

# **CULTURAL REVITALISATION**

One Pasefika Perspective

Anne Moefa'auo

## Contents

- ❖ My Fānau
- ❖ My Approach
- ❖ Partnership Protection Participation

### **Cultural Revitalisation**

- ❖ Māori Stories Make Māori visible
- ❖ Māori Language
- ❖ Treaty of Waitangi Education
- ❖ Indigenous Perspectives
- ❖ Conclusion

## My Fānau

My grandfather was a tulafale (orator chief) from the village of Lufilufi in Upolu, Samoa. My grandmother came from the village of Siufaga in Savai'i, Samoa.

Both grandparents were active supporters of the Mau. The Mau was a resistance movement, first against the German occupation and then the New Zealand colonial rule of Samoa. When the Germans imprisoned local villagers for acts of civil disobedience, my grandfather and other Faipule (chiefs), broke into Vailima prison and helped them to escape. The German administration punished my grandfather by exiling him to Papua New Guinea for two years.

My great grandfather on my mother's side was a music teacher from Heidelberg, Germany. As a Lutheran he and his three brothers immigrated to New Zealand to escape from religious persecution.

My father came to New Zealand, from Samoa in 1953. New Zealand in the 1950's was a cold and lonely place for a Pacific Islander. There were no established Pacific communities as there are today and there were more Pākehā people than he had ever seen in his life. His emotional response to Pākehā was influenced by his experience of the pālagi in Samoa. They were the 'colonisers'. They were the 'bosses'. They were in charge. Even the kind and caring pālagi, like the nuns and priests, were still, in his colonised mind, people he had to defer to.

However, there was a place in Wellington, where he and other Pacific young people, could find emotional, cultural and spiritual sustenance – Ngāti Poneke Marae. He would say, "We were hungry for brown skin. Māori were fānau. We could be ourselves." The Pacific Islanders formed a Polynesian club as an extension of the Ngāti Poneke Young Māori Club and enjoyed showing off their traditional costumes and performing their cultural dances and songs for the public. Ngāti Poneke marae was home. There was the comfort of shared language, values and belief systems. Shared cultural practices. A shared sense of humour and love of music and dance. There was also unity of purpose in facing the challenges of colonisation.

## My Approach

In this paper, I have looked at Cultural Revitalisation in relation to my role as a secondary school teacher of migrants and refugees.

### Perspectives

As a New Zealand Samoan, the choices I make in my teaching practice are influenced by my own experiences as an urban Polynesian growing up in New Zealand. The focus of this discussion is on pathways for cultural revitalisation based on my own experiences.

## Partnership, Protection and Participation

### New Zealand Secondary School Teacher Criteria

Teachers in New Zealand state secondary schools are required to meet all the criteria set out in the *Practising Teacher Criteria*<sup>1</sup>, for registration. It is important to note that teachers of Charter schools are not required to be registered teachers, therefore other mechanisms would need to be in place to ensure their teaching practice reflects a commitment to biculturalism.

Three criteria<sup>2</sup> in particular, link directly to the topic of Māori cultural revitalisation:

- Teachers must 'demonstrate commitment to bicultural partnership in Aotearoa New Zealand'.<sup>3</sup>
- Teachers must 'respond effectively to the diverse language and cultural experiences, and the varied strengths, interests and needs of individuals and groups of ākongā'.<sup>4</sup>
- Teachers must 'work effectively within the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand'.<sup>5</sup>

### Teaching English as a Second Language (ESOL)

With the above criteria in mind, I have tried to develop a programme for migrant and refugee students which reflects the spirit of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi - Partnership, Protection and Participation.

#### **Partnership**

- Student vocabulary lists include words such as 'indigenous'; 'tangata whenua', 'Pākehā', 'tauīwi', 'bi-culturalism', 'tino rangatiratanga' etc.
- Treaty of Waitangi study topic helps students to make connections between the experiences of Tangata Whenua and their own cultural histories in relation to oppression and self-determination.
- Opportunities for collaboration between the ESOL Department and Māori Department (and local community) arise from studies of Te Ao Māori and Tauīwi study topics and topic.
- Non-Māori and Māori students learn about each other's cultures and experiences through performance, story-telling, interviews, artwork and celebrations.

---

<sup>1</sup> Education Council NZ Practising Teaching Criteria

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1 for full text of these criteria, New Zealand Secondary School Teacher Criteria and Standards

<sup>3</sup> Education Council NZ Practising Teaching Criteria no. 3

<sup>4</sup> Ibid no. 9

<sup>5</sup> Ibid no. 10

- A senior study topic on Cross-Cultural Communication, with a focus on Māori and Pākehā cultures, gets students to examine how values impact on the way people communicate, the barriers that create cultural misunderstanding, using the Treaty of Waitangi as a case study, and strategies for overcoming them.
- Written and audio-visual resources include texts about Māori by Māori e.g. short story collections by Māori authors Patricia Grace and Witi Ihimaera and films such 'Whale Rider'<sup>6</sup>, 'Patu'<sup>7</sup> and 'Bastion Point'<sup>8</sup>

### **Protection**

Protection of Māori values, language and culture is practised in a number of ways:

- Consultation and collaboration with Māori resource people to ensure that the Māori content of learning activities, is accurate, relevant, appropriate and delivered in a respectful way e.g. all ESOL students learn to recite their pepeha before they give oral presentations in English.
- Expectations that Māori culture is valued, is communicated explicitly through the study of the Treaty of Waitangi and all other learning activities.
- Connections are made between how ESOL students value their own cultures, the challenges they have faced to protect their cultures and the experience of Tangata Whenua.
- Pronunciation of Māori names and words with accuracy is a key language learning goal for all ESOL students.

### **Participation**

ESOL students come from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Participation by Māori therefore is reflected through their involvement:

- in a consultative, advisory capacity;
- through collaborative learning activities between classes;
- as role models of leadership and guardianship for the students; and
- as human resources for student learning.

ESOL students participate alongside Māori in aspects of tikanga Māori such as pōwhiri, waiata and haka. For example, recently, a quiet, shy Columbian refugee student, who had been victimised in a refugee camp in

---

<sup>6</sup>Barnett, J (Producer). Caro, N (Director) (2002). *Whale Rider*. Film. New Zealand. South Pacific Pictures.

<sup>7</sup>Mita, M (Producer). Mita, M (Director) (1983) *Patu*. Documentary. New Zealand

<sup>8</sup>Mita, M, Narbey, L & Pohlmann, G. (Producers). Mita, M, Narbey, L & Pohlmann, G.(Directors) (1980). *Bastion Point: Day 507*. Documentary. New Zealand.

Ecuador, because of his African heritage, got up unsolicited and joined his volleyball team in a haka. At the end, his surprised team mates picked him up and carried him on their shoulders.

***Interestingly, it is their participation in tikanga, rather than their acquisition of English, that gives ESOL students a sense of belonging and citizenship.***

# Cultural Revitalisation

## Māori Stories Make Māori Visible

### My personal experience

I attended a predominantly Pākehā primary school. I was the only Pasefika student in the school and there were very few Māori students. Racism was not overt at this Catholic school. Everyone was very nice to each other, yet I still felt out of place. We were all treated the same but we were not the same.

For me there were no Pasefika stories that I could relate to. Stories of Captain Cook did not resonate with me. Of the few stories there were of Māori, they were probably historically inaccurate. However I was drawn to them. Māori were fānau. I felt a connection to Kupe. I felt proud of those ancient Polynesians. They were my ancestors too.

The absence of my own stories made me feel invisible at school. Those few threadbare stories about early Māori were a lifeline to me.

### In my teaching practice

Texts that reflect the backgrounds of the students are essential in our ESOL programme, as are texts written by Māori about Māori. It is important to make everyone visible. Through Māori stories, students from migrant and refugee backgrounds, explore Māori values and experiences making connections with their own stories.

A story that ESOL students connect with immediately is the short story, 'Ka Kite Bro'.<sup>9</sup> A young Māori boy called Tama, learns that his Pākehā best friend has died. He struggles within the mono-cultural setting of his school to come to terms with his friend's death in his own cultural way. These are insights expressed by two Samoan students:

#### On the topic of Tradition and language:

*"Tama finds Pākehā traditions confusing. The Pākehā seem uncaring. They do not seem to care about their loved ones because they don't show their sadness. Tama's cultural traditions are insulted and sometimes misunderstood. Mr Watson mispronounces the Māori word 'Kia kaha'. Another teacher says rudely, "This is not one of your tangys. It is a funeral." Tama does not react to the insults because he is focused on his goal of going to the tangi to farewell his friend. He feels hurt and anger but he holds it in."*

<sup>9</sup> Davis, W. Ka Kite Bro. <http://website-box.net/se-keyword/ka+kite+bro+willie+davis>

### What did you learn from the ideas in this story?

*“That no matter what others say, it is important to be true to yourself. Tama never allowed what others said to affect how he felt about his culture. He remained strong and proud. As a Samoan, I understand what Tama was going through. I would not have been patient like he was, with people who insult my cultural traditions.”*

This story helps non-Māori students feel empathy for Tama and imagine what they would feel or how they might respond in a similar situation. They recognise the importance of respecting the language and traditions of a culture. They also recognise that it is Tama’s culture that keeps him strong in the face of adversity.

Patricia Grace’s novel “Potiki”<sup>10</sup> is another text that enables the students to explore Māori spiritual values, the clash of cultural perspectives in relation to land, the shared values and objectives between Māori and non-Māori environmentalists and the activism and resistance that has been part of Māori history since Pākehā arrived. The short story, “The Seahorse & the Reef”<sup>11</sup> is another text used in English, Social Studies and Geography to explore environmental issues and Māori perspectives on these issues.

There is a wealth of stories written by Māori that give insights into Māori values and culture. They should, in my view, be included in teaching programmes across all subject areas.

### The Accessibility of Film

Performance of stories has long been the primary form of story-telling in indigenous cultures. Written stories are a relatively new innovation in the Pacific by comparison and low literacy rates make this form of story-telling inaccessible to some. Film however, a modern day version of performance story-telling, is accessible to everyone.

Today’s screen savvy students, connect with film more readily than with written text. Being the most accessible medium for story-telling, film can capture the widest number of people, educating and entertaining them at the same time.

In the ESOL classroom, students with limited English, are able to engage with film exploring complex and challenging ideas. Films like ‘Utu’<sup>12</sup> by director Geoff Murphy and documentaries such as ‘Patu’<sup>13</sup> and ‘Bastion Point’<sup>14</sup> by Māori director the late Merata Mita are all powerful authentic stories that capture students’ attention throughout. I have used all three films as a resource in my teaching, exploring land, human rights issues and the Treaty.

However film and television can perpetuate negative images of Māori, feeding racial stereotypes. For this reason, I do not include ‘Once Were Warriors’, in the

<sup>10</sup> Grace, P (1986). *Potiki*. New Zealand: Penguin.

<sup>11</sup> Ihimaera, W (2003) *His Best Stories*. New Zealand: Reed.

<sup>12</sup> Murphy, G & Blakeney, D (Producers). Murphy, G (Director) (1983) Film. New Zealand.

<sup>13</sup> Mita, M (Producer). Mita, M (Director) (1983) Patu. Documentary. New Zealand

<sup>14</sup> Mita, M, Narbey, L & Pohlmann, G. (Producers). Mita, M, Narbey, L & Pohlmann, G.(Directors) (1980). Bastion Point: Day 507. Documentary. New Zealand.

ESOL programme, although it is an approved school text and is written about Māori by Māori. That is not to deny the truth of the story, but the lack of balance in the way the story is presented, sends the message that abuse and violence is exclusively a Māori experience. An important message missed, that abuse and violence is a universal experience not exclusive to any ethnic group. Patricia Grace's short story, 'The Geranium'<sup>15</sup>, in contrast, deals skilfully with the issue of domestic violence without giving any hint of the ethnicity of the characters or the context. As someone, whose stories usually reflect Māori experiences, language and culture, it is as if she has very protectively, written it, so that readers of any ethnicity can own it as their own story.

Films of a greater variety of genre are needed. Rather than Polynesians being chased by police on 'Police Ten 7'<sup>16</sup>, young people need to see Māori detective stories, adventure stories, more heart-warming stories like 'Whale Rider'<sup>17</sup>, family stories with quirky interesting characters, comedy, war stories, 19<sup>th</sup> Century westerns (reminiscent of the Hunter's Gold <sup>18</sup>series in the 70's), historical dramas, Māori-influenced fantasy stories for teenagers etc.

In the absence of Māori and Pasefika stories in film, the vacuum has been filled by Hollywood. Our young people know more about the history of American slavery, than they do about the use of Pacific people as slave labour in Queensland and Peru. They give heroic status to Mel Gibson's 'Braveheart'<sup>19</sup> but know little of the heroism of Hone Heke, or the people of Parihaka. Such stories have all the elements of an exciting blockbuster and with greater relevance to our part of the world.

As a teacher, the challenge is to find more films that tell stories, including historical narratives, indigenous to this part of the world as opposed to stories about hobbits, giant apes or blue aliens. What an irony that all those films were made here!

There are now several talented Māori directors making their name on the world stage including Taika Waititi and Lee Tamahori. While they have several home grown movies under their belts, the New Zealand film industry has barely scratched the surface in terms of New Zealand stories reflecting Māori culture and experiences as well as historical narratives.

## **Live Theatre**

Taki Rua as a Māori theatre company, has been a generator of Māori stories, by gifted Māori playwrights, actors and directors since the 1980's. The works of Taki Rua story tellers, such as Briar Grace, Willie Davis and James Moriarty have been very much part of the New Zealand school curriculum in most secondary schools. Their stories have been studied as written texts or performed as school plays for many years. In addition James Moriarty has workshopped with students, to give voice to their own stories through dramatic performance.

---

<sup>15</sup> Grace, P (1987). *Electric City and other stories*. New Zealand: Penguin.

<sup>16</sup> Screentime (Producers). (2002). *Police Ten 7*. Reality Television. Television New Zealand.

<sup>17</sup> Barnett, J (Producer). Caro, N (Director) (2002). *Whale Rider*. Film. New Zealand: South Pacific Pictures

<sup>18</sup> McRae, J (Producer). Parkinson, T (Director) (1977) *Hunter's Gold* Action Family Television Series: Television New Zealand

<sup>19</sup> Gibson, M; Ladd, A & Davey, B (Producers). Gibson, M (Director) (1995) *Braveheart*. Film. USA: Warner Bros.

Certainly within the school context, there is an established need for the works produced by Taki Rua and other Māori theatre companies, which present a uniquely Māori perspective.

## Māori language

### **My personal experience**

Growing up in a colonised Samoa, my father learned that the students who did well in school and in society, spoke English and those, like himself, who only spoke their mother tongue, failed at school and failed in society. This impacted on the choices he made for me. I was not taught to speak Samoan and I was sent to largely Pākehā schools where I received a mono-cultural Pākehā education.

My limited exposure to te reo Māori at that time, was mostly through songs such as 'Pōkarekare ana' and 'Titiro mai ngā iwi' and listening to my parents' records by the Howard Morrison Quartet, Marama White and the Volcanics. There was also scary Father Wall from the Catholic Māori missions who liked to tell us children, a story in a very quiet voice and then suddenly burst into a loud haka that made us jump out of our skins.

Years later as I became increasingly involved in social justice issues and activism, concepts like 'Tino Rangatiratanga', 'Mana Motuhake', 'manaakitanga', and aspects of tikanga from my noho marae experiences, were added to my small but growing lexicon of Māori words. This was helped also by my developing fluency in Samoan.

My pronunciation of Polynesian vowels, the Māori 'r' and the soft 't' was accurate but my use of te reo Māori was limited to single words or short phrases run together like one word. My syntax, grammar and comprehension of te reo was sorely lacking. I wasn't a very good student. I attended a few classes, learning the 'rākau method', however my experience of living in Samoa, has taught me that 'immersion' is the way I learn and retain a language best.

I also struggled philosophically over the years, with whether or not I should learn te reo Māori. At first I felt that I should try to learn Samoan as a priority. Also in the 70's and 80's, as many of my Māori friends did not speak te reo, it did not feel right to try to acquire their language before they did. Today many more Māori speak te reo and there are multiple and diverse pathways available for learning Māori including the internet. Even a woman in Scotland has taught herself te reo Māori according to the news recently.

Like so many non-Māori New Zealanders, as my family has grown, the lineages of Māori, Asian and Pākehā are interwoven with my own. To learn te reo Māori, for me now, is a cultural imperative.

## In my teaching practice

### Principles<sup>20</sup>

#### Treaty of Waitangi

The curriculum acknowledges the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and the bicultural foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand. All students have the opportunity to acquire knowledge of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga.

## Home languages are valued

Within my school, all Māori and Pasefika students take their home languages in the Junior school. Te Reo Māori and Samoan language classes are currently the only language classes, aside from English, that are offered in the senior school. In addition to Māori students, Tokelauan, Cook Island Māori and Tuvaluan students often continue their language learning switching to te reo Māori classes in the senior school. They also take Māori Performing Arts. These students are also ESOL students.

## The ESOL/Social Studies Classroom

As teaching English as a second language to migrants and refugees is the core business of this subject, it might seem a challenge to then include a third language in this programme. However, from a migrant or refugee student's perspective, the new English vocabulary and Māori vocabulary that they learn are all one language, New Zealand language.

Developing fluency in te reo Māori as an ESOL teacher, is an important professional development goal. Working with migrants it is essential that I communicate through my own actions and speech, that the indigenous language and culture of this country, is valued and revered.

While the focus is on developing English language fluency, students are exposed to Māori language in a variety of ways: Social Studies text books with a New Zealand focus, contain Māori terms and concepts, reading books, include stories about Māori written by Māori authors such as Patricia Grace and Witi Ihimaera, in which they encounter Māori words and sections of Māori dialogue. Vocabulary lists of Māori terms and vocabulary such as 'kia ora', 'ka pai' and 'manaakitanga' etc. are learned. In oral texts – stories and poetry, by Māori about Māori are read aloud to them. Films that incorporate Māori dialogue, such as 'Whale Rider'<sup>21</sup> are viewed and studied.

ESOL students engage with speakers of te reo Māori in various learning activities. They learn to recite their pepeha before they give a speech or presentation in English. They also participate in aspects of tikanga such as karakia, pōwhiri, waiata and haka, and help their classmates with language and tikanga.

## Pronunciation

From a linguistics perspective, te reo Māori alongside other Polynesian languages, has the same syllable-timed rhythm patterns and intonations as

<sup>20</sup> <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum#collapsible5>

<sup>21</sup> Barnett, J (Producer). Caro, N (Director) (2002). Whale Rider. Film. New Zealand: South Pacific Pictures

French and Italian, evocative of romance and sensuality. This is a stark contrast to the stress-timed rhythm patterns and hard consonant tones of the German, Dutch and English languages.

When we are correcting students' pronunciation of Māori words we are promoting the beauty of the language as well as its value. To this end we also challenge students' colloquial pronunciations of commonly used Māori words and place names such as 'Porirua' and 'Paraparaumu'. Students are sometimes resistant to this as their desire to fit in with their Kiwi friends, some of whom are Māori, makes them want to say the words the way their friends do.

Useful resources for observing and analysing how Māori words are pronounced are Māori Television and Weather and News programmes on both TV and Radio.

There used to be a television advertisement, using a Māori speaker and an Italian speaker. The dialogue between the two young people sounded beautifully romantic. It was a clever way of promoting Māori language.

### **Te Reo Māori – When should it be Compulsory?**

From my experience as a language teacher, I would say the optimum time for language learning would be Pre-school and Primary School. If language learners learnt te reo Māori all through Primary, they would be likely to choose it as one of their subjects at College because they would have a high level of competency in Māori, after at least 8 years of study.

This would mean there would need to be two streams of te reo Māori language learning at Secondary school. An advanced stream (at the current University level) for those students who have studied it at Primary school and a Beginners or remedial stream for those students who come into the Secondary school system from overseas (migrants or New Zealanders) or who for some reason have not achieved mastery of te reo Māori at the same level as their peers. The Beginners/Remedial class would be the Māori equivalent of ESOL, perhaps MSL. It is worth noting that many of the migrant students coming from the Pacific would probably move from the beginners' stream to the advanced quickly because of the similarity in languages.

This would have implications for recruitment and teacher training. As a nation-wide initiative, native speakers of te reo Māori would be required for every year level. Therefore the establishment of a Māori Language Teaching College would be essential.

### **Migrants Fear the Loss of Their Own Language**

Learning a second or third language at a later age (from late teens upwards) can be problematic. There are many barriers to competency depending on the background of the language learner.

Motivation is very key to effective language learning. The fact that English is an international language provides high motivation to migrants. It is the language of business, commerce and academic study. Learning English opens doors to a job, university and travel.

Nevertheless older language learners, fear that learning another language will cause them to lose their home language. For refugee language learners such as the Syrian refugees, whose country has disintegrated into war, their home language is the final remnant of their culture that they have left. They are also afraid their children will lose their language, and that they will not be able to communicate with them anymore. So it is with great reluctance that many older migrant language learners, embark on English language learning.

With this in mind, clear expectations regarding language learning goals for te reo Māori would be required particularly for beginners who are older teenagers or adult learners. Native speaking fluency might not be a realistic goal but beginner level fluency might.

## Treaty of Waitangi Education

### **My personal experience**

I was relief teaching for a few days at a college. It was a school in a wealthy area. The majority of the students were Pākehā but there was a small number of Māori and Asian students at this school. It was a social studies class. I picked up the relief work and the teacher said to me, "The topic's 'Treaty of Waitangi' and I warn you, they've had enough of it!" So with that introduction I nervously went to meet the class. As I knew I was going to be the reliever for a week, I thought I would try to find out what their issues were with the topic. I wrote, 'Treaty of Waitangi' on the board and asked the students to tell me what they knew about this topic. For the next 5 minutes I wrote their comments on the board. Being teenagers I'm sure they were trying to shock me, but nevertheless the majority of comments were racist and sounded like they came from bigoted old people rather than these young people. Even two Māori students were equally derogatory in their comments about Māori. I thanked the students for their honesty and gave them the relief work. After class I asked the Head of Māori studies if I could book the whare hui for the next lesson. He agreed and said he would join us.

For my lesson preparation, I wrote a story about a fictitious New Zealand, which had been taken over after Japan won the War. The churches had been re-purposed as whale meat-processing plants. New Zealand society had changed. Pākehā people were the most disadvantaged group in society, because their culture was so different from Japanese culture. Pākehā students were failing because the language of instruction was Japanese. Māori and Pasifika people were succeeding in society because their languages and cultures were similar to the Japanese.

The Head of Māori Studies welcomed us into the whare hui and the students sat around in a circle and listened to the story attentively. At the end, I asked for comments. The Head of Māori studies talked about how the story made him think of how his local church had been burnt down by racists. One of the girls cried because she was Jewish and it reminded her of how someone had vandalised the Jewish graves at a local cemetery. They had painted swastikas on

the graves including her grandmother's. A discussion followed about values and culture and the students who shared such racist views in the previous lesson were not the same people. At the end of class without any prompt from me, they thanked the Head of Māori studies for his hospitality.

This experience made me wonder what their teacher had said or done on the topic of the Treaty of Waitangi, to provoke such vitriol from the students. I also wondered how safe those two Māori students felt in class during her lessons on the Treaty.

There is a school of thought that says, that this topic should be confronting. People should be made to feel uncomfortable, angry, ashamed, guilty. However, from a teacher's perspective, I know students who are stressed, angry, sad, afraid or uncomfortable do not learn. The learning part of the brain shuts down and they go into 'fight or flight' mode. If the goal of Treaty of Waitangi education, is for people to learn and commit to addressing the injustices of the past, confrontation is not an effective tool.

For this reason, teachers and other educators, need training as Treaty of Waitangi workshop facilitators. In my view, it is too important to just let anyone teach this topic. Facilitators need to reflect on their own position with regards to the treaty. These workshops cannot be used by facilitators to process their own baggage and dump it on participants.

### **In my teaching practice**

The Treaty of Waitangi study topic, is a component of the Junior ESOL programme and in the senior ESOL programme, the Treaty, is a case study for a Cross-Cultural Communication Unit, which focusses on Māori and Pākehā cultures.

As a teacher of migrant and refugee students, my approach is to put the Treaty within a global context. This enables the students to explore their own histories of oppression and movements for self-determination e.g. the Indian resistance against British rule, Samoa's Mau movement and the resistance against German and New Zealand occupation etc. The aim is to lead the students to make the connections between their own cultural histories and the experience of Māori and the Treaty of Waitangi. In this way the students are able to feel empathy and explore ways to address the injustices of the past and the possibilities for the future.

## **Indigenous Perspectives**

### **My Personal Experience**

My father was born in Samoa 93 years ago. Although he was sent to Marist Brothers school in Apia, he often used to run away to go fishing. As a consequence he did not learn to read English. This was always dad's cautionary tale, to scare me into going to school every day. I had this Hollywood-influenced vision of dad as a young Huckleberry Finn, with a rod and a can of worms sitting

on a riverbank, fishing. Years later I walked in on dad telling my sons about how he used to run away from school, to go shark hunting with his uncle, a Tautai (fishing captain). He talked about going with his uncle to select the young men to come with them. They had to be strong and quick. His brother, Tolo, was too slow moving. He was never picked. Shark hunters were admired for their bravery, skill and daring. Directed by the Tautai, they would paddle in canoes, out to points in the ocean close to a reef. They would dangle blood-soaked pig meat in the water to lure the shark and then use 3 rope lassos to catch it. My father described how they fought the thrashing shark with their bare hands. He said, "We were the cowboys of the Pacific!" Then once secured the animal was speared, then clubbed, then flipped into the boat. The men would blow the conch loudly as they approached the shore with their catch. All the villagers would come out singing and dancing and calling out to the fishermen, waiting to cut the fish into portions to distribute to each family in the village.

The exciting story my father described to my sons, was in stark contrast to the uneventful grey description, he shared with me as a child. When I asked him why he did not share this story with me, he explained that he did not think it was important. What was important was that he did not want me to miss out on school. He felt ashamed that he had not learned to read and write in English and he did not want this to happen to me.

What I learnt from this experience was that colonisation had taught my father that different forms of knowledge had different values - Indigenous knowledge e.g. his shark hunting knowledge, which he had internalised as 'primitive' and 'inferior' and Western knowledge e.g. the pālagi school system and the English language, which he regarded as 'modern' and 'superior'. I challenged this perception at the time. I felt cheated of knowing the truth about his life and what he knew and I expressed this to him. I wanted him to stop measuring his worth on the basis of the acquisition of Western knowledge. He has dementia now, but I am glad that he was able to accept that his own indigenous knowledge was of great value and deserving of the highest respect.

He had healing knowledge which he did not hide, because the wellbeing of his family was paramount. That was one area where he had greater faith in his knowledge of healing than in Western medicine. This experience made me aware of the importance of reclaiming Indigenous knowledge and processes, as valid and in many cases superior to Western knowledge.

### **In my teaching practice**

The Social Studies textbook 'Our Government'<sup>22</sup> covers the origins of democracy and its expansion from Athens Greece, to Rome, to Britain and then out to the America's and Australia and New Zealand. I ask students to explore other forms of social organisation in indigenous cultures such as Māori, other Pasefika cultures, Native American. They are asked to consider if any of these indigenous forms of social organisation or government might be better alternatives to Western democracy.

---

<sup>22</sup> Carruthers, W.J. (2009) *Our Government* New Zealand: Cengage Learning

This also presents an opportunity to explore an evolution of the present day New Zealand government into a future government shaped by indigenous processes of consultation and leadership.

### **Colonisation – indigenous perspectives**

When I was teaching in Samoa over 20 years ago, I was very impressed by the Social Studies textbooks I was given. I cannot remember who published them but I thought they were very revolutionary, even by today's standards. They were written from the perspective of indigenous people. Accounts of their experience with America, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and France revealed these countries' actions as exploitative and ruthless. The books covered stories about the hīkoi in New Zealand, Dame Whina Cooper and Māori land Rights. They also covered the experience of the people of Rongelap and the Bikini atolls who were exposed to radiation from nuclear testing carried out by America. Another story recalled the experience of the people of Diego Garcia, whose island was given by the British to the Americans, without any consultation with its inhabitants. They were tricked into leaving their island and then banned from returning, to what was now an American military base. Disenfranchised, they were forced to live on a neighbouring island as second class citizens, experiencing high rates of alcoholism, depression and suicide.

Today, our Social Studies text books by comparison still contain a Eurocentric element in many of them. There is a need for Social Studies and History textbooks which reflect indigenous perspectives, not just experiences.

### **Indigenous Knowledge Systems**

Every year our school participates with other Secondary schools in a Polynesian cultural festival. Preparing for this event takes hours and hours of practice and the students are often completely self-directed, with a minimum of supervision from teachers. When they perform on the day the students are like 'fish in water', completely in their element. Often many of the same students are not as engaged in the classroom. Teachers complain that in the weeks and days leading up to this festival, students are distracted and can't focus on lessons. If only we could bottle the commitment to excellence, the perseverance and creativity, that we observe in the students in their preparation for this event.

What is it that makes learning in the classroom so unappetising after the excitement of performing their cultural dances and songs together on stage, often for an audience containing their wider extended family? There is a 'disconnect' between the festival where they are confident with their cultural knowledge and skills and their other subjects which they perceive as having no link to their culture because they are 'pālagi' subjects. Yet our ancestors were scientists of the natural world.

It is important to address the cultural bias in all subjects. Indigenous knowledge systems of Maths and Science and other subjects give indigenous students ownership of their learning in the same way they take ownership in preparing for the festival. I would have loved to learn in science how my ancestors used astronomy for navigation, the way they used memory to guide them on long sea journeys, or the ways they used maths e.g. according to researchers Andrea Bender and Sieghard Beller of the University of Auckland, the early Polynesians

were using binary arithmetic, the foundation for computers, at least 300 years before German mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz determined the binary system for computations, in the early 1700s.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to challenge the perception of the early Polynesians as primitive if young Polynesians today are to take ownership of their learning. They need to recognise that their ancestors left them a legacy of knowledge accumulated over thousands of years, which is theirs to contribute to or adapt in the same way they so confidently contribute to and modify their cultural performances for the festival.

### **Affirming indigenous ways of learning**

Closely linked to indigenous knowledge systems is indigenous learning processes. As the only Pasefika student in my boarding school. I was conscious that I learnt differently from the other students. I needed to go off to the music room, and read my texts out loud in order to retain information and process it. Years later majoring in Education at university I learnt about multiple intelligences and realised my way of learning, although different was not inferior, it just felt that way in a mono-cultural setting. It was also reassuring to learn that many Polynesians are auditory-kinaesthetic learners.

Working with migrants and refugees my experience has taught me to affirm other people's learning process and to challenge students who say to classmates, "That not the right way." Teachers also need to check themselves and ensure that they are not communicating unconsciously to learners that their way is the right way. Learning experiences that affirm indigenous learning processes of the learner are essential to the wellbeing of the student.

## **The Government's Role in Cultural Revitalisation**

My thoughts on the role of government in the revitalisation of Māori culture have been drawn from my own experience as a Polynesian growing up in New Zealand as well as my experience as a teacher in the New Zealand school system.

Essentially the Government's commitment to biculturalism under the Treaty of Waitangi should be reflected in teacher training and the school curriculum in the following ways:

- Review teacher training requirements to address the understanding and application of Treaty of Waitangi competencies (related to the Teacher Practising Criteria for Teacher Registration, including for teaching staff in charter schools).
- Include appropriate and effective resources that raise the visibility of Māori and Māori values so that stories (written, oral and visual texts including films) produced by Māori about Māori are essential components of teaching programmes.

---

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2013/12/polynesians-may-have-invented-binary-math>

- Provide scholarships in the arts and sciences to graduates of Kura Kaupapa Māori.
- Make Te reo Māori compulsory at primary school level with advanced and beginner classes offered at Secondary school level.
- Establish and resource Māori language teacher training initiatives and make Māori History / NZ History (pre and post European) a compulsory subject.

As I have observed amongst migrant and refugee students their affinity with Māori cultural values and participation in tikanga Māori has eased their settlement into school and the wider community therefore a requirement for Treaty of Waitangi education for Permanent Residence and/Citizenship status must implemented and maintained.

In thinking about the revitalisation of culture and particularly the arts, government could do more to resource Māori writers, directors and artists to produce work that reflect Māori perspectives, and to which the broader community are now claiming a connection.

## Conclusion

### New Zealand Identity

Māori culture is valued at home and abroad and is experienced

- Everywhere
- Every day by
- Everyone

Like my ESOL students, it is Māori culture, not the English language or my mono-cultural education that gives me my sense of belonging and citizenship. It has saved my father and I and many Polynesians from disappearing. Not just in New Zealand society but also in the Pacific.

When the League of Nations gave Samoa to New Zealand as a protectorate in 1927, without consulting the Samoan people, Sir Maui Pomare was our champion in the New Zealand Parliament. He stood up against his own party and blamed the government for being responsible for the spread of influenza<sup>24</sup> throughout Samoa, causing the deaths of a quarter of the population.

Sir Maui Pomare<sup>25</sup>, guided and supported the Samoan people on their journey towards self-determination. The principles of non-violent resistance, upon which the Samoan independence movement the Mau was based, were inspired by the people of Parihaka.

<sup>24</sup> <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-HolRevo-t1-body-d1-d1.html>

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.waateanews.com/Waatea+News.html?story\\_id=NDYyOQ&v=592](http://www.waateanews.com/Waatea+News.html?story_id=NDYyOQ&v=592)

When the Samoan leader of the Mau, was shot and killed by New Zealand police, during a peaceful demonstration, Sir Maui Pomare sent the following telegram, "Heart bleeds for your people sick unto death ....no need to tell you to keep steadfast and above all to keep calm am writing aroha Galumalemana'."<sup>26</sup>

When speaking of great Māori leaders, who have helped the Samoan people, the following proverb is often quoted:

'O le e lave i tiga, ole ivi, le toto ma le aano'

He who rallies in my hour of need is my kin.

It seems appropriate therefore to address this proverb to all those, of any race or ethnicity, who would promote revitalisation of Māori culture. It is the pre-requisite for all of us to belong.

---

<sup>26</sup> <http://pacificguardians.org/blog/2013/07/16/Māori-and-samoan-legacy-sir-maui-pomare-and-taisi-nelson/.html>

## Appendix 1 – New Zealand Secondary School Teacher Criteria & Standards<sup>27</sup>

The three criteria below are extracted from fifteen requirements for eligibility for teacher registration. While all fifteen points are relevant to this discussion, these criteria address biculturalism more specifically.

<b>Practising Teacher Criteria</b>		<b>Standards</b>
1. demonstrate commitment to bicultural partnership in Aotearoa New Zealand	i. demonstrate respect for the heritages, languages and cultures of both partners to the Treaty of Waitangi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continue to develop understandings of the Treaty of Waitangi</li> </ul>
2. respond effectively to the diverse language and cultural experiences, and the varied strengths, interests and needs of individuals and groups of ākonga	i. demonstrate knowledge and understanding of social and cultural influences on learning, by working effectively in the bicultural and multicultural contexts of learning in Aotearoa New Zealand ii. select teaching approaches, resources, technologies and learning and assessment activities that are inclusive and effective for diverse ākonga iii. modify teaching approaches to address the needs of individuals and groups of ākonga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage student positively in learning</li> <li>Establish expectations which value and promote learning</li> <li>be responsive to individual student needs</li> </ul>
3. work effectively within the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand	i. practise and develop the relevant use of te reo Māori me ngā tikanga-a-iwi in context ii. specifically and effectively address the educational aspirations of ākonga Māori, displaying high expectations for their learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>communicate clearly and accurately in either, or both, of the official languages of New Zealand</li> <li>demonstrate a sound knowledge of current issues and initiatives in education, including Māori education</li> <li>continue to develop understandings and skills in the appropriate usage and accurate pronunciation of te reo Māori</li> <li>demonstrate an understanding of basic Māori protocols when opportunities arise</li> </ul>

<sup>27</sup> These three criteria, explanations and standards are extracted from Teacher Registration, Education Council NZ, Practising Teaching Criteria.

## Bibliography

### Written Texts

- Carruthers, W.J. Our Government. New Zealand. Cengage Learning. 2009.
- Davis. W. Ka Kite Bro. Retrieved from <http://website-box.net/se-keyword/ka+kite+bro+willie+davis>
- Grace, P. Electric City and other stories. New Zealand: Penguin 1987.
- Grace. P. Potiki. New Zealand. Penguin. 1986.
- Ihimaera. W. His Best Stories. New Zealand. Reed. 2003.

### Visual Texts

- Bastion Point: Day 507* Dir. Merata Mita. Television New Zealand. 1980. Documentary.
- Braveheart* Dir. Mel Gibson. Warner Bros. 1995. Film.
- Hunter's Gold* Dir. Tom Parkinson. Television New Zealand. 1977. Family Television Series.
- Patu* Dir. Merata Mita. Television New Zealand. 1983. Documentary.
- Police Ten 7* Prod. Screentime. Television New Zealand. 2002. Reality Television.
- Whale Rider* Dir. Niki Caro. South Pacific Pictures. 2002. Film.
- Utū* Dir. Geoff Murphy. New Zealand. 1983. Film.

### Internet Texts

- Influenza Samoa. Retrieved from <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-HolRevo-t1-body-d1-d1.html>
- NZ Curriculum. Retrieved from <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum#collapsible5>
- Polynesians binary maths. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2013/12/Polynesians-may-have-invented-binary-math>
- Pomare & the Mau. Retrieved from <http://www.waateanews.com/Waatea+News.html?storyid=NDYyOQ&v=592>
- Pomare telegram. Retrieved from <http://pacificguardians.org/blog/2013/07/16/Māori-and-samoan-legacy-sir-maui-pomare-and-taisi-nelson/.html>
- Teacher Registration. Education Council NZ Practising Teaching Criteria Retrieved from <https://educationcouncil.org.nz/content/practising-teacher-criteria>