

# Cultural relationships for responsive pedagogy

## *A bicultural mana ōrite perspective*

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### KEY POINTS

- Culturally responsive pedagogy is understood and implemented in many ways.
- Understanding the nature of effective relationships is foundational.
- The metaphors of partnership and mana ōrite can each contribute to our understandings about *learning* relationships.
- Building from learners' own prior knowledge and experiences is essential.
- Some things that we do in the name of cultural responsiveness may appear quite differently to our learners.
- This situation is often embedded in power relationships: The question of who thinks they must—or indeed have the right to—define the other.
- Understanding what these relationships and this pedagogy are not can sometimes help clarify what they are.

This article responds to increasing school and cross-sector interest surrounding culturally responsive pedagogy and the multiple ways that it is being discussed and understood. We try to bring clarity to how we have come to understand this term both as grounded in cultural relationships and as responsive to the prior knowledge and experiences of the students themselves. These shared understandings come from many years of working and learning alongside teachers, leaders, students, and whānau. These learning relationships, and pedagogy, are discussed from a bicultural, mana ōrite perspective to bring a practical, theoretical, and unique Aotearoa New Zealand perspective to this work.

## Introduction

Although culturally responsive pedagogy currently holds cross-sector interest in the context of Investing in Education Success,<sup>1</sup> it is understood and defined differently across Aotearoa New Zealand, and indeed the world. Sometimes it appears that there are as many definitions as there are people talking about it.

This article presents what we—a group of teachers and researchers—have learnt after working in this area for nearly twenty years. One member began as part of a research whānau working in the areas of literacy and behaviour with Māori students, their families, and primary schools. We met and began working together in Te Kotahitanga,<sup>2</sup> we remained throughout Kia Eke Panuku<sup>3</sup> and we continue today, as Poutama Pounamu,<sup>4</sup> to work together in understanding and clarifying this pedagogical approach as part of Kāhui Ako.

In this article, we theorise our renaming of the culturally responsive space as cultural relationships for responsive pedagogy and, as teachers, provide examples of how these relationships and this pedagogy can live and breathe in classrooms. We begin by focusing on the types of cultural relationships which we believe are important to learning relationships, and we continue by discussing responsive pedagogies that such interpersonal relationships can promote. We conclude by bringing relational and responsive pedagogy together and saying what we now believe after years of working with schools—what such pedagogies are, and what they are not.

## Cultural relationships

The Treaty of Waitangi became the founding document of New Zealand when it was signed

by Māori and the Crown in 1840. The Treaty promised these two groups of signatories partnership, protection, and full participation in all the benefits offered by the Crown. The relational intent of the Treaty of Waitangi was understood by many iwi as *mana ōrite*. This, as a metaphor for interdependent relationships, brings responsibilities to both groups to maintain the mana of the other, and understand the mana of both as ōrite. In English, this relationship has been translated as a partnership, however, the parameters of this partnership have continued to be defined by the majority partner. Although Māori were compelled to learn the ways of the coloniser through policies of assimilation (Bishop & Glynn, 1999), this also came at the cost of the reciprocal benefits that would have been available to non-Māori. Furthermore, it continues to perpetuate ongoing inequity across a range of social indexes for Māori (Office of the Auditor General, 2012).

The process of learning to engage within such a bicultural relationship within our schools is an iterative process that continues as more voices become part of the conversation. For the first time, Māori students in Te Kotahitanga shared what would effectively engage them in learning (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). This was not dependent on the ethnicity of the teacher, but it was dependent upon how teachers related to them and what teachers did. A synthesis of their theorising became known as the Effective Teaching Profile (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003) and was to influence related initiatives including *Tātaiako* (Ministry of Education, 2011). It was expected that when teachers implemented this profile in classrooms they would enact a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations. Bishop and Berryman (2006) defined such a pedagogy as contexts for learning where:

- power is shared
- culture counts
- learning is interactive and dialogic
- connectedness is fundamental to relations
- there is a common vision of excellence for Māori in education.

In the beginning phases of Te Kotahitanga, many teachers espoused the view that “relationships are central”, but tended to focus more on aspects of the pedagogy that they found more familiar and accessible. Māori-related iconography, such as the date in Māori, began to appear in classrooms. However, applying a power-sharing framework in ways that were interactive and dialogic was not for the faint hearted. Challenging and changing the traditional top-down model of transmission teaching was not easy. However, Alton-Lee’s (2015) evaluation of Te Kotahitanga Phase 5 showed for the first time the significant benefits across all schools that such a pedagogy was capable of achieving both in closing the gaps and raising the results for all.

Within Kia Eke Panuku in 2014 we knew how to build iteratively from what we had learnt about pedagogy but, given we only had a 3-year time frame in which to work with schools, we understood we would have to accelerate the shifts if we were to make a difference. Working with the refreshed *Ka Hikitia* strategy (Ministry of Education, 2013) and more closely with school leaders (Berryman, Eley, Ford, & Egan, 2016), we continued to frame the principles of this pedagogy within metaphors from te ao Māori. We also incorporated evidence-informed decision making into our principles so that leaders and teachers would begin testing the effects of their teaching and learning programmes against their students’ responses. Within Kia Eke Panuku, culturally responsive and relational pedagogy (Kia Eke Panuku, n.d.b) was understood as contexts for learning in which:

- our students, their whānau and our colleagues are treated in the same way we would want them to treat ourselves or members of our own family
- we value each other as whānau, collaborate and work as one for the common good, requiring us to share what we have including power, perceived or otherwise
- we respect and come to know who our students and their whānau are, where they come from and what their prior knowledge and cultural experiences are and what this means for our self and others
- the experiences and knowledge of our students and their whānau is foundational to “our” learning
- sense-making builds up over time, is dialogic, interactive, and ongoing
- decision making and practices are responsive to relevant people and to evidence
- we work interdependently
- our roles and responsibilities focus on the potential of learners—for Māori students this means enjoying and achieving education success as Māori. (Ministry of Education, 2013)

Today these concepts are increasingly being understood through the use of different Māori metaphors including whanaungatanga, mahitahi, kotahitanga, whakapapa, ako, wānanga, and kaupapa. However, only when the metaphors work in synergy and we move towards becoming a learner alongside our students and their whānau through responsive praxis can we learn how to bring these metaphors to life. Until we do, we risk appropriating the terms as rhetoric.

In seeking to establish relationships for learning under *Ka Hikitia*, teachers and leaders are challenged to reflect on the nature of those relationships. Are they relationships focused solely on each student’s academic success? Or is the student’s cultural identity and physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing also important? What do cultural relationships involve, and how would we recognise these in practice? For example, in line with the partnership intent of the Treaty of Waitangi, how have these relationships played out between Māori and non-Māori? And, furthermore, how would these relationships have played out within the relational principles of mana ōrite?

When we first encounter someone we do not know, a range of possible behaviours swing into action. Flora (2004) suggests that part of our first impression response is hardwired, but that is not the whole picture. Taught responses based on learnt patterns of behaviour also influence how we see the person in front of us in those first few seconds (Flora, 2004; Kahneman, 2011). Part of our initial response to meeting a stranger appears

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to be influenced by first impressions created by their physicality; for instance, their size, skin colour, dress, and facial expression. These first impressions lead to unconscious reactions based on our sense of whether they are more “like me” or “other”. For example, blame may be laid on individual students’ attributes developed as a result of their membership of a particular cultural group (Cummins, 1986). As Blank, Houkama, and Kingi (2016) contend:

The paradigm of unconscious bias helps explain patterns of discrimination... Māori children face significant barriers to achievement, which stem from negative stereotypes attached to Māori as a social group. (p.4)

Although these initial responses may be unconscious, what happens next is important when thinking about schools and classrooms. This is the point at which we have the agency to choose how to act and react, empower or disempower. Will we respond in ways that other people or, do we reach out and seek a stronger connection, that might be more akin to a familial-like, whanaungatanga relationship? For it is only through relationship that we come to know what is in each other’s heads, hearts, and inner beings, the “intrapersonal”. Within our theoretical understanding, learning as sense-making on both the intrapersonal (within the person) and the interpersonal (between people) plane is understood as situated not solely in the mind of the learner but located also within the social and cultural environment that contextualises the learner (Littleton and Mercer, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). Respect and courage are needed when entering into an ako relationship with someone who we perceive as other. It involves listening beyond the words and responding to the person in front of us rather than responding to our assumptions of who they might be.

We have often observed that, in their efforts to respond to a student’s culture, teachers fall into the trap

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of essentialisation in which they, as the professional and adult, determine what that culture is or isn’t, often by picking up the pieces that are most easily identified and they can make sense of. In schools this often plays out as bilingual signage, charter statements that acknowledge Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the use of pōwhiri to start the school year, or the ubiquitous kōwhaiwhai patterns around the whiteboard. This has meant that many efforts to be culturally responsive to, or for, Māori have, at best, been understood by Māori students as first steps or, at worst, tokenism (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). Shifting the focus from being responsive to the culture *of* others to developing and being part of cultural relationships *with* others, legitimates the aspects of culture that are less tangible but fundamental to the identity and wellbeing of all people. These are the things that lie beneath the surface in Hall’s (1976) iceberg model, such as expectations, thought processes, perceptions, notions of self, and values. For many Māori, these are the ways of being that have continued to be practised within the home, resisting marginalisation and assimilation. Cultural relationships benefit from our engagement with the metaphor *mana ōrite*. School leaders and teachers have an essential part to play in understanding and either perpetuating or disrupting traditional power relationships within the concept of partnership. Mana ōrite provides a different yet powerful position from which to seek solutions for relational engagement.

Cultural relationships require us to create spaces in which we must first listen to our students and their whānau. Such spaces open the opportunity for the sharing of prior knowledge and experiences, identities, aspirations, concerns, and connections (Berryman, Nevin, SooHoo, & Ford, 2015). They also allow each individual to determine whether they will engage in the dialogue or not. This points to the importance of trust and respect and the need to understand that developing such relational dialogic spaces (Berryman, SooHoo & Nevin, 2013; Berryman et al., 2015) takes time and commitment.

We believe educators working to create cultural relationships must:

- nurture mind, body, and spirit for the all-round development of students
- seek mana ōrite-type relationships with whānau for the wellbeing of students
- build relationships that support students’ mana and wellbeing
- respect each student’s physical and spiritual uniqueness
- value and nurture culture, language, and identity that honours and respects all people
- emphasise the importance of whakapapa so that students grow secure in the knowledge of their identity

- create a context for all students to pursue what inspires them and determine their own success
- centre the student within the learning in ways that respond to the student's interests, questions and inspiration
- value and legitimate culture and identity through the curriculum
- promote learning as an enjoyable and stimulating experience for students
- encourage students to explore new challenges and take risks in learning.

## Responsive pedagogy

Responsive pedagogy begins with listening—such that listeners are as actively engaged as the speaker in seeking to make their own sense of what is being said. It requires listeners to be attuned to both verbal and nonverbal messages, to defer judgement, and to formulate a response only when the speaker has finished.

Responsive pedagogy works from a place in which we, as teachers, believe in and enact our ability to effect change in our society through the realised potential of the future leaders we work alongside. It is a pedagogy that emerges from within a relational dialogic space (Berryman et al., 2013).

Dialogue is a two-way, dynamic interaction that opens the possibility for change in both ourselves and the contexts in which we teach and learn (Wink, 2011). To engage in dialogue, teachers must respect diversity and understand the potential for learning and growth through the exploration of those differences (Freire, 1998). Dialogue within responsive pedagogy requires relationships in which risk taking is encouraged, where there is no shame in being a “not knower” and where it is understood that everyone brings with them knowledge, ways of knowing, and experiences of value to share. Understood in this way, dialogue is foundational to responsive pedagogy; it is not simply a teaching technique or strategy.

Responsive pedagogy does not preclude any teaching and learning technique or strategy. As recent research has shown (Kahneman, 2011) there is value in a full range of activities, such as rote learning and repetition when developing cognitive function—just as “chalk and talk” has legitimacy. It is the over-reliance on any one strategy or approach which is problematic. As such, responsive pedagogy calls for both professional skills and adaptive expertise (Hatano and Inagaki, 1986; Timperley, 2013). Adaptive expertise is characterised by innovation and flexibility in the application of knowledge in response to new, diverse, or unique contexts or challenges; in

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other words, “the ability of educators to respond in flexible, context-sensitive and intelligent ways to novel situations that arise in their work” (Si'ilata, Le Fevre, Ell, Timperley, Twyford, & Mayo, 2015, p. 5). Furthermore, by bringing together adaptive expertise, responsive pedagogy, and strong cultural relationships with both students and their whānau (Berryman and Eley, 2017a; 2017b), learning for equity, excellence, and belonging can become a reality for Māori.

We understand educators working to enact responsive pedagogy:

- nurture relationships of care and connectedness between culturally located individuals
- value and legitimise multiple views of knowledge and ways of knowing
- recognise the potential in everyone
- identify and extend what students already know, understand, and can do
- engage students in the planning and evaluation of their own learning
- use a wide range of information or evidence, or both, to understand, monitor, and evaluate the strengths and needs of their students,
- position themselves as learners alongside other learners
- build connections between homes and school
- challenge established practice through critical reflection and iterative evaluation
- use a full spectrum of interactions and strategies appropriate for their students
- empower students to understand and transform their current realities.

Cultural relationships may be embedded in the metaphor of mana ōrite. In Table 1 we attempt to identify what effective cultural relationships look like, and what they do not look like. We also consider effective responsive pedagogy in the same way.



	What are <i>effective</i> cultural relationships, embedded in the metaphor of mana ōrite?	What are <i>ineffective</i> cultural relationships?
Whanaungatanga	Thinking about what you would want for your own child or whānau member and helping this play out for other people's children in your school.  Taking responsibility to provide care and support to students and then expecting the highest in terms of your combined endeavours.	Trying to be a friend or acting friendly without also being prepared to take responsibility for both the relationship and the outcomes.
Whakapapa	Working to know the student and their whānau, who they are, and what their experiences are. Being prepared to reciprocate by working to understand your own cultural identity, values, and assumptions and the way these can impact (both positively and negatively) your interactions and relationships with students and their whānau.	Assuming knowledge of the student and their whānau from an essentialist perspective (i.e., "They are Māori, so that means they ...")  Believing worthwhile learning only happens in formal education settings.
Kaupapa	Ensuring, through ongoing dialogue, and face-to-face meetings across multiple settings and with multiple groups, that what you want for your students' schooling is also what they and their whānau want as well.	Believing there is only one curriculum and one way to teach it.  Believing that traditional forms of consultation, such as newsletters, really work.  A school-mandated goal or vision determined without the voices of all stakeholders.
	What is <i>effective</i> responsive pedagogy?	What is <i>ineffective</i> responsive pedagogy?
Wānanga	Using a wide range of information including what you know and are still learning about the cultural context of your students to understand what a learner has in their "cultural toolkit" (Bruner, 1996) as the basis for determining their next steps.  A "one size fits one" approach for personalising learning.	Believing students come with no knowledge of the world or ways to make sense of it.  Using a single worldview approach to teaching and learning or a narrow set of strategies—a "one size fits all" approach
Ako	Taking reciprocal responsibility to learn from and teach each other.  Ensuring opportunities for students to question and learn from one another as well.  Finding ways to take advice from and learn from and with whānau.	Imposing your knowledge on others as a single truth.  Mining students and their whānau for information with no reciprocal benefit.
Mahi ngātahi	Asking students for their ideas about the learning contexts and being prepared to act accordingly.  Working together as one, collaborating to achieve common outcomes.	Giving away your power effectively absolving yourself of any responsibility in achieving common outcomes.

## Bringing the two together

Cultural relationships for responsive pedagogy is an "and/and" model such that both components are interdependent. Fundamental to this is the understanding that learning is not simply linked to relationships between people, but learning is deeply embedded in the types of relationships that exist between ourselves, our learners, and their whānau. It recognises that learning is not only a change inside individuals that prepares them to enter into new relationships, but rather learning is understood as the change in relationships with others that support them to better come to understand their world and their place in it (Bruffee, 1988). Learning such as this will better prepare students for their engagement with the 21st century, and with other communities within a global world.

Paramount in this pedagogical approach is ensuring that students are not only learning and achieving for the future but also that they are strong and secure in their cultural identity. We suggest that this is a state of *mauri ora*. Although this concept has layers of meaning, we draw on the theorising of Sir Mason Durie. Durie (2014, 2016) suggests *mauri ora* is demonstrated when a person is engaged in positive relationships with others, feels a sense of belonging, is spiritually and emotionally strong, and is positive and energetic. For Māori, this means that success enables them to walk confidently and with mana in the two worlds of Aotearoa New Zealand. As this senior Māori student explained:

For me it's being able to walk in both worlds—te ao Pākehā me te ao Māori (the Pākehā world and the Māori world); being able to balance them both; being able to implement them into your life; being able to recall the wisdom and tikanga (cultural customs and practices) of our tūpuna (ancestors) who we should never forget. They made us. They are us, and we are them. (Senior student, 2015, Whitiara Marae)

TABLE 1. CONSIDERING WHAT EFFECTIVE CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS AND RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY ARE AND ARE NOT

## Implications and conclusion

Bringing a unique mana ōrite perspective to education provides important opportunities for school leadership and governance to be transformative within the wider political and social sphere. Such a stance calls for action that seeks to transform the current dominant thinking within our education system through our daily classroom practices.

The catch-cry associated with culturally responsive pedagogies has been “it is all about relationships”. However, it is our experience that too often, little thought is given to the nature of these relationships. The risk of perpetuating such rhetoric is that the actions of well-intentioned teachers are received by Māori students as tokenistic and efforts to develop “partnerships” continue to maintain the dominant power differentials. As a way to conceptualise such relationships, mana ōrite presents leaders and teachers with an effective way of initiating and developing meaningful cultural relationships with their Māori students such that power to enhance the mana of the other can be a truly shared venture.

In positioning oneself within cultural relationships for responsive pedagogy we must resist the privileging of attaining standardised credentials as the single marker of success. We must also resist unconsciously creating a hierarchy of success in which academic achievement is of most value. Instead, we must broaden our thinking to encompass the cultural, spiritual, and physical wellbeing of our Māori students as potential future leaders in our bicultural nation. We can and we must all contribute if Aotearoa New Zealand is to become a more equitable society.

## Notes

1. Investing in Education Success (IES) is a Ministry of Education initiative that aims to simultaneously raise student achievement and provide further career opportunities for teachers and leaders. Communities of Learning / Kāhui Ako are seen as the main vehicle for this (Ministry of Education, 2017).
2. Te Kotahitanga was a research and professional development project that sought to raise Māori student achievement through the implementation of a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations and enable school leaders to provide the necessary support for them to do so (Ministry of Education, n.d.).
3. Kia Eke Panuku: Building on Success was a 3-year Ministry of Education (2013–2016) initiative that provided professional development to teachers, leaders and school communities in order to enact the principles within Ka Hikitia (Kia Eke Panuku, n.d.a).
4. <https://poutamapounamu.org.nz/about>

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