

Abstract PESA Conference, 2012, Taiwan

Category: *Possibilities and limitation of educational philosophies and practices crossing the boundaries between the North and the South*

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Out of place: economic imperialisms in Early Childhood Education.

New Zealand has received world-wide accolades for its Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. However, its implementation is possibly hampered by the discourse of Human Capital Theory (HCT), with its instrumental emphasis on economic outcomes. While *Te Whāriki* offers local cultural and educational possibilities, HCT is presented by those espousing economic disciplines, as having universal application. This paper explores the tension between economic imperialism, and a curriculum acknowledged as visionary.¹ This tension is apparent as follows.

On one hand, the foundational ideas of *Te Whāriki* emanate from socio-cultural and anti-racist pedagogies construct the child as ‘confident and competent’ (Ministry of Education, 1996, p.9). On the other hand the ontological understandings of HCT are the self-maximising individual operating in the educational marketplace. Both parent and child are constructed as educational entrepreneurs in economic parlance. A pedagogical underpinning of *Te Whāriki* is an acknowledgement of indigenous Māori ways of knowing and being; of educational restitution for colonising appropriation of land, language and culture by the dominant Pākehā peoples. *Te Whāriki* has a section written only in Māori, and there are expectations that teachers in mainstream ECE settings will foster Māori culture and values.

¹ *‘Te Whāriki is a world class early childhood curriculum and has been a significant factor in putting New Zealand on the early childhood world stage’* (Trevor Mallard, Minister of Education, press release, 17 January 2005, cited in Nuttall, 2005, p. 23).

By contrast, government policy is keen to rectify poor educational outcomes for groups such as the indigenous Māori, yet such interest is more about mitigating economic risk by New Zealand Governments in the 1980s and 1990s. The overarching policy framework remains that of neoliberal, managerial economics. than promoting educational equity. Ideas from the Chicago School of Economics were adopted

These tensions, largely unacknowledged and unexplored, place teachers in positions of difficulty. While trying to meet aspirational curriculum goals in their daily practices, their attempts are limited by economic constraints. I ask how Edward Said's concept of contrapuntal readings can offer spaces for resistance to the dominance of economics.

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Introduction

Dr Anne Smith, a member of the New Zealand Taskforce on Early Childhood Education (ECT, 2011), has noted that “Success or failure at th[e] stage (preschool) feeds into success or failure in school which in turn leads to success or failure in post-school learning” (Smith, August, 2011, citing Heckman, 2000) ... it is encouraging that ‘there has been a contribution from another discipline’ [economics] affirming the value of ECE. She noted that ECT supports *Te Whāriki*, and “wants to see it implemented properly” as “children are developing more elaborate and useful working theories about themselves and the people, places, and things in their lives ... Knowledge, skills and attitudes combine as dispositions” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 44, cited in Smith, August, 2011). New Zealand (NZ) has received world-wide accolades for its Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. However, I argue that its implementation is possibly hampered by the discourse of Human Capital Theory (HCT), with its instrumental emphasis on economic outcomes and individual responsibility. While *Te Whāriki* offers local cultural and educational possibilities, HCT is presented by those espousing economic disciplines, as having universal application. This paper explores the tension of economic imperialism, and its effects on a curriculum acknowledged as visionary.²

Contrapuntal readings: ECE as economic solutions to the ‘wealth problem’

In this paper I explore, using Edward Said’s tonal metaphor of contrapuntal theory, the juxtaposition of terms related to skill-deficits, and education to remedy these. Policy documents often note that in earlier centuries, the social and historical context gave indigenous peoples, often located in peripheral areas, a disadvantage that needs remedying, in the twenty-first century as an issue of social justice. Remedies, contemporary nations posit, are located in improved economic management for best cost-benefit state investments. Economists and politicians alike consider education to be one area where government monies need careful husbanding.

² “*Te Whāriki is a world class early childhood curriculum and has been a significant factor in putting New Zealand on the early childhood world stage*” (Trevor Mallard, Minister of Education, press release, 17 January 2005, cited in Nuttall, 2005, p. 23).

The requirement for a New Zealand ECE curriculum arose from a policy environment where politicians and policy makers sought a degree of certainty. Education, together with other areas of government interest, needed to be efficient and effective; to deliver outcomes from the input of government monies. Until the late 1980s, ECE in New Zealand had been fragmented, with funding going inequitably to service-types for historical reasons. Education was newly perceived, then, as a private good, rather than a public one; with the role of government to regulate, rather than be involved in direct management. Education reforms in the 1980s instigated by the Fourth Labour Government (FLG) attempted a degree of conformity across the ECE sector, by bringing all services under one regulatory and funding regime - part of a wider education reform across all sectors, which was continued by the incoming National government. National's Education Minister, Lockwood Smith (1990-96) required education agencies to implement a seamless curriculum, which would cover all education sectors, from ECE to secondary schooling (cited in Te One, S., 2003). A new curriculum framework was a part of this regulatory regime; government could ensure that education was delivered by schools and ECE services, by requiring quality syllabi with clear measurements of learning evident.

The ECE community was anxious about the possible content and intent of any national curriculum. Certain members sought to strategically address these anxieties. Helen May and Margaret Carr of Waikato University discussed possible options with others in ECE, before preparing and winning a contract to develop a national ECE curriculum (Te One, S, 2003). After three years of consultation *Te Whāriki Matauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa, draft ECE curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1993) was prepared and put out for further consultation and trial. It was widely supported by the diverse ECE services, and in 1996, the final *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), was adopted.

Underpinning the education reforms of the late 1980s, was a range of predominately education ideas emanating from the Chicago School of Economics. Ideas, such as New Public Management, Public Choice Theory and HCT, were to continue into the twenty-first century (see e.g. Olssen, 2001; Olssen et al, 2004). These theories tended to be instrumental, with individuals viewed as self-seeking entrepreneurs working to maximise their self-interest in the marketplace. Theorists espousing these theories portrayed education as merely a facet of the competitive

marketplace, where educational institutions were viewed as firms, governed to realise the interests of their management boards.

The period 1980-2000 also offered opportunities. Government, and some of its advisory bodies such as NZ Treasury and Education agencies were acknowledging that there was a more diverse population than there had been a few decades ago. Post-war European immigrants had arrived; while in the 1960s and 1970s Pacific Island peoples sought job opportunities in this country. Government policy had also supported Māori to move from traditional rural sites to build houses and take up trade-training in the cities. All of these peoples needed support from the education system, in order for them to contribute well to the economy (Treasury, 1986). The authors of *Te Whāriki* (1993) rose to the challenge of diverse populations, with sections in the draft document suggesting curricula adaptations for Pasifika³, children with sensory or intellectual disabilities, as well as giving space to the learning needs of infants and toddlers. It was especially the focus on Māori language and culture, which was innovative. For example, in a phrase deleted from the 1996 version the 1993 document notes that Māori is an official language. “Māori language and culture have only one home; if they are lost here, they will be lost forever” (MoE, 1993, p. 13).

Te Whāriki has a section written only in Māori, the language of the indigenous peoples of New Zealand, which is not a translation of the English text. The authors, those they consulted with, and many within the wider ECE community see ECE as primarily a way of ensuring equity and social justice for children. A pedagogical underpinning of the document, which remains, is an acknowledgement of indigenous Māori ways of knowing and being; of educational restitution for colonising appropriation of land, language and culture by the dominant Pākehā peoples. Teachers in all ECE settings are expected to have knowledge of, use and become competent in Te Reo Māori, as well as demonstrating awareness of Tikanga Māori (Māori culture).

The New Zealand ECE situation is unique in that *Te Whāriki* is a national curriculum, mandatory for all ECE services receiving government education funding. The teacher credentials, licensing and regulatory regime is also a national system overseen by a range of statutory agencies.

³ Pasifika is a generic term for people from the Pacific Islands: in New Zealand, Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island and Fijian are some of the groups covered by the term.

The Ministry of Education's role primarily involves funding, regulation and policy advice to government. Regulation, accompanied by regular crown agency audits, supports government-at-a-distance, with devolved responsibility for ongoing management to each individual educational institution. Such a system has inherent tension in it. One of the tensions is the role of crown agencies supporting the delivery, monitoring and quality control of Tikanga and Te Reo Māori (Māori language).

Traditionally in New Zealand, individual first nations' peoples viewed themselves as independent, self-managing, sovereign groupings, each with their unique cultural understandings, foundation stories and languages. While there is a generic language, understood by all, there are significant local cultural and dialectal differences. There has been considerable debate, too about these as intellectual property, owned by the local hapū and iwi, rather than the crown. The crown, however, forced by Māori, through social pressure and litigation, have accepted a regulatory responsibility for including language, at least in the national curricula across all three sectors. ECE teachers are required to foster language, as are Initial Teacher Education agencies charged with the preparation of beginning teachers. The effects of such measures has been a disconnect, the development of a generic language and culture, located in this country, but not embedded in local ownership and control. While many individuals are keen to foster language and culture, much of the teaching in ECE, however, is of low-level language, mainly initiated by adults.

The reason for the emphasis on teaching Te Reo and Tikanga is simple: it was, and may still be at risk of extinction. There is a wealth of information about the loss of peoples and of their spiritual attachments to land which was also 'lost' through confiscation across indigenous peoples. In the first four decades of the twentieth century, children were educated in schools, where the speaking of their home tongues was forbidden. If being caught speaking Māori in the school playground, children could be physically punished by their teachers. Māori took the Crown to a juridicial hearing, in a court set up to hear issues about cultural redress and loss. The Waitangi Tribunal (1986) found against the Crown, advising that it had failed "to protect the Māori language ... [which wa]s not adequately protected" (s 6.3.8).

The doctrine of imperialism has been intertwined with curricula matters. Schooling is, in Edward Said's phrase (1993, p.396), about "confinement"; Māori children were sent to church-mission schools in the nineteenth century, to native schools in the early twentieth century, and are

now being encouraged into participation in ECE centres. Such confinement is about the counting of, educating and regulating the bodies of those peoples deemed to require governing: in a bio-political term (where the state is viewed as organic) the 'risky'. The natives were increasingly drawn, by regulatory means, from the periphery of the newly developing nation, to the metropolitan centre.

The move from the periphery to the centre supported another discourse which began to emerge out of the New Public Management ideas adopted by successive governments. The understanding that individual's skill level and wealth could be aggregated to measure the national skills was an idea tied to competitive trading in international marketplaces. This view was allied to the understanding that education and training was an individual responsibility linked to their lifespan. Individuals needed to gain qualifications, and to keep them current, to maximise their competitive position in the employment market place. Statistical data, however, showed that discrete groups were falling behind the national norms e.g. participation in ECE for Māori is 89.4% and Pasifika 85.3% against 94.5% for the majority culture (Smith, 2011). Contemporary government policy aims to rectify poor educational outcomes for groups. This interest is more about mitigating economic risk than promoting educational equity. Governments' roles are to regulate order, legislate and manage populations within their territory. A vital tool for governments is the collection of statistical data, which supports knowledge of the population, and of groupings within the national border (what Foucault, 1994, p. 69, calls the "population-wealth" problem). With the use of statistics, there is an increasing use of norms, means and normative comparisons, as statisticians and policy makers seek to target educational investments for greatest effectiveness.

Of particular concern to governments— using statistical measures — is the skill-deficit of certain discrete groupings within its population. HCT has influenced government policy concerning ECE and its cost-effectiveness as a state early intervention investment since the turn of the twenty-first century. Led by the supra-national agencies such as the OECD and World Bank, many national governments have adopted the HCT promulgated by micro-econometricians such as James Heckman. Heckman and others, drawing extensively on longitudinal, American data collected in the mid-twentieth century, argue that monies invested early, pays dividends. Such

theories have left their places of origin, to become accepted in places like New Zealand as an economic ‘truth’.

It would be no surprise, to Edward Said, to learn that the supposedly ‘risky’ groups, are those brought by the state from the periphery to the centre: Māori and Pasifika. Concern about the skill-base and the assumed risk to the national economy can be found in policy documents as diverse as those from NZ Treasury, to the Ministry of Education. The discourse about the ‘tail’ of disadvantage has reached a crescendo in the twenty-first century, with titles like ‘Closing the Gaps for Maori and Pacific Peoples’ (Treasury, 2000) and statements such as “The most significant contribution to Māori economic development over the next 20 years is likely to come from improving the education and skills of Māori people ...”(Treasury 2005).

Books, scripts, governmental discourse from crown agencies, such as Treasury or Education, are affected by politics, despite oppositional voices offering alternative perspectives. Unlike Said’s examples, where intellectuals saw themselves as “emissaries of Western culture” (1993, p.312), the authors of policy offer the latest ‘truth’ from their discipline. However, Said’s criticism (citing Mohanty, 1989) that there can be see the “privilege of ‘objectivity’ to ‘our side’ [and]... the encumbrance of ‘subjectivity’ on ‘theirs’ ” is evident in policy documents. The latest research often arrives via the economic emissaries from Treasury, bolstered by reports from international publications. Yet texts, Said emphasised are cultural practices, which are never complete. The reader, however, can learn to read contrapuntally - ‘knowing *how* to read’ as well as ‘*what* to read’ (emphases in original). Reading government policy is about intellectual choices, just as writing policy was about deciding what to include; what to exclude. It is also, Said (1993, p.386) suggests, about a global analysis where texts and institutions are working together, intertwined, not in a harmonic symphony, but on an ‘atonal’ ensemble.

A critical reading of the position of the ‘other’, the group or groups who are located on the edge of policy; about which the government expresses objective concerns, is possible. Identity is constructed in the text, which is located within the field of power, within the world which produces the text for reasons of biopolitical concern. Marshall (2007, pp 15ff) discussed the melding of the social, the economic and the political, as new concepts emerge as a ‘problem’ of the present, which may not have been viewed as problematic in an earlier time. The researcher, by “stepping back” (Marshall, 2007, p.20), allows one to detach one’s self, to reflect upon, gives one the freedom to explore the contexts of a problem. It supports the problematisation of

contemporary positioning; of accepting nothing as ‘truth’, or as a ‘given’, but seeking the constructions of the history of this present problem.

Policy writers and analysts ‘know’ the other through the figures of the state.

Demographics demonstrate the achievements, failing, numerical patternings of populations within the national territory. The word, and the text require critics, who can locate the power bases, attune themselves to other portrayals. If theory travels, leaves its place of origin, to sing the same song in a new land, the critic should listen for the nuances of change, the reviewed emphases. The links between education and colonial powers of imperialism can be listened to in each new text, be it policy or theory. Texts provide spaces for struggles between representations, place, ethnicities. Texts are never neutral; their writing and the reading of them involve “interests, powers, passions, pleasures...Media, political economy, mass institutions – in fine, the tracings of secular power and the influence of the state” (Said, 1993, p.385) are all involved. To have meaning there needs to be a large amount of congruence – to be ‘in the true’ (Foucault). What this often means is a borrowing across disciplines of language, especially as languages intertwine. When education was conceived and structured as a marketplace, much of the language of pedagogy was adopted by economics; of economics by education – there was a cross-fertilisation. Behind such borrowing are attempts to ensure a melding, a harmony of purpose, a synchronization of rationalities.

Examples of such rationalities can be found in the FLG policy on ECE (MoE, 2002). The authors suggests that *Te Whāriki*, which is a ‘world leader’ (p. 7) will provide a roadmap (foreword) with an emphasis on foundations whereby children are enabled to direct their own lives (p.9). The curriculum, the authors suggest, needs to be “implemented effectively” (p.4) using “quality interaction” between adults and children (p.12). The concept of “biculturalism” (p.13) is revisited in diverse ways – leadership of kaumatua and kuia, and the need to consult widely with whānau and Māori families. It is here that the economic purposes become more explicit – “education lays the foundation for children’s later learning” (Quality in Action, p, 5, cited in MoE, 2002, p. 12). ECE is particularly important, it is argued, for those children from “disadvantaged backgrounds” (p.9). Participation in ECE is particularly low among “Māori, Pasifika, low socioeconomic and rural communities” (p.10). The tensions between the economic and educational discourses were implicit, rather than explicit, in the FLG’s ECE policy, as this government’s belief in the ‘third (middle economic) way’ ameliorated the harshness of the message (Stuart, 2011).

The boundary crossings of concepts and language become more explicit in the Early Childhood Taskforce Report (ECTR) entitled *Agenda for Amazing Children* (Taskforce on ECE, 2011) the ECE policy of the National Coalition Government (2008- present). In her background paper Anne Smith noted

An educated and skilled population gives huge advantages to a society and to individuals. Poorer education is linked to lower earnings, lower paid employment (or unemployment), lack of retirement savings and social exclusion, while more education is associated with secure futures and opportunities (Esping-Anderson, 2008, p. 2, as cited in Smith, 2010).

Throughout *ECTR* economic writing are cited as rationalities for ECE investment, which are among the most cost-effective investments available to governments, making the difference for individuals between “dependence” and having a “healthy and productive life” (ECTR, 2011, p.13).

[There is an] impressive body of research evidence confirms that returns from quality early childhood education are high and long lasting. Therefore, this is one of the most important investments a country can make (ECTR, 2011, p.3).

Most of the evidence is drawn from international examples, notably the publications of micro-economist James Heckman, who has co-published (with pediatricians and educationalists) on USA pre-schooling programmes.

Those programmes had common characteristics. They were relatively intensive ... The child-to-teacher ratios were relatively low and the classroom sizes were limited. In other words, the positive interventions incurred significant up-front costs. However, where cost-benefit analyses were performed on these interventions, the findings showed that for every dollar invested, the resulting returns fell within the range of \$3 to \$16. In percentage terms, those are massive returns on investment (ECTR, 2011, p. 21).

Heckman’s oft-cited phrase that “skills beget skills” (Heckman & Masterov, 2006) is repeated, along with his warning that “failure begets failure” (ECTR, 2011, p. 21). These examples have become proxy for populations within Aotearoa, as policy fixes for governments keen to adopt simplistic economic solutions to complex social problems.

Texts unless continually re-read and resisted, become monuments, frozen in time, unable to represent the fluidity of learning. They are cultural artifacts of the society and time that produced them. They emanate, as Scheurich and Young (2002) suggest, from civilisational attitudes.

However, using a musical analogy, Said suggests that we can both understand the colonizers, holding such attitudes; and also, the colonized - holding firm to their own reality. To understand the tensions between the economic and pedagogical discourses, using a 'contrapuntal reading' one must, as Said (1993, p. 79) suggests, "take account of both processes, that of imperialism, and that of resistance to it'...'to become subject to disputation", by connecting the structures of a narrative the experiences and concepts from which the imperializing discourse draws its support. According to Said (1993, p. 80) 'hybrid texts', such as government policy, require especial vigilance to critique the attitudes and perceptions policy texts advance about a globalised world view, a universalizing of experiences that assimilate all into the one model.

Conclusion

History and geography have been reworked in new types of connections, in New Zealand, as newly urbanised Māori became exiles in their own homelands. It was, as Said suggested, not the fate of a few, but an experience closer to the norm, where the exile experiences a "crossing of boundaries and charting new territories"(1993, p.384). Literature, including the *Te Whāriki* curriculum testify to the "contests and continuing struggles by virtue of which they emerged both as texts and as historical experiences" (p.384).

Recent government ECE policy, despite using the language of *Te Whāriki*, is underpinned by a theory that has travelled from its source- a song with origins in another time and place. The portrayal of poor, black, American children has been appropriated for purposes of economics. The unemployed mothers on the American continents have become proxy, in the NZ policy literature, for their counterparts at home. Pasifika families are portrayed as similar to the contemporary immigrants to Europe, as lacking skills, and training. Economics has instrumentalised ECE, and utilised its language for its own purposes. Both parent and child are constructed in economic parlance, as educational entrepreneurs, requiring paternalistic encouragement to better their circumstances through the acquisition of marketable skills, for both familial and national gains.

Yet there are also moments of hope, of alternative voices. In *Te Whāriki* there is acknowledgement of indigeneity, of the special place of Māori in New Zealand. Educators should aspire to teaching the language, culture and pedagogical style of the 'natives', it is suggested. Its very materiality is both a strength and a weakness. The document was a challenge to an attempt to

instrumentalise learning through a national curriculum that sought to determine learners' knowledge, skill and attitudes. Yet it is also the site of challenges from Māori, seeking to have the nativist views incorporated into it. It shows both the sites of power at the time it was produced, yet remains as a site for new readings, interpretations, possibilities in the future. Despite the 'authorisation' of the official curriculum document by the Ministry of Education, alternative stories exist. An early (1993) version had explicit attempts to share power between the dominant culture and iwi Māori; as do oral histories and commentaries, removed and less evident in the later (1996) version.

Within the wider discourse, the spaces for struggle, for local alternatives continue to be articulated. Despite the connotation of appropriation offered by 'bicultural models' (e.g., MoE, 2004) there is a growing body of texts that offer a Māori perspective on pedagogy *Te Whāriki* (e.g. MoE, 2009; Rameka, 2003; 2011).

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