

TIKANGA MĀORI

Animal cadavers used for teaching animal euthanasia

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Abstract

The importance Māori place on the environment and animals in particular is evidenced in Māori oral narratives and proverbial sayings. Understanding Māori knowledge and the cultural norms associated with animals is beneficial to animal welfare inspectors and building stronger relationships with Māori communities. 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 emergency euthanasia of the animal(s). Māori report a level of anxiety performing euthanasia on live animals, which highlights the importance for natural sciences to provide Māori-centred support and culturally relevant teaching. Animal euthanasia, taught using ethically sourced animal cadavers, is a difficult, sensitive and culturally complex subject to teach students. The cultural safety of staff and students is paramount. We have implemented a number of tikanga Māori (Māori customs) strategies, and feedback on these mātauranga Māori (Māori traditional knowledge) initiatives has been very positive: increasing cultural awareness, providing culturally relevant support for Māori students

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and increasing Māori cultural competency of staff. This article explores the relationship Māori had, and continue to have, with animals and discusses the use of tikanga Māori employed to aid and enhance the current euthanasia methods used by animal welfare inspectors.

Keywords

mātauranga Māori, tikanga, animal euthanasia, cultural safety, animal welfare

Introduction

Mātauranga Māori (Māori traditional knowledge) is enshrined in New Zealand culture and legislation through the Treaty of Waitangi. Māori values form the basis for explaining te ao Māori (the Māori worldview), and provide the concepts, principles and lore regarding responsibilities and interactions with the natural and spiritual environments. The importance Māori place on the environment, and native flora and fauna in particular, is shown in Māori oral narratives and proverbial sayings. Many of the traditional concepts and terms now form a modern Māori perspective, or worldview, along with a range of modern expanded definitions and interpretations (Harmsworth, 2002; Tipene-Matua et al., 2009). Understanding Māori knowledge and cultural norms is essential for science practitioners in New Zealand if they are to build effective teaching and working relationships with Māori communities.

Mātauranga Māori in the curriculum

Embedding mātauranga Māori within the curriculum can be challenging, particularly when there is not a great tradition of Māori participation in disciplines such as animal welfare. The conversations that ensue are often focused on relevance to the discipline and the availability of resources to embed mātauranga Māori content. How relevant is mātauranga Māori to the discipline of animal welfare? Addressing the question of relevance is a pertinent step towards the acceptance and normalisation of mātauranga

Māori within a discipline like animal welfare and so the development of resources becomes a priority to ensure that both staff and students are able to successfully embed and incorporate mātauranga Māori in their teaching, learning and assessments.

Understanding Māori relationships with animals

Evidence of the relationship Māori have with animals is contained within Māori genealogy, oral narratives, songs and proverbial sayings (Orbell & McLean, 2002; White, 1887). Māori would often liken themselves to animals of their environment, believe that their ancestors possessed the power to transform themselves into animals, and considered animals to be messengers, guides, guardians and friends. Māori often composed waiata (songs) and haka (dances) to celebrate animals and their deeds. This illustrates that the relationship Māori had and continue to have with animals is an important one; so important in fact, that the relationship between both is etched into the carvings that adorn our meeting-houses or repositories of knowledge (W. Simon, personal communication, 27 September 2014).

Māori representation in the sciences

Māori concepts of spirituality and how the New Zealand science education system encompasses and communicates the Māori worldview in practical science classes is an important area of study. Māori and Pacific people are

underrepresented within the sciences (Ratima et al., 2008), and as a result, within the field of animal welfare science. It is important that this is rectified and corrected (Wikaire & 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 (genealogy), mauri (life force) and wairua (spirit) (Mika, 2007). Science programmes have also been criticised for the absence of integration of Māori tikanga (customs) and Māori processes, and that the courses do not fully address Māori worldviews (Wikaire & Ratima, 2011). Tikanga affords the opportunity for successful integration of mātauranga with science to produce appropriate, meaningful and positive outcomes for Māori and non-Māori alike (Hikuroa, Slade, & Gravley, 2011).

In this paper we report on a number of tikanga Māori strategies that have recently been incorporated in animal euthanasia science teaching to ensure Māori-centred support is provided and teaching is culturally relevant. Feedback on these mātauranga Māori initiatives has been very positive in acknowledging the value and integrity of Māori knowledge and practice, evidencing a commitment to Māoritanga (Māori culture), 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 mātauranga Māori into our teaching has led to increasing cultural awareness and competency of staff and students, and providing culturally safe support for Māori students.

The Māori concept of wairua

According to Benland (1988), Māori have well-established concepts of both the taha wairua (spiritual side of life) and a person's individual wairua. As part of a holistic system, trying to separate the idea of wairua from other

fundamental principles such as mana (prestige), mauri, and distinctions between tapu (sacred) and noa (harmless) is not only impossible, but to do so would also miss the point that these concepts are part of an interrelated whole that must be viewed together. The nature of a person's wairua is in many ways similar to the Christian concept of a soul or spirit, which is indeed how the word is usually translated. However, wairua is not confined to humans, as all aspects of the environment are understood as having wairua and mauri (Jenkins, 1988; Mead, 2003). For example, the belief that all objects in the environment have both mauri and mana imbued within them means all things must be treated with respect and that humans are not more important than their environment (Patterson, 1992). 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; they constitute a living tradition (Lewis & Pickering, 2003).

Māori tikanga around death

It is important to be aware that death in the broader European sense does not equate well with Māori (Rameka & Te Pania, 1990). Mead (2003) argues that a greater regard for the spiritual component of the body after death 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 (Tipene-Leach, 1994). Lewis and Pickering (2003) discuss the movement between the realm 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.

Tikanga Māori when around cadavers

Ancient tikanga protocols passed down through the generations ensures 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, these processes have proven to be successful within Māori communities. Whether non-Māori benefit from or embrace these traditions has not been ascertained. As New Zealand increases its cultural confidence and maturity, and as Māori culture becomes more visible, especially in tertiary science education, the protocols introduced in this paper may become second nature in this country in the future (Mead, 2003; Tipene-Matua et al., 2009).

Sullivan (2012) elaborates in detail of whakanoa (ritual to cleanse) practices by Māori who work with tūpāpaku (corpses) both in a professional and non-professional capacity. In particular, Sullivan highlights the importance of carrying out karakia (chants/prayers) and whakanoa, such as sprinkling yourself with water, as it is believed that anything that came into contact with tūpāpaku became laden with tapu and hence, that item was unable to be safely used until that tapu had been removed. Whakanoa serves to render things “usable” again.

Tertiary academic programmes that use cadavers have been criticised because Māori students are not able to incorporate their own beliefs and values within programmes, and there is significant pressure to ignore or suppress Māori values and priorities in learning and practice (Wikaire & Ratima, 2011). These authors cite examples including the use of cadavers without appropriate Māori process 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 (Wikaire & Ratima, 2011).

Teaching emergency animal euthanasia

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 for Primary Industries, which aims to teach students to become animal welfare inspectors. 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, embedding mātauranga Māori is of fundamental importance.

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 emergency euthanasia of the animal(s). Euthanasia refers to a Greek term meaning “good death” (“euthanasia”, n.d.). Animal euthanasia is a difficult and sensitive subject to teach 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 practise the techniques on ethically sourced animal cadavers. It is crucial that the principles taught are based on the best scientific principles to ensure that the most humane practices are employed. 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 (Coughlan, 2008).

Respect for the cadavers has always been taught to all our students; however, in the last two years we have become much more cognisant of the culturally complex issues of working with cadavers—in particular, considering cadavers tapu, and being aware of the mauri of the animals from a traditional Māori perspective. The sacredness of human cadavers in Māori belief and practice has been discussed in detail

by many authors, such as Mead (2003), Mika (2007) and Sullivan (2012). The spirituality aspects accentuate the importance of valuing people and cultural perspectives by placing at the forefront the guiding principle of ensuring the dignity and mana of those engaging in the euthanasia component of the course. It has also been well documented that it is difficult for Māori students to work with human cadavers (for example, Lamdin, Weller, & Kerse, 2012; Sullivan, 2012).

Tikanga Māori strategies implemented to teach emergency animal euthanasia

The implementation of a number of tikanga Māori strategies around cadaver use has been guided and supported by Māori kaumātua (elders) in order to appropriately acknowledge these beliefs, and in particular by Major John Marsh from Te Arawa. The tikanga included are a karakia and a waiata 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; banning food and drinks; and washing their hands on entering and leaving the euthanasia sessions as part of the process of whakanoa (tapu removal procedures). Whakanoa is observed to give the students and staff psychological and cultural safety.

Student feedback on the tikanga Māori strategies implemented

Previous research has indicated that Māori report a level of anxiety performing euthanasia on live animals (Walker & Dale, 2009), highlighting the importance for the provision of Māori-centred support and culturally relevant teaching. Following the incorporation of the previously described tikanga Māori strategies within our animal euthanasia teaching, we gathered feedback from our 2014 cohort of Animal

Welfare Investigations students. This feedback was obtained as part of a larger survey investigating the use of cadavers as a practical tool to teach methods of animal euthanasia. This questionnaire contained a total of 71 questions, of which 7 directly related to the tikanga Māori strategies our students engaged with. These questions included requesting the students to share their feelings on the Unitec kaumātua's acknowledgement of the lives of the animals; whether they felt the strategies were worthwhile; whether they felt more comfortable working with the cadavers after observing the strategies and processes; whether they understood why the teaching staff had engaged these strategies and processes; and whether they felt there was any way this process could be improved. There was a 100% response rate. No students self-identified as being Māori.

The individual feedback provided by all 26 students regarding their experience and engagement in the tikanga Māori strategies in the animal euthanasia practical was overwhelmingly positive. Sixty-six percent of the students felt the tikanga was worthwhile and 96% indicated they understood why these strategies had been initiated. Whilst 66% were indifferent or did not feel the Unitec kaumātua's acknowledgement of the lives of the animals made working with cadavers easier, the great majority (85%) felt comfortable during the session and provided written comments recognising the importance of appreciating the lives of animals given to science and teaching. A sample of these follows:

He [Unitec kaumātua] spoke in both Maori and English and made it easy to understand what he was doing.

It's good to know that they dealt with spirits of the animals in a respectful way on behalf of others.

Animals have lives too and it is important to acknowledge this. As well as clarifying

different cultures that may be averse to handling dead animals as they are sacred.

I thought this was really beneficial, it is a great form of cultural communication that I believe an AWI [animal welfare inspector] needs to be aware compassionate of/to.

These findings suggest that regardless of cultural identity the implementation of tikanga Māori strategies within emergency animal euthanasia teaching is of great benefit to all students, encouraging cultural acknowledgement and awareness, as well as increasing respect for the sacrifice of animal lives used for teaching purposes. We feel strongly that our programme has been greatly improved by their implementation, as well as providing culturally relevant support for Māori students. In addition, it upholds the principles of the second article of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi).

We also hope that the integration of Māori content into the curriculum will enhance the cultural competence of all our graduates, and be beneficial by increasing the Māori cultural competency of staff within the Department of Natural Sciences. This is particularly important as we have a very multicultural staffed department with less than 50% of the current staff originating from New Zealand.

Conclusion

We are hopeful that the tikanga Māori initiatives we have integrated within the animal euthanasia curriculum will encourage Māori to study in the animal welfare sciences. These mātauranga Māori initiatives have also increased the respect for 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 Māori student success and retention, and will hopefully encourage future Māori students to study science in tertiary education.

Glossary

haka	dance
karakia	chant, prayer
kaumātua	elder
mana	prestige
Māoritanga	Māori culture
mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge
mauri	life force
noa	being free from tapu; harmless
taha wairua	the spiritual side of life
tapu	sacred
te ao Māori	the Māori worldview
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	the Treaty of Waitangi
tikanga Māori	Māori customs
tūpāpaku	corpse
waiata	song
wairua	spirit
whakanoa	ritual to cleanse; tapu removal procedures
whakapapa	genealogy

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