

Abstract for part two:

A recent media release based on the quality of teacher education in New Zealand suggested programmes offered by some Māori providers lacked rigour.....The second part of our presentation provides a snapshot of one aspect of practice within a Whare Wānanga, and focuses on himene, waiata and karakia being undertaken before classes each day. The significance of sound, as an affective input to the cognitive unconscious is briefly explored, as is spiritual transformation, part of the wholeness of learning that is recognised by Māori.

Kaupapa Māori Initial Teacher Education: Social, Political and
Educational Transformation for Māori
Part Two

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“The intuitive mind is a sacred gift, the rational mind a faithful servant. It is paradoxical that in the context of modern life we have begun to worship the servant and defile the divine.”

Albert Einstein.

Quote taken from (Grinder 1991:39)

A recent media release...suggests we lack rigour:

Rigour, “strictness, severity” (Hawkins 1981:445) Strict, “precisely limited or defined, without exception or deviation, requiring or giving complete obedience or exactitude” (Hawkins 1981:521,522). Severe, “strict; without sympathy: intense, forceful; (of style) plain, without decoration (Hawkins 1981:475).

Meanings associated with this word rigour, sit more comfortably with the left brain thinking that is predominant within educational establishments in New Zealand. A focus on developing “logical, sequential, and linear thinking over and above intuitive, random and holistic feelings” (Grinder 1991:40,41) reflect the lack of balance a lop-sided education promotes.

Talks back, heightening awareness:

Reaction to things Māori, through questioning the rigour of papers that are being offered on a ‘similar theme’ are, as my colleague has alluded to, an unenlightened attack upon the content of a course that prepares Māori graduate teachers. This ‘similar theme’ provided within a Māori centred programme prepares graduates for entry into a Pākehā dominated teaching profession.

Part of this preparation includes hīmene, karakia and waiata every morning before classes begin, where time is taken to ask for and acknowledge the support available from the spiritual dimension. Waiata, traditionally “one of the principle methods of teaching and learning” (Barlow 1991:151) utilizes the right side of the brain for learning, which stimulates the limbic region “responsible for long term memory” (Jensen 1995:207).

Indigenous perspective:

The right side of the brain, named as the domain of Rongo-mā-tane is the complementary partner to Tūmatauenga the left, a perfect balance between the two, Tane Maurangi, or “super-consciousness” (Pere 1994:113) is part of the divine intelligence that can be experienced when one stands on the fulcrum point between the two. Waiata help to activate and open up this connection between the two sides of the brain affecting healing and transformation, evidenced through the ‘synchronistic function’ waiata can arouse. The inner world of the person can then harmonise “with the world around them and the world of the metaphysical” (Raerino 1999:43).

Making explicit:

The vowel sounds, and in particular the long vowels are of interest here. In Māori the long vowels “remain distinct and keep their full value” when pronounced they “retain the same sound throughout” (Harlow 2001:13).

The use of elongated vowel sounds and positive focused thinking have been associated with connecting the vocalist “with the energies of the divine” (Goldman 1992:43) Thus hīmene and other waiata that focus on spiritual subject matter are likely to be powerful ways of bringing about the metaphysical synchronistic balance Raerino refers to.

The vibratory affect of vowel tones have been attributed to restoring balance to the “seven layers” of the bodies “electromagnetic field” (Boyce-Tillman 2000:185-187), inducing healing through and into the physical body. Therefore the vowel sounds sung in Māori waiata will naturally help in realigning our energy system, through the sounding of long vowels in combination with positive thoughts elicited through hīmeme and karakia.

Vowel sounds contain “the energy of harmonics” (Goldman 1992:61). Tones used by music therapists that follow the “laws of harmonics” bring about “a sense of total relaxation” and a “synchronisation of nerve impulses in the whole body” (Skille & Wigram 1995:27,32) restoring ones emotional and physical harmony.

Spiritual harmony can be fostered through intent, the way in which words are emitted have a powerful influence upon the healing and transformational qualities of the sounds associated with them. As “the power of words depend upon the depth from which the word arises” (Andrews 1992:65). The intent to teach and pass on knowledge is a powerful motive, and is traditionally associated with sounding through chanting with the aid of a musical instrument. Tohunga chanted through a long flute or Pūmotomoto, over the fontanel of a child in order to implant “information of tribal heritage directly into the child’s subconscious” (Flintoff 2004:71).

Accessing the cognitive unconscious through elongated vowel sounds activates implicit learning which is characteristically robust over time, shows transfer specificity which means that it “is less manipulable and more context bound”, “gives rise to a phenomenal sense of intuition”, and “remains more intact than explicitly acquired knowledge” (Berry & Dienes 1993:13,15). This reveals the educational skill of our ancestors in passing on knowledge, by working with the spiritual dimension through the cognitive unconscious the teachings were kept safe.

Each morning before class begins the students from our programme, office staff and any other members of the whanau wishing to participate sing hīmene, which lays the foundation for a spiritual focus or intent. Now intuitive, random, holistic insight can occur, through the affect of the sounds, as discussed, coupled with the language itself to implant the thinking of our ancestors through the thought contained within the language. There is “great spiritual wisdom contained in the Māori language, every word has both an ordinary and a sacred meaning” (Pere 1994:172). Karakia to acknowledge and seek spiritual support and guidance occur after the hīmene that set up the pure intent. The potential then to grasp the depth of the language through the spiritual energy contained within the long vowel sounds to unlock its deeper meanings is now possible.

Learning occurs as the student is able to access knowledge intuitively through the right hemisphere of the brain. Evidence to show that people have been nourished spiritually is expressed emotionally, each morning the waiata that follow hīmene and karakia are performed in a celebratory manner with smiles, laughter and cultural body movements.

Educational transformation:

The transformative state that can be realised through sound has been recognised and documented by music therapists and scientists alike, they term it entrainment. This is a vibratory harmony that links one to others and the environment, therefore relationship is an important factor. Music therapists can induce “psychological entrainment” (Maranto 1993: 165,159) by matching the music to the patient. Neuro-feedback practitioners using “photic and audio stimulation” (Demos 2005:201) harmonise brain wave activity in both hemispheres, and recognise this phenomenon as entrainment.

Learning for Māori is inclusive of the “spiritual, physical and intellectual dimensions” (Yates 1996:103) thus the transformation of students is also possible on all three levels. Learning by incorporating the spiritual dimension allows the learner to “construct knowledge through the unconscious and symbolic processes that are grounded in their cultural identities” (Tisdell 1999:211) which is what is possible in a Wānanga where relationships with others of your culture are prioritised.

Glossary:

Hīmene...Hymn

Karakia...Prayer

Waiata ...Song

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