Enabling Ability and Growing Talent: The Contribution of Self, Place, and Belonging

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Abstract

Enabling ability and growing talent is central to our professional work with young people. This paper is a 'think piece' that draws on findings from two research projects from the Aotearoa New Zealand context to highlight elements that appear to be central to enabling ability and growing talent in young people. A dialogic process was used to identify and explore commonalities from projects from two distinct fields of study: giftedness and talent, and outdoor education. This paper explores the three interrelated elements of sense of self, sense of place, and sense of belonging. Vignettes drawn from each of the research projects are used to provide insights into young people's experiencing of each of these elements. We speculate about self, place, and belonging as important constituents for enabling ability and growing talent in a range of educational settings.

Introduction

Enabling ability and growing talent is central to our professional work with young people. A range of personal and societal benefits can result from these endeavours (Moltzen, 2011a). The fulfilment of potential, for example, supports the development of a sense of wellbeing (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993) that, in turn, may foster individuals making positive and meaningful contributions to society. In our respective work in the fields of giftedness and talent (Ballam), and health, physical, and outdoor education (Cosgriff), we have each examined individual, contextual, and environmental components that contribute to and foster learning and achievement in diverse educational settings. This paper is a 'think piece' that shares ideas emerging through a process of collaborative dialogue between colleagues from two distinct scholarly disciplines. We highlight three elements we identified to be central to enabling ability and growing talent in young people - a sense of self, place, and belonging.

Given the broad understanding and lack of consensus internationally around the terms giftedness and talent (Borland, 2008; Dai, 2010; Davidson, 2009; Moltzen, 2011b), we have opted to use the phrases 'enabling ability' and 'growing talent' in this paper, which we feel are more accessible to readers. The words 'enabling' and 'growing' imply a responsibility to make it possible or to allow the space for *all* children's abilities and talents to flourish, without the preconception that giftedness and talent applies only to identified high achievers. This aligns with a principle for identification that potential is equally as important as demonstrated performance, outlined in the New Zealand Ministry of Education's (2012) gifted education guidelines. It also provides scope for learners who are regularly underrepresented in gifted and talented programmes in schools (e.g., learners from diverse cultures, from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and twice or multi-exceptional learners) to be less overlooked. Also, use of the phrases 'enabling ability' and 'growing talent' more accurately reflects the emphasis of this paper: that elements of self, place, and belonging are not exclusive to our work with 'gifted and talented' learners, but can be central to providing opportunities for *all* learners to tap into their abilities and experience success.

As colleagues working on a 'satellite' university campus, we have had numerous opportunities over the past five years to talk informally about our individual teaching and research responsibilities and initiatives. This paper arises from our endeavour to engage in a more deliberate and systematic way with research we had each conducted, and questions about enhancing the abilities and talents of young people, which are central concerns to each of us. As such, our 'think piece' is exploratory and speculative, charting the insights and questions arising through our collaborative dialogue. Our focus here is to surface the connections we drew, the provocations that arose, and points that we think might resonate for others' professional practice.

We begin with a brief description of the two research projects informing our dialogue and thinking in this paper, along with an outline of the dialogic process and how we arrived at the three elements discussed - sense of self, sense of place, and sense of belonging. Vignettes drawn from the two studies are used to illustrate each element and are supported by literature from

the fields of giftedness and talent, and outdoor education. Our discussion then draws together these distinctive fields of literature and two diverse research contexts to explore the common threads related to enabling ability and growing talent. We end this paper where we started – with discussion of some of the lingering provocations we consider pertinent to our own professional practice, and potentially that of others.

Background

The first project that we considered in this 'think piece' investigated the lived experiences of talented young New Zealanders from low socioeconomic backgrounds, with an emphasis on risk and protective processes that might foster resilience (Ballam, 2013, 2017). Data came from an electronic survey of 93 talented young people between the ages of 17 and 27, and eight in-depth semi-structured interviews. The qualitative methodology used for this research was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), an approach that allows the researcher to elicit an 'inside perspective' of participants' lived experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Three key themes emerged from this study: identity, drive, and opportunities. Aspects of identity, such as self-awareness (self-knowing), self-concept (self-esteem and self-worth), and self-assurance (self-confidence and self-belief) were prominent in the participants' stories.

The second study was a small scale, practice-based project focusing on pedagogical practice in outdoor education, one of seven "key areas of learning" in the Health and Physical Education (HPE) learning area in the New Zealand national curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). The project involved three teacher-researchers (a school principal, and 'Mike' and 'Joel', two classroom teachers) from a suburban primary school in Aotearoa New Zealand collaborating with a university-researcher (the second author) to review and reimagine outdoor education in their teaching programmes in ways that met diverse learners' needs and the holistic and socioecological intent of the health and physical education learning area (Ministry of Education, 2007). A collaborative action inquiry framework (Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell, Mockler, Ponte, & Ronneman, 2012) with cycles of dialogue, inquiry, teaching and learning, and analysis was employed, with a range of data generated throughout the cycles. These included teacher interviews, surveys of students' experiences and understandings of outdoor education, a range of teacher planning and reflections, and samples of students' work. Data was individually and collectively analysed by research partners

throughout the project. One of the key findings was that learning in and about a local bush reserve, just beyond the school gates, positively impacted students' engagement, learning and achievement in a range of curriculum areas (Cosgriff, 2015).

Generating this 'think piece' entailed three dynamic, fluid phases. The first phase was initiated after making a decision to collaborate together and generate ideas through dialogue (Paulus, Woodside & Ziegler, 2008) without knowing at the start what might emerge through this process. In essence, we were deeply curious to see how our disciplinary thinking and meaning making might evolve through talking collaboratively about and across our disciplines. We met regularly to discuss and establish how we would work together and to gain a more nuanced understanding of each other's research. The latter included each of us presenting 'pen sketches' of our individual research projects including aims, research questions, methods used, and key findings; posing questions to promote our individual and collective reflection about our own and each other's findings; and the reading of targeted publications. From the outset, we endeavoured to foster a dialogic process that valued the 'expert' disciplinary knowledge we each brought while remaining open to the possibilities of collectively developing fresh meaning by "generat[ing] understandings through conversation" (Paulus, Woodside & Ziegler, 2008, p. 238). The importance of the relational and responsive aspects of a dialogic process (Berryman, SooHoo & Nevin, 2013) meant our discussion meetings were organic and non-linear. This was especially so as we moved into the second phase of exploring the 'elements' we individually considered to be integral to enabling ability and growing talent in our respective projects and jointly established the common threads between each. During this phase, three elements repeatedly surfaced in our conversations as being central and of relevance to promoting ability and talent in both studies: a sense of self, a sense of place, and relatedly, a sense of belonging. These became the focal interest for further exploration.

The third phase involved collaboratively writing this 'think piece'. In practice, this phase proved to be as organic as the first two phases. Paulus, Woodside, and Ziegler (2008) suggest a metaphor of a dance in which one individual initiates with a step and then another person adds to this so that "a new two-step was born" (p. 239) with the construction and reconstruction of the dance continuing over weeks. The dance metaphor points to the dynamic and messy process of writing, talking, and rewriting.

The next section introduces the three elements of self, place, and belonging, and includes vignettes of participant experiences as examples of the element. Our selection of the focal vignette for each element was on the basis of providing what we thought was a strong point of illustration of that element from one of the two studies. For example, in element one, a sense of self was critical to the talented young individuals in the first author's study (Ballam, 2013, 2017), and Aroha's story encapsulated this well. Although context was important in this same study, place and a sense of connection to a local outdoor place was fundamental to growing students' motivation, engagement, and ability in the second study (Cosgriff, 2015). Hence, we chose to illustrate the second element (i.e., a sense of place) with a vignette drawn from this study. This choice was also aided by the emphasis that Mike, Jed's teacher, had repeatedly given to the positive influence of a placed curriculum on Jed's exceptional progress in reading over the course of the study. Our third element, sense of belonging, is interrelated with the previous two. The importance of cultural identity and whānau[i] to Matt, and his sense of belonging and not belonging in 'different worlds', is targeted in the third vignette. This vignette was selected as it exemplifies the complex nature of what belonging is and means to individuals, as well as suggesting factors and circumstances that impact on it.

Element one: A sense of self

Aroha's turning point
Aroha[ii] is resolute in her belief that people have the capacity to change themselves; after all, she did. "You have the ability to change your life. Your life lies in your own hands, so if you're unhappy with something – just change it. At the end of the day, the bottom line is, you're the only person that can."

Aroha's childhood and home life was characterised by gang-related activity that included parties, drugs, drinking, and violence. The result of this was a persistent chain of generational unemployment, and a dysfunctional family with never enough money, food, and other essentials.

From as far back as she can recall, Aroha had a clear sense of and belief in her abilities and, at the age of five, she announced to her nan that she was going to be a lawyer. At the start of secondary school, this was not looking promising; Aroha was strongly influenced by her home life and was wearing gang patches to school, where she terrorised her peers and was

constantly in trouble. To her teachers, she was a write-off.

This all changed one night, when members of a rival gang beat Aroha and her two friends, in an incident that was to become a major turning point for Aroha. Amongst the chaos and violence of that night, she distinctly recalls realising that this was not who she was: "If I keep going this way, this is what it's gonna be for me." In that brief moment, Aroha firmly resolved to find herself again amongst the person she had become and, in the days and months following, the person she had been became almost unrecognisable.

Aroha's teachers were suspicious of this sudden change and many did not believe that it would last. It was one teacher in particular who saw her potential, kept her in line, and really pushed her when others gave up on her. This teacher's encouragement and support was consistent, and she committed herself to understanding who Aroha was, where she was coming from, and what she was going through. Aroha speaks fondly of this teacher and others who were influential, describing them as "people who don't judge you on what's going on at home or what you've done in the past – they just look at you for you. They're people who remind you of your purpose and what you're doing with your life."

Today, being looked upon as a role model is important to Aroha, and what is critical is how she presents herself and who she is to others. "I'm not really worried about the spotlight – I just want people to know that I've made that change, that I'm growing as an individual… people know that I've been through hardship and struggled, and I want them to think 'if she can do it, I can do it'." Her passion is to connect with others and help them to realise who they are so that they can also grow as individuals. "The thing that matters most in the world to me is being able to bring people like my family up, and not leave anybody behind."

One characteristic that is commonly reported in studies of talented individuals is a strong sense of self, or knowing who one is, where one has come from, and where one is going (e.g., Ballam, 2013; Borland, Schnur, & Wright, 2000; Moltzen, 2005). This is clearly evident in Aroha's story, illustrated by her early self-awareness and confidence that her abilities would take her on a particular pathway. In their landmark work on self-concept, Markus and Nurius (1986) conceptualised the notion of 'possible selves', which extended the idea of 'current selves' to how people think about their potential and their future. Talented individuals are often visionaries

who see the 'possible' and not just the 'actual' (Gruber, 1986), and this pushes them to commit considerable time and energy to realising their aspirations. Aroha's life circumstances 'clouded' her early vision, and her time and energy were instead channelled towards surviving her life circumstances. In Markus and Nurius' eyes, ideas about what one could become provide a link between motivation and sense of self as the individual performs or avoids actions that will shape their future selves. Through the incident that became a significant turning point for her, Aroha was reminded of the self she had earlier thought possible, and her consequent actions reflected her commitment to realising those aspirations once again.

Our perceptions of self are constructed through our interactions with others (Berk, 2012; Hopson, 2010; Reay, 2010; Wetherell, 2009), and relationships are fundamental to the talent development process, a notion that has consistently been demonstrated in studies related to high ability (e.g., Ballam, 2013; Bevan-Brown, 2011; Bloom, 1985; Goertzel & Goertzel, 1962; Moltzen, 2005; Morales, 2010; Parkyn, 1948). It makes sense then that a sense of self is dynamic; it shifts and changes throughout our lives according to the interactions we have and the various contexts from which we move in and out of. The consideration of context in theories of self-concept is important as aspects such as confidence, effort, and persistence can manifest differently in various settings.

Jackson and Warin (2000) suggest that people draw on entrenched aspects of self in order to cope in unfamiliar situations, and these aspects of self can potentially conflict with the expectations of particular environments. In educational contexts, if young people are drawing on entrenched aspects of self that do not fit with the values and expectations of school life (as was the case with Aroha and her behaviour in her early secondary school years), potential and ability can remain hidden or unrealised. Similarly, context is consistently acknowledged in contemporary scholarship about learning outdoors especially with the resurgence of interest in socioecological, critical, and place-based approaches. A sense of self, as well as an individual's learning and meaning making, is fundamentally influenced by relationships and the physical, social, and cultural contexts in which they interact (e.g., Waite & Pratt, 2011; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). In respect to place, Mannion and Lynch (2016) propose recent scholarly attention in outdoor education is typically founded on an understanding of place as being co-created, embodied, cultural and social, and contested. Thus, place is not a

"physical location…. or container…" (p. 87); rather we learn about ourselves and about places in "relationally emergent" (p. 88) ways. Hence our sense of who we are emerges relationally – with other human and living beings, and places. The next section turns to specifically explore the element of sense of place.

Element two: A sense of place

Jed, Rimu Reserve, and the Kōwhai[iii] tree
Mike and Joel's Year 4 classes had spent 3-4 hours each week in Rimu Reserve, the focal context for the reimagined outdoor education that was taking place in the two classes. Rimu Reserve ran ribbon-like through the suburb the primary school was situated in, offering an array of different natural features, landmarks, flora and fauna, and waterways. In recent weeks, Mike's inquiry-based approaches had involved students exploring the different parts of the reserve, learning how to move through and play in diverse terrain, 'read' the environment, and investigate who and what else used or lived in the reserve. Students had also recounted the different feelings and sensations they experienced in the reserve, describing the spots that they particularly liked and were special to them. Despite repeated bouts of cold and wet weather, there was a uniform eagerness among students to be out and about in Rimu Reserve. Children variously spoke about the connection, enjoyment and excitement, and "joy" they experienced as they developed what Joel called a "felt knowing" for their "special place" and its inhabitants.

Jed was one of the thirty students in Mike's Year 4 class. As with other students, being in Rimu Reserve appeared to really ignite his interest and engagement in learning. During one of the early learning experiences exploring Rimu Reserve, students in Mike and Joel's classes were captivated by the monarch butterflies flying around and returning to what they later found out was a mature Totara tree. Feeding off this interest, students conducted inquiries about a tree in the Reserve that they identified with, liked, and wanted to know more about. For Jed, this was the Kōwhai tree. As Mike recalls, "Jed was hooked on learning about native trees" and the Kōwhai tree emerged as one of special interest to him.

Jed struggled with reading, something Mike thought might be in part due to him thinking many of the books and reading material he was exposed to in class were both uninteresting and irrelevant. Yet Jed's embodied knowledge and understanding of the Kōwhai trees in Rimu Reserve was something he was proud of. He

talked animatedly with Mike and other students about 'his' tree including what it looked like, where you could find it growing in the reserve and why it was in those spots, and the traditional uses for Māori[iv]. Jed confidently read and interpreted print and online material that was far more advanced than what he might normally tackle. In turn, Mike was "blown away" by the enhanced achievement that Jed's preoccupation with the Kōwhai trees in Rimu Reserve fostered. Such was the scale of his achievement that Mike used the Kōwhai tree page that Jed produced as part of his inquiry in Jed's Running Record[v], since his probe test with another story was considerably lower.

This vignette brings attention to Jed's enhanced enjoyment, learning, and achievement when a local "place of meaning" (Brown, 2013) was the focus for interdisciplinary teaching and learning programmes in the class. Mike, his teacher, repeatedly noted the positive impact of an experiential, 'placed' curriculum on all students' learning, motivation, and achievement (Cosgriff, 2015). Jed's notable progress in reading hints at the potential of local places for promoting connectedness to and a sense of place that we posit may be integral to engagement and fostering young people's learning. Jed's learning and achievement flourished when the experiential, sensory, emotional, cognitive, and aesthetic aspects of knowing 'his' local bush reserve and all it contained were prioritised.

The learning opportunities that teachers shaped and Jed experienced in Rimu Reserve stand in contrast to "…decontextualised activity based" outdoor education (Brown, 2008, p. 9), or "place-ambivalent teaching strategies" (Mannion & Lynch, 2016, p. 90) in which activities occur irrespective of the temporal, historical, cultural, and geographical specificities of particular places and the unique histories, proclivities, needs, and life circumstances of the individuals participating. The potential of place-based and place-responsive approaches have received ongoing attention in outdoor education scholarship in the Aotearoa New Zealand context over the past decade (e.g., Brown, 2008, 2012, 2013; Hill & Brown, 2014; Townsend 2011; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). In this academic and professional commentary, place and embodied experiences in outdoor places are proposed to be fundamental to developing young people's identity and learning given the "…intimate connection between learning, identity, and land" (Brown & Heaton, 2015, p. 56). Somewhat similarly, when writing about education more generally, and consistent with research about the relational aspects of identity already noted in element one, Penetito (2008, p. 7) proposes identity ("who am I") and location ("where am

I") as being fundamental to education and learning, not only for young Māori, but for all students. For Penetito, place-based education presents an alternative to four concerns:

> a form of detachment that people acquire as a result of familiarity with place; the need to overcome detachment by developing a consciousness of the environment; the homogenisation of cultures and communities in the interests of egalitarianism and efficiency; and the way in which local history is either ignored or presented disconnected from meaningful contexts. (p. 16)

Element three: A sense of belonging

Belonging in different worlds
Matt grew up with his extended family in a small rural town in the North Island of New Zealand. Life for Matt was not easy as he coped with an ongoing illness in an environment where money was tight and violence, alcohol, and drug abuse was rife. Because of this, his family was frequently evicted from houses, and Matt moved schools often during his early school years.

Despite the challenges of home life, Matt was strongly connected with his culture. He spoke fluent Māori at home and, from a young age, was involved in kapa haka[vi], which he stated gave him a strong sense of belonging. Matt also credits his whānau for keeping him grounded and family-oriented. Even though they recognised his abilities, he was also seen as the cheeky one at whom everyone laughed. When he was with his family he was on the same level: "It wouldn't matter if I had a PhD and they didn't have anything – when we're together, we're just family."

Matt's first real sense of 'not belonging' came with having to speak English in his school settings. Even though he knew he was capable, he felt as though he was constantly behind and struggling, and that he was not proficient in either Māori or English. Matt also felt the weight of stereotypes related to Māori underachievement, and learnt that to 'succeed' in what he described as "an English world" meant having to develop individualistic ways of being, which firmly contrasted with his sense of family. These educational experiences resulted in feelings of not quite belonging in either of his 'worlds'.

Secondary school brought a sense of relief for Matt. It was the first school that he attended for a lengthy period, and he described it as like a "second home." His teachers had faith in him,

encouraging and supporting him to just be and bring himself to the things he did. Matt reflected, "I don't think any other school could have made someone like me be what I've become…I was able to bring my concept of family and mana[vii] into the school and they respected my family thing and I respected them as if they were elders."

While he doesn't share much of his background with others, Matt believes that his life experiences distinguish him from others and give him 'the edge' in a professional world. Today, Matt and his partner take into their home young people who have left family to study but are struggling with moving between Māori and European worlds. Matt believes that allowing them to maintain a sense of family and belonging is crucial to their 'success'.

It is not uncommon for talented young people to experience 'clashes' between the contexts from which they move in and out, particularly when norms, values, and beliefs differ between each (Riley & White, 2016). Moving from one context to another can result in conflicting messages regarding behaviour in each setting, and this can lead to confusion in self and group identity. Superior cognitive processes that sometimes come with being talented can also add to feelings of displacement (Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000). Matt's sense of belonging, and at times of not belonging, were related to both his identity as a high achiever and his cultural identity. Defining oneself culturally contributes to consolidation of personal identity, which in turn leads to a positive sense of wellbeing (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch, & Wang, 2010; Webber, 2015). Developing a strong cultural identity is associated with higher self-esteem and a sense of mastery over the environment (Wetherell, 2009). The relief that Matt acknowledged during secondary school exemplifies these points; when Matt's cultural identity and mana were respected, his sense of self efficacy and belonging flourished.

Sternberg (2007) claims that when cultural context is taken into consideration, the recognition and support for talented individuals is improved. Penetito's (2008) emphasis on the fundamental importance of place and culture for supporting the learning of Māori as well as non-Māori students clearly aligns with this claim. This suggests that models of talent development that explicitly include cultural considerations might allow schools and other organisations to better serve the young people with whom they work. Webber (2011) discusses how negative stereotypes can impact on the performance and motivation of talented Māori learners in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, as this group is statistically overrepresented as underachievers. The development of a strong cultural identity amongst talented Māori students is important and, according to Webber, language and culture should not be compromised to 'fit in' with traditional European-dominated views of talent.

A sense of belonging is clearly complex and multi-dimensional in nature (Riley & White, 2016) and, in educational contexts, is based largely around physical and relational 'spaces'. It is fluid, requiring individuals and groups to shift in and out of these various 'spaces' in their search for feelings of acceptance, understanding, and connectedness. Adding to its complexity, belonging could also be experienced in part, but not fully. For example, a talented young person might have a strong sense of belonging in terms of their academic self but be struggling for the same sense of connectedness socially, or in other areas. Inextricably linked with aspects such as self-identity, self-concept, and self-worth, our sense of belonging is shaped by our perceptions of who we are and by who others 'expect' us to be. When Matt was given the space to unconditionally bring who he was to his secondary school experience, his identity as a high achieving Māori male was affirmed, his sense of connectedness to place and people was established, and this sense of belonging empowered him to thrive.

Discussion

Collaborating on this 'think piece' has been like opening a door to provoke our collective professional examination of what it might mean to enable ability and grow talent in diverse young people, working from within and across our respective disciplinary standpoints. In this section, we seek to keep the door open for future conversations and engage with some of the questions, points of provocation, and pedagogical implications that surfaced for us.

A striking feature of our ongoing conversations about the elements of self, place, and belonging were the pedagogy-related questions that repeatedly arose. In respect to our first element of sense of self, we mulled over how we and other educators might nurture young people's capacities to think of the 'possible self' and shape the time and opportunity so that all learners, not just talented individuals like Aroha, honed their capacities to imagine and reimagine 'what could be'. We thought about the confidence and critical thinking capabilities that young people may require to engage in this imagining process, and in turn, the opportunities and skills requisite to their enactment of the possibilities that surfaced. We also pondered the

knowledge, skills, dispositions, and professional support that educators themselves need in leading learning communities that consistently cultivate diverse students' capacities for hopefulness about 'what could be'.

The centrality of relationships for nurturing young people's talent and ability was evident through the process of identifying and constructing each of the vignettes. Brown and Heaton's (2015) assertion in respect to outdoor education that "Who we are, or who we might become is inseparable from who we are with, where we are, and what we are doing" (p. 56) resonated with our growing conviction that educators need to be responsive in their teaching to the dynamic, emergent and interdependent 'layers' of relationships in play in contemporary learning environments. The prominence of peers and whānau in constructing a sense of self and belonging also raised questions about educators' roles and responsibilities in explicitly teaching the relational and interpersonal knowledge and skills central to building and sustaining positive relationships in the range of 'worlds' that students inhabit.

We have lingering concerns about the (in)attention currently accorded to promoting students' embodied, sensory knowing and relationships with 'place' in curriculum and pedagogical decision-making in teacher education and school settings. While there is an explicit emphasis on the development of self, relationship, and belonging in the vision, values, key competencies, principles, and effective pedagogy statements of *The New Zealand Curriculum* for English medium schools (Ministry of Education, 2007), the influence of 'place' on student identity, learning, and achievement seems to us to be less accounted for. Is developing a sense of place an overlooked aspect of enabling abilities and growing talent? Coming to know place(s) intimately, where we feel empowered and connected, contributes to an inner sense of security and groundedness. Arguably, this in turn relates to an enhanced sense of self and belonging, which are both central constituents in student achievement.

Through our dialogue, it was apparent that educators taking risks, like their learners, is important. Getting to know students and identifying what is important to them suggests a pedagogical responsiveness which can sometimes be scary to embrace. In the second vignette, it would have been much easier for Mike and Joel to 'play safe' and provide materials for children to learn about their community and local environments from the comfort of their classrooms. However, their witnessing of the positive impact of authentic learning experiences in neighbourhood outdoor places on children's sense of connection to their local community, learning, and achievement meant they felt there was no turning back. If they had, there is a strong possibility that Jed's engagement and progress, particularly with his reading and writing, would have remained hidden. Mike and Joel also provided the space for learners to 'drive' the learning experience without first predetermining what the outcomes might be. This more inquiry-based, participatory pedagogy can be a challenging and somewhat frightening approach for educators in an era where educational pressures, expectations, and assessments are increasingly dictating priority learning areas and outcomes. However, we propose that when educators provide the space for young people to 'do' and 'be', and relinquish control over specific learning experiences with the knowledge that things may not happen as we might imagine, the potential for hidden abilities and talents to emerge is immense.

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[i] Whānau is an extended family group
[ii] Pseudonyms have been used for the names of people and places.
[iii] The kōwhai tree is a well know native tree of Aotearoa New Zealand that is a source of nectar food for a range of native birds and prized by Maōri for its medicinal qualities.
[iv] Māori are the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand.
[v] Running records are used to "....assess students reading aloud from any text and in any setting". They are a sytematic way to "...observe a student's reading processing system". For further information see http://literacyonline.tki.org.nz/Literacy-Online/Planningfor-my-students-needs/Instructional-Series/Ready-to-Read/The-theory-behind-Ready-to-Read/Effective-literacy-practice/Knowledge-of-the-learner/Assessment-tools-and-processes
[vi] Kapa haka is the term used for traditional Māori performing arts.
[vii] To have mana is to have "integrity, status, and charisma" (Ryan, 2008, p. 156).