

Mark Solomon address to 21st Century Education Wānanga

30 July, 2008

Ngai Tahu Perspective on Education

Mihi..

Ngai Tahu knows very well the value of building relationships and working collaboratively in all spheres of life, from the whanau, hapu, iwi level through to business, the environment and politics - and it comes from being secure in the knowledge that we can't do it all by ourselves - that working with partners increases our scope of opportunity and creates new ones. teaches us new ways of doing things and unlocks ways to enrich the lives of our people.

The sphere of education is no different - it offers the opportunities that will help sustain our people, revitalise our culture and ensure its survival for future generations. it is the key that will prepare us to be able to make the life choices we want - and establish us as global citizens in an ever changing world.

Working collaboratively and from a strong cultural foundation across the education sector isn't just an option for Ngai Tahu it is a "must". As an example - through Te Tapuae o Rehua and its relationship with Gateway Antarctica we are now sending a Ngai Tahu student to the furthest reaches of the globe to participate in the "Graduate Certificate in Antarctica Studies" and give them an opportunity to experience living and working on the polar ice cap.

Years ago for the iwi to contemplate an opportunity like this for one of its own would have been in the realm of fantasy - today it's a reality and only serves to hint at the possibilities that a collaborative approach can achieve.

For the past 10 years Te Tapuae o Rehua has led the way in Ngai Tahu's desire to collaborate in education and illustrates the type of success this can lead to.

Ngai Tahu is entering a new phase of collaborative education aimed at encouraging the concept of "life-long learning", embedding Ngāi Tahutanga whilst seeding, guiding and inspiring our leaders of the future.

The Ngai Tahu Leadership Programme is one that provides a vehicle for the implementation of succession management for key Māori and tribal organisations and will ensure that Ngai Tahu continues to have the capability to achieve its goals into the future.

It combines the institutional prowess of Kamehameha Schools of Hawaii and Stanford University in California to create a vibrant forum for young minds to exchange ideas and to grow and develop leaders who are culturally able, well connected to their community and outstanding performers in their chosen field of endeavour.

Another programme leading the way is Aoraki Bound, a partnership between Ngai Tahu and Outward Bound.

Aoraki Bound brings together Ngai Tahu cultural knowledge, tikanga, waiata and mahinga kai practices with the more than 45 years experience that Outward Bound has in delivering its range of experiential and adventure-based courses.

14 participants spend 8 days based at the Outward Bound school in Anakiwa followed by a 12 day hikoi from Anakiwa finishing at the base of Aoraki.

The hikoi takes in places of historical significance to Ngai Tahu, mahinga kai sites, the traditional pounamu trails and includes paddling waka the length of Lake Pukaki.

I saw first hand the affects this course had on those young Ngai Tahu people that attended the first course - and it gives me great hope for the future if we can continue to develop ways of engaging and empowering our people through both strengthening the presence of Ngāi Tahutanga and relationships like this that give access to innovative methods of education.

I believe the true value of Aoraki Bound will be realised by the differences that it makes to the next generation in terms of the revival and perpetuation of Ngāi Tahu culture, knowledge and identity.

While economic, social and cultural aspirations will continue to form and reshape our foundations in the 21st Century - we recognise that education in all its forms - from early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary - is the key that will help fulfil our aspirations.

I'm no education expert but I think one of the major questions facing us all as parents and teachers, as iwi, hapu and whanau isn't about the importance of **getting** an education - it is also about the **relevance** of the education that our children are getting.

I am continually astounded at the poor statistics that represent Maori academic achievement at high school level.

I read with interest the Honourable Parekura Horomia's press release last week delivering the good news that a Ministry of Education report shows 43 percent of Maori students leaving secondary school in 2007 achieved level 2 NCEA or above - unfortunately the flip side of that is that 57% didn't.

The Minister rightfully acknowledges that nothing limits a young person's potential more than leaving school without qualifications.

In his words, 'It narrows the career choices that young person has, and can lead to longer-term issues such as poverty and health problems' - I would also argue that a young Maori person bereft of culture faces similar limitations.

The beleaguered NCEA system may have something to do with this, but in my experience statistics are open to interpretation and so often only tell part of the story.

Strategies such as Ka Hikitea and Te Kotahitanga provide an important environment for the development of new ways of working with the Education sector, I believe we have to come up with better collaborative solutions that embrace methods outside the traditional academic institution.

With this in mind and building on an MOU signed with the Ministry of Education in 2001, Te Rūnanga and the Ministry are currently implementing a strategic engagement framework to achieve long term shared outcomes.

Together we seek to improve and provide access to quality te reo programmes in immersion, bilingual and mainstream schools. Increasing and supporting the presence, engagement and achievement of Maori Students in the Ngāi Tahu takiwā. This will ensure curricula, teaching practices and environments from early childhood through to secondary schools are increasingly responsive to and reflective of Ngāi Tahutanga.

This partnership recognises the distinct contributions of both parties and that only Te Runanga has the cultural capability to develop the framework for this work.

The Papatipu runanga are central to this model as the owners and controllers of the intellectual property and any subsequent dissemination into education settings.

In my day early childhood education consisted of learning at the knee.

(maybe you have a story you can recount about growing up and learning)

The things I learnt as a young child were about identity and culture - about how to do things and why to do things and when to do them - these are the keys to knowing who you are and where you belong - as a Maori and a Ngai Tahu person these are important things

As you're probably more than aware education means different things to different people and priorities are not always the same. I believe that cultural identity makes a positive and important contribution to wellbeing, in particular, to good health and education outcomes. A strong Ngāi Tahu identity affirms belonging and a sense of security while also providing access to social domains and support networks.

A good example of this is the annual titi or muttonbird season. It's an important cultural event for Ngai Tahu - a time of learning and whanau focus.

It is a tradition passed down through generations and today many Ngai Tahu children are taken out of school for between 6 and 8 weeks a year to go "birding."

Opportunities for learning on the islands abound. Even before families leave there are the preparations for many weeks of self-sufficiency in a place that may or may not have a generator for power.

There's the trip to the island that is usually by boat with supplies often dropped off by helicopter - just getting there is difficult - scrambling from a small dingy on to rocks in a good southern ocean swell is a feat in itself!

Life on the islands is rugged - the ancient tracks that have been walked for generations before need to be cleared to gain access to the bird's nesting areas, huts have to be repaired and readied for the weeks ahead.

Then there is the birding - the hunt - working on high cliff faces - torching at night - working in all types of weather good and bad - the kill (life and death) - preparing the birds, plucking (using wax), gutting, salting and preserving them.

With this mahi comes stories - stories of whānau, of ancestors, of history and culture - stories that educates and expands young minds and throws down roots that will secure them in who they are and where they come from.

Access to the islands is tightly controlled, only Ngai Tahu are allowed to go on there, it is a whakapapa rite, a birth rite, a unique cultural experience in New Zealand.

Working with nature and conserving this cultural toanga is a key to maintaining it for the future. The tribe and the Department of Conservation have spent many years gathering information about the habits and breeding patterns of the titi so that we can manage them so they are always there for us.

All the families that visit the islands are aware of this and children know what conservation and preservation means.

All these experiences are handed down - learnt at the knee of mum or dad, taua or poua, uncle or aunty - there isn't a book, a manual or a set of instructions - there's just a time to do things and a way of doing things.

Some families still use the traditional poha to preserve part of their catch. These are bags made from bull kelp and then wrapped in soft totara bark and placed in a woven kete. It is a slow laborious process of gathering the kelp, the bark and making the kete, preparing the kelp which needs to be cut and trimmed, then dried, then reconstituted, rolled and dried again for storage and transporting.

On the island they are allowed to soak up moisture again so they become soft and pliable and then the titi can be stored in them. The kelp bag dries again and forms a protective pouch that will keep up to 15 birds preserved for many months and even years.

Wrapped up in all these experiences and stories is our culture and our language.

What's the yard stick that measures this type of learning? It's not in a mark on school report or an NCEA result - it's measured by useful, engaged children and adults with self-respect and respect for others - making contributions in our communities, in our homes, in the workplace and on our marae.

It's this sort of valuable knowledge and self-awareness that is being kept alive and handed down in our traditional ways of learning - is it relevant?

Yes - has to be the answer or our people and our stories will be lost.

Cultural belonging is about the individual being empowered, which in turn strengthens whanau, hapu and iwi. Ultimately the flow on effect has the ability to positively empower this nation.

Within our lifetimes we will see major changes in the ethnic make-up of this country - Maori and Pacific people are having far more children than Pakeha New Zealanders - and as they grow up and enter the education system I believe cultural forces and sheer weight of numbers will make changes necessary in the way we view education and deliver it?

The titi breeding grounds have been active for hundreds of years - every year they return and every year we return - it is our heritage, our tradition and our future - it is in our own interests to make sure we look after this magnificent resource - because it is what helps give us identity and our place in the world.

We must be allowed to continue to tell our stories and to live our stories.

Today "learning stories" are becoming more and more common as a way of delivering and measuring learning. For Maori the telling and re-telling of stories is at the heart of our culture.

As a child growing up today in an environment like a kohanga reo or playcentre, this may be relatively easier to nurture, but after that the system as a whole struggles - not everyone is going to send their child to a kura kaupapa or wants to - mainstream education needs to find away to integrate cultural learning and cultural building.

How do you recognise and give effect to indigenous learning forms within a predominantly mono-cultural system that often attempts to standardise and thus control knowledge and learning.

Instead of seeing such experiences as "being off school" or "out of the system" - they need to be integral to the system and recognised as valid and enriching.

I believe our education system should be and can be flexible enough to embrace this type of learning experience - the challenge is ensuring the opportunity becomes a practical reality for us and our children after us.

Thank-you.