

Whakawhānaungatanga:

Culturally Responsive Teaching in the Drama Classroom

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Abstract

This article outlines the pedagogical practices expert New Zealand drama teachers employ in order to build an effective ensemble culture in their classrooms, and makes connections between these practices and key dimensions of culturally responsive pedagogy. Establishing an effective ensemble culture bears strong resemblance to the establishment of *whānaungatanga* in the classroom, a core dimension in culturally responsive teaching practice. Cody (2013) found that, despite the demands of a policy environment that requires outcomes-based performance products, experienced New Zealand drama teachers prioritised relational learning in their teaching. Learning to develop the pro-social skills necessary to work effectively in an ensemble was seen by these drama teachers as both the means to facilitate high levels of student achievement in Drama, and as one of the valued outcomes of the subject discipline itself. Five key practices are identified as central to effective ensemble development and the connections these practices have to the development of *whānaungatanga* in the classroom are explored.

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Biography



Tracey-Lynne is an experienced teacher educator, working in initial teacher education in New Zealand for the past 13 years. Currently a programme co-leader for Masters and Graduate Diploma Teacher Education programmes, she lectures in Arts Education across primary and secondary sectors, with a particular specialization in drama education. Her research interests include drama pedagogy and practice in school and applied theatre settings, culturally-responsive teaching practice, and education for social

and emotional well-being.

Introduction

Culturally responsive teaching is an important topic in New Zealand education and a significant outcome of Ministry-funded, Masters-level initial teacher education programmes currently offered across the country. Cultural competence is a goal many New Zealand drama teachers have embraced, but what does cultural competence look like in the drama classroom? Drawing on doctoral research, this article outlines the ‘bones’ of culturally responsive teaching practice, which lie within effective drama teaching.

Cultural competence in New Zealand schools

As Hynds (2011) points out, New Zealand classrooms are already responsive to culture – that is, responsive to Western, middle-class traditions in education. Arguably, the impact of monoculturalism in New Zealand schools is reflected in the statistics in achievement, where Māori young people underperform when compared to other ethnic groups. Many Māori leave school without qualifications (see <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics>). Consequently, the New Zealand Ministry of Education identify Māori and Pasifika students as “priority learners” and have developed policy strategies to support their achievement: *Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success Māori Education Strategy 2008-2012* *Ka Hikitia Accelerating Success 2013-2017* and the *Pasifika Education Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2008, 2013a, 2013b). Reports into the impact of these initiatives suggest that the quality of teaching for Māori students has improved, however many schools need to do significantly more (Education Review Office, 2010).

The research project, *Te kotahitanga* (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007), investigated discourses that exist about the causes of Māori underachievement. They found students, teachers and parents subscribed to one of three discourses: Either underachievement was seen as being due to the child and their home, including influences outside of the school and the classroom; or due to structure, systems or influences outside of the classroom, but pertaining to the school itself and/or the wider education system; or due to relationships classroom, interaction patterns and influences identified as being within the classroom. Many teachers in the study were found to draw on deficit discourses, explaining the educational achievement of Māori students as a result of the students’ deficiencies:

These discourses range from students’ lack of motivation, skills or abilities to the perceived deficiencies within the students’ homes or within the school structures and systems. Teachers who hold positions such as these are unable to offer realistic solutions to these problems and also can abrogate their responsibilities for improving the achievement levels of Māori students. Such deficit theorizing blames others and results in low teacher expectations of Māori students, thus creating self-fulfilling prophecies of failure, and leaving teachers bewildered as to how to make a difference... (Bishop & Berryman, 2010, p. 178)

Deficit-theorising is also highly problematic for Pasifika learners and has been explored in depth by Mather (2013).

Whilst the underachievement for Māori and Pasifika children is of great concern, Māori leaders in education challenge the sector to move away from deficit-theorising and problematising Māori learners, to emphasise aspirational goals of an education system that allows Māori to achieve success as Māori and enables Pasifika communities to realise cultural aspirations (Bishop, 2012; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; MacFarlane, 2004).

What works for Māori learners?

Research into effective pedagogy for Māori learners strongly emphasizes the need for relational pedagogy – that is, teachers who develop quality relationships with Māori students and their whānau, and consider the social and emotional climate in their classrooms (Bishop, 2012; Hawk, Tumama Cowley, Hill, & Sutherland, 2002; McLeod, 2010; Pere, 1982).

Tātaiako, a framework designed to support New Zealand teachers in their development as culturally-competent practitioners (Ministry of Education, 2011), identifies several *cultural competencies* for teachers of Māori learners (see Table 1). In an approach that shifts the responsibility for underachievement away from Māori learners themselves, *Tātaiako* emphasises the need to for teachers to create classroom cultures that encapsulate the “vibrant contemporary Māori values and norms, reflecting the cultural milieu in which Māori students live” (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 3). Similarly, *Ka Hikitia Accelerating Success 2013-2017* emphasises the importance of the teacher-learner relationship, along with high quality teaching for diverse learning needs, and the active engagement of students (Ministry of Education, 2013a).

Table 1
 Three models of culturally responsive teaching practice for teachers of diverse learners in New Zealand schools

Tātaiako Cultural Competencies - Ministry of Education (2013)	Bishop & Berryman’s (2006) Effective teaching profile for Māori learners	Alton-Lee (2003) BES Quality Teaching for Diverse Learners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Wānanga</i>: participating with learners and communities in robust dialogue for the benefit of Māori learners’ achievement. • <i>Whānaungatanga</i>: actively engaging in respectful working relationships with Māori learners, parents and whānau, hapū, iwi and the Māori community. • <i>Manaakitanga</i>: showing integrity, sincerity and respect towards Māori beliefs, language and culture. • <i>Tangata Whenuatanga</i>: affirming Māori learners as Māori. Providing contexts for learning where the language, identity and culture of Māori learners and their whānau are affirmed. • <i>Ako</i>: taking responsibility for their own learning and that of Māori learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Manaakitanga</i> – teachers care for their students as culturally located human beings above all else. • <i>Mana motuhake</i> – teachers care for the performance of their students. • <i>Ngā whakapiringatanga</i> – teachers are able to create a secure, well-managed learning environment. • <i>Wānanga</i> – teachers are able to engage in effective teaching interactions with Māori students as Māori. • <i>Ako</i> – teachers can use strategies that promote effective teaching interactions and relationships with their learners. • <i>Kotahitanga</i> – teachers promote, monitor and reflect on outcomes that in turn lead to improvements in educational achievement for Māori students. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quality teaching is focused on student achievement (including social outcomes) and facilitates high standards of student outcomes for heterogeneous groups of students. 2. Pedagogical practices enable classes and other learning groupings to work as caring, inclusive, and cohesive learning communities. 3. Effective links are created between school and other cultural contexts in which students are socialised, to facilitate learning. 4. Quality teaching is responsive to student learning processes. 5. Opportunity to learn is effective and sufficient. 6. Multiple task contexts support learning cycles. 7. Curriculum goals, resources including ICT usage, task design, teaching and school practices are effectively aligned. 8. Pedagogy scaffolds and provides appropriate feedback on students' task engagement. 9. Pedagogy promotes learning orientations, student self-regulation, metacognitive strategies and thoughtful student discourse 10. Teachers and students engage constructively in goal-oriented assessment.

Cultural competence and New Zealand Drama teachers

Progressive education, particularly Deweyian education, has been the most influential philosophy shaping the development of New Zealand drama education. ([Dewey, 1926](#); [Greenwood, 2009, 2012](#); [Heathcote, 1984](#); [Heathcote & Bolton, 1995](#)). Accordingly, many New Zealand drama teachers aspire to create an authentic bicultural space in their drama classrooms, in recognition of the Treaty of Waitangi. These teachers emphasise a commitment to citizenship, inclusiveness, social justice and human rights, and a desire to empower and support all young people to thrive creatively and collectively ([Cody, 2013](#)). The commitment New Zealand drama teachers have made to grow in cultural competence is reflected in the regular professional development opportunities offered through Drama New Zealand conferences¹; in the many Teaching as Inquiry ([Dreaver, 2009](#)) projects secondary school drama departments are undertaking; in current Teacher-Led Innovation Fund projects² focused on raising achievement for Māori and Pasifika senior drama students; and the regular discussions on Dramanet³ concerning effective practice for Māori and Pasifika students.

In the New Zealand context, Greenwood ([1999, 2001a, 2001b](#); [Greenwood & Wilson, 2006](#)) has made a significant contribution to our understanding of what bicultural drama and theatre work might entail. Additionally, Baskerville ([2009, 2011](#)) has explored the culturally responsive potential of stories in New Zealand classrooms (a key feature in Drama work), and illuminated the development of cultural competence through engagement in a marae-based devised theatre project for Māori youth. More recently, Hindle and van Dijk ([2014](#)) examined teachers' understanding of culturally responsive practice after they engaged with a performative, integrated arts model, designed to draw on Māori worldviews and pedagogies. These authors identify five variables that significantly impacted the quality and value of culturally responsive practice in the arts-based classroom. These include: teachers' understandings of culturally responsive practice; the use of holistic approaches to learning that engage mind, body and soul; place-based strategies as a vehicle to explore and connect with cultural knowledge; the quality, nature and extent of relationships between teachers, students, parents and the wider community; and collaborative creation and leadership ([Hindle & van Dijk, 2014, p. 6](#)).

Background to this paper

My doctoral research investigated the philosophies and pedagogical practice of experienced drama teachers in New Zealand schools ([Cody, 2013](#)). Although my study focused on effective pedagogical practice for *all* drama students, and not on cultural competence per se, these pedagogical practices are also reflected in Bishop and Berryman's ([2006](#)) *Effective Teaching Profile* (see Table 1). The specific practices include:

- Valuing and reinforcing positive classroom relationships (*whānaungatanga*) including being trustworthy as a teacher (*manaakitanga*), power-sharing, and holding high expectations (*mana motuhake*);
- Skilful management of the emotional and social risks demanded by drama work through: thoughtful planning; the teaching of metacognitive strategies; and prioritising and facilitating the development of ensemble skills (*Ngā whakapiringatanga*);
- And providing opportunity for co-artistry, reflection and constructive feedback processes (*Ako; Ngā whakapiringatanga*).

In this paper, I outline these practices and explore their connection to the values emphasized in effective, culturally responsive teaching practice (see Figure 2.). Throughout this discussion I share aspects of the work of the six participants in my study – *Aroha, Grace, David, Phillip, Julia and James* to illustrate these practices.

¹ Drama New Zealand is the national subject association of Drama educators and teachers: www.drama.org.nz

² See <http://www.education.govt.nz/ministry-of-education/specific-initiatives/investing-in-educational-success/teacher-led-innovation-fund/about-the-teacher-led-innovation-fund/>

³ Dramanet is the professional support network listserv hosted by www.tki.org.nz

The research study

“How do experienced drama teachers facilitate learning in drama in New Zealand schools?” was the central research question in my doctoral research. The study investigated drama teaching practice in New Zealand primary and secondary schools, through a case-based, qualitative inquiry into the practice of six experienced drama teachers. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with these teachers to discover the complexities of their teaching practice, their philosophy of drama education, and the decisions they made in curriculum content and pedagogy. Observations of classroom practice were undertaken, along with an analysis of planning documents and a focus-group interview with some of their students. Thematic content analysis was undertaken to identify key features of philosophy and practice across these cases.

Findings and Discussion

Towards whānaungatanga - relational pedagogy and ensemble development

While focused within the New Zealand context, the dimensions of effective and culturally responsive practice outlined here translate readily to international contexts and are consistent with international literature on culturally responsive teaching ([Gay, 2002](#); [Ho, Holmes, & Cooper, 2004](#); [Villegas & Lucas, 2002](#)). Participants in my study placed significant emphasis on developing a pro-social classroom environment. Although rarely assessed directly, these teachers believe the ability to function effectively in an ensemble context is essential to achieving quality drama/theatre work in senior secondary school, as well as being one of the significant outcomes of learning in Drama. Neelands ([2009](#)) highlights the connections between ensemble learning and citizenship, describing this as:

a way of modelling how through collective artistry, negotiation, contracting of behaviour and skilful leading, the ensemble in the classroom might become a model of how to live in the world. (p175)

MacFarlane, Glynn, Grace, Penetito, and Bateman (2008) state that “an abiding concern for the quality of human relationships needs to be established and maintained if learning contexts are to be effective for Māori students”. Central to the development of a positive ensemble environment is the establishment of trusting teacher-student relationships and quality peer relationships. Sometimes referred to as ‘relational pedagogy’ in educational literature, its role in effective drama teaching in the New Zealand context has been explored by a number of New Zealand education scholars ([Fraser, Price, & Aitken, 2007](#); [Holland & O’Connor, 2004](#); [Wallis, 2010](#)). Bishop ([2012](#)) also highlights the importance of quality relationships for Māori learners in what he calls a “culturally responsive pedagogy of relations”.

Wallis ([2010](#)) provides a detailed and illustrative account of what relational pedagogy looks like in a drama classroom through her close examination of one New Zealand drama teacher’s work. She identifies several key characteristics relational pedagogy in the teacher’s work. Firstly, the teacher was positively and actively involved, participating, modelling and supporting the active learning. Lessons were cooperatively designed, and constructive, supportive reflection times were a regular part of the learning. In addition, as the practical work progressed, an inclusive environment was reinforced by opportunities to “recognise difference” – in creative work produced and in perspectives. Wallis also makes the connection between these pedagogical practices and the values found in Bishop and Berryman’s ([2006](#)) *Effective Teaching Profile*.

Whānaungatanga is a value drawn from Te Ao Māori (literally ‘the Māori world’) and is emphasised in research literature as key to addressing the needs of Māori learners. It is defined as “a sense of family connection - a relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging” (Māoridictionary.co.nz). There are deep layers to whānaungatanga, as with each of the values Bishop identifies. He refers to each value as being a metaphor, to indicate there are riches of meaning that cannot be conveyed through literal

interpretations (Bishop 2012). There are strong parallels between relational pedagogy, the development of an effective ensemble culture and building whānaungatanga.

While whānaungatanga refers to quality relationships, *whakawhānaungatanga* refers to the process of establishing these relationships (Bishop, et al., 2007). It is the ‘how to’. Practice-based illustrations of *whakawhānaungatanga* are provided here, however immersion in the teachings of Māori educators is needed to truly appreciate the riches of these values, drawn from mātauranga Māori⁴ (Pihama, Smith, Taki, & Lee, 2004). Ritchie (1992) emphasises the connection between whānaungatanga and the other values, explaining that each empowers the other in an interconnected web. The web metaphor provides a useful model, which captures the interplay between the practices discussed here - practices that both characterise and enable whānaungatanga.

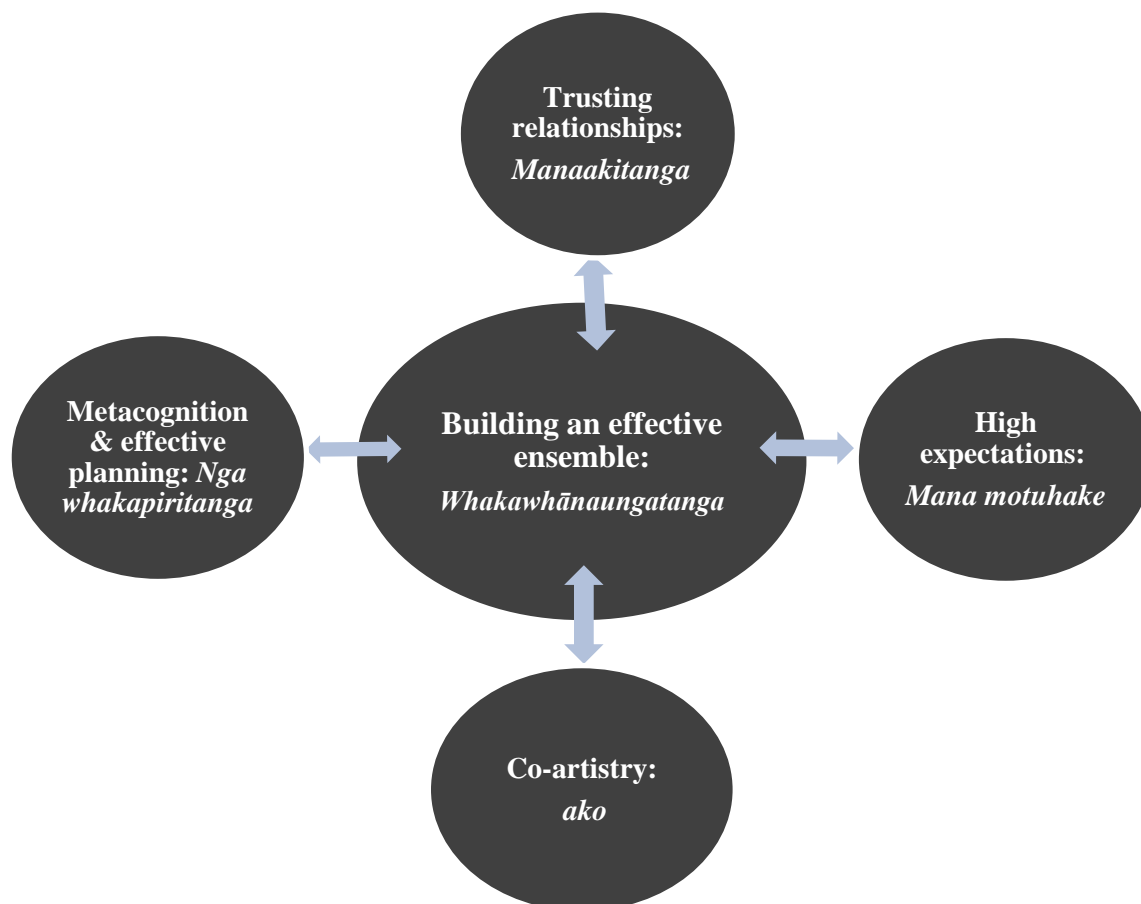


Figure 1. Key features in ensemble building and their connection to culturally responsive practice

Whakawhānaungatanga - building an effective ensemble environment in the drama classroom

Each key feature (see Figure 1) is now outlined below and the connections to culturally responsive practice are discussed.

1. Through *maanakitanga* – caring and trustworthy behaviour as the teacher

Classrooms that are emotionally safe and respectful demonstrate an ethic of caring that is *maanakitanga*. MacFarlane (2004, p. 80) explains that teachers who demonstrate *maanakitanga* use a range of strategies to “promote the caring process in the classroom”. For Māori and Pasifika students this means having their cultural knowledge, beliefs and identity respected and acknowledged. He

⁴ Traditional Māori knowledge, customs and practices

stresses that enacting *maanakitanga* is not optional, but obligatory for the effective teacher who wishes to be valued in return. Capturing the themes of responsibility, hospitality, reciprocity and caring, *maanakitanga* involves both the heart – having compassion for students, and the head – reflecting on the quality of the professional and personal roles they undertake as teachers (MacFarlane, 2004, p. 81).

Similarly, there is a strong ethic of caring needed for successful ensemble learning (Rabin, 2009). Istance and Dumont explain why the relational dimension is so important in learning:

Learning results from a dynamic interplay of emotion, motivation and cognition...It is therefore important to understand not just learners' cognitive development but their motivations and emotional characteristics as well. (Istance & Dumont, 2010, p. 321)

There are risks involved in being in relationship. Neelands (2010, p. 131) outlines these, saying:

The teacher/leader is taking risks in seeking a shift in the normative power relations within the class and between the class and the teacher...Young people must make themselves vulnerable and visible in order to participate and must know that there is protection and mutual respect for difference from within the group to match the personal and social challenges of taking a part in the action.

As part of facilitating effective creative and collaborative drama work, teachers in my study emphasised the need to be trustworthy, to show genuine care and interest in each of their students, and to be consistent and fair in their dealings with students – that is, they emphasised *maanakitanga*. These teachers were mindful of the need to demonstrate warmth and enthusiasm as part of their facilitation of drama work. They also reinforced the need to build, maintain and repair (when necessary) their relationships with each student (Cody, 2013, p. 233).

School students in the study also strongly emphasised relational practices. They valued teacher behaviours and attitudes that increased emotional safety, enabled trust to develop, and positively impacted the tone of the classroom. They believed drama teachers needed confidence, a willingness to work in role, enthusiasm, humour, openness, positivity and warmth.

- *Always be positive and enthusiastic. And happy;*
- *Be confident and relate to your students;*
- *Let [students] do the work instead of you doing it for them.*

(Student Interview: Year 11 Ju)

- *Be enthusiastic. Don't be dull because that will make the class real boring;*
- *Join in in what we are doing. Like [Mr X] gives examples and actually acts out things.*

(Student Interview: Year 12 Dav)

- *Make [students] feel comfortable for what you are trying to teach them;*
- *Also have fun as well. [The teacher] can have fun too if they want too.*

(Student Interview: Year 10 Ph)

These students valued the mutuality of participation and enjoyment in the learning experience. This quality of relationship is also supported in the literature. Winston (2009, p. 44) notes that effective drama teachers intentionally foster qualities of “gaiety”, “compassion”, “charm” and “good-hearted cheerfulness” for both their intrinsic virtue and as part of establishing “a spirit of co-operation and generous good-humour”. Such qualities can be seen to acts of hospitality (Palmer, 1998) – an core concept of *maanakitanga*.

The students involved in the *Te kotahitanga* research voiced similar themes in describing the teachers they considered to be most effective. These included teachers who had a sense of humour, were approachable, fair and compassionate, participated in the lessons, and showed genuine interest:

You can tell he respects us, because when it comes to learning big time he's always there, if we don't understand something he doesn't talk to us like little babies, he talks to us like young adults.

And you can rely on him, he's there. Like some teachers are distant to you but he's always there.

I suppose if you wanted to talk to someone you could talk to Mr H. (School 1: Group 2, 2004)

([Bishop, et al., 2007, p. 157](#))

Drama teachers and the students in my study described a sense of safety and emotional connection with each other that they did not experience in other disciplines. *David's* students referred to the drama environment as being more relaxed and friendlier than in other subjects. One student referred to their Year 12 class as being "a family" and several students spoke about the high level of trust they had established as a group over the years of working together in Drama. These students also noted that their relationship with *David* was warmer and more responsive than the relationships with teachers of other subjects. *Julia's* students also experienced her approach as being different to their other teachers. They described her as being "a lot happier" and felt she related to them more than other teachers did. These students recognised that the quality of their relationship with their drama teacher impacted the nature of their participation:

With other teachers the most talking you do is about answering questions or asking questions but in drama there is more discussing it and learning a bit more. You are a lot more willing to put your hand up and say something.

(Student interview: Year 12 Dav)

Effective drama pedagogy involves the development of an authentic connection between a teacher and their students in a way that communicates genuine care and trustworthiness. To enact *maanakitanga* in the context of culturally responsive practice, a further dimension must be added; where drama teachers care for their students as cultural beings. As Bishop and Berryman ([2009, p. 30](#)) explain, "Māori people see, understand and interact with the world in very different ways", therefore culturally responsive teachers must work to create an environment where these diverse cultural understandings, experiences and ways of being in the world can be acknowledged and drawn upon. Furthermore, when these ways of being and seeing are brought forward, culturally-competent teachers can be trusted to recognise, value and build on these offerings.

2. Through ngā whakapiringatanga - thoughtful planning and management of emotional and social risks

Effective management of interactions in the classroom is needed in order to sustain a positive, relation-based environment. Bishop and Berryman state:

...teachers need to be able to organise classrooms so that all the individuals involved are able to contribute to their own learning and to support the learning of others. Ngā whakapiringatanga is about teachers taking professional responsibility for activating the engagement of all learners. ([Bishop & Berryman, 2009, p. 30](#))

Part of being a trustworthy facilitator means ensuring students are not out of their depth in the work. Drama teachers must engage in thoughtful planning, cognisant of the emotional and social risks drama work entails in order to 'secure, well-managed learning environment' – ngā whakapiringatanga. The trustworthy teacher keeps the (emotional and social) 'stakes' low, while valuing (spotting & acknowledging) risk-taking in student work and pushing students to commit more and go further in their ideas.

To encourage engagement in the risky business of performing in front of peers, teachers in my study stressed the importance of valuing student participation and effort over performance expertise. This might mean early lessons begin with whole group improvisation tasks without requiring performance presentations. Conventions such as Still Images and Thought-tracking allow students to

move briefly into role. More confident students can be invited to share moments of work before less confident students are asked to do so. Through thoughtful planning, teachers are able to scaffold the performative and social risks, and to provide learning time needed for students' to develop the skills and practical knowledge they require to be successful in more challenging tasks. In doing so, they create a secure learning environment in which students can take artistic risks.

The youngest of the students I interviewed in my study were well aware of these risks. They told me they considered it important that drama teachers accept students' boundaries at times, and to avoid embarrassing students:

Don't put people on the spot if they really don't want to do it. Don't force them because if you force them to do something in the play, the play will be bad because they won't be acting as well. And if they don't want to do it, you can just help them to be more confident.

(Student interview: Year 7-8 Ja)

There is dynamic relationship between safety and risk in the Drama classroom because risk-taking in creative work is seen as important to achieving depth and aesthetic impact ([Burnett Bonczek & Storck, 2013](#)). The (socially and psychologically) safe 'container' that drama teachers establish with their ensemble groups must also be a space where creative risks can be taken. Drama teachers in my study were very aware of this dialectic:

*On the one hand [students] have to feel comfortable enough to risk, but on the other hand I don't think they need to become too comfortable because otherwise it just becomes too easy and they don't try any more. **Grace***

David emphasised the place of role models – the teacher, visiting professional theatre artists and senior students – who model expertise and encourage participation and risk-taking for other students.

*It's about taking risks. It's about them feeding off each other and we've now got some strong performance individuals in the classes who will try things out and other guys will think, "Oh jeez that's okay, I can have a go at that". **David***

In order to effectively lead in the drama classroom, teachers need to be attuned to the experiences of their learners and appreciate the social context and performative demands of the subject discipline. Thoughtful planning that allows for trust to develop in step with the risks demanded by the work enables students to experience a greater sense of security. Teachers who demonstrate such skills possess a level of "withitness" ([Kounin, 1977](#)) that enables students to have confidence in them, increasing their mana⁵ and their effectiveness.

3. Through ngā whakapiringatanga - teaching metacognition

Teaching metacognition in Drama is another strategy to enable learners to take control of their learning. Metacognitive strategies are essential in assisting learners to become self-regulated ([Timperley, 2013](#)). Both metacognition and self-regulation have been found to significantly impact academic performance, despite student ability and/or prior learning ([Aamodt & Wong, 2011](#); [Hacker, Dunlosky, & Graesser, 2009](#); [Ponitz et al., 2008](#); [Pressley & Harris, 2006](#)). Lucas and Claxton (2010) provide a definition:

Metacognition is essentially thinking about thinking. Metacognitive skills are the higher order skills which ensure learners have the ability to stand back and take control of their own learning.

If students are aware of the kind of cognitive and affective experiences they might have when engaging in a learning task - and if they have strategies they can apply - they can use this awareness "to initiate, motivate and direct their own efforts...instead of relying on others as agents of instruction" ([Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994](#)). As metacognitive strategies equip students to participate

⁵ Mana is a Māori term referring to a person having status, authority, power and/or influence

more fully, more consciously and more autonomously in learning processes, they are part of developing a 'secure, well-managed learning environment' – the value of *ngā whakapiringatanga*.

3.1 Metacognition – thinking about the creative collaborative process

Drama teachers can empower student participation by teaching students about the creative process and the skills required to work collaboratively on creative tasks. Giving students thinking strategies and an awareness of the metacognitive experiences ([Flavell, 1979](#)) they might have can support them in this work. Ideas in drama can be developed from a range of sources and processes – including spontaneous processes such as improvisation, where certain ways of thinking are useful. Improvisation requires a level of spontaneity that counters much of our schooling; the merits of ideas are usually weighed up before they are publically offered. In improvisation, the onus is on the group to work with an idea offered rather than on individuals coming up with amazing 'offers'. Teaching students to "Say Yes!" to ideas and to refrain from judgment is an important metacognitive strategy for moving ahead with improvisation and devising.

Teaching students about the kinds of inner experiences and challenges ahead is a way to equip them to sustain participation. For instance, students can benefit from learning that they can expect to experience cognitive dissonance; that it is possible to make a number of false starts in collaborative creative work; that following a creative lead may result in a dead end where the group has to back track or start over; that, in the face of the creative chaos of possibilities, it is useful to trust that something will emerge from the group's creative "scratchings" ([Tharp, 2003](#)). Students who have an understanding of the processes they are working through are better supported, reducing the interpersonal conflict such collaborative creative tasks may invite.

3.2 Metacognition – thinking about the skills required to work as an effective ensemble

Alongside metacognitive strategies for engaging in the creative process, effective pedagogy in drama includes developing students' metacognitive awareness of interpersonal strategies that support their collaborative work and enable an effective ensemble culture to develop. This means extending students' self-awareness and social skills so they can come to see how the nature of their participation impacts others and the work generated. Noddings ([2003](#)) argues that learning about conflict and cooperation is absolutely vital for young people and should feature more prominently in the curriculum of our schools. Inevitably, collaborative work gives rise to conflict as well as cooperation. Therefore, there is a process of teaching both the skills of cooperation and giving opportunity for students to reflect on their metacognitive experiences in this learning environment. Such work enables a 'secure, well-managed learning environment' – *ngā whakapiringatanga*.

The addition of the Key Competencies⁶ in the New Zealand curriculum ([Ministry of Education, 2007](#)) has emphasised the importance of pro-social outcomes for learners as they engage in learning across the curriculum. The competencies of Relating to others, Managing Self, and Participation and Contribution encapsulate the skills needed to participate effectively in an ensemble. This increased appreciation for pro-social outcomes has given Drama a greater profile in some settings, and drama teachers more pedagogical confidence ([Cody, 2013](#)).

The experienced drama teachers in my study are very clear about the importance of interpersonal skills and processes. *Aroha* maintains the drama classroom is a place where social skills, cooperation, creativity, diversity, and acceptance of each other are taught and valued, describing these values as being like "tikanga⁷ – the way we do things in drama; how we respond to each other". These values have immediate relevance to the artistic/performance contexts students are working in. In particular, *Aroha* emphasises trust, generosity and acceptance of others through rehearsal processes and in the many problem-solving tasks students are confronted with in drama. Fraser et al. ([2007](#)) also acknowledge that the extensive use of group work in the Arts provides students with many opportunities to build relational skills in listening, turn taking, questioning and supporting others

⁶ The Key Competencies include Thinking, Using language, symbol and text, Relating to Others, Participating & contributing, and Managing Self

⁷ Tikanga –the term for appropriate customs, protocols and practices for Māori.

Similarly *Julia* sees the social dynamic in the classroom as one of the most important things to get right and acknowledges the powerful influence individuals can have on the group. She notes the need to manage participation and relationships in the classroom in order to differentiate learning for varying abilities and to allow all students to engage.

One of the key pedagogical strategies employed by drama teachers in my study to develop interpersonal awareness was the use of drama games. Typically, drama games involve concentration, active listening, physical discipline, making offers (giving creative ideas), accepting and extending on the offers of others (without reservation), and attuning to dynamic social cues. They often involve spontaneous and random groupings, physical contact and the sharing of personal space. Games that are fun and involve humour also make an important contribution to the development of a sense of unity in the group. The skills are overtly identified to students in order to increase their metacognitive awareness of what is valued and expected in the drama classroom.

As previously noted, *ngā whakapiringatanga* concerns the creation of a secure, supportive environment that enables learning and active engagement for every student. Cooperative learning and peer support is a key feature of an effective learning environment for Māori learners explored in the literature. MacFarlane argues that,

Māori students, in the main, have a co-operative orientation towards learning and life, and the *whānaungatanga* aspects within cooperative learning classroom structures have the potential to facilitate improved academic engagement. (MacFarlane, 2004, p. 71).

A central concept in Māori education is that of the *tuakana-teina* relationship, where an older sibling (or more expert student) teaches a younger sibling (or less expert) of the same gender. The use of such cooperative learning strategies is recommended for Māori learners (Ministry of Education, 2009; Winitana, 2012). Greenwood and Te Aika's (2008) study of Māori tertiary students affirmed that tertiary students valued being able to share expertise and to actively support one another in their learning. Drama teachers who teach metacognition and facilitate learning about collaborative creative processes are able to maximise the opportunities these processes afford to their students, while providing an environment that supports Māori learners.

4. Through *mana motuhake* - high expectations

It is a well-established fact that teacher expectations have a significant impact on student performance (Oakes, 1985; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Tomlinson & Javuis, 2012). Holding high expectations for, and caring about, student performance is a key feature of Bishop and Berryman's *Effective Teaching Profile*, expressed through the value of *mana motuhake*. These authors note that teachers who had low expectations for their Māori students "by and large received poor-quality work from them" (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 30).

Given the problem of calling on deficit theories to explain Māori underachievement, teachers who hold high expectations of their Māori students, and who back these up with effective and culturally responsive teaching practices, are part of the solution. Defined as "agentic teachers", Bishop and Berryman (2009, p. 29) explain that such teachers reject deficit explanations, rather they:

see themselves as being able to solve problems that come their way and having recourse to skills and knowledge that can help all of their students, and that they believe all of their students can achieve, no matter what.

Alton-Lee's research (2003, p. 25) found that expectations for learning must also be backed up with quality teaching. She explains that a "culture of niceness" can undermine achievement and, if unsupported by effective teaching, high expectations can be detrimental to the teacher-student relationship and to student achievement. In addition, she found a balance between critical reflection and encouragement is needed to support achievement.

Participants in my study believed strongly that drama teachers need to hold high expectations of all students, while maintaining interactions that are positive and affirming.

I don't think that just being completely sweet and accepting ... it's nice and it's comfortable for a while but it doesn't move students on, it doesn't make them better or challenge them.

Grace

Grace believes good drama teachers are able to push their students on to higher levels of achievement. She sets clear expectations for her students in terms of their focus and self-discipline, and while she works to facilitate and guide students in work they create, she refuses to accept work that is below standard.

This is one of the things I'm quite clear about. Just because something is hard, doesn't mean you don't do it. Yes it is hard, so you've got to work harder in order to make it happen.

Grace

Fundamentally, these teachers are committed to assisting each student to discover their own creativity, believing that each student is capable of creative acts. James positions his students as capable, aesthetic “knowers” who often exceed the expectations adults have of them. He gives the example of the low expectations theatre works for children can have of children’s capacities.

... we are amazed at how children don't like plays put on for children. They don't like being condescended to. If you gave them a play and said this play is going to be all about refugees and how you've got to treat them and all the rest ... Nah! They're not going to watch that, just like adults don't want to. James

The level of co-construction and negotiation in James’ work reflects his high expectations. He consults with his students and respects their opinions, which also deepens the interpersonal relationship he has with them (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Aroha believes expecting students will have “something to offer” is a vital. She explains that this means being aware that students will be working at varying levels and “recognising what [individuals] are giving”, rather than expecting all students to attain blanket standards. She stresses the need to build loyalty in students so they come to class wanting to share or eager to carry on from the previous lesson. To encourage the development of this work ethic, she uses goal-setting to co-construct and articulate expectations with students.

Similarly, David is mindful of the range of student abilities and needs within each class. He retains the right to determine the make-up of groups, particularly for assessment in senior drama, so he can determine a grouping that will continue to stretch and challenge students artistically and socially – allowing for greater differentiation.

It's good because it challenges them to move outside the boundaries. Because a few of them will go back to the same group every time and they get in these ruts and it actually limits their creativity ... they get into routine and they have their little hierarchy already established.

David

These teachers get satisfaction in seeing their students’ progress, even if these gains are not reflected in formal assessment results. They are willing to invest in students with various abilities, not just those high-achievers. Julia notes:

It fascinates me because you often find that the very talented students are not the ones who are developing as much as the ones who come in and who are a bit shy and scared. And we can get so much more from them. Julia

Phillip stresses the importance of establishing a work ethic in the drama classroom. He believes he needs to set an example himself – in the effort he makes, and through consistency in his attitudes and in his expectations of students. This is an area of teacher practice also supported in research literature (Hawk, et al., 2002) Aroha makes a connection between low teacher expectations and students’ lack of discipline and passion for their work in Drama. She believes teachers who have low expectations, who give too much focus on task instructions and not enough focus on building relationships with the students, produce students who are slow to engage and “laid back” in their approach to drama work.

The goals of independence and autonomy are intrinsically linked to the notion of *mana motuhake*, and are sometimes offered as a definition the term ([Alton-Lee, Westera, & Pulegatoa-Diggins, 2012, p. 4](#)). These goals were also highlighted by the teachers in my study in their discussion of high expectations. Grace insists students take personal responsibility for both their work and for maintaining productive working relationships. She explains:

I will constantly reinforce the fact that if you don't meet your responsibilities to the group, I'm not going to save you. Grace

David also resists rescuing students from interpersonal challenges in collaborative work, believing there are greater rewards for students who can negotiate these conflicts with some autonomy.

It's good to see one or two of the more highly driven kids having to cope with someone in the group who is looking out the window all the time when they are trying to get something done, and they will come to me and say, "oh ..." and I'll say, "It's your group, you have to sort it out". David

Participants in my study strongly emphasised the need for drama teachers to hold high expectations for all students, in order to lift student achievement and autonomy. This is an important disposition for agentic teachers of Māori students, who need to recognise and reject deficit theories of explanation for Māori underachievement, in order to create a classroom culture that will empower Māori learners.

5. Through ako - co-artistry, reflection and consultation processes

The notion of *ako* is significant in effective pedagogies for Māori learners ([Bishop & Glynn, 1999](#); [Ministry of Education, 2011](#)). *Ako* refers to being simultaneously a learner and a teacher, and incorporates power-sharing and relational practices. In line with socio-cultural theories of learning ([Mercer & Howe, 2012](#)), *ako* is described as “a teaching–learning practice that involves teachers and students learning in interactive, dialogic relationships” ([Bishop & Berryman, 2009, p. 31](#)). This requires a redressing of the power relations found in traditional Western classrooms. The principle of *tino rangatiratanga* (relative autonomy) is at the heart of Māori education initiatives and reflects the desire for Māori to be autonomous and self-determining in decisions impacting Māori people. On the micro level, this is enacted in classrooms where Māori learners can have input into their learning, determine their own goals, and where teachers inquire into the effectiveness of their teaching through consultation with their students ([Bishop, 2012](#); [Bishop & Glynn, 1999](#)).

In the context of the drama classroom, three key pedagogical practices resonate with the notion of *ako*. These include undertaking a role of co-artist, the practice of group reflection, and the practice of group consultation.

5.1 Co-artistry

Haseman ([2002](#)) describes the drama teacher as being ‘leaderly’ – that is, the work is not explicitly teacher-driven but is also not without a leader. Leadership is provided by the drama teacher’s choices to structure and scaffold the dramatic learning experience. These choices may include times of leading from the front, times when teachers work in and out of role, and times when they direct students to reflect on the action ([Anderson, 2004](#)). Holland and O’Connor ([2004](#)) found that arts teachers often took the role of co-artist. Similarly, in an exploration of two case studies in drama and dance, authors Deans, O’Toole, Raphael, and Young ([2009, p. 166](#)) identify aspects of the teacher’s role in the learning process as ‘facilitator’, ‘questioner’, as ‘participant and sharer’ – all of which could be seen to be facets of the co-artist role. Co-artistry demands shared power and co-operation – and its success rests on a healthy relationship between teacher and students. It also includes offering opportunities to discuss thinking, encouraging inquiry and critical thinking, and encouraging acts of creativity ([Jeffrey & Craft, 2004](#)). These are all dimensions of dialogic teaching ([Mercer & Howe, 2012](#)).

Drama teachers in my study share power with students so that they might develop their own sense of identity and agency as artists. The drama contexts for this varied. For the secondary teachers,

significant opportunities for co-artistry happened within the performance of play texts or within devising contexts. On occasion devising may involve the whole class but more frequently occurred in small group contexts. These dramatic contexts allow varying levels of involvement for the teacher and students.

While the level of involvement may vary, drama teachers frequent operate as a co-artist. They may allow students choice in content and the power to make artistic decisions. Frequently, they design work that allows space for students to pursue stories and themes that are of interest to them or arise from their own worlds. This work may also be balanced with work that is more teacher-led – though, as *James*' case reveals (Cody, 2013, p. 104), this may still involve considerable negotiation. Aitken et al. (2007) argue that allowing spaces for children to determine “where the learning *may go* rather than teachers determining where it *will go*” enables children to “participate more fully and actively construct knowledge through engagement with their teachers, their peers and the real and imagined words of drama” (p. 16). Teachers-as-co-artists provide constructive feedback on creative work, which students can consider or disregard. They scaffold and structure work, teaching artistic-aesthetic processes and content for students to apply. Ultimately these teachers actively seek to give ownership of creative work over to the students.

Grace's teaching programme offers students a wide range of choices in both their focus of study and in the aspects of work they wish to have assessed, in order to allow students to be spurred on by their own interest and curiosity. In this way, there is room for greater ownership and engagement with the work. As part of allowing creative space, Julia explains that she takes the role of facilitator, though at times will lead in order to model or inform students so they can explore these new ideas and lead the exploration themselves. In her work with juniors, Julia will intentionally design lessons that allow students to take ownership of the creative work emerging:

They are the ones that decide which direction to take things in and often that is what happens, it doesn't matter how well I have planned, what I have planned to happen in this sequence of lessons, the students may take it in a totally different direction and that is great. Julia

While inventive teaching might be seen as creative, it is responsiveness – to context, to students, to the unexpected, to the moment, that gives rise to creativity and marks a creative teacher (Jeffrey & Craft, 2004). In this way, Julia's artistry manifests as the ability to design and facilitate learning experiences that enable her to work alongside students as a co-artist. Julia's students expressed appreciation for the openness of her practice in their interview. They recognised and valued the space she provides for them to make their own discoveries.

- *Yeah she waits until we have something we are happy with. And then she says, “oh how about you guys do this” or “just try this and see how it goes”, kinda thing and she waits for us to learn it, not just tell us.*
- *She lets you do the thinking and you learn and it's easier to remember if you discover.*

(Student Interview: Year 11 Ju)

According to Julia's students, this provision of intellectual space includes giving time to master skills and techniques, and allowing time for all students to form understandings before moving on to new content.

5.2 Consultation and reflection processes

Two other facets of drama teaching practice are part of establishing an ensemble culture and resonate with the notion of *ako* – that is, the use of consultation processes and the practice of whole group reflection.

As outlined above, drama teachers regularly share power with their students through negotiation over contexts, aesthetic decisions and processes, and through contracting together the kinds of values, routines and protocols the group will adhere to. The contracting of protocols and behaviour may be explicit – through written and signed contracts or through more informal

agreement. This kind negotiation is seen in the work of Māori theatre practitioner, Jim Moriarty, who believes it to be vital in order to develop a shared, ethical vision for working together. Moriarty explains his process is that of establishing Tika (the values and principles the group will work with), Tikanga (the protocols and customs the group will adhere to) and engaging in regular reflection on Pono (the everyday actions and behaviours of the group).

This is a process which Indigenous mental health practitioner, Te Ao Pritchard refers to as “negotiating the kawa⁸” (Personal communication 03/09/2013). Pritchard sees this consultation process as a means to creating a ‘living agreement’ as to how will we behave “in the presence of each other” in order to achieve a sense of unity alongside acknowledgement of diversity. Moriarty explains that the process of group negotiation and reflection allows members to raise and resolve tensions, reflect on group processes and individual contributions, and provides both accountability and support for the ongoing work of the group (Personal communication 29/08/2013). Both practitioners talked about this being a contract that needs to be revisited and reviewed in an ongoing way.

Reflection in Drama happens in a number of ways – individual and group reflection, reflection in and out of role, and reflection in and out of the action of a drama. Reflection might happen during exploratory drama work and may also occur in the form of critical (formative) feedback on creative work presented. Teachers in my study emphasised the importance of reflection as both performers and as audience members in order for students to develop artistic-aesthetic understandings. Here, in line with socio-cultural learning theory ([Alexander, 2004](#)), students are conceptualised as ‘knowers’ ([Palmer, 1998](#)) - their observations, reflections, their aesthetic engagement, their inner experience are pathways to deeper understandings about drama. Group reflection is a dialogic process where understandings are co-constructed between students and the teacher, and where insights from individuals’ experience and personal response are important sources of knowledge that may further shape artistic-aesthetic work. When framed constructively, the feedback from peers on drama work can be highly affirming and useful for generating new ideas ([Saxton & Miller, 2008](#); [Wallis, 2010](#)).

An example of this comes from Aroha’s work ([Cody, 2013, p. 217](#)). In order to increase students’ critical awareness of the artistic-aesthetic dimensions of their drama work and the work of others, Aroha asks them to work as an “outside eye” for others. This is a process Aroha models, working alongside students to record and deconstruct drama their work and helping them to reflect on their decisions. This process enables students to practise giving and receiving constructive criticism. Students are taught to trust their own perceptions and responses when in the viewer role, and to offer these observations as part of formative feedback processes. This reflective role is undertaken with increasing independence in senior Drama, where students engage in critical reflection and feedback processes with their peers, independent of their teacher. Although not all participants in my study used the term ‘outside eye’, other teachers also engaged their students in critical reflection as part of developing their depth of understanding, aesthetic awareness and autonomy.

These teachers model *ako* through the provision of a space where students’ aesthetic experience, feedback and reflections are valued and validated. Through co-artistry and consultation processes, teachers involve students in decision-making and enable them to give feedback about matters that impact their learning. In these ways, teachers encourage student autonomy and responsibility for work and for their relationships.

Conclusions

In addressing how drama teachers might develop in cultural competence, there is much to gain from reflecting on effective drama teaching practice. This article has discussed several dimensions of drama teacher practice related to *whakawhānaungatanga*; that is the process of building *whānaungatanga* – equated here to the development of an effective ensemble environment. Demonstrating authenticity and genuine care for students (*maanakitanga*) is an essential feature of

⁸ Kawa – a contemporary use of the term, referring to the guidelines a group will follow. Other iwi (tribes) may refer to this as ‘tikanga’

effective, culturally responsive drama teaching. In order to provide a secure and well-managed classroom (ngā whakapiringatanga), ‘agentic’ drama teachers support their relationships with students through quality teaching. This includes effective management of safety and risk, the teaching of metacognition and the intentional development of pro-social skills. Ako is demonstrated in drama classrooms through the use of dialogic teaching strategies that position students as ‘knowers’ in three key ways: power-sharing through the role of co-artist, through consultation, and through reflection processes. These teachers hold a genuine belief that all students’ are capable of growth, no matter their cultural backgrounds. Accordingly, effective and culturally responsive drama teachers convey high expectations for all students, empowering student autonomy and interdependence, while remaining responsive in their relationships (mana motuhake).

Closing thoughts

My intention in this article has been to identify and explore the strategies that effective drama teachers employ to develop an effective ensemble culture in their classrooms, and to make connections to culturally responsive teaching practices for Māori learners. In order that New Zealand drama teachers to grow in cultural competence, it is important we can engage more deeply with the opportunities existing within our discipline to achieve these ends. This exploration of culturally responsive and effective drama teaching practice has focused on the building of whānaungatanga, the development of a secure learning environment and the teacher-student relationship, but it does not address all the ways in which drama teachers can be culturally responsive. The drama curriculum offers teachers the space to use Māori and Pasifika performing arts, texts that focus on bicultural and multi-cultural New Zealand, to explore national and local histories, and to reflect on social issues relevant to Māori students (*Tangata Whenuatanga*). In addition, the use of Te Reo Māori in classrooms is a significant area of cultural competence New Zealand drama teachers might seek to grow in. In addition, drama teachers might increase their connection with whānau and local iwi, through consultation, public performances, forums, and teacher-student-whānau conferencing (*Wānanga; Kotahitanga*). While the dimensions of effective and culturally responsive drama practice outlined here are focused on the New Zealand context, these can be applied in drama classrooms internationally.

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