

MAPPING THE JOURNEY:

Putting Māori perspectives of giftedness into practice.

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ABSTRACT

Mapping the Journey: Putting Māori perspectives of giftedness in practice:

This paper outlines the policies and provisions for gifted and talented Māori students being introduced at Otumoetai College, a large state funded New Zealand secondary school. By listening to student voices and recognising Māori epistemologies in the college's understanding of giftedness, this paper highlights how the College is becoming better equipped to cater for the needs of its gifted Māori students and to deliver a more effective and culturally appropriate pedagogy. It explores the theory surrounding a Māori concept of giftedness and the implementation of provisions and practices within the college that reflect Māori perspectives.

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Aotearoa/ New Zealand comprised two islands in the south west Pacific whose Polynesian migrants became the Māori. The Māori in origin are Pacific islanders and comprised the first wave of migration to the last uninhabited portion of the earth's surface between 900 and 1200AD. In isolation and in just over 500 years the Māori established a unique culture. Aotearoa was a Māori world, a world that provided for the needs of its inhabitants. The Māori culture was an oral culture which handed down its knowledge and its traditions by song and story from one generation to another. Survival of this culture depended upon co-operation and an ability to embrace change; how else had these Polynesians been able to become so distinctly different to their Polynesian forebears. Nevertheless of equal importance were their traditions which recognised greatness in a diverse range of cultural expressions from moko, carving, fighting and hunting to weaving, song, dance and oratory. There were strongly held belief systems and values and the more Māori worked in the interests of others the higher the esteem in which they were held in their community. The society had its own particular structure, leadership came from either belonging to the chiefly caste through inheritance or by demonstrating particular skill as for example a warrior, orator or shaman. Greatness could transcend fixed levels of society. In an oral society with nothing fixed in text, change was always possible. Māori society was firstly divided into iwi or large tribal groupings. These iwi had adapted individually to their environments and showed difference in food patterns, traditions and dialect. Iwi were further broken into hapu or sub tribes, and most Māori lived their day to day lives within small whanau extended family groupings. Māori children were thus children of the whanau and not exclusively those of their biological parents. It was only for specific purposes such as war or hunting the giant moa of the South Island that Māori worked in larger co-operative groups than the whanau.

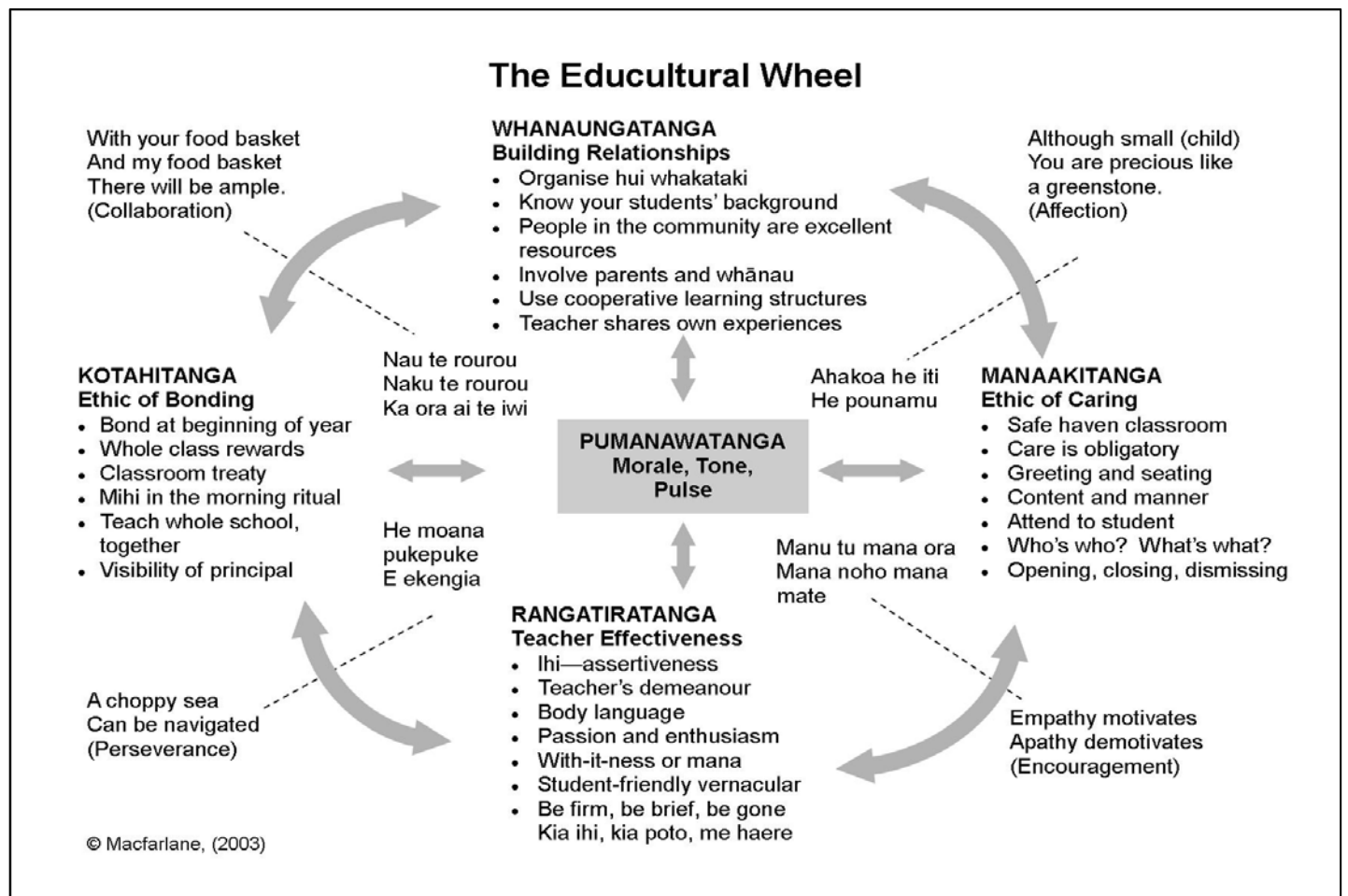
This Māori world was irrevocably changed in the late eighteenth century as Europeans made their way to Aotearoa/New Zealand motivated by the personal and national agendas of the age. The European group that came to work most in the interests of Māori were the missionaries who reflected the humanitarian motives of a small but influential number of the British elite. These people had initiated the abolition of slavery in Britain and in New Zealand their humanitarian concerns were manifest in the intent of the Treaty of Waitangi, the document that facilitated the mass settling of Aotearoa/New Zealand by the British. Written in English before being translated, over night, into Māori by the Anglican missionaries, the Treaty was translated in such a way that Māori signed without full realisation of the consequences. While Māori believed that that they had ceded merely administrative control (Kawanatanga) to the colonial government, while yet retaining their powers of chiefly authority as one of their chiefs saw it "the shadow of the land passed to the Queen while the substance remained with the chiefs." These powers of chiefly authority were guaranteed by Article Two of the Treaty and extended over Māori treasures or taonga. Prime amongst the treasures of any culture is language, knowledge and the transmission of knowledge. In Article Three Māori were granted equal status with British citizens which implies equitable access to the educational resources of the state.

The Māori culture that developed in isolation was an oral culture which established for itself its own knowledge base, its own traditions, its own belief system and values and a unique societal structure. Transcending all aspects of this culture were collaborative processes that were ultimately to ensure the culture's success and continuance. Traditions were passed on by word of mouth. Decisions were made by a process of consensus. Within this unique culture there was an acceptance of giftedness across all dimensions of the culture. The ability to be a persuasive orator, the ability to be a great hunter, or the ability to be a skilled weaver of tukutuku panels recording the genealogy of the whanau, indeed, the ability to do great works on behalf of the group was what came to be seen as gifted within this culture. In an often harsh environment the wellbeing of the group came before that of the individual. This culture worked for the Māori and comprised in its context a worldview. This was a worldview in stark contrast of that of the Europeans.

By 1858 the number of Pakeha/European living in Aotearoa/New Zealand came to equal that of Māori and move very rapidly ahead until by 1892 there were only 42000 surviving Māori in the nation. Indeed, by the dawning of the twentieth century in accordance with the accepted dictates of Darwinism, that the Māori would become extinct. Consequently, the dominant Pakeha/European worldviews, beliefs, customs and attitudes came to prevail in the New Zealand education system. This power imbalance has seen

practices stemming from a European worldview retain power over issues of initiation, representation, legitimation and accountability within New Zealand schools. Pakeha/European constructs of success are based upon individual ownership, individual success and abilities, and this is demonstrated in the nation's schools. The same degree of credit is not extended in Pakeha/European culture to group success or spiritual involvement. In contrast, Niwa (1998/1999) describes a great difference to the now ignored Māori worldview of a holistic giftedness in Māori culture "where inter-personal relationships and aspects of spirituality are highly prized and emphasised" (p. 3). Jill Bevan-Brown's research has made one further point that has been instrumental in shaping New Zealand's educational vision for the better catering of gifted Māori students. She highlights that Māori like any other ethnic group are a diverse people and consequently, it is impossible to speak of an all encompassing Māori construct of giftedness; it simply does not exist. Instead she offers eight components which constitute a concept that reflects the values, beliefs and attitudes that have traditionally been upheld and respected in the Māori world. The Pakeha/European worldview had consumed the Māori worldview which was given no credence and recognition of Māori giftedness fell into a void. It was not until the last 25 years of the twentieth century that this was recognised and that action was taken to redress the imbalance. At this point in the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand some Maori function as Pakeha within the dominant Pakeha/ European constructs, some Maori comfortably bridge both worlds and many Maori remain comfortable within the Maori world. Therefore culturally appropriate pedagogy must be infused into in the context of the Maori worldview in order to reach all Maori.

Given the collaborative societal order and spiritual understandings that have shaped Māori society in the past, it should come as no surprise that it is this same worldview that leads to twenty first century understandings of Māori giftedness. While Bevan-Brown (2004) rejects the notion of an all inclusive definition of Māori giftedness she presents several concepts of giftedness that have been widely accepted. Giftedness is not bound by social class, economic status, lineage or gender and is widely distributed in Maori society. Giftedness may be recognised in an individual or group context and based on "qualities" and "abilities". These qualities are consistent with those admired in the fabric of traditional Māori society and intertwined with other Māori concepts including whanaungatanga (the building of relationships), aroha and bravery.



McFarlane's (2003) Educultural Wheel presents an excellent visual summary of the Māori concepts that are being used in the formation of whanua based classrooms at Otumoetai College. By employing the principles of whanaungatanga (relationship building), manaakitanga (ethic of caring), rangatiratanga (teacher effectiveness), kotahitanga (ethic of bonding) a stronger pumanawatanga (morale, tone or pace) is developing between teacher and students. Returning to Bevan-Brown's concepts, we see again the reoccurrence of the expectation that special abilities and gifts will be shared for mutual benefit and that mana tangata is gained by those in the areas encompassing traditional knowledge and service. Empowered by this knowledge it is essential that gifted Māori students are presented with the learning opportunities and structures that enable their gifts to be recognised, valued and celebrated. It is essential that learning takes place within a context that values Māori knowledge including that it is centred in culturally authentic contexts which value collaborative opportunities and outcomes, whanau (family) involvement, allows for students to learn together as a whanau where age is irrelevant, while providing opportunities to explore concepts from the Māori world and recognise the impact of whakapapa, manaakitanga (caring for others), wairuatanga (spirituality), whanaungatanga (familiness), aroha-ki-te-tangata (love for others) and kaitiātanga on their life.

Otumoetai College is a state-funded, co-educational secondary school in Tauranga, a city of 110 000 people located on the east coast of New Zealand's North Island. The college has a current roll of 1889 students including 299 students between the Years 9 and 13 who identify themselves as being Māori. The ethos of Otumoetai College up until the late 1990s was one primarily concerned with the implementation of learning programmes in mixed ability groupings intended to raise the performance of low achieving students. Since then, the college's increased commitment to learning has seen the formation of a number of strategies designed to better cater for the cognitive and affective needs of our gifted and talented learners including the formation of advanced learner classes within the junior school, a greater commitment to professional development for those staff teaching advanced learner classes and the formation of focus groups focussing on promoting a greater awareness of effective strategies for promoting literacy, boys' achievement, gifted and talented and Māori achievement within the school. The establishment of the school's gifted and talented policy in 2003 represented a commitment to ensuring that classroom practice was grounded in theory. Underpinned by the theories of Renzulli and Reis (1985) and Betts (1985) the school recognises the Ministry of Education's (2000) definition of gifted and talented and adopts both a broad and inclusive understanding of giftedness. While the school's gifted and talented policy is shaped by a broad and inclusive understanding of giftedness, as is typical of many New Zealand schools, what it means to be gifted is one that is largely, if not exclusively, defined in Eurocentric terms. Māori under-representation within New Zealand education and particularly within gifted programmes can largely be attributed to culturally inappropriate pedagogical approaches with regard to identification, programming and assessment. (Bevan-Brown, 1993; Hurtubise, 1991). Otumoetai College is committed to redressing the traditional power imbalances held between Pakeha and Māori epistemologies. Fraser (1997) recognises four critical factors that work against the inclusion of students from non-dominant cultures in gifted programmes: access, accommodation, assessment and attitudes. Otumoetai College has undertaken a programme of intensive professional development to ensure that informed decisions about Māori epistemology shape pedagogy. Inherent within this development is the awareness of the need for community involvement in shaping our understanding of Māori giftedness.

Recognising the under-representation of Māori students within the advanced learner classes the College attempted to redress this cultural imbalance by actively placing a cluster group of Māori students in each of the Advanced Learner Classes at Year 9 in 2007 in much the same way that boys had been actively promoted into what were becoming heavily girl dominated English Advanced Learner classes the year before. Not surprisingly this decision was met with staff perceptions of reverse racism. The lack of provision for Māori in New Zealand classrooms is not uncommon. This is largely due to attitudes associated with cultural stereotyping and a lack of understanding on the Pakeha's behalf of the Māori concepts of giftedness. Despite an attempt to incorporate widely accepted beliefs about the teaching of Māori including the need to involve students in groups and the co-construction of content, student option choices and timetabling constraints meant that the intended clustering of Māori students in the Advanced Learner Classes were in some cases reduced to the presence of two Māori students. This isolation clearly did not provide the Māori students concerned with

peer support, nor does it allow them to be self-effacing. Classroom programmes need to provide opportunities for Māori students to display their cultural skills and talents. This under-representation of Māori in gifted and talented classes in mainstream education is consistent with national research (Bevan-Brown, 1993, Cathcart & Pou, 1992) and can be largely attributed to inappropriate practices with regard to identification, programming and evaluation.

The placement of Māori students in the Advanced Learner Classes was motivated by a growing recognition within the staff of the need to develop a more culturally relevant pedagogy for raising Māori achievement. Clearly what was needed was a resolution to recognising Māori giftedness that meant more than filling quotas. This raised staff awareness is reflected in the initiatives that have been introduced this year to raise teacher understandings of Māori needs and of course those gifts celebrated within the Māori community. One of the three College goals for 2007 is “to ensure that Māori achievement is raised through individual mentoring, recognition and classroom relationships, content, process, product and pace.” To this end, staff have engaged in extensive professional development instruction and debate, been introduced to the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy embedded in the Te Kotahitanga programme and become more active in ensuring that the relationships and programme provisions reflect the power sharing embedded within Māori culture and a Māori worldview. Otumoetai College recognises the important role that the community plays in the development of any Gifted and Talented understanding. In developing Otumoetai College’s understandings of Māori giftedness the school has strengthened communication ties between the community and the school by negotiating understandings with the Whanau Support Group, a highly active body within the College’s short history to ensure that the Māori community’s voice is reflected in the College’s decision making processes. The Board of Trustees has its own whanau representative and its own local kaumatua representative and also the College has facilitated the resourcing for the building of a whare wananga (traditional meeting house), a whare kai (a traditional separate place for eating) and a whanau meeting room and classroom. This clearly shows the commitment of governance and management to provision a sense of belonging and commitment to future progress.

Keen (2001 cited in Macfarlane, 2004) reported that Māori and Polynesian students relative to roll numbers, are identified as gifted and talented at about half the rate for New Zealand Europeans and Asians and at lower rates, also, relative to other ethnic groups. He hypothesised that numbers could be equally accounted for in terms of socioeconomic status. Bevan-Brown acknowledges that this is certainly a contributing factor but emphasises the role classroom teachers play in creating further barriers for Māori and particularly gifted Māori learners. Negative and stereotypical attitudes of teachers in conjunction with narrow concepts of understandings of Māori constructs of giftedness means few gifted Māori students are referred. Otumoetai College acknowledges the over-reliance on written testing fails to accommodate for the cultural differences that constitute giftedness. Low teacher expectations and low self-esteem often lead to the lack of identification or recognition of Māori children with special abilities, and are key factors influencing Māori underachievement. In fact, Davis and Rimm (1994) refer to low self-esteem as the primary characteristic of underachievement.

The renaissance of Māoridom through the last years of the twentieth century into the beginnings of the 21st century has seen a greater acceptance of the need for pedagogy to be shaped by the traditional associations of Māori including a greater attention to culture and relationships. The existence of the Treaty of Waitangi has enshrined in Aotearoa/New Zealand’s twenty first century’s education system pedagogy and enactment which sits within the Māori worldview. The establishment of whanau based learning approaches at Otumoteai College ensures that lesson planning and preparation reflect the values, assumptions and beliefs of Māori students. In developing Māori gifts and talents, a great deal of energy must be given to the support of the pupil's self-esteem, sense of personal value and specific cultural expression (Hurtubise, 1991). This allows for students to see their worldview reflected in the curriculum and presents the foundation for strengthening teacher and student relationships. Initial classroom changes have included a greater commitment to co-operative learning, reciprocal teaching, the involvement of students in the co-construction of learning and the negotiation of lesson objectives and direction. Infusing cultural concepts is likely to have a positive effect on students learning and teachers teaching because cultural referents are employed. Acknowledging these cultural referents and employing a culturally relevant pedagogy signals to Māori students that their culture matters

The Māori Enrichment class for 2008 will present Year 10 students the opportunity will seek to redress many of the pedagogical approaches that have actively prevented their gifts being celebrated by the Otumoetai College learning community. Multiple assessment measures and procedures sensitive to cultural values and practices in consultation with peers, family and community members will form the prime methods of identification. The class is to be an environment where the Māori worldview is not only acknowledged but celebrated as critical in creating programmes where content and context of learning is culturally relevant and that teaching approaches are culturally appropriate for Māori learners. The advent of this class recognises that Māori students who are recognised as being gifted and talented will not be separated from the peer group. This supports the Māori worldview of talents being shared for the collective benefit of the group. Identification includes a combination of peer and whanau, and teacher nomination. As Cathcart & Pou (1992) outline teachers should be on the lookout for the Māori child who: is the rangatira (leader, chief) in a group situation; has a good knowledge of, and interest in, Māoritanga and traditional arts and skills; has a sense of justice and fair play; can speak te reo Māori; accepts responsibility for classmates; and has skills in group interaction. The forging and continuance of a close-relationships within the Māori community in conjunction with a greater awareness of the interrelated concepts of pedagogy, culture and relationships will create an environment where giftedness is no longer a monocultural construct at Otumoetai College.

Today's pedagogy as researched and enacted to advance Māori giftedness fits securely into the Māori worldview as developed during the 500 years of isolation. Operating to the characteristics of collaborative, trusted values that are felt by Māori people is the only way forward. Demographers predict that by the middle of the century there will be a million people of Māori descent in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In a country with a separate Māori electoral role, there will be a voice which although ignored in the past will be loud in the future and ensure that the Māori worldview plays a paramount role in New Zealand's future. The future direction of the nation depends on how well the New Zealand Educational system deals to the issue of Māori giftedness.

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