**Speak Up-Kōrerotia**

**Pūrākau**

**26 June 2024**

**Plains FM**

This program was first broadcast on Canterbury's Access Media station, Plains FM and was made with the assistance of New Zealand On Air.

Coming up next, conversations on human rights with Speak Up – Kōrerotia, here on Plains FM

**Sally**

E ngā mana,

E ngā reo,

E ngā hau e whā

Tēnā koutou katoa

Nau mai ki tēnei hōtaka, Speak Up-Kōrerotia.

Tune in as our guests ‘speak up’, sharing their unique and powerful experiences and opinions and may you also be inspired to speak up when the moment is right.

Today we are talking about pūrākau: Māori storytelling, Māori stories. This is Speak up-Kōrerotia and I am Sally Carlton, your host. Today we have two guests who are going to talk to us about and talk us through pūrāka: What are they? What do they mean today? What can we learn from them, and I guess the empowerment that comes from storytelling and connection to story. It would be really nice to hear from both of you a wee bit about yourselves. What is it that drives you or inspires you? What brought you to today’s kōrero?

**Tania**

Kia ora tātou. My name is Tania Cliffe-Tautari. Nō Te Arawa, nō Ngāi Tahu, nō Ngāti Raukawa na ana hoki. Okay, so my tribal affiliations are Te Arawa which is based in the mid-north Bay of Plenty Rotorua area, down onto the South Island, Ngāi Tahu or Kāi Tahu in our dialect there, linking in to Otako as well as Taumutu, and I'm also connected to Ngāti Raukawa which links me back to Ōtaki. However, I'm actually based in the north where my husband’s from. So it's a little bit about who I am and where I come from. I’m currently working at the University of Auckland Waipapa Taumata Rau. I am the co-director of the Bachelor of Social Justice Studies there, as well as a lecturer.

**Sally**

A Bachelor of Social Justice sounds amazing!

**Tania**

Yes. This is our new degree that's been launched and starting off next year, in 2025. So we’re really excited about that. One of the pathways within there is a mātauranga specialisation and really supporting and bringing forward things like pūrākau, our stories and our narratives, and looking at how we look at things from within a Māori worldview and helping people to think about how they can support change within their own environments, within their own organisations or spaces that they are finding themselves in.

**Sally**

Very cool.

**Isla**

Rawe, rawe, that sounds amazing! Tēnā koutou te whānau, ko Isla tōku ingoa. He uri ahau nō Te Āti Haunui a-Pāpārangi, nō Ngāti Uenuku hoki, engari e noho ana au ki Ōtautahi. He kaiako ahau, he kai ahau. Hi, I'm Isla. I whakapapa to Te Āti Haunui a-Pāpārangi and Ngāti Uenuku up the Whanganui River, central North Island but I was born and have been raised and still live here in Ōtautahi Christchurch. I am a high school Te Reo teacher and a dean, and I also write, poetry mostly. My first book, *Talia*, came out last year and I’m super interested in my own... in terms of my own work as a teacher and as a writer, as to how pūrākau affect us today or what our kind of connection is with pūrākau in this modern era, I suppose so, and also what connection rangatahi have to our stories and storytelling. So yeah. Happy to be here. Hi.

**Sally**

Thank you, Isla. This is going to be a huge question, I’m sure, but what *are* pūrākau?

**Tania**

When I think of the word ‘pūrākau’, you know, you come back to just the literal translation: pū being the roots or the base, going to the base of the rākau [tree]. One of my colleagues, Professor Jenny Lee-Morgan, actually is behind a pūrākau methodology that I’ve used as well in my research and some of the things that she’s theorised within that is that pūrākau all have what we know as pedagogical intent. What that basically means is that it is something that we can learn from stories. So when we think of the rākau, the tree, and then the pū being the base of the tree, when you get to the bottom of every single story, there’s a learning there for us. So they're more than just myths and legends and stories, things that we pass on, they’re actually... They have depth to them and they’re rich in the point that they carry cross knowledge across generations. It’s the way that we learn, the way that we understand, the way that we articulate what we see in the world. Yeah, that’s a place to start off with anyway.

**Isla**

I totally agree. I think that the message of the pūrākau – or the taonga, the treasure, within pūrākau – is often not the story itself or the kind of the narrative as such, it’s like we get to connect back to however many years ago and think, what did our tīpuna decide? What was the one or two, you know, most important messages that they had to pass down across the generations. And so that… it’s almost like kind of actually seeing into the mind of, of, all that, you know, and what values they valued the most. And definitely from a teaching perspective, that comes across a lot for my students: not to get so caught up in the details and the narrative, the plot, and all of this, and to focus at least the majority on the intent. Yeah. What were they trying to say? Like, what is the message that we’re getting from this? So I think that’s kind of my whaakaro [thoughts] on that.

But in terms of what are pūrākau, yeah, what is a pūrākau? I guess it wasn’t until I went to uni to do my Bachelor of Te Reo Māori that I ever heard the word pūrākau. Like, I didn’t speak Te Reo and I didn’t really grow up very immersed in my culture at all. And I guess one of the first kind of key learnings at the start of that degree was, yeah, all these stories that you have kind of probably heard, maybe a bit through primary school with ‘myths this’ and ‘legends that’ – they are sacred narratives from our tīpuna and that’s not always how they’re presented in this world.

But the beauty of that also for me was realising, oh, I actually do know some of these pūrākau or you know, my parents have actually said these things to me, despite how much culture might have been kind of lost across the generations, pūrākau again, that one of those things that kind of stick, like even when reo [language] might be lost and tikanga [culture, values] might be lost, often whānau still passed down story – well, they do inevitably pass down story. So that was my first insight into what a pūrākau is versus just thinking of Maui and myths and legends. So yeah, pūrākau is a sacred narrative from whenever it was created that holds a key message – I think is my very best whakarāpopototanga, summary, of what are pūrākau, I think.

**Tania**

That’s not bad at all. You added some really important things to consider when we’re thinking about, you know, pūrākau. Storytelling in general is something that’s done worldwide, particularly within our indigenous cultures. I mean, as the one of the key ways that we have transmitted a lot of who we are in maintaining our histories and our stories – and our stories and our histories are intertwined. Obviously for Māori, we have more than just stories. We have our own traditional types of song, our mōteatea [lament], we have our whakairo, our carvings, we have our tukutuku, kōwhaiwhai – all our different patterns, they’re kind of like a blueprint of who we are, our identity within our, you know, our tūrangawaewae and our places of standing.

And so pūrākau is as a part of that, and they are the repositories of knowledge, really. The fact is, we have to think about how is it that these stories, you know, we've been able to retain them across all these generations? It’s not just that they exist, it’s that we tell them. It’s really important that we tell them. So coming from an oral storytelling culture, as Māori, somehow we talk about our stories. Like, you know, I was just in conversation with some people today around that there is a story of what we write, too. You know, we use different technologies, and Māori have adapted to different cultural ways of being and doing and we write our pūrākau now, you know, and it’s a different way that we’ve lived to adjust and to adapt. But they help us to stay connected to those people who are a part of our whakapapa, a part of our genealogy. Through maintaining and telling those stories that we – you know, the word ‘whakapapa’ itself: literally, ‘papa’ is not only the ‘ground level’, but it’s something that’s flat, that’s stacked upon one another – and so it’s about going backwards, in the past, but also, when people have children, going forwards into the future. And so pūrākau enable us to keep that connection from the past, present and into the future.

**Isla**

Aē, tautoko, tautoko [support], one hundred per cent. I really like what you say about, you know, we write our pūrākau now because as a writer… Like, I teach Te Reo and Re Ao Haka sometimes, but, last year was my first year as a teacher, and I got given an English class just because I was writing a book. And I said, oh my gosh, I don’t know how to be an English teacher. Instead of kind of streaming at our kura [school], we do everything by like, you join a core class based on a common interests, and so one of those was Te Ao Māori. And even though not everyone in the class is Māori, they’ve all chosen that they want to learn all of their subjects through that perspective, I suppose. So that was the English class I was given, so at least that was a little bit better.

But the thing that I found myself constantly saying to these kids was that, you know, they might look at me as a person saying, oh, I write poetry, or I just released a book of poetry and think, oh, that’s like the most Pākehā thing you could possibly do. Or, that’s old fashioned. Or that’s… you know, they've got this whakaaro about what that means. But a lot of what I think I spent the year doing was untangling their perspective of what… or, bringing everything back to the core place of storytelling, like you say. So I write my stories down, but, you know, even if this was hundreds of years ago, my stories would still be my stories, I just would be passing them orally. And, you know, people who…. yeah, like you said, people who do whakairo, you know, all of the patterns that they’re creating are stories. They’re telling the stories. And I suppose by like, peeling all of those layers of *this* was what counts as writing and *this* is what doesn’t count, and this is how Māori do it, and this is how Pākehā do it, or whatever, and bring you all back to the same idea that we all have these – every single one of us has stories to tell – and I’m not particularly fazed about what your mode is of bringing that across. Mine is writing but, you know, I’m kind of, I suppose just getting them to say that storytelling is an inherently Māori thing to do, like probably the most Māori thing that you could be doing. And so you don't need to kind of view expression of our stories with this lens of that being something that is not for us, that's something that other people do.

So it's really cool actually by the end of the year to see them, mostly, just get rid of their ideas, all of their kind of preconceptions about what counts like or what is writing, or what is a story, or what’s important or what’s not important, and just get back to the core of like, every story is this. Are you telling me what you ate for breakfast? Is a story like this? Whatever it is, that’s important and that’s super. It’s Māori in its root, whether you're writing or the English alphabet or whatever you’re doing. So yeah, I reckon pūrākau are a really cool way to show rangatahi [youth] of today’s generation that writing or all of these things, they have been for so long seen as like a Western concept, like publishing books and all of that kind of stuff, is really just what we’ve been doing for ages, is just a different way of doing it. So I think that really opened some minds to the fact that they’re all capable of doing those things and that they all have stories to tell. So. It’s cool to see that coming through with the younger generation, because it would be such a shame if our like our oral histories and narratives that have come thus far were to stop at any point. I hope there was like a little seed planted of, yeah, storytelling is innate in us, however we choose to put that out to the world.

**Tania**

You know, I agree. And I think also just when I think about pūrākau, I think they connect us to place. And the last Labour-led government they launched, the Aotearoa histories in schools. The intention around that is to bring to the forefront some of the history of who we are as a nation, particularly thinking also how we have not really, within the legislative framework or within our curriculum, created that space that they take shape as a fundamental part of our identity as a country. And so when I think about pūrākau and I think about the connection to place and how so important the naming of our places are, you know, because when we go to Māori names, place names – all those place names, they have a story behind them. And how we got these names, they lead us back to ancestors, they lead us back to events that happened, they lead us on a journey. And when we don’t make that a priority in terms of our conversation, we’re really missing out on an opportunity, actually, within the education context but even within our social context, that when we don’t make understanding how that place got its name an important part of conversation, we miss out on that rich history that it offers us. I would love to see that that our storytelling and our pūrākau will continue to grow within our schools, and that our teachers and students in the next generation will see it as a really important part of the fabric of our society.

**Isla**

I totally agree. Yeah, as you say, with that previous government, that focus on localised curriculum was incredible because I’ve always said, as a person who does not whakapapa to Te Wai Pounamu, to the South Island, but has lived here since I was born, I want to be going to school and learning about this place where I live, the mana whenua of *this* area and *these* pūrākau. I don't feel robbed of Whanganuitanga because if I needed to or if I wanted to or if I had to, I’d be going back up there to learn those and the history of my people. And of course, that's hugely important to me, but what localised curriculum does is it’s like, okay, well, this is where we are right now. This is the land we’re on. This is the people’s land that we are on, and they’ve got all their stories.

And so I think, especially during my degree, obviously all of that content, the vast, vast majority of our content, was based on Kāi Tahu history, Kāi Tahu pūrākau, Kāi Tahu waiata. People would say, oh, does that feel funny, to be learning kind of all of those things when you’re not from here as such? But actually I totally, totally valued that experience and feel like it would be kind of very wrong for it to be any other way. I agree that especially for people who have no known connection to the place that they live or to Te Ao Māori or whatever, the place that you live is what offers you all of that, all of that knowledge. And like, you’re a resident here, like you’ve got, kind of yeah, it's your job to be learning all of that stuff. But when people just kind of tell you what something’s called or don’t even give it a Māori name or use the correct name, but they certainly, you know, don’t go into the history of what the name means and how it got that name, they’re only doing themselves a disservice because we have so much, yeah, incredible local history and stories to be learning from and I hope that we don’t get so standardised and generalised that we lose those amazing kōrero. Because my experience down here in Ōtautahi *should* be different to what other people are learning in Rotorua or whatever. And yes, we probably have most of the same values and the pūrākau are probably saying a lot of the same things, but the people, the characters, the settings, yeah, are vitally important. And you know so much more about a place from getting those, those stories through.

So, specifically in terms of education, it’s so vital to me that that kind of continues. I teach at a school – the only school, I think, in Aotearoa, which is two schools in one building – and our site is called Orua Paeroa, but just like the place of two distant kind of peaks. And so when you are standing outside our whare and you look into the very distance over the city, you can see these two particular peaks of Kā Tiritiri o te Moana, the Southern Alps, that you can kind of only see if you’re standing in this very particular place. And to be able to physically take kids outside and be like, right, stand outside the whare, look over here, if it's a clear day, you can see this. And yeah, giving them that kind of belonging or a sense of place and location is so important. And the history behind that. Because I think if I just said, this place is called Orua Paeroa – especially if they’re not reo speakers, which most of them aren’t – that would be so lacking in all of the amazing history and whatnot that it actually holds. So aē, education is definitely a place that I’m passionate about not losing the ability to storytell and recount our history.

**Sally**

We’ll just have a wee break and a waiata. Isla, you selected something from Maisey Rika.

**Isla**

‘Waitī, Waitā’.

**Tania**

I chose that one, too!

**SONG Maisey Rika, ‘Waitī, Waitā’**

**Sally**

That was Maisey Rika’s ‘‘Waitī, Waitā’, a fantastic waiata for today’s kōrero about pūrākau, or Māori storytelling, Māori stories. We’ve got two guests on here, Tania Cliffe-Tautari and Isla Huia, who are sharing their whakaaro, their thoughts, on pūrākau. We’ve heard a lot about what are pūrākau and some of the content within them, it would be great now to think about how can we use or utilise pūrākau for empowerment.

**Tania**

Pūrākau really support young people, adolescents particularly, with identity making. So the research shows, you know, like, you know, a number of different researchers, Māori academics, show within their work that a secure cultural identity can help them to buffer some of the things that they face that they might be really challenging in their lives. And pūrākau really contribute to building a secure cultural identity because they are able to connect who they are to stories of the past and just really engender that sense of belonging.

I work across not only education but also to the social services and to the youth justice space in the work that I do, and working with some of the different groups that I’ve, you know, talked to and researched and, and some of the things that that we’re doing now is that we’re saying that social service providers are ensuring that some of our young people who may have come through the system, through whether it be like a care in protection or youth justice context, they make it the priority – these are Māori social service providers – they make it the priority to take that young person back to the place they come from and they say, look at your feet on the ground here. This is where your ancestors came from. That’s where your ancestor swam, who navigated the way across from Hawaiki to these shores. And just to remind them that that’s the stock that you come from. These are people who had robust knowledge. They had sophisticated navigational systems – it wasn’t by accident that we arrived here – we were actually moving backwards and forwards across Te Moana-Nui-a-Kiwa multiple times. It’s reminding them, actually, that’s what you come from, that’s your history and that’s your story. And so when we tell pūrākau and we get our young people to learn pūrākau, we are enabling them to build that sense of confidence and know who they are and that they belong and that they come from greatness. You know, there are lots of different stories and things that that are out there and people are starting to record these more in books, sharing the stories of our people so that they’re not lost. We haven’t lost a lot of them now: the practice that we’ve maintained for generations is working.

**Isla**

Aē.

**Tania**

You know, and it's about creating these spaces where storytelling can happen.

**Isla**

One hundred per cent. I think it's such a good point about our history of navigation. A few weeks ago, I took a bunch of my akonga [students] out on the *Hinemoana*, it’s like a traditional Māori wayfinding day thing. So we went out to Whakaraupō Lyttleton Harbour and seeing these kids with these ropes, and they're doing everything in Te Reo, and they're learning about the travels of autea [type of cloth] from Rarotonga or, you know, wherever, and you can just see their minds opening up to not only, like, the truths of how incredible our tīpuna were, but also the possibilities of their future. Something that I’ve always found is that the Western world can be very quick to make things, like, exclusive or ‘this is what counts as being Māori’, or ‘this is what counts as a story’ or ‘this is what counts as a skill’ or whatever. And a lot of what I see in my babies at mahi [work] is this just intense whakamā [shame] of “Okay I know that we've got all amazing pūrākau but I don’t know how to tell them, or I don’t know how to write them” – this feeling of exclusion from some club. And to be able to remind them that Te Ao Māori is inherently – like most indigenous cultures – very, very inclusive and very open to everybody’s kind of, different abilities and skills and whatnot, and to remind them that it’s the Western world that’s placed this, like, collar of restriction on what they do.

So aē, seeing these girls out on the boat, girls that have never been on a boat at all, or seeing when they would do their writing in English class, and they couldn't believe that I was, like, absolutely fine with them writing about some naughty thing they got up to with their friends on the weekend, but my perspective was and has always been I don’t get to, like, decide what's your story and what's not your story. All of them, every single one of them, even the ones that are naughty or boring or what you ate for breakfast or whatever… I would love to know what my, you know, great-great-great-great-great-great-great kuia ate for breakfast. Like, I don't know, just removing those barriers that have been placed on top of them of, like, what their skill level is or whatever and returning back to: you come from a storytelling people, you absolutely have the ability to do it, and there’s no right or wrong way; there's no good story, no bad story. I don't know, I found that to be a really big part of what I do is a kaiako [teacher] and as a dean, which is mostly pastoral and not, you know, really academic, was trying to like take off these ideas that have been placed on them of what ‘counts’ as good and bad and right and wrong and successful and Māori and Pākehā and Tauiwi and this, that and the other and just being like, you’ve got a whole lifetime of stories to tell. How you do them is, yeah, kei a koe te tikanga [it’s up to you].

But that’s definitely a way that I’ve seen rangatahi become, like you say, more embedded in their cultural identity. It’s not necessarily reo or tikanga or all of the things that, of course, are important, but it’s actually just removing those weird ideas about what they’re capable of and reminding them that, yeah, all of them have something important to say and all of them have tīpuna who’ve always had important things to say. And that's really, I think, quite reassuring for them, because they realise that they don’t actually have to work for that, they don’t have to do anything. It’s just their right, it's just who they are. So that's really, really cool to see and yeah, I think does have an impact on kind of what track they go down or what paths they follow. That cultural connection is like if they know that it's already there, then yeah, they don’t have to do anything to find it. They just have to trust it and access it and be brave enough to share it with the world in some way. So I think that’s actually my whole whakaaro on teaching in a nutshell. Yeah, definitely another way that. pūrākau are very important when it comes to young people and education and all those things. Yeah.

**Tania**

Kia ora. The thing that’s sort of sitting on the top of my head at the moment is really thinking about pūrākau enable people to get an insight into how Māori as a people group view the world, our ontologies, how we see reality, you know, our perspectives, and then also our epistemologies in terms of passing down of our traditions and our knowledge. I think back to the creation story, the fundamental example of that, that actually it’s through the telling the story about, you know, Ranginui and Papatūānuku, we can learn a lot about people. We can learn a lot about how decisions are made. The idea of Ranginui, you know, Sky Father and Papatūānuku, Earth Mother, and then they had all these children they kept in between them – we know probably about seven or so quite well, but there was like 70-odd children – but we know some really strong characters within this story and, we know that different tamariki, different children, of Ranginui and Papatūānuku had different feelings about separating their parents. Tell me what you’re thinking, Isla, in term of the different,,.

**Isla**

Oh, no. I’ve got my students in my mind now and I'm thinking, you know, when we do kind of restorative meetings between friend group or like, you know, when little dramas have happened that seem so big when you’re in high school, but actually we have, like, all of these stories that talk to us about (a) acknowledging that conflict always happens – conflict happened right in the beginning between, you know, between the tamariki of Papatūānuku and Ranginui – but also, I suppose, more than like a lesson on how to deal with it, just, yeah, the acknowledgement that these kind of things have always happened and the world has gone on, and there are lessons within those kōrero [talks] of how to face these problems and deal with these things. It’s kind of like an invisible, permanent, like, handbook for life or for dealing with so many things. I suppose it’s like a kete [basket] that’s got so much mātauranga that our young people, but also everybody, needs.

And thinking back as far as our creation story, we’re already telling these stories about how people deal with loss or separation or, you know, all of these things that still affect people today, but we’ve got all these kōrero from way back all about them. So I don't know, for me, just even knowing that there’s these kinds of raru – these little issues or debates or concerns – or big issues, whatever, all of that conflict that’s always been happening, and that’s part of a humanity and our life, but we’ve got all of these examples of, you know, the ways that we’ve lived through these things already. Which is real cool, to think that a lot of our young people especially, just don’t know yet or are learning now all of these kōrero about things that actually do affect him. Well, I think that was probably the whole idea of pūrākau to begin with, right, that they withstand the test of time, that they relevant regardless of the era that we’re talking about, which I think is so cool, so cool, and such a gift to give to young people and be like, “Hey, here’s a similar whakaaro from thousands of years ago” or whatever. Yeah.

**Tania**

Yeah. I guess because, you know, like every people group have their own, you know, their own belief systems and, and it’s going back into our pūrākau did actually teach us, teach our young people, teach us as adults. They teach us, you know, our history and beginnings, our epistemologies and our ontologies and how we see the world. And I think if we can understand and get an insight that actually through some of its storytelling, is why people like Māori do certain behaviours and different things, and it comes back to some of the stories. And if we understand some of these stories then we can understand actually why decisions are made in terms of, you know, human behaviours and our cultural practices. Listening to what you are saying, Isla, you know, about this modern, the modern day take on pūrākau and I agree that we’ve learnt to adapt and to adjust our storytelling in these modern-day contexts, and that we might see young people or different people – even like yourself, you know, as a poet, as someone who writes as well – we might tell our stories.

But one of the things that I did was a piece of research around young Māori youth who were being excluded and things like that from school was I used pūrākau as a methodology to actually help collect and analyse the data and then writing up the, you know, just the interviews and everything like that. And then I took what they had said to me, put all the coded, all the things that they told me, together to create a narrative of sorts with a little bit of work on my behalf, you know, to just drawing some of the sentences together and then then back to them and just it’s just amazing how we have our own ways of doing things in a modern-day sort of context that we can actually use pūrākau and spaces like research, that we can use it as a method and a methodology.

I think constructing narratives of now, pūrākau of now, they’re going to be the foundation of the future. We look back to the ancient knowledge, you know, tīpuna wisdom and knowledge that goes way back – and actually the stories of now, they’re going to be the old stories, in some point of time, in terms of what people were doing and how they were making decisions. So I think we need to understand that we can use it as a pedagogical strategy for teaching and learning, that we can write our stories from now, and we can grow different people to just document the journey. Tell this story because it will be of value and benefit to someone, someone along the way.

**Isla**

Absolutely. I think that, you know, the kōrero about your research also makes me think of before I did my Bachelor of Te Reo, I worked as an advisor in youth, child and adolescent mental health services. I remember hearing when I was working there about some service provider, I think in Te Tai Rāwhiti, and they were basing their whole kaupapa [theme] of their service – I want to say it was with tāne [men], I can’t remember what it was – anyway, basically the whole idea of the service contract was working with the people who were coming into their service needing some sort of assistance on their journey, but basing that journey on, I suppose, the journey that our characters, our people go on in pūrākau. I don’t know much about the service, but I thought in and of itself, that idea is really beautiful, that we can not only have pūrākau as stories and oral narratives, which of course is where they come from and are important, but actually, like you say, we can utilise them further. Like, we can come up with research methodologies that are based on the idea of pūrākau. We can run social services based on the journeys of the people in our pūrākau.

And to me, it’s like there are so many instances, I suppose, when you look across our – I don't even like the word, but like statistics of Māori not experiencing, you know, equal treatment or fairness or success, whatever that is – in our social services or our health services or our education or whatever, and then they say on the complete opposite side, people who are using ancient wisdom to guide people on these journeys and the success or the real, like authentic... What am I trying to say? There's something that comes out of that, whether it’s like, you know, the life experiences of the people in the service or, or the stories in your research, but there’s always something that comes out of it that’s so true and connected and authentic in a way that makes you wonder if you can actually reach that through any other means.

And to me, it’s like, maybe that’s what this modern era of pūrākau – modern, like you say, modern that will be what they’re telling the tīpuna about – but for now, like maybe a big part of what we’re doing or what we need to be doing even more is not just making sure the pūrākau keep being told, but being like, maybe this isn’t just about telling them anymore, it’s about we can actually help our people by providing things for them that, make sense and are relatable out of the stories of, you know, their ancestors to begin with. So yeah, I love that whakairo that pūrākau can be not just stories told orally or written or anything, but actually used as a process and whether kind of like a whakapapa [genealogy] offered to them of how people go through the world. I think that's so cool.

So yeah, and very cool that it was your research methodology as well. It’s making me think now, like, of all of the ways that we could base things off, that kind of type of our.. even, like, in our school, the whakataukī that our school uses: ““Ko Hinetītama koe nānā i puta ki te whai ao ki te ao Mārama”. So all about Hinetītama – I don’t want to say like a role model, but you know, at this big, public, all-girls high school, I like that we're finding new ways to be like, this is a person for you to look up to, or this is someone you can relate to, this is someone that you can connect with that’s not necessarily like some modern-day celebrity hero. Like we have so many stories that our young people can look back to and look up to for guidance and for reference so to see them used more and more is really, really cool and yeah, makes me wonder, yeah, what else and what other ways and what other areas of society could we be using pūrākau for to benefit people?

**Tania**

Yeah, I’m just thinking that, you know, like just with that methodology, that one that I used within my study was actually from Professor Jenny Lee-Morgan – and I encourage you, if you’re interested in that, to just sort of look into her work – but there are some other really cool resources out there too, like *A fire in the belly of Hineamaru* by, you know, another colleague, Professor Melinda Webber. The great thing about these ones is that she went back in terms of her mahi [work] and her research and she collected these narratives across time of people who were, like, really doing some really inspirational things across the period of time, across Te Tai Tokerau, you know, and produced this award-winning book. It kind of makes me think about the importance of telling some of these stories. We look at people who were really instrumental in some of our social justice movements: Kahurangi Dame Whina Cooper with “Not one acre more” and the 1975 land marches. We have to hold on to those pūrākau and those stories, you know, and learn so much from those stories because they tell us about being Māori and living in a modern, modern era and some of the challenges experienced through colonisation. How that’s impacted on Māori and then how people respond. I think at the core of who we are, you know, there is this drive for social justice, to see truth, to see things being made right within our communities and within our society.

**Isla**

I just finished Ngāhuia Te Awekotuku’s book *Hine Toa* last week. Oh, just to hear these, these stories! I guess that's what I come back to: our world changes so quickly that these stories that Ngāhuia Te Awekotuku’s talking about from, I don't know the 1950s or whatever, is relatively really not long ago at all sitting here thinking, oh my gosh, I cannot believe you lived through that, or you stood up for that kaupapa, or you were having lunch with Hone Tuwhare or Moana Jackson. I was like, you know, all these amazing kōrero, you know, that you just wouldn’t know otherwise. For me, at least, my main feeling upon finishing that book was like, just thank God that that’s out in the world, because otherwise so much mahi and fight and love and all of the stuff that you’ve done, that’s just – not necessarily forgotten, you’d like to think that like whānau would remember it and things like that – but yeah, like you said, we can always be thinking about our pūrākau from engari o ngā rā, like we need to be recognising that in however many years our next generations are going to be looking back to people of now for those kind of stories. And yeah, just seeing them out in the world makes me so grateful more than anything, just to be able to access them and read them.

I had an amazing kōrero with someone recently from the Māori and Pacific Recording Archives telling me all about these recordings that the organisation has in their care that have been collected from back 100 years ago of people in Pipiriki on the Whanganui River talking. And I’m like, “You have recordings of people talking?!” Like that’s, you know, undoubtedly my whānau, it’s not a big place. When we find out that that mātauranga is accessible and available to us, it’s an incredible feeling. So yeah, I totally agree that us nowadays, having access to those kinds of things is so exciting and it’s so amazing when we have it.

But also, yeah, remembering that one day it’s going to be our time that they’re looking back to. And yeah, we bring whatever stories we have, I’m just putting them out for our future generations to come. And also – I really am getting a bit off topic here! – but I really love the idea of relinquishing that whakairo of fiction. I don't know, like when we think about writing or storytelling in a certain sense it can tend to be very this is the structure and this is how you do it, and it fits into this genre, and this is the Kaupapa, and this is a good story and this is a bad story. I know I kind of talked about that already, but especially with my rangatahi [young people] who am very much living still in the zone of whakamā [shame], just being able to be like our pūrākau have changed over time, and I think the magic has even been to find the most perfect, or the most interesting, or the most captivating story; the key mahi has always been what is the important thing that I’m passing on or that I’m trying to say? So I think it’s kind of refreshing, especially in the school context, to be able to give that to kids and be like, this is not for excellence or merit or nothing like that. This is for the purpose of the message that you’re passing on. And you can kind of see them relax into the idea that they don’t have to, like, strive for this ridiculous level of perfection. Because that's certainly not what our tīpuna were up to, they had a broader sense to see what was going to be important for us in the future. I think we can do that, too.

**Tania**

Being able to use the reo, being able to write it in Te Reo Māori, to be able to speak it in Te Reo Māori – he mauri tōku reo, the language has its own mana [strength], its own life essence about what it is. And so when our stories are carried through a medium of Te Reo Māori, we hear the metaphoric nature of our language being spoken, the comparison between who we are in our environment. So in terms of, you know, being poets, we have always been poets. We’ve been creative. They’ve always been able to. They may not use the same terminology that maybe other cultures may use, but they do that. And I think there’s something beautiful about being able to use Te Reo Māori to tell our stories and to keep them alive, because there are certain words and certain ideas that that you just can’t convey them in English. They’re not able to be translated, you lose the wairua [soul], the authenticity of it when you turn them into English. There’s an encouragement there for us all to learn Te Reo Māori and to grow in that space, Māori mai, Pākehā mai, everyone mai! Everyone learning Te Reo Māori and then using that language to tell the stories.

And I think the actual act of storytelling, there is a real, you know, it’s real art. Some people are just really gifted with being able to tell pūrākau. Some of our stories that don’t have so much depth in terms of they may maybe like pakiwaitara [another kind of story] or paki mairo, but being the storyteller is important to raise generations of storytellers who will carry the pūrākau forward. We need people to be stepping up to that, into the different spaces and places and say, actually, I’m willing to go and learn about all the different knowledge that I need to know. And some people are chosen to do that role within their own whānau, but some people that have a deep desire. I mean, we have a lot of other ways in terms of how we transmit our knowledge, like I said before our mōteatea [lament], our waiata [song]. We have so many different types, types that are like a rebuke, kaioraora. We say that in a modern-day context, we see our young people wanting to go and write songs and they want to actually write raps or whatever it is to actually speak back to an issue, and we want to encourage them to do that because it is them taking their voice, sharing their voice, allowing it to really influence.

**Isla**

Absolutely I. It makes me think about my siblings because they’re all 9 to 11 years younger than me, high school kids, and the ways in which they’re telling their stories is so incredible. And I guess I’m a bit like a parent – I’m not, but being that I’m older, I’m kind of like a parent watching my kids figure out how to, like, express the things that they’re trying to say – and they’re saying, it’s so amazing to me, is just the variety of ways in which they’re all going about it. Like they’re all different people, but they’re all storytellers. My brother takes photos – and I’m biased because I’m his sister – but they’ve got this wairua [soul] to them. My sister does improv comedy, which is crazy to me that you could be eighteen and, like, brave enough to just get up and do something, but she's so good and like naturally, that quick, like witty responding to things, that’s her storytelling whereas I’m more like, oh, think, think, think and then, like, put it out to the world. And then our pōtiki is, like, a hearty activist; she’s recently tied herself to some train tracks, she’s only 16. But when I look at photos of her up there with her big Papatūānuku placards and Toitū te Tiriti placards and I’m just like, well, you are (a) you’re telling your story, but (b) you’re also doing what Ngāhuia Te Awekotuku or all of these other people – and we can go generations, generations and generations back – you’re, like, standing up and fighting and you’re telling the story that’s important for us as a people, and you’re doing it in different ways, you’re doing it through different outlets, but the most important thing is that you’re kind of fearlessly doing it.

But again, I also do absolutely tautoko the fact that if we can do that, using Te Reo, it’s like all of the things combined, and there’s so much to our reo that is untranslatable or inconceivable unless you’re learning it or doing it through the reo itself. And my favourite thing as a Kaiako is watching the actual little light bulb ‘ding’ moments where kids realise that like if there’s a compound word then what is the first part made and what is the second part mean? And then you put it together and it means this! And their minds are blown in the coolest way. All these words that I’ve always known but I’ve never thought about and how Te Reo is both so metaphoric and so literal. We were talking about Taylors Mistake Beach, and I was like, oh I Te Reo Māori, he Te Onepoto. And they were like, what’s ‘onepoto’ mean? What’s ‘one’, what’s ‘poto’ – so ‘short stretch of sand’. And just being able to see… yeah, it really is like a little bit of magic in their brains when all of these things kind of pieced together and they understand the story.

I do agree absolutely that there is a depth of understanding that you can only get from Te Reo. I will encourage any version of our stories being told but if it’s in Te Reo – it’s not necessarily that you can tell the story better or more effectively, but just that there’s layers and depth that you can’t get any other way. The more people we get telling and writing and reciting and reading our pūrākau through Te Reo, I think, yeah, the more, like, deep and broad our understanding and our knowledge becomes. And I suppose it’s just the same as whakataukī and kīwaha – it’s not the same as a proverb, because it’s not just a saying. Within each word and the way that these words have been chosen, and the order, are you using ‘a’, are you using ‘o’? All of those tiny details add to the dimension of that one sentence, yeah. To access through Te Reo itself, it's absolutely the most wholehearted and deepest way, I think, that you can access pūrākau.

**Sally**

I’m really sorry to interrupt this amazing kōrero but we’re kind of running out of time.

It's come to a kind of a natural conclusion – we’re looking forward – but is there anything else you’d like to add as a kind of final word?

**Isla**

For me, no not really, just thank you for having us and asking us to talk about this, it’s super cool and interesting. And I really want to look into the Bachelor of Social Justice! But my parting comment would be that pūrākau are the way that we show that storytelling within Te Ao Māori is for everybody. It’s not for a select group of people, there’s not one way you do it. It’s there, it’s for us, we’re entitled to it, it’s within us. We don’t have to do anything or look for it or seek it out. It’s all there. There’s all this guidance and all this mātauranga just waiting to be listened to and written. And that's pretty cool and exciting and inclusive of everyone, which is the reason I think it’s so important for young people.

**Tania**

E mihi ana au ki a koe, Isla. E mihi ana au ki a koe, Sally. I think for me, just sort of finishing off, is really just the thought that don’t underestimate the power in pūrākau. They are part of the kōrero, they are the food storehouses, the repositories of our knowledge across generations. We need to give our people access to our own stories, but the stories of the past and the present to lead us into the future. So thank you for this opportunity to talk.

**Sally**

Tēnā kōrua, thank you both so much for such a good chat. I didn’t even ask any questions!