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**Implementation of Tikanga  
Māori in Animal Euthanasia  
Teaching**

**Arnja Dale**

**Jessica Walker**

**John Perrott**

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# Implementation of Tikanga Māori in Animal Euthanasia Teaching

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## Abstract

One of the core functions of being an Animal Welfare Inspector is to mitigate animal suffering, pain and distress; a common method of which is through euthanising animals. Animal cadavers are used to teach euthanasia techniques to students studying towards the Certificate in Animal Welfare Investigations at Unitec Institute of Technology. This programme attracts a multi-cultural student body. Working with animal cadavers can be emotionally challenging and requires cultural sensitivity. This article reports on a number of tikanga Māori strategies incorporated for the first time. These uphold the principles of Unitec's Te Noho Kotahitanga, as well as the 2nd article of the Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi). This has allowed for this animal euthanasia teaching to ensure Māori-centred support is provided and the teaching is culturally relevant. Feedback on these tikanga Māori initiatives has been very positive in: acknowledging the value and integrity of Māori knowledge and practice, therefore evidencing a commitment to such key elements of Māoritanga; developing effective student-teacher relationships; and unlocking the science and innovation potential of Māori people and resources to the benefit of all New Zealand. In addition, incorporating tikanga

Māori into our teaching has led to: increasing cultural awareness and competency of staff and students, and providing culturally safe support for Māori students.

*Keywords:* Mātauranga Māori, tikanga, animal euthanasia, cultural safety, animal welfare

## Introduction: Certificate in Animal Welfare Investigations

The Certificate in Animal Welfare Investigations at Unitec is a vocational training programme run in partnership with the Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Ministry of Primary Industries, which aims to teach students to become animal welfare inspectors. This is a 120 credit, level four NZQA-approved vocational qualification that is taught in distance-delivery mode, incorporating three compulsory five-day block courses spread across one academic year. This certificate is the educational qualification requirement mandated under the Animal Welfare Act 1999 for an animal welfare inspector warrant.

The Certificate in Animal Welfare Investigations has, on average, 50 students per annum. This equates to around 45 equivalent full-time students, as cross-credits are common for students from a compliance or veterinary background. Traditionally, this programme has the highest number of Māori students within the Department of Natural Sciences, despite being significantly lower than students who identify as non-Māori. Consequently, imbedding Mātauranga Māori is of fundamental importance. Over the past five years (2009-2013), the number of Māori students has ranged from 10-20%, with an average of 15%. This is higher than the Unitec institutional figure of 10% Māori students.

One of the core functions of being an animal welfare inspector is to mitigate animal suffering, pain and distress; a common method of which may be through the euthanasia of animals. Euthanasia refers to a Greek term meaning 'good death' (Oxford Dictionary of English 3 ed. 2010). Animal euthanasia is a difficult and sensitive subject to teach to students. In order to prepare students emotionally

for this task, we first teach the theory of how to carry out humane animal euthanasia on a range of species, followed by a practical session where students can practice the techniques on ethically-sourced animal cadavers.

## **Animal Euthanasia**

It is imperative that animal euthanasia is taught constructively and appropriately, as research shows that performing euthanasia on animals triggers feelings of guilt, remorse and grief (Coghlan, 2008). In addition to this, employees with euthanasia responsibilities, such as occurs in animal laboratories (Allred and Berntson, 1986; Rohlf and Bennett, 2005); veterinary clinics (Bartram and Baldwin, 2010; Platt et al., 2010; Whiting and Marion, 2011); slaughterhouses (Dillard, 2009; Fitzgerald, 2010); and animal shelters (Marston et al., 2005; Rohlf and Bennett, 2005), are an at-risk population for physical and psychological ailments (Reeve and Rogelberg, 2005; Rogelberg et al., 2007a), such as high blood pressure, ulcers, unresolved grief, depression and substance abuse (Reeve and Rogelberg, 2005). It has also been found that employee turnover rates are positively related to euthanasia rates (Rogelberg et al., 2007b), however, individual, work and organisational differences (eg support services) influence the experience of stress resulting from euthanasia (Reeve and Rogelberg, 2005).

Having to perform euthanasia is difficult for many people who occupy positions within the field of animal welfare because of their love of non-human animals (Rollin, 1986). Very few of these people are adequately prepared for the fact that one of their duties, within these occupations, may be to kill animals (Rogelberg et al., 2007a and b). This is known as the caring-killing paradox (Reeve and Rogelberg, 2005), where employees are required to euthanise animals for which they have previously been providing care, either because they are no longer required; suitable homes cannot be found; or to mitigate future suffering. People's attitudes to the killing of non-human animals are complex (Jepson, 2008), many "suffer in silence because the subject is taboo" (Coghlan, 2008) and few receive any formal training on how to cope with their feelings.

The effects of animal euthanasia can result in perpetration-induced traumatic stress (PITS). PITS can result from actively participating in traumatic events that are morally difficult to justify (Reeve and Rogelberg, 2005). PITS results in a variety of symptoms such as grief, high blood pressure, depression, substance abuse, nightmares, and emotional numbing (Rogelberg et al., 2007a and b). These symptoms are very similar in nature to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), however, the key difference between these

two disorders is that in the former, the person is an active participant, whereas in the latter, the participant is a passive participant and has not 'willingly' participated in the event that has caused the PTSD.

PITS can be especially problematic when large-scale animal euthanasia operations need to occur in a short time span. These are often referred to as 'depopulation' operations, and can be particularly traumatic for personnel involved (Walker and Dale, 2009). Depopulation operations tend to be the result of large-scale commercial farming operations where large numbers of animals are suffering, or from a disease outbreak, or from food-safety breaches. The trauma experienced and the coping strategies required by those undertaking the depopulation exercise clearly require a solid educational platform initially.

## **Teaching Animal Euthanasia**

Teaching animal euthanasia is an extremely delicate area of teaching. It is a difficult and sensitive subject. It is crucial that the principles taught are based on the best scientific principles to ensure that the most humane practices are employed. We follow the American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals, which was produced in 2013, as it provides the most recent, scientifically-based reference on best practice methods to euthanise animals.

It is also important that the cadavers are ethically sourced. We use only surplus laboratory stock of rats, mice, guinea pigs and rabbits and slaughterhouse by-products for the heads of cattle, sheep and pigs. No live animals are used in the teaching of euthanasia due to our ethical principles, our animal ethics approval for use of animals in teaching from the University of Auckland Animal Ethics Committee, and our adherence to the '3R' principles which promote the reduction, refinement, and replacement of animals in research, testing and teaching (Balcombe et al., 2013). It has been well documented that it is difficult for students to work with human cadavers. In a recent paper reviewing the effect of human dissection for University of Auckland medical students, they reported vivid memories of the experience one year after beginning dissection, as well as emotionally struggling and requiring future support (Lamdin et al., 2012). Issues of working with human cadavers have also been documented for Māori extensively by Sullivan (2013) in her MSc thesis entitled *Te Okiokinga Mutunga Kore – The Eternal Rest; Investigating Māori Attitudes towards Death*.



**Figures 1. and 2.**  
**The Kaumātua (Māori elder), Mr Hare Paniora, blessing the cadavers prior to their use in teaching animal euthanasia.**

### **Respect for Cadavers and Cultural Considerations**

Respect for cadavers has always been taught to all our students but, in the last two years, we have become much more cognisant of the culturally-complex issues of working with cadavers, particularly in the areas of cadavers being considered tapu (forbidden, sacred), and awareness of the mauri (life force) of the animals from a traditional Māori perspective. Mead (2003), Mika (2005; 2007) and Sullivan (2013) discuss aspects of sacredness in Māori belief and practice in detail, and it is important that we acknowledge the spirituality aspects in our euthanasia teaching. It accentuates the importance of valuing people and cultural perspectives by placing at the forefront the guiding principle of ensuring the dignity and mana (prestige) of those engaging in the euthanasia component of the course.

It is important to be aware that death in the broader European sense does not equate well with Māori stages of the spirit moving to Hawaiki (Rameka and Te Pania, 1990). Mead (2005) argues that a greater regard for the spiritual component of the body – a component which vitalises and sustains the beliefs of many cultures – is in danger of being disregarded, and that the wairua is still alive in a ‘Māori’ sense. In fact, the wairua is believed to wander at will, leaving and returning to the body for three to five days. After this, the wairua walks the path from Awanui (the southern point of Ninety-Mile Beach) to the northern point of New Zealand, then dives off and proceeds to the Underworld of Hine nui-te-po (the Goddess of Death) and then to Hawaiki or Tawhiti, the ancestral home of Māori (Tipene-Leach, 1994). Lewis and Pickering (2003) discuss the movement between the realms of the living and the dead, and considerations of customary rules and observances in reference to cadaveric

donation involving removal of organs from the dead person as soon after death as possible.

Māori have specific ways of doing things, with the ancient tikanga passed down through the generations. These protocols ensure the cultural safety and comfort of all participants. Tikanga processes ensure that all those who want to have their say are given the space to do so, and whilst these processes will not suit all people or situations, they have proven to be successful within Māori communities. However, the test as to whether non-Māori benefit or embrace these traditions will be tested over time. As New Zealand increases its cultural confidence and maturity, and as Māori culture becomes more visible in science, the protocols introduced in the paper may become second nature in this country in the future (Mead, 2003; Tipene-Matua et al., 2009).

### **Tikanga Māori Strategies in the Certificate in Animal Welfare Investigations**

The implementation of a number of tikanga Māori strategies around cadaver use have been guided and supported by Māori kaumātua in order to appropriately acknowledge these beliefs, and, in particular, by Major John Marsh from Te Arawa and Hare Paniora, the Unitec Kaumātua. On the animal euthanasia teaching day, the Unitec Kaumātua led the progression of students into the animal laboratory. This was then followed by a karakia (blessing, chant) and a waiata (song: ‘Te Aroha’) to acknowledge the lives of the animals, and to give thanks to the animals for their use, prior to them being handled by the students (Figures 1 and 2). The tikanga took approximately ten minutes, after which time the students were able to handle the animal cadavers.

The students are also strongly encouraged to wash their hands on entering and leaving the laboratory for practical

sessions, as part of the process of whakanoa (tapu removal procedures). Whakanoa is observed to give the students and staff psychological and cultural safety. Our tikanga Māori strategies are also in alignment with the Māori views on health that take a holistic approach and embrace four cornerstones as described by Durie (1985): te taha wairua (the spiritual dimension); te taha hinengaro (the mental dimension); te taha tinana (the physical dimension); and te taha whānau (the family dimension).

Sullivan (2013) elaborates in detail on whakanoa practices by Māori who work with tūpāpaku (body or corpse) both in a professional and non-professional capacity. In particular, Sullivan highlights the importance of carrying out karakia and whakanoa, such as sprinkling the body with water, as it is believed that anything that comes into contact with tūpāpaku becomes laden with tapu and hence, that item is unable to be safely used until that tapu has been removed. Whakanoa serves to render things 'usable' again.

If food and drinks were permitted in the animal laboratories, these would have been prohibited in our tikanga strategies. However, under health and safety practices, food and drinks are not allowed in the laboratories. This evidences the alignment between Māori tikanga and mainstream health and safety protocols, which reinforces the practical nature of tikanga.

Other programmes that utilise cadavers have been criticised because Māori students are not able to incorporate their own beliefs and values within the programmes, and there is significant pressure to ignore and/or suppress Māori values and priorities in learning and practice (for example, see Wikaire and Ratima, 2011). Wikaire and Ratima (2011) cite examples including the use of cadavers without appropriate Māori processes such as karakia; and requirements to partially undress for mixed male and female class activities when practising physiotherapy techniques, which compromised some Māori students' cultural values.

### **Benefits of Tikanga Māori Initiatives in the Certificate in Animal Welfare Investigations**

We acknowledge that these spiritual views may not be held by all Māori and may fluctuate in terms of importance at different stages of life, and they constitute a living tradition (Lewis and Pickering, 2003). However, we feel strongly that our programme has been greatly improved by their implementation. The written feedback from all Māori and non-Māori students has been very positive. Examples of feedback include:

“It was great to show cultural sensitivity to encourage

participation, and to acknowledge other cultures a bit more” Student quote

“To satisfy the spirituality that some people hold towards the use of dead animals” Student quote

“Took away any guilt of handling the bodies of something that once had a spirit, mind and soul” Student quote

The feedback based on the initial implementation of the tikanga Māori strategies anecdotally suggests an increase in cultural awareness for all students and, in particular, it has provided culturally-relevant support for Māori students. In addition, whilst not the reason for the engagement of the tikanga Māori initiatives, it is pleasing that it upholds the principles of Unitec's Te Noho Kotahitanga, as well as the 2nd article of the Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi). Our initiatives are also reinforced by the following quote by Dr Tane Taylor when he launched the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners' Cultural competency guidelines for general practitioners in 2007:

I introduce a new concept. The concept of Māoriness. This concept is similar to that of Kiwiana. All Kiwis, irrespective of their whakapapa (genealogy), have a degree of Māoriness. A simple test would be to observe one's reaction (heart rate/goosebumps) when standing in Piccadilly Circus in London or Times Square in New York and hearing the All Black Haka, or Pokarekare Ana. If you react to either of these you are a true Kiwi; this is your Māoriness. As Kiwis we all identify with New Zealand, with our flora and fauna, with our skies and mountains, with our glaciers and volcanoes, with our rivers and lakes. All these are intrinsically connected to one people – Māori. We all proudly carry a Māoriness; therefore, without Māori, there is no New Zealand – otherwise we could be anywhere in the world. We, as Kiwis, take pride in who we are, the place we stand on, the space we occupy on this planet. As Kiwis we have a right and an obligation to protect our Māoriness. By looking after our Māoriness, we are, in fact, looking after ourselves. This is true equality.

### **Māori Student Success**

The tikanga Māori initiatives are also in direct alignment with the Unitec Māori Success Strategy that has the stated vision 'Ko te katoa e mahi tahi ana mō te angitu rawa o ngā tauira Māori - All working together for the success of Māori students'. Māori and Pacific people are underrepresented within the sciences (Ratima et al., 2008) and, as a result, within

the field of animal welfare science arena. It is important that this is rectified and corrected (Wikaire and Ratima, 2011). The lack of Māori in science may be in part due to the criticism that science includes practices that are reductionist; and that it is disdainful of whakapapa, mauri, and wairua (Mika, 2005). Science programmes have also been criticised for the absence of integration of Māori tikanga; Māori processes; and that the courses do not fully address Māori worldviews (Wikaire and Ratima, 2011).

We are hopeful that these newly-implemented Tikanga Māori initiatives will encourage increased numbers of Māori to study within the Department of Natural Sciences. In order to further encourage Māori students, and increase their success and retention, our department also has an in-house Kaiako Pono mentoring scheme. The Kaiako Pono programme has anecdotally already resulted in higher Māori student retention and higher levels of Māori qualification success.

The Unitec Kaiako Pono programme supports student academic performance by focusing on the learning environment, and encourages a two-way (ako) learning relationship between the student and teacher. This whanau-based learning methodology utilises the Mauri Model (Morgan, 2006) as an integration tool. We suggest that this affords the opportunity for successful integration of Mātauranga with science to produce appropriate, meaningful and positive outcomes for Māori and non-Māori alike (Hikuroa

et al., 2011). It has been noted by Wikaire and Ratima (2011) that Māori student success relies heavily on the development and maintenance of personal supportive relationships, so this is an aspect that our Kaiako Pono programme focuses on. We also hope that the integration of Māori content into the curriculum of our programme will enhance the cultural competence of all our graduates.

## **Conclusion**

These Mātauranga Māori initiatives have increased the respect and acknowledgement of the animal life being used and sacrificed, and the ceremony surrounding cadaver usage. We are confident that this will impact positively on our Māori student success and retention, and will hopefully encourage future Māori students to study not only the Department of Natural Sciences, but also Unitec Institute of New Zealand, Te Whare Wānanga o Wairaka, and in the tertiary sector, as a whole. These Mātauranga Māori initiatives have also been beneficial by increasing the Māori cultural competency of other staff within the Department of Natural Sciences. This is particularly important as we have a multiculturally-staffed department, with less than 50% of the current staff originating from New Zealand. Further research is now required to empirically evidence the benefit of the implementation of the tikanga Māori strategies.

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