

# Wrestling with Biculturalism in Social Work Education

*Kelly Glubb-Smith<sup>1</sup> & Karen Cherry<sup>2</sup>*

## **Abstract**

When approached to write a piece on Donna Awatere's (1984) book *Māori Sovereignty* from a social work perspective we seized the opportunity to reconsider her work. Revisiting the text after a 30-year-plus hiatus sparked a series of reflective conversations about how we wrestle with teaching biculturalism and our efficacy in preparing students for bicultural practice realities. This article draws upon our co-constructed narratives about what it means to be a social work educator in a bicultural practice landscape. Social work students graduate into an exceedingly complex practice environment fraught with tension about how to resolve inequities across the micro-to-macro continuum. The focus of this article is how Donna Awatere's work is reflected in the tensions and responsibilities experienced when socialising students into the bicultural mission of social work practice in Aotearoa (New Zealand). The ability of graduates to concentrate practice decisions beyond individualistic practice with the person or family to activate issues of sovereignty at a structural level is key to invoking meaningful bicultural practice. Within social work education itself, ongoing consideration is needed to further explore places and spaces in which Māori social work students can come together as a distinct cohort to support and sustain each other while learning their craft.

**Keywords:** Māori sovereignty, social work education, bicultural social work, professional socialisation, Donna Awatere, Aotearoa New Zealand

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<sup>1</sup> School of Social Sciences, University of Waikato, Aotearoa New Zealand

<sup>2</sup> School of Social Sciences, University of Waikato, Aotearoa New Zealand

### **Positioning Social Work Education**

As constructivist researchers who use reflexivity to critically examine social justice issues it is important to declare from the outset our positioning and identities (Charmaz, 2020; Kanuha, 2000). We are both Registered Social Workers in Aotearoa (New Zealand); we carry annual practising certificates, and education is a primary field of practice. Our identities as female educators in a gendered profession and our previous years of social work practice inform the way in which we conceptualise social work education and respond to the learning needs of the students. In terms of our ethnic identities, we both have Celtic heritage. Karen also descends from the following iwi (Māori tribes) Ngāti Porou, Rongowhakaata and Ngāti Paoa, while Kelly identifies as Pākehā (New Zealander of European descent).

Donna Awatere's (1984) writing sparked debate and reflection about whether social work education creates a safe learning environment for students to critically develop understanding about the need for Māori sovereignty at a macro level beyond that of the individual. Social work practice that is driven by the needs of government-funded organisations can promote a conveyor belt style of social work that 'fixes' the person in front of you (Glubb-Smith, 2020). A style of practice that is centred on micro-level issues within individuals and family groups can reduce issues of sovereignty to individualistic notions of self-determination. A sense of 'fixing' the same or similar problems in a never-ending queue of social work service users is a recipe for burnout or disillusion. As social work educators who hold fast to the profession's social justice mandate and the commitments made in articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Māori language version of The Treaty of Waitangi) the responsibility of nurturing students to become social workers who strive for equity and societal change became a central theme in our discussions about how we teach Māori sovereignty to social work students.

Awatere (1984) positions the signing of the Te Tiriti of Waitangi as the end of Māori sovereignty resulting in "the swift rise to power of white people who would rule first by the gun, then by the police and prisons and then by their education, church and media" (p. 14). Social justice is the central goal of social work action and Awatere's quote illustrates the process of ongoing colonisation that social workers are committed to unravelling (Glubb-Smith, 2022). Not all social workers actively demonstrate this practice commitment, and Western constructs of social work practice can undermine traditional Māori methods of practice (Webber-Dreadon, 2020). In *Māori Sovereignty*,



Awatere writes about her search for allies in resisting hegemony. The social work profession with its focus on social change, human rights and social justice should naturally be the type of place that Awatere went searching for a ‘friend among the enemy’.

Coinciding with Awatere’s life trajectory, structural and radical social work was predominantly developed through the 1960s to 1980s, with feminist social work models focusing particularly on stepping away from individualised responses to politicise personal experiences (Fook, 2016). Awatere’s (1984) perceptive assertion that there is a need to “shift out of the ‘tripod’ framework of racism, sexism and capitalism” (p. 8) is congruent with contemporary social work teaching about the need to critically appreciate the intersectional identities of individuals, families, groups and communities to discern the power of socio-political forces impacting upon them (Crenshaw, 1991; Joy, 2019; McNabb, 2019; Social Workers Registration Board, 2023a). The social work profession is often funded by the state and can be a tool of the state to exercise social control over oppressed populations, specifically Māori as Tangata Whenua (Indigenous people). As such, social work is not politically neutral, and the profession is obligated to be critically aware of occupational tendencies to exercise power in a manner that is complicit in the oppression of marginalised groups (Garrett, 2021).

### **Commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi**

Health and justice statistics consistently demonstrate that systems and structures within Aotearoa are designed for Pākehā to achieve and maintain their health and well-being (Waitangi Tribunal, 2017, 2023). In a study of social work programme leaders’ commitment to equity, McNabb (2022) concluded that the activist identity was evident in social work programmes in Aotearoa. Remaining vigilant to the privilege that non-Māori dominant groups hold is needed to create equity (Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ruwhiu et al., 2016). Awatere’s (1984) call for systemic change in order for Māori to achieve equality of opportunity and equity is still just as relevant now as it was forty years ago.

Any form of social work that depoliticises the intractability of racial inequities risks oppressing Māori further by working to assimilate them to be more congruent with unjust institutions (Hylsop, 2022). To counteract this risk, the social work profession in Aotearoa positions Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the foundational document for social work practice and as such informs

perceptions around Māori sovereignty. The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW, 2019) *Ngā Tikanga Matatika/Code of Ethics* notes, “the commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi is not optional and permeates everything we do” (p. 6). In this unique bicultural practice landscape, the social work profession strives to give prominence to the guarantees and responsibilities established through Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Alongside the obligations borne out of Te Tiriti social work educators are required to deliver a programme curriculum that is in alignment with the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB, 2021) Programme Recognition Standards. In relationship to te ao Māori (Māori worldview) these SWRB (2021) standards are set out to ensure that the social work curriculum will:

- be cognizant of the responsibilities outlined in the articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- include Māori practice models and a marae-based experience, and
- be designed to ensure graduate competency to practise social work with Māori.

The SWRB (2021) Programme Recognition Standards are currently under review with the SWRB (2023a) Draft Education Standards Discussion Document signalling a strengthening of the requirements of recognised social work programmes to uphold the guarantees assured within the articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. These currently drafted SWRB (2023a) Programme Recognition Standards task social work educators with valuing and utilising indigenous knowledge and practices to ensure that every student develops a critical understanding of the impact of colonisation and privilege. Students are to be appropriately supported throughout their studies so that they can become theoretically informed graduates who are proficient in culturally responsive engagement with Māori (SWRB, 2023a). Central to these revised SWRB (2023a) Programme Recognition Standards is guaranteeing that students understanding of social work practice is taught through a te ao Māori lens, through resisting the othering of mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge, perspectives, and cultural practices).

### **Operationalising biculturalism**

Biculturalism, like social justice, is a contested concept (Eketone & Walker, 2015; Gallie, 1955) and is open to misuse and misinterpretation. When teaching about justice and equity conceptual clarity is essential. Within social work in Aotearoa, the term biculturalism is driven by the articles of



Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the partnership that was formed in 1840 between Māori and the British Crown (Glubb-Smith, 2022). Teaching bicultural social work is centred on students developing a critical understanding of how Te Tiriti o Waitangi is to be honoured through the active privileging of te ao Māori (Deverick & Mooney, 2023).

Social work educators, Eketone and Walker (2015) distinguish between ‘biculturalism’ and ‘working biculturally’ in social work practice. They assert that biculturalism involves incorporating te ao Māori into institutions and social policy to uphold social justice for Māori as envisioned through Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Working biculturally is then defined by them as a practice that takes place in Aotearoa when non-Māori work with Māori individually, or with their whānau (extended family), hapū (sub-tribe), iwi (tribe) or communities. Within this context they defined working biculturally as having “basic competence in te reo (language), tikanga (customs), kawa (protocols), Māori values and Māori history” (Eketone & Walker, 2015, p. 110).

Māori social work educators are an essential element of bicultural teaching. Commitment is needed within the tertiary sector to make social work education more appealing to experienced Māori social workers, and to build workforce capacity (McNabb, 2022). Central to ensuring culturally responsive social work students is work done by bicultural educators to assist students to understand their worldview in relationship to social norms so that they are more critically aware of their personal bias. Bicultural social work practice requires knowledge of self to enable reflexive practice (Crawford, 2016; Munford & Walsh-Tapiata, 2006). Social work students are socialised into the profession throughout their educational journey (Smith, 2014), and this type of transformation helps to ensure that they are culturally responsive and more enabled to challenge structural racism.

### **Rechecking the authenticity of our bicultural teaching**

As already established, social work educators seek to encourage students to become attuned to the power of ongoing colonisation processes and to account for intersectional identities in their future practice. We, the authors, are aware that as social workers we have been pragmatic, and not actively utilised Awatere’s (1984) view of Māori sovereignty as outlined in the opening pages of her book in which she defines Māori sovereignty as the ability of Māori

*to determine our own destiny and to do so from the basis of our land and fisheries. In essence, Māori sovereignty seeks nothing less than the acknowledgement that NZ is Māori land, and further seeks the return of the land. At its most conservative it could be interpreted as the desire for a bicultural society, one in which taha Māori [Māori side] receives an equal consideration with, and equally determines the course of this county as taha Pākehā [Pākehā side]. It certainly demands an end to monoculturalism (p. 10).*

Instead, as social work educators who represent both sides of Te Tiriti o Waitangi relationship, we align with the more conservative position in the second half of this quote that depicts a society based upon shared authority. We firmly position ourselves as bicultural educators and this positioning is in alignment with the ANZASW (2019) bicultural Ngā Tikanga Matatika/Code of Ethics and the view of social work practice that is defined in the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW, 2014) Definition of Social Work. The commentary notes that IFSW (2014) provide to unpack the international definition of social work states that due to a legacy of colonisation indigenous knowledge has been discounted due to Western hegemony, asserting that:

*social work seeks to redress historic Western scientific colonialism and hegemony by listening to and learning from indigenous peoples around the world. In this way social work knowledges will be co-created and informed by indigenous peoples (para 14).*

A practical commitment to actioning Indigenous knowledge can be seen in the work of the Tangata Whenua Social Work Association (TWSWA) in Aotearoa. The TWSWA was the first Indigenous association to be recognised by IFSW, and it provides representation and support for Māori social workers. On the international stage, the TWSWA (with support from ANZASW) has recently facilitated the development of a permanent IFSW Indigenous Commission that will work to ensure that indigenous knowledge is included in social work curricula internationally (TWSWA, 2020).

Correcting Western dominance in social work education is a difficult endeavour. Ballantyne et al. (2019) conducted a national social work Enhance R2P curriculum mapping project, and they concluded that within



Aotearoa, social work educators seek to balance Māori and Western knowledge and practice approaches. The authors also noted that some social worker educators and students were not convinced that their curriculum was able to genuinely incorporate both knowledge bases. Like our colleagues reported on in the Enhance R2P curriculum mapping exercise we strive to embed Indigenous knowledge and note that improvements made to the curriculum are always a work in progress. We aim to teach biculturalism through the examination of power and privilege to assist students in critically dismantling social structures, social norms, and values. As social work educators there is an aspiration that the need to uphold the articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in social work practice is intrinsically felt as part of the students burgeoning professional identity.

### **Towards a bicultural society**

Awatere's (1984) conservative view of Māori sovereignty as a "*desire for a bicultural society*" (p. 10) is a long way off being achieved in Aotearoa. Recent health reforms that underpin the *Pae Ora (Healthy Futures Act) 2022* activate Te Tiriti obligations by seeking to gain health equity for Māori but have been positioned by political opponents as 'separatist' due to the establishment of an autonomous Māori health entity that has both governing and commissioning powers (Ahuriri-Driscoll et al., 2022). Māori cannot be equal partners while government maintains control of policy processes, but despite this fear of separatism seems to remain rife in our communities. *Stop Co-Governance* roadshows are currently occurring across the country headed by Julian Batchelor. The term co-governance has been weaponised by Batchelor (2023) by defining it as a "code for the takeover of New Zealand by tribal companies and their representatives, the end of democracy, the installation of apartheid and separatism into everyday life, leading eventually to full blown [sic] government by tribal rule" (p. 27). The polarising language of anti-co-governance factions demonstrates the intractability of some sections of society to understand the core tenets of biculturalism. As Awatere (1984) succinctly states

*Māori courtesy has allowed white supremacy and cultural imperialism to pass under the name of monoculturalism. In this country monoculturalism is a euphemism for separate development and a cover for white hostility and hatred of things and people Māori (p. 10).*

When Awatere (1984) was writing *Māori Sovereignty*, there was a growing acceptance of the bicultural imperative within the public sector with Māori language and motifs being used in a manner that was open to perceptions of tokenism (Hyslop, 2022). Underpinning this bicultural imperative was the recognition that public servants needed to address cultural bias towards Māori by developing an understanding of Aotearoa's cultural partnership (Workman, 2017). Within social work education, the Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Māori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare (1988) Pūao-te-Āta-tū report called for self-determination and endorsed the use of Māori social work methods (Hollis-English, 2012). The report rejected dominant cultural norms and provided a template for bicultural social work practice (Hyslop, 2022). The Pūao-te-Āta-tū report made recommendations that social work courses' ability to meet the cultural needs of Māori are assessed as one of the ways of remedying institutional racism. The Pūao-te-Āta-tū report provided a critical juncture for social work education in terms of responding to the call to attack all forms of cultural racism towards Māori and other minority groups (Glubb-Smith, 2020). Unfortunately, though, "racism will not vanish by simply acknowledging that it's there and telling those who do it to stop" (Awatere, 1984, p. 26).

Many of the criticisms about social service provisions still stand today, as evidenced in the statistics that indicate that 69 percent of children in State custody were Māori at the end of 2019 (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2020). Statistics New Zealand (2022) population data records that in 2018 Māori children made up 27 percent of the child population. However, Oranga Tamariki (2022) statistics indicate that, in the past decade, more than half of the children entering state care due to care and protection concerns are Māori. As Tascón and Ife (2019) assert

*white social workers may be well-meaning, inclusive and even consciously anti-racist, but if they are not able to address the whiteness of the knowledge they bring to their practice, they will perpetuate colonial and racist oppression and disadvantage. By applying only white social work knowledge, social workers force their non-white 'clients', and their non-white colleagues, to assimilate into the white world, and deny the alternative knowledge systems that may be more significant for the lived experience of the people with whom they work. (p. 2)*





A remedy for this is Pohatu's (2003) positioning of tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty) as having absolute cultural integrity and their statement that – when activated by Māori social workers – it places “Māori thinking, knowledge and application at the centre of their processes when ‘selecting in’ and ‘selecting out’ knowledge and practice” (p. 16).

### **Reflections on bicultural teaching**

Karen is currently completing post-graduate study and as part of the course that she is taking she has been required to do reflective writing about her role as a social work educator. In this writing, she has unpacked what it means to be a Māori social work educator teaching bicultural practice for the next generation of social workers.

Being a Māori social work educator over many years and institutions has been a difficult yet rewarding journey. Teaching biculturalism to students of mixed ethnic identities means that you are juggling a myriad of different complexities. Consistently across many cohorts, Māori students speak about how they are triggered by classroom discussions about Aotearoa history. Historical trauma is real for many, and the hurt is intensified by off-handed, sometimes racist comments made by Pākehā students. A sub-set of Pākehā students in many cohorts appear to be battling with either shame or guilt that their ancestors have perpetrated these hurts on Māori, or they feel that history is irrelevant as it is in the distant past. We are all products of our upbringing and the knowledge shared or learnt. We often struggle when our view of the world is challenged, and it is natural to not instantly know how to act or behave when one's worldview is being challenged.

The struggle to understand historical events and use this understanding to shape our bicultural practice is difficult for many Pākehā social work students (Crawford, 2016). The Human Rights Commission (2022) asserts in the Maranga Mai report that the first step to eliminating racism is

*... for tangata whenua to tell the truth about the impact of racism on their whānau, hāpū, iwi, ancestors, communities and lives. New Zealanders need to understand that colonisation, racism and white supremacy are intertwined phenomena that remain central to the ongoing displacement and erosion of tino rangatiratanga. The cumulative effects of this are evident in the intergenerational inequalities and*

*inequities tangata whenua suffer across all aspects of their lives. (p. 9)*

We can try to teach about white privilege but if the individual does not feel their privilege, then it is difficult to see the disadvantages others have (Crawford, 2016). We can lecture on the data that points to discrimination and disparity within all our social services statistics but as Pākehā, if you do not see white privilege you struggle to see discrimination or racism.

Meihana (2023) speaks to the predominant discourse of Māori privilege throughout our history. He believes this first appeared with the new settlers coming out from Britain in the 1800s. They were escaping a land that offered them little and saw New Zealand as a paradise that would fulfil their hopes for a new egalitarian society. As laws were introduced, supposedly to protect the rights of Māori, the settlers saw these as a threat to equal rights for all, using this to help with the taking of Māori land (Meihana, 2023). This thinking can still be seen in every new class of social work students. It is common to have a few Pākehā students in a year group speak about the impact of growing up in homes where the 'privilege' Māori receive is regularly complained about. Some students come into class suspecting that Māori students have had an easier entry in degree programmes, or that many Māori students receive scholarships and therefore do not have to pay for study. In this context, translating classroom learning about bicultural and culturally responsive practice across the academic divide into practice is complex (Walker, 2016). Stewart (2020) affirms our thinking that no matter how often we teach the history of Aotearoa and the issues of disparity we will always struggle to change the delusions of some Pākehā who believe that racism does not exist here. These types of historical tensions and divisions make the classroom environment one in which social work educators need to be attuned to the needs of individual students. Within this fraught context, Māori social work educators need to be well supported (McNabb, 2022).

When reflecting on instances in which the bicultural partnership has been activated in the classroom, we turn to the formation in some institutions of separate tutorial or supervision groups for Māori. In our experience, these have been optional for Māori but of most interest have been the reactions of tauwiwi (non-Māori), in particular, Pākehā students. These reactions range from expressions of confusion as to why Māori are 'special' and get their own group, to statements of 'missing out' on the learning that



they can have when being alongside their Māori classmates. Māori students are not responsible for the learning Pākehā students receive in the classroom. Consedine and Consedine (2012) discuss the development of parallel workshops in Te Tiriti o Waitangi education due to similar issues. Separate workshops were developed to try to ensure that Māori participants are shielded from ‘verbal Pākehā’ in introductory Te Tiriti o Waitangi education. Consedine and Consedine (2012) stated that the discontent expressed by Pākehā due to their fear of missing out then meant that it was difficult to meet the needs of Māori in the Te Tiriti workshops. Separatism is seen to be scary if it does not privilege the dominant group, if Māori get sovereignty what does that mean for the Pākehā?

This question led us, as authors, to think more about experiences of separate tutorial or supervision groups for Māori students. In Karen’s experience as a Māori educator, these groups have been invaluable to Māori students and confusing to Pākehā students. Ruwhiu et al. (2016) advise that within social work practice

*Te Tiriti o Waitangi is inherently about having an understanding of in-depth, respectful, meaningful, relational dynamics at the border between Treaty partners that sets the tone in promoting best practice in working with Māori. This requires tauwiwi to recognise the inequitably positioning of tangata whenua entering and relating to tauwiwi at the border, and the need to change and challenge that situation. (p. 83)*

Most social work students can link the need for Māori student groups to their learning of the impacts of colonisation, but some students still feel confused as to why these groups are necessary. The majority of Pākehā students appear to develop a good understanding of the impacts of colonisation through their studies. However, Māori students can still at times stumble into conversations that unintentionally cause harm to Māori or other minority groups. Whether comments are racist or unconsciously biased the impact is the same.

As social work educators and tertiary students in both mainstream and kaupapa Māori educational institutions, personal experience of these types of conversations leave us wondering about the need for kaupapa Māori education for Māori only (kaupapa Māori education is education that is provided through a Māori worldview). Reflecting on the articles of Te Tiriti o

Waitangi, especially with regard to cultural continuity principles makes us question why kaupapa Māori education is inclusive to all. Financial revenue obviously makes sense, however, surely there are valid reasons for sovereignty over mātauranga Māori?

At the forefront of Karen's thinking when reading Awatere's (1984) work is a recent experience of a family member who is new to Māori language classes. This family member has recently been in tears over hurtful and insensitive comments by Pākehā students. She spoke of being angry about having to sit in groups with students who are there to learn as a hobby, often adding to a variety of languages they already speak. She is critically conscious of having been denied the opportunity of learning her own language from birth due to the impacts of colonisation. She expresses frustration at having to compete for time in overcrowded classes with many Pākehā students taking tutors' time as their need is stronger due mostly to issues with poor pronunciation. Berryman and Eley (2017) report that Māori secondary students face negative stereotypes even within schools who are committed to making a difference, these challenges have been found to contribute to lower grades and leaving school early. Māori entering tertiary learning come with a dream to succeed despite the challenges and discrimination that have had to fight to make it through education. When Karen listens to the voice of her family member expressing frustration about battling for time and space in an inclusive kaupapa Māori learning space she finds herself questioning - when will we listen to Māori about their learning needs and do what is right?

These reflections about the safety and validity of Māori students learning within a bicultural setting are not novel. Mooney et al. (2020) highlight the need to consider the unique needs of Māori social work students in field placement, especially when the placement agency has a predominantly Western outlook. To assist with supporting these cultural needs, these authors recommend cultural supervision for Māori students on placement. Walker (2016) advocates for social work education for Māori students to be "for Māori by Māori, especially in culturally specific service provision where a culturally specific knowledge base and skill set is absolutely necessary, i.e., Iwi Social Services" (p. 66). As Walker (2016) asserts that in social work education Pākehā "students are encouraged to examine their own values and attitudes and become 'not knowers', or humble experts. They are guests in Māori culture and are therefore 'kaitiaki' (guardians and stewards) not owners of the culture of the 'other' " (p. 69).



### **Accomplices, Separate but Together**

In her book, Awatere (1984) provides a clear critique of colonisation processes, expressing frustration at the ability of natural allies to work in solidarity to advance Māori sovereignty and Awatere was sceptical about the growing momentum building behind the term ‘biculturalism’ (Belgrave, 2017). While Awatere (1984) does not provide clarity about the mechanisms of how Māori sovereignty would function (Belgrave, 2017), her whakaaro (analysis and voice) holds true for the way in which the ongoing injustices of colonisation are to be understood and resolved by social workers.

For social work educators, the complexity of abiding by the profession’s commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi has been proven to be difficult, due in part, to the dynamic manner in which society reacts to Te Tiriti over time (McNabb, 2019). Social work is currently on the New Zealand Immigration (2023) Green List due to workforce shortages, being on the Green List enables employers to guarantee residence pathways for hard-to-fill occupations. Māori need access to Māori social work practitioners (Hollis-English, 2020). With Māori, by Māori, for Māori is crucial to good social work outcomes (Glubb-Smith, 2022). Given the overrepresentation of Māori as service users, it is vital that Māori are encouraged to enter the profession and have their needs met while studying (Mooney et al., 2020). SWRB (2023b) reports that only 50 percent of social work students make it through from the first year to enrol into their final fourth year of social work studies. There is a need to increase the number of Māori students graduating with a recognised social work qualification. In 2021, Māori made up 26.9 percent of enrolled social work students, NZ Europeans were 41.2 percent, while Pacific Peoples were the next biggest population group at 19.5 percent (SWRBb, 2023).

Awatere’s (1984) voice carries well into the future. Māori mātauranga (knowledge) of time focuses on how the past, present and future are intertwined. Looking to the past to understand the future is true within social work education. Old knowledge/mātauranga does not ‘go out of date’ it holds true. As Awatere (1984) states in her whakaaro about the way in which mana motuhake (activism) was enacted back during the early days of colonisation, this style of rejection of power, acknowledgement of the importance of the community, wholistic wellbeing, restorative justice processes, enactment of tikanga still hold truth for the social work students of today.

As social work educators we are not recommending separatism within social work education, but we do believe that there is a need for further consideration of advancing opportunities for how and when Māori social work students can be enabled to be a distinct cohort in a year group. Given the ongoing impact of colonisation on social work education, the issues with Māori social work workforce capacity, the identity of Māori social work students would be strengthened if they are given the opportunity to be a subset of a year group that can move in and out of the mainstream classes. Separate but together.

Awatere (1984) declares that she has “spent a good 16 years snooping around the country looking for alliances. Friends among the ‘enemy’. This search has taken me into the feminist movement, the trade unions, around the left and into the Pacific Island communities” (p. 9).

Mafire'o et.al, (2022) considers the role of ‘allies’ preferring instead the term ‘accomplice’, to describe social justice action that is done in partnership by non-Indigenous people to transform structures and challenge existing systems of privilege. Powell and Kelly (2017) state that “the ally paradigm ideologically positions whites as those who assist and people of colour as those who need assistance, thereby maintaining oppressive hierarchies” (p. 45). Within social work education, Powell and Kelly (2017) assert that teaching is one of the most influential spaces for educators who seek to be accomplices. Social work educators can act as accomplices by pushing students to not only acknowledge systems of power and privilege but also to seek to disrupt them.

## **Conclusion**

Awatere (1984) states in her closing pages of *Māori Sovereignty* that “the task for those of us who are white-educated and have the skills is to create pipelines for resources to move from white people who control them to Māori people who don’t” (p. 103).

As social work educators we are mindful of meeting this challenge, of moving beyond the position of being allies to that of being active accomplices in achieving fairness in social work education. Our stance as social work educators is to be mindful of the need to explore and create spaces where Māori students are able to learn separately from Tauwiwi. To focus more on ensuring that within social work education, all students feel safe and able to critically develop an understanding of the need for Māori sovereignty at a



macro level beyond that of individual positioning, so that in practice the focus is not on a quick fix but that of structural change to facilitate fairness, equity and the rights of Māori as Tangata Whenua.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors report no conflict of interest. They alone are responsible for the content and writing of the paper but do wish to thank all their colleagues, students, and whānau for insights into bicultural education gained over the years.

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