

## INDIGENOUS PEDAGOGIES: BRINGING BACK THE HEART

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*Aroha mai, aroha atu*  
Love comes toward us, love goes out from us

### ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to touch on what's missing from current contemporary dialogue about the student-centered paradigm of higher education and learning. It is an attempt to engage in a conversation that might begin to 'fill the gaps' Western pedagogies are unable to fill, because what is required is an approach that is more intuitive to an indigenous epistemological framework; a cultural standpoint that is not only experientially based, holistic, and relational, but social, philosophical, and spiritual.

### INTRODUCTION

What is missing from today's university environment is heart. Without the heart the brain can't function. On a spiritual level, our students are exhausted, our universities bereft. It is to the heart that indigenous pedagogies speak; bringing a unique voice to the educational world.

Maori pedagogies stream out of the ancient world of mythology and creation, anchoring themselves to the immediacy of death, birth, and the struggle of life. The potency of this is illustrated in the "engine hum" of a community united in its attempt to survive. What better intrinsic motivation for the creation of a transformational pedagogy than that of a community (*whanau*) built on an energetic flow of guidance and support (*manakitanga*), and acceptance and compassion (*aroha*), in the interests of unity (*kotahitanga*)?

Indigenous standpoints can breathe life, heart, and spirit into Western frameworks of learning and teaching. The best of what Western pedagogies have to offer has often been part of indigenous learning and teaching practice for centuries. Hemara (2000a) writes, "We may discover similarities between tupuna Maori strategies, operations, aspirations and goals, and what is touted [today] as best practice and support" (p2).

### CLARITY STATEMENT ABOUT KAUPAPA MAORI

Some Maori writers say one cannot claim to speak about 'Maoritanga', that this is an artificial unifying concept, and it is erroneous to collectivise all Maori people (or cultural

practices) under one banner. John Rangihau (1975) an esteemed kaumatua<sup>1</sup> writes,

There is no such thing as Maoritanga...each tribe has its own way of doing things. Each tribe has its own history. And it's not history that can be shared among others....You can only talk about your Tuhoetanga, your Arawatanga, your Waikatotanga. Not your Maoritanga. (pp. 223-233)

To some extent this is true. As an author, I cannot speak for all Maori, nor can I write with any authority on any of "The Maori" ways – I can only tell you what I have learned, what I sense, and what I feel. I am a Maori woman of Ngapuhi and Ngai Te Rangi descent, but contrary to Rangihau's suggestion, I am not writing from within a localized tribal framework, as I have no specific experience of it. What I can write about in this essay are cultural generalities: concepts and approaches that are common to all tribal belief systems within a New Zealand framework.

### BACKGROUND

As a university librarian, my experiences with learning and teaching are located within the specific and rather unique pedagogical framework of information literacy. I teach students a discipline that underpins lifelong learning itself. Librarians can be very process focused, launching directly into jargon-laden content and focusing on the mechanics of the information retrieval process itself. Academics have an equivalent compulsion centered on subject content. As educators, we must resist these compulsions, however seductive, and spend more time on creating contextual

<sup>1</sup> elder

conversations – building a foundation upon which students and teacher can put their feet. In the Maori world this is known as *turangawaewae*, a place to stand. Once this is firm, or at least the elements recognised and acknowledged, the journey may begin.

Using Brookfield’s four lenses of reflective practice: autobiography as learner-teacher, observation and feedback of colleagues, the student perspective, and critical theory (Brookfield, 1995), I have come to see my own learning and teaching practice as situated inside a wider pedagogical framework. There have been recurring themes in the pedagogical approaches of some of the theorist-practitioners – some of which have resonated by their presence, and some by their absence. Others felt oddly familiar and, in retrospect, I believe they were touching upon the cultural practices of my *tupuna*<sup>2</sup>.

### THE MAORI WORLDVIEW AS IT RELATES TO HIGHER EDUCATION

*Kaupapa Maori* is often written about in the educational literature as “a collectivist philosophy of achieving excellence” (Bishop, 2003, p. 221). Such a philosophy contains critical metaphors for power sharing. This kind of power sharing and redefining of hierarchy is missing in most university learning and teaching settings. Through contextual conversations this uneven playing field can be leveled. Some of the mechanisms for achieving this already exist in indigenous metaphors. Two such examples are:

1. *Taonga tuku iho*: cultural aspirations.

This is a set of principles – passed down from the ancestors - include community-focus, respect for age and wisdom, importance of genealogy and family, and the integrity of an indigenous way of knowing (Bishop, 2003, p. 225). It is also about diversity and recognition of the fact that “individual identities are multi-faceted and multi-generative.” No classroom is monocultural: “...individuals have at their disposal a complex range of representational resources; never of one culture, but of many cultures in their lived experience, reflecting the many layers of their identity and the many dimensions of their being” (Kalantzis, Cope, as cited in Bishop, 2003, p. 226).

This principle is most recognisable in a classroom as respect for diversity of experience, prior learning, cultural context, and the different learning styles that students bring with them. In the context of information literacy, it extends also to acknowledgment and respect for the frameworks that students cannot yet free themselves from (e.g., Google) and using these as a basis for a common vocabulary to further learning.

2. *Ako*: reciprocal learning

The word itself means both to teach and to learn. Teachers and learners take turns as partners in a “conversation of learning”, storying and re-storying their realities – either as individual learners or in a group. Reciprocal learning also promotes the notion of knowledge in action, with a preference for active-learning approaches. This principle also involves a willingness, particularly by the teacher, to develop a certain tolerance for ambiguity, and some humility around the fact that teachers can and should learn from their students.

*Kaupapa Maori* is based upon a fundamental conception of *whanaungatanga*, which consists of kinship connections (*whakapapa*) and the reciprocal responsibilities between complex branches of kin. (Wihongi, n.d.) These kinship connections don’t just apply to humans. Humanity has a kinship relationship with nature and the cosmos; the gods and their children who are the creatures of the sea and air, and the natural land formations. There is an implication for learning and teaching here in that commitment and connectedness is paramount. The responsibility for the learning of others is fostered, and the classroom is an active location for all learners to participate in decision-making processes.

The Maori traditional belief is that the whole of creation is a dynamic movement: *i te Kore, ki te Po, ki te Ao Marama*, “out of the Nothingness, into the night, into the world of light” (Shirres, 1996).

Context is an integral part of lifelong learning and transformative teaching. Students come to learn that there are different purposes for knowledge and different reasons for learning and that, ultimately, the final responsibility is theirs, either “to stay, to learn, or to leave” Brookfield (1995).

<sup>2</sup> ancestors

## MAORI PEDAGOGIES

Perhaps the most effective vehicle for the expression of a Maori pedagogy is illustrated by traditional child-rearing practices. Children were considered to be the greatest resource of any *iwi*<sup>3</sup>. Hemara (2000b) writes, "It was crucial that children learn various skills, positive attitudes to work, and moral codes that ensured well being of the *whanau* and *hapu*. *Kaumatu* took on the important roles of teachers and guardians." (p. 11). This is common amongst Pacific cultures; Thimmappa (2004) describes Fijian educational culture thus:

The traditional Pacific education prior to colonial rule was aimed at cultural transmission and continuity. Informal schooling was specific to cultural roles in artistry, life skills, tacit knowledge and special duties. Cultural values such as reciprocity, respect, humility, cohesion and loyalty were transmitted from generation to generation. (p. 1)

Ancient Maori society had many of the hallmarks of pedagogical good practice.

Some of these, as described by Hemara (2000b, pp. 40-45) are included in the following section.

### AROHA (LOVE) AND ITS ROLE IN EDUCATION

When *whanaungatanga* is placed into a pedagogical framework, learners accept responsibility for themselves and each other in the learning process in order that the entire group (*whanau*) might flourish. Within this framework are the dual concepts of *mana tangata*, the preservation of the learner's self-esteem and self-worth at all times, and *Tuakana-Teina*, a shifting role between teacher and learner (Ka'ai, 1995, p. 183). The Maori perspective of locating students and teachers in the same place is reflected by the Maori language where the word *ako* means both to teach and to learn. Thus the processes of learning were reciprocal, and teaching and learning experience and experimentation were cooperative ventures where everyone involved learned something (Hemara, 2000b, p. 40).

The Maori principle of kinship and the commitment to *whanau* (family) is the bedrock of educational initiatives in early childhood education in New Zealand (*Kohanga Reo*). This can be extrapolated to a more general educational context, both in its powerful ability,

when present, to provide connection for the students; and in the power of its absence, and the consequent disconnection and disengagement of students with one another, as well as with the entire process of learning.

When *whanau* is translated to mean a traditional, extended family arrangement where children (as learners) are socialised in an environment surrounded by other children and grandparents, and where all adults have the responsibility for child rearing, it reaches beyond the confines of the Western idea of the nuclear family and embodies a holistic cluster of values or virtues. These virtues encompass the concepts of *aroha* (love, respect, compassion), *manaaki* (caring, sharing, empathy), and *wairua* (spirituality), values that on the whole are sadly missing from Western higher education frameworks. Such concepts are not alien among other indigenous cultures.

Janice Hill of the Turtle Clan from the Mohawk Nation, in her 2002 editorial, talks of "Indigenous education as a pedagogy of the land....our learning begins with the land Our Mother". She sees the starting point of a truly relevant education for her people as "grounded in the ability to 'be in respectful relation' with each other and Our Mother" (Hill, 2002, editorial page). What is respectful relation grounded in, if not in love?

Marlow, Kyed, and Connors (2005) talk of the concept of *Kuleana* and its role in facilitating collegiality and collaboration. "*Kuleana* is a feeling of caring and a sense of advocacy. It emphasizes relationships, not just institutions, and demands consideration of the needs and feelings of all partners. *Kuleana* is the binding glue that solidifies all effective relationships." (p. 559)

What is love if not the binding spiritual concept between all people, places, and things, and what state does such connectedness bring about if not unity?

Beneath the Maori concept of unity or *kotahitanga* are the twin principles of *manakitanga* (to take care of, to succour) and *aroha* (love). There is no real literal translation for *aroha*. It is the kind of love that encompasses and transcends feelings of empathy, compassion, service, sympathy, charity, and goodness. Moreover, it is a spiritual state of being emanating from the gods.

Cleve Barlow (1991) describes it thus: "Aroha is a sacred power that emanates from the Gods.

<sup>3</sup> tribe

There are three essential elements to all things: the *pu* positive force (male) the *ke* negative force (female) and the *ha* life-giving energy (life-giving power from the gods). Aroha is the creative force whereby new elements are created” (p. 8). Simply put, *aroha* is unconditional love that comes from a higher power, and it is entrusted to us to pass on. It undergirds all other connecting principles and provides the foundation of all positive relationships.

What a powerful concept to utilise in our own educational practices. The creation of positive relationships with our students based upon service (facilitation of lifelong learning), empathy, and compassion (respect for diversity and prior knowledge, as well as for the individual).

### WHY DO OUR STUDENTS NEED TO BE LOVED INTO LEARNING?

Not all students are the same. There is no single solution, no one type of user, nor one preferred pattern of use. But there are common profiles. Many first-year university students are in the 18 to 22 year-old age bracket and this qualifies them for membership of “Generation Y”. Chester observed in 2004 that this generation was cynical, street-wise, and remarkably resourceful. They were adaptable, talented, and innovative, but they were also desensitised, skeptical, and disengaged.

The expectations these students bring with them strongly influence their attitudes, beliefs, and teachability. Their world is online, immediate, convenient, visual, subjective, non-linear, and constantly changing. What’s more, they expect this in all areas of their lives

One of the terms used in the literature to describe today’s students is “post modern”. Some of the characteristics of the post modern condition are consumerism, superficiality, and knowledge fragmentation (Harley, Dreger and Knobloch, 2001, p. 24). When these approaches are applied to learning, the results can be depressing, confusing, and far from holistic.

Mark McCrindle (2004b) says of this generation: “It is a generation not disillusioned but disappointed and more realistic than idealistic ... they have heard all the lines and are tuned out to hype and turned off by it” (p. 3). When teenagers were asked,

...What/who has a lot of influence on your thinking and behaviour, one quarter of the

influence on their lives is from TV and movies ... at the same time Generation Y are increasingly worried by an array of factors from youth unemployment rates, youth suicide rates, increasing housing and living costs, to body image and crime rates. In these post modern times technology is often not trusted let alone held up as the answer, AIDS and other pandemics continue to defy the experts and the scientific method has given way to virtual reality. (McCrindle, 2004a, p. 4)

It would seem such a cynical paradigm allows no place for love, yet McCrindle’s research shows that, despite the outwardly depressing state of the Generation Y world (its music, its icons and images, it’s “what’s in it for me” attitude), and the apparent alienation of a life lived “virtually”, members of this generation are on “a search for fun, for quality friendships, for a fulfilling purpose, and for spiritual meaning; they are “seeking more than just friendships they want community, to be understood and accepted, respected and included. ...while they spend most of their time with their peers they often fail to experience real unconditional love, and connection with them.” Above all else, Australian teens wish for “a happy relationship” and a “loving family” He reminds us that “They don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care” (McCrindle, 2004a, pp. 3-5)

How wise an epithet for our own teaching practices, validating the time we should be spending developing connections with our students and co-creating a contextual framework where they can name and explore whatever meaning they draw from the knowledge we create.

The concept of *aroha* is not misplaced in this context; there is a yearning in our students for meaningful connection and kinship with others. So why is love (*aroha*) missing from educative discourse?

Jane Martin (2004) says it is because Western ideologies situate love in the world of the domicile, which – of course – is the realm of women; the female energy, which is emotional and nurturing, is counter to the male energy of reason and intellect (p. 27). It is interesting that the Maori concept of *aroha* encompasses both male and female energies, with the home being an integral part of community life and learning as a whole.

We talk about testing and accountability, competition and scores, and the high cost of education and the energy required to administer

it. Yet love is seldom, if ever, mentioned. Such an educative ethos is driven by “the idea of accountability, an excessively cognitive relation that fails students and teachers in the most meaningful ways” (O’Quinn, 2004, p. 63). She goes on to outline what is essentially *aroha* in its multiple layers: “Empathy compassion, commitment, patience, spontaneity and an ability to listen are all closely connected to the trust necessary for creating the conditions for loving relation in a classroom community.”

Bell hooks (2001) also defines love as a layered “combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect and trust” (p. 131). She says, “To speak of love in relation to teaching is already to engage a dialogue that is taboo” (p. 127). She too recognises that love is taboo because it abides in the emotional realm, whereas academia’s power emanates from the rational world. To be emotional is to lose objectivity and rationality, and this makes us suspect. Love is too often confused with eros or romance, and this, again, raises taboos. She states that objectivism can sometimes act as a mask for disassociation; that academics don’t want to engage with students because they are afraid to feel.

A culture of fear resides in many universities: the fear of failure; the fear of not belonging; the fear of losing control. To avoid stress and conflict, students (and teachers) will simply shutdown. Hooks sees extending the hand of compassion and respect in helping students to address their fears as an act of love. When we are working to affirm the emotional well-being of our students, reading and attending to their emotional climate, only then are we engaged in meaningful learning and teaching experiences (hooks, 2001, p. 133).

## CONCLUSION

Students in universities today are tired. Youth culture and the twenty-four-seven, post-modern lifestyle lack the spiritual connection and nurturing that they are seeking. They are searching for relevance, meaning, connection, and respect. If they are to love learning and be lifelong learners they require a more meaningful context than that set for them by an exhausting, competitive curriculum.

Indigenous pedagogies are vital; they are built upon necessity, where all learning contributes to the physical, spiritual, and cultural well being of the society. Fundamental to such pedagogies are the notions of respect, nurture, commitment,

support, and love. Taking the time to create connection through conversations built on trust, interest, and respect helps our students feel listened to and to be part of; to feel loved and cared for. In turn, they become more willing to experience the vulnerability required to open oneself to learning.

The final quotation must go to hooks, (2001) who has a powerful way of bringing love into the classroom, where it creates a learning community based on spiritual equity and a partnership between hearts and minds.

All meaningful love relations empower each person engaged in the mutual practice of partnership. Between teachers and students love makes recognition possible; it offers a place where the intersection of academic striving meets the overall striving to be psychologically whole....Love in the classroom prepares teachers and students to open our minds and hearts. It is the foundation on which every learning community can be created. Love will always move us away from domination in all its forms. Love will always challenge and change us. This is the heart of the matter. (p. 137)

*Kua mutu.*

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