



Practitioner Reflections

## Ka muri, ka mua – Walking backwards into the future

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Inspired by Mind Lab colleague Sonia Johnston's (May 2022) feedback to my first draft of this article, "...that learning journeys are susceptible to disruption, but it is important to be open and remain positive as you re-search ... for invariably what you are looking for is something that is already inside your heart."

I reflected and then recalled conversations had with my mentor Elaine Lynskey, English teacher and Deputy Principal at Wellington High School (1991). Elaine strongly advocated for teaching from the heart - if something makes your heart race with passion or pain, it is then that you are in the best state to engage in learning, and your passion or pain will drive you to higher realms of consciousness.

In 2021, I thought my Part 3 Research Project would be embedded in Karen Koopu's Talking Sticks (TS) programme, an innovative story approach to nurturing oral language skills with five- and six-year-old children. This was my passion. In March 2022, the Talking Sticks innovation came under scrutiny. Rather than allow the scrutiny process to "takahia te mana o te kaupapa, me te kaihangā" (trample the integrity of the innovation and the innovator) I chose to "re-search" and find something that would honour the Talking Sticks programme yet still make my heart sing.

I drew upon my knowledge and experience of creating social stories for students with special social needs and fused this with author Patricia Grace's drive to write reader stories that reflected the lives of New Zealand children, especially Māori children. When Grace started teaching in the 1960s, she considered many of the stories to be discriminatory, so she picked up a pen and started writing stories that Māori children could relate to, stories about kids just like them.

It occurred to me, who better to write stories about Māori children, stories about "kids like theirs," than their whānau. And what better way to honour the Talking Sticks programme than to develop 10 digital templates (writing frames) using 10 TS simple sentence patterns. So just as children *creating and sharing stories with*

*Cuisenaire rods* is at the heart of TS, *whānau creating and sharing stories* is also at the heart of my research study, "Te Ripo: whānau as authors of digital stories."

"Te Ripo" speaks to the ripple effect of a change in my practice - *kia poiipoia* te whānau - nurturing and supporting whānau to be active participants in their child's education. By providing whānau with simple sentence story templates in digital form, they had writing frames to flesh out with their words and their pictures. They gained insights into the features of early reader stories including the repetitive use of a simple sentence pattern throughout a story. There were opportunities to develop and extend their digital literacy skills. Perhaps, most important of all, whānau had a *purposeful* and active role to play in their child's learning.

Story as first voice narrative (Graveline, 2000) is a thick strand running throughout my methodology, a methodology that is anchored in kaupapa Māori because mine was a study involving tangata whenua in their home setting, thus resonating Linda Tuhiwai Smith's concept of kaupapa Māori being by Māori, for Māori with Māori (Smith, 2015). I used the cyclical process to consider the most appropriate digital format for whānau to access and manage story templates, a Google doc booklet versus a Book Creator e-book.

Adorned with the huruhuru (feathers) of Peter Walker's Teina/Tuakana research model (2003) I see the potential of changing shoes - the researcher becomes the learner/receiver, and the participants self-determined lead learners, and in their new shoes they now have a strong voice, a voice that must be heard and honored if only to address the balance/imbalance of power of the traditional position of researcher and research participant. The challenge for me (as teina), is to 'stop, think, speak' because I tend to free-flow speak...and in the process I end up over-talking others. This I have been told, on more than one occasion, is the hallmark of a teacher. My challenge, to remain in 'teina' position throughout the research journey. Perhaps that is why I needed to add Taina Pohatu's "Ata" approach to my methodology, it served as my 'stop, think, speak' button and led me to build and maintain respectful relationships (2013) that now travel beyond the zone of research.

It is the *huru* of Walker and Pohatu that flipped the corpus of power - from the researcher to the participants - creating a safe space for muted voices to be retrieved; and in due course, the manifestation of Tino Rangatiratanga, participant actions resonating full decision-making power. For example, when I shared with whānau story template #6 they responded: "we've already developed our own template, 'Fortnite'." They had used two simple sentence patterns from earlier digital stories then added "X is good/or bad" because it offered a space for them to discuss notions of good and bad actions versus good or bad human traits with their child. In

creating a space for muted voices to speak, and be heard, I considered myself to be ethically bound to two primal threads of engagement with whānau:

- Whakawhiti kōrero - active discussion and negotiation
- Kōrerorero - to talk, discuss, converse, chat - a conversational method that serves as a means for gathering knowledge through story.

According to Kovach (2010), the conversational method is of significance to Indigenous methodologies because it is a method of gathering knowledge based on oral storytelling tradition congruent with an Indigenous paradigm. Key to the conversational method, is dialogic participation.

Battiste (2000) contends that within Indigenous knowledge systems, generation of knowledge starts with “stories” as the base units of knowledge, proceeds to “knowledge” as the integration of values and processes described in the stories, culminating in “wisdom” - an experiential distillation of knowledge. The process of distillation - ordering and filtering lived experience into a comprehensive body of knowledge (Bulme, 2016) - is viewed by Battiste as cyclic, with wisdom keepers generating new stories as a way of disseminating what they know (Battiste, 2000).

In undertaking this research, I have come to reflect upon my preferred modus operandi as an RTLB practitioner, and realise that I work, think, speak, and connect predominantly in story mode. I wonder whether this is a DNA fingerprint from tūpuna (ancestors) for whom oral language was the dominant mode of communication, transmitted in a range of forms - mōteatea, karakia, pao, haka, karanga, whaikōrero - every form a conduit for story. Every story a space for metaphor. Our greatest orators, likened to the bellbird, korimako.

The use of metaphor invites other ways of seeing and understanding the world, offering perspicacious insights into the past. For example, ika (fish) was a common metaphorical image used, and in the context of warfare, “fish” represented the victims of battle. Krupa cites the metaphor “tautenga o te kaharoa” (the kaharoa harvest) from Ngā Mōteatea 1959:112 wherein “tautenga” should be interpreted as the “hauling ashore of nets ... and scaling, gutting, drying and roasting the victims killed in the battle” (Krupa, 2006, p. 25), a treatment similar to that of a fish.

In sharing this story with The Mind Lab peers, (with an invitation to critique), Karen Paku (May 2022) responded, “...Māori elders are very clever because they speak in pictures ...” however, the challenge for non-fluent speakers of Te Reo Māori is interpreting the “pictures” shared. The depth and breadth of metaphor so easily lost in translation.

My journey of learning, and in particular, my unconscious bias sway/inclination towards story mode and metaphor-speak has led me to name this article “Ka muri, ka mua,” a whakataukī that literally translates as walking backwards into tomorrow, or the

future. Given my reflections derive from an academic journey that traversed a contemporary education landscape, the concept of walking backwards into the future might appear to some, to be completely at odds with a 21<sup>st</sup>-century paradigm. Yet there is a school of thought that recognises the value in recalling the knowledge of the past, knowing and reading the patterns and tohu of the present, in order to navigate the uncertainties and challenges of the future. Concepts presented in Panoho et al.'s book, *Wayfinding Leadership* (2015).

There is much we can draw on from the past, and the challenge for me (and possibly for others walking backwards into their future) is “kia tui tuia” (Tapsell, 2000), being able to stitch together the past ... in the present ... for the future.

My journey of learning has been a myriad of surrender, change, collaboration, innovation, and digital creativity. It has also been a journey of cultural reclamation - claiming the right for whānau to pen their own stories for their child, stories about people like them, about their world, their values, their beliefs, using their pictures, their words, and their icons.

Mā te huruhuru, ka rere te manu (With feathers, the bird can fly)

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### **Violet Aydon-Pou**

Violet Aydon-Pou has whakapapa connections to Ngapuhi (Ngati Whakaeke, Ngati Rangī) and Ngati Porou (Ko te Whanau Hunara). With a background in education that spans nigh on 30 years, Violet started her teaching career at Wellington High School in the late 1980s. In the early 2000s, she moved from mainstream into special needs education when she secured an RTLB position in the Matamata Schools Cluster. Over the next 20 years, Violet won teacher study awards to complete in 2005 a Master in Social Sciences (Waikato University), and in 2022 a Master in Contemporary Education (Mind Lab). She has also had the privilege of securing 12 months' sabbatical leave from the RTLB Service to work as a regional co-ordinator on Te Kotahitanga Project in 2006/2007. The primary research themes running through Rangiwai (2005) and Te Ripo: whānau as authors (2022) are Tino Rangatiratanga, and the reclamation of first voice pedagogy.

