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## NOT WITHOUT CONSEQUENCE. MIXED PRACTICE: FINDING THE WORDS IN METHODOLOGY

Rachel Dibble

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# NOT WITHOUT CONSEQUENCE. MIXED PRACTICE: FINDING THE WORDS IN METHODOLOGY

Rachel Dibble

## INTRODUCTION

**Not without consequence: tangata whenua Tiriti educators in tertiary learning spaces**

Tiriti o Waitangi education is not without consequence. The ākonga | learner experience is layered, with, at least, ethnicity, gender and age contributing to the positionality of understanding the content. It is important to recognise that contemporary facilitation of Te Tiriti o Waitangi education in tertiary learning spaces has happened in a variety of ways. Facilitation in a two-day workshop has been a common experience, while in an Otago Polytechnic academic programme, this has been layered across several weeks focusing on how the programme facilitates content as explicit, integrated and applied. The focus of my Master of Professional Practice (MPP) thesis came from an educator's experience of teaching the content as the sole facilitator in the room. It also arose from observing and participating in education with two facilitators in the room.

A Kaupapa Māori approach underpins the research, which focuses on good practice for Tiriti facilitators in tertiary learning spaces. Whakawhiti kōrero | sparkling discussions align with a semi-structured style of participatory interviews. Kanohi ki te kanohi | face to face interviews and online interviews were held, with a small group of experienced tertiary educators within Aotearoa New Zealand. Arts-based research intertwines a response to both method and methodology approaches and pūrākau weaves with autoethnography and poetic inquiry as both analysis and response. For the participants and the researcher, praxis and practices weave together words and wairua, with an invitation to the reader to engage in an Indigenous analysis process, that evolves in reaction to the writing and the findings. The findings are a result of the series of interviews focusing on gender and ethnicity, which emphasise that for many tangata whenua Tiriti educators, facilitation of Tiriti o Waitangi content with two facilitators in the room, is good practice and is not without consequence.

### Mahia te Mahi: Hard Head Heard Heart

Narratives of HeaRT[d] mahi  
 the hard mahi of challenge and conflict  
 the heart mahi of remembering and decolonising  
 the head mahi recognising those who have gone before  
     and raised up the profile for tangata whenua to work in this space.  
 the heart mahi of my tūpuna, the ancestors  
 the head mahi of skilled educators  
 the hard mahi of resilience in survival  
 the heard mahi of education, of liberation, of conscientisation: mahia te mahi  
     it is  
     *not without consequence.*

*Mahia te Mahi: Hard Head Heard Heart* was written mid-thesis late night early morning. It is symbolic of the mixed mind, multitasking, marking and mahi of emotions in the time it was written, in early 2024. The title captures the essence of my experience as a Tiriti educator in this time, space and place, specifically with a newly elected (2023) coalition partnered government, in Aotearoa and specifically in Ōtepoti Dunedin. Recognition in the poem is given to tūpuna and the value of Ka mua, Ka muri – Look to the past, to inform the future (there are many variations of this).

The focus of this article is the methodology of Poetic Inquiry in my Master of Professional Practice (MPP). It is also a response to my presentation at OPSITARA Ōtautahi, in 2024. The response (by me) to that experience is simple. It was, do not present a 162-page thesis in a mere 15 minutes. Even if it is ALL important. To do so, is *not without consequence*. There were more than the expected nerves. There were too many PowerPoint slides (with excellent transitions). There was nervousness in the form of a dry mouth, of having someone in the activism world *watching me*. It was not my best presentation; however, I learned very fast in those 15 minutes – that ONE aspect of this writing process was enough to focus on. The mixed practice of presenting what is needed and what is possible became an exercise of finding words, of finding method and mixing the academic and the poetic practice into this article.

The process of presenting a thesis required many hours looking at a word document on (at least) one screen. This may have started an unravelling of time and space for me personally. How to capture all that was said, by participants in a small cohort study, about their Tiriti educator experiences? Many hours were spent reading words instead of writing them, to see and to find what could be written.

When I became tangled in the web of “which words where” and “who wants what” and “why we work” the blank white screen did not assist. It was at this point that my supervisors again, came to my rescue, along with the encouragement of a former assessor for my Graduate Diploma in Tertiary Education (GDTE), Doctor Robin Day. In the GDTE process I started to write poems to capture difficult moments of conversations, feelings of what being a Tiriti educator, alone in a room, was like. The supervisors for my MPP journey had read this and had encouraging feedback when I finally realised that poems were going to ‘break the blank’ for this writing process.

My notes for this mahi included ‘political inquiry’ which was indeed relevant; however, much later I realised that my supervisor had suggested ‘poetic inquiry’ and I had not ‘autocorrected.’ Following is a poem that captures the “blank doc” words of this writer, edits indicated with italics, which differ slightly from the original, as poetic licence allows.

I want to. I do not.

I want to write a poem.

I want to finish this mahi. I want to do the post research discussion. I want to follow up with the new strategic direction.

Mover and shaker.

But I am stuck. *Blank*.

I can't write. Drowning in the lived experience of a colonised reality.

The words on paper. The read/red dead/dread recalling the experiences of the interviewees.

because I am doing what I know is

Good practice.

I am doing what is the good outcome experience.

In the room, kanohi ki te kanohi

Their heads and hearts hear the duality of reality

Collaborative, coordinated, cooperation...

Outside the teaching space, it's a different grace.

Because the EFT does not fit the FTE.

And the fear of the unspoken-ism

Pulls more than hearts, lips

Pursed. Tense. Curved, down.

In the room

We share his. her. their. story. words.

Are we? Or are they *always*?

In the room.

Once encouraged and with some words on the page, it was a journey then of thinking about the way my thesis might do justice to the narratives of the participants and would hold the confidence and the kōrero of knowledge they shared. It drew me to recall a kōrero from a kaumatua mai rā nō | some time ago, that the origins of te reo Māori, comes from bird calls to each other – the bird song.<sup>1</sup> Tame Iti (Ngāi Tuhoe, Waikato, Te Arawa) in the TEDx Auckland talk “Mana: the Power in knowing who you are” (2015), described speaking “the same language as the tui...”<sup>2</sup> With the language of the birds in mind, the participants, this ‘flock of educators’ were identified by bird names. This connection to te reo was vital to me, as a limited speaker of te reo Māori, to connect to a kōrero of song and poetry.

The overview of the kaupapa | purpose of the thesis was fundamental to the mixed practices of method and methodology. It is the relevance of ka mua, ka muri. To talk of the methodology makes sense of the question; to what purpose? For this mahi of being a Tiriti educator, Tiriti o Waitangi mahi is mahi of the past, present and future. It is remembering, grieving and healing. It is recognising that grieving takes a multiplicity of forms. It is weaving together the experiences of those who have left stories of grief *and* resilience, of the enduring memory of the pain from raupatu. In tertiary institutions, remembering and grief might be recognising where Indigenous voices have or *have not* been seen or heard. The following poem speaks to that direction finding.

#### Navigating [Researched] A B Ceas.

When  
confrontation of confiscation  
is  
conversation and collaboration  
not  
competition or compensation  
it can  
absolutely  
become  
community  
communicatively  
caring

Weaving the communication into *kōrero*, I interviewed participants with a *whakawhiti kōrero* style. This is not the focus of this article and I refer to the work of Paul Whitinui, (2014) as a foundation for this mixed practice. Whitinui (2014) refers to Tuhiwai Smith's decolonial *kōrero* as a path to support *tangata whenua* to "(re)claim, (re)connect and (re)align their own existence" ... *as being Māori?* [emphasis added]. It is this *whakawhiti kōrero*, this sparkling conversation that is the structure of an end product; a *korowai* | cloak for shelter; or a *kete* to carry tools 'of the trade' in, or the weaving of a new reality.

Word weaving is an autoethnographic approach to my MPP, noting that autoethnography brings the 'self' into the research and juxtaposes quantitative research methods. When I began researching the 'story of the Tiriti educator in the room,' I knew that it would include my experiences. For me, that was the authenticity thread woven into the research, however, centring my own experience did not seem quite the scientific approach my very early (and failed) experience of Psychology 101 suggested was 'proper research.' Happily, I was able to complete Feminist, then Gender papers in the early 2000's at the University of Canterbury and gravitated to recognising positionality. So, when introduced to the concept of autoethnography it became a key thread to be woven into the words of this research.

Throughout my thesis I left 'breadcrumbs' of poetry, reflexive and narrative lines of words that involve my experiences in the room as a Tiriti educator. It is purposeful and integral to my overall teaching practice. Further to this, Nisa-Waller and Piercy (2024) hold a *kōrero* of relational praxis with students (teaching in Health Sciences at Otago University). They note the integrated autoethnographic approach connects to performance autoethnography (Denzin, 2018 as cited in Nisa-Waller & Piercy, 2024), to reflect or be reflexive to analysis of 'being' oneself and the "academic discourse...on structure and power relations" (p. 4). What draws my attention to Nisa-Waller and Piercy's capturing of the importance of autoethnographic work as decolonising, is that similar to Katrina Le Cong (2022) there is an awareness of "the impossibility of removing oneself from the research..." Le Cong writes that engaging in "deep and critical reflective processes" contributed to the researchers own "personal growth and development of understanding and acknowledging *wairua*" (Le Cong, 2022, p. 99).

Tiriti o Waitangi education and learning as a woven metaphor allows for the woven end piece to have frayed edges and imperfections, but it is the endpiece. However, teaching Tiriti o Waitangi alone can be a very heavy kaupapa (and then I need to mark it!). After four years of teaching exclusively alone 'in the front of the room,' I found myself feeling *alone*. While there was support for my aspiration to educate *with*, the funding was problematic and became a point of curiousness. How did other people in other tertiary institutions teach Tiriti and what was the consequence for them? This desire for collaboration, to teach with, to co-deliver became the focus for the question of "what is good Tiriti teaching practice?" As I wrote my thesis, it started as a history of Tiriti education and became a narrative of experiences, I knew that if I were to define what mixed practice, mixed methodologies would be, I could only start to do things poetically. The next poem is the indication of this response to definition.

## Words woven | A whakapiri approach

Indigenous autoethnography  
whakawhiti kōrero  
Poetic Inquiry.  
a collaboration, a conscientisation, a community.  
kahu kupu  
lines on skin.

words are the feathers of the poet  
words are the feathers of the researcher  
this KAHU KUPU.  
word woven, handed across, over, beside generations  
sometimes. lost. [LEGISLATED] fighting [WRITING] for survival  
word wov[e]inQuiry.  
Autoeth[n]i/c/ommunity.  
Whakawhiti korero/boration.  
Poeticscientisation.

Wear the words  
[L]inked.skin.

Growing up in a literature appreciating household was not just seeing books in all the corners. It was sensory. There were first editions and loved editions and I best not forget the surreptitiously *borrowed* editions. Both my mother and grandmother-in-the-stars would complete cryptic crosswords faster than I can spell cryptic and Scrabble has long been a game of Double.Dibble.Triple.Trouble when playing against/with Uncles and Aunts (I am looking at you Uncle Vic). Poetry readings were not uncommon as we are 'word people'. It is with this in mind that Poetic Inquiry became integral in the woven words of mixed practice in my work.

Poetic Inquiry, a means of engagement with participants through research has a demonstrated Arts-Based Research foundation. Champions of the approach referred to as Poetic Inquiry include Prendergast and Leggo (Sameshima et al. 2017) and Faulkner and Cloud (2019). My inspiration outside of Aotearoa me Te Waipounamu New Zealand, however, came initially from discovering the work of Dr Camea Davis, "a poet, educator and educational researcher with a heart for urban youth and communities" (Davis, 2020, np). Davis is a champion of "collaborative ethnography and poetic inquiry" (Davis, 2020, np). In "Writing the Self: Poetry, Youth Identity and Critical Poetic Inquiry" (2018), Davis speaks to supporting young middle school<sup>3</sup> American students to use slam poetry in a way that "provided a place to negotiate prescribed identities...and...create ideal self-narratives" (2018, p. 114).

Using poetry, often spoken word poetry, has been one of the varied ways I have used to connect relevant content to ākonga in the room specifically about Te Tiriti. Spoken word poetry is a method that has been used by a range of young people to convey deep and difficult kōrero and experiences. The work of spoken word artists from the Action Education community organisation in Auckland such as Ngā Hine Pūkōrero, a collective of four rangatahi | Māori youth poets, confronts colonisation through clear yet metaphorical poetry. They competed in Las Vegas in 2019 at the Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Slam, the first Australasian team to do so. Their hour-long performance at the Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tamaki is online and it is powerful.<sup>4</sup> Stevie Davis-Tana, a member of the collective, has also produced a spoken word poetry visual album titled "Kō." The poem "Portrait Profit" (Davis-Tana, 2020) comments on cultural appropriation, while "Daughters of the Land" contains the line: "If you want to know how a people treat the earth, watch how they treat their women" (Davis-Tana, 2020). The analysis of colonisation impacts within these poems and Ngā Hine Pūkōrero poetry such as Te Reo Māori, performed in 2020 at the Black Lives Matter rally in Auckland is what the potential of poetry, spoken word poetry leans into. It is inquiry into where tangata whenua have come from and incisive commentary on where rangatahi see disconnection and conscientisation.

As I started to explore spoken word poetry, I began to work with it as a format for journal and symposium presentations, to appreciate spoken word as a way to understand or connect with an audience. It is in this place that I conclude this article, knowing that there so much more to say, more patai | questions. How to weave poems into the academy? How to give voice to the unspoken-isms? How to give feathers to participants' kōrero so that they might fly to warm ears of other Tiriti educators? The poem *Two in the room* reflects the woven words of a mixed practice of informed, applied knowledge and education. Political Inquiry.

## Two in the room

Sometimes  
I am so uncomfortable.  
Hā ki roto  
Hā ki waho.  
Wairua.  
Kōrero kōrero kōrero. Sometimes.  
It's easy to talk and talk.

Whakarongo – whakarongo mai. Listen here.

*This is a poem that does not dare to say the writer knows what best practice is.*

All the writer wants to really do is say:

I listened. Listened to wāhine, tāne, kaumatua, tuākana, tēina.

I listened to the grief of teaching about my confiscated, legislated, raped, jailed, drugged people.

We are wards of the state. We are everyone's children.

I listened with my eyes.

Listening to how tangata whenua feel again and again, when everyone is vulnerable and  
Everybody hurts. Sometimes.

I listened and then someone else listened to me.

And increased the FTE.

And another couple of women, not only heard me

But stepped into the room.

We share the grief and make space for the place

Listening to each other

Listening to

the hard talk, the fragile talk, the grief talk

the kōrero of mai rā nō and the wairua of revitalisation,

the strengths-based approach of conscientisation.

That's where the magic happens. With two in the room.

Rachel Dibble (Ngāti Ruanui, Ngā Ruahine) (ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6394-9120>) is Principal Lecturer in Social Services Te Kura Matatini ki Otago, Otago Polytechnic, Te Pūkenga. Rachel's teaching philosophy is to 'create spaces' for tauira Māori and tangata Tiriti to experience 'seeing themselves' and by doing so, they see and experience opportunities to learn and grow. This is an educational practice Rachel lives by: "I am wahine Māori, from the edge of extinction, the noble savage defined. I redefine myself in the teaching space as a wahine from mātauranga navigators of whenua (both land and placenta) stars and sea."

**Editorial Endnote:** The use of the "upwards dash" or "!" as the separator in the text is a punctuation device to uphold the mana of each language. Further, as in feminist theory the upwards dash serves to symbolically represent a disruption in conventional narratives.

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- 1 I was told te reo Māori was the language of the birds by a kaumātua many years ago. Hēmi Kelly, teacher of te reo, recently wrote in *The Post* online, an article about manu | birds titled *Te reo Māori teacher Hēmi Kelly finds meaning in the language of birds*. <https://www.thepost.co.nz/wellbeing/350068540>
- 2 Iti is narrating his story of punishment for speaking te reo Māori in the school grounds, with options of punishment being either picking up horse manure or write "I will not speak Māori" a hundred times on a blackboard. This has been a focus of the toimahi, art of Tame Iti in recent years according to Brebner's article "'I Will Not Speak Māori': Tame Iti's provocative new artwork creates a splash" (2022).
- 3 This is equivalent to years seven to nine depending on age, in Aotearoa
- 4 See link in references (Davis C., 2018, p.119).