

# The Seemingly Imperceptible Touch of the Metaphysical

Christine Bailey



I start with a story, taking you into a moment of time I shared with Sammy:

*The ornamental cherry trees are in full flower in the park next door, and with the blossoms come the Tui. We have been enjoying watching all the Tui antics as they bounce, chase, feed and sing. On this day I was with a group of mokopuna (children) including you, Sammy, observing what the Tui were up to.*

*As we chatted, two Tui suddenly left the tree and took off in a fast synchronised flight over our heads to land on the branches of our Totorā Tree. We watched in surprise and amazement. These two Tui started to chortle, Then, suddenly they took off again dropping something pink that slowly began to flutter down from the tree. Sammy you and I noticed and you said, "Oh Look!"*

*Together we watched it's slow decent. We wondered what that pink thing could be. You tried to catch the small pink thing but it avoided you and landed silently on the deck. With such gentle fingers you picked it up, looking at it carefully as we tried to figure out what it was. A single beautiful, delicate pink blossom petal lay in your hand.*

*"That was a gift to you, Sammy, a gift from the Tui."*

*You looked at me mouth open, amazed.*

*- A copy of the full learning story is at the end of this article.*

I was recently privileged to listen to the Educational Leadership online webinar, presented by the inspiring Brenda Soutar, "He purapura I ruia I Rangīātea e hore e ngaro. A seed sown in Rangīātea will never be lost". Brenda discussed many things, including how from a Māori world view there is a connection with all animate and inanimate objects. This helped me make sense as to why I feel it so important to write some of the Learning Stories I feel driven to write.



As Te Whāriki guides us, we understand that children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things. It is through these relationships that children have opportunities to try out their ideas and refine their working theories. In the Māori world view,

inanimate objects have a mauri (life force) and a whakapapa (ancestry). Brenda Soutar says “We are constantly in this ecological relationship because we believe that we descend from the mountains, the rivers, the seas. We have a tribal connection to all those the way they were formed. As part of our history of our DNA.”

As a tangata tiriti (person of the treaty), I walk alongside Māori. I am drawn into this spiritual connection with all that is around me. I might not have the tribal connection Brenda Soutar is discussing, but I can open my heart to the possibilities our Māori leaders share, where I can also be sensitive to the opportunities and challenges the metaphysical world offers.



The whakatauki (proverb), from which Brenda Soutar titled her webinar, shares that a seed sewn in Rangiātea is protected, and in turn we need to keep those relationships alive. So, what is Rangiātea? Rangi (sky) + atea (clear). This is a concept that is simultaneously a physical place as well as a metaphysical place. For example, when Tāne is said to have climbed the aka (vine) to receive the Baskets of Knowledge from the supreme being, these baskets were

suspended within a building named Rangiātea. This is the place of higher learning, a place Te Ara Poutama takes us to as we also climb the aka when we work on our Professional Growth Cycles, where we research, study and practice the mastery of skills we acquire.

Here I make my connection between these Māori teachings and the story I shared about Sammy. How the relationship between all that is around us is connected, so we need to be alert to pivotal moments so they can guide us to places that look far and beyond and towards the stars, as we also climb the aka in search of knowledge.

At the moment that Sammy and I witnessed the gift of the small pink petal from the Tui, the physical and metaphysical worlds appeared to have joined and formed a clear conduit for us to experience where these two worlds meet, that Brenda Soutar calls belonging. This sense of ‘belonging’ that Brenda is referring to is at its heart through the gifts Papatūānuku offers.

*“When we turn towards the earth with curiosity and sympathy, with humility and wonder, our lives fall into place—we fall into place. This is what it means to grow an ecological identity.” (Pelo, 2010)*

Lorraine Sands extends this, *“Where we know this is the essence of home, of belonging. It is in this space we can model to and nurture our ākongā, like precious seeds, to ensure their survival, to inculcate them with an understanding of their own importance and place within this world.”*

As it is with all relationships there are times that require resilience. Our natural world

can at times bring destructive storms and floods. As Brenda Soutar said in her recent webinar: *"that is just how it is, we just need to weather these times and keep coming back to re-engage, accepting our humble place within the scheme of things."*

It is entrenched within Te Tiriti O Waitangi for all partners to actively participate and uphold these relationships. It is here we have a duty to ensure that we offer ecological guidance, have time and space where we all, as mokopuna can practice what it is to be a good treaty partner. To be in settings where a connection to Papatūānuku is embedded within the everyday curriculum, at all times being sustainable and protective.

The ancestral wisdom that flows through the indigenous people in Aotearoa connects them to their place, their natural environment. It is the place they know, and they understand. The comforting rhythm of the seasons, the influence of stars and the Moon guide indigenous practices. As Tangata Tiriti I benefit from this connected knowledge, if I take the time to listen. With local knowledge our way of living on this small island, tucked away at the bottom of the world will certainly benefit. In Aotearoa we now celebrate Matariki, the Māori New Year. We have learned it is a time where a cluster of stars has meaning for this place upon which we are living. It is the time of reflection and whānau, a time to remember and plan for the coming year, a time to connect to the environment and embed sense of belonging to this place.

Mason Durie (2010, p. 239) explains an Indigenous view of the relationality and unity of humans and their environment:

*"Relationships between people and the natural environment, between tangible and intangible dimensions, between organic and inorganic material, and between past and future constitute the foundations upon which indigenous populations understand the world. An energy flow that spirals outwards connects the multiple threads so that even very small objects become part of a wider context that gives them shape and meaning."*

Next, I would like to share a story about some small objects our mokopuna call Dragon Eggs, these are found in the river sand that fills our sandpit:

*Dragon egg hunting has been an important and ongoing activity at Ferndale Kindergarten for a while now. I learned from Niko that not all dragon eggs are equal, as there is the very rare one that has green swirls on it, and then there is the golden egg, a bit rare, and there is also the disgusting poop egg, which isn't worth collecting. Then there is the usual white egg, which is common.*

*I was interested in finding the golden egg and as I hunted, you came along Alice, to see what I was doing. You sensed the spark of the hunt, and you also began to search. Niko, Robbie and Viola had already collected a few of these eggs and I saw you look at them carefully before you began your search. Both you and I found quite a few common white eggs and then I found a very, very small golden egg. Rory informed us it was a good find, but we needed to keep looking.*

*- A copy of the full learning story is at the end of this article.*

The open-ended natural elements in our environment are powerful learning tools for



our mokopuna. As Kaiako we learn about the value of sand for children's learning, with time and support, foundations for maths, science, language abound, but as my story shares, it can also act as a space for connection, belonging and challenge. The beautiful smooth texture of the tiny stones, we familiarly call dragon eggs in our place. The colour and the shapes appeal in ways that inspire, where groups of people, who don't usually spend time together, can share a mutual interest and form a bond that is woven with a tie that is not tangible.



To finish off, my gift to you is a reminder that the objective of education is to hold possibilities for our mokopuna to spark their thinking and increase their agency. Alongside Māori we can offer time to connect to the metaphysical world, as it is in this space we engage in activities from which we learn to value the opportunities for concentration, reflection, imaginativeness and mindfulness; to be attuned to the marvellous, the beautiful and the challenging; to never be lost and to fully engage in ordinary experiences without the need to rush.

Who knows how these moments will manifest again in our children's later lives? I think through our own past experiences, we might have an inkling.

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Christine Bailey is a facilitator at the Educational Leadership Project (Ltd), a provider of professional development for early childhood teachers in New Zealand.

If you want to use this article, please reference it as follows:

*Bailey, C (2023). The Seemingly Imperceptible Touch of the Metaphysical. Retrieved from: [www.elp.co.nz/articles](http://www.elp.co.nz/articles)*