Constructing diversity through philosophy statements in Aotearoa New Zealand

Winter Research Seminar
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Contextualising discourses of diversity and education

- Rata (2001, p.190) argues “The recognition of and the treatment of diversity occurs within a social and historical context”.
- “It is indeed important to contextualise educational discourse and to look at the broader social, economic and political context in which it takes place” Vandenbroeck (2007, p.28).

Discourse

"A discourse is a way of thinking about a phenomenon or topic that produces certain ideas and other ideas and expectations" (Drewery & Bird, 2006, p. 6).

"Practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49)

Discourses operate through language and practices

Bicultural context

- In 1840 Treat of Waitangi signed to formalise the relationship between Maori and Pakeha but commitments made in the Treaty of Waitangi were soon trivialised or ignored
- In 1970s Treaty of Waitangi became recognised again and instantiated as a document of moral and political standing
- Now a commitment to the principles of the Treaty in areas of state activity, particularly with regard to policy and decision making in relation to the social, economic, political and natural resources of the country.
- At times the bicultural discourse is articulated in terms of Maori /Pakeha and at other times, particularly more recently as Maori/Pakeha and other recent immigrant groups (Brown, Clark, gilling, Waitere, 2007; Rata, 2007).

Against backdrop of bicultural discourse…increasing diversity

- Families experiences of cultural identity increasingly diverse
- Gap between the economically poor and the economically wealthy increasing
- Forms that families take becoming more varied
- Children with a greater range of disabilities attending early childhood settings

Increasing ethnic diversification in early childhood centres (2007-2011)

Increase in enrolments in early childhood settings

- Maori children increased by 23%
- Pacific Island children increased by 30%
- Asian children have by 41%
- Pakeha/European children increased by 7%
- Children other ethnic backgrounds increased by 7%
- 71 different languages spoken by children and adults in early childhood settings

(Education Counts, 2011).

Research project: the diversity of diversity

- How are teachers responding to this diversity?
- National Survey of 1,517 licensed centres asking a mix of demographic and opened ended questions along with a number of rating scales (25% response rate)
- Survey had 110 items – 100 were fixed response
- Case studies of 7 early childhood centres and a home-based service

- Case studies of a kindergarten and a parent-led service
- Case studies reveal the influence of the individual centre's contexts, histories and the biographies of the teachers and parents on the statements that are made about diversity and the way they are enacted (Loveridge, 2012).

- Some similarities but the combination of statements and the way they were enacted effected subtle differences
- Distinct coherence and logic to the dominant statements in each context
- Important to attend to what is effected by the multiple and some times contradictory discourses within centres rather than to focus on what might appear to be the dominant discourse

- We need more contextualised analyses which are open to the complex and dynamic intersections in the different aspects of what is commonly referred to as “diversity”.
- Raised the more general question of how other early childhood centres had constructed diversity in their philosophy statements

Sources of data from the survey

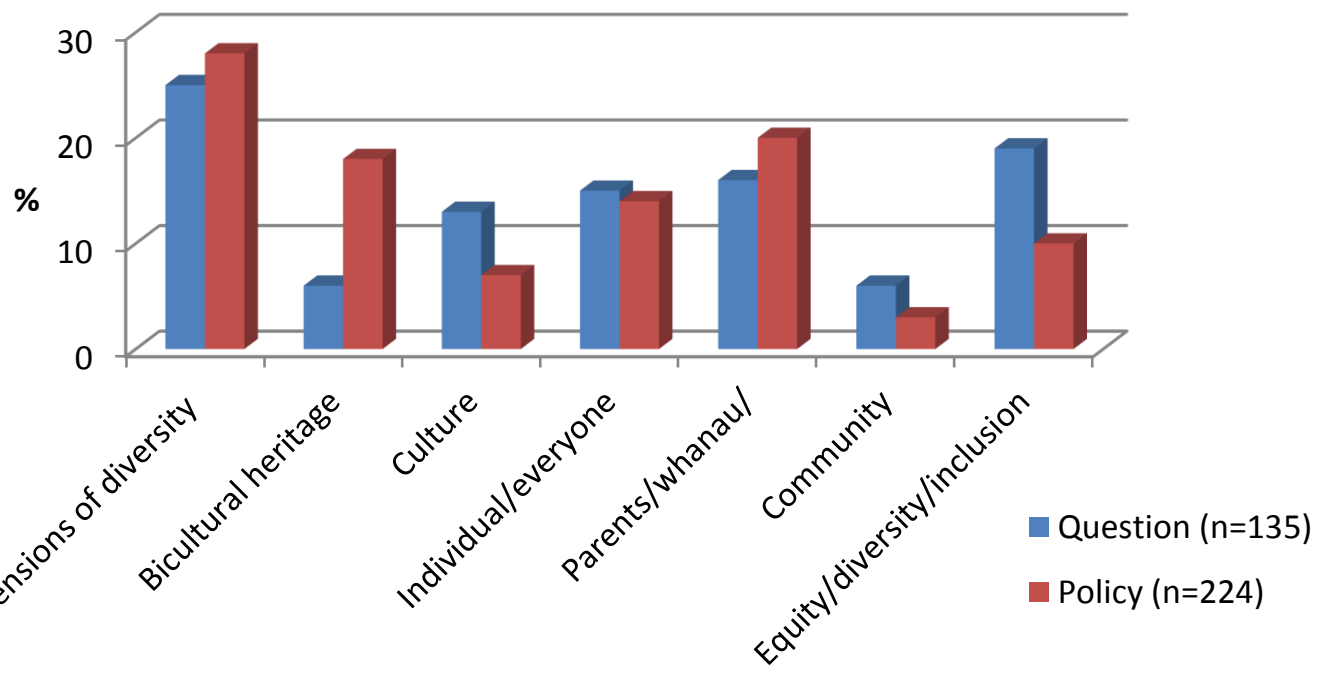
- Question 10: Does your service's written philosophy include statements that make reference to aspects of diversity? If yes please list any relevant statements below or attach a copy of your service's philsophy highlighting any statements you feel are relevant to the issue of diversity.

Response rate to Q10

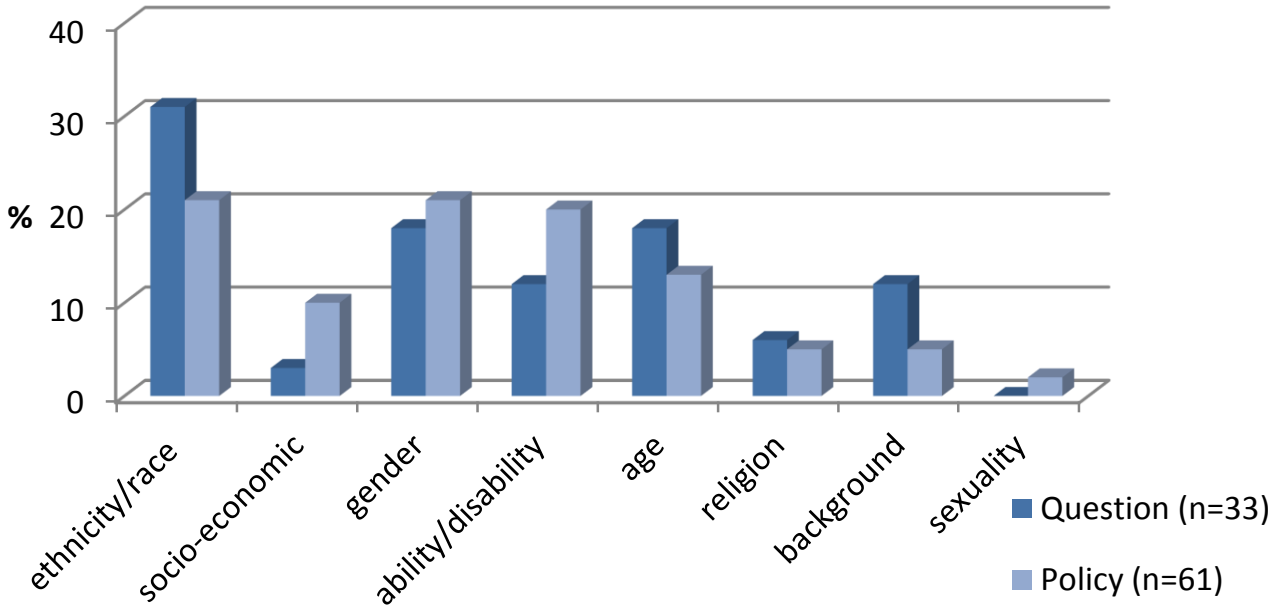
- 335 surveys returned
- 280 “yes”, 20 “no”, 12 “under review”
- 68 wrote something in space provided
- 62 philosophy statements attached

- Codes established on the basis of what had been written in response to Q10.
- These same codes then used to code the philosophy statements.
- Question 10 produced 135 coded statements.
- Philosophy statements produced 224 coded statements.

References to diversity in services' philosophy statements



Breakdown of dimensions of diversity in services' philosophy statements



Dimensions of diversity

- The policies and practices at *Children's centre* will provide equitable opportunities for learning irrespective of gender, ability, age, ethnicity or background. (Q10)
- We believe all children have the right to early childhood education through the provision of a quality programme, respecting differences such as gender, ethnicity, socio-economic, religious, culture, location and ability. We believe in the application of the principles of equity for teachers, parents, children and communities. (Philosophy)

Bicultural heritage

- That children have an awareness of and appreciation for their bicultural heritage. (Q10)
- Acknowledges the partnership inherent in Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the right of each child to be enriched in the dual heritage of New Zealand. (Philosophy)

Culture

- *Valley childcare* ensures that both the programme and staff are responsive to different cultures and heritages among the families of our children. (Q10)
- We value children's cultural backgrounds and believe that through the acceptance and sharing of our unique differences we will further enrich a child's holistic difference. (Philosophy)

Individual/all/every

- Caring family environment where all children are valued and respected as individuals. (Q10)
- We recognize that every child is unique. (Philosophy)

Family/Whanau

- We believe that building relationships with parents/whanau and involving them and the children in decision making is an integral part of our kindergarten. (Q10)
- We recognize the importance of partnership with families and whanau in building a programme that facilitates the opportunities for children to reach their potential. (Policy)

Community

- We value input from families and the wider community and believe all children learn their backgrounds and cultures. (Q10)
- We have a genuine commitment to valuing the diverse cultural identities in our community. (Policy)

Equity/Diversity/Inclusion

- No child shall be excluded; we celebrate diversity and employ wide ethnic mix of teachers to provide for our diverse roll. (Q10)
- Acknowledge and value diversity (Policy)

“Doing diversity”

- What is said as well as what is not said?
- Interested in the blandness- the formulaic nature of the statements -the sense that this was about all and everyone – the lack of reference to inequality.
- “beauty lies in the eye of the beholder” –does diversity also lie in the eye of the beholder? Who are respondents thinking of when they think of all, everyone, families the community?
- Interested in the sparse references to the economic situation of families and sexuality in particular

- Reminded of critique that diversity individuates difference, conceals inequalities, neutralises histories of antagonism and struggle (Bell & Hartman, 2007)
- Also that statements about diversity are also part of an audit culture, the bureaucratization of diversity (Ahmed & Swan, 2006)

Where else might respondents have told us more “diverse” things about diversity?

- Question 110: Is there any issue relating to diversity in your early chidhood context that has not been covered in this survey and that you would want to comment on?
- 234 responses – (cf. 68 who had written in response to the question asking about their philosophy statement)

Other issues relating to diversity

- Poverty
- Grandparents raising children
- Parent in prison
- Gay and Lesbian families
- Specific special needs
- Challenging behaviour
- Refugees
- Immigrants
- Multiple births

Poverty

- Before the 20 hours free policy I would give free child care to families that had serious hardship. Solo parents often contribute with their time
- Family financial hardship, no costs for attending, excursions free, food available if needed, clothing from other families, empathy
- We have a family who was not able to afford the fees. I was able to find a parishioner who sponsored the child and paid the fees shortfall -$5000 – for the year

Grandparents raising children

- We have three lots of grandparents raising children. They have been very open about it and we supported them in that role.
- Grandparents raising children supported, grandmother through listening, giving advice, resources, attending CYFs meetings in support, accessing other resources
- Solo parent/Grandparents raising child have become part of norm in society. Realise these families do not have as much money and be sensitive (e.g outside funding for trips)

Parent in prison

- Solo parent mother in prison. Grandparents cared for child and continued to attend regularly
- Parent with home detention still able to participate in kindergarten activities
- Mongrel Mob father sent to prison, mother on own with three pre-schoolers, no friends and unable to cope and needing to do community service. We let her do service at the kindergarten

Gay and Lesbian families

- We have had our first lesbian headed family joining our centre. Comments by the centre children regarding this situation is “You are lucky having two mothers”
- We have had gay/lesbian families come through or centre and we have had positive feedback from these families on how accepted they felt

Solo parent families

- We have had 2 solo dads (1 through separation and 1 through mother's death). We have learnt to reduce "you can show your mum" statements in group setting and try not to ask mum/dad questions
- At times we have created two profiles for children so both sets of parents can keepp a copy of their child's progress. We have a variety of family night to cover all interested friends and whanau.

Specific special needs

- We had a student with severe autisim and epilepsy attending, his seizures were so often and strong, we needed to learn how to administer medication, restore breathing and keep him safe
- A child on the Aspergers syndrome range was unable to gain funding from GSE so we accessed equity funding to provide support and he has learned to participate in our programme.

Challenging behaviours

- We believe children are entitled to early childhood education regardless. We have had parents with behaviour issues but strived to keep children attending. We accept everybody.
- A child with severe behaviour difficulties was delivered early as the parent worked. Without this she would not have had access to a service and her issues would not have been addressed.

Refugees

- We have enrolled approximately 40 refugee children into our preschool, the first being children from the ship turned away from Australia.
- Many of our refugee families share their culture with us.
- Three refugee children free care.

Immigrants

- We have many migrant families and have chosen to employ staff from those cultures in our community so we can develop greater understanding of and provide better support for them and their children
- We have found that were a member of an ethnic group felt acceptance they shared with others from their community. We then received many enrolments from that group who were in turn able to support each other.

Multiple births

- We had 2 sets of triplets and 4 sets of twins last year, all attending the sessions that best suited their family situation.
- At present we have 4 sets of twins.

No diversity here

- Conservative “middle class’; little exposure to extreme diversity
- Due to our location we do not tend to get people in those situations. We did have a twin once and with the help of the mother dressing the children in different clothes we could identify each child

Philosophy/issues relating to diversity

- Compared with the statements about diversity reflected in philosophy statements these responses gave a much a greater sense of the very different children, families, and their resources, that are involved in early childhood centres.
- They gave a greater sense of how teachers responding to diversity is translated into practice, and how teachers work towards social justice.
- Some statements revealed a deficit orientation to the other or a “blindness” to difference that should not be mistaken for educational equity.
- Philosophy statements about diversity dealt with difference but not inequality

- discourses of empowerment, diversity and equity are widespread
- rare not to find educational programmes that do not make reference to attending to diversity,
- “slogans can be widely adopted without their translation into programmatic impact…as critical concerns have been normalised with educational discourse, they have also been modified and in many cases watered down” (Gore, 2001, p.125).

- In pre-service teacher education suggestions have been made to provide students with intercultural experiences and the opportunity for critical reflection on them with a support group (Mills, 2006).
- Garmon (2004) argues that openness, self-awareness/self-reflectiveness and commitment to social justice are implicated in teachers re-cognising social justice

- Early childhood educators work very closely with families, and they work in teams and have the opportunity to discuss and debrief.
- Case studies show that the private world penetrated the public world of the early childhood settings (Loveridge, et al. 2012)
- “Early childhood education and care in this vein is a transitional space between the public and private domain (Vandenbroek, 2007, p.30).

- Does the work based context of early childhood educators provide the opportunity for a form of extended intercultural experience and supported critical reflection on that experience…if they are open, self-reflective and have a commitment to social justice?

What does this suggest about asking about asking how teachers are responding to diversity?

- Is it still worthwhile to ask about diversity?
- Unzeueta et al. (2012) “The lack of clarity in diversity’s meaning may make the concept appealing to both people with egalitarian moves and people with anti-egalitarian motives” (p.307)
- Is there a danger that if another term is used (e.g. social justice or equity) that the same kind of watering down will occur?
- What kind of knowledge does asking about philosophy statements give us?
- How do you ask questions that enable people to talk authentically about what is being done?

Contextualised, complex, dynamic and collaborative research needed

- Need more contextualised analyses which are open to the complex and dynamic intersections in the different aspects of what is commonly referred to as “diversity” and beyond what is commonly referred to as diversity.
- One possible avenue of enquiry would be to involve teachers and parents (and grandparents) in centres in generating and analysing the kind of data that was collected for this research, both the survey data and the case study work, within an action research framework.
- Nothing about us without us…

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