



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

*Faculty of Education*

Te Kura Toi Tangata

**Waikato Journal of Education**

Te Hautaka Mātauranga o Waikato

Volume 18, Issue 1: 2013

*Special Edition:*

Reclaiming and reframing  
teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand



# WAIKATO JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

## TE HAUTAKA MĀTAURANGA O WAIKATO

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The Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research (WMIER), which is part of the Faculty of Education, The University of Waikato, publishes the journal.

There are two major submission deadline dates: December 1 (for publication the following year in May); June 1 (for publication in the same year in November). Please submit your article or abstract to [wmier@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:wmier@waikato.ac.nz).

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Subscriptions: Within NZ \$50; Overseas NZ \$60

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Publisher: Faculty of Education, The University of Waikato

Cover design: Donn Ratana

Printed by: Waikato Print

ISSN 1173-6135

# Waikato Journal Of Education

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## Special Interest Group report: Tātaiako: Cultural competencies for teachers of Māori learners

**Jen McLeod and Pani Kenrick**  
Massey University

The conference theme of ‘Reclaiming and reframing teacher education’ was addressed within the special interest group session, Tātaiako: Cultural competencies for teachers of Māori learners, and how this document could be used as a tool to critique current practices within teacher education institutions. The key questions for consideration were:

1. What are the implications of Tātaiako for us as teacher educators?
2. What are the underlying concepts behind and within the competencies?
3. What does it look like for you, your students and your practice?
4. How does this translate to an embedded process?

A key point emphasised that in order to utilise Tātaiako as a tool, the underpinning cultural concepts need to be understood. Many people have a surface understanding of concepts such as whānau and ako, but still need to understand and grapple with the complexities of some of the underlying meanings inherent within each concept. For example, whānau is more than the traditional notion of immediate and extended family. We also need to understand how whānau has evolved and can be seen as a ‘kaupapa whānau’, which is probably more in line with how we might use it in our institutions.

The concept of ako, described as “students taking responsibility for their own learning and that of Māori learners” (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 4), was considered. It was suggested that ako could be demonstrated in the nature of the learning activities/tasks students participate in and in the ways in which lecturers engage with students. Such an approach is also reflective of manaakitanga—“showing integrity, sincerity and respect towards Māori beliefs, language and culture” (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 4)—which also implies how we look after and support each other in various learning situations.

Other groups discussed tangata whenuatanga and the importance placed upon identity and being able to stand tall and locate oneself within Aotearoa. The importance of providing authentic and meaningful contexts for learning where the language, identity and culture of Māori learners and their whānau is affirmed was highlighted (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 4). Still others considered ways in which wānanga was reflected in their contexts, and the notion of getting to know their surrounding communities better and engaging in “dialogue for the benefit of Māori learners’



achievement” (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 4). The notion of wānanga also led to a discussion about being connected to place (Penetito, 2010) and in doing so, becoming more aware of the local communities, but also what it means for an individual to be in this place.

The fifth competency whanaungatanga, described as “actively engaging in respectful working relationships with Māori learners, parents and whānau, hapū, iwi and the Māori community” (Ministry of Education, 2011 p. 4), was afforded more attention. Participants were challenged to consider how the relationships we have with students, colleagues and the wider community are created and maintained. An example from the Massey University College of Education context was provided in relation to the whare Te Kupenga o te Mātauranga as being our place. At the beginning of each year new students and staff are officially welcomed with a pōwhiri at the marae, and in the last two years the fourth year students have been taken back for a poroaki to complete the circle. Teacher educators at Massey University want students to feel connected to the marae and for them to make it their place. But in order to do this, opportunities need to be provided beyond students’ entry and exit points to make it happen. The challenge has been to get all staff involved and participating/contributing as much as possible. For non-Māori staff there is sometimes a level of discomfort and a tendency to rely on a committed few Māori staff to lead the activities.

If we are genuinely serious about embedding the cultural competencies into initial teacher education programmes, then it requires a considerable shift in how we do things. Recognising the good things we currently do and aligning them with the behavioural indicators for each competency is a good starting point. It may be that the competencies overlap, they may stand alone, be integrated or even be additive. All of these possibilities are fine, the point being that it is a starting point. The greater challenge is looking at the courses and papers that contribute to the whole programme and identifying within each paper aspects of the cultural competencies, being clear ourselves and also making these links clear to the students. Having knowledge of how the competencies are being built upon within each consecutive year allows students to make connections between their initial teacher education programme and the New Zealand Teachers Council’s Graduating Teacher Standards. Students should also be made aware of how the competencies contribute to the Registered Teacher Criteria and leadership roles, further highlighting the importance of embedding the competencies into their own teaching practices.

A final challenge was made to teacher educators: whilst we consider our roles as educators in upholding and maintaining these competencies, once students are in our programmes, we should be cognisant of the role played by those involved in the selection and interview processes. We should pride ourselves on recognising diversity and an applicant’s ability to address issues of valuing differing views, perhaps demonstrate some understanding of core Māori values, and have some knowledge of the Treaty of Waitangi. Perhaps it is now timely to also reflect on our selection processes and to use the behavioural indicators within Tātaiako as another benchmark for accepting prospective students into our programmes.

The challenges before us are many, but using Tātaiako as a tool to guide our programmes from pre-entry though to graduation can only auger well for Māori learners in the first instance, and for all learners, ourselves included.

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