

Foreword: Indigenous Voices: Indigenous Cultural Leadership

Ma te huruhuru, ka rere te manu; Me whakahoki mai te mana ki te whānau, hapū, iwi
Adorn the bird with feathers so it can fly; and return the mana (prestige) to us all

The above whakataukī (Māori proverb) aligns with the idea that a bird cannot fly without all of its feathers being aligned and working together, however if we work together to provide for what a bird needs to fly, it can thrive. The analogy being that Indigenous cultural leadership is really about coming together to collectively share our knowledge in ways that provide better opportunities to help (re)shape our educational futures as Indigenous peoples moving forward. It is also a critical response to new forms of colonisation that continue to oppress, alienate and assimilate Indigenous peoples ways of knowing within the current education system. In this regard, our past often informs the present, and the present provides the opportunity to narrate a more creative, innovative, and optimistic educational future that is both self-determining as well as transformative. Indigenous cultural leadership in action is as much about committing to a legacy of decolonisation, as it is about valuing Indigenous ways of knowing that is deeply grounded in the land, languages, community, culture and transforming our futures.

In this issue, Aboriginal art historian, Donna Leslie explores the concept of the ‘crucible’ in the work of Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas, and applies it to Australian Aboriginal art as an expression of cultural leadership. The idea being that how Indigenous peoples respond to adversity can provide invaluable insights into how Indigenous peoples approach leadership and in particular, how Indigenous peoples learn to channel adversity into creative and artistic expression. In this regard, the ‘crucible’ as a metaphor for cultural renewal and regeneration provides opportunities for reinvention, learning and exploration. More specifically, Donna helps the reader to explore what happens when an artist engages with a ‘crucible’ experience by highlighting a number of examples that have not only shaped Aboriginal art, but has also challenged the Nation to confront its own past social injustices.

Applying social justice theory and practice, Alex Barnes, a non-Indigenous Pākehā researcher and graduate of Te Kura Kaupapa Māori total immersion schooling, critically examines the impact of non-Indigenous Māori researchers working in Indigenous Māori research contexts. In this article, Alex seeks to understand how his own Pākehā culture continues to create unequal power relations while at the same time acknowledging his own privilege working in this space – it is indeed, a tricky ethical space to navigate. The solution, he suggests, is not only about how non-Indigenous Māori collaborators make themselves accountable, it also requires analysing these experiences using a specific theoretical, practical and ethical discourse called Kaupapa Māori. Alex concludes that by affirming Māori identity, language, culture, and ways of knowing that is holistic, and balanced within both a contemporary and traditional framework, is key to ensuring Indigenous Māori cultural leadership theory and practice thrives.

Nola Turner-Jensen's (Wiradjuri First Nation Australian) article is based on a 6 year-long study that sets out to define and compare two quite distinct belief systems – an Instinctive Belief System (a colonial mindset) versus a Collective First Mindset (an Indigenous mindset). The study is appropriately named the CultuRecode Project, and is described as Indigenous cultural leadership in action to address the following research question: Does the current colonial focused education system of Australia, meet the needs of how oral-based cultures, including Aboriginal Peoples learn best? The key finding to emerge is that the current educational standards, rules and systems do not work for Aboriginal peoples who seek more a 'narrative learning style' grounded in Indigenous kinship ways of knowing.

Jo-Anne Rey's article explores what custodial Indigenous leadership looks like in a city context, and does it have a place in today's educational institutions. In particular, Jo-Anne's study seeks answers to those questions by interviewing seven Indigenous Dharug women living in Sydney, Australia. Jo-Anne argues that when 'Country becomes a city', we must acknowledge and afford respect to those who are Indigenous to this place, and who as Indigenous peoples are engaged in upholding their custodial responsibilities to those now residing in this case, Sydney, NSW. In this regard, acknowledging the Goanna's (Australia English word for our monitor lizard) connection in being able to weave and understand the strength of place, identity and sense of belonging offers a form of relational and intercultural leadership that opens the door to a greater appreciation of Indigeneity, and in particular for Indigenous peoples now living in the city.

The article by Janice Victor, Warren Linds, Linda Goulet, Lacey Eninew, and Keith Goulet discusses an art-based program carried out in a Neehithuw (Woodland Cree) high school in northern Saskatchewan. The culturally-grounded and collaborative research project sort to enact Neehithuw (Woodland Cree) concepts and values that included an arts-based (historical based photos, poem, and performance) approach to achieve decolonisation and cultural affirmation. Underpinned by an Indigenous reciprocal leadership strategy, the inclusion of Indigenous language, culture and ways of knowing were a key strategy in the success of the project.

Finally, I want to acknowledge and thank all the contributors for their hard work, commitment and dedication to this special issue on Indigenous cultural leadership – greatly appreciated. Each contribution not only highlights the long list of on-going struggles, tensions, issues and controversies associated with the changing educational landscapes Indigenous peoples face today, but also how incredibly determined Indigenous peoples are to upholding the ancestors' legacy of ensuring our ways of knowing, doing and learning will never be lost. Ngā mihi nunui kia koutou katoa!

Ehara tōku toa i te toa takitahi engari he toa takitini tōku toa
My strength is not due to me alone, but due to the strength of many

Paul Whitinui
Editor