

Aotearoa New Zealand and Reggio Emilia; The space between: August 23rd 2010

This is the second evening of conversations in the series and brought to us three special people from Mana Tamariki Kohanga Reo in Palmerston North. Brenda Soutar, Miria Wipaki and Sherry Centeno. At Mana Tamariki, the whanau make a commitment to speak to their child and all other children enrolled at all times in Maori. The kohanga is part of the whole school; incorporating a kura for students until they leave after year 13. Mana Tamariki celebrated its 20th birthday this year in January. The kohanga was the first part established in 1990. The school began in 1995 as a homeschool and grew into a kura kaupapa Māori (Māori immersion state funded primary school). The wharekura, secondary department followed in 1999. In June 2007, Mana Tamariki settled into its permanent home - a purpose built environment all under one roof. The architects were encouraged to study the architecture of the Reggio Emilia centres while ensuring the Mana Tamariki building remained Maori.

Brenda, Miria and Sherry visited Reggio Emilia in April this year. Brenda has been to Reggio on another occasion. Just before leaving for Reggio, the whanau of Mana Tamariki developed their 10 year strategic plan and this has laid down an important foundation for the dialogue that they have been having since coming home.

One might ask,

'Why go to the other side of the world to be in
someone else's experience?'

They offered the thoughts of Mason Durie (2001)

"The strength may lie in the relationships that exist
between the pathways"

Three goals for Maori from Mason Durie - often called 'Durie's Goals':

- 1) to grow up as Maori
- 2) to grow up healthy
- 3) to participate in the world as a global citizen

The space between - leadership engages the space between the pathways. We work with Maori whanau and it's about creating relationships - if we don't create relationships, its worthless. The space between is also about making sense of what we are learning. At Mana Tamariki we are at a particular moment in time – when we decide about experiences for our Kaiako, we are thoughtful about grouping people together so that

they can get the most out of the experience (this is a similar notion to Reggio). Our work is about the survival of te reo (the language) and tikanga (culture practices). From our view, we see the Pākehā effort has been about building an identity relevant to this context here in Aotearoa NZ. The space between is where we can engage, share and reflect.

The Reggio Experience

- R.E. is embedded in the history that has been unfolding in Italy for thousands of years. By living in the culture for a week, it made it easier to understand where R.E. came from - focus on the family, the elegant clothing, the bicycles, piazzas and cafes etc. You really need to be there to understand. It's like an Italian trying to understand the powhiri or Maori culture while never having been here or experiencing these in real life.

Aotearoa/NZ

- since the Treaty of Waitangi, Maori have been focusing on survival
- our effort has been about who we are as a nation. It's been about growing up and we are not quite there yet

Mana Tamariki strategic plan 2010 - 2020 has three strands; one for whanau, teachers and children. On their return, Miria, Sherry and Brenda have asked themselves what they can take from Reggio to enhance Mana Tamariki and to assist towards their strategic goals.

Sherry, Miria and Brenda are leading the staff of Mana Tamariki towards 4 goals;

- the environment as the third teacher
- making learning visible
- strengthening relationships
- further defining our image of the child

The environment as the third teacher

- The environment is an expression of our values and what we believe about children. Mana Tamariki is first and foremost a Maori setting. In addition we encouraged our architects to study the architecture of the Reggio Emilia nursery schools and infant and toddler centres.
- The new building has lots of glass that creates features of light and transparency throughout. We focus on the value of welcoming so being able to see in says, "Come in" to the observer.
- The environment as the third teacher - we have to be constantly articulating our values in our space - i.e. **out loud**. The environment has to go along with your philosophy
- We've been reading 'Making Learning Visible'. When we put anything up on the walls we ask why? What other ways could we do this?

Brenda offered a thoughtful story explaining that they had realised that as new kaiako had joined the kohanga they had not shared the values of the building with them. They then walked the kaiako through the building, giving explanations such as the relationships between the spaces and the importance of not blocking these connecting space with

things that that are put up on glass. The glass provides transparency and is a metaphor for openness.

The image of the child

At Mana Tamariki we have an image of the child as:

- a confident, competent, bilingual, bicultural child
- a child who exemplifies the hopes and aspirations of his or her people
- a child with a Maori world view, a child with connections with their ancestors
- a child who has a connectedness to her or his whanau, hapu, iwi. Their pepeha is a real thing, not just a piece of paper
- a child who has a pride in being Maori and a love of learning

‘What we believe about children, this becomes a determining factor in defining their social and ethical identity, their rights and the educational contexts offered to them.’
Rinaldi, 2006

- The raukura is the feather which adorns the hair = a symbol of leadership. Mana Tamariki hopes our children will become leaders in Maori language recovery by raising their own children as speakers of te reo Maori.
- Our community is tight and committed. Parents meet twice a term to focus on their children and their own learning.
- Question: what signals do we give about our image of the child - in OUR space?

The group discussed their image of the child beyond the notion of capable, confident and competent. Nan from Te puna Kohungahunga offered an important thought that **‘the tamariki’s wairua (spirit) is beyond their heights and size’**.

The Treaty

- Miria commented that there are 2 peoples in Aotearoa/NZ - Maori and non-Maori. The Treaty connects these 2 peoples in relationship. Our children need to know about this. At Mana Tamariki we teach them a song of the story of the Treaty – which incorporates some history such as the date it was signed. At Mana Tamariki, tino rangtiratanga (Maori self-determination) is also another key feature. Mana Tamariki is a Maori led initiative for Maori children and their whanau.
- All children are kaitiaki (caretakers) of the taonga (treasures) and we all have a role and responsibilities.
- All children need to know about culture and identity, as when they’re adults they’ll be dealing with such topics as the foreshore and seabed.
- For some children, their early childhood setting may be the only place they come into contact with things Maori so there is a huge responsibility on early childhood teachers to get it right.

At Mana Tamariki, we asked the children - 'What does it mean to be Maori?' 'What does it mean to be Pakeha?' so that we could assist them to further explore their ideas, build theories and define their own identities. The 2-yr-olds told us that if you speak Maori, you **are** Maori, even if you're not. If you speak Pakeha, you **are** Pakeha even if you are Maori. The older children understood more about how Maori ways of being and doing creates a space that is Maori. One of the four year old girls drew her image of being 'Maori' and 'Pakeha'. Maori was a little koru and Pakeha was a big koru. Her explanation was that there were more of Pakeha. The child thought that the park was both Maori and Pakeha in that when she goes to the park, she does Maori things (has kai, blesses the food) and when Pakeha go to the park, they do Pakeha things.

- Remember everything we're doing NOW is the legacy we leave for them.

Graduates from Mana Tamariki

We only have 8 graduates from the school so far. They're invited to contribute to a monthly newsletter

- one youth in Australia gets together weekly with other Kura Kaupapa youth to keep themselves strong with waiata, te reo, karakia etc.
- One graduate is doing law, & one current Year 13 student has been selected by Maori TV to be part of a cross-cultural TV programme - living with a family in Sth Africa
- 5 current students are in the kapahaka group that came first at the national championship

Every Maori child has a right to take pride in their heritage

Every child has the right to take pride in Maori

Creating a Maori world view for our tamariki.

We are strict about speaking only Te Reo to our children, and our world view is woven through everything:

- When tamariki learn their pepeha – it is a real thing for them and their family.
- When there's a baby being expected, the children hear the heartbeat and are told the creation story, and about Ruaumoko - Papatuanuku's youngest child.
- a special waiata is sung to the new babe when they are bathed in the centre - about the gods associated with the creation of humankind
- Gardening - lots of predawn ceremonies, a mauri stone placed in the ground; talking about how we're related to the plants genealogically, etc.

Spaces

For us there are many different spaces - the marae atea has a different role in communication to the whare nui.

Spiritual space - connects the past, future & present - these are ever present.

New spaces - happening all the time, because we are such a new nation we've never come together as Maori and Pakeha in this moment of time. There are new issues, new contexts, new moments in time, new peoples coming together.

Our role as educators is to assist tamariki and whanau to go between the pathways (the space between).

Brenda left us with questions for us to think and talk about over the next month. We will begin our next sessions with these.

What regular opportunities are there in your centre for children and their families to go between the pathways?

What regular opportunities could there be in your centre for children and their families to go between the pathways?