Ready or Not? Problematising the Concept of Graduate Teacher Readiness in Aotearoa New Zealand

CLAIRE COLEMAN
University of Waikato

ABSTRACT

This article interrogates the concept of teacher 'readiness' within Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Aotearoa New Zealand. It reviews the influences of this concept, and interrogates the definition of readiness as currently understood and enacted within education in Aotearoa New Zealand. It highlights the opportunity to invoke concepts of readiness drawn from Kaupapa Māori Theory to provide a coherent, local concept of readiness that may resist the legacy of Western ideological domination in ITE. This article emanated from my own disquiet working in ITE, and a reconsideration of my relationship to Te Tiriti o Waitangi both as an individual and as representative of my institution. As a tuhiwai (non-Māori), I recognise my privileged position to ask these questions, my responsibility as tangata tiriti and the potential risk of acting as Western translator to Māori concepts (Mika & Stewart, 2017).

INTRODUCTION

In 2017, the New Zealand Education Council developed a new governance policy for teachers, entitled *Our Code, Our Standards* (New Zealand Teacher Education Council, 2017). This policy attempts to honour the intentions of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, to create ongoing, peaceful power-sharing relationships between first peoples and all others in Aotearoa New Zealand. As a result of the new standards all ITE programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand were redeveloped and required to gain new accreditation. This had numerous implications for ITE, including a shift to focusing upon the exit assessments of graduates and a new emphasis upon 'readiness' (Ell, 2021).

I am tuhiwai (non-indigenous), and manuhiri (guest) and carry this positionality within my research and practice. I conceptualise Te Tiriti o Waitangi according to the intention that Māori and all others live together in ways that recognise Māori as tangata whenua and are respectful and caring of each other (Healy & Huygens, 2015). I realise that all translations of Māori concepts are inadequate, and any translations provided act as indicators rather than equivalents of meaning (Mika & Stewart, 2017). As a critical arts educator within

ITE, I value multiple ways of knowing about the world and raise questions about my own practices and the ideologies that influence them.

In this article the concept of *readiness* in Aotearoa New Zealand's ITE is problematised through an exploration of the origins of ITE definitions of readiness and a bricolage of recent research on preservice teacher readiness. It hopes to provoke new thinking on how readiness might be conceptualised in the local ITE context to embrace and enact Te Tiriti O Waitangi and contribute to developing a locally informed education system that may resist global neoliberal discourses (Ell, 2021).

BACKGROUND

Over the last twenty years there have been significant changes to teacher preparation programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand yet longstanding tensions over the aims, content, provision, and governance of ITE continue to impact our current practice (Alcorn, 2014). The debate between the concept of teaching as an academic or vocational pursuit and impact of global trends are evident within the landscape of ITE in Aotearoa New Zealand (OECD, 2005). In the last 10 years the global discourse has insisted on the impact of teacher quality on educational achievement and shifted the emphasis of ITE from teacher preparedness to teacher *readiness* (Alexander, 2018). This complements the concept of teaching as a reflective intellectual activity and the relocation of teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand into universities (Alcorn, 2014).

Governed by the Teaching Council of New Zealand, the majority of ITE available in Aotearoa New Zealand consists of some combination of academic papers and in-service teaching experiences (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019). While there is variation in the design of ITE programmes across the various providers, all preservice teachers are subject to meeting the professional teaching standards prior to graduation. In addition to these standards, the stated vision for a teacher in Aotearoa New Zealand is an adaptive practitioner, committed to bicultural foundations, with the capacity to meet the needs of a diverse range of learners (Soslau, 2012). Consequently, developing these practitioners through teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand is a complex enterprise (Loughran, 2016).

While efforts have been made to honour the principles of protection, participation, and partnership through Te Tiriti o Waitangi these ideals are yet to be realised (Averill & McRae, 2019). Despite the current enthusiasm for incorporating mātauranga Māori in mainstream institutions there remains a risk that it is understood and interpreted only through the dominant ideology of those institutions. Honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi requires a paradigm shift, and a commitment to culturally sustaining pedagogies in the conception, design and implementation of teacher education programmes (Averill & McRae, 2019).

Teaching Standards

Despite its problematic origins in *Teachers Matter* (OECD, 2005) the belief that students' declining educational achievement is a direct result of poor teacher quality remains prevalent (Devine & Benade, 2017). This reflects a neoliberal view of education which downplays the impacts of broader inequities and focuses instead upon individual accountability. Internationally reviews of ITE programmes

are frequently motivated by the perception that teacher education is directly responsible for teacher quality and consequently educational outcomes (Lugg et al., 2021). While there remains scant evidence of such a correlation, asserting a direct connection between teacher quality and student achievement provides a tidy solution to a messy problem (Ell & Grudnoff, 2013).

Following these trends of increased teacher accountability, Aotearoa New Zealand developed new teaching codes and standards to govern teacher competence and 're-professionalise' the sector (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2016). Despite the turn in recent years towards local concerns in wider education policy (Ell, 2021), many ideas and practices reflected in the Aotearoa New Zealand teacher standards align with overseas policies dominated by PISA and the OECD (Ell & Grudnoff, 2013). Evident in the Aotearoa New Zealand teaching standards are the policy ideals of the OECD (2019) which mirrors developments in Australia and reframes teachers as a problem in need of fixing (Savage & Lewis, 2017).

The generation of these standards by the teaching council (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019) replicates international policies of managerialism and performativity (Barnes, 2019). As evidenced by schools' responses to the evaluation agency ERO, standards encourage performativity, creating unnecessary workloads and potentially encouraging the fabrication of practice (Sachs 2001, as cited in Barnes, 2019).

Reliance upon teacher standards to raise achievement disregards the complexity of the social process of teaching and positions teachers as directly responsible for student achievement. The establishment of standards reinforces a focus upon the performativity of teaching and an objective concept of teacher readiness (Thrupp, 2006). Loughran and Menter (2019) caution that prevalent market-driven discourses such as classroom readiness, standards, and effectiveness, risk validation of a narrow set of performative practices that may limit teachers' capacities to "establish and maintain their professional worth" (p. 259).

New Zealand Standards

Our Code, Our Standards | Ngā Tikanga Matatika, Ngā Paerewaoutlines expectations for ethical teacher behaviour and practice and recognises te Tiriti o Waitangi as the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand. Standards Our Code, Our Standards | Ngā Tikanga Matatika, Ngā Paerewa begins with a statement outlining its intended underpinning four key values, these are:

1. *Whakamana:* empowering all learners to reach their highest potential by providing high-quality teaching and leadership
2. *Manaakitanga*: creating a welcoming, caring, and creative learning environment that treats everyone with respect and dignity
3. *Pono:* showing integrity by acting in ways that are fair, honest, ethical, and just, and
4. *Whanaungatanga:* engaging in positive and collaborative relationships with our learners, their families and whānau, our colleagues, and the wider community. (New Zealand Teacher Education Council, 2017, p. 2)

The standards for teaching comprise six sections to be considered in relation to a graduate teacher's *readiness* for the classroom are:

1. Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership
2. Professional learning
3. Professional relationships
4. Learning-focused culture
5. Design for learning
6. Teaching

In an effort to operate as a culturally responsive document, Our Code, Our Standards | Ngā Tikanga Matatika, Ngā Paerewa , asks teachers to identify and understand the unique status of tangata whenua in Aotearoa New Zealand (New Zealand Teacher Education Council, 2017, p. 16).

ITE and the Standards (Programme Requirements)
These codes and standards initiated a requirement for ITE providers to engage in genuine partnership with stakeholders, such as the teaching council, local schools, kura, ECE centres and ITE providers throughout the design and implementation of new programmes (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019). This partnership is crucial in translating the teaching standards into classroom practice and ensuring coherence across the sector.

Throughout the programme preservice teachers must demonstrate their readiness to teach through the successful completion of a series of key teaching tasks (KTTs). Created in partnership with centres and schools the KTTs "should describe actions that derive from the integration of knowledge, understanding and behaviour associated with each teaching standard" (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019, p. 36). These tasks are intended to provide a unified set of criteria through which evaluating lecturers, mentor teachers and the student evaluate their *readiness* for the profession. However there remains a lack of consensus on what constitutes evidence of readiness, how readiness is understood and whether it is an achievable outcome for graduating teachers (Alexander, 2018).

LITERATURE REGARDING READINESS

While frequently utilised in recent OECD (2019) reporting, *readiness* remains an elusive term both Internationally (Alexander, 2018) and in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is predominantly considered either an assumed concept (Steele et al., 2017) or superficially defined as a capacity among graduate teachers "to use their professional knowledge" (Strangeways & Papatraianou, 2016, p. 117). Despite this ambiguity the concept of *readiness* dominates teacher education discourse in the global north and is the name of the game for graduates (Mockler, 2017).

Alexander's (2018) analysis of the term in the Australian ITE context provides a useful basis for discussion. Her research revealed uncertainty and variation around the definition of readiness. She revealed that the conceptual understanding of readiness relied heavily upon each individual context and

relationship of stakeholders to teacher education (Alexander, 2018). Alexander (2018) identified three core conceptions of *readiness* for graduating teachers. These are "classroom readiness, readiness for teaching, and readiness for the profession" (Alexander, 2018, p. 103). Classroom readiness implies an ability to perform competently in *any* classroom, readiness for teaching correlates to the view that graduate teachers have a positive influence on learning and *readiness* for the profession expects graduate teachers to have the dispositions and capabilities to develop ongoing development in the role of the teacher. Both classroom readiness and readiness for teaching identify the act of teaching as a performance of prescribed set of skills or practices and teaching as an act of technical proficiency (Menter, 2018). The third concept, readiness for the profession, recognises the fluidity and complexity of teaching and an ability to be responsive to the immediate context. This concept retains the need for the teacher to possess and demonstrate a range of skills, knowledges and competencies but moves beyond performance to integrating, embedding, and applying them in context as a professional (Alexander, 2018).

While it is not the intention of this article to mandate a conception of readiness, I suggest that the concept of readiness for the profession is productive because it conceptualises teaching as a critically reflective practice that acknowledges the complexity of teaching as a dynamic and contextually located process. It is not uniform and may therefore resist the lure of performing 'good teaching' and over reliance on meeting predetermined and decontextualized standards (Thrupp, 2006). Further, conceptualised as the initial stage in a process of life-long professional learning, readiness for the profession is achievable for a beginning teacher.

However, this concept of readiness remains reliant upon ongoing reflection and negotiation within diverse contexts and a critical consideration of teacher professionalism as a philosophical concept. A philosophical concept of teacher professionalism invites an interplay between the normative dimension based upon standards of practice and a cognitive one based upon specialised knowledge that can be applied to complex and unpredictable situations with impunity (Ell, 2021).

Standards of Professionalism
Being a professional is typically connected to the idea of quality and an adherence to standards guiding that profession (Barnes, 2019). Professional readiness (Wyatt-Smith, 2017 cited in Lugg et al., 2021) encompasses the range of complex skills and responsibilities expected of teachers while giving them autonomy to craft their identity and mediate their activity in individual contexts. Professionalism is not objective, but a manifestation of implicit and explicit assumptions based upon certain ideologically limited worldviews. Current research (Sheridan & Tindall-ford, 2018) with mentor teachers indicates the idiosyncratic and contextual nature of judgments made about the non-academic aspects of professionalism. These judgments were frequently made early, based upon dress, demeanour and disposition and based on the mentor teacher's own beliefs and values (Sheridan & Tindall-Ford, 2018).

Structures and programmes of ITE remain limited by the dominant ideology (Averill & McRae, 2020) and despite an increasing awareness of

diversity and culturally responsive practice within the teaching profession, the reality of professionalism as a social construct appears largely overlooked.

As Thrupp (2006) warned, standards for professionalism may disregard the complexity of individual contexts and risk establishing a compliance culture that would reduce teacher efficacy and effectively deprofessionalise teachers. Relying upon a performance of readiness, governed by teaching standards (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019), has the potential to discount the ideological parameters of professionalism, resulting in a narrowing of practice and marginalising of practitioners (Savage & Lewis, 2017).

Māori Pedagogy

Education in Aotearoa has recently asserted a renewed commitment to tangata whenuatanga and honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi through the Education and Training Act 2020 (New Zealand) and Our Code, Our Standards | Ngā Tikanga Matatika, Ngā Paerewa. These changes have seen a promising start to increasing the presence of Māori language and knowledge in education (Devine et al., 2021). Māori pedagogy is dominated by a relational ontology which considers concepts of whānau, whakapapa and ako and the creation of whanaungatanga and whakawhanaugatanga as vital (Stucki, 2010). This ontology foregrounds an appreciation that the relational skills of teaching cannot be easily articulated documents or tick boxes and that cultural and contextual factors do augment understandings of *readiness.*

Foregrounded by the production *Tātaiako – Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners* (New Zealand Education Council, 2011) designed to support the creation of genuine productive relationships among teachers, their Māori students, whānau, iwi and the wider communities. This guide lists five significant competencies and related behaviours for teachers of Māori students. These are

- *Wānanga*: participating with learners and communities in robust dialogue for the benefit of Māori learners' achievement.
- *Whanaungatanga*: actively engaging in respectful working relationships with Māori learners, parents and whānau, hapū, iwi and the Māori community.
- *Manaakitanga:* showing integrity, sincerity, and respect towards Māori beliefs, language, and culture.
- *Tangata Whenuatanga*: affirming Māori learners as Māori. Providing contexts for learning where the language, identity and culture of Māori learners and their whānau is affirmed.
- *Ako*: taking responsibility for their own learning and that of Māori learners. (New Zealand Education Council, 2011).

Underpinning these policies and guides for working in a bicultural context is a vision of *readiness* that suggests teachers, including recent graduates, can critically engage with and apply relational, social, and cultural competencies.

The privileging of relationship and love as qualifiers for teacher *readiness* resonates with kaupapa Māori theory informed educational models such as Te Kotahitanga (Berryman & Bishop, 2009) and Te Whare Tapa Whā. In these, the

connection formed between teacher and student lays the essential foundational for all teaching practice. Te ao Māori consider teachers to have a "familial responsibility to their students and their respective parents and whānau" (Lee, 2011, p. 23) which supersedes curriculum or schooling needs. These concepts, while perhaps more elusive, are essential if we hope to enact Te Tiriti O Waitangi. Whilst colonial paradigms continue to dominate our educational and social structures (Skerett, 2017) there is a growing awareness and appetite for the decolonising pedagogies of Te ao Māori. If ITE is to honour its 'partnership' obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi then, as Bell suggests, we must bring colonial and Indigenous knowledge "into an encounter" (2016, p. 17). This encounter between knowledges requires an ongoing, interactive process that disrupts notions of *readiness* and reconceptualises the kaiako/teacher.

METHODS: BRICOLAGE OF UNDERSTANDINGS

To explore the concept of *readiness* from multiple perspectives, I draw upon a bricolage of sources, including interview responses, personal vignettes, and policy document analysis to problematize *readiness* from a contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand perspective. I engaged in critical dialogue with a number of Māori colleagues who were invaluable in stimulating these debates. This bricolage aims to showcase different sources to cultivate a discussion of readiness across stakeholders and provide perspectives from which to examine power and privilege (Kincheloe, 2011). This approach reflects the multiple influences upon my own thinking around teacher readiness.

Data Sources
The initial data comes from the *Readiness Project* which investigated the early stages of implementation of redesigned ITE programmes at the University of Waikato. Aligned with a socio-constructivist approach, this research employed qualitative research methods suited to the complex social and contextual world of research in educational environments (Geertz, 1993). The project explored how lecturers and sector partners conceptualise, support, and monitor preservice teachers' *readiness to teach*. Through a sociocultural lens, the project focused upon mentor teachers' experiences of their engagement with the implementation and enactment of the new ITE programmes. As a member of the ITE programme team, I worked as a co-researcher to explore mentor Teachers conceptualise preservice teacher readiness and facilitated its development through collaborative professional development conversations.

      The findings on concepts of readiness from the mentor teacher interviews are considered alongside two other data sources. I consider a vignette from my recent experience as an evaluative lecturer in determining preservice teacher readiness. I have used a pseudonym for the preservice teacher and anonymised the mentor teacher comments to safeguard their anonymity.

      Through this reflection, I acknowledge my own cultural bias as a tuhiwai shaped by the dominant education system and signal the complexity of evaluating standardised practices within non-standardised contexts, moments, and interactions. The final data source are the references to readiness within the 2019 ITE programme approval documents provided by the Teaching Council of New

Zealand and the suggested assessment of this attribute via the key teaching tasks.

FINDINGS

This bricolage of findings revealed significant differences around the concept of *readiness* and how it is evaluated.

Readiness for mentors

Mentor teachers support preservice teacher development on placement and evaluate their abilities at the conclusion of the placement. They provide the practical aspect of teacher education and are a vital partner in teacher education. These mentor teachers' comments are derived from a professional development day held in 2021 between an ITE provider, school and early childhood education centre partners. The following comments from mentor teachers were offered in response to the question "How do you decide whether a student has met the requirements or when they are ready?" Two prevalent themes emerged in relation to impressions of a preservice teacher's *readiness*; their ability to develop and sustain relationships with others and their personal qualities and attributes.

The significance of teacher-student relationships
> "Ability to want to engage with children, relationships"
> "Whakawhanaungatanga, growth shift to relationships"
> "Relationships and the basis of relationships, open to love Whānau is holistic, family are teachers and guiders"
> "Build these relationships nothing more important than finding that trust"
> "Having the ability to build relationships across the board. With whānau with children"

The importance of a personal and interpersonal capabilities
> "Soft skills and the disposition, being vulnerable"
> "Can't be a piece of cardboard"
> "Character of who the person is, is massive, they need initiative, drive, a work ethic"
> "Soft skills as much as technical stuff, how do they deal with situations and people."

The quotes and sentiments above resonate with kaupapa Māori theory's which emphasis concepts of aroha (love) and whānau (family) (Stucki, 2010). Many of the mentor teachers employed te reo Māori words such as whānau and ako and there is a sense that 'who' you are as a teacher is integral to a concept of *readiness.* The next data source is a vignette taken from my own reflections after evaluating a third year Bachelor of Teaching student.

Readiness on Placement: Amelia's Story

> Visited Amelia and it is notable how casual she is with the class. They are intermediate age students and she is very chatty with them. She is very relational with them and not authoritative in the role of the teacher. This works with the context however; the nature of the conversation was at times surprising and related to things outside of the classroom but seemed absolutely in keeping with the feel of the school. The class has a range of adults in the classroom in support roles who come from the local community. This in itself is an unusual dynamic, the teacher works in a collaborative manner with these men and seeing who is 'in charge' is hard to ascertain. This shifted my thinking about readiness because Amelia appears to have been thrown into the deep end at this school and is perhaps not getting as much support as she would have liked BUT this does also seem in keeping with the school. The context for this school is difficult with many students coming from marginalised communities, the focus is getting them to stay at school and be positive about themselves. This context making a significant impact on the idea of 'ready' to teach.
>
> When evaluating her, I had an immediate sense she was ready to go but that couldn't be easily validated via the teaching standards or criteria. I was also conscious that she potentially wouldn't meet the criteria if she applied this approach in a different context. Her 'teaching' is different to my experience of teachers and my own teaching, but here it worked. Amelia is clearly well-positioned for teaching in this environment and has adapted to it. (Personal Journal, 22nd September 2020)

In this excerpt, I discussed Amelia's relational connection to students and her flexibility as key to my impression of her as 'ready'. I reflected upon the significance of her context upon her teacher presence and my gut feeling as a subjective metric for evaluating her *readiness*. I recognise how my bias and concepts of teaching influenced the evaluation. This understanding of *readiness* was personal to me as the evaluating lecturer, and I wondered how another evaluative lecturer might view her teaching practice.

Readiness in ITE Programme Requirements

The final data source to consider is the *ITE Programme Approval Requirements* (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019) documentation which governs all ITE provision nationally. The first excerpt explains the role of the key teaching tasks as assessments for *readiness*.

Excerpt 1

> Assessments give confidence that graduates are ready from the outset for the role of a beginning teacher.
>
> This principle requires an explanation of the selection of Key Teaching Tasks on which student teachers will be assessed to assure their readiness for their role as a beginning teacher. Key Teaching Tasks are not isolated performances – they describe actions that derive from the integration of knowledge, understanding, and behaviour. But this

generalisation should not distract from the fact that the origins of these tasks are the cultural competencies (knowledge, skills, and behaviours) for working effectively with Māori and Pacific learners. (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019, p. 3)

This next excerpt lists two suggested KTTs for preservice teachers to complete as evidence of *readiness*.

Excerpt 2
Design a series of learning experiences for a class with wide ranging abilities including two or three with dyslexia.
Carry out a running record for a learner whose current reading level is unknown, and who has expressed reluctance to read. (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019, p. 12)

This final excerpt lists an activity for teachers to complete as part of the learning but not assessment via the KTTs. I have included this because it appears to align with a concept of readiness as a professional and appears to align with the mentor teachers' view of teacher *readiness* and a holistic kaupapa Māori concept of teacher.

Excerpt 3
Engage in an informed conversation with a colleague about institutional barriers to Māori experiencing success as Māori (an important ability, but not a key teaching task because it does not represent practical, direct work with learners). (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019, p. 13)

The language of this document emphasizes the preservice teacher's ability to perform and demonstrate teaching through the completion of tasks. The KTTs suggested for assessment indicate clear, practical tasks for the preservice teacher and a fidelity to an 'outcomes' focused approach to ITE.

DISCUSSION

These findings reveal the difficulties of articulating a concept of *readiness* that is well understood by all stakeholders, adheres to the bicultural foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand, and may be evaluated accurately. They recognise the relational qualities of teachers and advocate for an approach to teaching congruent with mātauranga Māori. This discussion will consider how readiness is understood with regard to mātauranga Māori and professionalism and offer provocations for teacher education.

Mātauranga Māori Connections/Disconnections
This section details how aspects of *readiness* as indicated within the data contradict or align with understandings from mātauranga Māori. The use of te reo Māori words in participant responses and within the policy documentation signals

the wider permeation of Māori language as an established part of Aotearoa's identity (Breen et al., 2021).

The specific focus upon words around relationship, family, love and reciprocal ways of being and learning signals the centrality of relational ontology to teacher practice and a sense of readiness. Through this shared and reciprocal process teachers and students can engage in high quality, interactive and dialogic relationships. Knowing who your students are is vital to forming reciprocal relationships as conceptualised within te ao Māori (Hiha, 2015).

The emphasis upon the ability of teachers to develop meaningful teacher-student relationships is evident in the data and reflects concept of teaching aligned with Māori pedagogy (Stucki, 2010). Similarly, teachers need a critical understanding of what values, beliefs and attitudes shape their own understandings (Berryman et al., 2018). Teachers need to share who they are to build the relationships and engage in a process of genuine ako.

The findings reflect the importance of the preservice teacher's personal and intrapersonal skills and a sensed understanding of the teacher as 'ready' (Santoro, 2017). This correlates with holistic understandings within kaupapa Māori evident in the well-being models of Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 2013) and Te Wheke (Pere & Nicholson, 1997). These models conceptualise the self as a holistic, multi-faceted and connected being. Consequently, in te ao Māori sharing your whakapapa (family and heritage) stories and humour in the classroom are vital aspects of the teaching and learning relationship. This features strongly in the data and reflects the synergy between Māori pedagogy and a socio-constructivist approach to teaching that values the humanity of both teachers and students.

Conversely while ITE programme requirements incorporate the concepts of Tātaiako, as listed above, and make connection to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the structure of *readiness* indicators, documentation and assessment mechanisms remain tethered to a Western paradigm (Averill & McRae, 2020). Implicit within the documentation is an expectation that decisions about teacher *readiness* rely upon triangulation, evidence, and the completion of established tasks. This reliance upon a Western paradigm of knowledge and its methodologies reaffirms the legacy of modernity and coloniality and its dictates on knowledge production (Takayama et al., 2016). The standards seem reliant upon privileged Western knowledge' constructs of rational decision making.

Similarly, when attempting to determine personal qualities for teacher *readiness* it is left to personal judgment and there appears little critique of the sociocultural lens through which that determination is made. The findings suggest the established rhetoric that mentor teachers 'know' what a good teacher is and may rely upon 'gut instinct' (Haigh et al., 2013). A simplistic adherence to existing practices and codes of behaviour as evidence of readiness may unwittingly disadvantage certain groups and privilege others (Berryman and Eley, 2019, as cited in Alansari et al., 2020).

A feeling about a graduate's *readiness* remains interpreted through our biases and experiences, is not neutral and requires critical reflection. If teacher readiness remains a concept based upon either predetermined de-contextualised standards, the understandings of current educational stakeholders, or both, it will likely continue to reinforce dominant ideology and replicate inequitable relations of power within the educational context of Aotearoa New Zealand. This situation

is further exacerbated when we consider readiness in relation to the appearance of professionalism.

Professionalism and Readiness

The provision of established KTTs potentially reduces a complex iterative process to disconnected performances of teaching. Framing teaching as performance arguably returns us to earlier conceptions of teacher education as teacher training and the acquisition of specific skills and techniques (Cameron & Baker, 2004). While the programme requirements suggest opportunities to demonstrate relational skills, they are not designated KTTs because they are deemed not "observable, measurable and evaluable" (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019, p. 13). This reliance upon a Western theory of accountability and validity reduces what counts as *readiness* to what the dominant culture values (and can measure). It equates teacher readiness with a series of teaching as 'doing' rather than 'being' and fails to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

These findings and recent developments in education policy and priorities (Ministry of Education, 2020b) emphasise the need for a genuine bicultural approach to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The institutional and habitual reliance upon international paradigms potentially limiting the position of Kaupapa Māori to partial and supplementary rather than as an equal member of an authentic partnership. The following implications and ideas offer provocations for further research, policy, and action to redress this imbalance.

Provocations

Shifting our thinking

We can acknowledge the significance of relational and personal skills for teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand and value Kaupapa Māori as central to ITE. We may consider the development of specific, robust and inclusive mechanisms for identifying and treasuring these relational capacities. We need to ensure that the use of te reo Māori or Māori concepts in policy documentation does not become a catch all for translating Western concepts (Hekaraka, 2019) and enhance genuine understandings throughout the Education sector. We could orientate the key teaching tasks towards the development of personal qualities and the ability to formulate relationships with students. We could integrate Tātaiako deliberately and be explicit about the types of interactions that exemplify whanaungatanga from a Te Ao Māori perspective.

Enhancing our understanding

I suggest partnering with tangata whenua on research to craft a holistic and bicultural concept of what we value in quality teacher practice and presence. This would invite all stakeholders including whānau, tamariki (children), schools, communities and more to contribute and deepen our concept of teacher readiness. We need to ensure that all participants in the ITE process have a coherent understanding of *readiness* and the political underpinnings of that term If we wish to honour obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, I suggest that we embrace and value Indigenous ways of knowing and being. This may require tackling the lack of Māori representation and other marginalised groups within the existing

mentor Teacher and ITE lecturer populations. We must recognise teaching is a complex relational process, that occurs in the moment between a raft of variables. We need to provide existing ITE providers with opportunities to enhance their understandings of Kaupapa Māori and raise consciousness of inherent ideological bias.

Transforming our practice
We could reconceptualise what counts as evidence of *readiness* and who makes those assessment judgements. If we are developing professional teachers and reflective practitioners perhaps, they are best placed to know if they are 'ready'. This would enable them to take ownership of their teacher identity and associated readiness in specific sociocultural context. We can honour mātauranga māori as ontology and invite preservice teachers to define '*readiness*' for themselves and evidence it through a range of approaches such as Ngā toi (arts and creativity), waiata (song), haka (dance) or Kaupapa korero (narrative).

We can reimagine *readiness* for the unique context of Aotearoa New Zealand in a way that reflects Te Titiriti O Waitangi potentially as a process of committed 'becoming ... over the course of a career' (Mockler, 2017, p. 337) that requires a recursive practice of lifelong learning (Reid, 2017). We can centre a relational Māori ontology within education to create teacher practice that value learners for who they are socially, politically, spiritually, and culturally (Stucki, 2012). The influence of Linda Tuawhai Smith's *Decolonising Methodologies* (Smith, 2021), upon academia along with the widespread increased visibility of Māori knowledge suggests we are heading in a new direction. If ITE is to honour its 'partnership' obligations to Te Tiriti O Waitangi then as Bell suggests we must bring colonial and indigenous knowledge "into an encounter" (2016, p. 17). In our context, this encounter between knowledges requires an ongoing, interactive process that disrupts notions of readiness and reconceptualises the kaiako/teacher.

CONCLUSION

Through this article I have interrogated the concept of *readiness*, its location within the discourse in teacher education, how it is enacted in Aotearoa New Zealand and how it may be reconceptualised to recognise Te Tiriti o Waitangi our foundational bicultural commitment. I suggest that further research into the elusive concept of *readiness* in Aotearoa New Zealand is needed to encompass Māori ways of knowing, communicating, and understanding in ways that unsettle Western paradigms.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

CLAIRE COLEMAN
University of Waikato

Dr Claire Coleman is a Senior Lecturer within Te Kura Toi Tangata, University of Waikato. She is passionate about embodied and creative pedagogies for transformative education. She is a performer, creator and educator dedicated to inclusive practices that enhance opportunities for the tamariki (children) of Aotearoa New Zealand. Her areas of research interest include process drama, social justice, ILEs, creative pedagogies and teacher education. She recently co-edited a Teachers and Curriculum Special Issue: *The Arts Will Find a Way: Breaking through and moving forward*. She is currently trialling her critical process drama framework as an enactment of critical pedagogy in both Aotearoa and Australia. Claire is happy to hear from anyone interested in critical pedagogy, the arts and/or creative pedagogies. Email: claire@playfulpedagogy.nz