

Whakamana from a Māori worldview



VOICES

Nā Professor Meihana Durie

(Ngāti Kauwhata; Rangitāne; Ngāti Porou; Ngāi Tahu)
Deputy Vice Chancellor Māori, Massey University

Professor Meihana writes on whakamana from a Māori worldview -empowering all learners to reach their highest potential by providing high-quality teaching and leadership.

From a Māori worldview, identity is inherently connected to the notion of mana. Moreover, when identity is duly acknowledged, mana itself is maintained. Māori uphold many distinctive and often complex cultural practices (tikanga) and rituals (kawa) to ensure that whānau, hapū and iwi identity is appropriately recognised. This is of course why, as Māori, we go to such efforts to welcome first time visitors or manuhiri by way of a pōwhiri into the spaces that we occupy, such as a marae or kura. One of the most important outcomes of a pōwhiri is to ensure that the mana of people is given sufficient emphasis.

From a teaching and learning context, the full potential of Māori learners, or ākongā Māori, can be readily realised when their identity is both acknowledged and celebrated. With that comes a far more innate yet nuanced understanding of the specific educational aspirations and goals that the whānau have for their tamaiti or mokopuna.

By building strong relationships at a whānau, community, hapū or iwi level, a solid foundation is set in place for educational success to follow.

A failure to do this, of course, can result in catastrophic outcomes. The Native Schools Act of 1867 was designed to purposefully and systematically eradicate Te Reo Māori through a system that assimilated Māori students into English only educational settings. Many will be

aware that those of our people who spoke te Reo in school were corporally punished. For those of our older generations who experienced such trauma, it often also meant that their cultural identity was severely impacted. This somewhat brutal process was applied by earlier governments of the day to erase Māori cultural identity, an experience not dissimilar to those encountered by the First Nations people of Canada and the United States and Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders in Australia. For Māori, this was and still is, viewed as a deliberate and intentional diminishment of mana. It is also why we don't see much if any reference to the Māori word for racism, 'kaikiri', in written Māori historical accounts. This is because racism was and still is viewed by Māori as a direct threat to the mana of an individual or collective.

Practices such as student streaming and banding, alarmingly, still continue in some schools this day, a hangover perhaps of earlier eras of our colonial history whereby Māori were not afforded fair and equitable opportunities within the secondary school system.

Indeed, whilst we cannot change or necessarily unteach the mistakes of the past, the lessons of shared histories ought to serve as an important reminder of how racism in education can have intergenerational impacts.

I offer this example in keeping with the theme of this newsletter, whakamana, or empowerment. It is helpful here to also consider a 3-part framework which was developed by our pāpā, Tā Mason Durie, initially for whānau wellbeing. It has subsequently found relevance and application to other areas, such as education. Within this framework are two other constituent parts, whakapiri (engagement), and whakamārama (enlightenment). Tā Mason describes whakapiri as positive engagement, and the act of bringing whānau together. This then prepares the groundwork for whakamana, empowering whānau to be self-determining and to flourish. Finally, whakamārama (enlightenment), speaks to the way in which people (and whānau) can be more readily enlightened when the foundational elements of positive engagement, strong rapport, and empowerment are fully activated.

This strong emphasis upon mana has always been a central priority within the Māori culture. Of further importance, however, is the emphasis upon the concept of mauri, the life force or life principle of all living things. When the mauri of ākongā, students, is active, and when the mana of ākongā is duly acknowledged and respected, it allows for the full realisation of their potential, talents and gifts, in other words, their iho pūmanawa. Nurturing, protecting and uplifting both mana and mauri are important requirements in fulfilment of the potential of ākongā. Mana and mauri are increasingly familiar concepts that are often referenced in other contexts such as health, sport and environmental stewardship. Tā Mason's framework also serves to recognise, protect and promote the duality of both mana and mauri. By harnessing and protecting the identity and dignity of whānau, and by protecting and elevating the life force of whānau, we all stand to benefit. Kia ū, kia mau, kia manawanui tātou,