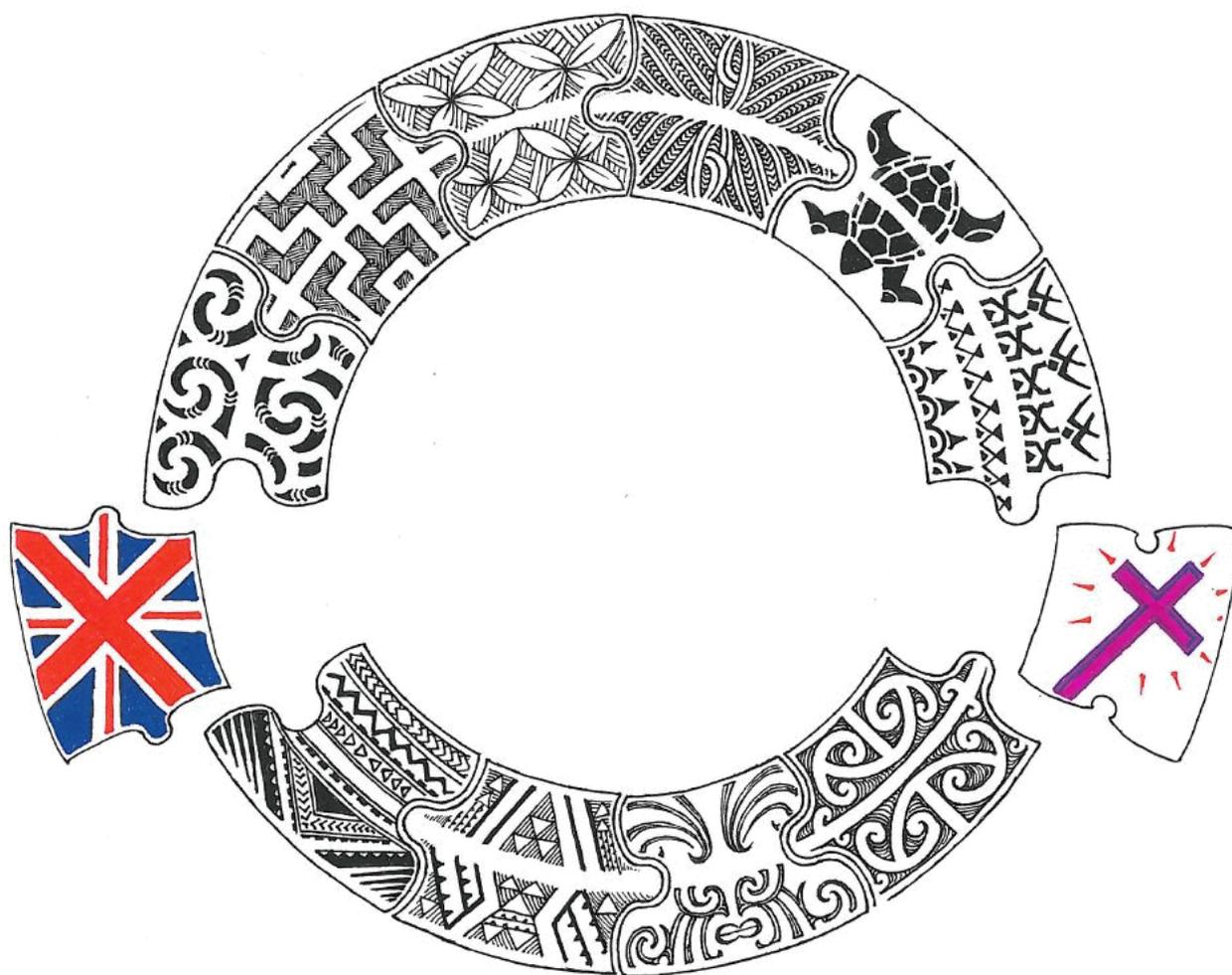


Colouring in the White Spaces:

Reclaiming Cultural Identity in Whitestream Schools

Sabbatical Report 2016

Ann Milne PhD



Papahueke

The cover image is an original art work, gifted to me for my doctoral thesis—the following explanation is from the artist, Blaine Te Rito (2013).

“The design was initially inspired by the black and white image of a classroom scene in which the faces of two pupils were colored in brown shade. It reminds me of how over time we as tangata whenua (indigenous people) have had to fit in and conform to the structure and values of foreign interests.

This design reflects the cultural diversity of the students within Kia Aroha College. I focused on artistic symbols from throughout Aotearoa (New Zealand) and the Pacific region from which many of the students descend. These symbols also refer to their proud and noble ancestors through whose authority we were successful in developing thriving and effective societies throughout these regions—until the arrogant establishment of foreign interests within these borders, which is still perpetuated today. This situation is not unique to Aotearoa.

The circle represents the importance of these pre-colonial societal structures viz; education, language, culture, theology, and environmental resources. The break in the circle represents the disruption and the white spaces incurred, and the difficulty of re-completing the circle with pieces or structures that just don't fit. The name, Papahueke (to be relentless or unyielding), represents our resistance.” (Blaine Te Rito, 2013)

Title: **Colouring in the White Spaces: Reclaiming Cultural Identity in Whitestream Schools**

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School: **Kia Aroha College**

Period: **10 Weeks: 2 February to 15 April 2016**

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- The staff of Kia Aroha College who have developed this research and practice over time, and who continue to evolve and lead exemplary practice for Māori and Pasifika learners.
- The funding and support provided by the Ministry of Education that makes these valuable sabbaticals possible.
- The network of social justice educators I am privileged to interact with, and the exchange of knowledge and research this gives us the opportunity to access and contribute to.
- The Warrior-Scholars of Kia Aroha College. This work is always for them.

Purpose

The purpose of this sabbatical was to further extend my doctoral research and study in the areas of critical, culturally responsive pedagogy, cultural identity, and Māori/Pasifika achievement and engagement. I also wanted to take time for writing papers and articles from my doctoral thesis, and from these, to develop a book proposal for submission to a publisher.

Rationale

The interest in my thesis since its completion in 2013, and the many speaking engagements I am invited to deliver is evidence of the high demand for this information within the profession.

National and international examiners of my doctoral thesis commented that there were numerous academic articles that should be published from its content and urged me to "rework the thesis for a national and international audience as an example of what Aotearoa can add to international debates on Critical Pedagogy and for minoritised students everywhere." It's always the intention I think when you finally complete the marathon of study and writing that make up a thesis, to disseminate that information more widely. Obviously that's not very easy to achieve given the frantic pace of life as a school principal.

My intention was to use the sabbatical to develop papers and/or articles with the aim of publication in national and international journals and for further presentation to education and research audiences. I also planned to work on a book proposal from my thesis research. I hoped the writing would provide information on the importance of Māori and Pasifika identities and the barriers our "Whitestream" education system imposes on these learners, for schools who are seeking to better engage their Māori and Pasifika students and whānau.

In the last two weeks of my sabbatical I planned to attend the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting in Washington DC to reconnect with a network of fellow researchers and writers in this field, both at this meeting and in East Oakland to gain further input into this area of research internationally. The AERA meeting was to give me further opportunities to connect with potential journal and book editors and publishers.

Activities Undertaken

The programme was planned for 10 weeks from 8 February to 15 March 2016. Although I factored in time for rest and simply doing nothing, it's fair to say I failed at the resting part and just enjoyed the time away from school to get my head into research and writing. I took on conducting and writing an evaluation of an after school technology programme which operates on the Kia Aroha College site, and this took some time away from my plans. However, with that completed I was ready to write and reflect.

During the sabbatical, I undertook, and completed, the following activities:

1. I was invited to author an opening essay for the online journal, Middle Grades Review. The theme of the issue was "Social Justice: For Whom?" I completed this essay and had it published. *Where am I in our Schools' White Spaces? Social Justice for the Learners we Marginalise*. (Milne, 2016). <http://scholarworks.uvm.edu/mgreview/vol1/iss3/2/>
2. I accepted three invitations to speak—to two Auckland schools during their professional development days at the beginning of the term, and to a large Community of Learning of 20+

schools in the South Island, about changing our thinking for Māori learners

3. I completed a book prospectus from my doctoral research which I submitted to Peter Lang Publishing in New York. This resulted in an immediate offer of a book contract, which I accepted. I was able, during the sabbatical, to get the book planned and to complete the bulk of the writing. The completed book was submitted to Lang in June and is on track for publication in November 2016.
4. In April I attended the American Education Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting in Washington DC. The theme of this conference was "Public Scholarship to Educate Diverse Democracies." I am a member of AERA and have presented at this conference previously. This time however, my goal was to meet with potential journal editors and a book publisher to discuss writing and publication options. I accepted an invitation to become a member of the Editorial Board of a new academic journal, *Radical Imagine-Nation: Journal of Public Pedagogy*, out of Chapman University in USA, co-edited by Professors Suzanne Soohoo and Peter McLaren. <https://blogs.chapman.edu/ces/2016/03/02/the-radical-imagine-nation>
5. Following the AERA Conference I visited *Roses in Concrete Community School* in East Oakland, California. Dr Jeff Duncan-Andrade opened this school in August 2015 (rosesinconcrete.org). It has been designed around many of the features and approaches he has seen in action at Kia Aroha College. I visited the school to interact with students and staff. This is a further extension of an ongoing relationship with the founders, funders, researchers and educators engaged with the establishment and philosophy of this school
6. I also visited Diablo Valley Community (DVC) College with Dr Duncan-Andrade and Dr Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, co-founders of the Teacher Excellence Network (TEN). Kia Aroha College has adopted TEN as our teacher appraisal and professional development strategy, and our own research has contributed to its development. I have spoken at DVC in the past and this time I was able to sit in on a presentation to senior staff there about adopting TEN for community college staff.

Reflection

I will structure this section in two parts: the personal learning from this writing journey, and the implications of the research and writing for schools and school leaders.

Personal Learning

I have written a master's and a doctoral thesis, chapters for books, papers and essays for academic journals and I thought that extending that writing into authoring a book would be a logical next step. After all, I had plenty of material to draw on. I was wrong! Who knew, that in order to use material you have already written and have had published, there is a complicated permission process to navigate before you can use your own work? Who knew that writing for an American publisher, who required USA English spelling would become something of its own nightmare? It's easy I thought. I'll just set my computer to USA English and all the errors will show up. They didn't, as my laptop stubbornly reverted to UK English at every opportunity. There was obviously a setting I missed somewhere, complicated by my need to be able to use macrons for Māori words and therefore changing constantly to a Māori keyboard. I had no idea that preparing a manuscript meant stripping every scrap of formatting from my text. I like formatting, layout, and the way writing "looks." I don't react well to being told what font to use, what spacing was needed, only using one space after a full

stop and a myriad of other American conventions—the “period” goes inside the quotation marks—for example.

It wasn't just the formatting, spelling and punctuation. The book had to be prepared for a world-wide audience, potentially to be, “printed, published and sold in all languages throughout the world in all forms of media now known or later developed, including but not limited to digital and on-line technologies.” I'm sure that really means world-wide and digital options, but it meant trying to translate New Zealand settings and situations in our education system for a global audience. How do you prevent diminishing the power and full meaning of words like *aroha* and *whānau*, with a few words in a bracket or a glossary? I know many, many, accomplished New Zealand writers have already mastered these frustrating tasks—but this was a first for me! I wasn't the only one finding this difficult it seemed. After months of asking for manuscript guidelines, to no avail, I received an email from the publisher one week before my deadline when I thought I had finished everything, which said, “After some conversations with several people asking for clearer information on our house style and submission requirements, we have created new detailed forms and manuscript submission guidelines for your use.” This meant completely changing major elements such as placing the reference list and endnotes at the end of each chapter, instead of at the end of the book, re-completing all the permission forms, and even more prescriptive details about removing formatting. Having those guidelines at the beginning of the journey would have been a huge help!

Over and above all these frustrations was firstly having to get my head around what felt like a brutal assault on all the work that went into my doctoral thesis in the first place. I was privileged to have great advice from experienced writers and editors, but I wasn't prepared for the advice to slash and burn huge sections from my thesis. “Dump your literature review and methodology sections. This is no longer an assignment. It's a book.” “The point in a book is to talk about the topic, elaborate on it, tell stories, and create meaning, not to interpret your research while doing it.” “Your book is no longer a research study. Do not mention the words ‘thesis’ or ‘dissertation’ or ‘study’.” “The general rule is that a dissertation may be turned into an excellent book, but the dissertation itself is hardly ever what gets published.”

The book proposal and the final information sheet which had to be sent to the publishers, were challenges in their own right with questions I didn't have answers for or hadn't thought about! “How can it be used? What subjects, courses can this book be a primary or supplemental text? What competing volumes (if any) exist? Please list up to 10 journals or other publications (online and print) that might have an interest in reviewing your book. Please list any conferences, professional meetings, and seminars at which you feel your book should be promoted. Does your book satisfy a course need or have the potential to be used in classrooms? If so, list the course titles and academic departments in which the book might be used.” I might have been able to answer some of these from a New Zealand perspective but that wasn't enough! Again, I drove my American friends crazy I'm sure with requests for advice, which they willingly gave.

My best advice I think came from Jeff Duncan-Andrade who told me, “Writing a book is its own cultural and artistic journey. All I would say is to make it your own. Develop habits and that will make your writing consistent. Always keep yourself close to things that inspire.” I found that all to be true. *Coloring in the White Spaces: Reclaiming Cultural Identity in Whitestream Schools* will be published in the Peter Lang series: *Counterpoints: Studies in the Postmodern Theory of Education*, edited by Shirley Steinberg, hopefully in November this year.

A further difficult aspect (for me) was the need to ask others to write about my book. I'm grateful for, and humbled by, the ready agreement by Professor Jeff Duncan-Andrade to write the foreword for the book, and for the back-cover endorsements written by Distinguished Professor Graham Hingangaroa Smith, Professor Emeritus Christine Sleeter, and Professor Arnetha Ball.

Writing the book made all my other sabbatical endeavours pale into insignificance. It was by far my steepest learning curve in many years—one that challenged me and moved me right outside my usual writing comfort zone, always a good thing I believe. It was certainly work that I could not have undertaken without the sabbatical, and the space away from school leadership.

Implications

While much of my challenge in writing the book lay in the technicalities I've described, these are certainly the least important in terms of the relevance of this work to schools. So, apart from the trials and tribulations of actually writing the book, what is it about, and how does it fulfil the purpose of the sabbatical to "further extend my doctoral research and study in the areas of critical, culturally responsive pedagogy, cultural identity, and Māori/Pasifika achievement and engagement"?

Kia Aroha College is a "designated-character" Years 7 to 13 secondary school located in the community of Otara, in South Auckland. The aims of the special character of the school include honouring the Treaty of Waitangi, and providing a learning environment where Māori and Pasifika cultural identities, custom, languages and knowledges, and the philosophy and practice of whānau are the norm. Critical, culturally responsive pedagogy is at the heart of the school's approach. The school aims to involve whānau in the education of their children, in culturally familiar ways that are empowering.

Dei (2011, p. 168) places the struggle to retain one's identity within the struggle to wrestle control of knowledge production from the coloniser. He states, "Indigenous knowledge is about resistance, not in the romanticized sense, but resistance as struggle to navigate the tensions of today's modernized, globalized world while seeking to disrupt its universalizing, hegemonic norms." The development of one's cultural identity in a Whitestream education system cannot be separated from this struggle.

New Zealand's education system has been largely silent on the topic of Whiteness, White privilege and supremacy, and the Eurocentric nature of our schooling policy and practice. However, when I talk to senior Māori Warrior-Scholars in Kia Aroha College about the White spaces (Milne, 2013, 2014, 2016) they have encountered in their schooling experience they can identify them all too easily. White spaces, they explain, are anything you accept as normal for Māori – when it's really not, any situation that prevents, or works against you "being Māori" and that requires you to be someone else and leave your beliefs behind. White spaces are spaces that allow you to require less of yourself and that reinforce stereotypes and negative ideas about Māori. Most telling of all was the comment from a Māori student that goes straight to the root of the problem, "White spaces are everywhere," she said, "even in your head."

Those White spaces are certainly in our heads. If we are serious about change, and the achievement of our indigenous and the learners we marginalise and minoritise¹, we have to name the elephant in the classroom that drives our education policy, our school and classroom practice, at all age levels. In Kia Aroha College our thinking about the pervasive Whitestream environment our students learn in, is underpinned by this very simple premise. If we look at a child's colouring book, before it has any colour added to it, we think of the page as blank. It's actually not blank, it's white. That white background is just *there* and we don't think much about it. Not only is the background uniformly white, the lines are already in place and they dictate where the colour is allowed to go. When children are young, they don't care where they put the colours, but as they get older we teach them to colour in more and more carefully. They learn about the place of colour and the importance of staying within those pre-determined boundaries and expectations.

This is the setting for our Whitestream schools — that White background, and its unspoken privilege, is the norm. When we talk about multiculturalism and diversity what we are really referring to is the colour of the children, or their difference from that White norm. It's about how they don't fit perfectly inside our lines. If the colour of the space doesn't change schools are still in the business of assimilation, relegating indigenous and minoritised children to the margins, no matter how many school reform initiatives, new curricula, or mandated tests and standards we implement. What the school in this story has done is change the colour of the space, so that the space fits the children and they don't have to constantly adjust to fit in (Milne, 2014, 2016). Tomlins-Jahnke (2008) describes "mainstream" schools in New Zealand:

Most Māori children in Aotearoa New Zealand are located in state mainstream schools where for many there is a disjuncture between the culture of the home and that of the school, between the lived realities of family and the school habitus. The term mainstream is a euphemism or code word for schools that privilege a western/Euro-centric education tradition. Mainstream schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand are controlled by those who have political, economic and cultural power and where western values, knowledge, culture and the English language are the central focus of the school habitus. Schools incorporate aspects of Māori language and culture as additions rather than core components of the curriculum or school knowledge. (p. 6)

I too find the term "mainstream" in New Zealand schools to be a euphemism for an education system which normalises practice that damages Māori and Pasifika learners and has "consistently treated [Māori learners] paternalistically, watching them to see whether they were capable of being as good as Pākehā" (Penetito, 2010, p. 51). Penetito puts the concept into its rightful perspective when he lists "mainstreaming" amongst deliberate policies designed to establish the education system's hegemony over Māori: "Europeanisation, civilization, amalgamation, assimilation, integration and, today, mainstreaming" (p.245).

Penetito (2010, p. 269) explains that being Māori "goes all the way down" and that while there are many ways to be Māori, one constant is that the collective has priority over the individual. Imagine how a Māori child feels in a school system where individual achievement is the goal. According to Penetito, the individual "can only become truly well-developed by evolving a consciousness of self in

¹ Shields, Bishop & Mazawi (2005) use this term to refer to those who are treated as if one's position and perspective is of less worth, who are silenced or marginalised, regardless of whether they are in the numerical minority or not.

relation to objects (people, things and events) outside or beyond the self.” My research and the experience of Kia Aroha College suggests that the development of a cultural identity for Māori and Pasifika learners in New Zealand schools also has to “go all the way back” to develop a critical awareness of the role of schooling as a tool of colonisation and assimilation, “all the way across” to understand events, policies and thinking that shape contemporary whitestream schooling in the present, and “all the way forward” to develop new knowledge and pedagogies to co-construct a different educational pathway for the future. The book describes Kia Aroha College’s practice in developing new approaches to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

The audience for this book are those seeking culturally located solutions to enable Whitestream schools to overcome the structural and pedagogical barriers to the educational success of minoritised students. The book will be relevant to schools, educators, and researchers interested in advancing the educational success of minoritised students, as well as promoting the agency and capacity of their communities to influence pedagogical changes within whitestream education systems that both honour and strengthen their children’s cultural identities. It is hoped that the book will contribute to the journey other schools might take to identify and name their own White spaces, and to make learning equitable for indigenous and minoritised learners.

The book focuses on solutions and praxis, rather than relying exclusively on problem identification, and the attribution of blame (frequently attributing blame to the minoritised groups themselves, despite their lack of agency and power to change things). Among the solutions examined and described is a critical pedagogy aligned with Māori and Pasifika epistemologies, described as a “critical pedagogy of whānau.” This is the pedagogy adopted and developed at Kia Aroha College.

I was fortunate to see this pedagogy also in action during my sabbatical on my visit to Roses in Concrete Community School, a Kindergarten to 8th grade public charter school in East Oakland in California. The school’s special character emphasises a bilingual/multilingual, critical and community responsive approach that centres on students’ cultural identities. The school’s name was inspired by the poem, *The Rose That Grew from Concrete*, written by Tupac Shakur (1999). This vivid image captures the need to celebrate the tenacity and will of the rose that against-all-odds, finds a way to grow in the inhospitable and toxic environment of the concrete. Instead of designing a model that plucks out individual roses that find their way through cracks in the concrete, the school aims to break up the concrete so that entire rose gardens can blossom in our highest need neighborhoods. In short, the school believes that the point of education is not to escape poverty, but to end it.²

In 2015, I had received a request from the school’s founder, Dr Jeff Duncan-Andrade, for Kia Aroha College to partner with Roses in Concrete Community School as “sister schools,” a description neither of us liked. He asked could we provide a Māori word to better describe our partnership. I consulted te reo Māori exponents, to find that there was no word that exactly fitted our needs. Certainly we could have used a word such as whānau, or words about joining or partnering, but none were quite right. Finally, our advisers suggested the new word, *Ukukura*. Kura is the Māori word for school. The word, uku, denotes an ally, or a supporting tribe, in battle for example (Moorfield, 2011). The two words combined gave us the perfect description of two schools working

² From the Roses in Concrete Community School website, <http://rosesinconcrete.org/> and personal knowledge.

closely together in solidarity as allies in the struggle for educational sovereignty and equity. Both schools proudly feature our Ukukura status on our respective websites.

My visit to Roses in Concrete Community School during my sabbatical brought home to me once again the need for allies in the struggle, which is strikingly similar for indigenous and minoritised children the world over. In the vibrant displays in the junior classrooms, typical teacher charts and learning aids jostle for wall space with a series of posters stating, “Justice for....” and “Black Lives Matter.” Another poster states “Migration is a Human Right” and another displays the principles of “In Lak’ech.”³ All children are learning in English and Spanish. In a senior class we observe a circle, where the teacher asks for the students’ opinions about the reintegration into the class of a peer who has not met their expectations. They are not convinced he is ready yet and give their reasons why. Returning to this Grade 4 (Year 5) class later that morning we interrupt the planned discussion on “internalised oppression.” These walls too are crowded with messages, “We are the Difference” a display heading proclaims, above photos and posters—there’s Che Guevara, Ella Baker, Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, and the Black Panther Party. In another wall space there is children’s writing, one piece is headed, “What I learned about the Taino Indians.” This is what authentic, critical, culturally responsive pedagogy looks like in action. It is also, very definitely, a critical pedagogy of whānau.

Schools struggle to understand and implement culturally responsive practice, in spite of the resources developed eventually to support *Ka Hikitia* and the initiatives the Māori Education Strategy has spawned. Inevitably, in spite of schools’ best intentions in many cases, responding to culture ends up in the too-hard basket, or is an add-on. Sleeter (2012) attributes what she describes as the marginalisation of culturally responsive pedagogy to three primary reasons: “1) a persistence of faulty and simplistic conceptions of what culturally responsive pedagogy is, 2) too little research connecting its use with student achievement, and 3) elite and white fear of losing national and global hegemony” (p. 562). Sleeter discusses the problems associated with trivialising, simplifying, or essentialising culture and states that, “Oversimplified and distorted conceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy, which do not necessarily improve student learning, lend themselves to dismissal of the entire concept.” (p. 572). Sleeter believes it is important to find “rich descriptions” as important counters to these simplistic models. I hope that the book provides a detailed and “rich description” of a school where a critical, and culturally responsive pedagogy drives all practice and underpins curriculum and decision-making.

Conclusion

The resources to challenge every school to empower non-White students to become self-determining learners exist in the community itself. The barriers that make this so difficult to achieve are inherent in the systemic White spaces this research identifies and names. However, Kia Aroha College’s experience and practice, and those of others in a network of schools internationally, prove that it is possible, in spite of significant odds, to give our children the educational sovereignty that should rightfully be theirs. There is no single, easy solution, no miracle “recipe” that can be picked up and placed in another community or another school. Each community is different and each

³ An ancient Mayan greeting and principle which means “You are my other self.” This aligns with the Māori concept, “Ko au ko koe. Ko koe ko au.” (I am you and you are me).

school needs to work to identify, then remove, their own barriers and to develop relationships of trust and reciprocity with their families and students.

There are however, lessons to be learned by schools and communities to develop a counter-narrative to a dominant White system where most interventions and solutions have their origin in paradigms imbued with deficits, and which alienate Māori and Pasifika learners. Our education system's White spaces can be coloured in by practice that gives a community voice, that listens, that responds, and that is underpinned by the cultural knowledge and beliefs of its people. This practice conscientises whānau to resist the status quo, to demand more, and to transform the educational experiences of our children.

A major focus of this sabbatical was writing and publishing. My doctoral thesis was completed in 2013 so just in the relatively short time since then, more resources and more reading have become available. Writing the book gave me the opportunity to both update the research and to present it in a more useful format for teachers, for schools and school leaders. This report has skimmed the surface of the content of the content of the book. The information is further available, as I indicated in my sabbatical application, through the following:

- the Kia Aroha College website www.kiaaroha.school.nz
- my own website www.annmilne.co.nz
- my doctoral thesis and other papers – available from:
 - both websites above
 - Milne, Ann. (2004). *"They didn't care about normal kids like me." Restructuring a school to fit the kids.* (Unpublished Masters thesis). Massey University, Palmerston North, NZ.
 - Milne, Ann. (2013). *Colouring in the White Spaces: Reclaiming Cultural Identity in Whitestream Schools.* (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Waikato, Hamilton, NZ.
- the book – in process – links to accessing this will be available on both websites once the publication date is finalised.
- ongoing presentations and workshops at conferences and meetings - as invited.

Further reading

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