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The usage of traditional Māori narratives as cognitive models and educational tools

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Social Anthropology at Massey University, Albany Campus, New Zealand.

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Abstract

The present research consists of an interdisciplinary approach which combines mainly sub-disciplines from the anthropological and psychological perspectives as theoretical background. Regarding the latter, from the cognitive anthropology perspective the research highlights Bradd Shore’s (1996) view on cognitive models, together with the theories put forward by the sociocultural approach in psychology based on Vygotsky’s school of thought.

The main objective of the study is to achieve a broad view on the use of traditional kōrero paki and kōrero o neherā (Māori folktales/legends and myths) as pedagogical tools and as cognitive models. The latter includes a bibliographical review which covers the analysis of narratives and their usage from different areas, such as Māori epistemology and education, cultural psychology and cognitive anthropology.

Being a research stemmed from an anthropological concern –how do people from different sociocultural backgrounds construct and transmit knowledge– it considered as a fundamental element an empirical or “fieldwork” approach to the matter. Therefore, the research analyses –based on semi-structured interviews– the perspectives and understanding of the usage of traditional Māori narratives as educational tools of scholars in the Māori studies/education field and of a sample of Māori teachers, most of them connected to a Kura Kaupapa Māori school, constituting a “study case” for this qualitative study.

A period of complementary participant observation was also carried out, focusing on the pedagogical practises and styles of the participant teachers. Through this, the research aims to contextualise the bibliographical and theoretical findings, considering the contemporary applications, limitations and understandings encountered through concrete experience.
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“Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou ka ora te manuwhiri”
(With your food basket and my food basket the guests will have enough)
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