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TOI ORA, WHATUORA

Exploring whatu pedagogy and wellbeing

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Abstract

This article explores whatu as a Māori arts pedagogy, focusing on how it extends beyond traditional practice into a space of oranga for practitioners and learners alike. Drawing from qualitative interviews with three experienced wāhine kaiwhatu, the study examines their early learning experiences, teaching methods and reflections on how their pedagogy has evolved over time. The findings reveal that whatu pedagogy is deeply embedded in intergenerational transmission, cultural identity and creative practices that contribute to Māori community wellbeing. The research highlights the importance of critically reflecting on how Māori arts practices are taught, emphasising that pedagogies should be adaptive and responsive to the learner's needs while preserving cultural integrity. By theorising whatu as a pedagogy for oranga, the article contributes to the under-researched field of Māori pedagogies and advocates for broader engagement with Māori creative arts as a vital component of flourishing Māori futures.

Keywords

intergenerational teaching transmission, Māori pedagogy, toi Māori, wellbeing, whatu practice

Introduction

Whatu is the toi Māori (Māori arts) practice used to create whatu kākahu. Internationally renowned for their '"craftswomanship", whatu kākahu are held in museums around the world as evidence of the Western ethnographic obsession with collecting and documenting the exotic "other" (Roth, 1924; C. Smith & Laing, 2011). In Aotearoa New Zealand, haka, raranga and whatu form part of a toi Māori resurgence to promote oranga practices that revitalise and transmit ancestral knowledge, foster cultural identity and support Māori community connections through creative practice (O'Connor, 2016; Pearse, 2023; Pihama et al., 2014). The Māori cloak weaving practice of whatu, centred in this article, is more than practice and artefact—it is a sacred act that weaves together threads of culture and identity (H. Smith, 2017, 2019, 2021).

This article extends the practice of whatu beyond its well-documented practice, and more recent scholarly theorisations as a methodology (H. Smith, 2019, 2023a, 2023b) to consider whatu pedagogy as an oranga or wellbeing practice. Taking time to consider our pedagogical approach to practice—the *how* and *why* we teach and

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learn—is important. As we continue to revitalise toi Māori practices that connect us to ancestral knowledge, it is also possible to unconsciously reinscribe colonial thinking and ways of learning in our pedagogy. How we teach toi Māori is inevitably influenced by how we were taught. Critically reflecting on how we teach "old" knowledge (H. Smith, 2019) in "new" ways to the next generation extends toi Māori practice into pedagogical thinking that places importance on the oranga aspect of toi Māori that brings us closer to our ancestors.

I am a Te Rarawa and Ngā Puhi woman, mother, teacher, kaiwhatu and Kaupapa Māori researcher. I encountered whatu as an 18 year old when I learned raranga from my Te Rarawa relation in a community night class. My creative Māori self felt closer to my whakapapa through the language and knowledge of raranga, where I found joy in the practice of learning, making and gifting. My developing teenager identity, reo and tikanga wove together with my whakapapa and my passion for teaching and learning. I became a secondary school te reo Māori teacher who, even in my early career, was intensely interested in the art and methods of teaching. My PhD research (H. Smith, 2017) and subsequent publications about whatu theory (H. Smith, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2023a, 2023b) contribute to scholarship around the growing toi Māori practice and methodology. Now my creative Māori theorist self extends its research curiosity to think about toi Māori pedagogy.

Supported by a one-year Ngā Pae o Te Māramatanga grant, this article is one of three woven strands that form a scoping study about toi Māori practice "as teacher". A collaboration between three established Māori arts scholar-practitioners, we think and write in to the under-researched field of Māori pedagogies to highlight how toi Māori contributes to flourishing Māori futures. Together, we are developing pedagogical theory (Goldsmith et al., 2024) across three embodied art forms—whatu, raranga and haka—to complexify thinking about our creative forms as more than the production of artefact or cultural performance. Prompted by eminent Māori educationalist Wally Penetito's (2010) critical question in *What's Māori About Māori Education?*, this scoping study considers what is Māori about how we teach toi Māori and how might contemporary ideas about toi Māori pedagogy support whānau Māori wellbeing.

Our collaborative theorisation contributes to scholarship around Māori pedagogies for wellbeing, Māori and Indigenous arts and education scholarship, and broader kaupapa Māori goals of enabling flourishing Māori futurities through our own kaupapa Māori arts-based research lens. The resurgence of Māori arts practice over the past 50 years offers a timely opportunity for practising toi Māori scholars to extend our creative practice to include a theorisation of our art and its pedagogy, entwining theory with practice to develop a Māori arts praxis for wellbeing. In doing so, we hope to encourage other Māori and Indigenous a/r/tographers (R. Irwin, 2004; S. Irwin & Springgay, 2009)—that is, the intertwined identity of artist, researcher and teacher—to critically reflect on, then articulate, their pedagogical practice.

This article forwards a developing theorisation of whatu pedagogy, drawing on qualitative interview data gathered from three experienced kaiwhatu. Ethically consented, one-on-one interviews were conducted with three wāhine who are teachers and highly regarded practitioners of whatu. Each wāhine kaiwhatu agreed to be identified by their first name and iwi affiliations. Semi-structured questions explored their early learning experiences of whatu—how they learned and from whom, how much of their learning experience they recognised as embedded in their teaching pedagogy, and how and why their teaching has evolved. I begin with a brief overview of pedagogy literature from both Western and Māori thought, then provide some context for theorising whatu pedagogy as an oranga strategy. I introduce the three wāhine kaiwhatu, before sharing a selection of themes that emerged from their storied interviews around how and why they teach whatu the way they do.

At the intersection of Māori creative arts and Western pedagogical thought

Western pedagogy is understood as the deliberate processes by which knowledge attitudes or skills are conveyed (Miller & Findlay, 1996), the systemised learning principles or "methods" of teaching (Good & Merkel, 1973), or the *how* and *why* we teach and learn the way we do. Internationally renowned pedagogy theorists Piaget, Vygotsky, Brunner and Freire shaped Western teaching pedagogy and, therefore, the ways that we teach and learn in the Western-predominant education system in Aotearoa. Goldsmith et al. (2024) offer a unique kaupapa Māori literature review of pedagogy through a Māori arts lens to intersect these ideas with Māori pedagogies (Hemara, 2000). Despite a groundswell of interest in and attention on "Māori arts", particularly Māori performing

arts, they conclude that there is a dearth of literature at this intersection with pedagogy and further encourage other kaupapa Māori arts researchers, practitioners and teachers to write into this gap.

Thinking about teaching and learning is not new to Māori, yet Māori pedagogy remains under-researched from a kaupapa Māori research perspective (Hemara, 2000; Pihama et al., 2004; H. Smith, 2017). Almost 25 years ago, Hemara's book *Māori Pedagogies* (2000) scanned a broad range of sources to canvas historical and contemporary approaches to teaching and learning in Māori education, including principles that guide Māori pedagogies, key findings on what works and the challenges to Māori education in the early 2000s. Of relevance is that Māori arts pedagogy is afforded one line in the book: "because the arts are considered particular forms of individual and collective expression they are linked to imagination, thinking and feeling" (Hemara, 2000, p. 57). The aim of developing whatu pedagogy, as an element of a broader toi Māori pedagogy, is to encourage toi Māori practitioners and Māori teachers more broadly to elevate toi Māori from practice, product and performance to include a focus on how and why we teach and learn through our arts practice.

Te reo Māori terminology holds key clues as to how Māori pedagogy might be better understood. The pluralistic term ako means to both teach and learn (Hemara, 2000; Lee, 2008). The terms tuākana and tēina are often used to describe familial older or younger siblings (Williams, 1997) but also to acknowledge the teaching and learning exchange that flows both intergenerationally and intragenerationally. Both terms suggest a shift away from egocentric and meritocratic individual learning to a collective beneficial learning approach that is reciprocal and iterative (Goldsmith et al., 2024). Other examples such as teaching and learning through whakapapa, waiata, whakataukī and whaikōrero (Derby, 2023; Hemara, 2000; Pihama et al., 2004;) offer creative, oral and artistic pedagogical approaches to learning. Important questions to consider are what makes a pedagogy Māori and what are our cultural assumptions? Penetito (2004) suggests three fundamental ideas: (a) a sense of belonging to place, (b) a relationship of cohabitors between themselves and their environment, and (c) embodying ways of knowing and being with an imbued "conscious union of mind and spirit" (p. 6). Notions of toi Māori pedagogy are best understood through our reo and concepts.

Beyond this scoping research we intend to wānanga further with mātanga reo to develop a te reo Māori term that encapsulates toi Māori pedagogy. Words such as āhuatanga ako and pūtoiako that already exist in Māori education are used to describe pedagogy more generally. We are interested in advancing a term that speaks specifically to the creative arts approaches to teaching and learning that centre mātauranga Māori, reo, tikanga and Māori aspirations to live flourishing lives through the arts.

In the mid to late 19th century, whatu practice was closely observed and documented by early Pākehā ethnographers (C. Smith & Laing, 2011) who viewed our culturally bound practice through a colonial, and almost always, male gaze. One hundred years later, Māori male scholars such as Te Rangi Hiroa (1924) and Hirini Moko Mead (1990a, 1990b) created meticulous diagrams to document weaving processes, and photographed and catalogued a wide range of whatu kākahu (Henare, 2005; C. Smith & Laing, 2011) as the knowledge and practice of weaving traditional cloaks shrank to small pockets of expertise across Aotearoa. While these historical records have played an important role in revitalising whatu practice (Evans & Ngarimu, 2005), there are few, if any, observations that document explicitly the pedagogical underpinnings of whatu. We are left to wonder: What pedagogy was at play? Did learners ask questions or did they rely on watching and listening? Was whatu practice a skill for survivance or a space of oranga? Importantly, how do we now want to purposively teach and learn whatu in ways that continue to revitalise the practice as well as providing oranga space that connects us to ancestral knowledge?

The first hui of the national Māori and Pacific weavers held in Tokomaru Bay in 1983 (Te Awekotuku, 1991) provided a pivotal moment in the revitalisation of whatu practice and led to the establishment of a national weaving collective, Te Roopu Raranga Whatu o Aotearoa. Since then, publications and photographic catalogues, "how to weave" books and community "cloak making classes" have proliferated. Thanks to this wide range of scholarship and practice, whatu is no longer in danger—except from commercialisation, cultural appropriation and capitalism, but that argument is reserved for another article.

Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1991) documented this first gathering in her article "We Will Become Ill If We Stop Weaving". It was a timely reminder that mahi toi and oranga are inextricably linked—to lose one is to gravely endanger the other. Almost 40 years later, with toi Māori practices no longer on the precipice, Māori scholars are extending our

thinking beyond practice to explore the methodology (Campbell, 2019; Te Kanawa, 2022) and now pedagogy of toi Māori. The attention given to Māori pedagogies as legitimate ways of teaching and learning resists the reification of Western pedagogy that risks dismissing Māori knowledge and our learning practices and processes as inferior (Bishop, 1996). Yet little attention has been paid to toi Māori practice as pedagogy—how we teach and learn our practice and why. The next section shares themes that emerged from interviews with three wāhine kaiwhatu who have years of teaching and learning experience both in formal institutional settings and in community- and marae-based learning environments. Their insights about how they teach and learn offer ways to think about the pedagogy of whatu and, more broadly, developing toi Māori pedagogical theory.

Introducing the kaiwhatu

Paula Rigby was raised in Ōtautahi with whakapapa connections to Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Kahungunu ki te te Wairoa, Ngāi Tūhoe and Ngāti Ruapane, and describes herself as having her "fingers and toes just about everywhere" in the South Island. Paula's experience learning to whatu speaks to her connection to her cultural heritage. Her grandmother's influence was significant, with vivid memories of her weaving shaping Paula's understanding of, and connection to, her arts practice. For Paula, whatu is a way to connect with her ancestors, providing a sense of continuity and belonging:

> I remember watching my grandmother weave and the pride she took in her work. For me, weaving is a way to connect with my past, to honour my ancestors, and to find peace and relaxation in my busy life.

Edna Pahewa comes from a long line of highly esteemed master weavers, which meant Edna and her twin sister were "weaving before we could walk". She grew up in Rotorua at Whakarewarewa, where tourism provided their "bread and butter" family income:

> Weaving was what the tourists liked to buy. So that was what we had to do. My nanny believed that when you were old enough you had to contribute to the family, which for us was making piupiu. That was a big part of our upbringing. Going down to the ngāwhā to boil flax. You could see the Pākehā almost cringing with pity at these poor little kids boiling harakeke in the hot pools because they thought it was unsafe. Our livelihood was weaving. It was something we had to do. There were no ifs and buts or "I want to go and play"; it was "get and do your mahi" to help pay the bills.

Te Hemoata Henare was raised in Te Tai Tokerau and had whakapapa connections to Ngāti Kurī and Ngāti Kahu on her father's side and Ngāti Hine, Te Kapotai and Te Whakatōhea on her mother's side. Te Hemoata learned from her aunty and her grandfather, and her narrative shares the practical and purposeful nature of toi Māori. Weaving, along with other cultural practices, was more than aesthetic, serving essential functions within the community, which highlights its role in daily Māori life and cultural preservation:

> Growing up, weaving was not just something beautiful to look at; it had a purpose. Whether it was making clothes or other essential items, everything we did was deeply connected to our way of life and our cultural practices.

Early toi Māori learning experiences

The three wāhine kaiwhatu, from different regions of Aotearoa and different childhood backgrounds shared their early memories of toi Māori learning that has influenced the way they now teach. Edna's teaching approach, for example, was formed by childhood experiences with her grandmother, who encouraged watching and doing, and gave minimal direct instruction. This hands-on "look and listen" approach encouraged practical engagement, close observation and listening skills in order to take up tacit knowledge:

> In the old days, we learned by watching and doing. You didn't ask questions. You watched and listened. Today, I try to be more supportive and understanding of my students' struggles, adapting my teaching to fit their needs while still preserving the essence of our traditional methods.

Decades of teaching in formal and informal contexts has honed Edna's pedagogy to be adaptive and responsive, embracing more inclusive teaching methods that accommodate ever diversifying and increasingly complex learner needs. Edna's pedagogy reflects a critically conscious balance between preserving traditional methods and adapting to contemporary educational paradigms. Her narrative is deeply embedded in the cultural heritage and ancestral connections that define her identity as a weaver:

> Weaving was a part of our daily lives. My

> grandmother taught us the skills, and it was our responsibility to contribute to the household. It wasn't just about making things; it was about preserving our heritage and staying connected to our ancestors.

Her grandmother, a pivotal figure in her upbringing, played a crucial role in teaching her and her siblings the art of weaving. This intergenerational transmission of skills and knowledge underscores the importance of familial bonds and ancestral heritage in Edna's weaving practice.

Paula shared how her creativity was also nurtured by her grandmothers—one Māori and one Pākehā—who taught her in different ways:

> When my Māori grandmother was alive, I watched her do tāniko. She would enter the Māori Women's Welfare League competitions. I remember once, she lent Mum a pōtae she had woven and she said, "Don't lose it," because she was putting it in the competition. We went to the beach and the hat fell off Mum's head so we all had to chase it before it got into the sea! While I have vivid memories as a child of her weaving, I never had the opportunity to learn off her because she passed away when I was quite young.

Paula's Māori grandmother provided her first memories of toi Māori and her Pākehā grandmother nurtured her creative making—an approach she now takes up in her own practice:

> I've had a creative bent right from my childhood. My Pākehā grandmother invested a lot of time and energy teaching me how to sew, embroider and crochet. I only found out when I was older that a lot of the time she was only one step ahead of me! She would say, "So what's the next project?" And I would say, "Oh, I want to learn to crochet." So she'd go to the library to get books out and teach herself and then teach me the basics of everything, which was beautiful. I like that whakaaro to teach the basics and let the person develop and grow their own creativity as they learn more. I guess I teach like that too.

Te Hemoata's experiences reflect a life immersed in toi Māori. Her upbringing in a Tai Tokerau rich environment where kapa haka, being at the marae, working at tangi and weaving were integral parts of daily life. Toi Māori was not taught as discrete lessons or classes as we might think of teaching now, but was integrated into practical and communal aspects of being part of, and contributing to, community life. Learning to raranga as a child was to adorn a carving that was to be unveiled. Making piupiu was to support the local haka group. Weaving baskets was to hold food for the hāngī. Each toi Māori "art" practice was practical and practice based.

It should come as no surprise that grandmothers, aunts and other extended whānau play a role in how we develop our own toi Māori pedagogy, given that parents were, and are still, often occupied with providing for the whānau. If we consider that our childhood experiences of toi Māori learning emerge from a particular socio-historical time and place—for these three wāhine kaiwhatu the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s—it is interesting to ponder how the prevailing societal pressures around Māori language and culture, prosperity and employment, the place of toi Māori and the place of women, for example, influence how they were taught.

Reflecting on their own pedagogy

Each wāhine kaiwhatu appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their toi Māori pedagogy—explained to them as the why and how they teach the way they do. Paula remarked, "No one has ever asked me that before," a sentiment echoed by Edna, who mentioned that people often asked her *who* she learned from but not *how*. The wāhine kaiwhatu were asked to reflect on how they learned to whatu and how their learning experiences now influence their own teaching pedagogy.

Like Edna, Te Hemoata learned through observation and minimal conversation. Her learning experiences with her aunt were characterised by a "look and listen" approach, through which learners observed and practiced with little explicit instruction:

> We learned by watching and doing, not by asking questions. Today, I teach in a similar way, focusing on building relationships and understanding the cultural context. It's not about perfection; it's about connection.

Te Hemoata's pedagogy emphasises the importance she places on whanaungatanga in the transmission of cultural knowledge, focusing on the process of fostering deep cultural connections rather than the product or achieving technical perfection.

Paula's whatu pedagogy is built on incremental learning and inclusivity. She advocates starting with basic whatu techniques and gradually introducing more complex skills. By initially using

contemporary materials such as mop string and wool, Paula ensures that learners are not discouraged by the time-intensive nature of preparing traditional materials. Important to note here is that graduating to using traditional materials is always the goal:

> I believe in starting with the basics and using materials that are easy to handle. Once my students are comfortable, we move on to traditional natural materials. This way, they build confidence and stay motivated to learn. I've seen wāhine discouraged trying to extract muka from harakeke. It takes time and skill to master, which they do eventually, and once you get them past that, they find the joy in it. I want them to love mahi whatu.

Paula's pedagogical approach reflects my teaching approach, which has. developed over years of teaching rangatahi. I want to build connection to, and confidence within, the learner to support their sustained interest in whatu, which naturally leads them to want to use natural materials. Even with her experience of being surrounded by traditional materials and teaching practices, Edna also spoke to the value of beginning with contemporary whatu materials:

> We were taught on wool; we weren't taught with muka. Even back in Nanny's and Mum's time. A lot of Mum's pieces were made with wool because she was so busy and travelled a lot. It wasn't until after you developed your skills that you advanced eventually to muka. But for the learner, I swear by the contemporary wool in learning the techniques first, and then you get into muka once you know the process and you've got the techniques down.

Paula's whatu pedagogy of understanding learners' motivations and tailoring her teaching to individual needs underscores her inclusive approach, fostering a supportive environment for skill development and nurturing a love of the art through a sense of achievement. There is varied opinion about the use of "traditional" or natural materials versus contemporary materials in teaching whatu. I do not argue that one way is more correct than the other. Instead, I encourage those who teach whatu to reflect on what motivates their *why* they choose to initiate learners using either set of materials and where this *why* comes from.

Edna's approach to teaching whatu is inextricably tied to her weaving upbringing. Her grandmother's teaching influence instilled a strong work ethic, discipline and a focus on crafting excellence, which Edna carries into her own teaching and practice. These early experiences developed in her perseverance in and dedication to mastering traditional arts. The responsibility Edna feels to sustain toi Māori practices was clear throughout our discussion as she spoke about connecting to her ancestors and her commitment to passing on her knowledge. She views weaving as a way to honour her heritage and contribute to the preservation of Māori culture:

> My grandmother was very strict, but her teachings instilled a discipline in me that I carry forward in my own teaching. Weaving is a way to honour my heritage and ensure that our traditions are passed on. It's really hard for me to put myself back there and to think how was I taught because after 50 years you've just got it down to a fine art and can do it blindfolded! Back when I was learning we didn't get a whack if we were wrong. Instead you would look up and Nanny would be watching and quietly shaking her head saying, "Kao, kao." [no]. Not like teaching nowadays. We'll show learners how to do just about everything one-on-one and explain it over and over, whereas with Nanny it was you watch and then you could have a go.

Edna shared an interest in developing her pedagogy while teaching at Polytech, where she was required to complete a Certificate in Adult Teaching (CAT).

> Mum was dead against it. She said, "What's a CAT course?" I explained it's a course on adult teaching. And she said, "Who are they to tell us how to teach our arts? Just teach them how we taught you." I said, "Mum, they're teaching us a way to reach the learner," but she couldn't see it. When I did the course, it was really quite interesting because it was everything we did anyway. Showing and explaining and then getting the learner to do it. I did the CAT course. And that was what I reckon changed me to be more aware of the learner and the struggles that they were having.

Even as an expert weaver, Edna's openness to be a learning teacher reflects a commitment to developing and evolving her pedagogy.

Challenges and changes teaching

The wāhine kaiwhatu discussed challenges that influence how and why they teach whatu, such as the ongoing colonisation of our knowledge, including language loss, cultural appropriation and commercialisation. Edna raised the challenge of enfolding Māori weaving into institutional

assessment frameworks to award degrees and certificates as presenting both opportunities and challenges to an oranga-centred toi pedagogy. Edna's mother, esteemed weaver Emily Schuster, opposed the formalisation of traditional toi Māori practices, fearing it would dilute their cultural integrity. Edna said:

> Institutionalising our traditional arts has its challenges. While it can provide structure and recognition, it's crucial to ensure that we don't lose the essence of our cultural practices in the process.

Despite these concerns, Edna acknowledges the need to adapt and evolve teaching modes and methods to fit contemporary educational contexts while preserving core cultural values and practices. Like Edna, Te Hemoata and Paula have a wealth of teaching experience across institutional, community, school and marae learning environments. All three are examples of reflective and responsive whatu pedagogues with the ability to balance cultural integrity and adapting to modern educational requirements to adjust to the ever-changing dynamic of teaching toi Māori.

Paula raised the challenge of global access that social media enables for teaching and learning toi Māori. While social media and online learning platforms can provide new opportunities for learning, they also pose challenges related to the commodification and appropriation of toi Māori:

> Social media is a double-edged sword. It can help spread awareness about our art, but it can also lead to misrepresentation. We need to be vigilant about preserving the authenticity of our practices and how these are taught.

It is possible to teach the practice of whatu online, making our art form available to the world through free YouTube clips and online fee-charging teaching platforms. While our tūpuna may never have imagined it possible, whatu is being practised by people all over the world, some of whom have never set foot in Aotearoa, engaged in our language and culture or held within their hands traditional weaving materials such as muka and harakeke. Such a global open access pedagogy raises questions about cultural appropriation and the selective uptake of Māori ancestral knowledge absent of the important whanaungatanga that the three wāhine kaiwhatu discuss in depth. The impact of teaching toi Māori online is a subject that warrants further research to explore what motivates and informs this "new" toi Māori pedagogy when the narrative and relationship to ancestral knowledge may not be safely maintained.

Te Hemoata reflected on the effects of colonisation on toi Māori and on teaching practice over time. One such effect was the loss of traditional practices, including the suppression of toi Māori, particularly after the passing of the Tohunga Suppression Act 1907, which was intended to stop people using traditional medicines, practices and beliefs that had a "spiritual" element. For example, Māori carving was classed as "demonic" anti-Christian idolatry. Legislating to limit Māori cultural expression had a profound impact on the transmission of cultural knowledge—a government approach that is being played out again 120 years later:

> Colonisation and the suppression of our arts have had lasting impacts. It's important to reclaim and revitalise our traditions, adapting them to fit contemporary contexts while staying true to their core values.

Despite the historical and contemporary challenges, Te Hemoata's pedagogy works to reclaim and revitalise traditional weaving arts alongside its language. She shared a sadness that much of the whatu terminology that she was taught is not specific to Tai Tokerau but comes from early publications using weaving terms from other areas in Aotearoa. Te Hemoata and her whānau are actively rebuilding a Tai Tokerau weaving lexicon by researching and recalling "old" weaving terms. Even more exciting is that they are creating "new" language to describe the process of weaving:

> I often sit with my son and his partner and say "Okay, watch me, and describe what I'm doing." Because he's a composer matatau i te reo and kapa haka, he can put words to my actions. In this way we sit down and come up with kupu and ideas that I then take to my students.

Keeping toi Māori practices alive is not only about what we make. It is about keeping vital all aspects of toi Māori, such as its language, practices and pedagogy. Whatu terminology is deeply embedded in maternal knowledge, for example, the aho is the same term as the umbilical cord that connects mother to child. The vertical strands or whenu hold the same name as the placenta that nurtures the child in utero. The term kahu refers to the amniotic sac we carry our babies in before they are birthed into the world, after which we continue

to cloak them both tangibly and metaphorically in our protection (H. Smith, 2017, 2020). To revitalise toi Māori practice absent of its embodied and storied language is to do only half the job.

Toi and ora

Te Awekotuku reminded us over 30 years ago that we will become ill if we stop weaving. How then might exploring how and why we teach whatu weaving keep us well? Here, the kaiwhatu share their thoughts on the connection between learning whatu and oranga as wellbeing. Paula discussed an oranga connection beyond personal wellbeing:

> It's deeper than just being well or happy. It's a connection to your tūpuna because we are using the same techniques that they passed down to us. Sitting in the same way. Why did I start weaving? Well, I didn't have a close relationship with my grandmother but I wanted to connect to her more so I thought if I learnt to weave . . . it was a way to connect, and even now that she's passed, I can still feel that connection to her. I hope that she's proud of what I've done. I don't think people understand or value the hauora or the rongoā that comes from being creative because we are all creative beings

Paula's vivid memories of her grandmother's weaving provide a rich context for her own practice. Weaving is more than craft to Paula; it is a passion that provides a sense of connection and oranga:

> Seeing my students develop their skills and connect with their heritage brings me immense joy. Weaving is not just a craft; it's a passion that provides a deep sense of connection and fulfilment.

Paula speaks to the creativity, resilience and emotional fulfilment that comes from practising a whatu pedagogy that she has developed to help others connect to ancestral knowledge.

Teaching for purpose, perfection or excellence

An unexpected theme emerged from the three wāhine kaiwhatu around their pedagogical approach to addressing learners' mistakes. Edna shared a childhood learning experience of making a tāniko pari under her grandmother's tutelage:

> I get to the end of a pari and show it to my nanny. I was beaming because I had finished! She looked at it and she was happy for me too. And then right at the top she saw a mistake. I had to take that whole pari off right to the top. I was so deflated. Nanny said, "You take it right back to there; you weren't concentrating on your pattern." The mistake wasn't in the aho tapu; it was further down. Somehow it should have put my whole pattern out, but I had managed to cover it up and carry on mistakenly because I didn't know until she pointed it out. That's probably the hardest lesson in my learning. But it's a good part of my teaching because I tell my students now, if you make a mistake anywhere, you'll be taking it off.

Edna's experience might seem harsh in today's modern learning context, but it served as an unforgettable reminder to Edna that being focused and present with your whatu practice is a form of oranga in our often distracting and multitasked contemporary lives:

> My own mokopuna last night was doing his tāniko piece and he saw a mistake up further because he was busy watching the [King Charles] coronation. I gently reminded him you've got other things on your mind and you've made a mistake because you're not focusing on what you're doing.

Te Hemoata learned from her grandfather that relationships or whanaungatanga made through learning to whatu was as important, if not more so, than the perfection of the product:

> Weaving something is the bonus—it's the whanaungatanga that comes with it that was more important for my grandfather. It's about being in space together, it's about the kōrero that comes out. It's about the story that's being woven into this kākahu.
>
> Some people find a mistake and they'll undo two months of work. My approach is that it's all part of the story. If you can learn from that mistake and you change your approach, then that's part of your story. Other kaiwhatu have different approaches to that; for some, if there's a mistake in the tāniko, it's all got to come off if they want it to be perfect.

My whatu pedagogy is undoubtedly influenced by many years as a secondary school teacher. Being student-centred meant making learning engaging, challenging, sometimes fun and always achievable. In my experience, teenagers were best motivated when they felt a sense of achievement. Therefore, my teaching was intentionally scaffolded with clearly explained and attainable goals while also offering opportunities for them to experiment,

be creative and learn from their mistakes. More important to me than the perfect whatu—whatever that means—is the knowledge that learners love the art form and all that it entails.

Paula discussed a similar approach to encouraging rangatahi into whatu space that is a safe place to learn from mistakes:

> It's about letting them have a tutu. We talk about the Māui in everyone, the haututū in everyone and I'm pretty sure our tūpuna made a lot of mistakes before they actually knew how you do it. So we need to embrace that, maybe not celebrate it, but embrace it and allow it to happen. And it's not a big deal. Like oh, okay, well, that didn't work this time. What can we do differently? What have we learned from it? What do we learn from there? How can we do it differently? So that it becomes achievable.

There is no right or wrong binary to either carry on weaving or unpick. Instead, interrogating ideas of perfection and excellence in toi Māori offers a useful place to reflect on how and why we teach whatu the way we do, what or who is at the centre of our pedagogy, and what of our own learning experiences may have influenced our pedagogy.

Conclusion—tying off the threads

This article centres whatu as part of a developing toi Māori pedagogy theory that weaves across three art forms: raranga, whatu and kapa haka. The aim is to promote a wider range of kaupapa Māori practices, and an exploration of their pedagogy, that support holistic whānau wellbeing woven through with reo, tikanga and mātauranga Māori. Together, we consider the important creative pedagogy of how these art forms are taught in ways that contribute to whānau wellbeing through the intergenerational transmission of language, values, beliefs and aspirations to thrive as Māori.

Pedagogical reflections from these three wāhine kaiwhatu contribute to a small but growing literature on Māori pedagogy and help to theorise toi Māori pedagogy for wellbeing. From them, we learn that for whatu to remain vibrant and vital, how we teach it must hold on lovingly to those strands of ancestral knowing and doing that were handed to us. At the same time, how we teach needs to be adaptive and responsive to contemporary learners, especially our rangatahi, as they are the next generation to take up and continue our practices, lest they once again become endangered.

The kaiwhatu remind us that why we whatu changes over time, and therefore, so should how we teach. From a practical activity necessary to provide for the whānau or to connect with and contribute to community, whatu is now perhaps more likely an oranga space for kaiwhatu to come together in toi Māori space in order to grow closer to their ancestors. If engaging in whatu is understood as an oranga or wellbeing space, then how we teach and learn in that space must also support well ways of learning and being. Developing toi pedagogy encourages other artists and teachers to consider their toi pedagogy, the how and why they pass on ancestral knowledge of their practice in the way that they teach.

Glossary

aho	weft threads; umbilical cord
aho tapu	sacred first line—the first line in weaving that sets the rest of the pattern
āhuatanga ako	the principles of teaching practice that are of vital importance in the education of children
ako	teach; learn
Aotearoa	New Zealand
haka	posture dance performance
hāngī	food cooked in earth oven
harakeke	flax
hauora	wellbeing
haututū	mischief, naughtiness
hui	meeting
iwi	tribe
kahu	cloak; amniotic sac
kaiwhatu	weaver
kākahu	cloaks
kao	no
kapa haka	a group performing haka/waiata/poi
Kaupapa Māori	Māori based topic/event/enterprise run by Māori for Māori
kōrero	discussion
kupu	word
mahi	work
mahi toi	art; creative practice
marae	tribal meeting grounds
mātanga reo	language experts
matatau i te reo	language expert
mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge
Māui	a demigod
mokopuna	grandchild
muka	fibre

ngāwhā	boiling spring, boiling mud pool
ora	health
oranga	wellbeing
Ōtautahi	Christchurch
Pākehā	a person of predominantly European descent
piupiu	grass skirt
pōtae	hat
pūtoiako	pedagogy
rangatahi	youth
raranga	flax weaving
reo	language
rongoā	medicine
tangi	mourning rituals
tāniko	finger weaving
tāniko pari	woven bodice
tēina	younger brothers (of a male), younger sisters (of a female)
te reo Māori	the Māori language
tikanga	customs and practices
toi Māori	Māori arts
tuākana	elder brothers (of a male), elder sisters (of a female)
tūpuna	ancestors
tutu	creative play
wāhine	women
waiata	singing, song, chanting
wānanga	ideate
whaikōrero	formal speech, oratory
whakaaro	idea
whakapapa	genealogy, ancestry, familial relationships
whakataukī	proverb
whānau	family; nuclear/extended family
whanaungatanga	relationships
whatu	weaving (garments, baskets, etc.), fibre-weaving
whenu	vertical strands

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