
Noho Marae learning - Eternalised through the experience

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Abstract

The contexts in which we live, work, play and learn often define and are defined by respective world views. This is no less relevant in the provision of social work education and training. The learning environment of formal academic social work education is defined by dominant ideology in terms of where and when it is delivered and what the learning will 'look like'. O'Brien (cited in Hibbs, 2005: 18) explains context as shaping '... all aspects of practice in every component of social work activity', and at our place of learning, we are familiar with classrooms, desks/tables, chairs and lecture processes. However, feedback from student evaluations of various noho marae has prompted us to share our thoughts of this critical cultural learning space and context.

Introduction

Manuu manuu manuu Tagaloa
Hake ke pu he lagi likoliko, hifo ke puu ki lalo fonua
Manuu manuu manuu Tagaloa
(Greetings and blessings of Tagaloa magnitude to
the depth and breadth of the motu)

Vaiolesi is Aotearoa New Zealand born of Niue and Palagi heritage. Her grandmother was Ieta Hemohetuki nee Vihekula and her mother, Manogi Fifisi Hetau Makaea, is from the village Alofi Tokelau. The mother of four children, Vaiolesi is also blessed with two moko-puna, Latisha and Cushla-Kohu and together with her family she is raising her two and a half year old niece. Over the past seven years, Vaiolesi has facilitated noho marae based learning in several bridging programmes, integrating Aotearoa New Zealand society and group dynamics imperatives. More recently, transformative learning outcomes during noho marae learning encounters have highlighted the imperative for bicultural paradigms in social work education.

Certainly there are differences between us ... but it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognise those differences ... too often we pour energies into denying these differences rather than developing tools for using human difference as a springboard for creative change in our lives (Lorde, 1984: 115).

Judith, born in Otatahi, Christchurch, under the mantle of Mt Aoraki, is Pakeha of Scottish and Yorkshire heritage. She is the eldest daughter of Marjory, who is the eldest daughter of Elizabeth, both of East Chatterton, Southland. Currently Judith lives on Waiheke Island, loves and is loved by the sea, the bush and her partner Hilary.

Te rongonui o te taaniko, kei roto I te whiriwhiri no mau tonu toona aataahua.

The preceding whakatauki (Ruwhiu, 2001: 17), translated to mean 'the beauty of taaniko is that there is more than one pattern', speaks of how social work education may measure up to the question of developing competencies to work inclusively with many contrasting ethnic and cultural groups. As tauwiwi (non-Maori) social work educators in Aotearoa New Zealand our contention is that to work with integrity across cultures, respective relationships with tangata whenua (bicultural understanding, obligations and responsibilities), is the first 'pattern' of engagement.

This article delivers two primary weaves that converge to pattern notions of a bicultural framework. We will present a noho marae learning encounter as a powerful way to engage social work nga tauira (students) to develop competencies to work inclusively with all ethnicities and cultural identities. In support of our whakaaro (intent), we explore essential ideas and theoretical frameworks with regard to cultural identity principles in social work. Second, but not least, the weft weave offers the place of marae in place of classroom learning highlighted by the potential for transformative learning heard from the voices of the students who attended the noho marae.

The noho marae encounter: a teaching, learning, 'holding' environment

It has been said that '...in the Maori world, the marae is a place that records identity...' (Greenwood and Wilson, 2003: 7) and residential hui on marae, whilst often not formally written into curriculum nor included in stated outcomes, have been a unique part of training courses in Aotearoa New Zealand (Everts, 1988; Cleave, 2000; Greenwood and Wilson, 2003). As co-operative performance and inquiry processes in preparation for social work, Cleave (2000) speaks of indigenous metaphors and participation in marae protocols as central to group dynamics. The experiences contribute in good measure to preparing social workers for practice and perhaps the larger political context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Our social work programme has had an innovative, yet not always successful, history where anti-racism workshops and attempts to develop a Tikanga Maori base have been part of its evolution (Cranna, 1989). In terms of affirming and introducing new and relevant 'norms', a noho Marae ('sleep over') is an opportunity to spend a substantial amount of learning time on a marae (traditional Maori meeting house). Often it is where nga tauira (students) play a role in powhiri, mihimihi (welcome and greetings) and karakia (prayer). They share responsibilities with cooking tasks in the wharekai (cooking house), sleep together in the wharenu (large meeting house) and contribute to poroporaki (closure).

At the noho, students are immersed in Maori kawa (protocols) in tandem with an assessment task for nga tauira to name and present to each other their respective ethnic/cultural identities. This learning task aligns with the learning outcomes for first year social work students, where they are required to: analyse and articulate notions of cultural identity;

understand concepts of mana whenua, tangata whenua and tauwi; recognise key beliefs and values and the implications for practice and demonstrate respect for worth and dignity of others. The noho marae learning encounter took place at the end of the first semester (2005) and was held at Tutahi Tonu (we stand, united, tall and strong together) Marae at the Faculty of Education.

The learning centralises Maori values and beliefs that include, but are not limited to, whanaungatanga, manaaki, aroha, arahi awhina, tumanako whakanoa and mana. In the spirit of this whakaaro, we as tauwi do so in relation to tangata whenua-preferred processes. The points of reference during the noho are Maori and not those of mainstream academic classroom paradigms. That is, Maori epistemology, processes and values are central to the learning context and focus. The essence of the marae becomes the centre to which each cultural and ethnic student group relates to tangata whenua tauria, who are often a marginalised group in classrooms, is centralised. This dynamic has a powerful impact on student learning. For tauwi students it facilitates the potential for their identity to be reshaped in terms of who they are in relation to tangata whenua and to each other. This transformative learning (Freire, 1972) names the heart of the experience and is the heart of this article.

Our approach in this article is to write together with respect, weaving our similar and different cultural perspectives while giving voice to our uniqueness.

Vaiolesi

In 1994, prior to commencing four years of social work degree studies, my magafaoa (family) and I accepted the invitation to attend a powhiri at a designated area on campus (for lack of a marae proper). As manuhiri (visitors) we observed with respect (fakaapa) notions of making 'right/normal' my presence and, by definition, my fanau (family) and tupuna (ancestors) at the campus. Notions of fakaalofa (reciprocity) were also facilitated during an integral part of the process when my fanau and I 'broke bread' with the people I would be learning with over the duration of my studies. Poignantly the relatively few who attended the powhiri did not reconcile with the numbers who attended the first classroom lecture of the social work degree. In part the significance of observing powhiri in the context of social work education was for me the first learning engagement in terms of bicultural pedagogy.

Judith

At a recent cross cultural workshop, I was profoundly touched by a comment made by a Pasifika panel member. She said to us: 'I welcome people inviting and wanting me to walk through their door, into their world.' However, she went on to ask the question: 'What about walking in through my door? When I opened my doorway you never came through, even though the door is open.' I was reminded of this story at our noho marae. In that place tauwi students had the opportunity to cross a threshold into another world, the powerful world of Maori reality, a noho marae facilitated by tangata whenua students. The question I held was, what might be the impact on tauwi students of being on the marae overnight and presenting to each other, who they are (ko wai au, who am I?). In particular, how might this experience contribute to the development of a deeper appreciation and understanding of others who were of a different ethnicity and culture from themselves? What might be the significance in this process of possible transformation?

In essence, there is a sense of acknowledgement that across the cultural divides of respective identities, culturally relevant engagement practices are valid and legitimate ways of building learning relationships with those of difference.

Supporting our intent (whakaaro)

The face of social work is changing in terms of rapidly shifting population demographics in Aotearoa New Zealand (Spoonley, 2000; Chenowith and McAuliffe, 2005; Smart and Gray, 2000). Ethnicities and cultures from contemporary migrant populations, inclusive of varying circumstances, all contribute further to a plethora of private troubles and public issues to be resolved. In this context and some 17 years since the Ministerial Report Puao-te-ata-tu (1988), there is, for the first time, legislation that now requires, social workers to be competent to practise social work with Maori and with diverse ethnic and cultural groups in Aotearoa New Zealand (Social Workers Registration Act, 2003, Section 13:10). The call remains for social workers to attend to biculturalism and diversity; to attend to the validation of Maori social work theories and models of practice; to attend to how we ensure 'across cultures' social worker professionalism and competency (Ruwhiu, 2001: 54; Smart and Gray, 2000: 96; ANZASW Bicultural Code of Practice, 1993).

A critical question therefore, in social work education, has to be how or perhaps, is it possible for social work students to learn to understand 'others' particularly 'others' whose perspectives differ from their own?

In Aotearoa New Zealand a cross-cultural pedagogy has a long, intricate and at times fraught history (Cranna, 1989; Foster, 2000; Jones 2001; Consedine and Consedine, 2001). Social work educators at various times have held a territory of contradictions in the experience of parallel classes and what Jones (1999) refers to as 'divided classrooms'. For some, working together in cultural specific roopu (groups) holds very positive learning outcomes (Foster, 2000). For example, in the above setting, Crichton-Hill (2001: 30) suggests that Kolb's experiential learning cycles assists transformative learning by acknowledging and exploring the impact of migration dynamics on Pasifika learners. In the same token Mila (2001: 23) citing acute awareness of new forms of whakama, in terms of the politics of identity for New Zealand-born Pasifika social workers, allows for self determination in a 'safe' learning environment. However, for others (particularly Pakeha) it can produce feelings of marginalisation and separateness (Jones, 2001; Cranna, 1989).

Working through 'who am I' is a key component of the Integrated Framework Practice Model taught in social work theory classes, particularly in the understanding of diversity (Mila, 2001; Maidment and Egan, 2004). Lee (in Ruwhiu, 2005: 8) also points out that 'Cultural knowledge and empowerment involves the strategy of embracing one's own culture and using it to understand and make sense of new knowledge and other people'. When cultural imperatives and cultural integrity are foregrounded in social work education and training, it often becomes fraught with questions of: who am I, what is my place, who are we, and how do my values differ? Resolution processes for the students in this article include further exploration and questing – what are my cultural assumptions and how do these affect my world view and my behaviour, where are the similarities and where are the differences, where do we fit in the power dynamics, how can colonisation not be perpetuated,

what roles do we play in the dynamics of that oppression and how do we make central to our practice, the Treaty of Waitangi?

Identity learning processes as contextually and socially constructed

Given the challenges and complexities of these questions and cultural encounters in social work education, there are some useful frameworks and ideas that contribute to understanding learning experiences of difference. Fay (1996) talks of the notion of mutual learning, particularly in relation to issues of identity and difference:

Understanding others ...is deeply interrelated with understanding ourselves. Changes in our understanding of others lead to changes in our own self-understanding, and changes in our self-understanding lead to changes in our understanding of others (Fay, 1996: 229 in Jones and Jenkins, 2004: 156).

The students who attended the noho are diverse in their differing cultural and ethnic identities. In this context that forefronts cultural and ethnic identity, students through engaging, connecting and building relationships, had the opportunity to learn and understand themselves in relation to others. This notion of the construction of a sense of 'self in relation' is of essence in the learning process around difference.

Acknowledging both the cognitive and emotional aspects of learning, Comerford (2005), has developed a skilful framework for learning about difference and contends that teaching and learning about '*varying points of distinctiveness*' requires an ongoing contextual process based also on relational learning. She articulates eight constructs that 'animate' this approach: exposure, engagement, emotion, empathy, narrative, personal disposition, the learning environment and a sense of self-in-relation" (Comerford, 2005: 113-135). Through the marae noho process, and the articulation of their cultural presentations, students engage with both the differences and the similarities around issues of self, culture and identity, effectively learning through such engagement. Kolb (1984) defines learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience – he focuses on processes also where the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning are also acknowledged, and cites the usefulness of the presence of emotion in the learning process.

Stepping further into the recognition of the presence of emotion, writer and interfaith teacher Stephanie Dowrick highlights the importance of being open hearted, in encounters with difference. Inclusive of the spiritual dimension she speaks of love – or simply genuine respect and good will – as having the power to transform the experience of difference. She espouses that while the differences are felt, there is less likelihood of being overwhelmed by them or frightened of them, and of behaving defensively or inappropriately, and that when encounters with other people are open-hearted and inclusive of their complexity, we will also feel more stable and accepting of ourselves (Dowrick, 2005).

By meeting with heart as well as vision, students are more likely to be able to take in the whole of who they are and the whole of whom the other is and that is the transformation. The noho marae offered such an experience for students, to engage together from their cultural perspectives with open hearts and non-judgemental minds which made such transformation possible.

To 'engage with' is central to this thesis and the learning of 'self-in-relation to' supports the notion that Spoonley and Fleras (1999) refer to where they speak of a move away from objective distancing of 'knowing about others' to 'engaging with'. In much the same way Scott (2005) espouses traditional concepts of cultural identity as being shaped by the dynamic interaction of encounter/engagement between people. As with any encounter with another, the place of beginning is the self/ ko au and far from being a theoretical construct '... it is ... how we work with difference...' (Scott, 2005).

In terms of critical social constructs, the penchant for the imperatives of objectivity and secularism in formal academic learning infers that subjectivity is not desirable. Indeed, professional training espouses that we write about the topic of 'others' objectively, (Autagavaia, 2001: 14) acceding to academic definitions. However, for those of us who aspire to cultural-specific frameworks of professional inquiry, notions of matakainga (behaving like family) belie objectivity imperatives (Mafile'o, 2006). To the contrary, notions of inclusion extend to those outside of one's kin group to an extent that using inclusive language gives effect to this – as with concepts of whanaungatanga.

Affirming the understanding of others as intrinsically connected to the understanding of self (Connolly, 2001; Cox and Ephross, 1998; Thompson, 2000) was a key rationale for the academic task of each roopu presenting their own cultural story at the noho marae where voices were not only spoken but also heard and where similarities and differences in the narratives could be witnessed and experienced openly.

The place of power is crucial to this critical reflection on noho marae. In her exploration of anti oppressive models in working with difference, Dominelli suggests students need to integrate understanding on three levels: intellectually, emotionally and practically (Dominelli, 1998 p.17). An integral shift in power occurs when learning dynamics are situated in an environment not wholly governed by 'classroom' protocols and western paradigms. Through the experience of engaging in the noho marae and completing academic tasks, tauwi students had an opportunity to become aware of how their own perspectives and assumptions influence their understanding and experience of one another. There was then the opportunity for their perspectives to be redefined. This reflective process engaged students in a process whereby issues of dominance and marginalisation as well as cultural difference is acknowledged and understood. With regard to frameworks of engagement, Wepa (2005), also refers to the importance of shifts in power as imperative to the construction of cultural safety and speaks of bicultural development as the backdrop to cultural safety.

The marae and the noho experience proved to be a safe encounter for transformative learning and, as the point of reference of Maori reality, a powerful place to witness 'self', in relation to and with others.

As a learning environment the noho marae encounter requires us to be subjective – to engage with, to talk with and to nurture relationships with one another. The influence of the noho marae context as the conduit for the transformative learning that takes place is profound. Durie (2002) speaks of how marae encounters not only provide a glimpse into Maori ways of thinking, feeling and behaving but also engender an understanding of tauparapara, karakia (interconnectedness), tapu, noa (safety), tuhonohono (synchronicity), mana, ma-naakitanga (authority and generosity) to name a few of the nine domains he refers to.

As a consequence, the centralising of an often 'mainstream classroom dynamics' marginalised group, nga tauira Maori, realises subtle power shifts, yet without domination (Hooks, 1994: 234), in learning and teaching rhythms. In contrast to classroom management where the 'right things' are done, in real terms during the noho marae the leaders (tangata whenua) did the 'right thing' (tika) (Tate, cited in Eruera, 2005).

As social work educators we are interested in learning in encounters that construct notions of 'safety' particularly when there is learning around difference where issues of domination and marginalisation are evoked. We are also interested in learning experiences that contribute to an experience of understanding and celebration. And Durie offers more insight into transformative learning when he describes the marae encounter as offering learning at the interface, as a pathway for bicultural understanding (Durie, 2005). He uses the word interface to describe energy from two systems of understanding in order to create new knowledge that can then be used to advance understanding in two worlds (transformative). Durie cites four principles for learning at the interface as essential: mutual respect, shared benefits, human dignity and discovery (Durie, 2005).

To give credence to this noho marae learning experience we believe that it is important to hear the voices of the students themselves who attended.

Tauiwi social work students speaking for themselves

Fantastic, insightful, feelings of wonderment, humbled by the experience (student evaluation 2005).

Some of the korero from nga tauiwi was to name themselves as the people from the four winds or 'Nga iwi no nga hau e wha' to represent the cultural diversity of their group. In acknowledging:

...that culture is a predominant force in shaping values and behaviour...by understanding our own culture and ethnicity, we set the basis for the understanding and identifying with those of others...each of us lives in a cultural bubble – multiculturalists can enter another bubble without bursting it (Student statement in cultural presentation, 2005).

We have grouped comments loosely into four themes of:

Relationship building – whanaungatanga

'... it had a big impact because it strengthened my relationship with my class mates.'
'... it helps to develop relationships between students.'

Bi-cultural relationships – whakaaro

'... a chance to integrate tikanga Maori into academic studies.'
'... it reinforced my bicultural relationships.'
'... made an impact that is significant to the application of a Treaty of Waitangi framework.'
'... respecting tangata whenua culture and breaking down barriers of misunderstanding and wrong perceptions.'
'... Learning about Maori culture and respecting marae procedures were among the most important aspects ... as a Pasifika student.'

'... reinforces my relationship with tangata whenua, respect for their culture, values and beliefs.'

'... much easier and comfortable for me to attend future functions where Maori customs are observed.'

'... biggest impact – the friendliness of our tangata whenua hosts.'

'... opportunity to immerse myself in Maori culture.'

'... humbled by the experience.'

Respect for diverse cultures – Manaakitanga

'... respect for others cultures in an inclusive environment.'

'... respect for all people and a sense of unity and community.'

'... greater understanding and a sense of unity and community.'

'... we all have different cultures that we shared and respected. We all stayed together as a family and enjoyed each other's company and learned how to engage with others of differing cultural identities.'

Integration of theory and practice – Kawa

'... it internalised learning.'

'... theory in action...'

'... by being immersed within the process it becomes practical rather than just theoretical that cultures can be different ...'.

'... provided a setting in which learning about and understanding of different cultural perspectives was eternalised through experience.'

(Student evaluations 2005)

In closing

Vaiolesi

In light of tauwiwi obligations and responsibilities with regard to bicultural frameworks, noho marae based learning creates for tauwiwi social work students notions of integrated preparation and professional integrity. Where better to engage bicultural relationships than in the working, learning, eating, sleeping, laughter and discourse rhythms of noho marae. Where better to address patterns of social work values in Aotearoa New Zealand than in an embracing and inclusive environment. Perhaps the challenge in tandem with the response lies in the weaving of tangata whenua epistemologies and tikanga, as parallel education and training patterns, into the everyday norms of social work learning rather than have them as discrete encounters.

E hara taku toa I te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini

The combined efforts of many are needed to complete a project.

Judith

Engaging with cultural differences in the marae context provided an opportunity for students to reshape and re-negotiate their identity with new points of reference, in a context of safety, respect, dignity, discovery, aroha, whanaungatanga, manaakitanga and tino rangatiratanga. Differences could be appreciated, understood and recognised rather than judgements made. Student assumptions and stereotypes were challenged and new knowledge gained. On a feeling level, uncertainty was transformed into courage and the overwhelming sense was one of being embraced and embracing. There was a strong feeling expressed by the students of

gaining new knowledge and confidence in tikanga Maori as well as increased understanding of their own relationship with tangata whenua. The learning experience also contributed to student unity and personal and collective pride and confidence.

Traversing cultural terrains by engaging with difference requires a lot of support time for interaction and trust if we are to assist social work taura to truly develop competencies to work inclusively with all ethnic and cultural groups. The social work students currently experience only one noho marae during their degree. A vision of hope and possibility is that students will have an opportunity to engage in noho marae each year of the programme. It can only be with enormous gratitude that there is the opportunity for students to be able to engage in learning on a marae as part of their academic study and in preparation for social work practice with Maori and diverse ethnic and cultural groups.

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Glossary of non Pakeha terms - Maori, Niue, Tonga

This glossary is arranged according to when they appear in the text of the article and while the majority of terms are Maori, small reference is given to Niue (N) and Tonga (T) language terms.

Only brief translations are given, but we trust that fuller meanings can be derived from respective contexts.

Noho - stay, dwell, inhabit

Marae - meeting area, courtyard

Palagi (N) - European

Pakeha - non Maori, European descent

Whakatauki - proverb, maxim

Powhiri - welcome, opening ceremony

Tauwi - other, non-Maori peoples

nga taura - plural of student – students

Whakaaro - intent

Maori - ordinary, indigenous people

Kawa - protocol

Whanaungatanga - relationship, kinship

Manaakitanga - expressed love and hospitality

Aroha - love

arahi awhina - guiding help

tumanako whakanoa - objective to make ordinary

Mana - integrity, charisma

magafaoa (N) - family

tangata whenua - people of the land, indigenous peoples

Puao-te-ata-tu - day break, new dawn

Roopu - group

Pasifika - Pacific islands peoples

Treaty of Waitangi - founding document 1840

matakainga (T) - making like family

Tikanga - custom, criterion

Tauparapara - chant, verse to start a speech

Karakia - incantation, spiritual

Tapu - sacred

Noa - free from tapu,

Tuhonohono - bind, interlocking

Tika - authentic

Manuhiri - visitors, guests

fakaapa (N) - to show respect

fanau (N) - family as in birth

tupuna (N) - ancestor

fakaalofa (N) - reciprocity, to gift

ko au - I am

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