

# “Maori Pedagogies : a view from the literature”

a presentation to NZARE Conference

Te Whare Wānanga ō Waikato – Hamilton - 2000

*Abstract – this paper attempts to illuminate ancient pedagogies, which resonate within contemporary educational contexts. Findings from the research on Maori traditional child rearing and teaching and learning practices could inform and contribute positively to today’s learning environments. It is worth noting that ancient conventions in education are sometimes replicated in what is currently termed best practice.*

## **Introduction**

It is with some trepidation that I stand before you and speak about a topic that has limitless interpretations and scope. So, I would like to begin my discourse by stating categorically that the piece of work I am presenting for public perusal is not definitive. It represents what was searched for and found in the historical record and contemporary literature.

**He iti tangata, e tupu ; he iti toki, e iti tonu iko**

I would also like to say at this point, that the whakatauaki, which is on the screen resonates for me. I believe that it also acts as a metaphor for Maori education, which has the potential to grow into something that is special and underlined by success. While sometimes a child may not remember all that happens to her as she grows there are some subliminal things that remain. Maori education in my view is like that child. We have fuzzy ideas about what happened in the past and how our tupuna lived and operated.

A couple of weekends ago I had the privilege to listen to Sonny Mikaere describe and explain *Te Rangakura: Maori Teacher Education for the New Millennium*. One thing he said struck a chord and also confirmed some of my thinking when I started on this project. He said, “our tupuna are waiting for us”.

This publication is the result of a journey into the past. I hope that the past, which our tupuna went to great lengths to record will inform our future.

Like any journey there was a reason for setting off. That reason or rationale was to respond to what was assumed to be a need to blend ancient and modern data, into some sort of coherent narrative, that could inform contemporary teaching and learning practices. The fact that our tupuna had created robust and effective means of transmitting knowledge and skills is a fair indication that they had definite ideas about how their offspring should be prepared for the world. They were also in the business of creating new knowledge. There is enough evidence to show that enquiry and action followed curiosity. Being some of the first to leave *the flat earth society* seems to confirm that theory.

Maori have a tradition of education, which is historically deep and intellectually challenging. Their ways of transmitting knowledge may not have been unique but the aggregation of a range of strategies and knowledges that had a particular Maori, iwi or hapu spin did and may still work. As we investigate further we may discover similarities between tupuna Maori strategies, operations, aspirations and goals, and what is touted as contemporary best practice and support.

Now that the introduction is over - let us begin.

### *The Source*

Before we draw out findings from the literature I think I should explain where I got my information from and some of the problems encountered and the solutions used to reach a satisfactory stage. I was about to say conclusion but the subject of Maori Pedagogies has a long way to go before we reach any resolution or conclusion.

The first question could be “where was the information” and “what did it look like”.

1. *published histories/secondary resources* – these were initially reviewed so that access to primary resources could be facilitated. While many of the histories can stand on their own as robust records of the past their other wealth is their bibliographies. Some important secondary sources such as ‘Tainui’ did not have a bibliography but that omission has been supported by complimentary works by the likes of Pei Te Hurinui and others.
2. *the ethnographic record* – these were generally written Pakeha accounts of Maori history, life, customs and activities. While they are a rich source of information they often tell more about the writer than they do of the characters and events they are describing. Their records may also tell the reader about the society the ethnographers originated from. It appears that most early Pakeha recorders were not particularly interested in female activities unless they were intimately involved with them. It seems inevitable that if the information gatherers were male who were interested in male activities and only sought out male informants then the record would be biased and incomplete. While this may be so, ethnographic records are an important contribution to the historical record.

3. *ngā Moteatea* – Maori and New Zealanders generally are fortunate that tupuna Maori religiously recorded their pasts and traditions. We are also fortunate that women as well as men were among the recorders and the recorded. In the context of early childhood education Waiata oriori (which in my opinion are the pre-eminent source of information relating to child rearing practices and education) were a combination of pedagogical practices and curriculum subjects. They recorded historical and contemporary events, the deeds and legacies of ancestors and contemporaries, geographical boundaries, customary rights, codes of behaviour etc. In other words all those things that were of importance to iwi, hapu and their members. While I consider moteatea to be the richest possible source of information, enquirers and researchers should be warned that the metaphors and analogies used are often difficult to fathom today. Ngata and Jones have helped us out by recording and editing four volumes of moteatea, which are accompanied by in-depth commentaries. Letters in the New Zealand Maori Purposes Fund Board papers held at the Turnbull library support the commentaries and create a rich backdrop to their later publications.
  
4. *archives* – all government departments are obliged by law to deposit their ‘dead’ files into Archives New Zealand (aka National Archives). These files are extensive and hold huge amounts of detailed information about nearly everyone in the country (if you care to search). For the purposes of this enterprise Native/Maori Affairs and Department of Education files were accessed. Within the Department of Education files are a sub-group known as the Native Schools Files. They proved to be the richest source of information about the interaction between Maori and Western European education. School diaries, and correspondence between teachers, school inspectors, government ministers,

bureaucrats, parents and community representatives give detailed descriptions of not only the day to day school operations but community activities, political wranglings and raft of other community and regional information. The particular wealth of these records is derived from the fact that teachers lived within the communities they served. While other government agencies such as those concerned with health, housing, reserves and transport etc. did send in representatives, this only happened intermittently. The demands for regular and extensive reporting by the Department of Education seems to have been as great if not greater than for any other government agency. It is worth warning potential archives users that the access to the files is arcane, labyrinthine and downright difficult. This is not the fault of archivists it is the nature of the records and their long and sometimes disjointed history.

5. *manuscripts* – as stated earlier Maori and New Zealanders are fortunate to have had ancestors who were obsessed with gaining literacy and then recording their histories and their lives. There are a number of Maori manuscripts held at various locations throughout the country including public libraries and archives as well as private collections. They include a range of media. One of the richest repositories of Pakeha information are diaries. A particularly interesting and useful source are diaries written by early missionaries and their wives. While the missionaries may record the ‘spiritual’ health of the local ‘natives’, the wives often record their everyday dealings with the community, such as trade and social lives. Maori manuscripts are a record of so many events, attitudes, histories, whakapapa, cultural activities, political maneuverings etc. that there is not enough time or space to list and describe them in this paper. Over the last decade institutions like the Turnbull have set up state-of-the-art electronic access points that

assist researchers and readers through the complex but not completely impenetrable indexes and filing systems.

6. *government reports* – we are a well recorded nation. The government has made sure of that. One of the most important resources successive governments have created and generated especially between the 1860's and the 1950's are the *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives* (AJHR's). The AJHR's are a type of parliamentary bulletin, which records interactions between the Government and the nation. While the records during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries tended to have a Government and by default Pakeha bias they do give detailed descriptions of events and activities which the government was involved in. The particular wealth lies in the fact that they are beguilingly candid. This is especially so at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It should be remembered that Maori were not really considered a going concern at the time when a "pillow was being softened for a dying race". It could be construed that frankness was an act of contrition Researchers and readers should be warned that because of the longevity of these records, indexes are idiosyncratic. Unfortunately the idiosyncrasies change over time.

6. *Native Land Court Minute Books* - these are a rich source of historical and territorial information. They also give an insight into the socio-economic contexts in which Maori at the time and their ancestors lived and operated. While the Land Court's main concern was the individualisation of land, underpinning information related to resource use was also recorded. How individuals, whanau, hapu and iwi learnt to manage those resources are given quite extensive coverage. Curricula and pedagogies concerning birding, fishing, gardening, mining etc. are scattered throughout the minute books. There are detailed

renditions of whakapapa and often the debates surrounding them. Microfilm and microfiche copies of the originals are located throughout the country. A caution for researchers and readers is that some information may not have been entirely truthful. That is an issue being thrashed out by the Waitangi Tribunal.

All the above can be found in the following repositories, the Alexander Turnbull Library, the National Library, Archives New Zealand, the Hocken Library, Auckland Institute Museum, Auckland Public Library to name a few. We are fortunate that most primary resources are available to the general public. However, there are some restrictions on some collections. Those restrictions are often required by donors.

Now that we have covered where information was found and how it informs research it is now time to move onto what was found and what may constitute Maori pedagogies. .

### ***The Findings***

The research was structured around three themes

1. pre –contact and 18th and 19th century Māori teaching, learning and child-rearing practices;
2. Māori and Pakeha encounters within the context of education; and
3. contemporary Māori education.

From those themes emerged the following:

- *child rearing and education - a mix of theory and practice -*

Traditional curricula were closely related to the spiritual, intellectual, social and physical wellbeing of the community and individual. As human and economic resources were identified, skills were taught that were commensurate with the efficient and effective use of those resources.

➤ *children and adults - at the centre of the educative process -*

While current thinking places children at the centre of learning, a traditional Māori perspective seems to locate students and teachers in the same place. The processes of learning were reciprocal, both teachers and students learnt from each other. Teaching/learning, experience and experimentation were co-operative ventures in which everyone involved learnt something new.

➤ *learning - a gradual process -*

Waiata oriori and whakatauki are examples of how understandings emerged from experience and levels of maturity. Lessons had direct and immediate application. As the student matured, the associated tasks would become more complex. It seems that a simple lesson on a complex subject would be delivered at one time, but then the student and teacher would draw out deeper and more complex meanings as time passed.

*training - formal and informal*

While the whare wānanga seems to have been a formal setting, much other learning was carried out informally by adults who were charged with looking after children.

Apparently rote learning was a hallmark of whare wānanga learning. Huge tracts of

historical events and details, whakapapa and esoteric beliefs were learnt in this way. This type of learning appears to have been highly ritualised.

Informal learning with an adult was often linked to the harnessing of natural resources. Lessons and their application had an immediate impact on the economic wellbeing of the community. This meant the students were fully functioning members of and contributors to their communities.

➤ *low teacher/learner ratios -*

It seems that within the formal setting of the whare wānanga a small number of students were allowed to take instruction at any given time.

Informal training and learning would often have been in the form of one-on-one tuition. This allowed teachers and learners to confirm family relationships by forging close social and economic interdependency.

➤ *intergenerational teaching and learning -*

While parents were often caught up in the business of providing the things that were essential to survival and economic and social wellbeing, older whānau members were often recruited to bring up young children. It was not and still is not uncommon for Māori grandparents to oversee the upbringing and education of their mokopuna.

➤ *relevant and mixed curricula -*

Māori began teaching their children before they were born. While the content of the lessons may have been complex and difficult, the learning was incremental and familiar. New knowledge, skills and activities were related to preceding and following lessons. The basis for lessons was what children had already become familiar with. Those lessons included

genealogical and geographic locations, social behaviours and cultural imperatives as well as ways and means of generating mana and, political and economic power.

➤ *streaming* -

Children were selected to attend a variety of lessons. Often the selection was carried out before birth. Especially gifted children were selected to attend institutions of higher learning. They often learnt complex esoteric conventions and beliefs. If a child was talented at particular tasks they may be streamed so that they could build on their natural talents and so enhance their hapū and whānau mana and economic wellbeing.

➤ *metaphor, allusion and surprise* -

Metaphors, allusions, historical events, relationships (e.g. waka, iwi, hapū) and community resources were often used as signposts to learning and teaching. While metaphors could be complex and convoluted, they could also be simple and familiar. Movement into new intellectual territory was supported by familiar metaphorical signposts. Surprise or a type of faux-anger seems to have been used to move students beyond their 'comfort zone'.

➤ *multi-level relationships between curricula and teaching practices* -

Different media were harnessed to teach specific subjects. Those subjects did not exist in isolation but to varying degrees touched on all other subjects. These types of relationships released infinite potential.

➤ *hooking new learning to the familiar* -

Relationships between curricula and the environments or contexts in which students lived were strong and recognisable. Learning new topics, which were seamlessly or obliquely related to what was recognisable, allowed for controlled-risk experimentation and relaxed learning.

➤ *perspectives rather than answers -*

Considered and imaginative perspectives may have been as valuable as correct answers. Again this led to limitless potential and unpredictable, and sometimes exciting, understandings. 'Korero Kaka' appears not to have been encouraged.

➤ *gender-specific learning -*

Because the economy was based on the potential productiveness of all community members, individuals were often encouraged to enhance their natural capacities. It was considered that women and men had different capacities that required harnessing for community wellbeing.

➤ *life-long learning -*

Understanding of particular concepts would expand as the student matured. This seems to be very closely related to the following finding.

➤ *simple understandings leading to complex analysis -*

Subjects were approached as if they required simple understandings in the first instance and then became more complex as understandings became deeper, more expansive and integrated into other ideas and analysis.

➤ *symbiotic relationships -*

Relationships between teachers and learners were mutual teaching and learning experiences. Those relationships were expanded to include the whole community and by association everything that exists.

➤ *peer assessment* -

Assessments were carried out when tasks were being performed before or with the community. The results may have been measured by the level of audience and participant support and enthusiasm.

I believe all the above are relevant to today. While they encapsulate ‘ngā mahi o ngā tūpuna’ they are designed to be taken up and applied. As stated earlier our tūpuna went to great pains to record their traditions and ways of being. The best way to honour them and their work is to make use of the principles they developed over millennia.

This presentation was informed by the publication which is displayed on the screen.

No reira ka mutu taku kōrero ki a koutou – Wharehuia Hemara (Ngāpuhi/Ngāti Maniapoto)

For those who are interested in knowing more about the publication “*Maori Pedagogies : a view from the literature*” – it is available to view and purchase at the NZCER display desk .  
It can also be ordered by email – [sales@nzcer.org.nz](mailto:sales@nzcer.org.nz)