

Cultural Taxation: Myth or Reality? Research in Progress

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Abstract

This presentation discusses the rationale and proposed research methods of a research project currently under development in Christchurch, New Zealand. The primary objective of this study is to document the experiences of Māori academics working in mainstream tertiary institutions. Of particular interest will be whether these academics experience any form of cultural taxation and to what extent. This study will identify the ways in which these academics are affected by cultural taxation and discuss the prevalence of the phenomenon.

The impetus for this study is twofold. Initially this research draws on my personal experiences and observations having worked in mainstream tertiary institutions for the past 17 years. During this time I have witnessed and personally experienced many aspects of cultural taxation on a regular basis. Often these 'acts of taxation' are located within the parameters of cultural customs and protocols.

Secondly, having undertaken research in 2011, I identified that Māori teachers in English medium Eurocentric settings are often faced with significant challenges. These challenges, although not limited to, include intercultural misunderstandings and the additional cultural expectations and responsibilities placed upon them from senior management and non-Māori colleagues. These additional expectations and tasks all impact on the wellbeing of Māori educators. All teachers interviewed in this study identified feelings of exhaustion and 'burn out' resulting from the ongoing cultural taxation that they had experienced in their respective schools.

Keywords: Cultural taxation, Māori academics, Indigenous teachers

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Introduction

This current research project builds on research undertaken for my Master of Education, which examined the lived experiences of six Māori teachers who had recently graduated from Hōaka Pounamu (Graduate Diploma in Immersion and Bilingual Teaching) at the University of Canterbury. The primary objective of this Masters research was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and various challenges confronting this group of Māori teachers working in English medium primary and secondary schools. These schools were all located in the Canterbury region of New Zealand's South Island. Each of these schools was, to varying degrees, dominated by what appeared to be a Eurocentric institutional culture of schooling.

This current study focuses on the dominant theme of 'cultural taxation', something that was highlighted by all research participants in the earlier study. The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Māori academics working in cross discipline faculties throughout 'mainstream' tertiary institutions in New Zealand.

Background

The Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840 between Māori and the Crown is the founding document of New Zealand. The Treaty of Waitangi recognises the unique status of Māori and the bicultural partnership that this document guarantees. In recent years recognition of the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi and its subsequent principles of 'partnership, active protection and participation' have been included in government legislation and policy (Hayward, 2009). In acknowledging this status schools and tertiary institutions are obliged to recognise the Treaty of Waitangi in formal documents and in programme delivery.

Further to recognising and giving act to the Treaty of Waitangi, and its principles, educators have ethical and professional responsibilities that shape their practice. Bicultural practitioners, such as those envisaged by the New Zealand Teachers Council Registered Teacher Criteria and the Professional standards for school leaders, require teachers and principals to be capable of performing tasks such as actively participating in hui (gathering or meeting) and pōwhiri (ceremonial welcome).

These cultural customs, known as tikanga Māori, underpin the essence of being Māori and are of considerable importance. Tikanga Māori is a term that encapsulates the customs, culture, protocols and procedures and the traditions of Māori. The actual word tikanga comes from the root word 'tika' which means 'correct' or 'right' so tikanga means 'the correct way of doing things' or 'the correct protocols'. Adding the word Māori then means 'the correct Māori way of doing things' or 'the correct Māori protocols'. Tikanga regulates the daily order of life, dictates the way in which one acts and behaves, and preserves the customs and lores handed down from generation to generation. Understandably, it is important that these protocols are enacted correctly and according to tikanga. All educators have a responsibility to be adept biculturally and be

able to fulfil their responsibilities under government legislation, school charters and institution strategic plans. However, when non-Māori choose not to participate in culturally based ceremonies or practices these additional expectations and responsibilities will often default to Māori staff members. In turn, non-Māori teachers who are biculturally adept will in turn reduce the potential for their Māori colleagues to be affected by culturally taxation.

Cultural taxation

Amado Padilla initially identified the notion of cultural taxation in a paper written for the Educational Researcher in 1994. What constitutes cultural taxation can be as varied as it is diverse but has a central theme whereby additional responsibilities and expectations are placed on ethnic minority staff with, either little, or no recognition of this additional burden. Latterly, other authors have explored this idea of cultural taxation (Hirshfield & Joseph, 2008; Samano, 2007), which according to Padilla (1994) is defined as:

the obligation to show good citizenship toward the institution by serving its need for ethnic representation on committees, or to demonstrate knowledge and commitment to a cultural group, which may bring accolades to the institution but which is not usually rewarded by the institution on whose behalf the service was performed (p.26).

Ibarra (2003) describes similar experiences as “minority burden” and defines this as the “overcommitment to minority activities/teaching” (p. 209). More recently Samano (2007) describes the concept as “the undervalued additional workload burden (related to diversity) experienced by faculty of colour” (p. 18). In his study Samano (2007, pp126-127) identified five dominant themes that offer a further insight into the concept of cultural taxation. These themes are 1) Cultural taxation and racist bigotry, 2) Cultural taxation and convenience, 3) Cultural taxation and conscious 4) Cultural taxation and ignorance, 5) Cultural taxation and pragmatism.

Padilla (1994) also notes some of the more easily recognised forms of cultural taxation as being asked to provide expertise in matters of diversity within an organisation, and being asked to educate individuals of the majority group on such matters. Furthermore, minority academics may be asked to serve on committees or act as a liaison between the organisation and the ethnic community, even though their own personal views may not align nor do they agree with the institutions stance or policies. Finally, being asked to provide translation services as well as being asked to act as a mediator for any socio-cultural differences within an institution are further illustrations of cultural taxation.

I would go further and suggest that in some situations the persons asked to fulfil these various tasks or roles may not be themselves, knowledgeable or comfortable to do so. Teaching into a te reo Māori language class with a lower level of language proficiency, being asked to perform important roles during ceremonial welcomes and being the Māori representative on committees simply because you are Māori makes an assumption that individuals can, and will want to, fulfil these roles. Moreover, while an institution (or senior manager) may be genuine in acknowledging individual staff members indigenous

status by asking them to fulfil these Māori roles does however absolve non-Māori of any responsibility to further develop their own competency. In turn this continues to perpetuate the responsibility on Māori individuals and in environments where Māori are a significant minority these tasks are unevenly distributed.

To further compound this issue these duties are often not listed in job descriptions nor are they recognised or given the status that accompanies the additional responsibility. With increased demands placed on academics to deliver research outputs to fulfil PBRF (Performance Based Research Funding) requirements, coupled with increasing teaching loads, additional workload can amplify the pressure on what is already a full time workload. To complicate this issue once an individual agrees to fulfil a Māori specific role or perform a Māori specific task they may unwittingly signal their ongoing desire to be called upon again in the future. This in turn may then place those individuals in a position where they either feel obliged or do not feel comfortable to say no to subsequent requests.

However in contrast to the above there may be individuals who relish the opportunity to show leadership and/or mentorship in these areas and who are genuinely agreeable to fulfilling these additional culturally specific roles. In looking at the term itself 'taxation' indicates a notion of something burdensome and unfavourable. Therefore the notion of cultural taxation insights a feeling of unwanted pressure added to Māori or indigenous educators work life, or rather something that is unquestionable imposed by one party to another. One must recognise however that power is relational, that it is a two way and not always driven from the top down. Individuals who happily fulfil these additional duties themselves may like the authority or specifically the mana that is bestowed upon them when they undertake these roles.

Motivation for study

The impetus to conduct this study is twofold. I have worked in mainstream tertiary institutions for the past 17 years. During this time I have witnessed and personally experienced many aspects of cultural taxation on a regular basis. As mentioned previously often these 'acts of taxation' are located within the parameters of cultural customs and protocols. An example of this is the traditional Māori welcome ceremony known as pōwhiri or pōwhiri. Afforded to visitors of all status, the pōwhiri requires complementary roles of both males and females. Many education settings are female dominated environments where the roles can be more easily shared. However, when there are very few males these individuals are left to fulfil the male orientated cultural role of speech making at every welcome ceremony. While it is appropriate that Māori lead these cultural practices, or at least afforded the opportunity, this is often done with little or no financial recognition or acknowledgement by the institution. Other forms of taxation that I have observed, and in fact experienced, are being asked to serve on committees, research projects and interview panels as the 'Māori' representative, organising and/or facilitating Māori initiatives, the leading of karakia (prayers/incantations) and other cultural customs.

The second contributing influence for undertaking this research project was the data from my Masters thesis (Torepe, 2011). The participants narratives highlighted that the Māori teachers I interviewed are also faced with the reality of cultural taxation in their daily professional lives. The challenge of working in an Eurocentric environment, intercultural misunderstandings and the additional cultural expectations and responsibilities all impact on the wellbeing of Māori educators. All teachers interviewed in this study identified feelings of exhaustion and 'burn out' resulting from the ongoing cultural taxation that they had experienced in their respective schools.

I am drawn by my own experiences and those of my colleagues to want to gain an understanding of the degree in which Māori academics are effected by cultural taxation. The concept of additional cultural expectations being placed on ethnic minority or indigenous peoples is not unique, nor limited, to New Zealand. Such studies have been undertaken in Australia (Asmar & Page, 2009; Reid, 2004; Reid & Santoro, 2006; Santoro, 2007) and the United States of America (Padilla, 1994; Samano, 2007; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012; Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011). Research in Australia (Reid & Santoro, 2006; Santoro, 2007) reveals that minority teachers are burdened with tasks in which they are expected to perform purely on account of their ethnicity.

Highlighted throughout the international literature is a consistent pattern of cultural taxation, irrespective of ethnic minority or indigenous status. Acknowledging this international literature, and the lack of current national research, leads me to question the domestic situation for Māori academics. Is cultural taxation only an issue in the environment that I work in? Is it more widespread than my own faculty? Than my own institution? Furthermore it is important to locate these local experiences alongside of international colleagues, whilst not necessarily of Māori descent but as ethnic minority academics in predominantly white institutions.

Proposed research methodology - Kaupapa Māori

While I am somewhat confined by Western research conventions of a university system and the processes required of completing doctoral research, the heart of this study is with the participants and outcomes that will eventuate. Moreover, given the theoretical perspective and subsequent design of the research, this project will intentionally not use traditional Western words such as 'elite interview' or 'participants'. Instead concepts and ideas taken from traditional Māori ways of knowing will be used.

As a Ngāi Tahu researcher working with Māori participants from a range of iwi backgrounds, it is not only appropriate but important that this research is conducted within a Kaupapa Māori framework. Irwin (1994) defines Kaupapa Māori research as:

Research that is 'culturally safe', which involves the 'mentorship' of kaumatua, which is culturally relevant and appropriate while satisfying the rigour of research, and which is undertaken by a Māori researcher, not a researcher who happens to be Māori (p. 27)

Kaupapa Māori research has become an area of research interest in recent years by many leading academics. Issues around what constitutes kaupapa Māori research, its definition and who can undertake this research has been discussed at length and has been the focus of conference presentations, journal articles and topics of postgraduate study. However, irrespective of the author and their definitions, many leading scholars suggest that Māori should lead research relating to Māori (Bishop, 1992). Moreover, inherently embedded throughout kaupapa Māori research is the practice of tikanga Māori. Smith (1999) lists seven culturally appropriate practices that Māori researchers should be mindful of:

1. Aroha ki te tangata (a respect for people)
2. Kanohi kitea (the seen face, that is present yourself to people face to face).
3. Titiro, whakarongo ... kōrero (look, listen ... speak).
4. Manaaki ki te tangata (share and host people, be generous)
5. Kia tupato (be cautious).
6. Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata (do not trample over the *mana* of people).
7. Kaua e mahaki (don't flaunt your knowledge) (p.120)

Kana and Tamatea (2006) have also identified key understandings that embody kaupapa Māori thoughts and values. These six understandings include mana whenua, whakapapa, whanaungatanga, ahi kā, kanohi ki te kanohi and kanohi kitea. In relation to research settings, Kana and Tamatea propose that the notion of Mana whenua (political control/authority over land) would imply that researchers should (repeatedly) return to where their research projects are located to better enable them to appreciate the stories shared by research participants and/or to form stronger links to the ancestral landscapes often central to their participants' narratives.

Kana and Tamatea suggest that researchers and participants should be aware of, and accept, the whakapapa (genealogy) of each other. Furthermore, researchers should be required to have a continued and open dialogue with participants and practice whanaungatanga. This concept is about the relationship, and the values of trust, loyalty, dedication, commitment and aroha (respect) earned and reciprocated between a researcher and the participants. Walker (as cited in Kana & Tamatea, 2006) to describe the implications of ahi kā or the 'well-lit fires of the home area' (p. 43). The concept of ahi kā applied in a research setting involves the participants and their whānau referring to the stories of their 'home fires' and, inevitably, senses of place and identity. Given the importance of ahi kā, or place-attachment, it is important that researchers continually return 'home' to contribute to their 'home fires' and to keep them 'lit'.

Kana and Tamatea's account of Kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face), meanwhile, is embodied by the whakataukī (proverb) 'He kitenga kanohi, he hokinga whakaaro' which means: 'when a face is seen, after a period of absence, memories associated with that face return'. This idea allows the participants to share their stories in a manner where trust and integrity is already understood. Thus, Kanohi kitea (the seen face) can be signified by a researcher participating, or being seen, in the participants' community and thus being accepted by the participants.

It will be these cultural practices and principles embedded throughout this research project that will provide the overarching framework and foundation for my interactions with those participating and contributing to this study.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this study is to document the experiences of Māori academics working in mainstream tertiary institutions. Of particular interest will be whether these academics experience any form of cultural taxation and to what extent. This study will identify the ways in which these academics are affected by cultural taxation and discuss the prevalence of the phenomenon.

The wellbeing of Māori academics is an issue worthy of research. Despite numerous government initiatives, legislation and strategies to raise the academic achievement of Māori students, there is very little recent qualitative research available nationally that specifically addresses the needs of Māori teachers or educators. However, research undertaken for my Master's degree (Torepe, 2011) identified Māori teachers in mainstream settings are often faced with significant challenges. The challenge of working in an Eurocentric environment, intercultural misunderstandings and the additional cultural expectations and responsibilities all impact on the wellbeing of Māori educators.

This study will contribute to a national and international discourse that seeks to develop an understanding of the workload and cultural pressures placed specifically on Māori academics by their institution and colleagues. Furthermore it will contribute to the small pool of national literature in this subject area and locate a New Zealand experience alongside that of international authors.

Glossary

<i>Ahi kā</i>	home fires, lace attachment
<i>aroha</i>	respect
<i>hui</i>	gathering, meeting
<i>kanohi kitea</i>	the seen face
<i>kanohi ki te kanohi</i>	face to face
<i>karakia</i>	prayers, incantations
<i>kaupapa Māori</i>	Māori ideology - a philosophical doctrine, incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of Māori society.
<i>mana</i>	prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status
<i>mana whenua</i>	territorial rights, authority over land or territory
<i>Māori</i>	indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand
<i>Ngāi Tahu</i>	tribal group of much of the South Island, New Zealand
<i>pōwhiri</i>	ceremonial Māori welcome
<i>te reo Māori</i>	the Māori language
<i>tikanga</i>	correct procedure, custom, practice, protocol
<i>whakapapa</i>	genealogy
<i>whanaungatanga</i>	relationship, kinship, sense of family connection

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