



Ko Whaea Kēkē te Haumi | Aunty Ally: Kaupapa Māori in the Classroom

Our daughter Rosa started intermediate this term, and for the first week she came home each day talking enthusiastically about the “getting to know you” activities that she’d done with her new class. It got me thinking about the whakawhanaukataka/whakawhanaungatanga (relationship-building) activities which I used to run with ākoka/ākonga (students) and kaiako (teachers).

One such activity was based on the kaupapa Māori (Māori concept) tūrakawaewae/tūrangawaewae. At the beginning of the activity, I would explain that tūrakawaewae means “your place to stand”; somewhere you feel connected and secure in your identity. We would divide the class into rōpū (groups) of 7-8 before going outside to an open space. Each rōpū was given a rope long enough to make an outline of Aotearoa on the ground. Ākoka then had a few minutes to think about where they would stand in the motu (country) to represent their tūrakawaewae. After moving to that place, ākoka took turns to share their place to stand with the rest of their rōpū. On the surface, the activity was a winner: it drew on mātauraka Māori (Māori knowledge); it embodied kinaesthetic, verbal, aural, and visual learning; and we built connections with each other which strengthened classroom relationships.

As I’ve transitioned from working in a Pākehā-led system to a Māori-led one, I’ve begun to understand that kaupapa Māori are multifaceted and require exploration before engaging with them in the classroom. Without a deeper level of understanding, educators risk falling into the colonial tendencies to simplify te ao Māori (the Māori world), perpetuate cultural misunderstanding and, as in the case of the tūrakawaewae activity, claim something which uniquely belongs to Māori as something which belongs to everyone.

In *Ko Tahu, Ko Au*, Hana O’Regan highlights the interconnectedness of whakapapa and tūrakawaewae through the eyes of a Kāi Tahu kaumatua (elder):

George Te Au identifies the connection between whakapapa and land through the concept of tūrakawaewae, which refers to the place where a person has the right to stand. That right is inherited through one’s whakapapa: ‘Firstly it’s whakapapa – then tūrangawaewae. Those are two factors, the most important factors that identify Ngāi Tahu. Then the pride in ourselves.’ – George Te Au (O’Regan, 2001, p.51).

Inherited through whakapapa, tūrakawaewae is a Māori birthright and as such it is only applicable for takata whenua/tangata whenua (Indigenous people of the land). However, the way that I ran the activity overlooked whakapapa and taught that anyone could claim tūrakawaewae, regardless of their ancestry. If I was running the activity this year, I would change its name to “My Special Place” and explain that while Māori may draw on the concept of tūrakawaewae to explain the place they feel most connected to, the rest of us as tauwiwi would use different language because tūrakawaewae is a kaupapa that belongs uniquely to Māori. As a follow up task, we would return to the ākomaka/ākomanga (classroom) and each research the histories of our special place, including the iwi/hapū with ancestral links to that place.

Kā mihi nui (thank you very much) for reading this column – if it evoked any whakaaro (thoughts, ideas) I would love to hear from you! Whakapā mai (contact me) at holly.bodman@ngaitahu.iwi.nz.

Nā Holly Bodman (aka Aunty Ally).



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