

Matariki - our past, our future

Ahhhh Matariki, here you are again. This year, I think, your presence will be different. This time more people know your name. This time they will look for you. This time, the ancient being you are, will be honoured. Mānawatia a Matariki.

I paused just the other night and looked at the sky cloaked in all its glory. Each star, millions of miles away, ever constant, ever seeing, ever present. My momentary reflection made me think about just how old the stars are. They have led generations, they have guided waka around the world, they have given signs and have provided comfort and wise counsel.

They remain the same, yet we have changed. Our world is ever changing – he ao hurihuri tēnei ao.

The word ‘mātai’ is synonymous with star gazing. It is also a word that we use for ‘examine’. In the development of the new Aotearoa New Zealand and Te Takanga o te Wā histories curricula, mātai is used in the guiding whakataukī Mātai whakamuri, kia anga whakamua – look to the past to move forward. Matariki provides the impetus for us to do just that, reflect on what has gone before and to prepare for the future. So what then is our past, and what will be our future?

With every generation comes change. We have evolved as a society, and continue to evolve as a society. That is how nature works. And thank goodness for that. Those of us who have glimpsed into the window of our past know we have seen dark times. We still see, feel and hear the impact of those times, that is, if we choose to do so. For those that are yet to learn the history of this land, the time has arrived.

Prior to the signing of te Tiriti o Waitangi, te reo Māori was the predominant language of the land. Māori culture, society and identity were intact and māori (normal). In the span of the next one hundred and fifty plus years we experienced the most horrific legislation, for example the 1879 Māori Prisoners Act (Māori imprisoned without trial for an indefinite period of time), the 1863 Suppression of Rebellion Act (any Māori deemed to be in rebellion with the Crown were punished with land confiscation), the 1863 New Zealand Settlements Act (allowed the Government to confiscate land as punishment for those who fought against the crown), the Pepper Potting policy in the 1960s where whānau Māori were housed in non-Māori areas to hasten the assimilation process, and the list goes on and on. Be it racist policy, the perpetuation

of racist discourse, the racist slander we might even experience in our own families, down to the 'everything is so Māori nowadays', tells a story of where we have been, and shows us where we need to get to in order to ensure the world looks different for our future generations.

And the world is looking different. Hope is being restored each time a Māori word is pronounced correctly. It is restored every time 'mainstream' media uses te reo Māori in our TV shows. When we go to the supermarket and see bilingual signage, when people call out racist behaviour, when people invest time in learning the language, when people seek to change – to do better and to be better. When mātauranga Māori is naturalised back into 'mainstream' society, as we see with the Matariki holiday, things are changing.

This year marks the first time we will celebrate an indigenous public holiday. To me, it is a very public way to honour mātauranga Māori. If people didn't know what or who Matariki was, they will now. It is a deliberate act of re-indigenisation, challenging the face of eurocentricity and New Zealand culture. This, among other forms of cultural reclamation and revitalisation, are becoming more and more normal. Iwi are investing significant heart, time and resource into the identity of their uri – identity that has been, like land, dispossessed for generations, for many of us. We are pursuing cultural responsiveness. We see so much grace and willingness to work in partnership that there is a sense of te Tiriti o Waitangi slowly gaining mana and finding a home in society, beyond rhetoric and into spaces of authentic implementation. Although the term is beginning to sound slightly cliché, Aotearoa is getting 'woke'.

It is good to reflect on how far we have come. As we prepare to consider what our contribution to the narrative of our land will be, our collective story will eventually become history, what deliberate acts might we do to ensure mātauranga Māori is returned equitably to the winds, ngā hau e whā, of Aotearoa? Hiwa-i-te-rangi, the 'wishing star' of the Matariki cluster, will soon be visible to the eye. What might we lay before her, what are our hopes and dreams for our land? The responsibility for the future sits on our shoulders and in our hearts. He aha tāu? What part will you play?

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