



Te Puawaitanga o Te Kakano: Nurturing the Seeds of Learning Within Rural Māori Women

Author

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This project sits within the Adult and Community Education (ACE) arena and has been put together by Māori women, for Māori women. It reports on how we as a small rural ACE provider incorporated into our everyday operations a model of participatory management based on Atawhaingia Te Pa Harakeke (Pere, 2002). Designed for use in the early childhood sector, our main reason for adopting it was to reshape the way we delivered adult community education to Māori, especially to rural Māori women. The model recognises the cultural values, practices and life experiences they have as adults, women and young mothers, and we have found it to be an invaluable pou (marker) in helping us re-engage them with learning.



Te Puawaitanga o Te Kakano tutors and adult learners

Who are we?

Located within the grounds of a decile 1 College, the Opotiki Community Activities Office (CAO) has provided adult and community education (ACE) for surrounding rural communities on the western and

eastern tribal boundaries of Te Whakatohea for 31 years. The 2006 Census notes that this part of Aotearoa is one of three areas with high numbers of Māori with:

- A mean age of 25.6 years
- 35.8% under the age of 15 years
- 28.7% living in a one-parent household
- High unemployment in the 15–19 years bracket, with a corresponding high level of government benefit dependency
- 47.7% left school without qualifications and 56.5% earn less than \$20,000 a year.

Those who do have jobs tend to work mainly as agricultural labourers. Many are women who work part time or as seasonal labourers during the kiwifruit season, while at the same time caring for young children. The majority of the rural Māori women for whom we provide ACE programmes fit this snapshot above. Most have worked in the kiwifruit industry long enough to know that they do not want to be doing so for the rest of their lives.

"I've worked in kiwifruit ever since I left school. The money sux. I want to get a decent job" (K.M. Adult learner).



Young mums take time out from work to re-engage in learning

What is participative management?

Participative management for us is about inviting people who would not normally be invited to participate in decision making at a level that is normally the reserve of ACE management. Participation involves individual learners as well as communities of learners who might have specific learning needs, discussing and designing a learning programme round what it is that they would like to learn, rather than just ACE management designing a course that we perceive meets their needs.



Building rapport – getting ready for a night of fun!

Atawhaingia Te Pa Harakeke (Pere, 2002) is a participative management model (PMM) that enables this to happen in a way that is culturally appropriate for Māori. By adopting practices based on

whanaungatanga, it inverts the top-down pyramidal management structure commonly associated with governmental departments, including ACE. Deeply embedded in kaupapa Māori philosophies there is an emphasis on developing and enhancing relationships, promoting a sense of organisational family, building collective support within an organisation, and promoting understanding, rapport and programme ownership, rather than just on planning.

From the very beginning staff and prospective learners are encouraged to work together for the best outcome for all concerned, with everyone acknowledging that they, as individuals or organisations, have a part to play in the bigger picture of learning. Everyone is equally valued as adults who bring a wealth of life experiences with them, and kotahitanga (unity) is developed and promoted through the 'rule' of consensus when entering into dialogue and consultation over matters that impact on the group. Unity is also promoted directly by the teaching or role modelling of group identity, respect, security, confidence, and dignity. For those familiar with the back/front operations of marae – where there is an understanding that if things go well at the back, then things in the front will too – this way of working should come as no surprise. Most of our learners are familiar with this way of working and it seemed the most natural 'model' to adopt inside our organisation to effect meaningful change.

Our process

Step 1: Sharing the responsibility for planning & course development

Step 2: Negotiating terms so that outcomes are met for all involved

Step 3: Promoting partnerships

Step 4: Analysing needs through interactive dialogue

Step 5: Empowering staff

Step 6: Building rapport through face to face talk, exchanging ideas, trust building exercises, sharing life experiences, food, art, having fun etc

(Atawhaingia Te Pa Harakeke Roopu, 2005)

Participative management in practice

In 2007 we set up Te Puawaitanga o Te Kakano: Nurturing the Seeds of Learning (TPOK), an ACE programme for a group of women involved in early childhood with their children. Initial consultation on what they wanted and how we might accommodate these needs meant we had to make shifts in thinking about the way ACE was and could be delivered. While the play centre and local Home Improvement Parenting Programme for Youngsters (HIPPY) supervisors were keen to prepare some of their mums for tertiary training to be teachers/tutors, the mums themselves were unsure of their ability to cope with study. Many were also breast-feeding, volunteering at an early childhood centre, or working part time, and struggled to see how they could attend regular night classes.



Adapting programmes to meet the needs of mothers like Krystal Mokomoko and her baby is challenging

After much discussion, to meet the needs of the group we agreed to run our first ever full-time ACE day class for 3 days a week from 9.00 am to 2.00 pm. This gave the women some attendance options and more flexibility to incorporate learning into their busy family and work schedules. We also agreed they could bring their babies to class and when a child was ready for alternate childcare we would, if needed, help both to find somewhere for that child, and to fill in any necessary paperwork WINZ might require. Such flexibility allowed a woman who might be scheduled for a day of study on a Monday to attend on another day if her child got sick or she had a change in work circumstances.

Negotiated learning

Many of the women on our TPOK courses tell us that learning (school) never really made sense until they left school. For them being invited to have a say in planning their own learning programme is a challenge, as they have more often than not allowed others to do so on their behalf. While those who are parents and involved in early childhood can see value in completing studies on themes such as early childhood care and parenting, others are at a loss as to know what to learn, yet with encouragement and sensitive dialogue, they eventually begin to find their voices. This sense of 'loss' is one reason we like to build into our programmes a study on cultural (in its widest sense) identity. Understanding one's cultural identity is an example of negotiated learning that not only helps our women, but also helps us form positive relationships with them in a way that is familiar and non-threatening. It is also a way to introduce them to our ACE organisation and the values that underpin the way we operate, while at the same time teaching them the importance of managing their own personal well-being in a holistic manner.



Babies are welcome to come to class with their mothers

Our challenge has been, and still is, to embed learning in contexts that make sense and are meaningful to our women and their every daily lives, while at the same time helping them to further their own personal learning journeys. Other negotiated learning contexts in this area of learner self -management include:

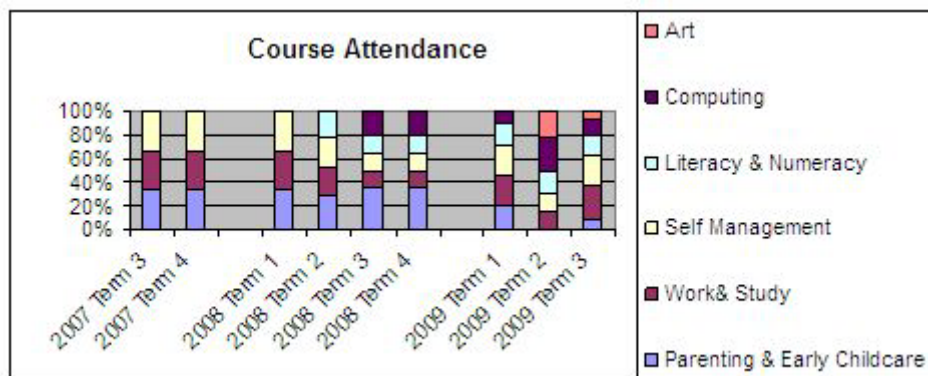
- Learning how to manage time & stress as a mother with a family
- Managing personal & family finances
- Self-directed learning through e-learning and correspondence

Our women are also encouraged to develop their work and study skills independently by:

- exploring possible future directions (jobs, further study)
- learning how to manage personal career development relevant to an area of personal interest, e.g., early childhood

When making personal learning decisions, those working as volunteers or part-time workers in early childhood centres often choose to expand their parenting and study skills by self-selecting units of work from the National Certificate in Early Childhood Studies (L2/3). Examples include exploring child development, learning how to improve hygiene practices, or becoming more knowledgeable about the provision of early childhood services and community organisations within our town.

For those who left school without qualifications we offer an opportunity to improve their literacy, numeracy and digital skills by designing programmes of learning for contexts that are of interest to them, including those mentioned above. Examples include arts and crafts such as tukutuku and harakeke for special occasions, and where applicable we encourage them to formalise part or all of their learning by working towards a certificate on the National Qualifications Framework. Most readily accept the opportunity offered to gain learning credits.



Community learning support

TPOK was able to be launched quickly because we had formed a partnership and positive relations with the Opotiki Māori Women's Welfare League. They generously assisted us in purchasing much needed teaching resources and gave us additional finance to cover the fees of women who had little to spare for study. In planning to meet the needs of our women, we draw on the support of community groups such as the League, Eastbay REAP, Opotiki Quota Club, Woodlands Cottage Crafts Group and others, to help when needed in the delivery of programmes. They do this by sharing their resources, lifelong learning skills, and knowledge in tikanga Māori, education, social welfare, business mentoring, leadership, hauora, arts and crafts.



Lisa Kelly from Ngai Tai Iwi Services and expectant mother Denyse Moana learning about what it means to be a woman – the gourd representing a womb / being hapu / responsibility for the future

In this way our women are able to interface on a regular basis with women who are positive role models within our community. All are invaluable in helping our women become more accepting of themselves –

first as Māori women, then as mothers and then as learners. In this way the potential for achievement has become the shared responsibility of a much larger group of people outside of ACE who share a common vision – strong families and strong communities.

“We are like new shoots seeking growth in new directions, exploring other pathways, taking responsibility for our own mental, physical, emotional and spiritual needs” (TPOK group 2009).

What’s in a name?

The name ‘Te Puawaitanga o Te Kakano’ (TPOK) itself was chosen by the women themselves and hints at some of the philosophies embedded in the different types of TPOK courses, all of which form part of an initial and much bigger discussion about the nature of learning, and how the women see themselves as learners in a supportive environment. The picture on our cover is part of the pamphlet that currently informs women about our TPOK programmes. For those who participated in its development it represents the symbiotic relationship that can exist between an older learner; the tuakana mother plant (the fully grown fern), and a younger learner; the teina pikopiko (frond shoots).



83-year-old Māori Women’s Welfare League member Mary Collier presenting April Fidler with her First Aid certificate during Adult Learners Week



A Māori metaphor captures the essence of supportive learning using the age old concept of tuakana and teina

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In finding metaphors to describe themselves as learners and women, our wahine are taught that our Māori myths acknowledge that we are of the Earth, and that for us to grow we need to be nurtured, and learn in ways of 'knowing' that acknowledge and respect such relationships. Our women are taught by their tuakana that these are the sorts of metaphors that give learning meaning and purpose. More importantly, they are metaphors about relationships – with themselves and with others

"I am the seed that bears fruit. When nurtured with tons of love and compassion, guidance and patience I will sprout" (TPOK group 2008)



Older women role model life-long learning

What have we learned?

We have learned that it is possible to adapt models of participative management to meet the needs of learners in another education arena, when the underpinning values and philosophies are aligned with those of our learners. To do so we need first to acknowledge where our Māori women are at in terms of their respective learning journeys:

- For some rural Māori women their 'life circumstances' mean they often need additional support to become engaged in learning
- Embedding spiritual values and cultural practices to which Māori women can relate is a necessity in helping them realise their learning purpose and potential
- Māori women respond well to older Māori women who have credibility in their eyes and to whom they are able to relate either culturally or socially
- Learning to be seen as more than just a mother is important in helping Māori women learners find themselves and their voices



Group working together on a parenting unit of work.



League member Doreen McCokindale and young mum Serena Linstead sharing ideas at a celebratory luncheon

Beyond our learners we have learned:

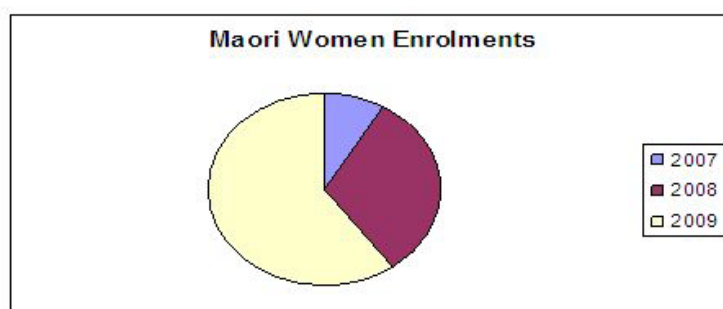
- Māori models of participative management require a change in thinking about who 'owns' ACE programmes, and how they are planned and delivered
- Community organisations, such as the League, that share similar visions and aspirations are assets just waiting to be used
- Use of participative management models embedded in principles of Māoritanga require staff who have a knowledge of these things
- Strong community networks outside education need to be nurtured
- Government departments need to work together more closely for the good of their individual clients (learners), otherwise learners are likely to give up on pursuing their learning dreams and remain on the 'unemployment wheel'.
- Additional funding support is necessary to enable participation in present and ongoing learning
- Management of learning programmes needs to be flexible enough to reflect the contextual approach required by adult learners who have busy lives centred on the raising of children and part-time work

More important, we have learned that when you share information and the responsibility for the management of ACE in the way PMM suggests, positive things happen. Former ways of delivering ACE need to change and become more flexible to accommodate the flow of creativity and synchronicity that often comes from group discussions. We have also learned that such dialogue needs to be open and ongoing as learners' experiences and views change with each bit of new learning and personal insight.

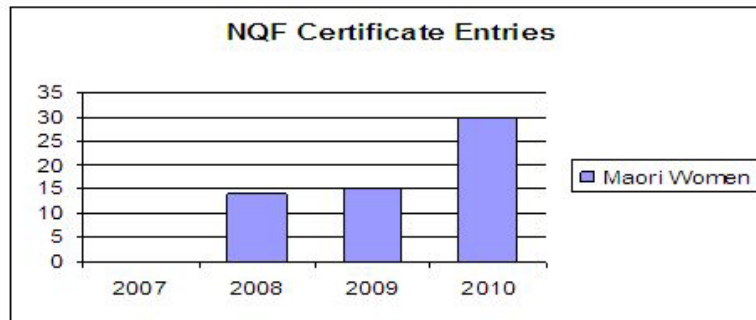
How successful have we been?

We believe we have been very successful over the last three years in re-engaging rural Māori women into learning. Our annual reports show:

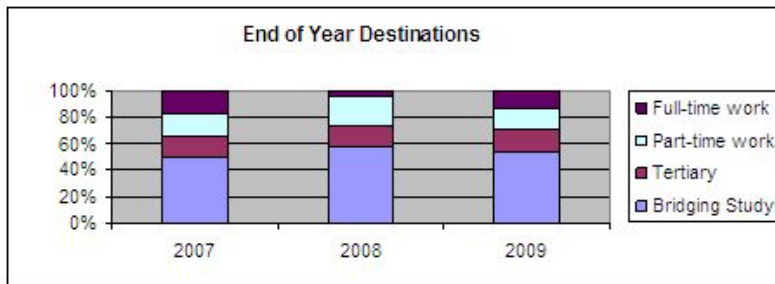
- Enrolment numbers have quadrupled over three years from five women in 2007 to 28 women in 2009.



- Numbers of women enrolled in formal learning (NCEA) have quadrupled from 7 women in 2008 (before 2008 ACE provision was nonexistent) to 30 women in 2010.



- Forty percent of women are returning for further bridging study after a year with us.



- Those who have gone on to tertiary study continue to do well with ongoing support provided on a case-by-case basis (completions data not available yet)
- The Māori Women's Welfare League have set up a tertiary scholarship to assist Māori women with tertiary study
- Our initial TPOK programme has been modified and duplicated in three other organisations in the Eastern Bay of Plenty



A group of women receiving ongoing study support

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Acknowledgements

This work is dedicated to all the women involved in Te Puawaitanga o Te Kakano, those ‘womb-men’ who have taken the brave step back into learning, along with those who continue to support them.

“Ko te pae tawhiti kimihia kia mau, ko te pae tata whakamaua kia tina”
As you seek the distant horizon, hold fast to that which you treasure.

Tena ra koutou katoa.



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