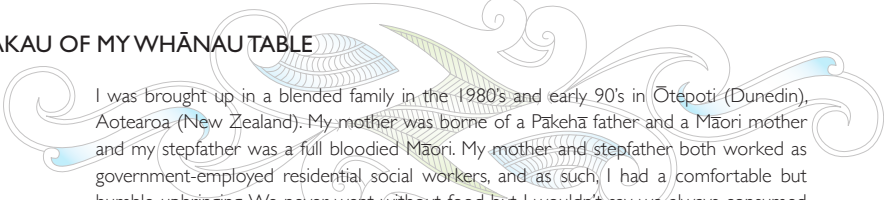


## PŪRĀKAU: EMBRACING OUR INDIGENOUS IDENTITY AND RECOGNISING THE EQUALITY OF THE IMPLICIT OTHER

Adrian Woodhouse

### PŪRĀKAU OF MY WHĀNAU TABLE



I was brought up in a blended family in the 1980s and early 90s in Ōtepoti (Dunedin), Aotearoa (New Zealand). My mother was borne of a Pakehā father and a Māori mother and my stepfather was a full bloodied Māori. My mother and stepfather both worked as government-employed residential social workers, and as such, I had a comfortable but humble upbringing. We never went without food but I wouldn't say we always consumed the finer cuts of meat. Our humble upbringing meant that we often ate humble pie, not literally, but a figurative assortment of discount proteins and convenient frozen vegetables.

Both of my parents worked shift work at the same youth residence and this allowed for one of them to always be at home, but at the same time, it was uncommon for both of them to be there at the same times. On those rare occasions that we were all at home together as a family, we would often feast collectively over a roasted piece of prized meat. The process of cooking, serving and eating the roast within our household had its own set of customs, rituals and associated social roles.

The roast was often on a Sunday and my mother would start the cooking process late in the morning, sometimes just after lunchtime, its timing all depended on the meat we were eating that night. The meat would be sprinkled with salt and pepper before being placed into a gentle oven to slowly cook for up to five hours. As the meat gently roasted away it would give forth its natural juices to the bottom of the pan. As it did so, we would take turns as children to bathe the meat in its own moist deliciousness. As is the way with a roast, some of its natural juices would escape the basting process and begin to caramelise on the bottom of the pan. These juices, combined with the rendered fat from the joint of meat, would eventually form the basis of a liquid that would be lacquered over the potatoes before they were returned to the roasting pan and cooked on their own. What resulted, was potatoes that were light and fluffy like little pillows but with a crispy exterior that was speckled with pockets of umami richness. Later on, as the meat and potatoes rested in a side dish, the ritual of making the gravy would begin.

As a young boy with an interest in food, I was often granted this responsibility within the family. It was part of the social ordering of the ritual, the first step on the pilgrimage before one gets handed the knife to the sacrificial lamb (leg). The roasting pan would be sprinkled with a dash of flour and returned to the warmth of the flame before the nourishing water from the cooked vegetables was added to the pan. This nutritious elixir of liquid would be brought to the simmer and seasoned with salt and pepper before finally being poured into the communal jug. On the odd occasion it lacked flavour, a sprinkle of bouillon or a teaspoon of Marmite might be added. What went into the sauce didn't matter to us at all, it just had to moisten the meat and nourish the soul.

When we sat at the table, the social conventions would once again play out their respective roles. As hungry children, we would wait patiently for the platters of the vegetables to be handed our way. We only took what we could eat because it was important within our family to respect the wants and needs of others. The meat was always rationed, and if any of it was left over, it became the focus for the following meal.

Once our dinner plates were filled, we would plunge our forks into the soft moist meat and stuff our mouths with its succulent richness. The first few mouthfuls were always the most enjoyable; the top pieces of meat would naturally be blanketed in the warmth of the silken thick gravy. As we ploughed our way through the food on the plate, we would find ourselves searching out for any lost remnants of gravy. Often, the lost gravy would be hidden under some cabbage, it would always be there, you just had to find the time to look around and find it. Eventually there would be no more gravy on your plate and you would kindly ask one of your family members to pass you the jug - a symbolic act of being inclusive and caring towards each other - the building of a truly authentic kinship.

This act of giving and receiving the gravy jug within the meal would break the silence in the room. This breaking of silence, was a call to bring forth and share the individual and collective family stories of the week. Because my parents were hardly ever at home together we would often talk about what we had been up to in sport or school. Most of the conversations were trivial and meaningless but they were important to us children and we felt a real desire to share them with our parents. Our parents also enjoyed listening to them – well at least they pretended too most of the time!

As human beings, storytelling is fundamental to our very existence. The telling of our stories is our personal enactment of the realities of our worlds through a form of shared communication.<sup>1</sup> Whether it be viewing rock paintings on a cave wall, reciting whakapapa on the marae or reading stories in a journal article, it has been the endeavour of the human existence to translate to others what it is that we know to exist within the workings of our minds.

For Māori, pūrākau is a traditional form of implicit and metaphorical storytelling which has recently been reconceptualised by indigenous academics as a form of cultural identity reclamation within the kaupapa Māori research movement.<sup>2</sup> It is also politically situated within the wider indigenous retaliation to the western hegemonic constructs of scientific research and its associated ideologies of imperialism and colonialism.<sup>3</sup> For many Māori, adopting pūrākau as a research practice is part of the process of “decolonisation” and identity reclamations because storytelling has always been one of their key tenets of knowledge creation and retention.<sup>4</sup>

Traditionally, pūrākau was the symbolic form of storytelling within the visual arts such as wood and bone carving, and weaving in the form of tukutuku panels. Within these visual representations, it was typical to embed stories of whakapapa, as well as the ethical and moral lessons for living a healthy and spiritually fulfilled life. Pūrākau differentiates itself from pakiwaitara, due to the fact that pakiwaitara is the oral method of storytelling in the form of songs, haka and narratives. It is therefore through the conceptualisation and creation of the written story, that the Māori storyteller applies their mātauranga (wisdom and knowledge) through the crafting of the implicit and metaphorical pūrākau. As a reader of a pūrākau story, you are in fact in search of the messages which exist deeper within the work. Like all forms of storytelling, you will interpret different messages within the story, depending on your understanding of the storytelling medium.

As a doctoral student, culinary teacher and an emerging indigenous academic storyteller, I have adopted pūrākau as a means of constructing knowledge which has meaning and purpose to the communities I serve.<sup>5</sup> Pūrākau is relevant and important to me as it allows for the crafting of a methodology which expresses epistemological constructs, cultural codes, and worldviews that are fundamental to Māori teachers and researchers and their way of being.<sup>6</sup>

My embrace of pūrākau as a knowledge construct has allowed me to perform stories of human emotional realities, while at the same time provide power and agency to those traditionally silenced voices within our communities. It allows me to communicate my story in ways that emotionally connect to the people I serve and to use a voice that they can understand and personally relate to. In adopting this approach to my scholarship, I do not present stories of the truth but I allow my stories to be interpreted and personalised in meaningful ways to my reader.

The opening pūrākau is a recollection of my childhood through my own eyes and due to its metaphorical nature, it has become a powerful story which connects and binds my culinary, teaching and scholarly worlds together. As a piece of scholarship it operates on multiple dimensions and within different paradigms. On a surface level, it introduces some basic principles as to who I am and how and where I grew up. However, if we stop for just a minute and look just beyond the surface and into a perspective less obvious, we can engage in other learnings that we may not have known existed.

## PŪRĀKAU AS A TOOL TO COMMUNICATE THE IMPLICIT VALUES OF PRACTICE

The influence of our values, informs our lives in ways which we cannot escape. For many of us, we walk in this world being unconscious and unknowing in how their influence is guiding our everyday actions. We make decisions and enact our thoughts based upon a natural gut feeling or what just what makes sense to us in our own minds. Some of us have been lucky enough to sit down, reflect on our lives, and unpack and discover what drives the constructs of our thoughts. In essence, some of us have been privileged to engage in reflexivity and understand how our values have shaped the landscape of the realities of our lives.

Our socially constructed beliefs and values influence the nature of our actions within the worlds that we inhabit. The opening passage is my recollection of a shared family meal, it introduces you, the reader, to the early experiences within my life which have informed and shaped the values that influence my current framework of practice. Within this passage, I have intentionally crafted and interwoven three key implicit concepts into the fabric of the narrative.

The first of these concepts is the respect of others through the reciprocal sharing of that which we care for and value. My home dinner table was a sacred place where these values were regularly played out, but they also translate into my practices as a teacher where *ako*<sup>7</sup> is a fundamental and an everyday tenet of my pedagogic practice. As a family we shared kai together, but we also shared with each other our lived experiences and personal stories.

We listened and acknowledged the stories of others while adding to them from our own perspective. Through this *wānanga* (place of shared learning), we developed a collective and shared ownership of *whakaaro* (thoughts) through a richness of *kōrero* (conversation).

The second concept is that of fostering and developing meaningful relationships which are built on bonds of kinship. Our family dinner table was a place in which we could feast together and tell the stories of our lives. Within these moments, the stories we told created a sense of belonging and developed the emotional bonds that would eventually strengthened the kinship of the *whānau*. In *te ao Māori*, this type of relationship strengthening and building is referred to as *whānaungatanga*.<sup>8</sup> *Whānaungatanga* is important to me as an educator, because without having it in place, I find myself acting in a didactic, soulless state of content transmission. My pedagogic practice is based upon shared conversations in which I encourage students to bring the richness of their lives into the *mauri* (conscious life force) of the classroom.

The final concept within the passage is that of empowerment and self-agency. As children we were encouraged to do well, but live and lead our own lives in ways which were meaningful to us. The dinner table became a place where we could take what was necessary to fulfil our needs and desires but never at the expense or detriment of

the other whānau who shared the table. Just after I made the decision to become a chef (around the age of ten) I would sometimes be allowed to cut the meat at the family dinner table. This wasn't because the social conventions stated that the oldest male should cut the meat (I am in fact the second oldest); but it was in response to my desire to one day become a chef. My parents would entrust me with the knife, a physical expression of personal empowerment. What I came to realise later on in life, was with the power of the knife also came the privilege of determining who had what to eat.<sup>9</sup> The concept of rangatiratanga<sup>10</sup> or self-agency<sup>11</sup> is incredibly important to me. It is one of the principles of my pedagogic practice which I live and preach everyday but one which I also find myself having to fight for on a daily basis.<sup>12</sup> As a Kāi Tahu kaiako (teacher), the importance of providing safe spaces for my student whānau to live, learn and grow as self-fulfilling individuals is important to me.

The experiences of my family table serve as the foundational leaves of my pedagogic kete of practice and have informed my pedagogic practice values. As a kaiako, the lived experiences and stories of my life have informed how I see and act as a teacher. It is only through the process of standing back and reflecting on the stories of the past and crafting them into a pūrākau for the future generations, that I can now see that my kete of practice is based upon manaakitanga – a morality of care for others. The kete itself incorporates the te ao Māori values of ako, whānaungatanga and rangatiratanga into its structure forming a raranga (weaving) of practice from which all other actions are informed and enacted.

## THE WERO

Within this article I have presented the pūrākau that I believe is the foundation of my teaching practices and which informs how I practise as a teacher. In doing so, I have revealed to the reader the concepts, theories and philosophies of my teaching practice that are interwoven within its construct in a manner that is intentionally explicit. This directness was necessary to demonstrate to the reader the unique insights and potentiality that pūrākau offers as an academic tool for meaningful and legitimate knowledge construction.

As I write I realise that in order to communicate to the reader how my pūrākau has informed my practice, I have sought to explain its wisdom by being overtly explicit. Therefore, I present a wero (challenge) to myself and the wider academy: that we must consciously abandon the dominant belief that academic knowledge needs to be explicit to be legitimate and to have value within the communities we serve. Instead, I suggest we learn to embrace the implicit beauty of knowledge and wisdom that only a carefully crafted pūrākau can encapsulate; and as kaitiaki we share these learnings with others. These actions will enable Māori teachers, and their students, to construct meaningful knowledge by understanding and embracing their culturally authentic self. The wero as Hunt notes, is that<sup>13</sup> "Indigenous knowledge is rarely seen as legitimate on its own terms, but must be negotiated in relation to pre-existing modes of inquiry". Acceptance of this wero requires the worldviews and epistemologies that shape and inform the crafting of a pūrākau to be normalised and naturalised within the landscape of education. However, I suspect that this [normalisation] will be the true wero, as we look beyond the dominant explicit epistemologies to recognise the equality of the *implicit other*.

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## Endnotes

- 1 See Connelly, F.M. and D.J. Clandinin, "Stories of experience and narrative inquiry," *Educational Researcher* 19, no. 5 (1990): 2-14.
- 2 See Lee, J., "Decolonising Māori narratives: Pūrākau as a method," *MAI review* 2, no. 3 (2009): 79-91.
- 3 Specifically speaking, storytelling is one of the twenty five indigenous research projects identified by Linda Tuhiwai Smith as part of the decolonisation process. See Smith, L.T., *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, (Zed Books, 1999).
- 4 Lee, "Decolonising Māori narratives," 79-91.
- 5 Russell Bishop states that the dominant western epistemological world view still privileges the written English language over other forms of communication. This presents challenges to Maori who prefer their knowledge to be retained through the narrative, collaborative storytelling approach. See Bishop, R., "Interviewing as collaborative storytelling," *Education Research and Perspectives* 24, no. 1 (1997): 28.
- 6 As a research methodology, Pūrākau has been utilised as a culturally responsive construct for narrative inquiry into Māori teacher pedagogy. Māori academics such as Jenny Lee have revived the methodology by creatively blending it through a bricolage process to ensure the methodology is still relative to the contemporary lives we lead. See Lee, "Decolonising Māori narratives," 79-91, and Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.
- 7 Ako literally means to teach and to learn. It is built upon the premise that the teacher is not the fountain of knowledge but simply a facilitator within the learning context. Within this framework, the teacher and the student take turns in the learning conversation allowing them to story and re-story their realities. See Bishop, R., "Freeing Ourselves," in *Qualitative Inquiry—Past, Present, and Future: A Critical Reader*, eds. N. K. Denzin and M. D. Giardina (London: Routledge, 2015), 402-420.
- 8 Whānaungatanga as a basic concept, based on the idea of relationships. However the concept is situated within the deeper concept of whakawhānaungatanga which is identifying and establishing family relationships through bodily linkages to other people. For Maori, whakawhānaungatanga identifies through rāranga kōrero (the telling of stories) how all living and inanimate objects are connected to the world we inhabit. See Bishop, "Freeing Ourselves," 402-420.
- 9 Power, control and privilege have always been of interest to me. Why has society and its structures allowed certain individuals to be privileged over others. As I commence this academic journey, I once again find myself in this critical space asking myself these questions once again. However, I have not always been operating within a space of reflexivity and criticality. In my early days of teaching I was in fact, enculturated within a more individualistic and self-serving mind set. See Woodhouse, A., "Reflective Storytelling: An Examination of Culinary Spaces and Identity Formation," *Scope: Contemporary Research Topics - Kaupapa Kāi Tahu*, 4 (2017): 94-98.
- 10 Rangatiratanga is the concept of chiefly control although more recently it has been referred to as self-determination. This is premised on the right of an individual to determine ones destiny and to define what that destiny that will be for the individual. For rangatiratanga to be effective it relies upon the principles of ako (reciprocal learning) and whānaungatanga (meaningful relationships) to be present to facilitate the practice. See Bishop, "Freeing Ourselves," 402-420.
- 11 A deeper insight into the structural and embedded practices of student agency within my teaching practice can be found in the following article. See Mitchell, R. and A. Woodhouse, "Design as pedagogy: giving Culinary Arts students agency over their learning," in *Experiencing Food, Designing Dialogues: Proceedings of 1st International Conference on Food Design and Food Studies, Lisbon, Portugal*, eds R. Bonacho, A. Pinheiro de Sousa, C. Viegas, J. P. Martins, M. J. Pires and S.V. Estêvão, (London: Taylor Francis, 2017), 27-31.
- 12 Within my Masters degree, I explored the traditional culinary arts pedagogic system through my own experiences. Within my research, I proposed that between the integration of the explicit structural system of culinary education and the implicit hidden curriculum of the culinary arts teacher worked in tandem to create a pre-determined obedient Francophile culinary identity for the student. Within my facilitation role within the Assessment of Prior Learning for the Bachelor of Culinary Arts programme, I have benefitted from hearing the stories of many culinary polytechnic lecturers from all over New Zealand. Within these stories, it is evident that a predetermined construction of identity is still largely prevalent within the culinary education sector. See Woodhouse, A., "Culinary Arts Pedagogy: A Critical Enquiry into its Knowledge, Power and Identity Formation" (Masters thesis, Capable New Zealand, Research Gate, Otago Polytechnic. Masters of Professional Practice, 2015), 74.
- 13 See p. 3 Hunt, S., "Ontologies of Indigeneity: the politics of embodying a concept," *Cultural Geographies* 21 no. 1 (2014): 1-7.

