Caucusing: Creating a space to confront our fears

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Abstract

Learning does not occur in a vacuum and this reality challenges all educators to provide for the differing learning needs that exist because of students' particular relationship to the course material. Teaching Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the colonial history of Aotearoa New Zealand to adult students of social work and counselling in mainstream tertiary education programmes provides particular challenges and opportunities for tutors and students alike. When teaching this topic, it is essential that the nature of the relationships that exist today between the peoples that represent the signatories of the Tiriti / Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 is explored. Yet, at the same time, the learning needs of all students must be met.

The authors have extensive experience in the teaching of Te Tiriti o Waitangi to adult learners. They have found the practice of caucusing helpful in creating a process that affords an opportunity for a transfer of learning to take place. How this process operates is the subject of this research study. In it, the authors identify distinct differences between Maaori and non-Maaori students' experiences of caucusing. Worthwhile explanations of these differences are provided and linked to literature findings. Excerpts from research relating to the hidden dynamics of white power and domination are provided and assist in increasing an understanding of the intense reactions expressed by students during the transfer of knowledge process. Comments from students are included to highlight the shifts in understanding as the caucusing experience proceeds. The authors suggest that this topic has quite different implications for students within the same classroom, dependent upon whether they are located within the group that has experienced colonisation and domination (Maaori) or the other group, i.e. the colonising group (non-Maaori). They highlight the need to go beyond an intellectual fact-gathering exercise to achieve significant and worthwhile educational outcomes in this topic area.

Rationale for research

The authors of this research teach Tiriti o Waitangi and the colonising history of Aotearoa New Zealand to students on the Bachelor of Applied Social Sciences at Wintec, Hamilton.

It is the authors' experience that consistently students, both Maaori and non-Maaori, have little knowledge about the colonising history of Aotearoa/New Zealand, and the policies and practices that have continued to occur from the time of the signing of the Treaty

through to today that have impacted in all areas of Maaori well-being (Ministerial Advisory Committee, 1986; Cheyne, O'Brien, and Belgrave, 2005; Bell, 2006).

As well as an ignorance regarding the history, there is a general lack of awareness regarding the overall social and economic imbalance that colonisation has created today between the two signatories.

> …the inability to recognise that many of the advantages whites (*non-Maaori*) hold are a direct result of the disadvantages of other people (*Maaori*) … (Baldwin (1962), cited in Consedine & Consedine, 2005). (Authors' words in italics.)

Consedine & Consedine, 2005 contend that the impact of this historical and contemporary reality, where the inextricable link between the significant advantage of one group to the significant disadvantage of the other group that exists, will be present in the relationships between representatives of Treaty partners today, not least those relationships that social workers and counsellors have in their professional roles.

The professional bodies of both social workers and counsellors contend that education programmes must equip students with a full understanding of this history, and its impact particularly relating to social services.

Caucusing is a teaching method used by the authors of this study on the programmes that they teach. They believe that it can be a component for teaching practice that can assist in fulfilling the outcomes outlined. However, use of the caucusing method has been accompanied often, since the method was first used in 1986, by mixed reactions from students and others.

In conclusion, this research project has been undertaken for the following reasons:

1. To fill in gaps in student's knowledge regarding history in a way that creates understanding about the interwoven nature of the Tiriti / Treaty relationship that exists today.
2. To understand better the processes and dynamics that underlies the caucusing process.
3. To contribute to the literature available to educators both in the area of Te Tiriti o Waitangi education, generally and specifically for social work and counselling education programmes.

What is caucusing?

Caucusing is a term used when a group is divided into two or more sub-groups for aspects of the parent group's life. The caucus sub-groups have some factors in common which mean that they can discuss or work separately to the parent group. It is a process that has been commonly used in the government political process as well as in the women's, gay rights, disability and other social/political movements.

In the Wintec example, caucusing occurs during the Tiriti / Treaty of Waitangi module. The students are divided into two caucuses: a Maaori caucus and a non-Maaori caucus for specific parts of the module.

Maaori students have the opportunity to choose which caucus they feel reflects their culture whereas non-Maaori students do not have this choice. The rationale for this derives from the history of colonisation that has forced Maaori to assimilate to a western way of life which they may relate more comfortably with.

It should be noted that there may be students in the non-Maaori caucus from cultural groups that have experienced colonisation in their own countries. For this reason these students may believe that they have much in common with the members of the Maaori caucus. However, as they are not indigenous to Aotearoa New Zealand they remain in the non-Maaori caucus.

Origins of caucusing at Wintec

Caucusing has been used as a method of teaching Te Tiriti/Treaty of Waitangi by the social work and counselling programmes at Wintec, in Hamilton, since 1986. The method was first used following a challenge by Maaori educationalists at Wintec to `walk the talk' in fulfilling Treaty obligations. It was advocated that Maaori students be provided a safe environment away from non-Maaori classmates in which to learn this topic. Their concern was that material Maaori students would be learning (possibly for the first time) about the impact of colonisation on their own families, grandparents and recent ancestors, could be very personal. To hear this information in a context with non-Maaori students who may be angry, incredulous and defensive could add to that trauma.

It is believed by the authors that caucusing benefits both caucus groups. They contend that it provides a means for students to explore and gain insight into the dynamics of privilege and domination that could not occur in a mixed situation. Manglitz (2003) believes there is a need for a closer look at racism and relationships between races to be viewed from the point of view of the dominant cultural position. She refers to the norm/invisibility of whiteness and calls for processes that make closer scrutiny of the dominant position possible.

Comparative examples of caucusing

Four examples of writing that refer to some form of caucusing are outlined below and their relevance to this report are briefly considered.

Jones (1999) is interested in examining the desire for shared dialogue between dominant and subordinate groups as a goal for multicultural classrooms. She is concerned there are '…problematic, imperialist assumptions that often underlie it' (Jones, 1999, p. 299).

Jones outlines a classroom exercise in a tertiary setting where adult class members were divided into three groups: Pakeha, Pacific Island and Maaori , for the duration of one course of study. The responses by group members gathered provided interesting insight into how the experience was viewed very differently dependent on which group students were in. The Maaori and Pacific Island groups consistently reported benefit from the chance to learn in this context compared to the usual mixed situation. The Pakeha group reported that they found the exercise a negative experience, and would have preferred to remain in the mixed group. These responses mirror the responses reported below in the Hamilton example and are explored in the discussion segment of this report.

Rich and Cargile (2004) describe a socio-drama process facilitated in a mixed race class-room in the USA intended to help the white students to become aware of the racism that is experienced by non-white students. Students are exposed to fellow classmates' (white and non-white students) anonymous opinions about, and experience of, racism. The white students and non-white students then meet separately. This separate meeting time is described as being a key time of transformation for the white students, where they are able to freely discuss the uncomfortable feelings that they experience, in hearing, mostly for the first time, the non-white students' daily experiences of racism. This is a positive opportunity to discuss feelings freely in the separate groups.

Ritchie's article (2003) concerns a structured educational programme about Te Tiriti/ Treaty of Waitangi provided to students of early childhood education at the University of Waikato. For some segments of the programme Maaori students are taught separately by Maaori tutors and non-Maaori tutors teach the rest of the students. The explanation given for this refers to the unfairness of expecting Maaori tutors to justify, explain and defend the reality of what happened in Aotearoa to non-Maaori students who in some cases can be angry and defensive. This is consistent with the initial call for caucusing in the Hamilton example referred to earlier.

In Bell's thesis report for a Master of Philosophy there is an indepth discussion of the idea of facilitated workshops that deal with the impact of colonisation and racism as a way to assist in '…positive development and well being of whanau whakapapa' (Bell, 2006).

In Bell's research she invites kaimahi whanau[1] to share their thoughts on the idea of facilitated workshops that are conducted with groups who are members of the same whanau whakapapa.

Whanau whakapapa refers to:

…the social grouping of Maaori connected by descent from a common ancestor or tupuna, that could include up to five generations of descendants … it does not include unrelated friends or non-Maaori (Bell, 2006, p. 1).

A principle of this approach is the opportunity for whanau whakapapa members to (re) connect and strengthen the connection through the experience. This is seen as critically important since:

…disconnection leaves them trapped in the coloniser's world, in the Matrix where they are unaware of what is really shaping their lives and creating their unwellness … This process would also strengthen relationships with whanau whakapapa and rekindle links back home, allowing them to stand authentically and confront the changing world (Bell, 2006, p. 140).

This study provides a further refinement to the Hamilton example as it clearly calls for group members consisting of whanau whakapapa. It differs from the Hamilton example in that it is

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[1]   Kaimahi whanau is the name for a person who may work voluntarily or in paid employment among whakapapa whanau on concerns such as addictions, poverty, abuse. They are concerned with the safety and emotional well being of whanau and see first hand the impact on whanau of colonisation (Bell, 2006).

solely focused on a decolonisation process for whanau whakapapa, and not for non-Maaori. The connections that are made and/or strengthened in this approach are helpful to consider in examining benefits for Maaori students in the Hamilton example.

Context for the study

Both researchers in this study are teachers on the social work and counselling programmes in the School of Social Development, Wintec, Hamilton. Both have been involved in education regarding Te Tiriti/Treaty of Waitangi for approximately 18 years each. One researcher is Maaori of Tainui, Ngai Takoto descent and the other Tauiwi, is first generation Pakeha New Zealander of English and Scottish heritage.

Ethics approval from the Wintec Human Ethics in Research Committee has been granted for this study

Aims of the study

To answer the following questions:
1. In what ways does caucusing impact on students' learning regarding Te Tiriti/Treaty o Waitangi?
2. Are there identifiable common reactions to the experience of caucusing and what are these?
3. What are students' thoughts on the practice of caucusing?
4. Is caucusing a worthwhile practice for Te Tiriti/Treaty education?

Methodology and design of the study

Material was gathered by anonymous questionnaires and through focus group discussions. Participants in the study were current and recent ex-students on the social work and counselling programmes at Wintec. Participants were both Maaori and non-Maaori. Independent facilitators were used for focus groups. Separate groups were provided for Maaori and non-Maaori participants. Focus group discussions were tape recorded and then transcribed.

There were 18 participants in focus groups (13 non-Maaori and five Maaori) and 21 questionnaires were returned from a total of 87 distributed.

Focus group participants	Maaori	Non-Maaori
	5 (1 male, 4 female)	13 (11 female, 2 male)
Questionnaires returned	7	14

Findings

Main themes from findings are grouped as follows: 1. Strong negative thoughts and feelings expressed by the participants when they first encountered the caucusing process; 2. Similarity of experience within each group, and a difference of experience between the two groups at this early stage; 3. Changes in attitude (consciousness) noted as the process moved forward. In the discussion segment further findings are discussed. These relate to 4. Expectations of having learning needs met; 5. False sense of community, and 6. Disruption of norm-governed interactions.

Initial reactions

The responses by participants when they first encountered caucusing highlighted that at the start of the process there was a high level of discomfort by mostly non-Maaori and some Maaori participants and that the reasons for these feelings were different between non-Maaori and Maaori caucuses.

The highest proportion of reactions to the initial experience of caucusing were strong, negative thoughts and feelings expressed by non-Maaori students:
• Confusion
• Disappointment
• Anger
• Frustration
• Outrage
• Fear
• Shellshocked
• Uncomfortable.

There were also a small number of non-Maaori students who were positive about the experience from the outset:
• Humbled
• I liked it
• Curiosity
• It was a good learning experience and I thoroughly enjoyed the course.

A small proportion of Maaori students had negative reactions at the start of the caucusing process:
• Uncertainty if I would be accepted in class (into Maaori caucus)
• Guilty, after I made my choice for Maori caucus I felt almost guilty about how great it was
• Almost grieving leaving the other group.

One participant commented simply that the process seemed unusual.

Positive thoughts and feelings expressed by Maaori students were:
• Brilliant
• Connected
• Enjoyable.

One Maaori student talked about her feelings of aloneness with her experiences of issues around the Treaty:

> …uncertainty of choosing to go into the Maaori caucus at first I thought I was the only person in my group that had experienced certain things that related to the Treaty, hence the distrust. I soon learnt I wasn't the only one that had Treaty issues, that the others had similar issues to me.

Points of similarity and difference

Commonly there was an initial reaction from members of the non-Maaori caucus of being unhappy and alarmed with the separation process. Comments indicated that a majority

of non-Maaori did not like it and did not see it as necessary. A number of the non-Maaori students referred to missing out, having choice taken away, especially as Maaori students did have a choice.

Overall initially Maaori students liked the caucusing process. The negative reactions by Maaori students were from concern about leaving the non-Maaori group, and worries about being accepted in the Maaori group.

Attitude change as the journey progressed

Non-Maaori
From the non-Maaori caucus early on in the process, there were a number of comments that although caucusing felt negative at first, as it progressed it seemed less worrying, and benefits for learning are identified. Also, they begin to comment on their thoughts about the value of caucusing and the personal impact of the topic for Maaori classmates.

> My first reaction was incredible segregation, but then since our class I've come to realise through conversations with people that I think its very important for Maaori to have a voice in an environment where they feel safe … from a European perspective we have got to give them due respect if they don't feel comfortable sharing what they feel without a caucus.

> …when it comes to Maaori and what's happened with colonisation it's a very, very difficult subject.

A large number of comments from non-Maaori participants describe the benefit of being able to speak freely themselves, which aids learning. Since Maaori require that space as well then there is learning for both.

> …this caucusing is a good idea with the majority being Tauiwi (*non-Maaori*) so that gives Maaori a chance to do that in a safe environment and for us to be safe too. (Author's words in italics.)

One participant talked about her fear of offending Maaori students because of her ignorance and that this inhibited her expressing herself and her learning. Another participant had concerns that for fellow Maaori students, not caucusing meant that Maaori felt that they could not express themselves in class.

> They got ripped off and you wonder why they don't want to say anything.

Maaori
The common opinion expressed within the Maaori caucus from the start was of the benefits derived from caucusing. This opinion is reiterated as the process progresses and the impact on learning is clear, as these examples show.

> I have these feelings inside me that I don't quite understand or why I feel like that and I believe that if I am in a bigger group without the caucusing, I would end up sitting there and not having an opinion because I would be afraid that I would offend someone. It's trying to understand these emotions inside me.

And

I wouldn't feel safe in a big group to ask questions to clarify things.

And

I wouldn't feel free to ask the questions, so I would walk away with no answers.

I've just learnt to not have a voice, and I've kept my opinions to myself because I don't want to cause offence or I don't want to be misinterpreted..

It is interesting to note that these responses by Maaori students match some of the concerns non-Maaori students expressed around Maaori students feeling unsafe and not speaking in the bigger mixed group.

Maaori students also provide numerous comments about the benefit of caucusing for their learning. One Maaori student talked about the sense of loss she felt when, in the second year, caucusing did not occur.

I missed it deeply and felt alienated in Treaty class for a while. I did not learn as well as the year before.

One Maaori student talked about the pressure she feels in a mixed group to know about things Maaori and history, when for her there are many gaps. This pressure was relieved in the Maaori caucus group.

Discussion

Manglitz (2003) states that social position, privilege and its link to race that go unacknowledged in the classroom, risk perpetuation. In the research study Maaori students clearly outline their unmet learning needs in the mixed caucus group in a number of comments:

I wouldn't feel free to ask the questions, so I would walk away with no answers.

I've just learnt to not have a voice, and I've kept my opinions to myself because I don't want to cause offence or I don't want to be misinterpreted…

In contrast, some non-Maaori students state their concern about their learning needs not being met in the caucused situation:

…how can we develop empathy if we don't hear what they say?

Because of separation I can't hear what Maaori are saying.

These excerpts highlight an example of the 'norm-governed interactions' that Rich and Cargile (2004) refer to. In the mixed caucus situation there exists an unspoken, unacknowledged norm of non-Maaori learning needs being met to the detriment of Maaori students' learning needs.

Manglitz (2003) therefore challenges educationalists to recognise the way the lives of students have been scripted by their membership in groups that differ in degrees of social dominance and marginality.

This challenge is put to social work educators in particular by Rossiter (2001) when she describes her concern that education programmes run the risk of perpetuating the very power imbalances that they champion against.

…educate for or against social work … (Rossiter, 2001, p.1).

So as Consedine and Consedine (2005) ask:

Why is it that Pakeha (*non-Maaori*) are so unconscious about the immense level of privilege, which they regard as 'normal'? Who were the primary beneficiaries of our colonial history? (Consedine and Consedine, 2005.) (Author's words in italics.)

One explanation to this question provided by Howard (2006) is that for non-white people it may be quite clear from an objective point of view that white people have a disproportionate amount of power, wealth, control, dominance. But from a white subjective perspective it may not be possible to see oneself as dominant or wealthy.

Also Howard (2006) theorises that being able to see oneself from a racial point of view is a necessary stage before people have the ability to see the privilege and dominance that is in existence. And since white people often are not accustomed to seeing themselves as racial beings, this creates the need to find ways to bring culture and race into the foreground.

Howard (2006) goes on to argue that a lack of seeing oneself from a racial point of view supports and allows a lack of connectedness to the culture or racial group which has established and perpetuates white dominance and privilege.

Rich and Cargile (2004) advocate initiating a situation that upsets the norm-governed social interaction about race in a classroom will allow real exploration and the potential for cultural identity transformation.

In the Hamilton example, the authors believe that caucusing is the 'situation' that allows the upsetting of the norm-governed social interaction that Rich and Cargile (2004) refer to. The immediate responses by, in particular, non-Maaori students are a result of this disruption.

… disappointment, anger, frustration, outrage, fear, shellshocked …

… confusion, uncomfortable …

Rich and Cargile (2004) attribute these types of reactions as stemming from:

…feelings of messy, temporary, transitory 'betweenness' which will be in contrast to endings and beginnings with 'clear, clean borders' (Rich and Cargile, 2004, p. 362).

They see this as a necessary step towards transforming cultural identity.

McFadyen (1997) provides relevant ideas in relation to the development of our sense of identity that also contributes to our understanding of the dynamics at work in the caucusing process. She describes the importance of the context of a relationship before the development of identity. Sampson (1993) refers to the idea of 'other' as being pivotal in the infant's growing

ideas about themselves and the nature of reality. Relating this to the example under examination, i.e. caucusing, identifying which caucus group to go into forces the participants to, at the very least, consider who they are, racially and culturally. This then brings into the open their relationship to members of the other caucus from a racial or cultural view point.

Commonly expressed by members of the non-Maaori group in the early stages of caucusing was a concern that they would not be able to learn directly from their Maaori classmates, despite access to literature, the chance to gain insight from discussion with own group members and other means.

> …but we miss out on the Maaori feelings and emotions, how they feel about it.

In the Jones (1999) study this sentiment was also expressed by members of the Pakeha group. Jones describes this phenomenon as another instance of power imbalance between the dominant coloniser and colonised.

> Such a stance seeks sympathetic and helpful attention from the other, reassurance … that the violence of colonisation and privilege happens only 'over there' or 'back then' or among other people – not us (Jones 1999, p. 313).

Jones refers to the sense of uncertainty that is created for Pakeha by the separation. Jones advocates that liberal Pakeha need to learn to embrace this feeling of uncertainty. For dominant groups, accustomed to knowing and having access to knowledge, limiting access to knowledge, of course is difficult. She states that Pakeha need to:

> … be both resigned to and committed to … the impossibility of fully coming to know the other, but as a strategic act of interruption Rich and Cargile (2004) go on to suggest a methodological will to certainty and clarity of vision' and the colonising impulses that attend it (Jones, 1999, p. 315).

Healing

In their research with a mixed race class where issues of race were brought to the fore, Rich and Cargile (2004) go on to suggest that it was during the meetings in separate racial groups, similar to caucusing, that the opportunity for processing the uncomfortableness of the experience provided the opportunity for transformation to occur. They refer to the 'false sense of community' that must be revealed and disrupted before healing can be possible. This false sense of community is identified in the material gathered from students in this study:

> …had all that time building the class into a team and then you'd just get that cohesion and that teamness and then you're told, no, forget all that.

However, a number of comments by both non-Maaori and Maaori students indicate that this sense of comfortableness that caucusing disrupted was in fact false, and that what existed before caucusing was more the 'norm-governed' way of being that Rich and Cargile (2004) describe. One Maaori student suggests:

> I do know there is a lot of pressure to stay in the Tauiwi (*non-Maaori*) group because we had that choice and I do know one student that would like to be in the Maaori but is not confident to make that move. (Author's words in italics.)

This comment from a non-Maaori student:

> … underlying fears that caucusing has caused to surface were there all along and so now can be acknowledged.

The disparity between thoughts of some non-Maaori and Maaori students indicate that there are widely differing views. This from one non-Maaori student:

> … it is just history!

And yet these feelings expressed by a Maaori student:

> I feel … resentment at the treatment of Maaori up to present day.

Some Maaori students note the difficulties they encounter in speaking up or asking for clarification in a mixed caucuses class, also indicating that the sense of community others had referred to was not shared by all members of the community.

Healing, from Rich and Cargile's (2004) perspective is, for white students, the movement for white students from a state of accepting the dominant ideas about race to an awareness of realities about race and a development of empathy. This does not mean becoming the 'other', instead it means to enter another's place while still maintaining your own cultural base.

Howard (2006) states that healing can be achieved through honesty, empathy, advocacy and action. He describes empathy as letting go of assumptions, ego, and the privilege of non engagement which is the antithesis of dominance. Sensitivity expressed by a high proportion of non-Maaori students about the topic of colonisation and its impact on Maaori students shows the development of empathy in the case under scrutiny.

> …this caucusing is a good idea with the majority being Tauiwi (*non-Maaori*) so that gives Maaori chance to do that in a safe environment and for us to be safe too. (Author's words in italics.)

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate the practice of caucusing and how it impacts on learning. In particular it sought to clarify if this process contributed to the development of a deeper understanding regarding the impact of colonisation and its relevance to relationships today and whether the practice of caucusing is worthwhile. To aid this understanding, information was gathered identifying common and differing reactions to the caucusing process.

The research has been revealing. It identified that initially strong negative reactions occurred, particularly from non-Maaori students, which could be attributed to the disruption created by upsetting the norm-governed interactions of the mixed caucus situation. It has been helpful to link literature on white domination and development of cultural identity to the research findings, as this has provided a clearer understanding of benefits available through a process such as caucusing for non-Maaori students as well as Maaori students. The thoughts of non-Maaori students as the caucusing process proceeded were also helpful, revealing that in the majority of cases there is a shift by students to a more

empathetic, engaged and sensitive position regarding the topic and its impact on Maaori class mates.

The researchers have found the results have supported the ongoing use of caucusing in teaching subjects such as Te Tiriti o Waitangi and understanding gained through the research has in turn been helpful in contributing to the current practice of how the caucusing process is initiated and maintained. They believe that this research opens the way for further study of teaching methods for use in the area of Te Tiriti/Treaty o Waitangi. Some thoughts for consideration are: What methods within each of the caucuses are useful in determining outcomes that increase each caucus' learning? What are the implications of teaching this topic without process methodology such as caucusing? What opportunities exist for members of the Tauiwi caucus who have experienced colonisation in their own countries of origins?

Finally in the words of one of the study's participants:

… underlying fears that caucusing has caused to surface were there all along and so now can be acknowledged.

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