

How do we develop culturally-responsive contexts and practices in the Drama classroom?

A teacher-led innovation

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Abstract

With the assistance of tertiary educators and the Teacher-Led Innovation Fund (TLIF)¹, four experienced secondary drama teachers formed a professional learning group seeking to improve the impact of their teaching on achievement for Māori and Pasifika students. The research question “How do we develop culturally-responsive contexts and practices in the Drama classroom?” framed their inquiry. Their innovations were designed to build whanaungatanga, demonstrate manaakitanga, practice āko, and establish effective learning environments that would support success in Senior Drama. The outcomes of the project were evidenced by increased student engagement and agency in the classroom, increased attendance and retention of students at Senior level, and achievement in NCEA² Drama. Furthermore, the quality of participation, the level of student ownership, and the deepening relationship students had with Drama as a subject and an art form, were outcomes highly valued by these teachers. This article outlines the dimensions of culturally responsive practice explored in the 3 year project, and reflects on the impact this discipline-based professional learning group had in enabling each teacher to enhance their practice and understandings of cultural competence.

Biography



TRACEY-LYNNE CODY is an experienced drama educator, working in initial teacher education at Massey University. Her research interests include drama pedagogy and practice in (primary and secondary) school and applied theatre settings, culturally-responsive teaching practice, and education for social and emotional well-being.



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1 The Tcher Led Innovation Fund is an initiative of the NZ Ministry of Education <https://www.education.govt.nz/ministry-of-education/specific-initiatives/investing-in-educational-success/teacher-led-innovation-fund/>

2 National Certificate in Educational Achievement (NCEA) is the official secondary school qualification in New Zealand

Introduction

New Zealand's record in educational achievement for Māori and Pasifika peoples is an area of concern. Accordingly, it is an ongoing aspiration of the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Education Council to develop the capacity of New Zealand teachers to be pedagogically and relationally responsive to diverse cultures; in particular, to be able to provide an educational context in which Māori and Pasifika students can thrive. In response to initiatives to improve educational outcomes for indigenous communities (Ministry of Education, 2008, 2011, 2013a, 2013b), four secondary drama teachers formed a professional learning group with the goal of innovating their classroom practice and building their cultural competence. Together they engaged with current research into effective pedagogical practice for Māori and Pasifika learners (Bishop, 2012; Bishop and Berryman, 2006, 2009, 2010; Bishop and Glynn, 2003; Dreaver, 2009; Ho, Holmes & Cooper, 2004; Macfarlane, 2004), and with theory and research into effective and culturally responsive drama practice (Cody, 2013, 2016; Fraser, Price & Aitken, 2007; Greenwood, 2001 a, 2001b, 2012; Hindle & van Dijk, 2014). Having considered the literature, their particular school context and their own level of cultural competence, each participant selected a range of interventions to implement. The teacher-led nature of the project meant participants had autonomy over the nature and direction of these innovations. Using qualitative methodology, thematic analysis of the data (drawn from planning notes, professional learning conversations, student and whanau surveys, focus group discussions, classroom observations and interviews) identified the following innovations were undertaken by these teachers:

- Participating and collaborating with other drama teachers in a professional learning community
- Engaging student voice and sharing power
- Strengthening whanau engagement
- Engaging culture and identity through the selection drama contexts (place-based pedagogy)
- Incorporating te reo Māori and tikanga
- Building student criticality and critical literacy

Description of the Project

This TLIF project explored the programmes and practice of drama teaching and learning in four urban secondary schools. This group of teachers wanted to collectively investigate their teaching practice in order to identify areas in which they could deepen their responsiveness to culture and in turn, they hoped to raise the engagement and achievement levels of Pasifika and Māori students in Senior Drama. The focus and desire to improve outcomes for Māori and Pasifika students are in response to factors in the New Zealand policy environment, the mandate for education under the Treaty of Waitangi and the ethical and philosophical positions these teachers hold. The group wanted to extend their pedagogical practice in new ways in order to improve outcomes in Senior Drama for Māori and Pasifika students, with the view that all students would benefit from a teacher demonstrating cultural competence, inquiring into the effectiveness of their practice and fostering student agency and criticality. Over the 3 years, teachers met at least once a term to identify pedagogical innovations, formulate ways to track and reflect on their progress, probe and identify findings, trouble-shoot and celebrate. This collaborative group approach gave accountability and focus to the pedagogical innovations. Perhaps more significantly, the group offered a supportive environment teachers drew confidence from.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study that spanned three years from inception. It provides a collective case study into the implementation of culturally responsive practices in the secondary drama classroom. Each participant is an experienced drama teacher (including two tertiary educators) and all four teachers were teaching programmes in secondary Senior Drama. Teachers engaged in professional learning before they selected and applied a range of teaching strategies designed to improve outcomes within their specific school context. The study relied on a range of data sources appropriate to the interventions implemented: teacher field notes, peer-teacher observations, questionnaires (to students and parents), achievement statistics, attendance records,

focus group interviews, and interviews with teachers. Ethically, this was a low-risk project where participants had agency over their interventions and methods of data gathering. Surveys and questionnaires were anonymous and students were invited to participate or withdraw at any time.

Innovations for the drama classroom

It was important that each teacher was able to engage with interventions and strategies that were appropriate to their individual school contexts and sat well with their own practice and teaching philosophies. Initial investigation into research-based culturally responsive practice revealed a breadth of potential areas for innovation. From these discussions, each teacher identified the strategies they felt ready to trial. As the project continued, the shared successes across the group led to a deepening of this work.

Teacher A and her department initially chose to focus on the development of relationships - between teachers and students, and between students themselves. This was seen as a key area of culturally responsive practice and of effective drama teaching (Cody, 2016). Teacher B chose to develop the discursive nature of her teaching (Bishop and Glynn, 2003). Specifically, she wanted to establish a classroom climate where dialogue and discussion were integral to the teaching and learning, and where she moved from being the expert to create greater reciprocity in learning relationships with her students. Teacher C's initial goals centred around building whanaungatanga in the classroom. Teacher D drew together cultural concepts and identified the wider human questions they gave rise to, Working with her department (and its changing personnel over the 3 year period), these concepts informed a new department-wide vision which emphasised the significant place of students in the learning.

The following table provides a summary of the school contexts and the chosen innovations of each teacher:

Key Innovations across the project	
<p>Teacher A</p> <p>Decile 9 co-educational school.</p> <p>12% Māori, 4% Pasifika students (ERO³, 2013). In 2015, 27% of drama students were Māori or Pasifika.</p>	<p>Teacher A wanted to increase student agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o small groups and individual discussions were held around what students want to achieve within the first few weeks of school o gathering data on student achievement and engagement for all students and a particular focus on seven Level 1 students who identified as Māori or Pasifika in order to be more responsive to their needs. o two weeks of games and drama activities with students that establish a greater sense of whanaungatanga in the Drama classroom <p>She wished to establish greater connections with students and their whanau. In order to improve home-school relationships she:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Introduced a Drama hui (MacFarlane, 2004) where students and whanau met to share food and discuss Drama. o Actively encouraged whanau to attend performances and established a way this audience could respond to the learning they saw. <p>Development as project progressed</p> <p>After identifying a lack of engagement with external Achievement Standards, Teacher A undertook professional learning in critical literacy and examination writing support in order to lift the number of students (including her target Māori and Pasifika students) who attempted and/or achieved in the external Drama examinations.</p>

³ The Educational Review Office (ERO) is the government department that evaluates and reports on the education and care of students in New Zealand schools and early childhood services.

<p>Teacher B</p> <p>Decile 10 single sex, state integrated (ERO, 2013).</p> <p>In 2015, 12.5% of drama students were Māori or Pasifika</p>	<p>Several of Teacher B's strategies were designed to increase democracy and student agency in the classroom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o encouraging debate and different viewpoints; accepting that there is no “right” way o favouring collaboration over competition o Enabling year 13 level 3 NCEA students to co-construct course at the start of the year o enabling greater choice in year 12 level 2 NCEA course o encouraging students to lead some of the teaching. <p>In addition she looked for ways to increase the connections between content and students' own lives (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008) by encouraging drama work in which students use their own experiences as a starting point.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o engaging community and whanau through regular emails o establishing a way audiences could give feedback on performances <p>Development as project progressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o use of the Habits of Mind framework (Costa and Kallick, 2009) to deepen students' metacognition and criticality and to support learners in understanding themselves as learners o identifying individual learning preferences o use of whakatauki (proverbs) to underscore classroom values and increase visibility of te reo and tikanga Māori
<p>Teacher C</p> <p>Decile 9 Integrated Boys' College with 14% Māori and 10% Pasifika students.</p> <p>In 2015 25% of drama students were Māori or Pasifika.</p>	<p>Teacher C's innovations spanned several key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o conferencing one-to-one with each student at the beginning of the year, to look at what they wanted out of the course and find out any perceived barriers to learning, cultural or otherwise. o increased networking with wider whanau through regular email contact home and invitations to performances o using ritual and cultural traditions in devised work o building a sense of community in the classroom o using personal and family story contexts to devise drama o investigating the ways students from differing cultures preferred to receive feedback on their work in Drama
<p>Teacher D</p> <p>Decile 10 single sex girls' school (ERO, 2013).</p> <p>In 2015, 19% of Drama students were Māori or Pasifika.</p>	<p>Teacher D chose to work on both departmental and classroom levels. She sought to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o use a hui/barbeque to establish connections with parents o develop a class “truth” (A ‘truth’ can be likened to an overarching Big Idea or Question) that underpins learning at a conceptual/thematic level. o work with year groups embedding selected cultural concepts into the learning: Year 11- whanaungatanga- who we are; links to whenua (land), mana tīpuna (ancestors), and mana tangata (ourselves); responding to what we share; family; building of local knowledge and Year 12 - political and social concerns became a starting point for production. This student-centered discussion allowed significant opportunity for student voice and agency over the artistic direction and vision of the production. o find opportunities to move towards a more dialogic classroom (Bishop & Glynn, 2003) including how to extend active student participation in the learning process. This included targeting specific Māori and Pasifika students through several ‘fit-to-purpose’ surveys followed by one on one interviews around their participation and sense of agency in Drama.

Findings and Discussion

Data were analysed according to central themes which captured both the innovative work of teachers and the impact of this work. Key themes arising in the data include: the impact of teachers' collaboration; engaging student voice; strengthening whanau engagement; enhancing drama contexts (place-based pedagogy), incorporating te reo and tikanga, and building student levels of criticality. These themes are discussed in the following section. Lastly evidence towards impact on student engagement and achievement in Drama is presented.

A community of learners - the impact of teachers' collaboration

For all teachers involved, their commitment to the group enabled them to move from aspiration to action. All teachers agreed that they had found themselves to be more committed to enactment, reflection and evaluation as a result of their involvement. Teachers committed to setting up action plans that would be reported on to the group at each collaborative session. They also reviewed how to gather data that would inform their practice and changes. Each teacher questioned and assisted one another to understand and move forward in their practice - initially using the "I Like, I Wish, I Wonder" strategy (Burnett, 2014) to frame the feedback. Further innovations evolved out of this questioning.

The discipline-based support and professional learning in effective drama teaching that took place opened new possibilities for how these teachers approached their programmes and their classrooms. Teachers were encouraged to trial new ideas after listening to each others' stories and finding common ground in the subject. For example, having shared the problems of student retention in senior classes, teachers found new ideas to increase the profile of Drama in their own schools. In 2016, Teacher D's Year 12 students were invited to develop an initiative to build the profile of Drama in the school. Students came up with an idea of running a Drama week, that included sharing of performances and activities across a week at lunchtime.

Following the reporting of this successful week, Teacher B trialed Year 12 and 13 students running lunchtime programmes in Drama for Yrs 7 and 9 students. This was described as a turning point for her, in relation to her students and to her sense of community within her school context: "This made me feel like I wasn't alone, and the students were part of "team drama" ambassadors". Such comments reflect the development of *whanaungatanga* but also illustrate a strong level of *āko* in this teacher's work.

The willingness to take risks and go further in engaging whanau was encouraged by involvement in the professional learning group. What one had started, another built on. For instance, when reporting on progress mid-2016 Teacher A described a Drama hui/ barbeque she had run in order to engage whanau and Teacher D spoke about how having an elderly visitor had inspired devising work based on local stories. As the discussion evolved, the suggestion arose that even greater authenticity for student devised work and whanau involvement might be achieved if Teacher D invited her Year 11 parents to a Hui/ Barbeque to tell their family stories. Teacher D followed this through. After attending the hui, Teacher B explained it , "... made me see what a bonding and inclusive experience it was. It emphasised to me how important whanau engagement is". Subsequently Teacher A has extended the purpose of her 2018 hui/barbeque. There was a strong sense of collaboration and reciprocity.

Student choice/voice

Increasing student choice was a significant feature in the innovations of these teachers. A range of possibilities as to how they might lift student agency and increase student voice in their programmes were discussed. The following areas were noted:

- Involvement in planning the year's programme (Teacher B and D)
- Involvement in selecting what pathway to take for assessment purposes (Teacher B and D)

- Regular check-ins through questionnaires and interviews to see how students were feeling about the choices they were making (Teacher D)
- Involvement in the Habits of Mind approach and close interviewing around this (Teacher B)
- Projects that were student initiated and led (all 4 teachers)

Teacher D described the way her students negotiated the choice of play texts and contexts for drama they wished to explore, using the class 'truth' to frame and guide their choices. She explains,

Each year level has a 'truth' (or Big Question) that frames the entire drama programme. Giving this broad framework allowed greater student choice. This is also a strategy to deepen critical literacy.

Teacher D maintained there had been a major shift to students' understanding their responsibility for their own learning as a result of the vision that Drama students be open and generous with what they bring and then explore in Drama. One teacher in the department reported she had more flexibility and students had more of a voice as a result of the departmental vision. She explained,

Next week I am starting with Theatre Form and I [the teacher] have no idea which one the class with choose. It makes me more flexible with this. I like the options. This is our vision in practice and,I am open to flexibility.

Teacher D in her work with her class's chosen theatre form, Epic theatre, provides another example of student voice and agency for learning was increased. She found students asking her about how they might incorporate devising [NCEA] credits into a second class production; they presented two reasons for this. Firstly, they felt as a small class (12) they has bonded really well, and secondly they felt they had stumbled upon something really important that mattered (relating to the big question). From a basis of this Big Question "What lies [beneath]?", they were drawn to the impact of social media on their lives. They wanted to draw together as many of their thoughts about this, research ideas and create a drama that would last beyond the assessment and be performed at the end of their school year. In this way, it was their voice and their learning that was important as well as what they could teach others, rather than the assessment driving their programme.

Students responded positively to a questionnaire that asked how they felt about making their choices wide open. A typical answer was that they enjoyed being able to choose their own play for production, for example, because it meant they could all have a say in what style of play they wanted to do and it opened their eyes to different plays that other people were interested in. For Teacher C, student choice was encouraged through play selection - particularly plays where students could explore their identities and through the use of devised theatre. She explains:

In the process of creating a drama the students find they are bringing certain aspects of themselves to the piece. This year they deliberately found themselves looking into their own lives but the revelations were controlled by them and they only showed us the parts of their lives they wanted to. At the start of rehearsals they were wary and less likely to share but as they went on and gave the characters names other than their own or just felt safer in the drama.

As a result of attending live Pasifika theatre performances, these students had greater desire to engage in their own devising work and saw their own stories and experiences had great value for theatre making. Two target students took their self-devised performance to the One Act Play National Finals and won. Being involved at this level brought pride and a strong sense of achievement for these students.

Teacher B identified her innovations as centering around developing a democratic classroom model (Bishop and Glynn, 2003) for teaching and learning. She implemented a number of opportunities for negotiation and consultation. She also embedded the *Habits of Mind* (Costa and Kallick, 2009) into her drama teaching as a way to increase both metacognition for students and her understandings of individual learning needs.

Classroom observations of Teacher B provided supporting evidence that she was shifting towards a more discursive classroom through increased negotiation with her students. Teacher B noted this letting go was innovative as it forced her “to look differently; to concede control and trust it will still work”.

In addition to these innovations around student choice and negotiation in the classroom, all teachers increased their use of student surveys to ascertain engagement levels, attitudes, perceptions and specific feedback/feedforward on their teacher. Results from surveys were used to inform text selection and to inform individualised programmes in NCEA Drama as students selected the Achievement Standards they would undertake.

Whanau engagement

Each teacher became interested in exploring ways to increase the connection between school and home. Much of the literature regarding successful teaching for Māori students emphasises the need for schools and teachers to connect with whanau and engage in dialogue about learning (Bishop, 2012; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop and Glynn, 2004; MacFarlane, 2004; McLeod, 2010; Ministry of Education, 2011; 2013a, 2013b). Drama Hui have been one way teachers have sought to strengthen whanau engagement. Hui were held at two schools. Parent survey responses to the hui at one school at the start of 2017 showed that 78% of parents felt more involved as a result of the experience and 84% of parents felt that their child had learned a lot. Parent feedback about the hui included: “a relaxed and friendly experience. A great idea of what the emphasis is for the year”...and that “it is nice to be involved in a specific school exercise and see the girls performing; otherwise we have very little idea of the output from Year 11 Drama.”

Teachers noted that more frequent correspondence with whanau through regular emails and sharing of work via the Internet led to more parents attending performances. Teachers also reported a correlation between invitations to whanau to see performances and improvement in grades. Teacher C noticed her class was more cohesive and engaged after getting students to bring their whanau to barbeques. For one teacher, the intention to involve more whanau developed into a future project where whanau stories will be central to student research for devised work.

Understanding Drama in Context

Another significant theme in the innovations of these four teachers concerned making connections between student lives and the place of drama in society. Such connections are related to “enhancing the relevance of new learning - one of the New Zealand Curriculum’s “Effective pedagogies” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p34) and supported by research such as Aitken & Sinnema (2008). Experience of theatre in authentic contexts was a major area of focus for Teacher C’s students. She wished to raise the status of achievement in the subject by providing the students with quality performance experiences - both as performers and as audience members. Winning a national award at the New Zealand One Act Play Festival for a self-devised performance was powerful for two target Pasifika students in Year 13 in 2016. Class visits to Auckland and the International Festival of the Arts in Wellington had given them first hand experiences of high quality live theatre. Teacher C observed that the professional experience of live theatre for Pasifika and Māori students gave them confidence to be bold. The students were able to perform with confidence in front of a class of Auckland drama students they had not met before. This was a huge shift from a group of students who early in 2015 she had found to be “wary and less likely to share”.

Survey results at the end of 2016, showed that students overwhelmingly felt they had gained a lot from their experiences and student success and pride in their work after these experiences was clear. Following on from seeing a very strong self-devised work by Massive Theatre Company⁴, for example, students returned enthusiastic to complete their own self-devised work based on personal stories. A subsequent survey showed that only 7% of students would have preferred teacher-given topics. Teacher C felt that making theatre that reflected their own place and people was very relevant and powerful. Target students who had been surveyed about their experiences said:

⁴ <https://www.massivecompany.co.nz/>

For me personally, with the amount of visits to different performances and workshops it truly helped me gain more knowledge about theatre life and aspects in general. Now I am confident that I can apply that knowledge and teachings to anything I do. *STUDENT A*

I really benefitted from the extra opportunities that I was given this year; especially the one act play festival as I really benefitted from partaking in the experience. *STUDENT B*

Place-based theatre making was an important aspect of the drama programme for three teachers. Work in Teacher A's department has extended into community theatre through the use of place-based pedagogy and site-based theatre. Such drama contexts provide a powerful way to connect authentically to students' lives and the communities around them. These theatre approaches also encapsulate something of the key function of theatre in society and community. Teacher A's work included taking students to the local marae to meet with elders and experience a pōwhiri which included the local intermediate and two high school students, who are members of the kapahaka team at the marae. Three different locals told stories that brought to life the connections to whenua. From this work, students created devised work that was later performed at the marae. Of this experience, students said,

- I've never been here
- This was amazing - I love it here
- That's my Koro [grandfather] there - *pointing to a photo in the corner*
- I realise that I can make a good drama out of Maori myths

Further examples of Drama contexts which which connected students to local communities and their stories came from Teacher C and D, whose students performed in local museum spaces to audiences that included parents. Parents commented:

- I absolutely loved the Museum performance - it was amazing to see how much the girls are progressing, and the setting was great. I really enjoy being an audience member
- I was impressed by the girls' confidence and enthusiasm. The venue for the Museum performance was innovative and challenging for the girls.

Teacher A now wants more devised work to be based on local stories and legends using the local marae as place to perform. She acknowledged that making connections with local iwi was a big step for her. She explains she overcame her concern to get it right and her advice now is to: "just do it - let the students know that you are keen to explore te reo and tikanga Māori and then just go for it and ask for help where they can give it." Having the support of teachers in the project to meet her goals has given her confidence, and her commitment to making a difference for her Māori and Pasifika students has driven her to form a stronger community bond.

One final example comes from Teacher D who had Year 11 students performing parents' stories that were shared at the Drama hui three weeks earlier. A survey following this performance indicated that 84% of parents felt that students had learned something about their own and/ or each others' heritage from this exercise. Responses to the work included:

- It was nice to be involved in a specific school exercise and see the girls performing;
- It's wonderful to see the girls acting with imagination and enthusiasm
- The gathering, mixing, talking, sharing the meal, meeting the others- the sense of involvement!
- Integration. Interesting fun learning and education all in one.
- Involved their own heritage and their families. Useful to listen to others.
- I just thought it was a great idea to use our real stories. I thoroughly enjoyed it!

Building Critical Thinking and Drama Literacy

This theme in the data related to the development of students' critical thinking skills in regards to both texts and examination responses, and the concept of critical literacy in Drama.

Teacher A aimed to raise student engagement in attempting examinations. For her students, Drama was not a written subject but a practical subject, so a lot of work was done in developing strategies that would help students understand more about what makes a good answer in an examination. Using work of Shirley Clark (2001) as a framework for student feedback and feedforward, as well as SOLO Taxonomy (Hook, 2011), students could be more critical about what made a clear answer. The teacher reported that for the first time in her experience at the school, all students attended the examination at her targeted Level 1, even though this particular examination was the very last NCEA exam timetabled for the year. She puts this attendance down to the increased confidence students had in their ability to sit the examination because of the work they had undertaken. On surveying them about the examinations they said they now realised how important the exams were for endorsement and that being helped in these different ways gave them a greater understanding of what was required. For these students it was a significant shift.

Another example of a strategy that aimed to develop students critical thinking skills came from the work of Teacher D. In the development of her programmes, she employed the use of thematic frames - such as Big ideas and Big Questions - as a lens to view performance texts through. The use of Big Ideas in education is a way to support students in their meaning making, activating deeper thought and connections (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). In approaching performance texts this way, this teacher deepened her students' understanding that drama worlds are a means to explore the real world and in fact, this is central to the value and purpose of the artform in society. Drama had become something bigger than the NCEA Achievement standards or assessment students undertake:

Year 12 Drama students are excited about taking their concerns
about the impact of social media on young people further by ...
they want to use theatre to create a change in other students' lives.
TEACHER D

One student noted: "I now have a wider world understanding and relate to what we do in the world; Drama doesn't need to be a traditional (Naturalistic like TV) performance to be art."

While not specifically an intervention of cultural responsiveness, this was a feature of effective drama pedagogy and essential to enabling all students to engage in the kinds of critical thinking needed to achieve in Senior Drama and to appreciate the possibilities the subject offers students to critique and challenge social and political worlds.

This leads us to the notion of critical literacy. Heather Coffey (2008, p1) defines critical literacy as "the ability to read texts in an active, reflective manner in order to better understand power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships". She explains that teachers who actively develop critical literacy in their students enable them to interrogate societal issues and institutions and to discover the inequalities that exist for many peoples in our world.

Having selected and explored Pasifika play texts with her students, Teacher B was feeling discomfort around statements the students were making following the performance of the Pasifika play, *The White Guitar* - written by Fa'amoana John Luafutu, Matthias Luafutu and. Malo Luafutu. This included students concluding that family violence was a cultural aspect of being Samoan. The question around how this could be discussed with the students without statements that framed negative aspects of the family's life as cultural was explored by the TLIF group. With the help of a tertiary educator, they looked again at questioning the voice and the lens that texts are constructed from. In understanding the constructs of the text, they were then able to identify their bias. Discussions were held with the students around the fact that the cultural displacement

of moving to New Zealand created levels of stress that lead to the violence and not that violence was a feature of Samoan culture. This is an important dimension that needs to be highlighted for all drama teachers working with texts that depict cultures and feature cultural stereotypes. A common choice for NCEA Drama is the play *Niu Sila* by Dave Armstrong, which also features stereotypes of Samoan characters and social issues that are experienced in some Samoan communities in New Zealand. Michelle Johansson's (2012) work, *Dusky maiden- noble savage: Pasifika representation in the NCEA drama classroom* is an important resource for drama teachers and their students wishing to confront the negative stereotypes that often can be drawn from a less critical reading of these play texts.

Te reo and tikanga Māori

The increased visibility of te reo Māori has been an aspect that may have helped engagement of Māori students. Teachers in this project looked for ways to integrate te reo authentically in their classroom practice while working at their current levels of competence. Teacher B made purposeful application of whakatauki. Whakatauki offer wisdoms and insights into life and community, and became a means to reinforcing the cooperative classroom culture needed for successful drama work. These whakatauki were also related to the *Habits of Mind* principles the teacher was working with in her classes. The teacher explained, "I felt nervous and self-conscious – but the students enjoyed it and took an active part in unpacking and translating these. It was interesting to relate the whakatauki to some aspect of the class."

Similarly, Teacher A introduced waiata at Year 9, as well as ongoing use of greetings, instructions and dates in te reo Māori. She reports that this has strengthened relationships with her Māori students, and her own confidence and willingness to grow in her understanding of tikanga Māori.

The innovations went beyond the use of te reo and whakatauki as teachers sought to bring Te Ao Māori into the classroom. The use of Māori texts with Teacher D's Year 13 students had been a strength in the programme for a while. These texts provided insights into Te Ao Māori and the experience of Māori as a colonised people. In addition to this, Teacher D sought to integrate tikanga more deeply by having the principles of manaakitanga and whanaungatanga actively underpin the department's vision. A waiata that supports the vision of openness and generosity is now being introduced by the department .

When Teacher C moving to a new school context, issues of biculturalism in predominantly non-Māori classrooms for arose and were discussed by the group. Teacher C had been struggling to find as many meaningful links as she would have liked within the current curriculum programmes. Going back to the Tātaiako cultural competencies (Ministry of Education, 2011) as a guide was helpful - she chose to focus on whanaungatanga, supporting the learners and bringing as many Māori and Pasifika aspects to her programme as she could.

Impact on student achievement across the four secondary schools

While all participants felt that the quality of student relationships, their collaboration, engagement and motivation was improved as a result of the interventions not all of these outcomes are reflected in achievement results. When examining the attendance and attainment in NCEA, the following outcomes were reported by each school:

Teacher A

In 2016, Teacher A reported students gained greater confidence in knowing the kinds of answers that were expected in an examination by using the SOLO taxonomy to mark practice answers. The teacher was pleased to see a big shift in attendance between 2015 and 2016 at the examination for Level 1. This teacher reflected that her personalised learning programme (where she targeted students early in the year through interviews about what they would like to achieve) and the accountability to the group to report on progress was what drove her. In doing so she discovered that "taking the time to talk to the students means that they really understand that I am there for them in the classroom."

Teacher B

In 2016 the target group was made up of eight Year 13 students. All these target students achieved, maintained or improved on their grades of the previous year. Interestingly, one student (Samoan), dropped off in all other subjects, not achieving an overall pass for the year; however, she continued to achieve at Merit level in Drama. Another target Māori student achieved a grade higher in 2 of the 4 assessments.

Teacher C

Students achieved highly when they had been fully engaged in both seeing and devising theatre. Teacher C found there was a positive correlation between whanau attendance at performance assessments and results. This was shown with the target group who were in the play that their whanau did attend. Teacher C strongly believes that it was whanau support alone that took her target student all the way to Invercargill for the One Act Play Final.

Teacher D

Modelling, and peer assessment of practice questions were used to deepen students' understanding of examination requirements. Level 2 external results showed that overall there was a 30% increase in endorsements for that cohort from 2015 to 2016. 75% of targeted Māori and Pasifika students increased their endorsements across Level 1 and Level 2 in 2016.

Conclusion

Teacher shifts in practice - reasons and impact on teaching, learning and student achievement

The task of moving beyond their own cultural norms can seem daunting but the support and encouragement offered by the group was instrumental in enabling these teachers to take new risks. Through professional learning facilitated by experts, teachers engaged with current literature into culturally responsive teaching and gave attention to key MOE policy documents supporting these aspirations. Drawing on key documents such as Tātaiako (Ministry of Education, 2011) and Bishop's Effective Teaching Profile (Bishop and Berryman, 2009), teachers were increasingly able to embed cultural competencies into their programmes and daily teaching.

As the findings reveal, these teachers made several key shifts in their teaching practice towards being increasingly responsive to culture in their classes - particularly to the Māori and Pasifika students they teach. Māori and Pasifika students' engagement and achievement was seen to improve. There was an increase in use of te reo and waiata as well as a greater openness to Te Ao Māori, and to the values of whanaungatanga and manaakitanga that enrich the development of an effective drama ensemble culture. Rather than being seen as a layer of teaching practice that must be added to address disparity, these teachers came to appreciate the power of these values to build and enrich an effective classroom community who make theatre together - theatre that matters and reflects their identities, their histories and their stories. Considerable thought was given to develop strategies to increase student voice in classroom and to share power with their students in innovative ways. When the stakes of NCEA achievement outcomes are high, these teachers' willingness to take risks and let go, not knowing the outcomes of student choice, show both fortitude and adaptive expertise.

Innovations also saw teachers opening out, to bring in the wider communities of theatre and drama practitioners and whanau. This broadening has enabled the perceived status of Drama as both a subject and a contemporary artform to rise in the minds of students and their whanau. In turn, the relevance of engaging in drama practice and achieving in this discipline was enhanced. Teachers achieved this through attention to finding opportunities to increase place-based drama, community theatre and in their selection of drama contexts. Students were exposed to live theatre and increased their involvement in live theatre performance, particularly where Māori and Pasifika players and texts were featured. Local resources such as museums and stories from both whanau and local iwi provided powerful contexts. Along with greater engagement, it was noted that students had an increased sense of pride in their work and an appreciation for Drama as a practice. Some teachers found students wanted to be ambassadors for Drama

across their school and noted a change in classroom culture characterised by greater student ownership.

Finally, working together in a community of learners, across schools and with tertiary experts, had a positive impact of the engagement of teachers in this initiative, and on the nature of their innovations. The group provided support, accountability, fresh ideas and a means to bridging research and classroom practice. Advice and guidance from professionals was seen as particularly valuable. This included timely classroom observations that informed the overall picture, undertaking student interviews and providing assistance in clarifying teacher direction.

It was challenging to gather data that could prove a direct correlation between interventions and the impact on student achievement due to the many factors that play into student performance in NCEA. However, teachers did use a range of measures to gauge impact - their observations of student attitude, motivation, attendance and achievement; their experiences and the reported responses of whanau (through surveys and other exchanges) and their conversations with their students. Many of the dimensions of Bishop's Effective Teaching Profile for Māori learners (Bishop and Berryman, 2009) are dispositional and require the inner life of teachers to align with the wairua (spirit) of this kaupapa. As such, the impact of these dispositional and attitudinal shifts on student achievement needs to be measured over a longer period of time.

Certainly, the data suggests that this project has allowed for a deeper and more authentic relationship to develop between students and the subject of Drama; between students, their whanau and the school; between teachers and their students, between students of diverse backgrounds, and between teachers and their peers in Drama education. These relationships are characterised by aspirations towards whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, mana motuhake, kotahitanga, wānanga, tangata whenuatanga and āko (Bishop, 2012; Ministry of Education, 2011)

It is important to note the significant role of funding that enabled this group to engage in the project. Teacher release time was vital in order for the group to study and reflect on culturally responsive pedagogy with the help of tertiary drama educators, to apply these understandings to their plans of action and later, to reflect on progress. This also provided teachers the time to collaborate with each other, talk about their learning, ask questions of one another and seek further clarification in understanding the innovations they might implement. Funding also enabled the group to engage in professional learning, where they explored teaching strategies that might enhance critical literacy and thinking, as well as enabling drama educators to observe the teachers in the classroom and give specific feedback. Teachers valued this critical eye, which helped them to reflect further on their cultural responsiveness, their own practice and clarify ways forward. In addition, this independent drama educator interviewed individual students - enabling greater distance to obtain more objective views from students for the teachers concerned.

Challenges

The challenges of the project centred around two key areas - the practicalities of carrying such a project with time-poor teachers and the challenges that arise for teachers wishing to develop their cultural competence in an authentic way, while working in school contexts and institutional systems that may not necessarily be ready to embrace the outworkings of these aspirations.

Although teachers did receive release time to gather and record evidence, this still posed a significant challenge. Time away from the classroom has been valuable but the pressures of the classroom do not disappear and coordination of relief and students were still demands teachers needed to meet. The project leader was under considerable pressure as the driver of the project and the key writer of milestones. Although interesting, she explains that the work has "eaten into a lot of personal time".

The challenges arising from the aspiration to implement culturally responsive pedagogies centred around fears of tokenism, of unintentionally causing offence and the risk that teachers might alienate their target students further by choosing to highlight

their cultural differences. For Teacher A, the visit to the local marae had necessitated time for her to work through her own fears of getting it wrong. In the end, she negotiated with the marae through emails to take her Year 13 students and they ran the day according to the marae's suggestions. The teacher had wanted to do this for a long time but had wanted to get it right. She described her own personal journey as one of learning to be brave and reaching out.

The project also challenged traces of deficit thinking in participants, challenged school norms and presented each teacher with the challenge of change. This not only impacted teachers but whanau too - who were not necessarily used to engaging with teachers and performances to the extent these teachers were now seeking. The challenge of sustaining interest from whanau was an aspect experienced at one school - once the barbeques and trips were over and the devising work was complete, audience numbers dropped and the gains in achievement were not sustained.

Next steps

All teachers involved in this project have asked for further informal collaboration between one another as Critical Friends. Accountability to their respective personal learning focus and goals they feel has been hugely beneficial. Continuing with the innovations across different cohorts and with new staff has been workable because of the clear vision and direction they gained through the professional collaboration, and it would be good to see this develop further.

As Heads of Department, these teachers were not only considering their personal teaching practice, but how they might lead and model innovations that would deepen the cultural competence of their staff and the cultural responsiveness within their departments. These HODs noted that clear communication, being collaborative in terms of ensuring staff feel empowered, having time to hold staff members accountable through regular meetings, and one on one conversations were essential factors in sustaining this focus and effecting change.

It would be interesting to explore whether increased whanau engagement does lead to greater retention of drama students or increased popularity for the subject. Drama teachers often report feeling their subject is undervalued against more traditional disciplines, an attitude that could be encountered in staff rooms as well as homes and increasing the subject's impact and visibility for whanau may give students increased permission to engage with the subject throughout senior secondary school.

Authentic shifts in the cultural competence of school teachers needs to be supported on a systemic level so bringing the project to school leaders, and to professional learning conversations with other teachers seeking to develop cultural competence, will be a positive next step.

Glossary

āko – reciprocal learning between teacher and student

hui – meeting of people

iwi - tribe

kapahaka – traditional Māori performing arts

kaupapa – agenda, policy, approach

manaakitanga – support and hospitality towards others

mana motuhake – self-determination and autonomy

marae – a communal meeting place for both social and ceremonial use

pōwhiri – an official welcome ceremony

Te Ao Māori – the Māori world

te reo Māori – the Māori language

tikanga – the customs and protocols of Māori iwi

waiata - songs

wairua - spirit

whakatauki - proverbs

whanaungatanga – a relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging

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