‘Opening the can of worms’. *Interrogating resistance to change within culturally diverse communities*


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Abstract

This paper addresses a current educational problem; how to prepare school change agents to deal with resistance to change in order to improve teaching practice and outcomes for marginalised students. The paper draws on the results of a doctorial study (Hynds, unpublished) of teachers’ collaborative reform work in two New Zealand schools, following a government-funded initiative designed to raise the achievement of minority ethnic (Maori\(^1\)) students. Results indicated that different forms of resistance influenced the practice and acceptance of teachers’ collective reform work across both school communities. Analysis of results emphasised the cultural complexity of resistance within schools, as well as missed opportunities in establishing school-community discussions related to diversity, difference and marginalising practices. In this paper we argue that it is necessary to re-examine resistance to change, as such forms of opposition reveal much about the existing, but largely hidden, and unacknowledged cultures and structures of schools. We conclude by considering the implications for the professional development of school leaders working to develop and/or sustain culturally responsive programmes.

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\(^1\) Maori are the indigenous people of New Zealand.
Introduction

It has long been argued that schooling and education are contested sites and places of struggle and resistance (Corson, 1998). Critical approaches to education begin with the view that schools are not closed systems, cut off from wider influences (ibid). Understanding the locations and nature of resistance to the development of culturally responsive practice is important because it impacts on the learning capacity of the whole school. Shields and Sayani (2005) have argued that learning communities that encourage an examination of classroom practice from culturally diverse perspectives inevitably allow conflict and tensions to arise. However, the treatment of opposition and resistance to change in much of the school reform literature suggests that it should be avoided or resolved rather than understood (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006). Taking advantage of new findings (Hynds, 2007) we reveal the cultural complexity of resistance to change in schools and discuss the implications for leadership within change programmes that seek to transform practice and outcomes for marginalised students.

Resistance associated with struggle and marginalization

The concept of resistance is emphasised by theorists interested in student marginalisation and of social justice (Theoharis, 2007). The history of indigenous peoples, within the context of colonisation has not been one of partnership, but one of domination and marginalisation (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Smith, 1999). Educational failure, poor health statistics and unequal employment patterns are legacies of colonisation. Historical attempts to address cultural diversity in mainstream schools have been inadequate due to epistemological racism, “that is embedded in the fundamental practices of the dominant culture” (Bishop & Glynn, 1999, p. 12). Smith (1999) has long argued that opposition is needed to overcome the impact and influence of colonisation on indigenous peoples. Colonisation is viewed as a process which ignores and/or denies the status of indigenous people and which maintains a colonial discourse as the ‘other’. Therefore, individual and/or group resistance can be linked to activism and agency; a process of ‘decolonisation’ which seeks to uncover, disrupt and transform the status quo and practices which promote domination and marginalisation of indigenous peoples (Smith, 1999).

Reducing disparity in student learning outcomes and addressing cultural diversity within schools

In the 2006 census, the resident population of Maori in New Zealand was recorded as 565,326 (14.6 percent of the general population). Projections over the next 20 years based on the 2006 census show that the Maori population will continue to increase. For example, in 2021 the number of Maori is expected to reach 749,300, an increase of 27.9 percent. Sixteen-and-a-half percent of the total population will then be Maori. However, two OECD reports (2001, 2002) on achievement patterns in New Zealand schools have highlighted a ‘long tail’ of underachievement by some ethnic groups, particularly Maori students.
Previous research within New Zealand has identified the importance of teachers developing culturally responsive pedagogy (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Teachers can improve the quality of their teaching by drawing on the diverse cultures of pupils they teach, respecting, valuing and connecting to students’ prior knowledge and experiences (Alton-Lee, 2003). Honouring the diversity of all students is central to the notion of quality teaching (ibid).

However, some assert that social institutions such as schools give superficial nods to culture whilst tending to preserve the existing social order. Noted multi-cultural researcher and educator James Banks (2006) argues that schools must be viewed as social and cultural learning systems which are larger than their interrelated parts. He maintains that schools can be conceptualised as cultural systems with specific ethos, values, norms and shared meanings that develop through grouping practices, actions and interactions amongst school participants.

**Resistance to ‘equity minded’ reforms**

The phenomenon of resistance to change has emerged in some studies of educational reform, where new initiatives have attempted to improve teaching practice and outcomes for marginalised student groups (Oakes, Wells, Yoneawa & Ray, 2000; Theoharis, 2007). These studies emphasise the impact of dominant discourses related to difference and diversity within the wider school community and the power of parental elites. For example, Oakes, et al. (2000) reported on ten case studies of ‘detracking’ school reform initiatives in the United States of America that were committed to issues of equity and social justice. Oakes et al. explain how these reform programmes met with considerable parental resistance from privileged, white, middle-income parent groups. They also noted that change agents working within the subject schools were ill-prepared to respond to political pressure from such powerful groups, who interpreted reform activities as threatening to their own children’s education and academic achievement:

> Most of the change agents that we observed were caught unprepared when the process and shape of their equity-minded reforms were profoundly affected by norms and politics concerning race, gender, sexual orientation, language and socio-economic status. (Oakes et al., 2000, p. 88)

Theoharis (2007) also highlights parental opposition to school reform efforts with a social justice orientation. He argues that social justice work in schools is centred on “concern for situations of marginalisation” and “grounded in the daily realities of school leadership” (p. 223). In a recent study he investigated culturally responsive leadership by interviewing seven public school leaders in the Mid West of America, who came to their principalship with a social justice orientation. He found that these school leaders ‘enacted’ their own resistance to unfair and inequitable practices in their own schools, but also faced ‘formidable resistance’ which subsequently had a personal toll (p. 248). The school principals in Theoharis’ (2007) study believed that their own preparation programmes “did not assist them in their ability to lead for social justice” (p. 249). Hence, Theoharis called for preparation programs in the area of social justice leadership, arguing that such professional development work should prepare “leaders to both enact
and develop resistance in the face of significant barriers” (p. 249). Although he stated that school leaders should build capacity to develop their own resistance and resilience to such challenges, he believed it would be “irresponsible to prepare leaders to take on” such work “without understandings on how to weather the storms that will result” (ibid, p.250). In this paper we highlight the cultural complexity of resistance to change within diverse school communities and conclude by considering the implications for the professional development of school change agents working to develop and/or sustain culturally responsive programmes.

**Background to the Study**

In 2001 the New Zealand government launched a new action research project, with the intention of providing several voluntary schools with partnership opportunities to enable teachers to improve classroom practice for Maori students.

Voluntary schools were grouped into clusters and undertook to:
- collect base-line data on Maori student achievement and identify students’ learning needs;
- develop appropriate professional development programmes for teachers to address the most significant learning needs;
- implement the interventions;
- observe and record changes in Maori student outcomes;
- assess the impact the programme had on Maori student outcomes and family (whānau)-school relationships.

One of the authors of this paper (Hynds) was a member of a team contracted by the Ministry of Education to evaluate the impact of the first phase of the government’s programme. The evaluation indicated some progress had been made towards the development of new partnerships between Maori and non-Maori teachers, students and parents/caregivers across school communities (Tuuta, Bradnam, Hynds, Higgins & Broughton, 2004).

After the evaluation process was finished, Hynds approached the Ministry of Education and two school communities for permission to use the action research initiative as a context for a new doctorial study. This second research study (Hynds, 2007) posed the following question: What influences the practice of teachers’ collaborative partnership work, when Maori and non-Maori teachers work together on a school reform project? Teachers’ collective work was investigated from multiple perspectives (for example, those of Maori and non-Maori teachers, students, parents-caregivers, principals and in-school facilitators) in the two selected schools which had taken part in the first phase of the project.

**Research methodology and theoretical framework**

The study reported here draws on the narratives of experiences of teachers, students and community people in two schools (one elementary and one high school), who participated
in the government-funded action research initiative. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 77 participants to track personal experiences of teachers’ collaborative partnerships and perceptions of change over time. 17 teachers’ (7 Maori and 10 non-Maori) were interviewed twice over the course of 12 months (2003 – 2004). Parents/caregivers (10 Maori and 20 non-Maori) and their children (15 Maori and 15 non-Maori) were then interviewed towards the end of 2004.

Inductive analysis ensured that codes, themes and patterns emerged from the collected evidence (Janesick, 2000). Co-construction of meaning developed through member checks and debriefing procedures with participant groups. The theory of resistance that evolved was grounded in interview evidence, and developed from statements of beliefs from participants involved in the study (Janesick, 2000).

It is important to note that in order to protect the identity of participants who volunteered to take part in this research, their names and the names of their schools have been changed.

Findings and Discussion
Research findings indicated that particular forms of resistance developed within and across both school communities, which influenced the practice and acceptance of teachers collaborative partnership work. These forms of opposition reveal much about the existing, but largely hidden, and unacknowledged cultures and structures of both schools. We begin by examining the most vocal and visible form.

Resistance from non-Maori Parents/Caregivers
A highly visible form of opposition emerged during the first two years after the action research initiative was introduced. Twelve out of fifteen non-Maori parents/caregivers who were interviewed from across both school communities expressed concerns, as they felt that their own children’s identities and learning opportunities were now being threatened by the increased focus on Maori language, customs and protocols. This principal described how a group of non-Maori parents/caregivers vocalised their concerns as they openly threatened to withdraw their children from the school:

We faced ... really negative reactions from... non-Maori parents to the amount of te reo (Maori language) being used in school and especially spoken in classrooms. They have .... seen this as detrimental to their children’s learning ... parents ... said that they would pull their children from the school, particularly when we appointed our Deputy Principal who is Maori, and there have been some families who have withdrawn their children.... (Principal 2, non-Maori, 2004)

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2 As key patterns emerged from analysis, participant groups were asked to comment on the validity of results through a process of ongoing member checks and debriefing procedures. The process of conducting member checks with culturally diverse participants developed into a process of mutual story-telling, “…where participants are engaging in a discourse where meanings are contextually grounded and shift as discourse develops and is shaped by speakers” (Bishop & Glynn, 1999, p. 127).
Some parents and caregivers acknowledged their opposition to teachers’ reform work once they started to see changes in teachers’ practice within their child’s classroom and/or school:

*I’ve noticed that the Maori influence has got stronger at the school ... the school has sent out information about what the teachers are doing, .... and how they are bringing the Maori side into it... there was ... resistance around the parents to that..... because most of us didn’t want that much coming through.* (Mrs Logen, parent/caregiver of non-Maori child, 2004)

Some parents/caregivers expressed concerns that teachers’ reform work at their children’s school was racist, even though they acknowledged that they did not know much about what teachers were attempting to do. These participants appeared to jump to the conclusion that by addressing the needs of Maori students, teachers would ignore the needs of their own children. They also espoused the idea that teachers should ignore racial differences, claiming acknowledgement of such differences to be a type of racism:

*It’s like it’s racist ... ... I don’t get this race difference, like, to me everyone is even and we should be treated the same ...., let’s get over this race thing and try and get all our kids achieving .... .* (Mr Smith, parent/caregiver of non-Maori child, 2004)

It appeared from some Maori teacher interviews and subsequent member checks that there was pressure to dilute some of the new practices (Hynds, 2007). This Maori teacher described how her colleague was approached to reduce the attention on Maori language and traditional cultural values:

*I felt really angry that my colleague was told she was using too much te reo in class, after all that talk ... my feeling is we haven’t really progressed .... . It’s really come down to the nitty-gritty and it’s a question of our values, and ... and really a lack of respect for us as Maori.* (Barbara, Maori teacher, 2005)

Resistance by non-Maori parents/caregivers developed as a counter-action to observed changes and a strong desire by these participants to maintain the status quo. The results of this study echo those of Theoharis (2007) and Oakes, et al. (2000), who also found principals and other school leaders working to enact social justice reforms, met with considerable parental resistance, particularly from white, middle-income parent groups. These authors argued that school reform efforts that sought to improve teaching and learning outcomes for marginalised groups are extremely threatening to parental elites, and that ‘threatening flight’ can thwart reform efforts as such parent groups had other viable private or public schooling options. Addressing the issue of dominant groups and of their fears and prejudices, Bishop and Glynn (1999) have argued that contemporary educational policies and practices within New Zealand have developed from a framework of colonisation, and as a result present schooling systems serve the interests of monocultural elites. The impact of non-Maori parent/caregiver opposition and the
subsequent pressure placed on teachers to dilute new practices and maintain the status quo emphasised existing but largely hidden, power relationships and dominant discourses related to cultural diversity and difference within the two schools.

**Resistance from teacher groups**

Interviews indicated that different teacher groups disengaged with collective reform work over time. Some of this resistance emerged as passive opposition and/or silence, and accompanied as a refusal to comply with change activities. During the second interviews in 2004, 12/17 (4 Maori and 8 non-Maori) teachers reported that they had chosen not to share particular ideas, questions or concerns openly or honestly with colleagues. In addition, only 4/17 teachers (2 Maori and 2 non-Maori) talked about sustaining new collaborative partnership work with colleagues, such as collecting or examining Maori student achievement data.

Analysis indicated that there were different reasons for teachers’ disengagement, and these included valid concerns about:

- a lack of a shared vision and agreement on ‘what counted’ as improved classroom practice;
- a lack of agreement about ‘what counted’ as important cultural values;
- a lack of trust and respect between teachers for differences revealing prejudice, racism and stereotypes;
- a lack of culturally appropriate and safe environments in order for participants to express ideas honestly, openly and constructively.

**Resistance among Maori teachers**

A particular point of disagreement seemed to centre on teacher beliefs about involving students in decision-making processes. Seven teachers (3/7 Maori teachers and 4/8 non-Maori teachers) reported that they had been talking to and/or working with colleagues to help improve their classroom practice through the use of power-sharing or co-construction strategies with students. However, amongst teachers it appeared that the notion of power-sharing with students was contested. This Maori teacher commented that asking students their views contravened traditional Maori protocols of reliance on the wisdom of the tribal elders, not the immature comments of the young:

> … there are some strategies... that are not.... Maori ... in my day you had to be white haired, just about bald before you could stand up and speak on a marae (formal Maori meeting house). Now ... anybody can go and .... korero (speak their mind) because this is how they’re being taught... and a lot of our Maori people are forgetting to learn ... there is a step and our kids aren’t going through those steps, ... you’ve got to go back to values (Barbara, Maori teacher, 2004)

Individual Maori teachers shared their concerns with the researcher about fading teacher engagement in collective reform work, and that important cultural values were not being
addressed in the work. Three out of the seven Maori teachers explained that cultural status had been a factor that had influenced their own engagement in collaborative partnership work over time. These cultural differences related to status did not appear to be acknowledged, investigated or understood within the context of reform work in either school community. It’s important to note that 2/7 Maori teachers felt very strongly that teachers should develop power-sharing strategies with students, as a means of improving classroom practice.

Some theorists have argued that teachers must work to identify, accept and value cultural diversity within staff-rooms if they are to work together to develop culturally responsive practice and/or multi-cultural education in their schools (Banks, 2006; Johnson & Bush, 2005). During member checks all of the Maori teachers who had been interviewed shared concerns that initially the action research initiative had involved teachers listening to the voices of Maori parents/caregivers, Maori students, Maori elders and community members in order to develop a ‘shared vision of reform.’ However, they also concluded that these processes had not been sustained across the two school communities. All of the Maori teachers (7/7) who were interviewed believed that the process of power-sharing with students would need to be openly debated, but only in adherence to important cultural protocols (on the marae/meeting house) and with other Maori stakeholder groups.

The clear majority (13/15) of parents and caregivers of Maori children who were interviewed, although supporting the collaborative work of teachers, believed that the goal of reform (improving Maori student outcomes) could not be undertaken without including family (whānau) members:

*I still think the partnership idea is good, Maori and Pakeha teachers working together to make it work, but what about involving whānau and community more? I don’t think the school or the teachers can do it by themselves.* (Mr Tumu, parent/caregiver of Maori child, 2004)

Nine/15 parents and caregivers of Maori students who were interviewed at both schools also believed their children needed to be consulted about the effectiveness of teachers’ reform efforts over time:

*The kids seem to be able to judge who’s good and who isn’t good and why they’re not good, and why they didn’t think that they were going to learn off them … and this wasn’t just the European teachers either, this was Maori teachers as well. At times they were just as critical of their Maori teachers.* (Ms Walker, parent/caregiver of Maori child, 2004)

There appeared to be very valid concerns related to the notion of ‘what counted’ as important cultural values and culturally responsive practice. However, these concerns were not examined and/or debated within either school community. It appeared that there was a very superficial understanding of culturally responsive practice within both schools
and a lack of acknowledgement of the need to engage culturally diverse stakeholder groups in ongoing inquiry and dialogue around new such issues.

**Resistance, valid concerns and a lack of effective listening practices**

Participant stories indicated that numbers of teachers had disengaged with the reform work over time. Some of the reasons cited related to concerns for personal safety, existing staff factions, divisions and/or school hierarchies and of teachers’ ability to debate issues of cultural difference and diversity in honest, constructive and open ways. One participant explained that he had witnessed aggressive and dysfunctional communication practices of teachers within his school:

> There had been that sort of subversive teacher behaviour … it has done a lot of damage …. Comments at staff meetings, put-downs about (the project) and the work being done, sighs, body language, blatant ‘No’s’, to subversive behaviour, going behind people’s backs and saying, ‘Let’s not do that’, ‘I’m not handing it in to colleagues’, just not being made accountable for their behaviour really …. it lets people down… and sometimes it is aggressive. (Special Needs Resource Teacher, 2004)

Participant stories indicated that individual staff members from across both school communities had experienced very negative and damaging incidents in their work with colleagues, which highlighted issues of trust and respect. For example, in her first interview one Maori teacher was very enthusiastic about the possibilities of working collaboratively with colleagues to improve aspects of classroom practice for diverse groups of Maori students. She believed teachers needed to establish positive relationships with students who were most “at risk” of being suspended from school and she had been an outspoken advocate for “power-sharing” strategies. She explained that in the past, she had upset some of her colleagues (Maori and non-Maori) because of her beliefs. When this teacher was interviewed again in 2004, she told me that recent events that had occurred at school had made her wary of engaging in collaborative reform efforts:

> … some people have a problem with fronting up and being honest about what they really think …. No one came and saw me or talked through their concerns directly …. Another staff member came to me … and very quietly said, ‘Watch your back … because there are some people gunning for you’, and I said, ‘Oh, what have I done?’ And she said it was just a personal vendetta, … but that really, really upset me, like I was in tears. At the moment she said it I thought, ‘Who cares!’, but as five, ten minutes ticked by and by the time I got down to the classroom … I just thought, ‘Oh, my God, maybe I can’t do this. Maybe I’m really not good enough for these kids’. (Heria, Maori teacher, 2004)

Some participants opposed the work of reform, because they felt their concerns were not listened to and/or they did not feel safe within the school community. There appeared to be a lack of listening and inquiry mechanisms which would have enabled school leaders to evaluate the impact of the school’s existing culture and structure on the development of
new reform work over time. Two teachers (1 Maori and 1 non-Maori) across both school communities, described how they had attempted to voice their concerns about teacher disengagement in the work of reform:

.. I’ve shared (my concerns).... I’ve talked to people. But at this point ... I’ve been told ... to concentrate on my job.... So .... that’s what I’m doing. .... But you know .... it’s a waste of time.... just saying, ‘We’ve got values, we’ve got whakawhanaungatanga, (relationships) kotahitanga (unity) and aroha (love). Well, what is it? How do you manifest it? OK, how do you do it, practise it within your community? Yeah, it’s a lot to do with walking the talk... and more than just lip-service, or tokenism. But ... I need to concentrate on my own job, or so I’ve been told. (Herewini, Maori teacher, 2004)

I have raised this, that I feel there is a need for a whole staff discussion..... Have I suggested that? ‘Yes’. Have I been listened to? ‘No’. ... I’m having trouble getting anyone to hear me on this ....I think there’s a whole bunch of real good reasons for not wanting to talk through issues.... I think that 90 percent of that is addressed through the tone of your staff relationships, and it comes down to tone... in the school, or in meetings,... you feel that it’s a trust thing... that you can say what is on your mind without being negatively received, or others pooh-poohing the idea or whatever, that people will listen to you. That even though they might not agree, they’ll listen and they’ll value your input. (James, non-Maori teacher, 2004)

It appeared that there was a lack of willingness on the part of school leaders to engage all stakeholder groups in critical analysis and dialogue over such issues. In 2005, as part of the ongoing member checking process, 9 of the 17 teachers (3 Maori and 6 non-Maori) from across both schools expressed concerns about senior/middle management and the way they supported (or failed to support) culturally responsive reform work. Some teachers detailed specific concerns about individual senior managers who expected teachers to gather evidence and reflect on their practice without modelling the same approach. It was not clear that participants in either school saw the purpose of collaborative reform work as transforming the entire school system for culturally diverse children and young people.

Banks (2006) has argued that any attempt to implement culturally responsive reform in schools requires many different changes in the school, because such organisations are social learning systems. Approaching school reform from a systems perspective is necessary, as many school reform efforts in this area often fail to sustain change over time because the relationships, roles, norms and ethos of the school are not critically examined (ibid). An empowering school culture should engage culturally diverse participants (teachers, students, parents/caregivers, community elders) in collaborative, critical inquiry and dialogue to improve aspects of practice for all learners across the school community (Banks, 2006; Johnson & Bush, 2005). Respect for differences must be considered a non-negotiable factor in the work of culturally responsive practice, and should ensure that practice addresses issues of diversity whilst reducing disparity in
student outcomes (Johnson & Bush, 2005). However, time is also an important consideration in the development of culturally responsive practices because ongoing dialogue and critical inquiry, that engages culturally diverse stakeholder groups, is essential for developing a shared vision of reform (ibid).

**Resistance from Student Groups**

Interviews with student groups also revealed that some could oppose and/or resist teachers’ collective reform work. Some students stressed the phoniness and superficiality of teachers’ reform work within their school community.

*I’d like to ask the teachers if they are really serious about this, about their collaboration ... because I don’t think all the teachers are doing this work .... I don’t think they’re all working together.* (Marama, Maori student, Year 11, 2004)

*Sometimes when the teacher is observed (teaching in class), like they try harder to teach you, like they’re more interested or ... ask you questions ... that’s what I’ve noticed .... This year, one of my teachers was observed and he taught differently and then he just went back to how it was before, how he usually was. Most of the times he just sits behind his desk and says, ‘Don’t bother me’. (Ngawai, Yr 11 Maori student, 2004)*

*...some of our teachers have been speaking PC (politically correct) language and talking gay, like you know they’re trying to speak Maori proper with the way they speak like they’re Maori or something, trying to be something they’re not.* (Andrew, Yr 12 non-Maori student, 2004)

Eleven students (6 non-Maori and 5 Maori) expressed their own concerns and/or views related to racial divisions within the school grounds, racial tensions between groups and/or incidents of racism which they had witnessed:

*... in the school I think there’s racism and it would be good to see less .... There are some people ... they act as though they are better than students from other races ... like they’re looking down at them ...* (Louise, Yr 11 non-Maori student, 2004)

*... the Maoris and the Pākehās are really split, one side is on one side of the school and the other on the other....* (Sonia, Year 11 non-Maori student, 2004)

*Well, pretty much the Maori kids stick with the Maoris and, well, the White kids stick with the White kids, why would you want to get any closer?* (Sonia, Year 11 non-Maori student)

An analysis of participant stories revealed racism, prejudice, constructions of ‘White’-ness, and of labelling practices within the schools’ playgrounds. Teachers did not appear
to be aware of the existing social and turf divisions which existed within playgrounds (Hynds, 2007). Various authors have argued that because schools are unique socio-cultural systems, both teacher and student behaviour is affected by the climate or culture within the school (Banks, 2006; Stoll, Fink & Earle, 2003).

Banks (2006) argues that the behaviour of school staff must be examined in order to determine “the subtle messages it gives the students about racial, ethnic, cultural and social class diversity” (p. 16). There were gaps which emerged from an analysis of teacher and principal stories regarding their knowledge of such theories as they worked together for change (Hynds, 2007).

Implications and Recommendations

Results from this study indicated the different forms of resistance developed within both school communities. These various forms reveal much about the existing, but largely hidden, and unacknowledged cultures and structures of both schools. For example, there was a lack of:

- acknowledgement of dominant discourses and power-relationships which resulted in some voices being privileged over others;
- respect and trust between culturally diverse teachers, students and parents/caregivers revealing prejudice, racism and stereotypes;
- safe environments and listening (feedback) mechanisms which would have enabled participants to raise valid concerns;
- teacher and principal knowledge of important theories related to the development of culturally responsive practice; and
- leadership within schools to ensure culturally diverse stakeholder groups were engaged in dialogue and ongoing critical inquiry over culturally responsive and marginalising practices.

Different forms of resistance indicated that culturally responsive practice was not well understood by teachers and principals in either school community and that teachers’ collaborative partnership work was superficial and ‘contrived’ (Hargreaves, 1994). These results affirm the proposition that culturally responsive practice includes far more than simply teachers acknowledging racial and cultural differences (Banks, 2006).

The different forms of resistance which emerged in Hynds’ (2007) study emphasise the complexity of undertaking dialogue and critical inquiry with culturally diverse groups on issues of cultural difference, diversity and marginalising practices. Locating and understanding different forms of resistance to change across culturally diverse stakeholder groups therefore requires new forms of leadership within schools (Hynds, 2007). Schools can develop culturally responsive practice only through a process of careful facilitation that encourages listening and inquiry into the perspectives of culturally diverse participants (students, parents and teachers), because their voices “contain essential data for shaping reform strategies” (Johnson & Bush, 2005, p. 292).
Implementation of whole-school/community inquiry is needed to develop culturally responsive practice and requires all members of the school community to “examine their own issues, biases and cultural differences” in openly supportive yet critically thinking learning environments (ibid, p. 293).

However, final member checks with both principals in 2005 revealed that these participants did not believe that they had the necessary expertise to investigate resistance, particularly from the perspectives of culturally diverse stakeholder groups. One participant, quoted below, believed that engaging in such discussions would be difficult and something to be avoided.

*It’s like opening a can of worms … why would you want to go there?*

(Verna, non-Maori teacher, 2005)

It has been argued that school leaders may be “reluctant” to lead conversations which appear “messy and uncertain” around issues of culturally responsive practice, including an analysis of power relationships and evidence of practice related to the race, class and gender of students (Johnson & Bush, 2005, p. 294). As discussed earlier, Theoharis (2007) reiterated such concerns by arguing that principals who were identified as successful social justice leaders in their school communities, believed that “their preparation programs did not assist them in their ability to lead” (p. 249).

**Implications**

School change initiatives need to prepare leaders in advance to understand the cultural complexity of resistance and its various locations, foci and forms. This preparation will be necessary if school principals are to confront the hidden curriculum and ‘taken-for-granted’ practices in schools that promote marginalisation and discrimination. Recognising the opportunities that resistance provides to investigate marginalising practices will be essential as various forms of opposition reveal much about the existing, but largely hidden and unacknowledged, cultures and structures of schools.

However, developing and maintaining dialogue and critical inquiry with culturally diverse stakeholder groups (teachers, students, parents/caregivers) around issues of cultural difference and marginalising practices is high stakes work, a process which takes time and energy. It is also a process that requires a genuine commitment to change. Leaders must be prepared to investigate their own and others’ identities, values, world-views and cultures if they are to develop genuine environments of collaboration and trust (Hynds, 2007).

Finally, further research is needed on the cultural complexity of resistance and the impact that different forms of opposition have on school change initiatives that seek to improve teaching practice and outcomes for marginalised students.
References


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