

Book Review

Our Sacred Māori Voices

Our Sacred Māori Voices. Kelli Te Maiharoa and Adrian Woodhouse, eds. Dunedin New Zealand: Otago Polytechnic Press, 2022. ISBN: 978-0-908846-73-3 (print), 135 pages. ISBN: 978-0-908846-74-0 (online), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34074/book.248>.

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Our Sacred Māori Voices offers insight into the early, lived experiences of six Māori learners who have graduated through Capable NZ—a New Zealand-based online suite of degree programmes that recognise, and validate, students’ community-based prior knowledge, skills, and experiences. The two Māori editors, who hold leadership roles at Capable NZ, have crafted this collection with an attention and care that speaks of the close relationship necessary to encourage us to write about ourselves.

For Māori and Indigenous learners, reflecting on often complex and colonised life experiences offers multiple ways to heal from colonial trauma, helping us to navigate and create transforming change for ourselves, for our communities, and for our past and future. When we heal ourselves, we can heal seven generations before us and seven generations to follow. Instead of centring colonisation, this collection of life stories is an agentic counter narrative that the editors say “celebrates the unique strength and resilience of Māori voices, perspectives and lived experiences” (2). The stories celebrate the heterogenous nature of Māori lives and offers “the other” an opportunity to “build cultural understanding, competencies and empathy” (3) to better enable a culturally safe learning environment.

The book begins with a short introduction laying out the collection’s aims and some brief contextualising. Indigenous autoethnography is described as an Indigenous research tool capable of providing a “deeper understanding of the Indigenous self” (4). Given the Māori context and cultural location of the editors and contributors, I wonder how pūrākau, as an Aotearoa-located kaupapa Māori approach to storying, sits alongside their expression of autoethnography. Pūrākau was initially theorised by Lee (2008) and subsequently further developed by other Māori scholars in to a substantial kaupapa Māori literature field as a Māori-centric way of telling and re-telling our stories to create transforming outcomes.

The six contributor chapters, each accompanied by a beautiful photographic image of the author, offer the reader moving and personal accounts of the authors’ early, lived experiences. The contributors should be applauded for their courage to share their stories and to be named and

identified. *He mana to te kupu* in te reo (the language) Māori means there is power in our words and stories, and pūrākau as autoethnography supports us to be named and identified as the agents in, and of, our own stories.

One challenge in autoethnographic collections, and more specifically Indigenous autoethnography, is that of taking the accounts to the next level—that is, how does the telling of our stories enable transforming change for ourselves, for our communities, and our wider iwi (tribal) identities? In the discussion, the editors acknowledge the healing space of unpacking and analysing our formative years and pose the question “So what does this mean for me as an adult now making my way through the world?” (95) and, I assume, their higher education journey.

Every pūrākau (story) holds meaning, and that meaning shifts and alters, expands, and slides, depending on the interaction and relationship between the storyteller and the audience(s). Each time I read the stories in this collection, I see, hear, and feel another layer of meaning. Given the context that weaves the six contributors together—graduates of Capable NZ—I am curious to know more about how the lived experiences they share, have contributed directly to their education pathway in to Capable NZ, and to successfully completing their studies. Furthermore, what might others learn from the contributors about education pathways and life pathways?

The collection concludes with a brief theming of the common threads woven through the stories before closing with a powerful reinforcement of the book’s intentions, which are to affirm, validate, and regenerate Māori lived experiences. Similar hope is expressed that by sharing, others will be inspired to recognise and share their own experiences to “build and create a legacy for those that will follow in your footsteps” (111). This book is a lovely collection of stories and will be of interest to Māori learners, those working with Māori, and those in wider Indigenous educational and sociological fields.

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Reference

Lee, Jenny B.J. 2008. *Pūrākau of Māori Teachers’ Work in Secondary Schools*. Auckland, New Zealand: The University of Auckland.