The allocation of Pasifika identity in New Zealand classrooms

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Abstract: Recent curriculum development in New Zealand has included an emphasis on the notion of developing students' identity. This presents a dilemma for New Zealand teachers who are working in an education system where diversity is acknowledged and valued in curriculum documents but who are living in a society where fragmentation, confusion and even hostility exists towards pluralism. Introductory comments to the Ministry of Education policy statement *The New Zealand Curriculum* include a pronouncement that, "The New Zealand Curriculum is a clear statement of what we deem important in education" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 4). Both the vision for young people and the principles, which embody what is important and desirable in the curriculum, detail the hope that students can clarify their own identities in relation to their particular heritages and that they are positive in their own identity (Ministry of Education, 2007). This paper examines the way in which New Zealand teachers have interpreted and addressed the concept of identity in their classroom programmes. It presents an analysis of qualitative data collected in interviews with Year 7 and 8 teachers. Drawing on findings from this study, the author details four categorisations of teacher type: the cultural provider; cultural mediator; cultural transmitter; and cultural popularist. These categorisations underscore teacher choices and practices related to the affirmation of identity. The article argues that teachers allocate rather than affirm a form of identity to their students and that this choice has significant implications, particularly for Pasifika students in New Zealand classrooms.

Keywords: ethnic identity; national identity; Pasifika students

Introduction

The recognition of identity has long been a feature of New Zealand education, particularly in the curriculum area of Social Studies. Its inclusion has been coupled with a long-standing "search for a mutually acceptable national identity on the part of many New Zealanders" (Archer & Openshaw, 1992, p. 20). More recently, notions of New Zealand identity have grown to encompass the inclusion of diverse ethnic identities represented in New Zealand's ever-expanding multicultural society. Today, New Zealand teachers are charged with the task of ensuring "that students' identities … are recognized and affirmed" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9). Furthermore, New Zealand's educational policy outlines a vision that students are "positive in their own identity" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 8). These requirements seem justifiable in educational policy which aims to be inclusive and empowering for all students. Such requirements do not reveal, however, the complex power relations through which identity is constructed (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998), nor do they acknowledge the difficult task of meeting these new and complex requirements given the immense changes that call into question what identity is in a world that is in constant flux (Parekh, 2008).

One of the ways that teachers respond to the recognition and affirmation of identity is to allocate a form of identity to their students. I argue that the allocation of identity is directly related to and a consequence of the choices teachers make about the content of their classroom programs. The findings from a small study of teachers' beliefs about the purpose of Social Studies education suggested that two forms of identity are most commonly recognised in classroom programs —national identity or ethnic identity— and that teachers choose to focus on either one or the other, but not both (Siteine, 2006). The teachers involved in the

study were teaching Years 7 or 8 students within the Auckland metropolitan area. All the teachers were curriculum leaders of social studies within their schools. Table 1 shows the range of school location, experience, ethnicity, and qualifications of each teacher.

Table 1. Background of teachers

Gender	Auckland location of school	Number of years teaching	Ethnicity (as described by the participants)	Educational qualification
Male	South	1	Samoan/ New Zealand	DipTchg BA
Female	East	30	European	TTC DipTchg Higher DipTchg
Female	North	8–10	Cook Island Māori/European	TTC DipTchg BA MA
Female	South	4	Samoan	BEd
Female	North	6	New Zealander	BEd
Female	East	5	Māori	DipTchg BEd
Female	East	4	NZ Pākehā/ Māori	BEd
Female	North	14	European	BEd

The teacher-determined focus on either national or ethnic identity leads to an unconscious allocation of students' identity as either a shared, common identity or a distinct, bounded identity. In order to understand this unconscious allocation, I use a theoretical model of four possible types of choice. These are expanded in the next section of this article. I then discuss some of the significant implications of allocating an ethnic identity to Pasifika students.

The allocation of student identity, the designing of classroom programmes and other activities about identity were determined by two motives. First, teachers allocate students' identity based on their own personal beliefs, experiences and understandings about identity. Second, teachers' allocations are grounded in their tacit knowledge that this is what good teachers do, and in their attempts to be culturally responsive educators. The decision to allocate children according to a perceived identity and to be a culturally responsive teacher ultimately influences the ways in which students will understand identity and, ultimately, 'see' themselves.

Four types of teacher allocation

Four types of teacher allocation have been theorised to understand the ways in which teachers allocate their students' identity. Two of the categories are related to the recognition and affirmation of ethnic identity and include ideas of the teacher as cultural provider and the teacher as cultural mediator. The remaining categories are related to the recognition and affirmation of national identity and include ideas of the teacher as cultural transmitter and the teacher as cultural popularist.

Type 1: The teacher as cultural provider

The teacher who acts as cultural provider is specifically concerned with students' ethnic identity. This emphasis is based on the belief, expressed by teachers, that students who are members of a minority ethnic group are often confused over who they are, and where they belong in society. These students are at risk of having, or developing, marginalised identities that require affirmation and validation in order to help them find their place in society.

One way that students from minority groups can be marginalised is a result of their invisibility in classroom resources and programmes. Dominant culture perspectives tend to influence the curriculum (Harrison, 1998; McKay & Gibson, 2004). Jacoby (1979) described this process of invisibility as social amnesia: "a forgetting and repression of the human and social activity that makes and can remake society" (p. 5). Simon (1992) argued that Social Studies in the New Zealand curriculum serves this purpose:

> Social Studies in New Zealand schools functions as a vehicle for the transmission of dominant class Pakeha values, not just because of the design of the syllabus and the scope it provides for teachers to bring their own values and prejudices to bear in the selection and development of their programmes, but, more significantly, because these features together support the cultivating of social amnesia. (p. 269)

The views, knowledge and histories of ethnic minority groups can, consequently, be rendered invisible. A curriculum that is dominated by the mainstream Eurocentric culture may negatively affect students outside the mainstream because they often find the classroom alien, hostile, and self-defeating (Banks, 2002).

One teacher spoke with some poignancy about her students' ethnic identities. She had observed that several of her students lacked a sense of belonging because they were confused about both their ethnic and national identity, "I see kids who actually get quite hurt because they can't identify themselves, if they were born here, to their culture and they can't identify themselves as kiwis."

The inability of students to identify either as 'kiwis' or to their 'culture' suggests a fragmentation of identity into a national and an ethnic identity. Interestingly, while this teacher acknowledged both forms of identity, and acknowledged that students experienced confusion over both identities, she chose to address only one form of identity: ethnic identity. As such, the teacher was allocating an ethnic identity to her students rather than recognising or affirming students' self-identification.

Ethnic identity was validated through students' teaching, learning and performing songs and dances from their ethnic groups. Students' sense of pride in their ethnic identity was also supported by promoting role models from students' ethnic backgrounds. These role models were either prominent sports people or musicians. One teacher explained how role models were included in her class programme:

> *Last year they had Adeaze [and] Orene Ai'i, the rugby player .... The year before that they had Ali Lauiti'iti. So they had these famous New Zealand people that they can*

> *look up to. We're actually looking at Pacific Island role models that they can actually look up to .... I actually prep the guest speakers to talk to them about setting goals and taking pride in yourself and your culture.*

Recognising and validating students' ethnic identity in this way, was seen as contributing to constituting their fragmented identities and helping them develop confidence, pride and feelings of belonging to society because they could then know and be proud of who they were.

During the interviews, the same teacher shared the following description of her personal struggle with identity and belonging:

> *When I was growing up, I didn't actually fit in. I'm Samoan but I never say [that I am] .... I'm not what they considered, back then, the typical looking Samoan .... and I didn't fit into Western society either. So, I really had to struggle to find my place in society.*

Teacher allocation of identity is determined by two motives: personal experience, beliefs or understandings about identity; and teachers' determination to act in culturally responsive ways. Overt in this brief admission about her own identity is this teacher's motive for choosing to address ethnic identity in her classroom programme.

Another teacher described that her concern about ethnic identity stemmed from her past experiences as a social worker: "The identity issue is really important for me because that's what I found working in health and other areas in social work, that if they aren't properly worked on then people drift." Teachers as 'cultural providers' act as saviours of supposedly marginalised children in their class, in the hope that the teacher can reconstitute fragmented identities and validate diverse and personal ethnic identities. Although two possible choices are acknowledged, teachers choose to allocate ethnic identity to their students in order to meet these goals.

Type 2: The teacher as cultural mediator
The second type of identity allocation by teachers is also concerned with ethnic identity, but it is a much softer form than acknowledged in the former type. The teacher is less concerned with directly addressing any anxiety or confusion associated with the identity of students from ethnic minorities and is more interested in smoothing over the differences that exist over the range of students' ethnic identities. In this classification, the teacher acts as cultural mediator. In contrast to Type 1, which was related to the validation of the ethnic self, in Type 2 the affirmation of ethnic identity was related to making ancestral links and to places of origin. The emphasis on ancestry and places of origin was made to help students acknowledge that they were all different, all came from different places and this knowledge should help them appreciate their own and others' cultural difference.

Two teachers in the study suggested that students' ancestral links with the people they were studying helped students identify and reinforce their own identity even if it meant going back several centuries:

> *I had some children who were actually able to move back and see [a connection. They said] 'Did you know we're related to the Vikings?' And so that, and what have we learnt about the Vikings, that helps us know who we are, what we are, so there's a sense of identity.*

Another teacher who associated ethnic identity with students' countries of origin explained:

> *We did a thing at the start of the year on where the kids came from ... mostly*

> *Auckland of course, I've got one Fijian, a couple of South Africans, so that's fantastic and then we could all see we come from different bits.*

The teacher as cultural mediator believes that the acknowledgement of these elements of ethnic identity will help students be accepted in society and to be accepting of others. Teachers expressed a fear that ethnic difference in the classroom and playing fields had the potential to lead to conflict. For example,

> *We have problems out there ... with students ... who don't accept cultural difference and we've got to do our very best within the classrooms to help students to stand tall, to stand proud and be accepted.*

The role of teacher as cultural mediator is to help students understand the diverse nature of New Zealand's multicultural society and to locate themselves within this society. One teacher said, "It's about multiculturalism, about understanding where and how they [students] fit with other people." While another explained, "We try to encourage kids . . . to realise that everyone is different and to accept the differences."

Teachers saw understanding the plurality of ethnic diversity in New Zealand as important because it assisted students to understand that one did not have to be the same to belong. If students lack a "sense of belonging, self esteem issues surface", it can give rise to "anger, distrust, [and] conflict."

Therefore, the teacher as cultural mediator emphasises, acknowledges and affirms the diversity of ethnic cultures found in New Zealand society, and especially within its classrooms. They believe that it is important to acknowledge and accept difference in order to minimise potential ethnic conflict in society, schools, and classrooms.

Type 3: Teacher as cultural transmitter

The allocation that is theorised as Type 3 is concerned with national identity. Identity development was related to New Zealand's national identity and students' awareness of their place as New Zealanders. In a similar manner to Type 2, this view of national identity acknowledged the plurality of cultures found in New Zealand society and the acceptance of difference in order to help everyone 'fit in'. However, while a plurality of cultures was acknowledged, they were subsumed in favour of a common, shared national history related to knowing about New Zealand's heritage and, in particular, knowledge of important historical events such as Waitangi Day and ANZAC day. One teacher expressed the opinion:

> *Knowing where we've come from and where our country has come from is really important to us, so Waitangi Day and ANZAC Day are very important. I think it's important for the children to know the history of what makes up our country.*

National identity, therefore, was characterised by a common, shared heritage that was embedded in knowledge of New Zealand's history. Social Studies programmes with these goals as their central focus are traditional in their approach and have been prevalent in many classrooms for many years (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1978; McKay & Gibson, 2004; Archer & Openshaw, 1992). The teacher as a cultural transmitter is interested in the passing on of established knowledge, beliefs, and values that support a national identity. This emphasis will allow all students to find a place to or 'fit in' and belong to New Zealand society.

Type 4: Teacher as cultural popularist

The final allocation of identity is characterised by what it means to be a 'kiwi'. 'Kiwi' identity was related to a recognition of and affinity with significant New Zealand symbols and 'famous' New Zealanders, mostly sports people or musicians. Another teacher described how she promoted kiwi identity with her students:

> *[We are] designing a new New Zealand flag …. I've printed off a whole lot of well-known people who have said the flag should be changed and these are people that [students] will know like Sarah Ulmer, like Susan Devoy, those people …. We're celebrating the whole of what it is to be kiwi …. I think it's important that we acknowledge that we are kiwis and this is what we stand for, we stand for having pavlova and the silver fern and all that stuff that makes us unique.*

Social Studies programmes should, according to these teachers, develop students' understanding of the significance of contemporary New Zealand icons. These unique icons represent a shared New Zealand culture and symbolise what it means to be a 'kiwi'. They provide boundary markers for what it means to be a New Zealander, identifying how New Zealanders consider themselves the same as each other and different from others. The meringue dessert known as 'pavlova', for example, is seen as representing the concepts of originality and distinctiveness. Students were encouraged to identify elements of the New Zealand culture that made them the same. In so doing, students became 'us' or 'we' rather than 'them' or they'. The following statements, selected from teacher interviews, provide examples of the significant use of the designation '*we*' in teachers' discourse about identity [own emphasis].

- *[Students will] identify who **we** are, why **we** are like we are . . . how **we** fit.*

- *As a nation, **we** need more debate on our identity issues.*

- ***We** are kiwis, and this is what **we** stand for.*

- *[Social studies] is a terrific way to learn about who **we** are.*

In some instances, teachers used the word 'we' to distinguish those who identified as the same, and also the word 'they' was used to identify those who were different [own emphasis]:

- *We have an umu . . . but **they** call it something else …. People come from the Islands of other countries . . . **they** know who they are when they come …. but when **they're** here they're faced with all sorts of other ethnic groups and **they're** trying so desperately to fit in with society here **they** kind of lose who **they** are.*

- ***We** talk about Māori culture and bicultural issues but, in actual fact, **we** separate **them**.*

'They' were seen as different and not necessarily being New Zealanders or 'kiwis'.

Loyalty and patriotism were also featured characteristics of national identity in teachers' discourse. One teacher, for example, noted that she taught students to be "loyal by being patriotic to their sports teams and people who support New Zealand in sports or anything around New Zealand, New Zealand music." In addition, understanding national identity was expressed through the support of national sports people and New Zealand musicians. One could demonstrate national identity and experience national pride by supporting those who represented New Zealand. For example:

> *I think we punch above our weight in lots of things, in sport especially, and that gives us great pride …. Every time you see that black jersey, that's [what makes us] really proud.*

This emphasis on national pride was explained by one teacher in light of her own experiences:

> *I've lived and travelled and worked overseas and every time you see that black jersey*

> *that's really proud …. We love to explore, we love to do different things and I try and tell my kids that. When you go, it's not like **if** you go, its like **when** you go then you will appreciate New Zealand so much more when you come back because we have the green hills and we are just like Lord of the Rings. That is us. We have the fantastic rivers that you can go swimming in. We don't have the polluted air that you can't hang your washing out in [like] London. It's all of that. That's us and we have to celebrate that. I get really passionate.*

The teacher as cultural popularist, like the teacher in Type 3, is also interested in strengthening students' national identity. National identity for the cultural popularist, however, is linked to contemporary icons that are well-known and generally accepted as representing New Zealand society. Recognising the icons as representations of New Zealand society gives students 'insider' knowledge and allows them entrance to the group that shares a 'kiwi' identity. Teachers are concerned with assisting students to find an affinity with kiwi culture so that they might be included rather than excluded from the group.

This section has outlined a typology that underpins the argument that teachers allocate a form of identity in their classroom programmes. The following section will consider the implications of identity allocation for Pasifika students and will advance the view that the task is complex and problematic.

The allocation of a Pasifika ethnic identity

The affirmation of ethnic identity was seen as a priority by teachers who acted as cultural providers or cultural mediators. They saw their role as promoting a sense of pride and belonging by helping students make personal links to their ethnic or ancestral origins. Their rationale for prioritising ethnic identity in their classroom programmes supported the idea that recognising and exploring students' ethnic backgrounds or family histories could help affirm the cultural roots of students who may feel marginalised by the dominant culture (Hill, 1994). However, the attempt to affirm a Pasifika identity is difficult because it inevitably leads to allocation of a particular form of identity. This allocation is particularly problematic for those who are described as having, or who claim to have, a Pasifika identity for three reasons:

- a gap exists between an ideological and lived view of Pasifika identity;
- teachers understanding of Pasifika identity can be shaped by deficit views; and
- allocation does not allow for choice or variability.

Ideological views of Pasifika identity

The need to affirm Pasifika students' identities was highlighted in interviews with one teacher in particular who identified a division or fragmentation between the ways in which first generation New Zealanders experienced their Pasifika identity, in comparison with their immigrant parents. A similar fragmentation was described by Van Meijl (1999) in a piece of research that involved Māori students in a marae-based training course. Van Meijl noted that students had a set of ideological criteria for describing Māori identity such as holding traditional knowledge, knowing marae protocol and speaking Māori. Few students in Van Meijl's study measured up to the characteristics they considered relevant to Māori identity. The students experienced difficulty reconciling "their Māori ethnicity with a traditional identity" (Van Meijl, 1999, p. 69). This fragmentation between an ideological view of one's identity and the lived reality is the experience of many Pasifika students (Nakhid, 2003). Many New Zealand born Pasifika people do not know their village affiliation, are ignorant of their family connections, cannot converse in their heritage language. Conversely, they may

see these features of ethnic identity as "marker[s] of authenticity" (McIntosh, 2005, p. 45) of their Pasifika identity. This becomes an issue when classroom programmes that attempt to affirm Pasifika identity promote these markers of identity.

Attempts to address and acknowledge Pasifika identity in a classroom programme can, therefore, be difficult. Attempts can often degenerate into what Jones and Derman-Sparks (1992) termed a 'tourist' approach to diversity, in which students experience the culture of a particular group in the same way that a tourist might. Students, like tourists, learn a few words, participate in the performance of songs and dances, taste the food, and perhaps find out a few historical or geographical facts unique to the place and people under study (Samu, Mara & Siteine, 2008). While students from the dominant culture are "presented with their heritage as part of the regular and accepted sequence of topics", Pasifika students can be "put on show" to illustrate topics dealing with their countries of origin or related to their ethnic group(s) (Hill, 1994, p. 89). Those students who are not able to 'see' themselves in the Pasifika representations put before them are unlikely to feel that their ethnic identity is affirmed or validated. In fact, such an approach can serve to perpetuate stereotypes, misrepresent cultural realities, and undermine the sense of identity that teachers are attempting to promote (Ellington, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1992). For these reasons, students may be unwilling to identify themselves as 'Pasifika' or at least to align themselves with the type of Pasifika person that is being promoted in classroom programmes.

Deficit views of Pasifika identity

A second reason that Pasifika students may be unwilling to locate themselves as having a Pasifika identity can be understood in terms of the way in which ethnicity has been linked with academic achievement (Hernandez Sheets, 2005; Portes, 2005). There can be little doubt that Pasifika students and their families have not always been served well by New Zealand schools (Ministry of Education, 2006). The statistics of disparity in educational achievement associated with Pasifika students shows a higher number of school leavers with little or no formal attainment, higher school suspension rates, and a greater percentage of intermittent and unjustified absences. In each area, Pasifika students have lower rates of achievement and participation than non-Pasifika students. Theorising of these deficit statistics, as well as of the low socio-economic status of many Pasifika groups, continue to shape some teachers' perceptions of Pasifika students and their identity (Ferguson, Gorinski, Samu & Mara, 2008). Scholars who examine the implications of deficit theorising on students from ethnic minorities claim that students may "go out of their way **not** to exhibit 'cultural displays' …. and sometimes even refuse to acknowledge their ethnic ancestry" (Hernandez Sheets, 2005, p. 58). Being Pasifika, then, is not always associated with feelings of success or pride in New Zealand school contexts.

Lack of choice

The final reason that the allocation of a Pasifika identity is problematic is that such an allocation does not acknowledge the existence of choice. Choice is related to both the act of allocation and the identification of an individual as Pasifika. Ethnic self-identification is taken for granted by individuals whose ethnicity places them in the dominant mainstream, but this has not always been the case for ethnic minorities. Historically, ethnic minorities and multiracial individuals have not had the opportunity to choose identities for themselves (Spickard, 1992). As Waters (1990) explained, "one of the most basic choices we have is whether to apply an ethnic label to ourselves" (p. 52). This choice of ethnic identification is fundamental to the affirmation of self because it is "an identity that overrides all others' judgments of the self. As such, it is also basic to the establishment of self-meaning" (Stephan, 1992, p. 51). Programmes that focus on the validation or affirmation of an ethnic Pasifika identity, as discussed earlier, are often based on the teacher's views of a Pasifika identity rather than that which comes from Pasifika students. McIntosh (2005) describes this as a 'forced identity', one that is

> Cast upon individuals and groups rather than having being formed by them. All identities are formed from within and without, but the forced identity is one that is predominantly based on the perceptions of the outsider group . . . identity formation where the individuals have little control of the process. (p. 48)

The allocation of a Pasifika identity, then, may force rather than affirm an identity. As well as removing the opportunity for choice, the allocation of a Pasifika identity is troublesome. The use of the term Pasifika to collectively describe the identity of those who have affiliations with Pacific Island Nations has been highlighted by several authors. Samu (2006), for example, observed that only in New Zealand was she called Pasifika or a Pacific Islander. Everywhere else in the world, she is identified as Samoan. Tupola (2004) noted that many New Zealand born Pacific Islanders refer to themselves using a pan-Pacific label, such as 'PI'. Spickard and Fong (1995) noted a similar trend in the USA. In their examination of Pacific Island American multi-ethnicity, they explain that Pacific Island Americans were treated "as a single group despite their obvious multiplicity" (p. 1368). Furthermore, they point out that the term Pacific Islander is not an ethnic group. "No person arises in the morning thinking of herself or himself as a Pacific Islander American. Most think of themselves as Tongans … or Samoans, Fijians, and so on" (p. 1368). The same claim can be made about the term 'Pasifika'. While there is a growing acceptance of this term by Pasifika groups and individuals, many researchers advise caution about indiscriminate use of the term and advocate the acknowledgement of the ethnic diversity amongst Pasifika peoples rather than viewing them as one homogenous group (Anae, 1998; Manu'atu, 2000; Nakhid, 2003; Samu, 2006; Tupuola, 2004). The emphasis on a Pasifika identity rather than a Tongan, Samoan, Niuean, Tokelauan or Cook Island identity, for example, further homogenises and limits a vision of the self. Furthermore, it consolidates the lack of choice offered to students to self-identify.

Conclusion

The recognition and affirmation of students' identities called for in the New Zealand National Curriculum reflects the goals of culturally responsive education. The way in which teachers understand identity, and therefore select the content of their educational programmes, has significant implications for their students. The selection of national or ethnic identity leads to an unconscious allocation of identity and privileges one form of identity over another. In this paper, a typology of teacher allocation of identity has been developed from teachers' voices with the goal of making teacher choices and their implications explicit. Its purpose is not to promote one type over another, but to highlight the fact that what teachers choose to teach, and the experiences that they bring to the classroom, has a profound impact on student identity. This deserves careful attention, particularly with reference to Pasifika students because ideological understandings of Pasifika identity, deficit views and the lack of choice about identity can serve to promote fixed, unrealistic, fragmented and singular identities. The idea of singular identities does not allow for the idea that individuals have multiple, fluid identities. One person can be, without contradiction, a New Zealand citizen, of Samoan heritage, with German ancestry, a Christian, a woman, a heterosexual, a feminist and an All Blacks supporter, and none of these identities can be taken to be the person's only identity.

Balancing the varying, and often conflicting, values posed by the affirmation of identity epitomises the complex and difficult task with which teachers are faced. Affirming identity is an on-going, dynamic process. The sensitivity and understanding that teachers need to show to their students is more critical in the affirmation of identity than the factual information or celebratory experiences they may engage in within their classroom programmes that focus on different ethnic and cultural groups.

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