Embracing Te Ao Māori to Rebuild a Sustainable Future for Chefs in Aotearoa New Zealand

Adrian Woodhouse, Chloe Humphreys

Otago Polytechnic Te Kura Matatini ki Otago

*Innovation Spotlights extremely brief contributions that highlight an innovative teaching practice, approach, or tool, and provide accompanying evidence that speaks to the effectiveness of the innovation.

Abstract

The professional kitchen is a fast-paced environment often founded on hierarchical structures and stressful working conditions. Within this environment, tensions often run high resulting in aggressive behaviours, and at times, bullying and violence towards junior chefs. For the last decade the hospitality sector has been struggling to recruit and retain aspiring chefs into the professional kitchen. Compounding the recruitment issue is the social narrative that the hospitality industry is a poorly paid profession that works long and unsociable hours.

Due to the global pandemic the hospitality sector has suffered significant upheaval resulting in significant numbers of its workforce choosing to leave the industry. Like other countries around the globe, the hospitality sector in Aotearoa New Zealand is having to rethink and reset the way it operates in a new, post-covid landscape. Central to this is the questioning of established modes of practice and reimagining a new hospitality future.

In response to the changing landscape of hospitality, the Bachelor of Culinary Arts programme at Te Kura Matakini ki Otago (Otago Polytechnic), Aotearoa New Zealand developed a bicultural pedagogic framework that embraces te ao Māori values. As a strategy to educate chefs into alternative workplace behaviours and cultures the values of manaakitaka (care and integrity towards self and others), whānaukataka (integrity of relationship), and kotahitaka (a sense of collective unity and ownership) are deliberately integrated into the programme's pedagogy and the courses' learning outcomes. In doing so, this pedagogic framework upholds the worldviews, values, and mana of Aotearoa's takata whenua (Indigenous people), while also attempting to rebalance the historical practices of the professional kitchen.

Introduction

The global COVID-19 pandemic has had a massive and irreversible impact on the hospitality industry in Aotearoa (New Zealand), resulting in a mass exodus of workers and bringing to light a raft of issues with workplace culture (Williamson, Rasmussen, & Palao, 2022). Whilst devastating for businesses within the sector,

it has also forced a complete rethink of common practices and attitudes, resulting in an opportunity to reset the way it operates and treats its people (Williamson et al., 2022). The Bachelor of Culinary Arts programme at Te Kura Matakini ki Otago (Otago Polytechnic), Aotearoa New Zealand, has embraced this opportunity, using the timely Five Year Programme Review to redevelop the programme to help address such issues by embedding bicultural values within the pedagogy and curriculum.

This article will examine traditional culinary workplace culture in the context of the global pandemic, highlighting the need to return to values that focus on the care and wellbeing of the people within the industry. It will outline the work done by Bachelor of Culinary Arts kaimahi (staff) in the redevelopment of the degree, and the adoption of a bicultural framework built on the values of manaakitaka (care and integrity towards others and self), whanaukataka (integrity of relationships) and kotahitaka (a sense of collective unity and ownership). A discussion of the implementation of these values will go on to highlight the potential to change the trajectory of workplace culture and industry practices, ultimately improving the hauora (wellbeing) of our people and working environments.

Traditional Culinary Workplace Culture

Gordon Ramsay: *Hey you, yeah you...come here. Why aren't you wiping the f@*%king plates.*

Young Chef: *I don't know chef?*

Gordon Ramsay: *Every time there's food on the pass, where should you be...on the f@*%king pass! Now stay here, next time you're out...ok!*

(Graham, 1999)

In the comfort of our living rooms, many of us will have watched an innocent chef physically and emotionally succumb to the judgement of a Chef Master via shows like Hell's Kitchen or Boiling Point. These programmes glamourise the fast-paced nature of professional kitchens; but in doing so, they also expose the aggressive behaviours, which at times, play out within these environments.

Professional kitchens have a chequered history of adopting aggressive actions to cultivate worker productivity and enforce quality food production. Verbal, physical, and psychological abuse towards young chefs has traditionally been a widespread practice within the hospitality industry; albeit more evidently so within the fine dining sector

(Burrow, Smith, & Yakinthou, 2015). Chefs have commented that to be considered a legitimate member within the culinary arts community, they have had to resort to acts of aggression towards others to affirm their professional identities (Palmer, Cooper, & Burns, 2010). The following quote from the Burrow, Smith, and Yakinthou (2015, p. 679) study into the culture of professional kitchen highlights the normalisation of aggression towards vulnerable junior staff:

> "Go and f@#king beat him up' and it would just happen – the guy would go over and start beating another guy up. That was normal, but everyone there was mad. The whole mentality of that place was completely warped."

Normalising such behaviours within the industry has been identified as a key influencing factor in chefs adopting aggression and exploitation within their leadership practice (Burrow et al., 2015). As Gill and Burrow (2018, p. 21) comment, "Fear was a tool used to support the [culinary arts] institution...passed on through generations of teaching and training," meaning, the practice of aggression is so deeply embedded within the culture of the culinary arts, that at times, the culinary arts would struggle to exist without it.

The abuse and exploitation of chefs is further evident within many restaurants' business models. Until recently, it was an accepted practice for salaried chefs to work over and above their contractual hours, unpaid. Working a 10-15 hour day and being paid for an eight hour day was not uncommon (Cole, Stuart, Hardy, & Spencer, 2022), and until the recent public ousting of a number of high profile chefs, wage theft was a widespread practice in the industry (Robinson & Brenner, 2021). Worker exploitation also continued to be practiced through the time-old tradition of stagiaire. Stagiaire is the practice of working for free under the guidance of an experienced chef, in much the same manner as an unpaid internship. It has its roots in the traditional French kitchen and was a means for young chefs to extend their culinary repertoire. However, many chefs built their menus and business models around this model of free labour, meaning many junior chefs in fine dining kitchens were working for no pay. The practice of stagiaire has recently come into criticism, whereby it is no longer viewed as an authentic relationship of learning, rather an exploitive business practice (Kauffman, 2019).

It is therefore no surprise that many hospitality operators who premised their business models on the exploitation of

labour and allowed aggressive cultures to cultivate within their workplaces have, in recent times, struggled to attract and retain a stable workforce.

The Aotearoa New Zealand Situation

As with other professional kitchens throughout the world, aggressive and exploitive practices operate within the Aotearoa New Zealand hospitality industry (Gong, 2017). Similar to other countries, there is an underlying social distrust within Aotearoa New Zealand of the hospitality sector's workplace practices (Williamson, 2017). As a result, within the last decade, many chef positions within Aotearoa have been filled by low-paid migrant workers. Many of these workers have come from impoverished countries, and they have worked in the hospitality sector as a pathway to permanent residency. While migrant labour has provided the hospitality sector with a short-term solution to its labour issues, the recent disruptions caused by the global pandemic have resulted in an exodus of migrant workers. The labour situation is further complicated due to a significant number of domestic workers having left the hospitality sector in search of an improved work-life balance and security of employment.

The hospitality staffing crisis within Aotearoa New Zealand means that many hospitality businesses have reduced their product and service offerings, and in some cases closed altogether. The staffing challenges are further intensified by recent changes in government policy, which has stemmed the flow of low-paid migrant labour into the hospitality and tourism industries (Smith, 2021).

In response to COVID-19 and a changing tourism landscape, the government of Aotearoa New Zealand has strategically repositioned the country's tourism industry (which includes hospitality) from a high-volume, extractive model, to a high-value, sustainable and regenerative industry (Tourism Industry Aotearoa, 2022). Within this strategic pivot, there is a recognition that if Aotearoa New Zealand is to reposition itself as a world-class tourism and hospitality destination, it needs to be a sustainable and regenerative industry. To that end, the government has identified that tikaka Māori (doing things the correct way) is critical in rebuilding a sustainable future for tourism and hospitality (Tourism Industry Aotearoa, 2022). Within a tikaka Māori mindset, operators will need to have staff physical and mental wellbeing front of mind. Gone are the days of churning and burning overworked and poorly paid

hospitality workers in Aotearoa New Zealand (Williamson et al., 2022); rather, business models which look after staff wellbeing, pay a living wage and provide opportunities for learning and progression are seen as vital in rebuilding a local workforce (Williamson et al., 2022). Furthermore, the government has made significant changes to Aotearoa New Zealand's immigration and employment legislation, forcing the hospitality sector to move away from a reliance on a low-paid and often exploited international workforce. Rather, employers need to place worker, community and environmental wellbeing at the centre of their decision-making processes (Hendry-Tennent, 2022).

A Bicultural Framework for Culinary Education

In 2019, the government of Aotearoa New Zealand announced the Review of Vocational Education (RoVE). The kaupapa (intent) of the RoVE is to create a "sustainable vocational education system that helps improve wellbeing for all New Zealanders and supports a growing economy that works for everyone" (Te Pūkenga, 2022). As part of the RoVE, Aotearoa New Zealand's polytechnics and Industry Training Organisations are currently transitioning into the state-led vocational education organisation, Te Pūkenga. A key focus for Te Pūkenga is the authentic honouring of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and supporting and empowering Māori learners through the integration of te ao Māori (the Māori worldview) within its programmes' pedagogic design and curriculum structures (Te Pūkenga, 2022).

In 2022, the Bachelor of Culinary Arts (BCA) programme at Te Kura Matatini ki Otago (Otago Polytechnic) commenced its five-year programme review. The Bachelor of Culinary Arts (BCA) programme is founded on the methods and wayfinding tools of design. It is an applied degree which primarily uses project-based learning to allow culinary arts' tauira (learners) to acquire the skills, knowledge and capabilities required to operate as culinary practitioners. The programme operates in a holistic and integrated manner, requiring that tauira engage in culinary problem-solving activities to demonstrate their professional skills and sense-making abilities from year one of the degree.

The timing of the BCA programme review, the government initiated hospitality reset, and the aspirations of the RoVE would become the catalyst for a redesign of a bicultural pedagogic framework for culinary education. The BCA pedagogy has traditionally operated within constructivist

and humanistic pedagogic philosophies—philosophies situated within the western paradigm.

Working with industry leaders, members of the Kaitohutohu Office (office of Māori guidance) at Te Kura Matatini ki Otago, and mana whenua (local Indigenous people), the BCA programme development team engaged in a series of hui (meetings) to discuss the hospitality sector's traditional workplace cultures and how an alternative pedagogic framework might contribute to the rebuilding of a sustainable future. Through various hui, the discussions finally centred around the following statement: "How can the BCA programme develop a culturally responsive pedagogy which helps facilitate a sustainable future for the chefs of Aotearoa?"

As part of the developmental discussions, manaakitaka was identified as a critical concept which differentiated Aotearoa's practice of hospitality from others internationally. Due to the multidimensional nature of te ao Māori, context defines how manaakitaka is interpreted and practiced (Mead, 2016). However, within the field of hospitality, manaakitaka is widely understood as the act of care towards others; ironically, something which has not always been practiced within the professional kitchen. Furthermore, due to the holistic, integrated, and multidimensional nature of te ao Māori, manaakitaka cannot be practiced without the presence of a genuine relationship and a sense of responsibility towards others. Therefore, expressing an act of whānaukataka (meaningful relationships) and kotahitaka (collective bonding and responsibility) need also be enacted if one wishes to enact manakitanga towards others.

The development team explored how the concepts of manaakitaka, whānaukataka, and kotahitaka could become the tūāpapa (foundational) principles within the programme's pedagogy. As part of the process, the team discussed the ways in which these values presented a counter cultural perspective to the traditional cultural norms of aggression and exploitation. The following table highlights these differences in these cultural perspectives.

Differences in Kitchen Cultural Perspectives

Culture of Manaakitaka, Whānaukataka, and Kotahitaka	Culture of Aggression and Exploitation
Manaakitaka is about **upholding the integrity of self and others** through the **provision of care.**	Aggressive and exploitative kitchen cultures **promote individualism** and are intended to protect **self-interest.**
Whānaukataka is about building **respectful and meaningful relationships** and recreating spaces to **share experiences and perspectives.**	Relationships are **transactional** and within these relationships there are **winners and losers.**
Kotahitaka is premised upon **collective purpose and responsibility** and embraces **the diversity of the individual as a collective strength.**	**Individuals perform a function** within a structure. If individuals do not perform, they are replaced by another functional individual.

Table 1. Differences in Kitchen Cultural Perspectives

Beyond the pedagogy of the classroom, it was deemed that the adoption of these values within kaiako (lecturer) teaching practice allowed them to explicitly role model the professional behaviours expected of a contemporary chef. In this way, kaiako were not just teaching tauira the technical knowledge required to practice as a chef; rather, they would support technical knowledge with learning activities to facilitate tauira understandings of how to positively interact with others and the environment they operate within.

Bicultural Framework in Action

The following are examples of the framework's values and how they are implemented into the pedagogy and curriculum design of the programme.

Bicultural Values	Pedagogic Strategies
Manaakitaka is about upholding the *integrity of self and others through the* provision of *care.*	Tauira and Kaiako get to know each other's cultural perspectives and personal aspirations early within the programme. Tauira then bring these cultures and aspirations into their project work. Understanding the application of manaakitaka within different culinary contexts is developed through project work, which requires tauira to design dishes, systems, and experiences which meet the needs of others. This involves tauira understanding the mana of the place, the people, knowledge, and kai within those contexts. Reflective exercises and assignments allow tauira to interpret and define how manaakitaka is embedded and enacted within their culinary practice and their wider community of practice. Tauira and kaiako wellbeing is central to the planning and design of curriculum, through the integration of self-care and effective learning strategies, and the programme's holistic assessment philosophy.
Whānaukataka is about building *respectful and meaningful relationships* and recreating spaces to *share experiences and perspectives.*	Culturally safe spaces are created within the programme structure where tauira share openly with others their perspectives and learnings without fear of judgement or ridicule. Relationships of trust are nurtured so that tauira feel safe seeking feedback and asking for help. Projects are designed so that tauira are introduced to community partners and are exposed to the importance of relationship building (networking) within the culinary community. Projects are managed in a way that ensures tauira can deliver realistic outcomes that continue to build positive relationships with the culinary community. Reflective exercises and assignments allow tauira to define how whanuakataka is embedded and enacted within their culinary practice.
Kotahitaka is premised upon *collective purpose and responsibility* and embraces *the diversity of the individual as a collective strength.*	A community of practice is established at the beginning of the degree, through shared learning spaces (both face to face and online) within which ako is highly valued. Tauira regularly collaborate with the wider BCA community, working within teams across cohorts and receiving/giving feedback to achieve collective outcomes. All tauira project work culminates in a collaborative event with community partners. While tauira may complete individual work, it is required to be modified and adapted so that it supports the kaupapa of the collective. Tauira are acknowledged for their overall contribution to the collective team, as opposed to being rewarded for individual actions.

Table 2. Bicultural Framework in Action

Beyond implementing these values into the pedagogy of the classroom, the programme includes papers at each year of the programme where these values are explicitly taught. In year one, the course Manaakitaka for Kai requires tauira to apply the principles of manaakitaka, whānaukataka, and kotahitaka to design and implement a food experience for manuhiri (guests). Within this course, students are assessed on their application of these values to create a food and beverage experience for invited guests. Through this approach, there is a shift in attention from the food that the tauira produce to how the tauira embrace manaakitaka, whānaukataka, and kotahitaka within their dish development and implementation processes to uphold the mana of the cohort and their guests.

In year two, tauira work with community partners to design new food products or service offerings. Within these projects, tauira explore the ways in which manaakitaka, whānaukataka, and kotahitaka are practiced in the building and maintaining of professional relationships, and how these relationships create a positive impact within the wider food landscape.

In year three, reflective activities allow tauira to interpret and define how manaakitaka, whānaukataka, and kotahitaka are embedded within their own and others' culinary practice. Within the course Hauora (wellbeing) in the Culinary Workplace, tauira frame their reflective insights around their interactions of manaakitaka, whānaukataka, and kotahitaka with other culinary professionals, and how the interaction of these values impacts the kitchen's hauora.

Conclusion: A Return to Manaakitaka

As chefs in Aotearoa New Zealand, we have unconsciously wandered in an identity wilderness, not really knowing who we are, often performing as the gastronomic Other. As the gastronomic Other, we have performed the traditions of Europe, which has influenced not only our dishes but carved deep into our psyche the ideologies which surround them (Woodhouse, 2021). The pandemic has provided us with the opportunity to stop, reflect and reset our understanding of self. As we move into a post-COVID landscape we now have the opportunity to acknowledge and embrace our unique perspective and place within the culinary world. Inherent within our uniqueness is the cultural gift of te ao Māori, a perspective which allows the values of manaakitaka, whānaukataka, and kotahitaka to guide our decisions

and personal interactions. As culinary educators, it is our inherent belief that through embedding these bicultural values within our pedagogic practice, we have the ability to change the mauri (life force) and hauora within our working environments.

Māori often express the following whakatauki (proverb) when faced with making decisions in life, Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua 'I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past'. This whakatauki acknowledges that for Māori, many of the questions we have about our future can be answered by connecting with our past. In the case of the future of culinary arts, we believe that reconnection with how we have always viewed our relationships with people and place within Aotearoa provides us with an answer for our future.

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