storying' can provide topics of relevance for students, and thus contribute towards motivation for further study. It is suggested that this type of learning environment will facilitate cohesion, promote inclusion, and reduce learning and behaviour difficulties in the classroom.

Culturally relevant learning and behaviour programmes have been developed. The *Hikairo Rationale* (MacFarlane, 2000) draws on both contemporary theory and Māori tradition in the belief that co-operation, understanding, reciprocity and warmth, combined with assertion (ihi) can form a pathway towards positive classroom behaviour management and effect an enjoyable classroom environment, which is conducive to learning.

> Teachers whose behaviour reflects the quality of ihi, as well as those of aroha and manaaki, are more likely to succeed in establishing effective relationships with students and in managing behaviour in classrooms (MacFarlane, 2000, p. 83).

Hei Awhina Matua, is a research project that addresses behavioural and learning difficulties experienced by Māori students at school, home and in the community. This project is developed within an ecological perspective and conducted by a 'whānau-of-interest' at Poutama Pounamu Education Research Centre in Tauranga.

As a Pākehā woman the writing of this article has been a slow, unsettling and, at times, disturbing process. I have been continually challenged to think outside of my usual frames of reference, to reflect on and change previously held ideas. Is this uneasy feeling of disorientation a familiar experience for many Māori students in our classrooms? Could this sense of 'not belonging' be an exacerbating force for our Māori students experiencing learning and behaviour difficulties? Just as an ecological model emphasises family, school and community as contexts for development, equally the 'macrosystem' in our society, and therefore our educational system, continues to be primarily governed by the dominant eurocentric culture.

However, changes are taking place, as seen in the Ministry of Education documents, *Te Whariki* (1996), and *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (1999). Here the concepts of whanaungatanga, and associated Māori metaphors have a presence, and as such, may be upheld as modelling a degree of commitment to inclusive practice for classrooms and for our students with special education needs.

References

Ballard, K. (1998). Disability and development. In A. Smith, *Understanding children's development: A New Zealand perspective*. (4th ed.) (pp. 296-317). Wellington, New Zealand. Bridget Williams Books.

Berryman, M., Walker, R., Reweti, M., O'Brien, K., & Weiss S. (2000). An ecological approach to understanding behaviour. Comprehensive and culturally appropriate strategies towards student success. *Set. research information for teachers. 2.* 35-38.

Bishop, R. (1999, September). *Changing power relations in education: Kaupapa Māori messages for mainstream institutions*. Paper presented at the Nationalism, Identity and Minority Rights: Sociological and Political Perspectives conference, Bristol, England.

Bishop, R., and Glynn, T. (1999). *Culture counts: Changing power relations in education*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press .

Glynn, T. (1998). Bicultural challenges for educational professionals in Aotearoa. *Waikato Journal of Education, 4.* 3-16.

Glynn, T., Berryman, M., Atvars, K., & Harawira, W. (1997). *Hei Awhina Matua: A home and school behavioural programme*. Book 1. Final Report to the Research and International section of the New Zealand Ministry of Education. September, University of Waikato.

MacFarlane, A. (2000). Listening to culture: Māori principles and practices applied to support classroom management. *Set: research information for teachers. 2.* 23-28.

MacFarlane, A. (2000). The value of Māori ecologies in the study of human development. In L. Bird and W. Drewery (Eds.), *Human development in Aotearoa.* (pp.46-51). Auckland: McGraw Hill.

MacFarlane, A. (2000). The value of Māori ecologies in special education. In D. Fraser, R. Moltzen and K. Ryba (Eds.), *Learners with special needs in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.

McNaughton, S., and Glynn, T. (1998). *Effective collaboration: What teachers need to know about communities*. Invited keynote address, Hamilton: New Zealand Council for Teacher Education Annual Conference. October.

Ministry of Education. (1999). *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.

Ministry of Education. (1993). *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework*. Wellington: Learning Media.

Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.

Ngā Haeata Mātauranga: Annual report on Māori education 2000/2001 and direction for 2002. Retrieved March 29, 2002, from http://www.minedu.govt.nz

Pere, R. (1994). *Ako: Concepts and learning in the Maori tradition*. (monograph). Te Kohanga Reo National Trust Board.

Quinn, S., & Ryba, K. (2000). Linking Inclusive Policies with Best Teaching Practices. In D. Fraser, R. Moltzen and K. Ryba (Eds.), *Learners with special needs in Aotearoa New Zealand* (2nd. ed). Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.

Ritchie, J. (1992). *Becoming bicultural*. Wellington: Huia Publishers and Daphne Brasell Associates Press.

Salter, G. (2000, December). Deciding between cultural identity of 'success' in physical education: Describing attitudes and values. *Journal of Physical Education New Zealand. 33* (1). Retrieved March 30, 2002, from http//www.waikato.ac.nz/library/resour ces/librarylink/education.shtml/databas es.

Tangaere, A. (1996). Maori human development learning theory. In B. Webber (Compiler). *He paepae kōrero: Research perspectives in Māori education*. Wellington: NZCER. (pp. 109-122).

Te Puni Kokiri (1997). *Making education work for Maori*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.