
NZARE

NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATION
- TE HUNGA RANGAHAU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA -

NZARE National Conference 2006

"Manaakitanga: Feel the Spirit"

Grand Tiara Hotel, Rotorua, New Zealand

5 December 2006

President's address

Manaakitanga: Feel the spirit.

Research begins in challenge and is never far from mystery.

Te mea tuatahi
kei to mihi atu au
ki te Atua
e Pa, tena koe.

Te whare e tu nei
te papa e takato ki waho
tena korua

Nga mate, nga aitua
haere haere haere
nga hunga ora
tena koutou katoa.

Nga mihi nui ki a koutou katoa
kua huihui mai
Tena koutou
Tena koutou
Tena koutou katoa.

It is my privilege, as President of the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, to welcome you here. To the people of Te Arawa and to Waiariki Institute of Technology: Welcome and thank you for hosting us in your beautiful setting.

May I also extend a special honouring of our conference committee for their wonderful uncompromising commitment: Cheryl Stephens, Donna Mariana Grant, Kerry Earl, Catherine Lang, Jenny Ferrier-Kerr, Elizabeth Pakai, and Sarah-Jane Tiakiwai.

We are also privileged to have sponsorship from a number of institutions and organisations which are listed in your conference booklet. Please take time to appreciate and acknowledge their interests.

I am really encouraged by the theme of this year's conference. *Manaakitanga—feel the spirit*. It is both refreshing and pertinent.

Manaakitanga—feel the spirit reminds us as researchers and practitioners that education is about relationship. It begins in relationship; involves relationship; and ends in relationship. Teaching and learning are intimately concerned with relational connectedness—relational connectedness with people, relational connectedness with time, relational connectedness with place, and indeed relational connectedness with our own selves.

Manaakitanga honours the importance of relationship, respect, kindness, hospitality, of being well looked after. All these values are central to nourishing relational connectedness. And they must be core values of educational research and practice. The conference theme, then, encourages us to contemplate how our research, teaching and learning take time to honour these values.

Manaakitanga—feel the spirit. The conference theme also encourages us to “feel the spirit” — not “watch the actions”, not “assess the outcomes” — but “feel the spirit.” I am heartened by this for two reasons.

My first thought is that it asks us to consider feelings, the affective, the emotional, the intuitive, the very humanness of our field of enquiry and practice. Such is the beauty of working with people.

Secondly, it respects the presence of spirit. It acknowledges that the innerness of researchers, teachers and students (their spirit, beliefs, personality, values) is just as important as their outerness (what they know and can do). It celebrates the wholeness of teachers and the wholeness of learners. Yet, I might add, the new curriculum has bleached all reference to the spiritual, except for a small footnote in reference to Māori health.

I do like what Ayers (2002) says:

Teaching is an intimate encounter... that is intensely practical and yet transcendent, brutally matter-of-fact, and yet fundamentally a creative act. Teaching begins in challenge and is never far from mystery

Such is the joy of teaching and learning. But educational research ought to be no different. Certainly, there is a variety of pressures, including political, which seriously threaten the prospect of joy in researching. The rush to produce milestone reports bypasses the time needed to dwell and to seek the deeper essence.

The haste for research outcomes, for research outputs, for PBRF points, puts us in danger of circumventing contemplation about the mysteries of research in teaching and learning. There is a real danger that research may be reduced to simply providing rapid justifications for policy decisions.

Research in education certainly begins in challenge and is never far from mystery.

Our responsibility in educational research is to take the time to seek the essence of what this transcendence is in teaching and learning, this brutal matter-of-factness, this fundamental creativity.

As we dwell in the essence of such questions and allow the true innermost meanings to begin to resonate, then the dynamic unpredictable transactional nature of teaching and learning— its *heartness* and wholeness—will begin to emerge.

This may open possibilities for new ways of researching education that harmonise with the interests, values, and complexity of teachers, learners, cultures and communities.

Research that seeks to understand the deeper aspects of teachers and students, cultures and communities, needs to be premised on respect for those participating, involves the researcher in face-to-face interactions rather than being removed from those participating in the research, shows generosity of spirit, and demonstrates attitudes of open communication and teachability, while always maintaining respect for the integrity of those involved and their knowledge, beliefs, and values.

(Gibbs, 2006, p.254)

As we embrace *Manaakitanga—feel the spirit*, we may well find our research moving from partnership and collaboration into a deeper level— into what might be termed a covenantal relationship:

... a covenantal rather than a contractual relationship between researcher and host. Unlike a contract that simply specifies rights and duties; a covenant requires the researcher to consider his or her relationship with the subjects on a much wider level, accepting the obligations that develop between involved, interdependent persons... A researcher cannot engage in the reciprocal relationship required by the covenant without making efforts to understand his or her hosts' beliefs, values and views of the world.

(Gold, 1989, pp. 104-105)

So, welcome to our conference—the Annual Meeting of the New Zealand Association for Research in Education. We welcome you to share in *Manaakitanga—feel the spirit*.

Nō rēira
Nga mihi nui ki a koutou katoa
kua huihui mai
Tena koutou
Tena koutou
Tena koutou katoa.

References

- Ayers, W. (2001). *To teach: the journey of a teacher*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gibbs., C. (2006). *To be a teacher: Journeys towards authenticity*. Auckland: Pearson Education.
- Gold, S. (1989). Ethical issues in visual fieldwork. In G. Blank, J. McCarthy & E. Brent (Eds.), *New technology in sociology: practical applications in research and work* (pp. 99-112). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.