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Cloaked in Our Love: Indigenous Women's Traditional Garment Making as Cultural Pedagogy

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Abstract

Colonial education in the Pacific have systematically disrupted Indigenous intergenerational pedagogies by marginalising women's knowledge and embodied learning central to cultural knowledge transmission. This paper presents decolonising, arts-based research that centres Indigenous women's traditional cloak-making practices as powerful sites of pedagogy, resistance, and cultural regeneration. Grounded in Māori feminist theory and Indigenous 'activism', this study explores Māori cloak-making (kōkahu) and Aboriginal possum skin garments as pedagogical sites that weave language and identity through embodied, community-centered practice.

This research advances Whatuora (Smith, 2019; 2020; 2023), a Māori arts-based methodology, alongside decolonising methodologies (Smith, L. T., 2021), to theorise traditional garment making not merely as 'craft' or artefact, but as a sophisticated pedagogy of relationality, care, cultural responsibility, and identity formation. Central to this analysis is Indigenous maternal pedagogy, where making and cloaking operate as acts of love, protection, and cultural continuity.

Practice-led, land-based workshops culminated in a community-led fashion show, art gallery exhibition, and publications bringing together mothers' and grandmothers' weaving as material expressions of love, alongside their own words written in the form of 'love letters' to living and yet to be born grandchildren. Extracts from a short film documenting these art-based pedagogy research outputs will be shared.

This paper contributes to the theme of Pedagogy and Indigenous Education as a community-grounded, theoretically informed, model of Indigenous arts-based pedagogy. It advocates for recognition of Indigenous women's pedagogical practice and invites educators to engage with Indigenous pedagogical innovation to inform culturally responsive curricula beyond the classroom walls that honour diverse knowledges and support equitable educational futures.

Keywords: Indigenous Pedagogy; Artsbased-Based Teaching Praxis; Kaupapa Mori?ori (Centric) Research; Decolonising Education; Intragenerational-Generational Learning