

THE GIFTED CHILD WHO IS MAORI

Report of a Workshop
Naida Pou & Rosemary Cathcart

First published in *Gifted Children: Their Future: Our Challenge*, the Journal of the Newland Association for Gifted Children, Vol. 17, No. 3, December 1992.

Foreword: A Moment of Discovery for the Convenors

In this workshop, although initially only one of us was asked to speak, we decided to do it together because we felt we really needed each other's strengths and knowledge. Then, as we worked out our presentation, we found that, rather than deciding whose turn it was to do what, we were developing role play, interaction between ourselves, and audience involvement to send our messages. We realised that in fact we were structuring our workshop as an **experience** rather than as an activity or lecture. Somehow, this "felt right" to us.

Only later, towards the end of our planning, did it dawn on us that in recognising our need to work together and in choosing the approach that we had, we ourselves were inadvertently symbolising what bi-culturalism is about and how it grows.

This was a moment of insight for us, and it is one we want to share with you.

For in our view, bi-culturalism (and multi-culturalism too) is not primarily about the exchange of **information**. It is about the development of **understandings**. This is not something which can be transmitted through conventional teaching strategies: it is a **process** which takes time, and appropriate experiences, and sensitivity and tolerance on the part of both teacher and learner.

Thus at first we were reluctant to translate our workshop into written form for publication. We knew we could not reproduce on paper the very thing we felt had been its most important feature, i.e. the nature of the experience shared and contributed to by everyone present.

But we have been persuaded to try, because of the scarcity of material in this field. We do so therefore, although with some considerable diffidence. We ask those who read this not to regard it as a formula or set of precepts, but simply as one further addition to your own ongoing experiencing and responding to and reflecting on this complex, delicate, important issue.

--oOo--

The workshop opened with a dialogue that went something like this:

R: Good morning everybody, welcome: we're delighted you've chosen to join us in this workshop. My name is Rosemary Cathcart. I take the CWSA papers for the School of Advanced Studies here at College and am a tutor and consultant in this field. I'd like to introduce you to Naida Pou, whom I met when I was teaching at Henderson High School: Naida.

N: E te kaihanga
Ko te whakaaro
tua tahi kia kae
ko te -

R: (Interrupting, sotto voce) Naida, I don't think they all understand - I don't think they all speak Maori.

N: (Sotto voce, rolling her eyes) Well, translate!!

R: (Aghast) Um - well - what Naida is saying is that: she - er - was a teacher at Henderson, where she ran the immersion unit -

N: (Indignantly) No I'm not!

(Audience is beginning to look worried: what have they got themselves into?)

R: (Weakly) You're not?

N: No! I'm doing the karakia, the prayer, to start things **properly!**
- ko te whakaaro
turua kia ngai tatou te tangata
ko te whakaaro tuatoru
kite whenua. Amine!

R: (Very politely, realising she has put her foot in it) Would you like to introduce yourself now?

N: Certainly. Ko Naida Pou ahau - my name is Naida Pou. I am of Ngati-Whatua - Ngati-Hine descent, the Kaipara is my moana, Puatahi is my marae -

R: (Interrupting again - a slow learner) Naida! Why are you telling us all that? What about your teaching?

N: How can I explain what I am as a teacher if I do not say where I stand? Where I come from, what has made me, what I go back to?

R: The **place** is important?

N: Yes!

R: Oh ... (thinks about it) ... I think I see ... I remember when the house I was brought up in was sold - that was over 30 years ago, but I still have a sense of loss about that ... it's true, it does feel like part of **me** is lost ... your marae is still there for you.

N: Yes, it will always be there ...- (she thinks about it too)

... But I know what you feel - my grandmother's own house was sold - I lived with her - I feel the loss of that still - we both know that feeling.

To audience: What we've just role-played for you reflects the kinds of things we ourselves worked through as we got to know each other. Our sharing of this has taught us that bi-culturalism is not only possible, it's profoundly satisfying, it makes sense of the world we live in.

This is the foundation for what we want to talk about with you today.

-oOo-

We are here, Maori and Pakeha together, to consider the Maori child who is gifted.

This is like looking for election promises the government has kept - there are very few to be found.

Is this because they don't exist? Or because we don't know how to find them? How many here believe there are gifted Maori children out there in just the same numbers as there are gifted Pakeha children? (All hands go up).

Then *why* aren't we finding them? How can we change this? And what should we do with them once we *have* found them?

Borrowing a technique from the Treaty network, let's begin by asking:-

What did your parents drum into you when you were little?
What did they teach you was important in life? Which of these things are you in your turn teaching your children?

- * How would you, the reader answer this question? We suggest you have a go before you move on!

Our group, working in pairs, produced statements like,

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."
"Do your best at all times."
"Always finish what you start."
"Be fair."
"Be tidy."
"Strive to reach the top."

As we shared what had been written, we found that the pairs had often made very similar statements: everyone's parents had taught them very similar things. This is our culture.

Two very important insights emerged from this:

1. "Culture" is not something that *other* people have. *Everyone* is part of a culture; everyone has a "cultural background."
We Pakeha do too!

2. One teacher initially said, "How can I express my culture? I don't know any songs or dances." But culture is not just about outward forms of expression, important as these may be. It is about our most fundamental values, our basic perception of reality - of the way things are, of what matters, of how things ought to be.

Given that this is so, how then does our culture influence what happens in our schools?

Our discussion of this question led us to agree that culture influences virtually *every* aspect of school:

- the management and organisation systems we set in place;
- the curriculum - what we believe should be taught and the different priorities we give to different subjects;
- the teaching strategies we employ;
- the goals we set for children's learning;
- the expectations we have of the teacher/child relationship;
- how we believe children should relate to each other;
- the rewards and punishments we use - and what we reward and punish for;
- etc, etc, etc.!

What does it mean to be a gifted Maori child - or indeed any Maori child - in a learning environment shaped in these ways by Pakeha culture?

Naida spoke to us at this point of the loneliness of the Maori child at school, of the confusion and sense of conflict s/he experiences, of the de-valuing by apparent invisibility of her/his existing knowledge and experience, and of the impact all this has on the child's self esteem and attitude to learning.

Little wonder if such children perform poorly, seem shy or unco-operative or drop out of school early.

But surely schools are trying to overcome this now? Look at the culture clubs, the way visitors are greeted, the multi-lingual notices everywhere, the hugely successful Maori and Polynesian festivals!

True - but valuable though these things are, they are still essentially "add-ons." *They do not change the everyday experience of the child in the classroom in all those fundamental aspects listed above.*

To "set the scene" for Maori achievement, we must create a learning environment which is *supportive* of Maori children,

i.e.

we must recognise *Maori* knowledge, skills and values as a *valid and integral* part of the curriculum.

For example, at Henderson High School in Auckland, the historical battle between the tribes of Ngati-Whatua and Ngapuhi became the basis of a dramatic production in Maori, created by the students and teachers themselves working with a theatre director.

This activity, as well as involving children in creative writing and acting,

- used Maori life and history as a natural and valid basis for learning;
- created links between Maori and Pakeha ways of learning;
- through a performance for family and kaumatua, allowed for assessment in ways acceptable to both Maori and Pakeha cultures.

But not all experiences need be so extensive or so major. There are many other steps we can take to help create a supportive learning environment for Maori children. For example, we can:

- * Reward children for achievements in areas Maori value.
- * Search for Maori stories, legends, poetry, etc, and use these as the basis for work in language, art, social studies.
- * Use re-telling, role play and creative drama as routinely as we do written exercises.
- * Use both contemporary and traditional Maori art as creative stimuli in language and art work and in developing art appreciation.
- * Find out about Maori science/health/natural history, and incorporate into our lessons in these subjects.
- * Encourage **group** activities and **group** learning.
- * Develop "panui" - group discussion of values, behaviour, etc - as a regular feature of our classroom management.
- * Use self esteem measures based on co-operativeness and as a regular feature of our classroom management.
- * Use self esteem measures based on co-operativeness and sharing rather than on individual uniqueness and winning over others.
- * Teach **all** children how to mihi (greet visitors).
- * Teach waiata and when and how to use. Learn traditional waiata. Practise writing own waiata for special occasions.
- * Talk about cultural differences in practical terms, e.g. compare Maori/Pakeha meeting styles, practise, use.
- * Discuss also things Maori and Pakeha have in common.
- * Begin the day with karakia. (If we feel uncomfortable with a prayer, we can simply make a joint commitment to our day's work and to each other).
- * Have **all** children learn their whakapapa.
- * In language development, make generous use of poetry, include whakatauki (proverbs).
- * Create bridges between Maori & Pakeha ways of handling knowledge, e.g. by using drama, genealogies/flow charts etc.
- * In reports to both Maori and Pakeha parents, specifically mention achievements in areas valued by Maori.
- * Make all labels in our classrooms bi-lingual.
- * Use Maori terms wherever appropriate to do so: support both Maori and Pakeha children in doing the same.
- * Encourage our colleagues to alternate Maori and Pakeha meeting styles for staff meetings and to learn and use waiata, karakia, etc.

In this supportive environment, Maori children can learn and achieve much more readily - and gifted Maori children are much more likely to "surface."

--oOo--

How can we *identify* the gifted Maori child? Providing the right learning environment is just the first step. Next we have to discover effective ways of **recognising** the gifted Maori child when s/he does begin to surface.

Our traditional identification procedures have failed abysmally in this. Look at the acceleration and enrichment programmes, the withdrawal groups and streamed classes in our schools, even at Explorers' Clubs: with a few rare and precious exceptions, Maori children are overwhelmingly **absent** from most such activities.

The key to changing this lies in our acceptance of the following concept:

People are most likely to display high levels of ability in skills which are highly valued by their culture.

When we think about it, it's easy enough to understand why this should be so. Quite simply, we give children **more opportunity to learn** the skills we value, and we **reward** them more readily and more fulsomely when they achieve in these areas. Consider, for example, the relative value attached in our schools to learning and achieving in maths and science compared with the value attached to learning and achieving in, say, history or poetry: maths and science are areas of knowledge and skill much more highly valued in Pakeha culture than are history and poetry.

Therefore, to identify gifted Maori children, we need to:

- (a) discover the skills valued by Maori culture, and then,
- (b) look for children who are displaying high levels of performance in those skills.

The checklist shown on the following page, which is based on skills valued by Maori can help us to find such children. However, we do need to emphasise two points:

1. It is **not** suggested that this checklist should replace all other procedures. It is still very important always to draw on as wide a variety of sources as possible.
2. It is also very important to realise that **no** checklist can be a substitute for direct personal experience - not just the experience of ceremonies and visits, vital though this is, but also the kinds of insights and awareness that come from the experience of working and being together.

This is why we said at the outset that this is a process which takes time.

Thus a checklist should be seen simply as a useful starting point in lifting our own awareness of appropriate things to look for, not as "the answer."

Bearing all this in mind then, our checklist is as follows:

Gifted Maori children are likely to display ability in:

- * group interaction skills
- * leadership in a group situation
- * knowledge of Maori history, custom, tradition, protocol
- * acceptance of responsibility for peers, family, community
- * Sense of justice, concern for fair play
- * mental agility, strategic & negotiating skills
- * possession of te Reo
- * acquisition of mana
- * interest/ability in traditional arts & skills
- * games and sports
- * musicality
- * crafts
- * memory
- * observation, eye for detail.

[Credit for this checklist goes in the first instance to Judy Findlay, Helensville Primary: her original suggestions have been only slightly adapted to produce the above].

-oOo-

We come now to a difficult, sensitive and little-discussed issue.

Let us suppose that we are beginning to have some success in recognising gifted or potentially gifted Maori children.

The question is, **how should we provide for these children? What are the learning goals for the gifted Maori child? Should we assume - as virtually all programmes currently do - that these goals are exactly the same as for the gifted Pakeha child?**

That is to say, having identified the child through her/his performance in skills valued by Maori culture, do we thereafter forget about these and measure the child's subsequent achievement only in terms of her/his success in skills valued by Pakeha culture?

The United Nations calls this "cultural genocide."

That's a strong statement, but we can see its truth when we consider another fundamental point.

In our Pakeha culture, we place great emphasis and value on achievement by the individual. We encourage our children to strive to be first, best, top, etc. Such competition is widely seen as both natural and healthy. Schools reinforce this view in a multitude of ways: virtually all our performance indicators are based on comparing children against one another: our greatest rewards at school are for success as an individual in various types of competition.

But do all cultures respond to ability and measure achievement in the same way?

The answer is no, they do not.

In Maori culture, for example, great emphasis and value are placed on **working co-operatively with others**: it is the group rather than the individual who achieves: the individual is judged by her/his contribution to and performance within the group.

"Standing out," being different from others, is therefore actively discouraged.

~~In other words~~, Maori and Pakeha perceptions of ability and achievement are about as different from each other as it is possible to be.

We need to be sharply aware of just what this difference means for the **gifted Maori child**.

In essence, it means that if the learning opportunities we provide result in the child's being singled out from the group, responding to these opportunities will require the **Maori child** to act in a way that goes against all the standards and patterns of behaviour s/he has been taught from birth. But **not** responding to these opportunities means being labelled by the Pakeha system as a failure or non-achiever.

Must we continue to place the gifted Maori child in this impossible, agonising position?

Let us make ourselves clear.

We are **not** about to suggest that Maori children should be denied either the opportunity or the encouragement to achieve to the highest possible level in skills valued by Pakeha culture. On the contrary!

We do suggest, however, that

Maori children should have equal opportunity and encouragement to **continue** to achieve in **skills valued by Maori culture** and that such achievement should be **measured and rewarded** by our education system in ways that acknowledge it as **equivalent in status** to achievement in skills valued by Pakeha culture.

That is the challenge as we see it: for those charged with educating the gifted Maori child.

We have one last word to add.

If our concern is to bridge the gap between **Maori and Pakeha**, it may help us if we remember that **a bridge is always designed to be crossed in both directions.**

In other words, helping Maori children to achieve at school **also** involves helping **Pakeha** children understand, accept and value Maori thinking and concerns. If we truly wish to close the gap between Maori and Pakeha understandings, we must stop thinking, "Things Maori for the Maori; things Pakeha for everyone." We must allow Pakeha children to be exposed to Maori learning, to share in Maori insights, wisdom and tradition, and to be acknowledged and rewarded for achievements valued by Maori culture.

It is in this situation of sharing and valuing that we are most likely to find that:

- * the gifted Maori child can achieve in ways s/he finds acceptable and relevant;
- * the school can most effectively offer this child whatever is appropriate in Pakeha culture without undermining her/his Maoritanga;
- * we can hope for the gradual emergence of a genuinely bi-cultural society, one in which all gifted children are nurtured, valued and encouraged.

He ora te whakapiri.

There is strength in unity.

—oOo—

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alton-Lee, A., Nuthall, G. & Patrick, J. "**Take Your Brown Hand Off My Book: Racism in the Classroom**" Set No. 1 1987

Anderson, J. & MacDonald, K. "**Hine Alofa: Maori & Pacific Island Girls with Special Abilities**" Apex magazine.

Ashton-Warner, Sylvia "**Teacher**" Secker & Warburg 1963

Benton, Richard "**Now Fades the Glimmering: Research in Classrooms in New Zealand**" Set No. 2 1986

Doidge, Greer "**Maori Children: Maori Studies: A Special Giftedness**" Apex Spring 1990 Vol. 4, No. 2.

Freeman, Dave "**Maori & Pacific Island Children with Special Abilities**" Paper delivered to Director-General's Conference 1983

Jones, Alison "**What Really Happens in the Classroom**" Set No.2 1487

Metge, J. & Kinloch, P. "**Talking Past Each Other**" Victoria University Press 1984

Milne, Ann "**Meeting the Challenge of Maori Education in our Schools**" NZEAS Journal Vol. 6, Nov. 1991.

Mitchell, Ian "**Notes Towards Incorporating Maori/English in the English Learning Scheme of Henderson High School**" Henderson High School 1989

Mitchell, Ian "**Sylvia Ashton Warner in the Secondary School**" Office of the Race Relations Conciliator "Let's work Together"

Reid, Neil "**Polynesian Conceptions of Giftedness**" Paper presented to the 5th World Conference on Gifted & Talented Children Manila 1983

Rewi, Danielle "**Who are these Pakehas?**" Interview with Mitzi Nairn, Dominion, 18/2/86

Renzulli, Joseph "**Talent Potential in Minority Group Students**" Exceptional Children March, 1973.

Scott, Raymond A. "**The Challenge of Taha Maori: A Pakeha Perspective**" Office of the Race Relations Conciliator 1986

Simon, Judith "**Good Intentions, but...**" National Education, Vol. 66, No.4, September 1984

Whiu, Charlie "**Research has shown that people of high intelligence are found in all races. Why, therefore, are Maori and Pacific Island children so poorly represented in programmes for exceptionally able children? What can we do about it? Should we do anything about it?**" Unpublished paper May 1991

Biographical Notes

Naida Pou is of Ngati-Whatua, Ngati-Hine and Yugoslav descent. Now Bicultural Manager, Greenlane and National Women's Hospitals and Central Auckland District, she was formerly kaitiaki of the whanau of te Reo at Henderson High School. She is also Chairperson of the Auckland District Maori Council.

Rosemary Cathcart is 4th generation Pakeha of Irish, American, English and Australian descent. Amongst other activities in education, she is a consultant in gifted education, tutor of the CWSA papers at the School of Advanced Studies, Auckland College of Education, and an education advisor for NZAGC.