



TAUIRA

Māori methods of learning and teaching

JOAN METGE

*What it was like growing up in Māori rural communities
in the mid-twentieth century? Voices from the past
answer this question in the pages of this book.*

Based on extensive interviews, *Tauira* offers a window on a mid-twentieth-century rural Māori world as described by those who grew up there. Metge's work tackles important questions about Māori teaching and learning of this period: What was the role of whānau and hapū, household and marae, kaumatua and siblings, work and play? How much learning was practical and how much by teaching?

Metge shows that Māori ways of learning flourished alongside the school system – especially in rural Northland, the Bay of Plenty and on the East Cape – and that those educational practices had a particular form and philosophy. Māori focused on learning by doing, teaching in context, learning in a group, memorising, and advancement when ready. Parents, grandparents and community leaders imparted cultural knowledge as well as practical skills to the younger generation through daily life and storytelling, in whānau and community activities. In preserving this evidence and these voices from the past, this important book also offers much inspiration for the future.

In te reo Māori, 'tauirā' means both student and teacher. Joan Metge introduces readers to Māori methods of teaching and learning that are rich in lessons for us all.



Dame Joan Metge was born in 1930. A trained anthropologist, she is particularly famous for her outstanding promotion of cross-cultural awareness. She has published significant books and articles on cross-cultural communication, including *Talking Past Each Other* (1978/1984) and *Kōrero Tahi* (AUP, 2001), and on Māori history and society. Her most recent book is *Tuamaka: The Challenge of Difference in Aotearoa New Zealand* (AUP, 2010).

Metge was awarded the Royal Society of New Zealand's inaugural Te Rangī Hiroa Medal in 1997 for her outstanding scientific research in the social sciences and, in 2006, won the third Asia-Pacific Mediation Forum Peace Prize, previously won by José Ramos-Horta.

All my relatives lived just over the fence. That was the pā. We played in each others' backyards or we'd go to the river to swim. We all had jobs to do . . . Up at 5 a.m., light the fire, feed the chickens, milk the cow . . . After school, we came back, we were going to look for kai, picking pūhā, peeling potatoes . . . Especially on Sundays, everyone would take food and go to the gardens. There were acres and acres of it. We weren't taught what to do, we learnt by watching them do it. When you are four or five, you water the plants. — HONE PIRIHI

Finding kaimoana was our fun. We knew when we got home we'd get a hiding for not saying where we were going. So the thing was to bring home a kit of crayfish or kinas . . . If they had a big hui coming up they wouldn't go to a section of the beach till the hui was near and everyone, fifty to a hundred people, would go down and get it all in one day. — TE AOMARAMA MATETE

We didn't have a lot but what we had we shared and we never went without. Money just wasn't around, but we were never hungry. Because if they knew our rua was empty, well, 'Haere mai, come and get something to eat.' — MATEOHORERE KAA

I remember starting out at school, my koroua taking me to the side of the puna, doing a karakia there; . . . and the iriiri or sprinkling of water on my head, and sending this child to school, a sort of dedication for the purposes that he wanted me to have in life. And one of those was this idea of being a repository of information for the people.

— HAARE WILLIAMS

When they would plant, they would say, 'Aa, this is for us, this is for the marae.' My mother's uncle would say, 'Aa, mō ngā mea pani', for the orphans. So there would be main crops for the family, some for the marae and some for the orphans. — WIREMU KAA

The old people live on the marae. There's about three kaumātuas – real kaumātuas with tokotokos – and old kuias, sitting around with us, and there's oodles of kids, and they're telling us stories. How people got to Pawarenga, how the local mountains were named. And we are sitting on the marae and we are looking out at these mountains. — NIKORA ATAMA

In my childhood it was the accepted thing, when we went to Karepōnia church [on the hill], afterwards we came down to Karepōnia marae. On their way to church everybody dropped in a plate of meat or whatever as their contribution to the communal lunch. When we came down to the marae there would be the usual whai-kōrero as lunch was prepared by the women. We'd all sit down to a meal. If there was any take [issue] that concerned the tribe, after lunch it was discussed and resolved. About milking time, people began to disperse. — MAORI MARSDEN

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Teaching and Learning

Teaching Roles

In the communities from which the kai-whakauru came, parents typically shared the responsibility for educating their children with other kin. In most cases parents concentrated on overseeing their children's acquisition of practical skills in house and house garden and on the farm, with help from grandparents, aunts and uncles when they were available. Where the transmission of mātauranga Māori was concerned, however, it was these older relatives who played the major role, with parents involved only if and when they had both the time and the requisite depth of knowledge. Siblings and cousins of the same generation also played a part in the learning process through the interaction of older children with the younger ones and in peer groups.

It's not an abdication of responsibility, it's a sharing of responsibility, a preference for the third party. (*Wiremu Kaa*)

Before reading what the kai-whakauru said in this regard, it is important to recognise that they used both Māori and English kinship terms with a much wider range of reference than those understood by speakers of English. In their vocabulary, 'grandfather' and

‘grandmother’, ‘pōua’ and ‘tāua’ (the Ngāti Porou terms), ‘granny’, ‘nanny’ and ‘tupu’ (an abbreviation of ‘tupuna’) referred not only to a child’s parents’ parents but also to the latter’s siblings and cousins of the same generation. While the terms ‘grandfather’ and ‘grandmother’, ‘pōua’ and ‘tāua’ indicate gender, the other three terms do not.* In talking about the parental generation, the kai-whakauru nearly always used the English terms ‘father’ and ‘mother’, ‘mum’ and ‘dad’, ‘aunt’ and ‘uncle’, but while they restricted use of the first four to their own parents, they used ‘aunt’ and ‘uncle’ to refer both to parents’ siblings and to parents’ cousins of the same generation.

In talking of members of their own generation they mostly used the English terms ‘brother’, ‘sister’ and ‘cousin’, but typically noted whether they were older or younger, reflecting the Māori distinction between ‘tuakana’ and ‘teina’ with respect to age and sometimes but not always with respect to seniority of descent. In the first descending generation, the kai-whakauru extended the terms ‘tama’ (son) and ‘tamāhine’ (daughter) from their own children to the children of the siblings and cousins of their own generation and recognised all the children of the latter as ‘mokopuna’. Like its reciprocal ‘tupuna’, ‘mokopuna’ does not distinguish between the genders.

Grandparents

One thing that stands out in the kai-whakauru’s accounts of their childhood is the important role that grandparents played in their education, imparting knowledge ranging from the practical to the metaphysical, teaching tikanga Māori (the right Māori way of doing things) and the underlying values both explicitly in words and indirectly through storytelling and their own example. While some grandparents were clearly more accessible and loving than others, in

* Ihimaera, 1972, pp.1–5. In Ihimaera’s story ‘A Game of Cards’, the word ‘Nanny’ is used to address and describe both men and women ranked as ‘grandparents’.

general they were remembered with gratitude for their teaching as well as affection for their love and care.

Some kai-whakauru highlighted the influence of one or two particular grandparents.

As children we had so many homes to go to; we weren't always with Mum. Most times we were with our grandfather. He was widowed, and we used to spend a lot of time with our grandfather, and I am sure that is where we picked up a lot of the things that we still practise today. (*June Tangaere*)

My grandmother, she had the biggest influence in my mind, she featured very greatly, because she was the one who everyone used to look to in the family. They lived with us, my uncle and his wife and my cousins, and there were other aunties, too. We were all living together, and yet she was the one who guided everyone, or if there was anything to learn about how you behaved, she was the one who actually taught us, the mokopuna, what to do. (*Liz Hunkin*)

I was brought up by my father's sister and her husband. This couple had no children of their own. They brought up fourteen. I was one of the last three. We were all cousins; we called her Auntie. Her father lived with her too. He was a Ringatū minister . . . [If anyone had a strong influence on me] I'd say it was my grandfather. He never ever reprimanded us. If he did tell us off, he did it in a lovely, soft way. It made you feel bad and made you feel you wanted to cry . . . He's still alive, in his nineties. He's a beautiful old man, he hasn't changed from the day I was little, he's still the same . . . Even today, in this day and age, though he didn't go to the whare wānanga, he has so much to offer us . . . He never went to primary school or high school. His whare wānanga was his church, what he grew up in and what he did in his lifetime. (*Hone Pirihi*)

My nanny was a wonderful old lady. This is Mum's mum I'm talking about . . . Quite often my younger brother and I used to be left with my grandmother and that was a wonderful time in our lives. We got anything we wanted. She made sure we were tucked into bed and things like this, which made our lives at that time far more comfortable and made us feel more secure. With regard to kai, we got anything we wanted, within reason of course. Everything she had in the cupboard we could have . . . When I say that we were spoilt, I don't think it was spoilt, I think . . . we were being really loved and cherished by our Nanny. (*Sonny Huia Wilson*)

During his first nine years Haare Williams was nurtured by his paternal grandmother, who belonged to Whakatōhea and Tūhoe in the Bay of Plenty; in his teens he returned to the East Coast to live under the influence of his maternal grandmother who belonged to Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki. Both women were highly regarded by their people for their knowledge of whakapapa and tikanga but they differed markedly in personality and teaching methods.

My first grandmother: I think her greatest gift to me was her ability to talk to me all the time, either whispering or body language – with the eyes, the hand that comes around, the arm round my neck when I'd done something good or when I was crying. When I had experienced some mishap she would pick me up and really boost my spirit . . . I cannot recall any form of formal teaching at all in the things I picked up from her . . . My second grandmother was very, very specific in what she wanted to see happen and talked about it often, that she wanted her grandchildren to succeed . . . This perpetuation of the culture and the values and the history and so on was very much part of Waioeka Brown's plan for us as her grandchildren, and she wanted us to succeed in the Pākehā world too: School Certificate and no less for her . . . The influence of both these women was very, very powerful indeed. (*Haare Williams*)

Wiremu Kaa had warm memories of one particular nanny and her indirect teaching.

We always looked forward to seeing my mother's aunt. She was a widow. She was always giving us things, barley sugar or blackball lollies . . . And she played tricks on us. We'd go there and she'd be lying in the sun in her cane chair – she'd know we were there, she'd go 'Boo!' and we'd get a scare and she'd laugh her head off . . . She'd take us to her orchard, tell us not to eat those ones over there, 'Ānei ngā mea pai' [These are the good ones], and she'd point to ones that were good, make sure we weren't going to break the branches of her trees. She talked to her peach trees. Everything was alive [to her]. Her trees were alive – she talked to them, that was the fascinating thing about her. She talked to her cats and dogs, her trees and her apples and her lemons. I remember her picking some lemons one time and she was telling the lemons to make our coughs better . . . A real lovely lady . . . When we left we always had a kit full of something to take home. There was always caution and concern. Don't do this, don't do that. Don't gallop too fast on our horse, make sure we take it to our mother, and things like that. (*Wiremu Kaa*)

This nanny taught Wiremu things he didn't think his mother would have had the time or patience to do, such as how to light a fire.

She'd tell us to go and light it, and we'd make a mess. We'd just burn all the brushwood and never have a fire. And she'd sit there and kōrero Māori to us, and she'd go 'Ārā ngā rārā!' [Then the twiggy brushwood!], and 'Ārā ngā tāwhaowhao!' [Then the bigger pieces of driftwood from the beach!], chanting, and we'd know which ones to put on top, the order of the wood, of the fire-building. And then the fire was burning and we'd be amazed. And so next time we'd say 'Ārā ngā rārā!' and 'Ārā ngā tāwhaowhao!', chanting what she chanted, and the fire lit, presto! (*Wiremu Kaa*)

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