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Teaching in context: Some implications of a racialised social order

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I extend my thanks to Professor Russell Bishop for inviting me to take part in this conference and to present this lecture to you this morning.

At a conference last year I presented a paper on aspects of the social, political and ideological contexts within which teachers undertake their work (Ballard, 2007). It is on the basis of that paper that Russell has asked me to talk about context today (note 1).

In particular Russell suggested to me that one of the studies I had referred to would seem especially relevant to the work of Te Kōtahitanga. This is research by the Ministry of Health and University of Otago (2006) and I have taken from that work the second part of my title today, the idea of “a racialised social order” (p.4).

To speak of racism and of systemic discrimination is to engage in a challenging and fraught task. It is challenging because it requires care in the definitions that are used and in the quality of the evidence that is presented to support a claim that one group of people experiences harm from the ideas and actions of another group. It is a fraught area because issues of race and ethnicity arouse strong emotions. Those of us in a majority position may deny the existence of racism, deny our own part in it or imagine that any harm a minority experiences is self-inflicted (Sleeter, 2001). Also, racism is a repellent idea to
most people so that speaking of it is often avoided. In any case, it needs to be approached with care lest wrongful attributions are made.

For such reasons I avoided for some time including the notion of a ‘racialised social order’ in the sub-title of this paper. But it was clear that this would not do. The use of the term in the joint Ministry of Health and University of Otago (2006) research – two agencies that I suggest are not known for their unreasoned claims – is based on compelling data that indicates a context that should be a matter of serious concern (2).

So, before telling you how I have organised my thoughts on context in this paper I will summarise some key findings from this health research. One aspect of this continuing work is a comparison of life expectancy between Māori and non-Māori. In health and in epidemiological research life expectancy is regarded as a key indicator of how well a society cares for its people (Wilkinson, 2005). In their studies the Ministry of Health and University of Otago (2006) have used census and health data to report on what they term the 1981 to 1999 ‘decades of disparity’. These were the years when neo-liberal ideology was embedded into economic and social policies in New Zealand creating an increasingly unequal society. The study data show that in this period Māori, who already had higher mortality rates, experienced a decline in life expectancy in comparison with non-Māori. Disparity in life expectancy at birth increased from six to seven years in the early 1980’s to eight to nine years by 1999 (Ministry of Health & University of Otago, 2006, p. xi).
The researchers report that the increase in socio-economic inequality for Māori in comparison with non-Māori in this period explains up to half the observed disparity in life expectancy between the two groups. Life style variables – including smoking, diet and alcohol consumption – were found to contribute less than 10% of the variance. This negates a deficit interpretation of the data (p. 59). Also, inequality in life expectancy was evident within socio-economic groups (that is, “Māori : non-Māori inequalities in mortality persist within socio-economic strata”, p.xii) indicating that socio-economic position alone was not the major health impact. Rather, the researchers say that “discrimination and socio-economic position are closely intertwined” reflecting a “racialised social order” in which health inequalities are the result of inequalities of resources and power (Ministry of Health & University of Otago, 2006, p.4).

As well as emphasising that “ethnicity cannot be reduced to ‘socioeconomic position’ in terms of health impact…” (p. xii) these researchers say that because of historically unequal access to power and resources the “lived reality” of different socio-economic positions is unlikely to be the same for Māori and non- Māori (p. xii).

Commenting on the most recent of the “tracking disparity” reports, researcher Tony Blakely says that in the period to 2004 the data show that socio-economic and ethnic disparities “are no longer widening…” but that “the gaps in death rates – especially the two-to-three fold high death rates for Māori compared to European/Other- remain especially high” (Blakely, 2007, p.1). In this regard Blakely and his colleagues report that, independent of socio-economic position, the unequal distribution of resources
resulting from institutional racism “contribute to much of the ethnic disparities” recorded in their data and that there is also evidence that interpersonal discrimination contributes independently to disparities in health status (Blakely, Tobias, Atkinson, Yeh, & Huang, 2007, p.128). As Blakely and his colleagues emphasise, “without doubt not all ethnic inequalities are explained by socioeconomic position” (Blakely, et al, 2008, slide 34).

I will return to this point later as it challenges a proposal by some researchers (for example, Openshaw, 2007) that social class and socio-economic status should be emphasised in the analysis of Māori experience. However, at this point I want to suggest the importance of the Ministry of Health and University of Otago (2006; Blakely et al, 2007) findings. They show that New Zealand social conditions, in which racism has a part, have resulted in a decline in Māori life expectancy in comparison with non-Māori across a ten-year period. That is surely a social context that warrants concern.

The health research studies refer to the intergenerational and cumulative effects on Māori of low incomes and poverty. In the next section of my paper I show that levels of child poverty are high in New Zealand and represent an important context for the work of teachers.

Following that I will consider racism as a context worthy of teacher study and critical thought. As Donaldo Macedo and Lilia Bartolome (2001) note, the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire held that while teachers may not be able “to compensate for structural inequalities that students face outside of the classroom…” they can work to understand
issues of power and control, to provide supportive classrooms and to do their best to help students deal with injustices in and beyond school (p. 126).

I follow this with a section in which I comment on a recent report on Te Kōtahitanga and suggest how ideas form a context for policy and practice in teaching. I will then conclude with some thoughts on teaching and context and on how relationships are central to each of the areas I have discussed.

**Poverty and inequality**

Susan St John and her colleagues in the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) say that official recognition of child poverty in New Zealand occurred for the first time in June 2002 in the Labour led government's *Agenda for Children* document (St John & Wakin, 2003, p.5). It was known that from the early eighties the overall number of New Zealanders in poverty had risen dramatically to around 20% in 1993 (St John & Wakin, 2003). Using a poverty threshold of 60% equivalent net-of-housing costs median income, the Ministry of Social Development (2002, p. 10) showed that by 2002 there were 29% of New Zealand children living in poverty with 66% of children of sole parents living in poverty (St John & Wakin, 2003, p.10). St John (2007, p. 2) notes that in 2004 one out of every five children “still exists at the margins of society” while the Ministry of Social Development (2004, p.6) records that in sole parent homes one in five reported they “could only sometimes afford to eat properly”.
In this context it should be no surprise that the United Nations International Children’s Education Fund (UNICEF) *Child poverty in rich countries* (2005) report records that out of 24 OECD countries New Zealand is one of a group of five that show “exceptionally high rates of child poverty” (p. 3). Waldegrave, King and Stuart (1999) note from their study that such poverty is experienced disproportionately among Māori and Pacific Island people (p. 47). Fletcher and Dwyer (2008) report that 22% of New Zealand children live in poverty (using 60% median income after housing costs, p.18) comprising 16% Pākehā, 27% Maori, 40% other (including Pacifica children, p.25).

There are different ways of measuring poverty, but each has a theoretical and methodological justification and is open to critical appraisal (St John 2007; UNICEF, 2005). The UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2005) supports research on a range of poverty indicators but notes that “income and its distribution [is] the leading indicator of poverty…and the most telling single indicator of child well being” (p. 7). Such a measure is relative to a particular time and place so that it refers to fairness in the distribution of resources that are available in a society. Nevertheless, in all contexts poverty correlates with indicators of wellbeing in areas of health, nutrition, education and social participation (UNICEF, 2005; Fletcher & Dwyer, 2008). It is in these areas that poverty is recognised in research as having long term implications accruing cumulative damage (Ministry of Social Development, 2004, p. 10; St John, 2007).

At the same time that high levels of child poverty have been created in New Zealand, data also shows the development of increasing inequality. Waldegrave(1998) cites a
report of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in Britain that notes that “income inequality has been growing more rapidly in the UK than in other [OECD] countries except New Zealand” (Barcley, 1995, p. 14, cited in Waldegrave, 1998, p. 3). Statistics New Zealand (Cheung, 2007) calculates a Gini coefficient (a summary measure of inequality where the range is from 0 to 1, the closer to 1 the higher the inequality) for New Zealand of 0.693 (p. 8) which is consistent with international data indicating New Zealand as having one of the highest measures of inequality internationally (Conceicao & Galbraith, 2001, p. 155). Statistics New Zealand report that the top 10% of wealthy individuals own 51.8% of New Zealand’s total net worth while the bottom 50% of New Zealanders “owns a mere 5.2 per cent of total net worth…” (Cheung, 2007, p. 6)

In this context, data for the years 1982 to 1998, the period within which neo-liberal market policies were initiated in New Zealand, show that the mean household equivalent disposable income (adjusted for number of people and in 1998 dollars) for the lowest income group decile involved a loss of –17% in that period (Mowbray, 2001, cited in Povey, 2002, p. 22). The top income group, decile 10, made a 36% gain in the same period. The Child Poverty Action Group (St John & Wakim, 2003) says that this shows a “large shift of income from low and middle income groups to the highest income group” (p. 11) with an actual decline in income at the lower levels.

From University of Texas Inequality Project data (Galbraith & Berner, 2001), James Galbraith (2001) says that the sharp rise in inequality in OECD countries after 1981, with New Zealand showing the largest increase, is not explained by advances in technology or
by trade data. Galbraith claims that “[r]ather, the timing points mainly at the quasi-violent, financial regime change of the early 1980’s” (p. 3). This analysis is supported by Joseph Stiglitz, former Senior Vice President and Chief Economist of the World Bank. Stiglitz (2003) documents increases in poverty and inequality in countries that have followed what he terms the “fundamentalist” free market economics promoted by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (p.35; see also Naomi Klein, 2007, and Nobel economist Paul Krugman, 2007).

Nevertheless, there are two contrasting explanations for why significant poverty exists in New Zealand. Both reflect a different imagining of human motivations and responsibilities.

The dominant imagination is evident in the neo-liberal discourse of welfare dependency (Fraser & Gordon, 1997) advanced by both the Labour and National parties. The neo-liberal belief is that humans are essentially individualistic and self-seeking. This means that they cannot be trusted to work without the pervasive surveillance systems of managerialist performativity (Ball, 1999), and that they may not work at all if they receive money in the form of welfare benefits on which they will become dependent. Overcoming ‘dependency’ was the justification given by a National government for the severe cuts it made to welfare benefits in the 1991 budget, with no research undertaken to assess the likely impact on families and children (Blaiklock, Kiro, Belgrave, Low, Davenport and Hassal 2002, p. 8).
Subsequent Labour led governments have not restored benefit levels to pre 1991 levels (benefits are well below 1991 levels even with recent family tax credits, see Fletcher & Dwyer, 2008) and have continued to implement the “hard core” of neo-liberal policies (Roper, 2005, p. 234) that reflect a dependency model (Blaiklock et al, 2002). This model constructs the issue of welfare assistance not as a sharing of community resources in the interests of general wellbeing but as a problem of individual responsibility. It involves a particular concern directed at women who are single parents and assumes that child rearing itself is not productive work (Fraser & Gordon, 1997). An overall result of this belief system is that New Zealand does not have family benefits with a universal component, which are widely regarded as more effective than our targeted benefits, and the present (2007) Working for Families policy offers support only to those with work, leaving aside a vulnerable 250,000 children (St John, 2007).

The dominant explanation for poverty, then, locates the problem within the motivation and morality of the individual. An alternative explanation for the causes of poverty places emphasis on the wider socio-cultural context that is created as the result of chosen economic policies and practices.

As the data on poverty shows, the cost to New Zealand children of our chosen policies is considerable. The most recent UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 7 ranks New Zealand as in the worst group for child income poverty at 19 out of 25 OECD countries (UNICEF, 2007, p. 42). New Zealand is also ranked last but one at the bottom of a table (24 out of 25 countries) on measures of the health and safety of children (p. 12), and New Zealand
is the worst country in the OECD (24 out of 24) for deaths from accidents and injuries per 100,00 under 19 years of age (p. 16). These measures of health and safety are described by UNICEF as “indicators of the societies overall level of commitment to children” (UNICEF, 2007, p. 13).

UNICEF (2007) emphasises that comparisons across countries show that there is “no obvious relationship between levels of child well-being and GDP per capita” (p. 3) and that poor levels of child well-being “are not inevitable but [are] policy-susceptible” (p. 3; see also UNICEF, 2005, p.2). From the evidence of their studies the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre says that reducing child poverty requires state support. They note that because of such support there have been many countries where significant increases in unemployment in the 1980’s and 1990’s have not resulted in a significant rise in child poverty (UNICEF, 2000 report 1). Clearly New Zealand presents a different picture confirmed by Bradshaw and Finch (2002, cited in St John & Wakin, 2003, p. 23) who show that on measures of support for families New Zealand ranks toward the bottom at 17 out of 22 OECD countries.

It seems evident that when we imagine that people are individual and self- seeking then we will extend support to them only reluctantly. If we wish to support children and families in ways that will enhance well being for all in our communities then we should work from an alternative position that imagines people as interdependent and that sees a wider sharing of resources as the basis for a more democratic and just society (Fraser, 1997).
Racism

Processes in a society that treat some people psychologically, socially and materially less well than others involve discrimination (Bhaba, 1994), and “where inequality and injustice disproportionately affect particular racial or ethnic groups”, such oppression may be identified as racism (Malin, 1999, p. 2). Colonisation involves related processes of power in which the ideas, meanings, language and ways of being of one group of people dominate those of another group (Smith, 1999).

In this context, a school system that consistently meets the needs and wishes of a dominant group, Pākehā, and consistently meets less well the needs and wishes of another group, Māori (Te Puni Kokiri, 1998, p.11; Human Rights Commission, 2006), should be analysed not from a deficit model of individual or group inadequacies but in terms of colonisation, oppression and racism. As part of such an analysis, the policies and practices that comprise New Zealand’s market model of schooling are implicated. The market policies of ‘Tomorrows Schools’ have created widening gaps between wealthy and poor state schools with increased ethnic and socio-economic class segregation (Harker, 2000; Waslander & Thrupp, 1995) and a decline in student performance in those schools that are market losers in this competitive system (Lauder, Hughes & Watson, 1999; Fiske & Ladd, 2000). Alan Hall (1999) considered the implications of a successful school that gains students at the expense of another school. The losing school declines in student numbers and resources and this may harm the educational chances of students.
who remain at that school. Hall suggests that such harm represents an ethical challenge for teachers and an issue of social justice.

Racism clearly represents a challenge to social justice. Statements expressing views associated with racist positions became evident in New Zealand following the Don Brash Orewa speech in 2004 (Hager, 2006, pp. 79-96; Taonui, 2006). As leader of the National party at the time, Brash (2004) described Māori claims over stolen land as the “Treaty grievance industry”; claimed that Māori gained special privileges from government funding based on ‘race’; and suggested that there were no “full blooded Māori”, a reference to the idea of blood purity that is a basis for eugenics and racism. In an editorial, the Sydney Morning Herald referred to these statements by Brash as “playing the race card” and said that “[t]he liberation of racist…views from the constraints on which social cohesion relies is not easy to reverse” (Editorial, 2004, p. 12).

The Brash speech and its claims that Māori were a privileged group was popular and associated with a dramatic increase in voter support for the National Party. The response of the Labour led government suggested an alignment with such views by requiring that policy areas be made “needs” based and not associated specifically with data on Māori (or other ethnic group) deprivation, as, for example, in health, or with Māori rights under the Treaty (Hager, 2006, p.94).

A particular example of alignment with a populist discourse demanding the invisibility of Māori involved The New Zealand curriculum: A draft for discussion (Ministry of
Education, 2006). The draft curriculum deleted all reference to the Treaty of Waitangi with the exception of one mention (in Social Sciences, Level 5). At an IHC(Inc) advocacy seminar in Wellington (23 November, 2006) I said that the deletion of the Treaty from the Draft Curriculum was shameful and a disgrace. In response, Labour Party Minister Ruth Dyson disagreed. She said that the Treaty was now so well understood that it was “infused” throughout the curriculum. The term ‘infused’ may be the latest code word for assimilation and suppression. In teacher education ‘infused’ signals an intention to delete serious study of the Treaty, inclusion and other social justice areas.

In its submission on the curriculum draft, the Human Rights Commission (2006) said that removal of the Treaty was in direct contrast with the (then) current curriculum where the Treaty was one of the principles on which the curriculum was explicitly based. The Commission stated that the Treaty should be in the guiding principles of the new curriculum and should be reflected throughout the learning areas. The final version of the curriculum reflects this position.

What it is that children are required to know through formal processes of education will always be a contested site as interest groups struggle to have their values and beliefs expressed through the curriculum. Success is an indicator of power, and for the moment power resides locally and internationally (Bob Lingard, 2001, p.28, for example, describes the OECD “proselytising” a neo-liberal managerialist model of education) with those who support and sustain a neo-liberal, New Right ideology. In the previous section
of this paper I have claimed that political application of the theories and practices grounded in this belief system have consistently across countries and cultures benefited a few and disadvantaged many. The evidence also shows that benefits have accrued to white people over others (Allen, 2001).

In this context I do not think that we can make alternative ideologies work toward more socially just societies unless racism is addressed as a significant force that permeates society and underpins disadvantage and oppression (Malin, 1999). To challenge modern racism and its links to a populist nationalism (Rizvi, 1990) requires more than striving for understanding through inevitably limited accounts of minority cultures in bicultural and multicultural studies (Rizvi, 1992). While accounts of the Other have a role in exposing a reader to realities that are not their own, Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2000) suggests they may also create a “false sense” (p. 174) of understanding racism in those who are not oppressed, and could be a further instance of the appropriation of the lives of a minority in the interests and to the benefit of the majority. Christine Sleeter (1993) expresses a related concern that white discussion of difference and ethnicity may take on a “‘tourist’ frame of thinking” (p. 14) and involve a depoliticised discourse that avoids issues of racism and white power. What is needed beyond exposure to stories of harmed individuals and groups, and beyond a concern for care and empathy that avoids engagement with politics and oppression, is a critical analysis of racism that, for white educators such as myself, must include scrutiny “of the power that accompanies our color” (Sleeter, 1993, p. 15).
In an account of an anti-racist professional development programme for American teachers, Sandra Lawrence and Beverly Tatum (1997) record one participant as saying that she had thought of racism as “an individual act of meanness … [not] an intricate system of advantage, of which I was a part” (p. 336). An understanding of whiteness as “institutionalised privilege” (Hytten & Adkins, 2001, p. 439) is essential if white researchers and teachers are to act against racism within schools and universities and if we are to understand that we cannot get “an individual dispensation that releases us from our racial position” and its rewards (Scheurich, 1993, p. 9). For those of us who are white, then into each classroom and each community setting that we enter, we take our white colour as a cultural, hegemonic signifier of normalcy, privilege, and power. This does not go away because we say that we oppose racism and that we work on anti-racist agendas. Rather, as Scheurich (1993) suggests, it requires recognition of our racialised status and the “need to make white racism a central, self-reflective topic of inquiry within the academy” (p. 9; see also International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, Special Issue: Whiteness issues in teacher education, 2003, Vol.16, No. 1). This self reflection should, I suggest, follow Freire’s (1998) call for intellectual rigour and avoid the often simplistic rituals of ‘reflective practice’ which John Smyth (1992) describes as lacking in a “politically informed” analysis (p. 292).

Donaldo Macedo and Lilia Bartolome (2001) analyse white racial superiority in western societies in terms of the oppression of subjugated minorities and the invisibility of this oppression to most white people. They urge that educators attend to the “hegemony of
white power” (p.81) in universities and take seriously the ways in which racist views are
promulgated as shared ‘common sense’ through the mass media.

Ideas as context

Educational historian Roger Openshaw was invited by the New Zealand Post Primary
Teachers’ Association (PPTA) to “review the Te Kōtahitanga project” (Openshaw, 2007,
p.iv). Openshaw’s methodology did not include interviews with participants and he did
not undertake observations of teacher professional development sessions or practice in
classrooms. What Openshaw does provide in what he describes as his “comprehensive,
independent and scholarly review” (p. v) are data from a questionnaire survey; criticism
of data in the Te Kōtahitanga Phase 3 report (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy,
2007) that is presented to support a claim that Te Kōtahitanga has enhanced student
achievement; critical commentary centred around the role of teachers in student
achievement; and some ideas on Māori culture (3). In this section of my paper I will
focus on some of the ideas about Te Kōtahitanga that Openshaw (2007) provides and that
have been endorsed by the PPTA who commissioned and published the review.

For the review the PPTA sent out “[a]pproximately 1000 questionnaires” and received
308 responses. Of these 264 were from teachers who had participated in Te Kōtahitanga
(225 present and 39 former participants, p. 31). As a brief summary of some of the
findings from the questionnaire survey the data show that 48.7% of respondents said they
had not felt “completely free” in making the decision to participate in Te Kōtahitanga
(p.33) and 52.8% of current participants said they did not feel completely free to opt out
(p. 34). There were comments of feeling pressured and bullied, including by employment contractual arrangements and school policy requirements for participation. The idea that we can be “completely free” to determine our actions in professional or employment contexts warrants some thought. Nevertheless, these questionnaire responses suggest an area for further investigation in terms of programme evaluation and development, and also an area for possible action in terms of teacher wellbeing.

Without diminishing the significance of reported experiences of pressure to participate, such further analysis should consider research indicating that in areas that challenge long held beliefs and values, in programmes of anti-racism for example (a similar context is that of anti-disablism), such responses may occur and may not accurately reflect programme intentions or processes (Hytten & Adkins, 2001; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Malin, 1999; Rizvi, 1992). To understand such issues in Te Kōtahitanga would require research that observes programme activities and involves talking with teacher and other participants. Interpretation of the research data might then be undertaken with awareness of the kind of studies I discuss in the previous section of this paper that examine experiences of anti-racism projects in education and professional development settings.

The questionnaire responses in the Openshaw report identified some other concerns, including a perception that Te Kōtahitanga is blaming teachers for low student performance and a view that the programme is not attending to issues beyond teacher influence that may impact on achievement (p. 38). Responses also provided comment on various aspects of the Te Kōtahitanga approach to teacher professional development.
Nevertheless, 63.4% of respondents agreed that Te Kōtahitanga could “dramatically improve Maori student performance” (p. 36); a “large majority” said that the Effective Teaching Profile was “either beneficial or highly beneficial” (p. 38); 65% of the teachers rated the facilitators “highly for credibility” (p. 42); and 59% responded in agreement to the proposal “that their teaching has improved as a result of participation in Te Kōtahitanga” (p. 42). Overall, the data from this self-selecting sample indicate for Te Kōtahitanga some areas requiring critical attention but also some key areas of significant achievement.

In his report Openshaw has two sections of commentary on Te Kōtahitanga. In the first section Openshaw claims that the programme is part of the school effectiveness movement that supports, and is supported by, a neo-liberal ideological position.

Since the time of the Lange Labour government (1984-1999) neo-liberal ideology and its beliefs in markets and managerialism has formed the basis for educational policy and practice in New Zealand. The school effectiveness movement is closely aligned with the individualistic model of human behaviour that the neo-liberal belief system promotes. Like Openshaw I am of the view that the school effectiveness approach is distrustful and controlling of teachers (Ballard, 2003; 2004a) and limits the scope and creativity of the curriculum and of teaching in classrooms (Ballard, 2004b)). However, I do not believe that Te Kōtahitanga is part of the school effectiveness model. The school effectiveness model is positivist, technicist and managerialist in its approach. I see no evidence of these in the relationship-focused kaupapa Māori model of Te Kōtahitanga.
The school effectiveness movement often claims that an aspect of education is in ‘crisis’ and that teachers should be held responsible for this and for resolving the problem. Openshaw says that Te Kōtahitanga is part of the school effectiveness approach because Te Kōtahitanga writers have referred to a ‘crisis’ in Maori education and because they attend to the role of the teacher in student achievement. He offers no other evidence for his claim.

There are educational researchers, myself included, who oppose neo-liberal ideology and the school effectiveness movement but who also have identified an issue of significant concern in education and who work with teachers on ways of understanding and addressing that concern (Ballard, 2004c; Lingard, 2001; Slee, 2001). New Zealand researcher Martin Thrupp (1999), for example, says that a failure to address the problems of schools in poor areas will have “educational and social prospects [that are] truly alarming” (p. 196), a description that school effectiveness people would readily grasp. Thrupp emphasises that schools alone should not be held responsible for poor achievement in such settings and writes of his opposition to the school effectiveness model in this regard (Thrupp, 2008, has endorsed the Openshaw 2007 report). However, he also says that teachers should “strive to do their best by the students in their care” (p. 183). Clearly the idea of an ‘alarming’ problem (‘crisis’) and teachers ‘doing their best’ (which would surely include professional development) can and does exist outside of the school effectiveness field.
Researchers John Smyth and Robert Hattam (2004) have studied Australian high school students who have been expelled or who have dropped out early. On the basis of student ideas for improving education they present recommendations that include attention to issues beyond the school setting. However, their recommendations for within school action include enhancing teacher student relationships; developing teacher sensitivity to “class/gender/racist/homophobic harassment”; and “confront[ing] teacher-student harassment by requiring a rethinking of pedagogy” (p. 193). Smyth and Hattam recommend “transforming the culture of the school” (p. 194, emphasis in original) so that “all students experience success” (p. 184). In the context of their work and its opposition to neo-liberal politics and policies this challenge to teachers does not carry an implication that they are part of the school effectiveness movement.

It seems to me that asking teachers to consider if the assumptions they work with could be harmful to some students need not be part of what Openshaw (2007) calls “simply finger pointing and apportioning blame” (p. 9). When such concerns are presented within the context of the school effectiveness approach then blaming teachers and implying their responsibility for overcoming social ills is an integral part of that model. However, the same concerns can be presented in an alternative context of ongoing teacher learning and professional development in which critical thought allows for the possibility that changes in teacher approach are needed and recognise that such changes are of value to teachers and students. If this were not the case then just about all professional development could be assessed as blaming teachers for what they do not know or do.
Education, including teacher education through professional development, is about change. Change implies recognition that on the basis of values or of data some ideas and practices are to be preferred over others. For example, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2008) suggests that instead of talking about an “achievement gap” shown by minority children we should talk of repaying an “education debt of longstanding inequities and educational disenfranchisement” (p. 236). Outside of the school effectiveness movement such a critical evaluation of the ideas behind our work is a basis for ongoing professional development rather than a basis for attacking teachers.

In the field of disability, for example, research indicates that the belief system known as the medical model is the basis for discrimination and exclusion experienced by many disabled students in the New Zealand school system (Ballard, 2004c). In this context the United Nations (Munoz, 2007) says that in order to achieve social justice for disabled students it is necessary for policy makers and teachers to reject medical model (deficit) thinking and work with alternative positions which emphasise disabling environments rather than impaired persons.

The United Nations recommendations on disability in education are consistent with the New Zealand Disability Strategy (Minister for Disability Issues, 2001) to which schools are required to comply. It seems to me that this approach to disability is very much like the attention that Te Kōtahitanga gives to changing the ways in which teachers construct their relationships with students. Like the Te Kōtahitanga criticism of deficit thinking
about Māori educational achievement, disability researchers recognise that teachers who hold a deficit position on disability reflect the predominant socio-cultural context in which such assumptions are the norm. That does not mean, however, that disabled people and their allies should not ask teachers to examine their thinking and practices in order to improve levels of educational participation and achievement for disabled students. Further, encouraging such critical thought by teachers does not in itself imply allegiance to the school effectiveness model.

Nevertheless, Openshaw (2007) claims that asking teachers to examine their ideas and practices around culture as an aspect of teacher-student relationships is to impose a school effectiveness approach. Also, he suggests that such an approach directs attention away from the influences of social class and of economic and home factors on school achievement. Openshaw emphasises that these factors are the responsibility of politicians, government agencies and communities rather than teachers.

From my reading of the literature there are some researchers who study the role of social class and class-mix in educational achievement and who fail to consider in any substantial way issues of culture, ethnicity and racism. There are some researchers who focus on culture, ethnicity and racism and who give only limited attention to class structures that may shape actions and opportunities within and beyond an ethnic group. In both fields of study at present the issue of inequality as an independent and powerful variable (Wilkinson, 2005) is rarely evident.
To the extent that such an incomplete analysis applies to Te Kōtahitanga I do not see this as warranting the ‘school effectiveness’ accusations presented by Openshaw. Rather, it presents a context requiring more thought and more research (as Te Kōtahitanga researchers intend, see Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2007, p.185) so we might consider, for example, the case presented by American black writer bell hooks (2000) that “class matters” but also evidence such as that from American researcher Michelle Fine and her colleagues (Fine, Weis, Weseen, &Wong, 2000) who describe their efforts to match samples on a class basis in studies of poverty in American cities. They found that the within class experiences of white and non-white Americans were not the same and that for African Americans race and racism “saturates every pore of their lives” (p. 112; see also Krugman, 2007). This is consistent with New Zealand data from the Ministry of Health and University of Otago (2006; Blakely et al, 2007) studies that show ethnicity and racism to be influences that are interrelated but that also have powerful actions independent of the influences of poverty and class. On the basis of such data the emphasis that Openshaw (2007) gives to socio-economic status is not supported.

The second area of commentary in Openshaw’s (2007) Report involves his ideas on Maori culture and their implications for Te Kōtahitanga.

Openshaw writes that many Māori academics are part of a “newly emergent middle class capitalist neo-tribal elite” (p. 23) who adhere to an “ideology of culturalism” (p. 24). Openshaw says that “culturalism” emphasises the role of culture in individual experience and is similar to “fundamentalism” (p. 24). Such an approach, says Openshaw, is
aligned with an “indigenous nationalism” that has “some of the characteristics of pre-war fascism” (p. 25) involving a “brand of mystical, anti-rational and holistic ideas regarding … cultural unity…” (p. 25).

Openshaw claims that attention to cultural matters in Te Kōtahitanga means that insufficient attention is given to issues of economic conditions, social class and family resources. He says that this approach by Te Kōtahitanga is a deliberate ploy by the “Māori elite” to direct attention “away from themselves and on to schools and teachers” (p. 27) through a process of “indoctrination” in a “culturalist ideology” (p. 28). He also says that the early childhood curriculum Te Whaariki and work on reading with Māori and Pasifica children in South Auckland by researcher Stuart McNaughton are part of an “ideology” of “culturalism” and a “further tightening [of] the regime of surveillance on teachers” (p. 23) which could lead to performance pay for teachers and a voucher system for education (p. 48). It would seem that for Openshaw and the PPTA if projects have Māori and Pasifica involvement they are to be opposed.

Openshaw (2007) describes the writers of Te Kōtahitanga as elite “neo-tribal” Māori (p.23) who he says are ‘contemptuous’ in their approach to deficit explanations of Māori school achievement (p. 10 & 11). He says that he finds their work “irksome” (p. 8), “very strange” (p. 14), and that it involves a “culturalism” that has aspects of “fascism” (p. 25; note 4).
Openshaw references his comments on a Māori elite and on culturalism to researcher Elizabeth Rata (for example, Rata & Openshaw, 2006; Rata, 2006) who is listed as a member of the advisory body (5) to the Openshaw (2007) report (p. v). Rata (2008) says that individual Māori share more in common with other social groups than with the claimed common interests of what she refers to as a “primordial” Māori ethnic group whose “various social practices” include “body-snatching” at funerals (p. 3).

Rata also claims that the “wheelers and dealers” of the neo-tribal elite have more in common with their pakeha business world equivalents than with “those Māori” who, quoting Chapple, (2000 p.115), she says have “low literacy, poor education … benefit dependence, sole parenthood … drug and alcohol abuse, physical violence and illegal cash cropping” (Rata, 2008, p.3). This group, says Rata, should be considered as part of a low socio-economic sub-cultural group rather than ethnic group (Rata, 2008, p.3). Rata presents no data to support this claim (p.6). In contrast, the Ministry of Health and University of Otago (2006) data show Māori and non-Māori to have different experiences of similar socio-economic positions (p. xii).

According to Rata (2008) the basis of a democratic society is the individual (p. 4). Rata claims that to protect nationhood and “a common national identity” (Rata, 2006, p. 5) requires that we do not give political recognition to ethnic groups (although ethnic identity can be adopted as a “private” choice – Rata 2006, p.3) and must reject “tino rangatiratanga projects, such as the Kaupapa Maori system in education” because they involve a “subversive process” that intends to replace “New Zealand’s liberal democracy
..[with] an undemocratic ethno-nationalism …” (Rata, 2007, p. 1). Rata (2006) says that such a process, led by “well educated elites” has resulted in genocide, for example in Rwanda and in Cambodia under Pol Pot (pp. 5-6). This seems meant to suggest that educated Māori represent a threat of violence in New Zealand.

Researcher Alison Jones (2006) has noted that although Elizabeth Rata is Pākehā she is often assumed to be Māori and has been referred to as “the Maori Don Brash” in the New Zealand Herald newspaper (p. 1). Given her support for the Brash comment on ‘blood’ (Rata, 2006, p.2) and for Brash’s individualistic notion of ‘nationhood’ (Rata, 2007) such a label may not be surprising. Also, just as Brash’s statements on Māori have been seen as racist (Editorial, 2004, p.12) so to has this charge been directed at Rata’s work (Pihama, 2004). Whatever the case in this regard, no doubt those who see Māori as comprising a self serving ‘elite’ along with benefit dependent growers of illegal crops who engage in ‘body-snatching’ at funerals (Rata, 2008, p.3) – and those who agree with Rata (2007, p. 5) that Mason Durie’s ideas on citizenship are “nonsensical” - will value her work and its prominence in Openshaw’s (2007) report together with the PPTA’s endorsement of that.

Openshaw (2007) presents a strongly negative account of Māori culture and of the motivations and aspirations of Te Kōtahitanga. The support of the PPTA for these ideas seems likely to encourage a context in which Māori views are not well received. Openshaw (2007, pp. 24-30) sees the political recognition of a Māori ethnic group as problematic, while for Rata (2008) such recognition is a threat to democratic processes.
These ideas are consistent with the position taken by Brash (2004) in his Orewa speech in which he denied the “constitutional status of Māori…as secured by the Treaty of Waitangi” (Barber, 2006, p.13). If such ideas were acted on then removing political recognition would further reduce Māori access to resources and power. The Ministry of Health and University of Otago (2006) research has shown that Māori at present have relatively limited access to resources and power and that this creates a ‘racialised social order’ with negative effects on Māori health and wellbeing. The idea that Māori should have less political recognition seems likely to worsen that clearly harmful context.

Some implications in context.

A racialised social order exists in and through social relationships. This means that we are all involved. We are involved as we support or oppose the beliefs, values and ideologies that create inequality in economic and social practices. This implies that we should strive to be aware of how our interactions with others may be collaborative or oppressive.

Teacher professional development asks us to think critically about what we do and why. For example, a study of unequal access to resources and power might consider how relationships are formed and experienced in the wider socio-political contexts within which schools operate. Teachers may consider how a classroom may reflect or subvert the values and practices of these contexts and how a classroom itself is a place where justice and injustice is enacted (Amnesty International, et al, 2007; Gallego, Hollingsworth & Whitenack, 2001).
An aspect of the wider social context I have discussed in this paper is that New Zealand has one of the highest levels of income and wealth inequality in the developed world (Cheung, 2007). Social epidemiologist Richard Wilkinson (2005) has made extensive comparisons of data on equality and inequality across and within developed countries. He has shown that greater inequality in a society is associated with significant inequalities in health and life expectancy; less cohesive relationships; less empathy and concern for the social good; deteriorating quality in family relationships; and greater levels of anti-social and violent behaviours. It seems that environments of greater inequality place stress on the sociability of humans and harm their physical and psychological health (Dorling, Mitchell & Pearce, 2007). This is a further area worthy of study in terms of increasing our knowledge about the contexts of teaching and their possible implications.

This is not to suggest that teachers should be held responsible for overcoming the effects of harmful environments beyond the school. Rather, as Smyth and Hattam (2004) suggest, the critical study of cultural, economic and ideological contexts acknowledges that schools “do not exist in isolation” (p. 195). It supports work already undertaken by schools to understand the lives of students and in particular to understand how to support those students who are most disadvantaged. In this regard Smyth and Hattam suggest that schools should show sensitivity to the effects that poverty has on young people and should be “pro-active” in adopting “anti-racism practices” (p. 193). Ongoing advocacy for properly funded state schools is also, I suggest, work in support of student learning and student rights.
Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1998) says that “[e]ducators need to know about the world of the children” that they teach (p. 72). He also suggests that without a commitment to freedom and justice “the teaching task becomes meaningless” (p. 4). Perhaps from experiences of care and social justice in schools students may learn how cooperation (Fraser, 1997) and respect (Sennett, 2003) are central to citizenship and to democracy.

My overall implication is this: that we should strive to be critically aware of the assumptions and beliefs that we hold about others; that we should consider how these shape our expectations and interactions in classrooms and communities; and that we should understand that it is through our relationships with others that we create contexts that support, or that fail to support, fairness and justice.

Notes

1. In the present paper the section on poverty and inequality and the section on racism are from Ballard (2007).

2. The Ministry of Health and University of Otago (2006) research is published in three reports and involves extensive statistical analysis focussed around many possible explanations of data relationships and of interactions between data sets such as socio-economic status, life-style and ethnicity.

3. Openshaw draws heavily on ideas from his own work and that of Elizabeth Rata. The claim for thoroughness might be challenged by the lack of any data from interviews or observations of the Te Kōtahitanga programme and by the number of references used in the text but not included in the reference list.
4. Elsewhere Openshaw (2007) claims that the writers of Te Kōtahitanga are “showcasing” what he claims is their lack of historical knowledge (p.8); may not understand Freire (p. 5); and “as one may expect” are selective in their data analysis (p.6). Such terms and implications are not usual in writing that claims to be scholarly.

5. The advisory body comprised Judie Alison and Bronwyn Cross of PPTA, and academics Elizabeth Rata, Howard Lee, and John Clark (p. v). Other contributors are described as two researchers with data analysis experience who “preferred to remain anonymous” (p. vi).

References


Ball, S. J. (1999). *Performativities and fabrications in the education economy: Towards the performative society*. Paper presented as the Frank Tate Memorial Lecture and keynote address to the Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference, Melbourne.


