Unpacking resistance to change within-school reform programmes with a social justice orientation

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Previous research in the area of resistance has inadequately described opposition to change within-school reform initiatives with a social justice orientation. A lack of attention to, and agreement on, the nature and causes of resistance may explain why so many equity-minded educational reforms fail to be sustained. This article highlights various forms of resistance which emerged during a New Zealand study of an action research project that aimed to improve classroom practice and outcomes for marginalized students. In this research, teachers’ reform work was investigated from the perspectives of dominant and minority groups (students, teachers and parents/caregivers) within two schools involved in this work. Results indicated that different forms of resistance emerged over time, fuelled by separate concerns and characterized by different sets of behaviour. These findings reveal the complexity of resistance as both a construct and as a developmental process in the reform project. In addition, results revealed that school leaders felt unprepared and ill-equipped to deal with resistance. Understanding the different sides to opposition would have aided reform efforts as resistance revealed a lack of shared vision, alongside inadequate communication and partnership processes. Implications for the preparation and professional development of social justice leaders working to develop and sustain such work are discussed.

Introduction

Much has been written about processes that effectively promote change and school reforms (Hopkins et al. 1997, Fullan 2001, 2005, Tajik 2008). In contrast, there is little research examining specific challenges to implementing change and school reforms, particularly with respect to social justice initiatives, such as those that explicitly aim to improve teaching practice and outcomes for marginalized students (McKenzie and Scheurich 2008). One such challenge is resistance, which is commonly defined as opposition to change efforts and viewed as a barrier and hindrance to change (Piderit 2000, Achinstein and Ogawa 2006).

The purpose of this article is to examine various forms of resistance that emerged within a social justice school reform initiative in New Zealand from the perspectives of both dominant (New Zealand [NZ] European) and minority (Māori) stakeholders’ groups. Considerable research has documented the inequalities of the Western schooling system across the world, especially in relation to meeting the needs of minoritized children and young
people; however, there remains a need for research to inform change and transformation (Fine and Weiss 2005, Shields et al. 2005).

**Resistance to change**

Human relations writer Mary Parker-Follet argued several decades ago that friction and conflict are necessary in creative enterprises, because it is only through analysis of different ideas that organizational improvements can be achieved (Graham 2003). Fullan (1999) echoes such views and asserts that educational change is complex and contradictory and because of this, new lessons are needed to bring about improvement. One lesson is that that diversity of ideas and conflict are essential within the school reform process, and if used effectively, can lead to deeper understandings and collective commitment (Fullan 1999). Shields and Sayani (2005) also state that reform involving culturally diverse perspectives inevitably meets resistance. Resistance to change is typically connected to individuals’ values, beliefs, professional identities, social position and responses to change (Piderit 2000, Achinstein and Ogawa 2006, McKenzie and Scheurich 2008). All of this suggests that resistance to change is a normal and integral part of the change process.

Although authors such as those cited above highlight the importance of resistance, diversity and conflict in the change process, much of the literature on school reform has focused on how to avoid resistance or to resolve conflict that arises from resistance, rather than investigating and understanding it as a standard characteristic in reform work (Lieberman and Miller 1999, Achinstein and Ogawa 2006, Theoharis 2007). Understanding the nature of resistance across culturally diverse stakeholder groups is therefore important in preparing social justice leaders to implement change effectively. A lack of attention to, and agreement on, the nature and causes of resistance within equity-minded school reforms may explain why so many initiatives are not sustained. The following section examines research literature on resistance to change in equity-minded school reforms.

**Resistance from the dominant group**

Resistance to school reforms with a social justice orientation have emerged in some studies which emphasize intransigent discourses related to difference and diversity within staffrooms (McKenzie and Scheurich 2008) and the wider school community (Oakes et al. 2000, Theoharis 2007).

Three studies (Oakes et al. 2000, Theoharis 2007, McKenzie and Scheurich 2008), all conducted in the USA, emphasize resistance from subsets of stakeholder groups, for example, white, middle-class teachers and parents/caregivers. Such participants have been described as belonging to the dominant or majority group whose cultural capital, values and assumptions are reflected in the Western schooling system and who benefit most from the status quo (Bishop and Glynn 1999, Shields et al. 2005). Resistance from such participants can be fuelled by a common belief that
children from marginalized or minority groups have less ability or that their cultural capital, values and beliefs have less value in mainstream education (Bishop and Glynn 1999, Shields et al. 2005).

Teachers who belong to the dominant or majority group can hold beliefs that lead them to resist social reform policies. For instance, McKenzie and Scheurich (2008) examined the implementation of school reform designed to close achievement gaps for minority groups: children of colour and children from low-income homes. They investigated the change process in one school over a one-year period using collaborative action research. Participants were mainly white, female teachers. Teachers were involved in intensive school-based professional development activities, facilitated through collaborative decision-making and evaluation processes. By the end of the year, small gains were made by some minority student groups (e.g. Hispanic student groups); however, other minority groups (e.g. African-Americans) were still under-performing. Different but interrelated themes of resistance emerged which emphasized that teacher resistance was related to beliefs associated with teachers’ social positions (McKenzie and Scheurich 2008). First, teachers blamed the homes and family backgrounds for the African-American students’ underachievement, which highlighted teachers’ low expectations. Second, teachers did not believe it was their role or responsibility to be leaders within the reform work. Furthermore, they viewed teacher-initiated suggestions for change as unwarranted and potentially destructive criticism. Lastly, new assessment procedures, introduced as part of the professional development, were perceived as unwarranted scrutiny and destructive to teaching. The researchers characterized the teachers’ lack of collective agency to solve the issue of student underachievement at their school as a form of resistance. The authors attributed teachers’ resistance to their social position; a complex interaction of beliefs related to their social status and positions as teachers. Thus, teacher beliefs can lead to resistance to social reform policies.

Beliefs held by parents/caregivers who belong to the majority or dominant group can lead them to resist social reform policies. Theoharis (2007) investigated culturally responsive leadership by interviewing seven public school principals in the American Midwest who held a social justice orientation. He found that these school leaders faced formidable resistance from powerful parent groups whose values and beliefs were associated with the dominant culture (white, middle-class). Such groups presented significant challenges because they believed that reform work threatened their children’s educational opportunities. The school principals believed that dealing with resistance from the dominant or majority group was professionally and personally exhausting. In addition, they believed their preparation programmes ‘did not assist them in their ability to lead for social justice’ (p. 249). Theoharis stated it was ‘irresponsible’ to prepare leaders to take on such work ‘without understandings on how to weather the storms that will result’ (2007: 250).

In a much earlier study, Oakes et al. (2000) reported on 10 case studies of ‘detracking’ school reform initiatives committed to including children with learning disabilities or difficulties in mainstream classes. These programmes also met with considerable parental resistance, particularly
from privileged, white, middle-income parent groups who threatened to take their own children out of the schools if change programmes continued. Change agents working within the schools were ill-prepared to respond to political pressure from such groups who interpreted reform activities as threatening to undermine 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: 88)

Each of these studies examined resistance by different subgroups of the dominant or majority group, for example, from white, middle-class parents/caregivers and teachers. Their opposition was characterized by active, voiced disagreement and, in two of the studies (Oakes et al. 2000, Theoharis 2007), by applying considerable pressure to prevent change.

These studies demonstrate the need for greater understanding of resistance in school reform initiatives with a social justice orientation. This will prepare more effectively school leaders and other change agents working in such initiatives. Fullan (1999) has argued that moral purpose is complex and problematic, but is at the heart of the education process. However, there is a lack of research which highlights the complexity and messiness of resistance to change from the perspectives of subgroups within both minority and majority stakeholders. The purpose of this article is to examine different forms of resistance that emerged from an action research project that sought to transform teaching practice and outcomes for marginalized student groups (Hynds 2007). Results showed that subsets of different stakeholder (majority and minority) groups resisted reform for different reasons and that their resistance was characterized by very different behaviours. These forms of resistance were fuelled by different participant concerns and revealed much about the lack of continued dialogue and inquiry which may have resulted in a shared vision of reform. The following section describes this new study.

The present study

In New Zealand, there is a significant disparity in educational outcomes between the majority (NZ European/Pākehā) population and minority groups, including Māori, who are the indigenous people. The underachievement and disparity in outcomes between indigenous and non-indigenous groups is not unique to New Zealand (Smith 1999, Shields et al. 2005). Researchers attribute such differences to a variety of factors. Some attribute these disparities to socio-economic circumstances, family background and/or oppression of certain groups (Harker 1991, Nash 1993). Others view mono-cultural in-school practices, including curricular structure and provision, as major contributing influences (Alton-Lee 2003, Bishop et al. 2003). Teachers’ use of culturally responsive practices plays an important role in improving student learning outcomes (Bishop and Glynn 1999, Bishop et al. 2003). However, despite various attempts to address achievement patterns
in New Zealand schools, the patterns of underachievement, particularly by Māori students, persist (OECD 2001, 2002). In response to such statistics, the New Zealand government launched new forms of teacher professional development, very different from what had previously been operating. Te Kotahitanga was one example of an intensive and comprehensive professional development programme aimed at improving the educational achievement of Māori students in mainstream classes (Bishop et al. 2003). Key findings to emerge from Te Kotahitanga were the importance of teachers responding to, and valuing, students’ cultural knowledge and identity, the impact of teachers’ expectations and beliefs, the quality of teachers’ in-class, and face-to-face relationships and interactions with Māori students as well as the influence that these relationships and interactions have on Māori students’ educational outcomes (Bishop et al. 2003). Findings from the project indicated that as a result of changes in teachers’ awareness and understandings as well as in teacher–Māori student relationships: ‘Māori students’ on-task engagement increases, their absenteeism reduces, their work completion increases, the cognitive levels of the classroom lessons are able to increase, and their short-term achievements increase; in many cases, dramatically so’ (Bishop et al. 2003: 2).

However, long-term school interventions such as Te Kotahitanga require a heavy investment in ongoing teacher professional development and can be very costly for governments to sustain. The government-funded initiative discussed in this article started as a two-year action research project. Its first phase began in 2001, with an intention of providing several voluntary schools with opportunities, in partnership with their local Māori communities, to develop and sustain partnership processes that would enable teachers to improve their classroom practice and learning outcomes for their Māori students.

The purpose of the reform was to raise teachers’ awareness of culturally diverse perspectives (Māori parents/caregivers, Māori community elders, Māori students and Māori staff members) and use these to inform changes in teachers’ practice.

Teachers engaged in new professional development activities, for example, the initial professional development sessions, which were not held in the school staffroom but in local marae (meeting houses). Local Māori community members, including elders and parents/caregivers as well as Māori students, were invited to attend, and these sessions created spaces for different participants to speak about their experiences and interpretations of mainstream schooling. At school, the teachers focused on improving teaching practice and outcomes for Māori students. This meant that teachers were experimenting with new teaching techniques, such as co-construction or power-sharing strategies with students where they have a voice in classroom procedures. Teachers reflected on their expectations for Māori students and worked on developing more responsive, positive relationships with their Māori students. Teachers also met with colleagues and other specialist teachers to gather, analyse and reflect on Māori student achievement data and to use this evidence to inform changes in pedagogy. During staff meetings, teachers were introduced to new research findings which had facilitated improvements in Māori student achievement and
which highlighted the need for ‘culturally responsive’ pedagogy. Collaborative planning and decision-making processes were adopted within each school to ensure that teachers had ‘a voice’ in the reform process and to ensure collective commitment towards reform. Changes in teacher practice and Māori student outcomes were documented and reviewed. Teachers engaged in structured, reciprocal in-class observation and feedback sessions with specialist teachers in order to improve practice and learning outcomes for Māori students. Successes and improvements in Māori student achievement were celebrated through new school awards and in school newsletters. Each school reported back on initial improvements in Māori student achievement to the Ministry of Education.

Methods

Appropriate Māori-based protocols, as advocated by Bishop and Glynn (1999), formed an essential basis for establishing trusting and respectful relationships between the researcher and participants and for the development of an appropriate research methodology.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were undertaken with participants. These developed into ‘negotiated text’ (Fontana and Frey 2005: 722) through a series of ongoing conversations and checks with participants. The purpose of interviews was to gain participants’ experiences of reform activities, their beliefs about such activities and their perceptions of the impact of change over time. Inductive analysis was used, which ensured that codes, themes and patterns emerged from participant interviews (Janesick 2000). Throughout the process of interviewing, the researcher kept a detailed journal, as valuable information was often gained before the tape-recorder was turned on. The research journal provided an audit trail for recording hunches and decisions made about interview evidence and the research process. This proved invaluable, as the researcher moved back and forth, revisiting notes as different sets of data were compared. Data were triangulated across participant groups in order to identify similarities and differences in participant experiences, beliefs and perceptions of the impact of reform. In keeping with Māori-centred research protocols (Bishop and Glynn 1999), participants were asked to comment on the trustworthiness of results through a process of ongoing member checks.

Participants

Participants came from two project schools that had been involved in the first phase of the government-funded action research initiative. These schools had reported early success in improving their Māori student achievement through subsequent changes in teachers’ pedagogy. One school was a primary school in a rural setting, and the other, an urban high school. Interviews were conducted with 77 participants (teachers, students, parents/caregivers, principals, specialist teachers and in-school action research facilitators). In total, 32 Māori participants and 45 non-Māori participants
were interviewed in two very different school communities. Forty-three of these non-Māori participants identified themselves as NZ European.²

Two interviews were conducted with each participating teacher (7 Māori and 10 non-Māori) from both schools over the course of 12 months, following the first phase of the school reform initiative. The purpose was to track their experiences of partnership work and their perception of change over time. The first interviews were conducted with teachers during the latter half of 2003 and the second towards the end of 2004. Interviews were then conducted with parents/caregivers (10 Māori and 20 non-Māori) and their children (15 Māori and 15 non-Māori), and were completed towards the end of 2004. It is important to note that pseudonyms have been given to protect participants’ identities.

Findings

Various forms of resistance emerged over time and across subsets of diverse stakeholder groups, including participants from the majority group (NZ European) and the minority group (Māori). These different forms influenced the nature of the initiative within both schools. A highly visible form of resistance came from parents/caregivers in the dominant group, who viewed the reform changes as threatening to their children’s identities and educational opportunities. In addition, resistance also emerged within a minority group made up of Māori teachers. In this group, there was concern and disagreement about involving students in decision-making processes and whether this was compatible with traditional cultural protocols. This resistance was less visible as subgroups of teachers simply disengaged from the reform work over time.

These different forms of resistance reveal much about the lack of a shared vision of reform and inadequate, but unexamined, communication and partnership systems, and structures of both schools. Study results emphasized missed opportunities which may have enabled and sustained cross-group conversations through collaborative, critical inquiry and dialogue. Consultation and feedback from various groups over time may have enabled school leaders to understand more clearly participant concerns. Member checks revealed that both groups wanted to be consulted further about the direction of reform work but felt that there was no formal process for them to do so.

This next section describes the process of reform within the two school communities and how various forms of resistance emerged over time.

Initial enthusiasm for change

During their first interviews in 2003, 15 out of 17 teachers (six Māori and nine non-Māori) reported feeling enthusiastic and optimistic about improving their classroom practice and outcomes for Māori students through the development of a ‘shared vision’ of change. One teacher’s comment exemplifies the feelings of most of the others about the importance of developing a common vision:
Firstly ... I think ... collaboration started with us changing our mindsets ... it was about getting everybody talking openly to see ... how it would ... benefit the school, and Māori children particularly ... So that process got us on to the right path ... and without the shared vision ... a collective vision, then I don’t think we would have got anywhere. (Saul, Māori teacher 2003)

Teachers talked about the importance of ‘shared experiences’ within the first phase of the project, in particular the listening to voices not typically heard within their school environment.

It was listening to the stories of kaumatua (elders) and of Māori students at the hui (meetings) and hearing their experiences of being in mainstream classrooms ... so those hui were really powerful and I could see how classes were for Māori kids ... it made me see my teaching quite differently ... (James, non-Māori teacher 2003)

These teachers likened their experiences to an uncomfortable awakening from a deep sleep, or from a state of unconsciousness which some described as a kind of blindness. The practice of sharing experiences and seeing classroom pedagogy through other pairs of eyes was unsettling to many of the members:

It was somebody from outside in the local Māori community, a kaumātua [elder] who spoke and some of the Māori staff spoke, it made me aware of what my downfall had been, my lack of cultural knowledge. I picked up so much more, and it made me re-think about why I was at the hui, it made me realize what does go on in my classes and re-think how I approach teaching ... and the way I had been treating students prior to this. (Max, non-Māori teacher 2003)

Other participants also noted that the discussions and the presentation of evidence from different perspectives during the sessions in the meeting houses had been an ‘eye-opening’ experience for some teachers:

I have been to a couple of their hui (meetings), down at the wharenui [large meeting house], where ... some of the teachers talked ... and basically I think it’s been an eye-opener for the teachers from their point of view, learning about the needs of Māori students. (Mr Huia, Māori parent/caregiver 2004)

The process of collective inquiry and dialogue was not usual practice in either school community. Māori teachers who were interviewed explained that it was very unusual for them and whānau (members of the extended family) to have a voice and to be listened to within their school.

It is very rare to have the senior management of a school trusting the Māori staff and the Māori whānau to make decisions, which best fit their needs. (Heria, Māori teacher 2003)

The unsettling effect of the sharing of experiences appears to have led teachers to talk through their beliefs about effective teaching. Description, discussion and analysis seemed to enable them to weigh up and examine the contradiction between their beliefs and their practice, and between their practice and students’ needs:

Some of that was really tough data ... particularly from their Māori students ... teachers believing one thing about their teaching and then having students giving data that absolutely opposed their beliefs, and teachers having to confront that gap. (Shasha, Māori in-school facilitator 2003)

Teachers’ initial reports of enthusiasm and commitment for change were also backed up by interviews with other stakeholder groups. For example, 12
out of 15 parents/caregivers of Māori children explained that it was unusual for them to see this level of teacher collaboration, excitement and enthusiasm, particularly when non-Māori teachers talked about their expectations and aspirations for Māori:

It was good to see … non-Māori and Māori teachers working together … a good interaction of ideas … teachers talking together … and sharing their ideas about what they were trying to do to improve their teaching for our tamariki [children] … when I was at school which was some years ago, we didn’t see that … type of teacher interaction, so it was quite, you know, new to me … and it made me think that the teachers were quite serious about this. (Mrs Pio, Māori parent/caregiver 2004)

Participants spoke about teachers attending new professional development hui together, setting individual goals for improvement in practice, pairing up with colleagues to explore new teaching approaches. Data indicated that teachers attended new meeting structures where they discussed Māori students’ progress and brought evidence of student work and engagement to class. Meetings included time to read, discuss and reflect on new teaching practices considered to be culturally responsive. Finally, participants talked about teachers undertaking new partnerships, such as working with others in reciprocal and structured classroom observations and working with specialist support teachers to examine data gathered through the action research process.

An analysis of the data indicated positive signs towards change in each of the two schools. However, by the time of the second set of teacher interviews one year later, the majority of teachers explained that their own and other teachers’ engagement in collaborative partnership work had diminished. An analysis of this interview data indicated that different forms of opposition developed over time and disrupted the reform process. The following section identifies the sources and character of this resistance.

Sources and character of resistance

Resistance from members of the dominant group (NZ European parents/caregivers)

A highly visible form of opposition emerged during the two years after the action research initiative was first introduced. Twelve out of 15 non-Māori parents/caregivers who were interviewed across both school communities described themselves as NZ European. These participants expressed concerns that their own children’s cultural identities and learning opportunities were now threatened by the increased focus on Māori language, customs and protocols. This principal described how a group of these parents/caregivers vocalized their concerns as they openly threatened to withdraw their children from the school:

We faced … really negative reactions from … non-Māori parents to the amount of te reo (Māori 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 Māori, and there have been some families who have withdrawn their children. (Principal 2, non-Māori)
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:

When I had my concerns, it was towards the end of last year when they were talking about increasing the Māori content. There were a few of us parents that spoke up and discussed … other options if we didn’t like how much was being introduced … we would remove our children … and take them to a school which didn’t do so much. (Mrs Kruger, non-Māori parent/caregiver 2004)

I’ve noticed that the Māori influence has got stronger at the school … there was … resistance around the parents to that……, because most of us didn’t want that much coming through. (Mrs Logen, non-Māori parent/caregiver 2004)

A few 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 believe that by addressing the needs of Māori 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, non-Māori parent/caregiver 2004)

These parents/caregivers clearly resisted the school reform work. However, it is important to note that during subsequent member checks, a few of these parents/caregivers also believed that they had not been consulted about reforms and were genuinely fearful about whether the change in practice would negatively impact on their own children’s education. These participants acknowledged that they knew little of the nature of reform and wanted to ask questions about what was happening in school. They also believed that there was no avenue to do so and that there was a lack of partnership between their child’s school and themselves as parents/caregivers. The following quote, gathered through a member check with non-Māori parents/caregivers, illustrates this:

I think basically if there had been more consultation about how much Māori was going to be introduced, then there wouldn’t have been this panic … I wanted to ask questions … you know how much Māori content was going to be put in. Because when you hear it’s being introduced you think its going to be another curriculum area. And when you look at how much time is being spent on reading, literacy and maths, and you think ‘Well they’re only getting 40 mins for each topic? What’s going to give? What will they miss out on?’ Whereas the teachers actually don’t do it as a separate topic in class, its introduced as much as possible into everything else, like integrated more rather than being as a separate subject and I think if we had been told that at the start then you know it wouldn’t have been seen as big a problem, you know. (Member check with Mrs Kruger, non-Māori parent/caregiver 2005)

It is unclear as to what would have happened if the dialogue and collaborative inquiry which had occurred in the beginning of the action research initiative had been extended to include all stakeholder groups (minority and dominant). Data gathered from interviews indicated that initial invitations to meetings about the reform work were extended only to parents/caregivers and elders of the minority indigenous group.
In contrast to the active resistance demonstrated by the parents/caregivers of the dominant group, interviews indicated that different teacher groups demonstrated a range of resistance over time. This opposition was demonstrated by silence and a disengagement with change activities. By 2004, four out of seven Māori teachers reported that they had chosen not to share particular ideas, questions or concerns openly or honestly with colleagues. In addition, only two out of seven Māori teachers talked about sustaining new collaborative partnership work with colleagues, such as collecting or examining Māori student achievement data. Interviews with student groups also demonstrated that students noted increasing teacher disengagement, manifested as 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, Māori student, Year 11 2004)

Analysis of interview data indicated that a particular form of Māori teacher resistance was fuelled by concerns about a lack of agreement on ‘what counted’ as important cultural values. The following section explores this other form of resistance, that of members of the minority group.

Lack of shared understandings of the purpose of the reform work and in particular ‘what counted’ as improved classroom practice became more evident to the researcher as she listened to different participant groups over time. A particular point of disagreement seemed to centre on teacher beliefs about involving students in decision-making processes.

In the original interviews, the majority of teachers spoke of the impact and importance of partnership between Māori and non-Māori as part of the essential elements of the action research project. This was evidenced through community elders being invited to professional development hui held at marae, and the attention paid to gathering and analysing diverse Māori perspectives (children and their parents/caregivers). As described earlier, teachers had talked about the impact of listening to voices not typically heard in their school speaking about their own interpretations of mainstream school experience.

Although student participation was an important principle in the original project, the issue of teacher power-sharing with students was not clearly articulated until teachers started to experiment with new pedagogical approaches.

For example, three out of seven Māori 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 but not articulated within the
school community. This issue was particularly evident during interviews with Māori teachers. For example, some Māori teachers believed that the focus of power-sharing needed to include older Māori community members. One Māori teacher commented that asking students their views contravened traditional Māori protocols of reliance on the wisdom of the tribal elders, not the immature comments of the young:

There are some strategies ... that are not ... Māori ... in my day you had to be white haired, just about bald before you could stand up and speak on a marae. Now ... anybody can go and ... korero [speak their mind] because this is how they're being taught ... and a lot of our Māori 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, Māori teacher 2004)

Three out of the seven Māori teachers explained that respect of cultural status was an important factor within the original action research project demonstrated through the inclusion of older tribal members. These cultural differences related to status did not appear to be acknowledged, investigated or understood within the context of school reform work and the Māori teachers quietly withdrew their consent for it.

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

I still think the partnership idea is good, Māori and Pākehā 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, Māori parent/caregiver 2004)

However, 9 out of 15 Māori parents/caregivers 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 Māori teachers as well. At times they were just as critical of their Māori teachers. (Ms Walker, Māori parent/caregiver 2004)

Evidence indicated that there was disagreement within each of the school’s Māori communities about whose views should be represented within the context of school reform. During member checks after the interviews were completed, a number of Māori teachers commented that to resolve these differences of opinion, it would be important to go back to the elders, family members and students in the Māori community. However, there appeared to be a lack of acknowledgement and support related to this issue from either school’s senior management team. It was not clear whether participants in either school saw the purpose of collaborative reform work as transforming the entire school system for minoritized children and young people. Final member checks with both principals in 2005 revealed that they did not believe that they had the necessary skills, knowledge and preparation to investigate resistance, particularly from the perspectives of both majority and minority stakeholder groups, and then
use opposition as a catalyst for developing and sustaining a shared vision of reform.

**Discussion and implications**

This study revealed the complexity of resistance both as a construct and as a developmental process. Findings indicated that resistance was multifaceted and interdependent, and emerged within and across both school communities over time. Resistance emerged across subsets of diverse stakeholder groups (dominant and minority groups) characterized by highly visible, active and outspoken opposition to less visible, silence and passive disengagement. These forms of resistance were fuelled by different participant concerns and revealed much about the lack of continued dialogue and inquiry which could have resulted in a shared vision of reform.

Resistance by NZ European parents/caregivers (members of the majority or dominant group) may have developed as a counter-action to observed changes and a strong desire to maintain the status quo. The results of this study echo those of Theoharis (2007) and Oakes et al. (2000), who also found that principals and other school leaders working to enact social justice reforms met with considerable parental resistance, particularly from white, middle-income parent groups. However, subsequent member checks with participant groups revealed a lack of consultation with NZ European parents/caregivers about the work of reform and the implications for their own children’s achievement. Therefore, this resistance appeared inevitable—a reaction to an inadequate consultation process.

In addition to the resistance of the dominant group, resistance also emerged within minority stakeholder groups. Within each school’s Māori community, there were conflicting views about major conceptual issues related to the development of culturally appropriate practice and the degree to which power and decision-making should be shared with students. The resistance of Māori teachers was less visible; demonstrated through passive disengagement with the work of reform. Subsequent interviews and members checks with Māori teachers and with parents/caregivers of Māori children also revealed that they wanted greater consultation and involvement in the reform initiative. These results highlight the lack of shared vision about the goal of reform.

Study findings indicate that on one hand, school leaders and change agents need to be prepared for the complexity and challenging nature of social justice reform work, whilst on the other hand, all stakeholders need to be engaged in the process of dialogue and inquiry in order to create a shared vision of reform. Results emphasized the obvious lack of inclusive communication and partnership processes. It has been argued that transformative processes such as school reform must begin with a shared vision (Senge et al. 2000). However, this requires leaders to understand that collective dialogue and inquiry must be inclusive from the beginning and must be sustained. Sustaining such processes is important as understanding of the nature and direction of reform work develops over time through participant engagement.
Whilst resistance presents challenges to equity-minded school reforms, it also creates great opportunities for learning and development. Pinar (2004) states that schools can only fulfil their promise as democratic public spheres if we engage in complicated and inclusive conversations about curriculum, teaching and learning. If members of the dominant parent/caregiver stakeholder group had been involved in the initial consultation, dialogue and inquiry process, then perhaps greater understanding and partnership could have been achieved.

Whitehead (2002) argues that individuals from powerful dominant groups can gain a greater sense of being and emancipation as a result of a process which acts to bring greater equity to marginalized groups. Acts of marginalization and discrimination exist across diverse groups of people, so reform processes must work to liberate all as oppressed, not just the minority. Whitehead (2002) argues that transformation in the relations of power between dominant and minority groups is not a straightforward process. Therefore, the work of change is a complex process, because it can be ‘dangerously reductive’, and because of this, it requires movement beyond the ‘oppressor–victim’ scenario, whereby multiple identities and subjectivities within and between groups are made visible (Whitehead 2002: 99). This requires a commitment to continued dialogue and inquiry that cuts across divisions of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and (dis)ability (hooks 2003, Fine and Weiss 2005, Hynds 2007).

In the study highlighted in this article, the initial enthusiasm and commitment to change amongst teachers was developed through critical, collaborative inquiry and dialogue (Hynds 2007). Through this process, teachers were able to examine contradictions between their beliefs and their practice, and between their practice and students’ needs. It was the opportunity to engage in this work which initially developed collective commitment to change amongst teachers. However, this process was not extended or sustained across minorities in all stakeholder groups. Therefore, new forms of leadership, committed to issues of social justice, are required (Shields and Sayani, 2005, Hynds 2007). Such work requires a commitment to important inclusive protocols and principles that facilitate dialogue and collective, critical inquiry between and amongst groups.

Inclusive dialogue and inquiry could have enabled diverse groups of students, teachers, parents/caregivers, elders and community members from minority and majority groups to examine how particular students are advantaged in mainstream schooling practices, because their prior experiences and cultural capital are most likely to be represented and valued within the existing curricula and mainstream schooling practices (Shields and Sayani 2005). Both the content and the process of community dialogue must address such issues if schools are truly to embrace difference and develop culturally responsive and inclusive practice which enables diverse groups of children and young people to achieve (Shields and Sayani 2005).

An empowering school culture (Banks 2006) is needed to engage diverse participants (members of the minority and majority group) in collaborative, critical inquiry in order to develop a shared vision of success. Sustained engagement in such activities is necessary to understand how schooling and
other institutional practices contribute to the marginalization of particular groups in society.

Whilst diversity and conflict are viewed as ‘friends’ to the school reform process (Fullan 1999), the research highlighted in this article suggests that we need to pay more attention to the complexity of resistance—both as a construct and as a developmental reform process. As a construct, resistance is multi-faceted. Therefore, further research which highlights the perspectives of both minority and dominant stakeholder groups is needed. As a developmental process, resistance is also related to the school reform programme. Inadequate partnership and communication processes also influence resistance. Future research is required to investigate resistance as a developmental process.

Finally, more attention is required on the preparation of school leaders and change agents working in equity-minded school reforms and their understandings and dispositions towards resistance to change. It is hoped that results from the highlighted study, discussed in this article, will enable avenues of further debate and research in social justice leadership.

Notes
1. Māori are the indigenous people of New Zealand.
2. In New Zealand, the dominant or majority group is NZ European.

References


