Ka Tangi te Tītī

Opening Address

Te Gathering – 6th Annual Event, 14 June 2014

“Ka tangi te tītī, ka tangi te kākā, ka tangi hoki ahau”
As the sooty shearwater bursts forth the rhapsody, as the native parrot assertively conducts; a new day dawns and I too yield through voice

Tēnei au, tēnei au, ko te hokai nei i taku tapuwae
Ko te hokai-nuku, ko te hokai-rangi, ko te hokai
A tōku tūpuna a Tānenuiarangi
I pikitia ai ki ngā rangi-tū-hāhā, ki Tihi-o-Manono
I rokohina atu ra ko Io-te-matua-kore anake
I riro iho ai nga Kete o te Wānanga
Ko te Kete Tū-a-uri
Ko te Kete Tū-atea
Ko te Kete Aronui,
Ka tiritiria ka poupoua ki Papa-tū-ā-nuku
Ka puta te ira tangata ki te whaiao
Ki te Ao mārama! Haumi e, hui e, taiki e!

(Explain Māori epistemology, the search for knowledge and knowing – and our ancestral journeying into the mind, and the welcome to these ancestral lands of Te Waipounamu).

As we get into this our sixth very important annual gathering I want to draw on some identity-shaping story telling – just for a moment

Piki’s story -
I want to touch on is the idea of who we are and how our identities are shaped through the languages we speak, as illustrated by a conversation that I had with my eight-year-old who talked about monsters in the previous exemplar, Te Piki Kōtuku, at 11.00 p.m. one night traveling in a car from Rotoiti to Hamilton. Most everyone had gone to sleep, but Piki was very contemplative. He commenced this conversation with “Mum, I can see things, and I can feel things”.

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I said “What do you feel?” He said “Well, this is my skin and it is Piki Kōtuku (pinching his skin) and you can’t change that”.

I said, “Yes, that’s absolutely right”. He said “And that is because of my great, great, great grandmother”. I said “Yes, yes, yes” (feeling very excited by his observations). He said “And James, (his Pākehā friend at school) is called James. And James lives in his skin and he cannot change that”. I kept responding with “Yes”, encouraging this conversation. Then he asked “Can James feel what I feel”? I had to think hard about how to respond. I responded along these lines that depending on the context, who is there, what was happening, James may feel similar things, but that Piki was unique and only he could feel what he feels. He said “That’s why I am good at everything I do, if I play basketball I am strong and I know I will get the ball. I am good at everything and it’s like this, this is me and my name is Piki and memory and there’s Piki and memory, and Piki and memory and Piki and memory” with a layering motion as he spoke. Of course I recognised instantly, and was excited by, the concepts Te Piki Kōtuku was referring to and where his searching questions were heading, in terms of his identity, his memories and naming, Te Piki Kotuku, the ascending heron, his genealogical connections, and the connections to his life.

_Tirangi’s latest musings_

Currently – my youngest daughter is an American Field Scholar in Italy.

Tirangi rang me at 4 am (our time) earlier this month with some critical observations. She had had an epiphany - She wanted a discussion about languages –

She talked about the beauty of the Italian language and how it was soooo elegant.

She talked about our English language and changes over time – and how it was becoming increasingly full of slang.

She talked about Arabic languages and then she said

“Mum, my Italian family think that te reo Maori sounds Chinese” -

I said “I am not surprised – we travelled down through Asia thousands of years ago and so YES, THAT makes sense”

Then she said

“We live in our language. We just live in it and we may think there is no grammatical relationship of our language to Chinese – but actually you can hear it – It is not until you come outside of your language, and have this opportunity to live in another language that you can get such a birdseye view”

Of course, being a language activist I was absolutely excited – yet again by the clever insights of children who live at the interface between languages, in the fluid space as Pennycook puts it – of knowing how great it is to live in other language/s, you get to live
in another skin (as Piki would say) – to live in the fertile lands of linguistic happenings – in spaces created by language

Tirangi put the concept so simply – “we live in our language” –

That is why it is important that we all have to care about our fast rapidly vanishing land languages.

And I have to say, no other part of the education sector does that job better than what happens in our early childhood sector, so I just had to contextualize the geopolitical and pedagogical practices that are ours, that we hope to sustain and grow out of our lands, the methodological spaces that we hope to create through reasserting our language, our ways of being and doing through the reassertion of our kaitiakitanga, our rangatiratanga (our guardianship roles and self-determination).

So it is indeed an honour, and a pleasure to open The Gathering in the ways that my ancestors would have done – with a journey throughout the layers of knowledge that our ancestor Tāne nui a Rangi went on as he went on a journey in search of the baskets of knowledge – to fill his own ‘kete’

I called this opening address Ka Tangi te Tītī

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Thank you for allowing me to give voice to my thoughts and get into your skin today

No reira, rau rangatira ma, nei ra te mihi ki a koutou mo a koutou taringa whakarongo

Opening Himene: He Honore, He Kororia!

Housekeeping, morning tea