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A Practice of Educational Mindfulness

Ka mua, Ka muri - Looking Back to Move Forward: Culturally Conscious Support for Kaimahi/Tauira as Whole Persons in the Educational System

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Abstract

Education and culture are an inseparable pair that have fascinated many scholars including the primary author of this article to explore. But what does this really look like in the tertiary learning advisor's role, and the practice of a Māori kuia, kaitiaki of their Marae, who also provides pastoral care to students and staff? This article re-presents the authors' practice of whole-persons approach to student success, which they delivered at tertiary learning advisors' conferences in NZ and overseas in 2022. In our practice as a learning advisor and a pastoral care giver at the tertiary institute, we naturally (due to our cultural beliefs and upbringing) perceived of ourselves and students as whole persons. We call our practice "Educational Mindfulness"- acknowledging all participants in education are teachers/students on their life journey of fulfilment – where education is a phase they go through as part of their journey, alongside their homeland with original cultures, and the land they stand on right now - Aotearoa, NZ; as all play a part in their success. The culture of the land kaimahi/tauira are standing on connects their past with their future. This article introduces Māori and ancient Chinese ways of whole-person education and provides readers with examples of mindfulness education in practice, including its transformative impact on students. It is hoped that fellow learning advisors will gain a deeper

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understanding through the examples which demonstrate what Educational Mindfulness is, and apply this approach to their work as well. It argues that culture is an integral part of education because it is an integral part of identity for educators and students alike, and education is supported by the culture of the land where the education takes place.

Keywords: Educational mindfulness, culture-conscious practice, transformative impact, future education, marae-based education, si-shu

Education and culture share an intertwined relationship that has, and continues to, inspire scholars, researchers, policy makers and the like, to constantly explore and examine. This is evident in the number of publications listed via a Google Scholar search on 2 June 2024, using the keywords "Education and Culture" (across all years of publication), which found 8,170,000 journal articles. This was reduced to 36,500 when the time parameter was set to 'since 2024'. Another Google Scholar search on 2 June 2024 using the keywords of "Mindfulness in Education" found 16,600 returns, all published since 2024. This indicates that the authors of this article are not alone in their interest in exploring the concept of mindfulness in education. As kaimahi in tertiary education in Aotearoa New Zealand, we (authors) practice and advocate for a culturally conscious approach to education that we have termed as 'mindful education', a practice in tertiary student support that sees both students and educators as cultural beings. It acknowledges that our work as educators takes place on a land that is rich with culture, which when consciously acknowledged in practice, can nurture and foster both the learning and the learners. To share our mindful education or our practice of educational mindfulness, we begin with definitions to set the boundaries of what we refer to. Then we provide readers with examples of the two cultures that we embody and the whole-person concept in our respective cultural education, while also acknowledging the practise of another culture, i.e. Pacific culture, in the tertiary learning advisors' practice at the institute where we both teach. This article is part of the primary author's (Hua Dai) on-going investigation since 2012, which is centred on the concept of the 'whole-person in education', and concludes with success stories using educational mindfulness, i.e. consciously using cultural knowledge and practice to support students' success.

Definitions of 'education', 'culture' and 'mindfulness in education' and the authors' belief in practicing 'mindfulness in education' in their respective roles as kaimahi/educators

According to the Online Etymology Dictionary (2023), the word 'education' originates from the Latin roots: Edu-care: to train, to bring up, or to mould through the process of participating in education; and edu-cere: to foster, incite or call forth (the potentials hidden in learners). Both definitions of education imply that there is potential in learners to be called forth or trained or moulded into a new shape through education; and that there is a process of training, moulding, or drawing out that potential into a new form of being in the learner. According to the authors, that process of training, moulding and drawing out or drawing forth the learner's potential is what education is about. Ancient China has a proverb comparing education to growing trees: "十年树木, 百年树人 "-it takes a decade to grow trees (to maturity) and a century to grow people. This is China's philosophical origin regarding their educational practice.

Online Cambridge Dictionary and Online Oxford Learners Dictionary both refer to culture as "the way of life" and both agree that culture is defined as "the general customs and beliefs of a particular group of people at a particular time" (Cambridge University Press, 2023; Oxford University Press, 2023). Neito (2022) proposes that culture is a social, political, and economic construct that evolves through time and differs due to the geographic, economic and philosophical situations of any particular group of people. In this article, we believe that all participants in education are cultural beings. In other words, we all come from our own diverse cultures, and we embody our own cultures when we begin our educational journey, even in our own countries of origin. But when the reduction takes place in different countries, or in a society of multi-cultures such as Aotearoa NZ, for many international students studying at the authors' institute, culture as an inherent factor in education becomes even more pronounced. Thus, our culturally conscious approach to education provides opportunities for learners to grow and develop as human beings on their life's journey, of which education plays a critical role in training, moulding, and shaping up who they are becoming.

As a learning advisor, the primary author works with their Pacific and Māori colleagues to promote and educate their students in a manner that is aligned with their respective cultural perspectives on health and family. For example, talanoa is a cultural

practice offered by Pacific learning advisor colleagues, which I (Hua Dai) have learnt from my colleagues and use in my professional practice to support Pacific students. I have also collaborated with a Pacific colleague in conducting research, conference presentations, and publishing journal articles in 2022. As well as co-presenting at a conference with my Māori colleague on 'personality types in education' in 2023. Today, this level of collaboration with both colleagues is on-going. This article focuses on Chinese and Māori traditional education because these are the two cultures we authors embody. Also, the data collected stem from our direct support with students for this action-based research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and carried out by me (Hua Dai) in a series of exploration of whole-person in education, of which "personality types in education" is my current interest.

Mindfulness in education is a concept explored by many scholars. It has been used to refer to the practice of meditation, breathwork, etc. in order to improve students' concentration, mental capability for processing learning materials for increased academic productivity, and more (Buchanan, 2017; Leland, 2015). However, the term mindfulness, in the context of this article, refers to the practice of educators' being mindful of the cultural factors of participants in education, for the purpose of improving students' wellbeing and enabling them to overcome difficulties to actualize their aspirations in education. Moreover, this has been a long-standing tradition in the educational practice of Māori and Chinese educators.

The whole-person practice in Māori and ancient Chinese education

Traditional Māori education facilitates learning by making it relevant to learners; starting from where a learner stands and moves, and with a clear sense of identity and connection within and without in the community (Penetito, 2008). Other scholars of Indigenous education also advocate relation-based and place-based education that is culturally responsive, in relation with their hapu or iwi; they ~~make~~ argue that the culturally responsive education is relevant for all marginalized learners within the mainstream educational system in order for those learners to achieve educational equity (Bishop, 2019). This might include teaching/learning via wānanga on the marae, which resembles Lynda Toki's earlier experiences during her formative years. Those approaches have, embedded in them as their natural outcome, the conscious awareness of where the kaimahi/tauira are, and what they are faced with. In other words, Lynda's approach to teaching is one that

recognises students' wairua and life-situations and utilises this to facilitate deeper learning experiences, so does Hua's approach, hence their "Mindful Education".

Lynda started participating in the tribe's political debates on their Marae, from 3 years of age alongside her ancestors - Nō Maniapoto. Lynda was contracted, at age 7, by her great grandmother to carry on the healing work and was promised a payment of an actual 'logging truck'. Today, Lynda has the biggest logging truck, i.e., their wharenui Ngākau Māhaki – which she also sees as a vehicle of knowledge carrying staff and students from the past to the future. This is the Māori traditional whole-person way of knowing and doing; it is Lynda's personal example of ako-the intergenerational teaching and learning. Also, in my own earlier years as a PhD student, I attended a wānanga where I sat next to other doctoral students from all years and all phases of their research. More to the point, I found myself sitting next to Lynda, participating in the discussions of our mindfulness practice for this journal article and our presentations. Consequently, together we experienced ako where teaching and learning are interwoven.

Ancient Chinese education agrees with both aspects of the western etymology of education: it fosters, nurtures, and leads out the desired behaviour from learners through their subtly shifting and quietly adapting and transforming in the process of education. The early enlightenment education is done through teachers reciting passages of classic texts to pupils in class for the students to learn by heart the teachings. One of the well-known early Chinese enlightenments material 三字经-the three-character classics teaches children at the enlightenment age (equivalent to school age in modern time) the culturally and socially desired behaviours, in which the morals or principles of life are embedded in the characters or stories and carried in the idioms, which make up the content of the book. Children learn these verbal teaching by heart, and thus the learning acquired becomes slow-releasing fertilizer that nurtures the development and growth of the learner through their life course.

I was self-taught to learn this by heart, out of interest of what my grandparents were taught: 人之初, 性本善，…, 昔孟母，擇鄰處。子不學，断机杼. … The teaching does not only enlighten the children to a word-supported communication system but also imparts moral teachings-to 潜移默化 subtly shift and quietly transform children's behaviours, thus ushering them or leading them out to refined social beings and giving them the wisdom to keep shifting and transforming themselves as they go deeper and deeper into life, while growing up to their adulthood. The story embedded in the text: 昔孟母，擇鄰處，子不

學，断机杼 refers to the four-character idiom of 孟母三迁 which tells the story of the mother of Mencius (372 BC-289 BC), an ancient Chinese philosopher, contemporary to Confucius. Mencius' mother chooses to resettle three times to a peaceful neighbourhood to give the young Mencius a good social environment to grow up in and become a fine learned man; when he played truancy to visit her, the mother took a pair of scissors to cut the fabric she was weaving on the loom to show her son what running away from his school could result in his learning journey (Zhu-Zi-Bai-Jia, 1910). This is the traditional educational system operated in China before scholars like Confucius set up private schools - an ancient educational system where kaimahi and tauira stayed on campus together, engaging in teaching and learning through shared experiences in life, including decision-makings in life situations, and demonstrating a holistic approach to whole person in education. Si-shu (private schools) are Confucian schools where scholars lived on the home ground of the students or in a village accommodation to teach. The teaching/learning is through children learning by heart, without a textbook, the classic texts orally taught by the teacher and through children observing the living-out the examples taught by their teacher, while also asking questions where needed to help them develop and evolve into their own beings. Both Lynda and I fully accept and practice in alignment with these philosophical approaches to education.

Our educational mindfulness in Aotearoa NZ

In December 2022, Lynda and I considered the ANZSSA's conference theme of "focusing further forward – making lasting and sustainable impacts on students and our institutions". We reflected on the practices we each had developed in alignment with our respective cultural practice and philosophical beliefs in education and decided to present, in collaboration, our approach. I, on behalf of Lynda, presented nationally in NZ and internationally at ATLAANZ and ANZSSA. The presentations were well received, and I was invited to share it to a wider audience for colleagues in education across the globe to engage with the concept and practice of our "Educational Mindfulness"; hence this article.

Due to our belief that participants in education are all cultural beings, thus making culture an integral part of the process of education, our mindful education acknowledges both the potentials of learners as cultural beings and the process of shaping, moulding, and bringing up the learners with their potentials. There is also an acknowledgement of what learners bring

with them when they enter education: i.e., what and who they have been at the beginning of the educational process, and what and who they are, and are becoming throughout their education. Educational Mindfulness requires all involved in the education process to remain mindful of who they are and where they are from, before and during their engagement with education; thus including the land and the culture of the land where their education is taking place at the present.

Lynda and I, of our own volition, without any participation or acknowledgement of our institute, acknowledge, at each appointment, who we – the teachers/students are; where we come from: our homelands, and the land we are on right now, Aotearoa, New Zealand. As whole persons, we and our students all bring what we were, to what we are becoming, to our educational journey in Aotearoa. The culture of the land provides both teachers and students endless nurturing for our learning and development. Culturally conscious support in ~~their~~ our practice as a teacher through pastoral care and academic support has had lasting and positive impacts on our students, which is evidenced in the examples in the following sections of this article. The information about students' experiences of our practices is based on anecdotal feedback they provided to us in the course of our work.

Advocating a culturally conscious and aware education-Educational Mindfulness and its positive outcome with students' success stories

A mindful education simply requires educators to take into consideration, the confluence of the cultures and origins of both kaimahi and tauira, including the hosting culture of Aotearoa NZ and its educational system which interplays with everyone's aspirations, and goals as kaimahi/tauira. For example, I have been learning Te Reo Māori as well as participating the Karanga Wānanga since 2019 to deepen my understanding of Te Ao Māori and better support Māori students. This has been beneficial for my ability to support tauira more effectively, which has also been well received by students due to the trust developed through the conversations of cultures. This approach only requires educators to be mindful of cultures and the effect that cultures can have on the learning journey. It does not require all educators to learn another language. But showing some interest in students' cultures, i.e. starting each appointment with a short acknowledgement or conversation on the cultures the students and the kaimahi embody, will make the learning and teaching much more effective for both. Furthermore, graduates of our educational mindfulness can best serve the multi-culture

community they reside in. The joy of learning and developing in a culturally conducive environment will flow on from our graduates' work out into the community.

This project and article have come from the interactions between Lynda and myself over a five-year period on our cultural identity exploration. I first sought Lynda in 2019, requesting her support as a cultural supervisor for professional registration with the New Zealand Association of Counsellors. The first session was creating my pēpeha-recital of genealogy. However, it was difficult at the beginning because I only wanted to include my independent new life in New Zealand and thereby, disown my past, omitting the parts that reminded me of the struggles life had presented to me when growing up with a controlling mother in China. Fortunately, Lynda helped me weave together both worlds that I belonged to: my heritage Chinese culture and my adopted culture of Aotearoa, New Zealand, whose tāngata whenua-Māori culture I had begun embracing increasingly through my learning of Te Reo and Te Ao Māori, including participating in the Karanga Wānanga – a Māori women school to preserve the cultural heritage and the welcome calling at pōwhiri. This acknowledgement, in the pēpeha, of my culture of origin, together with my adopted Māori and Pākeha culture through education, has proved to be an extremely supportive and nourishing experience. Moreover, it keeps my world whole and coherent.

For both of us, as we go about our work in the world, we know where we come from and where we are standing. We know we belong in the grander scheme of things. Developing this sense of belonging, has made it possible for me to feel grounded while continuing to do my inner healing work. The process of creating a pēpeha, i.e., accepting who I was, who I have been, who I am now and who I am becoming, gives me a good starting point, as a whole person, to work with students and interact with colleagues in Aotearoa New Zealand. I also explore and draw on Chinese ancestral knowledge and wisdom to guide me and those I support on their life journeys. As a whole person, supporting students with a whole-person approach allows all to be grounded in their own cultures while meeting others in the culture of the land.

Students found this approach more relaxing, and nurturing, simply because they are accepted and seen as whole persons, i.e. every part of them are in the education process. Hence, the students' responses were positive and encouraging. For example, I supported a year-two nursing student to pass their placement after they had failed twice and was on a final warning. As an international student, they carried the emotional trauma they experienced in their

culture of origin and found it hard to adapt to the new way of interacting with their classmates and patients at their placement. They studied hard and passed their academic assessments but failed their placements due to a lack of cultural understanding regarding Aotearoa New Zealand workplaces and socialisation practices, which made it difficult for the student to make the necessary adjustments and shifts. However, my skills and understanding of other holistic approaches to human conditions included Psychosynthesis – a psychospiritual framework that sees human beings as experiencers of mind, body and feelings and each is a centre of consciousness and will (Palmer, 2010) at any given time. Therefore, through regular one-on-one appointments with the student, I was able to support them in their journey to becoming conscious of the whole person they were and the whole persons their colleagues, preceptor (aka. medical supervisor), and patients are. For example, I worked with the student to broaden their awareness and understanding of other cultures and ways of socialising within the context of workplace practice. To do this, we engaged in multiple activities, which typically involved roleplaying scenarios and conversations about self-development and growth. Eventually, the student found it easier to engage and socialise with colleagues and passed their placement. They further passed their state exam to graduate as a qualified and registered nurse in New Zealand.

Likewise, Lynda has also supported students' transformation in a culturally conducive educational environment through her pastoral care. Lynda's approach to supporting students relates directly to the spiritual healing she was contracted into by her great grandmother at a young age to continue practicing. While not all support staff have access to such practice methods, this spiritual healing is a cultural heritage that Lynda received as it was passed on from her ancestors. This too is an integral part of her education as she was mentored and trained by her elders. She, as kaitiaki of the Marae and pastoral care for staff and students, has practiced with the full trust and support of the institute she works within.

The first example comes from Lynda's work with an international student who was a Physics/Science teacher in their own country and came to New Zealand to learn English. In the initial pastoral support sessions, Lynda heard the student's love for children. So, every Saturday that semester, Lynda brought her three grandsons to learn maths and science in exchange for teaching English to this student. Thus, the student learnt English in a familiar setting as a teacher. While not all staff may have young people to bring into work, and institutional policies may prohibit doing so, such a practice reminds us of the significance of

ako in the context of advising and support practices. This ako style of learning/teaching not only helped the student learn English, but also gave them a sense of belonging as it involved spending time with children similar to how they had done in their own country with students. The student is now a Kura Kaupapa (schools that have Māori language as medium for instruction) Science Teacher with proficient English and Te Reo Māori.

Lynda has also supported a nursing student who failed their practicum. They were said to have demonstrated an inability to show empathy to their preceptor at placement. The comment had caused much distress for this student. Through conversations, Lynda identified an early life trauma, where it is customary for the student's culture of origin to discourage showing emotions. Lynda invited the student to the marae with permission of their Head of School. She gave the student the responsibility to care and manaakitanga (support) new nursing students at their Orientation Pōwhiri. Being put in charge and given responsibilities at the pōwhiri, with Lynda's trust and support, had helped the student find their self-confidence. In turn, their peers' needs were met with a caring and attentive manner. The peers' praises and thanks further encouraged the student to open-up to others in their world. They passed their practicum and are now working in their dream job at a Nursing and Rest Home. Being an only child, the student's success has not only prepared them for a promising future but also given much comfort to their family in their country of origin.

The last example is of Lynda's support of another international student. This student was failing due to being distracted and did not want to continue their study. Through a conversation, Lynda identified that the student was being influenced by external issues. The student confided that their partner was taking them to court. In the Hauora (wellbeing/spiritual healing) session, Lynda sensed the presence of an ancient Goddess, and she interpreted it as having come to correct an imbalance. After hearing about the Goddess, who was of the same cultural origin as the student's partner, the partner changed their accusation and admitted to lying and hence dropped charges against the student. This resulted in the student's changing their direction: they left their partner and continued their study to graduation. The student has become an agent of change and is now working as an advocate for social justice. In addition, our article acknowledges the unique effectiveness of Lynda's approach to enhancing students' wellbeing and their education outcome, as well as the relevance of mindful education to the wider communities that learners belong to and graduate to serve.

Conclusion

With our practice of educational mindfulness in our respective roles, students are not only viewed as students who have come to the institute for learning, but also as whole persons with their life aspirations, goals and problems as human beings who keep developing and evolving in the world. Also, in our professional practice, we, as whole persons, see it as our personal responsibility to hold an open space that supports and fosters the development of students in their learning journeys. As highlighted in the examples above, these students' experiences have had a long-lasting and transformative effect on their education and future outcomes. For us, education involved engaging these students in a process that drew forth their potential and moulded them into the skilful and resilient graduates, who were conscious of, and culturally mindful of the communities they were a part of, with their maturity and a culturally conscious approach in life.

To practice educational mindfulness, we believe that learning advisors only need to be mindful of the fact that they and their students are all cultural beings. Therefore, learning about their cultures at the beginning of the support could help advisors better understand the students' struggle and thus, able to provide even more effective academic support.

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tātou, katoa.

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