

Kia mau: Recruitment and Retention. Moderator - Moana Waitoki

## **The intergenerational perpetuation of achievement messages in whānau**

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The current research is an open exploration of achievement messages that are carried from generation to generation in whānau, in relation to the mainstream education system of Aotearoa. Participant groups comprised of two to three generations within each whānau. A maximum of eight whānau will be asked to participate. A series of continuous conversations will be held with each member of the whānau, reminiscent of the narrative approach, but most recently described as a methodology that allows for ensuring that data is collected in its fullest form. Differing views about achievement and how it is negotiated within whānau will be explored; along with issues on what, and who, within whānau are the most predominant indicators of achievement views. Detracting from an ethnocentric view of scholastic ability (a common marker for achievement) is done through abandoning mainstream ideals. This research favours an open exploration approach allowing for differing values about what constitutes achievement, and what context achievement is based in. Outcomes of the research are intended to show patterns within whānau and among Māori on the mainstream school system, and how this system has contributed to achievement messages. The positive or negative nature of the contribution from mainstream education is highly important and relevant to further research goals, including the ability to use outcomes to suggest social change in education provision for Māori.

The initial conceptual framework for this research was an attempt at an adaptation of North American Model formed by Duran and Duran (1995): Intergenerational Post Colonial Stress Disorder (IPCSD). Utilising this model and adapting it to suit Māori education in Aotearoa was problematic, because of the various reasons that this model would have attributed any differences in Māori experiences of education to. In order to explain the difficulties with the model, I will give a brief outline of its elements and then explain the implications of using IPCSD with this particular research focus.

### **Intergenerational Post Colonial Stress Disorder**

IPCSD attempts to explain the destructive behaviour patterns that are practiced and replicated through the generations in indigenous families. Domestic violence is the behaviour that this

model was created to explain, but it is the historical and generational way in which behaviour is described that attracted me to this model as a possible framework for describing Māori and education.

In its simplest form, IPCSD describes historical events that have caused trauma in the lives of indigenous peoples from generation to generation. Duran and Duran (1995) point to the loss of land, language, and culture as markers of initial trauma for the indigenous group, which is described as a holocaust type event such as that suffered by the Jewish population during the Second World War. This thesis research was attempting to pinpoint the loss of land, language, and culture in Aotearoa through different acts, policy, and initiatives in education. From this traumatic loss, indigenous peoples are left to not only deal with the cultural impact, but also to make sense of the oppression that they have suffered. The model explains how (unlike

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Jewish peoples) making sense of oppression is complicated by the lack (or non-existence) of recognition from the rest of society that the historical acts of oppression were unnecessary, hurtful, or oppressive at all, or that the events ever took place. From here, indigenous peoples look at themselves as the cause of the trauma that they have and are suffering. The message that the indigenous people are responsible somehow for their loss and ongoing deprivation is then passed down from generation to generation, through behaviour and beliefs that become a part of family life. In short, society sends the message that indigenous trauma is isolated from oppression, and that the anger, or other emotion(s), that exists due to the trauma has no place to be resolved in society. Therefore, it stays in the indigenous community and the family.

Thus, my interest in this model was because of its attempt to explain how Māori may hold views that they themselves are responsible for their failures in the mainstream education system of Aotearoa. Without marked recognition from the rest of society about the failings of the system itself in providing for Māori, where then do Māori look for explanations of low Māori retention rates and academic pass rates?

#### *How the Conceptual Framework Fits with Māori and Education*

IPCSD was eventually abandoned as the sole conceptual basis for the research for two main reasons. Firstly, it is a model of disorder, which would succeed in pathologising the experiences of Māori. Attributing the complex reasons that Māori have for their current participation and achievement rates to some type of disorder gives little respect to the diversity that exists within the Māori population. For example, if children are taught that knowledge of whakapapa, iwi, or other cultural concepts, outweigh the importance of knowledge from mainstream schooling, under the analysis of the IPCSD model this would be measured as a failure to achieve, and attributed to the generational disorder described by IPCSD.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, an analysis based on this conceptual framework assumes the

superiority of mainstream knowledge. This is assumed almost by default where achievement in mainstream schooling is a reference point from which to measure whānau encouragement, commitment, and the level at which they would value mainstream education for the absolute good of their children. Initially, no conceptual space was given to explain, describe and explore the myriads of forms of knowledge that Māori may value.

The conceptual framework that has developed from this initial focus more readily allows for values and perspectives that are not largely included in mainstream schooling.

#### *An Open Exploration Approach*

The conceptual framework that now forms the basis of the research and the method of gathering information differs markedly from what has been described above. There is now no 'hypothesis like' framework to work from, where the researcher poses a question that necessitates interpretation of behaviour in line with a model or theory. What has emerged is an open exploration approach that is better able to deal with the complexities that may exist in whānau dialogue on education.

Some of the issues that are becoming clear in the literature on Māori and education help to clarify the need for open exploration as a methodology. Research that has been conducted on indigenous peoples and education indicates the need to analyse participation and performance with a more positive 'cultural fit' view. Considering participation and performance as a product of both appropriate provision of schooling and the ability of whānau to identify the shortfalls of the system is important in the construction and analysis of indigenous education research. For example, Schwabb (1999) found that a major consideration for Aboriginal parents in having their children participate in mainstream schooling was the degree to which they felt their child's investment in the 'white' school system would pay off with respect to future benefits such as employment. If the schooling was only to produce either a feeling of failing (in mainstream knowledge) or an assimilated child, then the degree to which this type of

education was valued lessened considerably.

There is also a need to explore the possible existence of commitment to mainstream education by whānau. Although some research suggests that, for many whānau, mainstream education is a default option (McKinley, 2000), there is evidence that shows that whānau do invest time and effort in succeeding in some academic sense. The aim of this thesis is not to push for higher recognition of cultural and alternate values of knowledge alone. There is also a need to recognise the ability of Māori to achieve academically and succeed at a high level.

#### *The Importance of Context*

The reasons behind the messages that may exist in whānau on mainstream education also need to be given context. There is a danger of conducting research about attitudes on education, where the attitudes are presented in isolation from events and experiences that have occurred and have served to shape these attitudes. Much research and literature describes the history of the mainstream education system in Aotearoa and the impact it has had on Māori from generation to generation. Appreciating the sometimes devastating experiences of earlier generations is essential in understanding the views that they may hold on mainstream schooling. For example, the language that is used in schooling and education is seen to reflect the cultural dominance that is suffered by Māori (Gadd, 1984). It is described as a:

*...language of tests. The Tosca and the PAT tests sort out how well educable you are in the system... [and]... you will have spent maybe 10 years at school all the time being told openly or silently by your teachers that your language means that you and your family and your culture and your*

*community are not up to the education offered by the school (Gadd, 1984, p34).*

The questions included in the information gathering method provide for recounting educational experiences that may be similar to those found in previous research, and those experiences are used to explain, and give some justification for, views held about schooling.

#### **Conclusion**

In the process of this thesis, forming a research question that does not necessitate an ethnocentric analysis has been a major challenge. The intricate way in which perspectives and societal norms interact to produce unbalanced accounts and attributions has been the main lesson learned as a researcher. From here, the goal of the thesis is to produce a research paper that respects Māori and bicultural perspectives, and allows for this diversity. The changing dynamics within psychological research, towards true indigenous research investigation, must not only allow for exploring indigenous concepts, but must seek to do so by employing methodologies and perspectives that are in themselves more in line with indigeneity.

I truly hope that this thesis teaches those who read it about the historical and generational effects of mainstream schooling on Māori whānau. There is something to be learnt from the attributions that society makes about the participation and performance of Māori in mainstream high schools, that cannot be captured by exploring either statistics or educational strategies that attempt to integrate te ao Māori. Whānau messages, in the context of the impact of mono-cultural schooling, must be explained and explored openly, and without overvaluing academic achievement.

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## References

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