

# uLearn21 - Thriving individuals and futures

*Janelle Riki-Waaka and Josh Hough share the second part of their blog on Aotearoa e tōnui nei | Thriving Aotearoa, the theme of uLearn21. Part 2 discusses Ngā ahurea e tōnui nei | Thriving cultures and Te tōnuitanga o te āpōpō | Thriving futures. See Part 1 here.*

## Ngā ahurea e tōnui nei | Thriving cultures

**Janelle:** I spoke earlier about the Māori culture on a journey from survival to thriving and what this might look like. Just this week we have had a debate play out in mainstream media about mātauranga Maori where many varied opinions about its relationship to science have been aired. To be honest, I don't have sufficient expertise in either mātauranga Maori or Western science to weigh in on this debate in a deeply informed way. However, I will say that what led me to consider was whether two worldviews (that may be conflicting from time to time), can live in harmony next to each other, each with their own mana intact.

During the colonisation of Aotearoa, many Māori converted from our initial beliefs and spirituality to a Christian faith. Christianity continues to be very prevalent in the lives of many whānau Māori to this day. More recently some Māori have found that in fact Māori forms of spirituality can sit alongside a Christian faith in harmony, neither needing to dominate the other. Our right to choose the belief system and spirituality that best talks to our heart is something we should all value. Our ancestors articulated our desire for this in Te Tiriti o Waitangi Article 2 – Rangatiratanga or Māori self-determination. This article expresses our right to determine our own lives and live as Māori.

I don't believe that it is necessary to belittle or disparage one set of beliefs in order to legitimise another. Wouldn't it be great if we could simply acknowledge the existence of a multitude of world views and beliefs and simply allow people the right to choose that which aligns best with their own cultural values.

“Not all indigenous knowledge is science – because it is the broad spectrum of art, religion, music, philosophy – the entire gamut of knowing! But not all indigenous knowledge isn’t science – it includes scientific knowing in multitudes of ways.”

**Dr Karlo Mila (uLearn21 keynote speaker)**



In a thriving community I believe that’s what we would see. A diverse group of cultures living together and in relative harmony, each acknowledging and respecting the others’ worldviews, beliefs, languages, and cultural practices. In essence, a melting pot of awesomeness! Indigenous knowledge should not have to prove its legitimacy to the Western world. This was the very same mind set that was in play when many indigenous peoples around the world were colonised and assimilated. We know better now and should do better now.

Thriving cultures in Aotearoa are when cultural beliefs, languages and identities are alive and practiced by members of those communities. For me as Māori, this is the ability to connect to my whakapapa, speak my ancestors reo, and live as Māori. Decolonisation is when indigenous people reclaim their identity and breathe life into it so it can be treasured and passed down to our tamariki.



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**Josh:** In writing this blog, I have to admit that coming to this part, I was challenged. Some questions began to come up for me as I considered what to write – “as a white heterosexual male, what even is my culture?”. “As someone not from Aotearoa but having lived here for 19 years, where do I belong culturally?”. “If I’m 15,000 miles away from where I was born, am I even connected to ‘my’ culture anymore?”

In an excellent conversation with Janelle, we unpacked the word “culture” together. Through it, I landed on the notion of culture as a ‘way of life’ – those behaviours, beliefs, and values we hold, often without realising it, that in part define who we are. They could be the fact that we have developed ‘cultural’ practices like starting everyday with a cup of tea, keeping our jam in the fridge, maintaining an even keel of emotion at all times, or that we incessantly feel the need to get out into rugged countryside every time things are getting stressful. The links to culture can be identified by those warm feelings we get when we think about a certain familiar routine that we adopt, a group we gravitate to, or an activity we regularly seek out. These behaviours can be learned, instilled, or simply a part of who we are, and are often most easily identifiable by the fact that others share them. To me, in a sense, knowing who you are is defining your culture.

Suffice it to say, culture is complex and diverse. It can include religion, ritual, what we eat, how we talk and act, how we celebrate, how we greet visitors, how we behave, and a thousand other things.

Cultures thriving in Aotearoa means tangata whenua and tangata Tiriti are able to authentically live into their values, customs, goals, morals, outlooks, languages, attitudes and more in harmony. As we celebrate the richness of cultures in Aotearoa, thriving means that we don't try to shrug off our own culture or co-opt that of others – instead, we live into our own ways of being and doing while acknowledging, valuing and learning from the rich tapestry of other ways of doing the same.



## O te āpōpō | Thriving futures

**Josh:** As a futurist (i.e. someone who practices strategic foresight), I embrace the notion that the future is not predetermined. Nor indeed is there any singular, correct future. There are a number of futures (plural intended) that are possible, probable, and preferred, and they can be shaped by decisions that are made today.

To pursue thriving futures in Aotearoa, it's important to analyse the historical and present contexts in Aotearoa. And this means the whole picture, not just the parts that are good, attractive or easy to digest. As tangata Tiriti, this means owning our politics and our intentions and it involves actively seeking out partnership with tangata whenua. We don't go into this work focused on our own individual wants and egos – instead, we approach it as an expression of shared aspirations that are about creating a better Aotearoa for our descendants to come.



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In the education bubble, it's easy to assume the equity pendulum has swung the right way. There's no doubt that there have been some improvements in system level responses that are beginning to result in improved educational experiences for rangatahi. Awareness is on the increase, there are great examples of equitable partnership popping up throughout the country, and critical conversations are beginning to be had. But if we think that we're there yet and the ideal future is now, then we've definitely drunk the Kool-Aid as there's still a long way to go!

The invite then is to lean into working together in equitable partnership as we begin to co-design our preferred futures.

**Janelle:** I'm excited about the future of Aotearoa. I'm equally excited about our current place in the journey and the fact that I'm here now to bear witness to it and get involved.

I'm particularly looking forward to the inclusion of Aotearoa New Zealand Histories in our curricula and the positive impact this will have on our Treaty relationships. Sadly much of our history has not been taught in schools and some parts have even been swept beneath the rug. Teaching our history will not be about airing the dirty laundry though, it will be about empowering our tamariki with the wisdom we may have gleaned from the past, in order to inform a more positive future for all. By omitting parts of our history and ensuring they have not been learned or discussed, we have dismissed the intergenerational trauma that exists for Māori in Aotearoa. For Māori,

acknowledgment of our history will go some way to perhaps heal some of that trauma.

“As frustrating as the fight to end racism is, the recent commitments to teaching the history of Aotearoa gives us the opportunity to educate the next generation about the injustices of the past and give them the tools to move into the future.”

**Dr Eruera Tarena (uLearn21 keynote speaker)**



Our many and diverse communities need allies. People sitting next to them in the waka as we traverse the many awa of Aotearoa. For NZ Pākehā to engage in allyship with Māori, it will undoubtedly involve some unlearning and relearning. In a recent article I read (What does it mean to act as an ally), one of the descriptors of being an effective ally is to know when to ‘yield the floor.’ This really resonated with me and I began to think about the intent of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and what it means to be an effective Treaty partner with Māori.

I think effective allyship may at times involve sitting in the passenger seat and simply admiring the view as you accompany Māori on their journey towards their desired destination. Ready and willing of course to jump out and muck in should you hit a pothole and get a flat tire! Other times it might look like co-navigating the journey together and reaching agreement about the desired destination. And other times, both Treaty partners may be in separate vehicles making their own way to their own destinations. Effective allies will need to learn how to discern which is the appropriate way of travelling on a case by case basis. The good news is, learning is about listening, asking questions and being prepared to fail in humble and respectful ways. A journey towards a thriving future is certainly a journey worth taking.

If you missed it, the first [blog in this two-part series is available here](#).

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## Josh Hough

Josh Hough (he/him) is the Professional Learning Services Programme Manager at CORE Education Tātai Aho Rau. He specialises in transformation strategy, leadership, programme management, futures thinking, human-centred design thinking, research and effective learning practice. Josh