Realising indigenous potential relies on attitudinal transformation and practical shifts to recognise, respect and reflect the cultural beliefs of a nation. Worldwide indigeneity is about supporting the rights of indigenous people to live firstly as themselves and, secondly, in wider societal contexts where they can succeed in whatever ways they choose.

MAORI PEDAGOGY

In order to begin to understand the Māori world it is necessary to first know about whakapapa (the placing of layers, one upon the other). Our tapūna (ancestors) created many valuable methods of passing on knowledge and skills. Whakapapa, as the ‘basis for the organisation of knowledge in respect of the creation and development of all things’ (Barlow, 1998, p. 173), is a fundamental principle of such knowledge.

An example of whakapapa are the documents Te Whariki (early childhood curriculum) and the supporting book, Quality in action, which integrate Whare Tapa Whā into daily practices. Whare Tapa Whā is a four-sided model developed by Professor Mason Durie for New Zealand’s health sector which can be used as a basis of Māori pedagogy, beneficial to all early childhood educators and carers. It is divided into: Taha Wairua (spiritual health), Taha Whānau (family health), Taha Hinengaro (psychological health) and Taha Tinana (physical health).

TAHA WHĀNAU

This aspect of Whare Tapa Whā deals with the interactions and relationships with local people and environment. It is important for all early childhood services to establish and maintain healthy relationships with tangata whenua (specific Māori people who hold chieftainship of a designated area).

There are many tikanga that can easily be incorporated in daily practices to support Taha Whānau. An example is separating the cloths used to wipe tables and chairs. This protocol is required because of the tapu (restrictions) that dictate culturally appropriate practice.

Chairs are for sitting on and tables are where food is laid upon and eaten so if chairs and tables are wiped with the same cloth then cross-contamination is more than likely to occur. The two parts involved are polar opposites of the body so clearly designated cloths need to be used. A noa (free from tapu) environment is one in which colour-coded cloths are allocated for specific use and are laundered and stored separately.

In order for a centre to positively reflect Taha Whānau, it is necessary for all carers and educators to be united, consistently following tikanga correctly.

TAHA WAIRUA

This concerns the spiritual connections that everyone has to past, present and future pathways. Māori practices are governed by their historical accounts, conveyed through stories and education about the importance of local geographical features. Māori refer to this part of our pedagogy as taonga tuku iho (knowledge being passed down) which means we incorporate the traditions of the past into present day teachings and programs, which enhance our future pathways.

For example, Aoraki (Mount Cook) is not only a New Zealand icon, but also at the centre of cosmological accounts of the origin of the area. These accounts explain the genealogies of Ngāi Tahu iwi (South Island tribe) who are charged with rangatiratanga (chieftainship) over Te Waipounamu (South Island) and provides tikanga (protocols) for daily practices, such as the karakia (incantations) which are passed down by educators to young children.
TAHA HINENGARO

This is about the expression of one's thoughts and feelings. A generic tikanga within Māoridom is simply to greet and farewell people. Tangata whenua (indigenous people) are considered your hosts and all like to be recognised as great ones. Accordingly, there are reciprocal dialogues that have been used since the beginning of time, such as when one visits a marae (sacred place) and when you take part in a pōwhiri (welcome) and poroporoaki (farewell).

Educators can easily incorporate greetings and farewells into everyday practice, such as:
- 'Tēnā koe Emma' ('Hello Emma'),
- 'Kia ora Douglas' ('Hi there Douglas'),
- Haere rā Emma' ('Goodbye Emma'),
- 'Ka kite anō Douglas' ('See you again Douglas').

The more you use another language the more confident and competent you become. Taha Hinengaro is about enhancing your thoughts through implementation of another language and its protocols, becoming more receptive and responsive to another language and culture. As a recipient of greetings and farewells, a person's taha hinengaro is acknowledged and this sets the scene for reciprocal and responsive relationships.

TAHA TINANA

This concerns a person's physical wellbeing and the environments they interact within. A simple practice that respects tikanga is providing sufficient space for both adults and children to move about during mat sessions. Correct tikanga would be to have a pathway available so that both adults and children can access the mat without stepping over anyone.

Each person is regarded as tapu and by stepping over someone you are encroaching on their personal space. The preferred noa option would be to walk behind the person or ask the person to move so that you can pass. By employing simple practices such as these, Taha Tinana is promoted and the safety of your own body and those around you is maintained, via the structuring of the environment.

CONCLUSION

This article calls out to all indigenous peoples of the world to tell your history, language, cultural values and protocols. If nations are to accelerate success for their indigenous peoples then it means that your language and cultural values must form an integral part of everyday life and, at the macro level, there must always be an emphasis on achieving and celebrating indigenous potential.

We are all citizens of the world, however indigenous peoples are the traditional ambassadors of nations and it is an indigenous right to tell our stories. Our culture is integral to our identity and our cultural practices are iconic symbols of our nationhood. If there is to be a shift in thinking and an attitudinal change, it is the responsibility of nations to support the telling of our stories.

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References and further reading

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