

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Creating peaceful and effective schools through a culture of care

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Many schools in New Zealand, the USA, and elsewhere, are searching for ways to respond positively to the educational achievement disparities that exist between majority culture students and students from minority ethnic and cultural communities. Most of the approaches and strategies that have been implemented to date have either failed, or had minimal positive influence. This paper presents the results of over five years of research, conducted collaboratively by the authors, that has been focused on developing the theory and practice of a ‘culture of care’ in schools. Using a cultural lens to interpret the findings, these replicated studies offer the promise of positively influencing the culture of schooling in the USA, New Zealand and beyond. Creating a culture of care requires schools and teachers to be cognisant of how the school and classroom values, beliefs and practices make it safe for all students to engage, to contribute, to belong and to feel confident in their own cultural identities.

Keywords: culture of care; disparity; educational achievement; cultural lens; cultural identity; ethnically diverse students

Introduction

Over a number of years, many secondary schools in New Zealand, as in the USA, and elsewhere, have found that the academic achievement of students from minority ethnic and cultural communities, particularly those from indigenous communities, is well below that of students from the majority cultural community (Macfarlane, Glynn, Cavanagh, & Bateman, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999). Schools also report increasing levels of challenging and disruptive behaviours from culturally minoritised students, and highlight the challenges that such behaviours create for students, teachers and school management. Such schools are seldom peaceful places, either for students or teachers, but more typically they are places where both students and teachers experience on-going levels of frustration, stress and conflict.

This paper suggests that a responsive approach to managing both learning and behavioural disparities for minority students may be found through adopting two different but mutually dependent strategies. The first strategy focuses on establishing a *culture of care* (Cavanagh, 2003, 2004; Noddings, 1992, 2003), whereby schools and teachers take ownership and responsibility for students’ holistic well-being (adopting an ethic of care), for building trusting and respectful relationships and for repairing

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those relationships that have been harmed through wrongdoing. The second strategy implements *culturally responsive pedagogies* (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995), and requires schools and teachers to employ pedagogies that respond to the *cultural* knowledge and understandings that minority students bring to school and to affirm and incorporate these within classroom learning and teaching. Further suggestions are proffered in terms of how these two inter-reliant strategies are able to positively impact on the inextricably linked components of learning and behaviour; the notion that educational achievement for minoritised students can indeed be enhanced when schools and teachers are responsive to both the educational and socio-cultural aspects of the classroom curriculum.

It is respectfully acknowledged at the outset, that many schools and teachers in both the USA and New Zealand are working extremely well with culturally minoritised students, and continually seek out best practice approaches and strategies that enable learning and behavioural success to ensue, and student potential to be realised. Thomas and Loxley (2001) contend that many western societies continue to challenge previously preferred education policies and practices – specifically those emerging from a deficit or functional limitations paradigm – to a more inclusive and ecological paradigm. They declare that during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, there were emerging social frameworks including social justice and values approaches that provided the guidance and stimulus in terms of reshaping education and, more specifically, targeting educational disparity. Thomas and Loxley posit that the long-running argument as to whether ‘schools may be able to determine what happens in society’ versus ‘society determines what happens in schools’ will continue to be debated, and further propose that schools may be able to drive the former (and preferred) argument by openly declaring that values and rights are fundamental to their educational philosophies, policies and practices.

Sadly, however, there still remains a significant number of schools and teachers in both countries where responses to culturally minoritised students’ learning and behavioural challenges are met with sanctions and aversive actions that clearly stem from prevailing discourses of deficit. Discourses of deficit perpetuate the myth that learning and behavioural challenges emanate almost entirely from within students, their families and cultural communities. Locating the challenges thus merely abdicates the responsibility of schools and teachers to respond proactively or implement alternative approaches. Furthermore, it supports the on-going implementation of failed and worthless teaching strategies and pedagogies, as well as reinforcing undesired stereotypes that exist for many minoritised students by exacerbating and perpetuating the learning and behavioural disparity cycle.

Abdicating *educational* responsibility for the implementation of positive and adaptive responses to learning and behavioural challenges has resulted in many schools preferring to adopt a *punitive* approach (Canter & Canter, 2001; Rogers, 2003), or even a ‘zero tolerance’ approach, both of which emanate from a punitive ‘crime and punishment’ type of ideology. Such an ideology all too often leads to the segregation of disproportionate numbers of culturally minoritised students (through temporary suspension or permanent exclusion), and emphasises keeping ‘non-problem’ students safe from harm by removing ‘problem’ students. However, this does little to develop or embed an inclusive ideology which promotes educational strategies that focus on establishing and maintaining a culture of care based on

peaceful and trusting relationships, and on repairing any harm that may be done to those relationships (Hooper, Winslade, Drewery, Monk, & Macfarlane, 1999; Olsen, Maxwell & Morris, cited in McElrea, 1994).

Fortunately, there are alternative discourses that locate learning and behavioural challenges – and the necessary responses to these – differently. One such discourse is that of identifying and modifying institutional and systems barriers. This discourse locates the challenges and the responses within the systems and processes of schools, as well as the teaching practices and actions of teachers (Macfarlane, 2007). It is clear that schools and teachers are still able to choose to respond, or not respond, to the educational disparity that exists for many minoritised students in mainstream (regular) educational contexts that are fundamentally designed to meet the needs of majority culture students. A compelling variant of this discourse, the concept of ‘cumulative national debt’, adds an *historical* dimension, by unearthing and acknowledging an *educational deficit* that has resulted from years, and even generations, of schools’ and systems’ failure in providing an education that responds adequately to the needs of students from minoritised cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2006). This kind of discourse opens up possibilities for schools and teachers to re-position their ongoing relationships with culturally minoritised students and communities and to change their pedagogical strategies to better meet the needs of these students and their communities. A willingness to change – to be responsive, fair and just – is central and critical to building a culture of care within classrooms and schools.

The notion of creating a *culture of care* sits comfortably within the field of Peace Education, and typically involves teaching students about conflict resolution and non-violence within the context of global conflict. However, as well as including a global dimension, creating a culture of care also focuses also on the notion of peaceful classrooms and schools where teachers and students can learn to work together, to care about each other and care for each other in safety (Cavanagh, 2003, 2004, 2008; Gay, 2000; Macfarlane, 2004, 2007; Noddings, 1992, 2002). Schools and classrooms that embody a culture of care, understand safety not only as freedom from harm but also as having the freedom to be *who* and *what* we are. Being who and what we are within classrooms and schools implies being able to maintain and enhance our ethnic and cultural knowledge and identities – and values and beliefs – while at the same time interacting peacefully with students and teachers from different ethnicities and cultures.

When invited to comment on a group of papers presented to the Peace Education Special Interest group at the 2008 AERA annual conference, Ndura-Ouendraongo, asked what it means for peace education in American schools when schools are becoming increasingly segregated, the majority of students of colour are under-achieving, and 50% of Latino/Hispanic students drop out without graduating. She observed that many of the papers presented at the conference lacked a focus on the *cultural* aspects of peace education. In New Zealand as well as in the USA, schools increasingly include many students from diverse cultural, linguistic and experiential backgrounds that differ from those of their teachers; the challenge for teachers is knowing how best to affirm these students’ cultural identities and to meet their cultural and learning needs.

Within the New Zealand education system, disproportionate numbers of indigenous Māori students continue to be stood down, suspended or excluded

from schools because of challenging and disruptive behaviours, and/or leave high school without formal qualifications. The cultural values, knowledge and lived experiences of Māori students are regularly marginalised or invisible within the formal teaching curriculum; indeed the richness of Māori students' culture is oftentimes trivialised or ignored by schools and teachers. The national curriculum framework, as well as how it should be delivered and how students should be assessed, is premised on western epistemology and pedagogy. Teaching design, delivery and assessment practices – as well as student management strategies – do not generally reflect Māori preferences or practices. However, more recently educators have come to appreciate the notion that 'culture counts'; in other words, that paying attention to students' culture can indeed inform and facilitate educational success for Māori students (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Macfarlane, 2004).

Writers in the area of socio-cultural theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bruner, 1996; McNaughton, 2002; Vygotsky, 1981; Wearmouth, Glynn, & Berryman, 2005) emphasise that the out-of-school social and cultural contexts within which children grow up, and the values, beliefs and behaviours they acquire mediate whether and how they 'make sense' of the learning contexts they find themselves in at school. Although the language, knowledge and cultural backgrounds of many Māori students are just as rich as those of many Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent), and emanate from or *belong* in their country of origin, these may not necessarily be affirmed or incorporated into the culture of teaching and learning within majority culture classrooms. Many Māori students also report that they struggle to find ways to engage and participate, and 'be themselves' in classrooms where their traditional knowledge bases and cultural worldviews (i.e. the essence of who they are) are overlooked or misrepresented, and where these classrooms themselves lack a culture that cares enough to affirm the values and worldviews of *all* students (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003; Bishop, Berryman, Powell, & Teddy, 2007). From a socio-cultural point of view, therefore, how teachers and schools *understand* as well as how they *respond* to students with learning and behavioural challenges is critical. This will require them to examine and modify the ways they engage and interact with their students and the pedagogical practices they employ (Macfarlane & Bateman, 2005).

Schools need not be alien, unsafe and uncaring places for Māori students; such places potentially engender high levels of learning and behavioural challenges. Success for many Māori students in majority culture education over recent generations has had to come at the cost of their language and culture; educational success and the maintenance of culture need not be mutually exclusive. Interestingly, the work of Valenzuela (1999) in the USA indicates that Latino/Hispanic students find themselves in a very similar predicament to Māori. Teachers and school management cannot expect schools to provide a culture of care for all students and to be peaceful and effective learning sites until the impacts of these cultural inequalities are addressed.

Cavanagh (2008) declares that a culturally responsive pedagogy that is based on building enduring, respectful relationships are central and critical to establishing and maintaining a culture of care in classrooms and schools. Bishop et al. (2007) report on a nation-wide pedagogy developed systematically from a large-scale and long-standing New Zealand research and professional development project, known as *Te Kotahitanga*. This initiative focuses on improving school retention and achievement

of Year 9 and Year 10 Māori students, who have long been identified as students at greatest risk of dropping out of high school within the first two years. The Te Kotahitanga project addresses this challenge through supporting teachers in a number of important ways. Teachers are helped to build trusting, non-dominating and reciprocal relationships with their students (positioning themselves as novices as well as experts), so that they are able to learn from their Māori students as well as better able to teach them. Teachers are encouraged to accept responsibility for the holistic care for the learning and well-being of their students and to commit to ‘a common (school-wide) vision of what constitutes excellence in educational outcomes for Māori students’ (Bishop et al. 2007, p. 15). Māori peoples’ aspirations for the educational success of their children are represented clearly in the educational policy document *Ka Hikitia* (Ministry of Education, 2008). They want their children to succeed in the modern world (i.e. to do well in all subject areas of the National Curriculum). But they also want their children to enhance their development *as Māori* people (i.e. to do well in expanding their knowledge and achievement in *te reo Māori me ona tikanga* (Māori language and culture)).

Research from the Te Kotahitanga project to date indicates that assisting teachers to reach a deep understanding of how and why each of these components of a culturally responsive, relationships-based pedagogy is crucial, and how to introduce and sustain them in their teaching, takes a large amount of professional development time and effort. Professional development in Te Kotahitanga includes carefully focused observation, monitoring, feed-back and feed-forward for each participating teacher. Te Kotahitanga is not a ‘quick fix’ set of strategies for improving academic success and eliminating challenging and disruptive behaviours, but rather it is pointing the way for sustainable classroom and school-wide change in pedagogy.

Also central to establishing and maintaining a culture of care in classrooms and schools is the related challenge of incorporating restorative practices that focus on repairing the harm done to relationships through wrongdoing and conflict (McElrea, 1994; Prochnow & Macfarlane, 2011; Thorsborne & Vinegrad, 2004; Wachtel, 2005; Zehr, 2002). Restorative practices offer a powerful means of moving teachers and schools away from crime and punishment approaches to challenging and disruptive behaviours. Restorative practices are particularly important where the person or persons harmed, and the person or persons causing the harm come from different ethnic or cultural groups. Different ethnic or cultural groups will have a different understanding of what constitutes harm, and a different understanding of what constitutes an effective and acceptable way of repairing the harm. Working through these understandings in an honest, trusting and respectful way will help to establish a culture of care, but it will take a great deal of time and effort.

Methodology

All four authors of this paper have considerable academic and professional experience in finding ways to improve learning and behaviour outcomes for minority students in majority culture schools. The first author’s ethnographic study on creating a culture of care within an elementary school in the USA (Cavanagh, 2003) led to his visiting New Zealand on a Fulbright Fellowship to carry out a similar study in Brady Area School (pseudonym for a semi-rural school having both elementary and secondary classes). Subsequently, he spent several further years

engaged in collaborative research in New Zealand schools with the other three authors, on research and professional development aimed at improving learning and behavioural outcomes for Māori students through helping schools to create a culture of care. The qualitative information (student and teacher comments) reported in this section are drawn from the first author's research experiences in Brady Area School, and in other schools in the North Island of New Zealand (Cavanagh, 2005). All of these schools had substantial proportions of Māori students (40–50% average), well in advance of the national average, estimated at around 15–16%. The research focus was on what these schools were doing to create a culture of care, and this paper focuses on the views of Māori students and their teachers on the importance of building and maintaining trusting and caring relationships and on ways of repairing relationships harmed by wrong-doing.

A participatory action research methodology to data gathering and analysis was employed in these schools. This methodology provided an iterative (cyclic) process that incorporated the aspects of planning, data gathering, reflection and action (Elliot, 1988). This methodology was deemed appropriate so as to facilitate access to the voices and understandings of Māori students, from within their own cultural worldview, about how to improve their well-being and achievement. Furthermore, a participatory action research methodology was seen as offering a framework for students and their teachers to identify and clarify problematic situations (with regard to establishing a culture of care), suggest and implement plans for improving these situations and evaluating outcomes, implement these plans and evaluate outcomes, and understand from within a Māori cultural worldview how being responsive to these challenges might contribute to building a culture of care. It was hoped, too, that this research approach might assist Māori students and their communities to address what are clearly social justice issues impacting on their education. Kemmis and Wilkinson (1988) argue that participatory action research is an appropriate and effective methodology for doing this.

Data gathering and analysis

Qualitative data (interviews, observations and researcher reflections) were collected over a period of two years at the various schools through a process of 'Appreciative Inquiry' (Patton, 2003). This process is used to create a strengths-based action plan with the participants. These qualitative data were segmented into units for analysis, and coded and organised. Findings were given to participants for feedback and comment. Two Māori scholars and researchers, the third and fourth authors, provided important cultural insights into how these findings might be understood from within a Māori cultural worldview.

The research process was iterative so that a context of trustworthiness and participant support for researcher interpretations could be established and maintained throughout. Triangulation was addressed through comparing evidence from different sources of data (i.e. interviews, observations and reflective field notes). Evidence of trustworthiness was further obtained by inviting participants to engage in the Appreciative Inquiry process in order to review claims identified by the researcher, having the scholars who are authoring this paper examine the findings (both independently and collaboratively), searching for counter interpretations, and

finally, representing the different cultural worldviews among the participants and researchers involved in this project.

Throughout this project the authors relied on trusting, respectful and collaborative relationships between the researcher and participants as the foundation for developing new understandings of what a culture of care might look like from the point of view of indigenous students in majority culture schools. This approach is among those judged more appropriate for researching with indigenous people than the traditional positivist Western–European approaches (Smith, 2008).

Findings

Based on researcher experiences in the various studies previously referred to, four representative themes in student and teacher comments were identified as central to a culture of care. These were: *building relationships*, *holistic caring*, *building capacity* and *building trust*. On examining comments from students and teachers (samples of which are included in this section) and after discussion and input from the two Māori authors and researchers, it was found that the last two themes could be subsumed under the first two themes (*building relationships* and *exercising holistic care*). In order to understand these themes from within a Māori worldview, appropriate *whakaaro Māori* (Māori constructs) that might represent these two themes were identified, respectively, as *whakawhanaungatanga* and *manaakitanga*, and findings in this paper have been organised around these constructs.

Whakawhanaungatanga (Building and maintaining relationships)

Whakawhanaungatanga can be understood as building and maintaining cultural interconnectedness and collective identity with other people in one's extended family (*whānau*), in one's sub-tribe (*hapū*) and in one's tribe (*iwi*). A person's collective identity is also strongly defined in association with people who descend from specific important ancestors and who affiliate with particular geographic locations and landscape features (Glynn, Cowie, Orel-Cass, & Macfarlane, 2010; Macfarlane, Glynn, Grace, Penetito, & Bateman, 2008). Traditionally, maintaining these relationships was central to maintaining one's identity, and indeed central to one's safety and survival. Today, even where Māori students in majority culture education settings may not be aware of blood relationship and affiliations among themselves, they will soon form strong working relationships, and take collective responsibility for each other's well-being and learning, especially through a commitment to sharing their knowledge freely among members of the group. In these educational contexts Māori students will also build respectful and supportive relationship with their teachers (whether Māori or non-Māori) as long as those teachers show that they understand and accept the cultural connectedness and collective responsibilities involved. Building and maintaining interconnectedness through enduring relationships is all important (Cavanagh, 2009a).

Students at Brady Area School explicitly acknowledged that their relationships with their teachers had a direct effect and powerful impact on their learning. Also, these students wanted not only to have a positive teacher–student working relationship but also to have their teacher as a good friend... One student wrote:

I learn with certain teachers and in some classes I don't. Teachers I learn with do things like explain things well to me and I feel comfortable working with them.

For this student, being connected with the teacher was a key concern: 'What helps me learn is a good connection between me and the teacher'. This student was also sure that it was important to 'have a good relationship with the teacher I am with'. Another student said, 'I don't want to just look at a teacher as just my teacher, I also want them as a friend' (Cavanagh, 2009b, p. 56).

It became clear also that establishing a relationship of friendship between teachers and students required educators to build trusting classrooms and school community. The interviews with teachers revealed that the key to building a trusting community is creating a context of family-like relationships, where everyone belongs and no one is excluded. This type of family atmosphere is based on the idea of solidarity or an overriding sense of all for all. One of the teachers interviewed described building trust in these words (Cavanagh, 2009b):

Community is a safe and friendly environment where people live in healthy relationships based on caring and support in a family atmosphere; a place where everyone knows and looks out for each other and their surroundings in an atmosphere of bonding of everything and everyone. (p. 71)

These student and teacher statements demonstrate that there are strong synergies between the Māori construct of *whakawhanaungatanga*, and the understandings of the importance of connectedness and collective responsibility within a community that operates as an extended family, within a culture of care.

Manaakitanga (Exercising holistic care)

Manaakitanga can be understood as unqualified (and usually unsolicited) caring for the health and well-being of others. It is usually spoken of in the context of a cultural expectation that local people will provide unstinting hospitality, respect, and care for visitors. In other contexts, manaakitanga can describe the total commitment that *whānau* (extended family members) or a group of work colleagues display when they actively care for each other's health and well-being, as much as for achieving the tasks in hand. In the context of this paper, manaakitanga refers to the kind of respectful and holistic care that effective teachers have for their students, where they care as much about promoting the health and well-being of their students as they care about promoting their learning and academic achievement.

Brady Area School students were clear they wanted their teachers to care for them as individuals as well wanting them to care for their learning. One or the other form of caring was not enough. Students wanted teachers to engage in both kinds of caring. One student expressed this as wanting teachers 'that can understand me and my learning ways'. Another wrote about the importance of 'the things teachers do to help me learn and to get to know me personally and know how I like learning'. They wanted teachers to explain things so they understood: 'What helps me learn is when a teacher explains the work to me in a way that I understand. I like it when teachers explain it so you understand, but if you don't [they] will explain once again' (p. 56).

The kinds of explanations these teachers used were likely to have been explanations that utilised icons, images and metaphors familiar to their students.

One Māori student explained what caring for her holistic well-being meant from within her own worldview (Macfarlane et al., 2007). She was answering a question about what it is like to be a Māori student in the senior school. She replied: 'Most of the time the lights are turned off. The light comes on Tuesday afternoon at kapahaka' (Cavanagh, 2009b, p. 69). (Kapahaka lessons are practical sessions dedicated to teaching and learning Māori performing arts, typically taught by tutors from within the Māori community).

These students strongly articulated the need to be cared for not only as students in a classroom but also to be acknowledged and respected as Māori people who come to the school with experiences and skills from their home and community culture that are an important part of who they are. These experiences and skills include language, performing arts, stories, rituals, and daily lived routines. It is interesting that schools very seldom report concerns about challenging or disruptive behaviour of their Māori students during kapahaka sessions. During these sessions, tutors interact with students, and students with other students in ways appropriate to Māori tikanga, which focus strongly on collective responsibility for helping each other to raise the standard of performance of the entire group.

At Brady Area School all of the teachers, led by senior Māori teachers, implemented a policy of responding to challenging and inappropriate behaviour through a 'care before censure' strategy (Cavanagh, 2009a). The idea of 'care before censure' offered an alternative to a crime and punishment ideology for responding to discipline-related problems, but more importantly, it also provided new opportunities to build the educational capacity of students and teachers to take responsibility and respond to these problems in positive and caring, non-threatening ways, rather than relying on administrators, school management, or agencies outside of the school to determine appropriate responses to any given situation. The teachers talked about the new mantra, 'care before censure', which was described in terms of four general principles (Cavanagh, 2009a):

1. Responses to challenging and disruptive behaviour need to be individualised, but appropriate to the cultural background of the student and appropriate to the nature of the wrong-doing.
2. Challenging and disruptive behaviour can be understood as an indication of other problems.
3. Students from minoritised cultures may not have the appropriate language or strategies to express their emotions or concerns in ways that are acceptable to majority culture teachers.
4. Challenging and disruptive behaviours provide opportunities for further learning (for teachers and students) about how to behave or react. (p. 57)

Students at Brady Area School readily understood that the construct of holistic care, within a culture of care, was no easy option, because such 'wrap around' caring for both learning and well-being, contains not only elements of 'soft' caring – kindness and concern, but also elements of 'hard' caring – high expectations and accountability (Gay, 2000). Students expected their teachers to be in control of the classroom and 'in charge' of students, and to exercise control through careful and culturally

respectful leadership, rather than through resorting to personal or institutional power. They talked about the kind of classroom environment they wanted. Rather than being punished, students wanted help with classroom disruptions by ‘teaching us how to behave in the classroom’. They wanted ‘a teacher [who] can control our class [and] a teacher that we respect so we are quiet for them and listen to what they say’ (pp. 56–57).

As was the case with the construct of *whakawhanaungatanga*, it is evident from these student and teacher statements, that there are strong synergies between Māori understandings of the importance of *manaakitanga* and holistic caring for learning and well-being within a community that operates as an extended family within a culture of care.

Conclusion

This paper has focused on the plight of many minoritised Māori students in majority culture New Zealand schools. However, both the central criticism raised concerning the lack of a *cultural* focus or context in the prevailing discourses of deficit, as well as the solutions offered, establishing a *culture of care* and implementing *culturally responsive pedagogies* apply also to other countries, such as the USA. Student and teacher comments reported in this paper were subsumed under two major themes, *building relationships* and *exercising holistic care* understood as essential components of a culture of care. These major themes were discussed in terms of their relationships with the Māori constructs of *whakawhanaungatanga* and *manaakitanga*, in order to explore their meaning within a Māori worldview.

Teacher and student comments concerning *whakawhanaungatanga* (building relationships) suggest that while there were clear differences in the cultural meanings embedded in this theme there was close accord on the importance for student learning of building respectful and reciprocal student–teacher and student–student relationships. Attending to building such relationships addresses the need for all members of a class or school to know that they belong, and to feel safe to participate without threat to their cultural identities, values and practices, all characteristic of an effective culture of care. Schools and classrooms embodying a culture of care are able to be fully inclusive of individual and cultural differences, and to resist resorting to exclusionary practices in responding to stress and conflict resulting from challenging or disruptive behaviour.

Teacher and student comments concerning *manaakitanga* (holistic caring) also suggest that while there were clear differences in the cultural meanings embedded in this theme, students very much wanted teachers to care for their well-being as well as for their learning. On the other hand, teachers’ comments displayed a lesser understanding of the importance of this. This appears to highlight differing perceptions between people from differing cultural backgrounds, about cultural concepts and values. Teachers who understand a Māori worldview, however, are more likely to understand such concepts and to understand the importance of connecting to the culture of their students through facilitating *manaakitanga*, as well as implementing culturally responsive teaching practices. Creating a culture of care within classrooms whereby students’ holistic well-being and learning are dual priorities takes commitment, willingness and understanding.

Teachers and school management do not have to face the seemingly impossible task of becoming competent participants in each and every culture that is represented by their students. Rather, they need to develop a shared school and classroom culture, one which is co-constructed alongside the students and their communities. The culture that is built must reflect school and classroom values and practices that make it safe for all to engage, build relationships that make it safe for students to contribute on the basis of who they are, without threat to their individual cultural identities, values, beliefs and practices. If schools and teachers succeed at this, they will have created a culture of care.

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