



## Qudwa 2017 – Global Teachers' Forum Coffeehouse Sessions

### "Culture Counts"

Tracie Pile

Saturday, October 7, 2017

After greeting the audience in Maori, her mother tongue, Tracie Pile introduced the concept of *kete* - traditional baskets woven from the leaves of flax and used by the Maori people in New Zealand. It is a metaphor for humans. The key to learning, and to life, is to identify what each person has in his/her *kete*.

Tracie teaches Maori in New Zealand. Students were not performing well at her school. There was a decline in their interest in learning, pursuit of knowledge, and overall achievement. When teaching culture and exposure to culture in general lack in schools, students' academic performance tend to plummet.

For the longest time, the Maori language was repressed and not allowed to be passed on to generations. However, when students learn their heritage, they do achieve a lot.

The Maori environment is rich. Maori performing arts offer valuable opportunities to students. Tracie does not only teach her language to students, but she also encourages them to speak about their customs. Students value culture.

Tracie encourages the students to teach teachers. She shared a video with the audience of her students teaching their teachers about Maori art, dances, language, and songs. Reciprocal teaching and engagement is key to successful learning and to instilling confidence and autonomy in the students.

"As a teacher, my role is to enhance the *mana* (prestige) of my students by being a Qudwa, motivating my students to embrace their culture, to have ownership and knowledge of what is in their *kete*," said Tracie.

Tracie asked the audience: "What can we do to identify and acknowledge what students have in their *kete*?"

The answer was to look beyond what they can offer in the classroom and acknowledge cultural value.

Teachers have to be excellent examples to students in what they do and how they implement their culture and values.





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Tracie concluded by saying, "You are so fortunate in the UAE to have a government, a leader, who recognizes the role of teachers and the importance of education. Nations which value and celebrate every single culture are the greatest and most successful nations."

