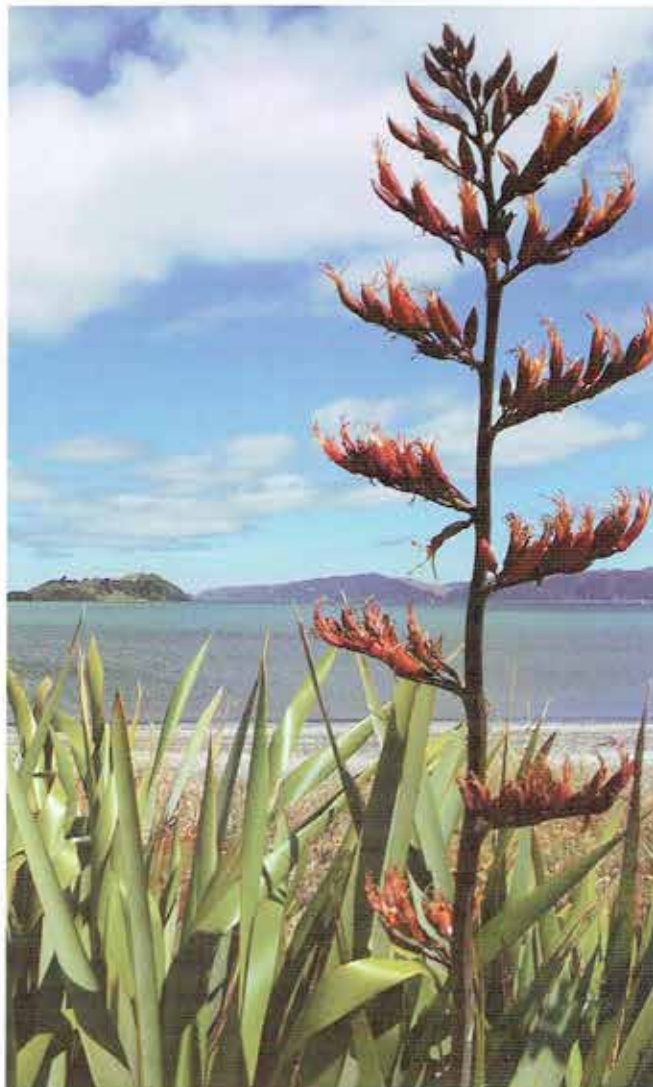


Getting to maybe... possibilities for living out Te Tiriti in early childhood centres: some reflections

Lately I have been thinking about where we are, and how far we have travelled in our Treaty journey in early childhood. Most centres are on this road trying to apply the Treaty in their practices: for example playing Maori games; saying kai karakia; singing waiata; displaying a copy of the Treaty on the wall, and referring to Te Tiriti in policies. While learning and using bicultural practices has its place I have a hunch that if we want to achieve authentic Treaty-based relationships, we need to step back from "working at being bicultural" and take another look at our foundation for Treaty-based early childhood education (ECE). I have a hunch that this will lead us to the new possibilities of living out the Treaty in our centres. A book I have read recently *Getting to Maybe* has inspired me to think about new possibilities for our Treaty-based journey.

What does "maybe" mean to you? I often hear it used in the context of – it might happen... it could happen...it is unlikely to happen! But **MAYBE** can also be used as a possibility or an opportunity. *Getting to Maybe* is a book that disturbed me to some new thinking about 'the maybes' in relation to Aotearoa and the Treaty. Here is a chunk from the book: "*Maybe*" is about a relationship in which time is one of the critical dimensions.... A relationship to what is ahead; a relationship that is constantly unfolding... the world ahead is what calls to us.... commands our actions.... We do not command it. And yet- it yields, so "maybe" becomes a potent work for the brave, the inventive, the adventurous. "Maybe", just "maybe" we can discover a way to save a species, prevent an epidemic of disease or violence, help lift people out of poverty and indignity, break the grip of intolerance, and lighten our footprint on the fragile earth. "Maybe" comes with no guarantees, only a chance. But "maybe" has always been the best odds the world has offered to those who set out to alter its course.... To: find a new land across the sea, to end slavery, to enable women to vote, to walk on the moon, to bring



down the Berlin Wall. "Maybe" is not a cautious word. It is a defiant claim of possibility in the face of status quo we are unwilling to accept. And.... transforming the world is possible because the very complex forces of interconnection that make systems resistant to change are the same ones that can be harnessed to propel change. "Maybe" is hope incarnate... for all but the complacent and cynical. (Westley et al, 2006)

I think that "maybe" we are called on as early childhood educators to be brave, to be inventive and adventurous. It is time for us to stop being cautious to claim the possibility, the hope to be transformative in our Treaty-based journey.

Over the last year I have been working with teachers and parents focussed on our youngest tamariki our pāpi/babies. I believe in and promote this work, the understanding that our job as early childhood teachers is to create a culture of respect for our tamariki in our centres. In this work with our littlest tamariki lie some clues, I think, to "the maybe," the

possibilities of authentic Treaty-based ECE. What does a culture of respect look like for our babies? I suggest that it is based on these key principles: Partnership, Protection and Participation.

- Partnership: a reciprocal relationship, based on trust, shared communication and understanding... listening carefully to baby's cues and messages.
- Protection: creating an environment of care where baby can flourish according to his/her innate intelligent agenda of development, supported by responsive respectful relationships with caregivers.
- Participation: that baby is involved and able to offer his/her contribution in relationship to the family/caregivers, wider community and the environment.

Pennie Brownlee, in her book *Dance with Me in the Heart*, describes the three wishes of a baby. "If your baby could tell you

to feel safe (to be protected), to feel loved (to be a participant), to feel respected (to be a partner)

Partnership, Protection & Participation



what she would really like from you, she would tell you that she would like three wishes; to feel safe (to be protected), to feel loved (to be a participant), to feel respected (to be a partner) (My words in italics). She wouldn't care in which order her wishes were granted, but she would definitely ask for all three. Any one wish by itself is not enough; it is only part of the parcel. Full attention is the key to great partnerships".

And the funny thing is, if we can do this with babies: relate, live and grow alongside our youngest tamariki in a relationship that is based on partnership, protection and participation, then we have a model for our relationships between Tangatawhenua and Tangata Tiriti (peoples who migrated to Aotearoa after the Treaty signing). This is how the practice of Treaty-based relationships can be enacted. This baby based model is also a Treaty-based model. Article 1 of Te Tiriti is focused on partnership. Imagine if we paid full attention to a reciprocal respectful relationship between Maori and Tauwi based on open communication and trust. Protection is central to Article 2 of Te Tiriti. How powerful would it be if we created an environment of care where Maori and Tauwi can flourish, where cultural intelligence is supported by responsive respectful relationships? Article 3 of Te Tiriti promotes participation. How invaluable would it be if participation from Maori and Tauwi was expected, recognised and valued as a rich resource and contribution to ECE, the community, the environment and to the nation of Aotearoa? These three articles of Te Tiriti provide a foundation to develop authentic honest relationships for Maori and Tauwi. It seems to me, that what our babies need to ensure healthy development is exactly what our Centres need to live in an authentic Treaty-based way.

A Maori metaphor for this Treaty-based foundation is the harakeke (flax bush) expressed in this whakatauki: Hutia te rito o te harakeke, kei hea te kōmako e ko? Ki mai ki ahau he aha te mea nui o te ao māku ē ki atu? He tangata he tangata he tangata. This proverb about the flax bush reminds us that if you cut the centre (te rito) out of the harakeke, there will be nowhere for the bellbird to sing. What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, people, people.

One can liken the harakeke to the whānau. Te rito (the little flax leaf right in the middle of the flax bush) symbolises the child. The leaves next to the rito are the matua, the parents. The outside leaves are the tupuna, the grandparents, the ones who have gone before. This whakatauki is saying that the community, wider whānau:

tupuna, matua, need to hold the space, to nurture and enable (te rito) nga tamariki to grow. If you cut the centre out of the harakeke, there will be nowhere for the bellbird to sing (for beauty and nature to be expressed). If adults neglect the raising of our children (participation, protection and partnership) what hope will we have for the future?

In today's world, when the extended whānau are often not around, ECE forms an essential part of the whānau, or harakeke. Harakeke is also the very essence of Te Whāriki – our curriculum.

Where does this lead us in our Treaty journey? We are reminded that our work with babies in ECE mirrors what is required for an authentic Treaty journey. It is to pay full attention to the baby's three wishes: to feel loved (to participate in a relationship), to feel safe (to be protected in a relationship) and to be respected (to be partners in relationship). It is a journey of maybes and possibilities for us as teachers in early childhood – a journey based on partnership protection and participation. The challenge for us is to be brave, inventive and adventurous and to draw on the roots of this land of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Do this and we are well on the way to 'maybe'. Kia puawai koe ki te ao, ka kitea o painga: So you shall blossom into the world, and the world in turn is transformed.

References

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