Maori Women and Leadership in Early Childhood Education

“Repositioning Maori Early Childhood Teachers as Educators”

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Repositioning Maori Early Childhood Teachers As Educators : A Wananga Approach Presentation by Early Childhood Educators to the 6th World Indigenous People’s Conference on Education 2005: Waikato University – Hamilton


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Abstract:

Differing views, notions, and epistemologies intersect and conflict. These tensions are realities and contribute to the fragmentation of progress. For the situation in Aotearoa the binary function has been fragmented by struggles between treaty partners, government policy and societal misconceptions of early childhood education.

It is at this intersect that our research work, experiences and knowledge of the early childhood scene within Aotearoa is positioned to contribute to the international community of early childhood educators as it has on the national scene. The research being presented is a culmination of 25 years working within the early childhood sector and engaging with multiple discourses throughout this period. As Maori women, the challenge has been the repositioning of Maori epistemologies, methodologies and pedagogies within early childhood services and teacher education settings.

Introduction:

This presentation builds on the narratives of twelve Maori women who are early childhood professionals. They hold a range of positions within the early childhood department of Te Wananga o Aotearoa, a Maori based tertiary institution. All women hold tertiary qualifications from degrees to postgraduate qualifications, but most importantly, they have a passion for early childhood education which prioritises Maori traditions. They have undertaken studies within Western institutions, which has enabled them to critically evaluate their learning’s against their personal values and beliefs as Maori women. This critique has made it possible for these women to re-position themselves, not only as professionals but also as Maori women within the field of education and society.

Narratives as a basis for this presentation were the preferred pedagogy for generating discussion and analysis. This process allowed people to tell their stories, as a way of constructing and defining their realities, and their truths. Bishop and Glynn (1999) believe that the aim of narratives creates an image of relationships that are committed,
connected and participatory. These women, though from different iwi (tribal) groupings and from different social and cultural contexts display the same passion, motivations and political consciousness in their work. While early childhood education is their passion, it does not de-tract from the fact that they are positioned within a social, political and cultural milieu which is contested on a daily basis by dominant discourse. This paper provides reflections on Maori women’s realities; their discourses; their conflicts and their solutions through re-defining their purpose, their functions and their roles as early childhood educators within Te Wananga o Aotearoa. Like most stories, it is important to begin at the beginning.

**Our traditions and history:**

Women in Maori tradition were certainly not subdued or restricted by male dominance. This was a gendered society, which like all cultures, encompassed values, beliefs and practices pertaining to being either female or male. According to Rose Pere (1987), both men and women had responsibilities that complimented each other. Women were defined in terms of their purpose so there is no better place to begin than with Maori creation stories.

There were three phases, or intense realities, in the creation of the world according to Maori traditions. The first phase being te kore, or the infinite nothingness, where the sound of silence was deafening and nothing could be seen or articulated. The second phase was te po, or the infinite darkness where movement was detected. Te po, a female element was a place where Maori gods resided with their distinguishable identities and characteristics. This was a period of gestation. Hemara (2000) describes activities amongst these deities as having been played out in a ‘celestial womb’. The third phase, te ao marama signalled growth and evolution where Tane, one of the many off-springs of Ranginui (sky father) and Papatuanuku (earth mother) was responsible for the separation of their parents. This feat was successfully accomplished by Tane lying on his back and pushing his father upwards, separating the union which kept all off-springs close within their embrace. The act of separation occurs time and time again through childbirth, which Hemara believes reflects the creation of the universe.

This was the period where the first human evolved, who was a woman, Hineahuone. Hinetitama (Dawn maiden) was a child of Hineahuone and Tane who because of the misdeeds of her father descended to the world of death to receive those who depart to the spirit world. These stories and many more in Maori traditions resonates the significance of women in this time and place. Another process, which carried resounding messages about women, was through language associations. For instance hapu means sub-tribe and relates to the state of being pregnant; whenua means land which also refers to the afterbirth; whanau means extended family groupings and relates to
the moment a child is born. The discussion so far indicates the role women played in cultural continuity and whakapapa (genealogy). Denise Henare (1994:22) states our histories, our whakapapa are replete with actions and work of our women who in current times are defined as ‘whare tangata’ which means ‘the house of the people’ or refers to the womb being responsible for the re-regeneration of kinship and whakapapa. One of the women articulates this concept when she says:

As a mother I have been blessed with the gift of ‘te whare tangata’ the house of creation and have given birth to seven wonderful, amazing children...

Women were valued members of society not only by the way in which they featured in the creation of the universe, but also in the maintenance of whanau, hapu and iwi. Over the past one hundred and sixty years there has been a disruption, not only to the lives of Maori women but for Maori society overall.

Our colonial history
Aotearoa New Zealand has a history of colonial settlement that worked rapidly to break down iwi, hapu and whanau groupings through land confiscation and an education system based on colonial values, beliefs, and practices which were underpinned by an ideology based on Christian morals. Like many colonised countries, the story is the same; low educational achievement; poor health statistics and high levels of offending. Maori women have suffered immensely as a result of a dichotomy based on masculine and feminine discourse. According to James and Saville-Smith (1994:16), the notions of masculinity and femininity were imported to Aotearoa by British immigrants. This discourse was based on an individual’s station in life and access to property, skills and vocation. Colonial attitudes toward women were based fundamentally upon a belief system that positioned women as homemaker and being totally dependant on her husband as the major source of income. This is described by Novitz (1982) cited in Pihama and Mara (1994) as the ‘cult of domesticity’ which relied on schools to educate girls in order to prepare them for their role. Over the years, many whanau Maori, through assimilation adopted these views to the detriment of women and tradition.

The impact on Maori women was two fold. They were exposed to gender inferiority which was over-laid with racial superiority and the belief that race accounts for differences in human character or ability and that a particular race is superior to others. Through this doctrine, a type of dualism occurred, which redefined Maori as savage, heathenistic and immoral and defined Pakeha as civilised, Christian, and moral. It was the impact of these beliefs on the social fabric of Maori society that created major disruptions to the lives of whanau, hapu and iwi. The loss of land, economic base, disruption to whanau groupings, language loss and cultural genocide affected Maori women
extensively. The role of women as child bearers, coupled with the capacity to rear children lead to impoverishment for many women in society. This was distinctively and instinctively different to Maori worldviews. The traditional spiritual connection of women to land; the significance of their role as major contributors to cultural continuity and whakapapa; the loss of a language which carried subtle messages about the value of women, and the legends which carried stories about the fundamental nature of women were replaced by another set of myths which did not value difference or diversity. A statement from one of the women highlights this position when she states:

*I have heard it said, and I do believe this so much, that the poor state of our people is reflected in the condition that Papatuanuku is in today. She is sick, just like our women who have high rates of cancer through smoking and other illnesses..... Maori women must focus on their own wellbeing. Our tamariki and whanau cannot survive without our women.*

Maori women do not feature in New Zealand’s colonial history, a history that has served only to silence the dialogue and render them invisible. The impact of racism and sexism, have over the century have caused Maori women to re-define themselves within a contemporary context.

**Re-defining ourselves:**
The impetus for Maori women to re-define themselves have in the main been facilitated by the advent of kohanga reo (Maori language nests for children between the ages of 0-5yrs ). Out of this movement has emerged a generation of women who are politically aware of the dilemma and conflicts that have plagued Maori throughout their colonial history. From kohanga reo the emergence of kura kaupapa Maori (kaupapa Maori based primary schools); whare kura (kaupapa Maori based secondary or high schools) and Whare Wananga (Maori based tertiary institutions) have added to the momentum of language and cultural revival. The past twenty five years have experienced the increase of Maori women who, according to Smith (1994) are now part and parcel of the economic and political reality of society. In a society riddled with conflict, many Maori women have been driven to seek equity and social justice not only as women but also because of their connectedness to the wider social struggles of their people. Maori women experience multiple sites of struggle. It is within these sites that many are re-positioning themselves as advocates for change. Change has come in different forms which are expressed in the following discussion.

When listening to the stories of the Maori women engaged in this discussion, a major theme to emerge was the need to reclaim and uphold the integrity and authenticity of ancient knowledges by seeking clarification of meanings and symbols. Following are two examples which accentuate their position. The first is related to the birth of a first child:
Her father and I have a responsibility to ensure that our child is connected to her past, by taking her to the places of her tupuna (ancestors) so that she comes to know the connections to her maunga (mountain), her wai tapu (sacred waters), the whenua (land) and to the pu-rakau (stories) of these regions.

Another reclamation story is linked to a whakatauki or a proverbial saying

‘I heke mai i nga kawai Rangatira’  Rangatira are held in high regard as, leaders, warriors, visionaries, negotiators and role models for future generations. Some may carry an ancestral name; some may display certain gestures, mannerisms, traits and characteristics.

This woman then goes on to link the traits of her ancestors to the image and mannerisms of her children.

Links to mythology and Maori traditions were displayed in the following ways. The first was an expression taken from the cosmos:

Matariki is a group of stars visible to the naked eye on a clear winter sky after the full moon. Matariki is a mother surrounded by her six daughters, so what messages could women take from her? Matariki indicates the New Year; with new horizons. Matariki indicates a time for planting, fertility and harvest. Matariki is a tool for navigation.

In articulating her understandings of matariki, she is proactive in her use of this metaphor when thinking about her philosophy as a professional in early childhood education. She goes on to say:

I learn in this realm to navigate pathways to ensure that our children are nurtured in a fertile environment and prepared for the horizons ahead of them.

Another group of women sought to share their thoughts through articulating sites of struggle and conflict which must be addressed. This is reflected in the following statement by one of the women whose children have been raised and educated through kaupapa Maori philosophy:

I have served my time in kohanga reo, kura kaupapa Maori, rumaki reo at high school, working at a Pakeha university for fifteen years of my life and now at a wananga Maori. In every institution I have experienced conflict... this conflict is exacerbated by systems and criteria, which are defined by non-Maori.

A statement offered by another participant alludes to struggles experienced by women in early childhood:

Another site of struggle for all early childhood educators is the notion of “truth” or “views”. There are conflicting truths on child development, on accepted practice; on effective approaches; what
counts, and what doesn’t. Confusion reigns. However if we are to be critical educators and unbiased researchers then we are encouraged to be open to all forms of information.

The latter group clearly positioned themselves within a framework of political activism citing dominant discourse and critical theory as a place from which they are able to negotiate and circum-navigate meaning for the purpose of their work. The following comment from the Programme Manager for Early Childhood Studies presents a clear expectation of the role of Maori and non-Maori in seeking social justice for Maori:

*In a profession that is constantly changing, where traditional ways of doing and knowing is being debated, and where government initiatives influence policies and practice, the early childhood sector is said to be fragile. I would like to think that perhaps early childhood is in a state of transition and poised to lead Aotearoa towards what Ritchie (2004), describes as “an equitable bicultural society”. I support her stance on dual commitments to social justice and to The Treaty of Waitangi, but challenge the notion of increasing Pakeha commitment to supporting Maori aspirations if it means drawing on Maori women’s’ energies to do that. What I am suggesting is that our priorities should be to our own and getting it right first.*

The Treaty of Waitangi formed a strong backdrop to both comments:

*Te Tiriti o Waitangi protects us from total oblivion... all Treaty based relationships must adhere to the Maori text of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Claims have been made against the crown for a number of reasons with successful results. I always use Te Tiriti as a rationale for the development of Maori based resourcing.*

While Te Tiriti o Waitangi has its uses as a political tool, this woman signals a level of annoyance at having to provide a rationale for being Maori.

**Te Tiriti o Waitangi: An Advocacy Tool for Social Justice.**

All women agreed to the role Te Tiriti o Waitangi plays in their profession as early childhood educators for the following reasons. Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand was signed between Maori and the queen of England’s representative. This was a binding contract to protect the rights of Maori to live as Maori, and Pakeha to exist as equal partners in a land that promised prosperity and wealth. There are two versions of Te Tiriti o Waitangi; an English version which states that Maori ceded sovereignty to the Queen of England and the Maori version which states that Maori maintained their sovereignty or rangatiratanga and Pakeha could govern their own people they way they see fit. Te Tiriti o Waitangi is used by Maori to assert their rights as the original inhabitants of this land throughout health, education, politics and economical ventures.
When Maori make reference to Treaty issues the comments are located within the Maori text of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, which, in all intent and purpose recognises Maori sovereignty. Te Tiriti o Waitangi has particular implications for education at all levels and in all activities (Glynn 1998). Macfarlane (2004) provides an overview of the intent of each article to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, while simplistic in nature, would provide major challenges. When considering Macfarlane’s view, considerations for early childhood are posited.

Article One: Ascertain that there are two treaty partners who share responsibility for shaping the direction of Aotearoa New Zealand including the development of policies in general education.

A consideration related to this article for Maori women in early childhood is to identify the philosophy and principles of partnership and how that would apply when defining their rights, roles and responsibilities within the profession.

Article Two: Determine that while Maori ceded kawanatanga or administrative control to the colonial government, they retained their rangatiratanga or autonomy over defining, promoting, and protecting their taonga or treasures. These taonga are language, values, beliefs, practices, knowledge, and transmission of knowledge. This defines the right for Maori contribute to the development of policies and curriculum, and to determine appropriate pedagogy.

Article Three: Suggests that there be equitable access to educational outcomes for Maori.
In 1997, Vylette Tapine and Danica Waiti carried out consultation with a range of key external clients and Maori educationalist. These people were asked to contribute their strategic visions. A common theme regarding treaty related issues identified that:

*Article three has been looked upon as a vehicle by which Maori aspirations for education can be validated, as a right, rather than a privilege. The crown is obliged under article three to provide Maori with the same citizenship rights as non-Maori. This includes the provision of an education that is appropriate and accessible, and which works for Maori* (p16).

The key issues to be considered in this article are appropriateness and accessibility of education for whanau Maori, which can only be achieved through consultation and dialogue with Maori. The majority of educators in early childhood are women; therefore Maori women have a major role to play in realising this particular goal.

Article Four: Affirmed that Maori beliefs and customs (ritenga) had equal status with those of the Christian faiths represented by the missionaries (Colenso 1890) cited in Ritchie (2002; p21).
This article acknowledges that traditional beliefs based on ngā ātua Maori or spiritual dimensions linked to environmental domains such as the earth mother Papatuanuku, sky father Ranginui and their offspring are relevant to today and continue to be practiced within different contemporary contexts. This also indicates a strategy for re-defining the role of women through these stories which are laden with messages about the value of women. This is about re-storying women’s lives through early childhood education. When seeking equity and relevance, it is important that appropriate educational sites implement this type of knowledge.

**Early Childhood Education:**
As Maori women, the challenge has been the repositioning of Maori epistemologies, methodologies and pedagogies in early childhood services and teacher education settings within TWoA. The curriculum within this department not only serves to uncover oppressive practices but it is also a mechanism for reclamation of ‘self’ and one’s identity. This is described by the German, social theorist Jugen Habermas (1972; 1974) as emancipatory knowledge. In recognising major factors that contribute to the marginalisation of certain groups of people, such as women, early childhood curriculum also provides a critical response to the ideology of traditional educational practices which has provided a challenge to the Western traditions of learning and teaching. Philosophies that underpin both early childhood philosophy and kaupapa Maori education are linked through the principles of whakamana or empowerment; kotahitanga or holistic development; hononga or relationships, and whanau tangata, whanau, families and communities. These principles are used by the Maori women of the early childhood department to define who they are and how they operate. Implicit within these concepts is the notion of Maori pedagogy.

**Maori Pedagogy: Re-defining teaching and learning:**
Māori pedagogy has been defined as a culturally appropriate approach to the science of learning and teaching. There are five major themes that contribute to Māori pedagogy which have been identified by Metge (1984) Smith (1990), Ka’ai (1990), Royal-Tangaere (1992), and Höhepa (1994). These are learning settings, curriculum, transmission of knowledge, tikanga whakaaako, and the importance of the whanau model as a basis to operate from. All authors argue for Maori control of the above areas and propose that a more holistic approach to education be carried out. One of the participants conveys this when she refers to the holistic nature of teaching:

*As an educator, I embrace kotahitanga (holistic development) in my every day life. This is integrated though out my student’s time... and is displayed through whakawhanaungatanga (dynamics which underpin collective activity)... through acknowledging our student’s strengths and embracing their differences...*
A fundamental concept, which is implicit in all areas, noted above is the term ako, a principle that underlies both the learning and teaching process and requires the implementation of values such as manaaki, awhi, tautoko and aroha. One of the participants who is a pouako or facilitator in the certificate of Early Childhood Studies highlights this point by stating:

*He pouako ahau (I am a teacher), it is with heartfelt passion that I teach. My knowledge is their knowledge, I am a pou (support) for them (students) to lean on, for it may be soon that I will have to lean on them.*

Another staff member supports this view by stating:

*Nga hononga (relationships) has a pedagogy of connectedness and joining. It gently encourages us to foster warm and intimate relationships. It also reminds us of our identity and the knowing of who we truly are. Collectively we can achieve this... if I am a teacher, I must then be a learner for teachers and learners are joined.*

According to Hohepa (1994), Ka’ai (1990) and Pere (1984) the inclusion of Maori values into all practices raises self esteem amongst the learners because the power is shared and all participants feel they have control over the situation. Collaboration and cooperation within a learning context enables all members to share mutual goals; make decisions jointly; share ideas and materials; negotiate and bargain, coordinate actions to accomplish goals; and evaluate their own progress (Goffin 1987). According to Hill (1994:44) cooperative learning promotes both social and academic benefits and conditions are created to eliminate elements of competition and individualism. Within this social setting the ability to be responsive is encouraged. Responsiveness involves the need for parties involved to display reciprocity and empathy for one another. These interactions produce an environment that advocates an ecology of relationships, which creates a sense of wellbeing and belonging (Goodfellow 1996). This is expressed by one of the women who is a project co-ordinator for professional development:

*As a facilitator... it is about acknowledging each individual not only for who they are and where they have come from but also acknowledging them as teachers who play an important and crucial role in the lives of future generations. The key is respect...having respect for colleagues, children, whanau and wider community.*

Teachers, no matter what area of education they teach have one thing in common; their teaching practice will be governed by their values and beliefs. The women supporting this presentation share common philosophical views about the world, about their role as a mother, and about their role as professionals. There is a blurred line between all
three roles, simply because their values and beliefs are applied across all contexts.

**Finally:**
This paper has argued that the worlds of Maori women has undergone a great deal of conflict and struggle over the past one hundred and sixty years. Women have been moved from a position of privilege, which was framed by their traditions and re-located in a time and era which oppressed and marginalized them through colonization. The resilience of Maori women has survived the test of time and they have clearly re-claimed and re-defined their roles, purpose and functions within the whanau and educational institutions. Hana Te Hemara (1994:48) states *Maori women have taken over leading our people, not from choice but from need.* Denese Henare (1994) goes further to say *The status of Maori women and the future of Maori society lies with Maori women and we will not see a strengthened Maori society without that recognition.* These statements re-position Maori women within leadership roles in a time when Maori people are seeking resolutions to the social, cultural and educational crises that confronts them.

The Maori women who contributed to this presentation all display common traits. They are clearly leaders in their profession, they are clear about who they are, their whakapapa links, and they have a clear focus. This focus is children and their whanau which indicates a return to Maori traditions. They understand the world of children both philosophically and theoretically. They have the well-being of children at heart and believe that quality education at this level is critical in setting future pathways for children’s learning. Quality education for these women is based on Maori worldviews and the inclusion of whanau, hapu and iwi in the education of their children. This is final comments reflect clearly how these women have positioned themselves within their profession as early childhood educators and in doing so not only have re-defined themselves but have re-positioned early childhood and kaupapa Maori philosophical and theoretical underpinnings as a model for the development of further education programmes within Korowai Manukura, the School of Education in TWoA.

*We as a group of Maori women have come together to work collectively with a kaupapa Maori based early childhood programme. We demonstrate and practice our skills by implementing Maori pedagogy within early childhood education. As we progress through the 21st century we learn from our past to guide the present to shape a better future for Maori children through the programme that we offer. We celebrate our uniqueness which strengthens the common cause that unites us all, which is the well-being of the Maori child and their whanau.*
Bibliography:


Macfarlane, A. (2004) *Kia hiwa ra! Listen to culture- Maori students plea to educators*


