

Mentoring and teaching in academic settings: Professional and cultural identities from one Pākehā's perspective

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Abstract: When invited to respond to the paper on “Mentoring Māori in a Pākehā framework” by Hook, Waaka and Raumati (2007), I hesitated. Mentoring was not a term I had previously used in my professional thinking or academic writing: unlike Barbara Grant (Ratima & Grant, 2007), I had not been involved in formal mentoring programmes or immersed myself in the mentoring literature. As a Pākehā, I was not qualified to evaluate the authors’ definition of a Māori framework. At first glance, the target paper’s focus seemed to be on mentoring in commercial, rather than academic workplaces. My experience had been as a teacher, the last 30 years having been in a university School of Education. I was persuaded to undertake this commentary on the grounds that academic work involves nurturing, advising and supporting younger or less experienced colleagues, as well as students – tasks identified as mentoring in the Hook et al. paper. The following comments are informed by my everyday practices as teacher, thesis supervisor and researcher, and by my former management roles as an assistant dean of graduate studies and head of department. My angle of vision and conceptual resources are those of a (Pākehā and feminist) sociologist of education.

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As the Ratima and Grant commentary (2007) points out, Hook, Waaka and Raumati’s paper offers useful conceptual tools with which to think about mentoring processes in workplaces. It sketches a binary, or dichotomy, between two world-views in evidence in New Zealand organizations: a Māori world-view centred on spirituality and connectedness, and a Pākehā one based on competitive individualism. They argue that, if Māori are to have equal opportunities to reach their full potential in workplaces, the dominant (Pākehā) organisational patterns, including individualised, hierarchical and secular approaches to mentoring, need to give way to, or at least co-exist with, more collective processes that can accommodate Māori communal and spiritual values. Such models of the social world are necessarily essentialist: being conceptual schemas designed to identify issues in organisational structures, problematise their everyday processes, and throw into question their established patterns of interpersonal relations. But, like all such abstractions, or, (in sociological terminology), ideal-typifications, their conceptual categorisations can appear distorted when the messy realities of everyday life in workplaces overflow their boundaries. This is not intended as dismissive; it is the way models and schemas inevitably work. They are starting points, and, once applied in a working environment, are continuously adapted, refined, modified, split apart, recombined: bent to fit the shapes of specific organisational settings and human dynamics.

Hook, Waaka and Raumati’s classification opposes two notions of individuality: a Pākehā / Western one grounded on “values of autonomy, freedom, self-interest, entitlement, competition and so on” and a Māori world-view “where individuality is more likely to be constituted on values of relationality, collectivity, reciprocity, and connectivity to prior generations.” The title of the target article is “Mentoring Māori within a Pākehā Framework.” This positions Māori as anomalies, minorities, in organizations structured according to the Pākehā world-view. The model, presumably, does not apply to Māori-dominated organizations, such as iwi authorities (although, presumably, even these will be infused with the Pākehā world-view where accountability and reporting procedures connect with

hegemonic Pākehā commercial or public sector institutions). The majority of Māori workers, however, will be structurally positioned as the title suggests – as cultural minorities in Pākehā-dominated workplaces, including universities. So it is important to unravel the complexities of what exactly is included in this idea of the Pākehā framework. It is necessary also to explore its historical and political relation to a Māori world-view.

Hook, Waaka and Raumati's idea of the Pākehā framework knots together the historical and cultural legacies of colonialism, the economic and ideological demands of contemporary corporate global capitalism, the institutional structures of bureaucracy, and a New Zealand-based "non-Māori" (Pākehā) sense of individual and collective ethnic/cultural identity. Māori scholars in the sociology of education and related fields have opened up spaces for translation across the conceptual borders between "Maori" and "Pākehā" as identity categories by drawing attention to their common origins in the British imperialist project – its theories, commercial ventures, scientific knowledges, military strategies, political appropriations, and ideological manipulation. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) argues that, although historically and experientially entangled, colonialism, corporate global capitalism, bureaucracy and cultural identity are conceptually and analytically distinguishable. Their intertwined threads are tightly woven through the fabric of educational institutions and the experiences of their human participants. Schools today still bear the traces of colonial domination, of historically explicit missions of linguistic genocide and denigration of tikanga (Walker, 1996). The natural and social sciences still bear traces of their origins during the era of British imperialism, when they created and legitimated hierarchical typologies of (white) racial dominance over "coloured" indigenes, and were politically and commercially allied with imperialist strategies such as military conquests, slavery, and colonisation (McKinley, 2003; Smith, 1999).

Hook, Waaka and Raumati (2007) describe the centrality of whakapapa, connectedness of one's present with a past and a future, in Māori individuality and argue that mentoring of Māori in Pākehā dominated workplaces must take account of such dimensions of a Māori worker's individual and collective identity. Similarly, Rangimarie Rose Pere argues that, in her tribal traditions, an "absolute uniqueness is a part of the individual's own mana as a whole. As long as humanity has existed, there has never been anyone who is exactly the same as anyone else" (Pere, 1988, p. 15). Ratima warns that a shared whakapapa between mentor and mentee can sometimes be problematic in a workplace setting as tribal, intertribal, institutional, political and personal affinities can at times contradict or collide (Ratima & Grant, 2007). While, as an "outsider" I cannot enter such discussions from a Māori perspective, I need to remain wary of institutional policies that stereotype, assuming that "one size fits all" for Māori. Rangimarie Rose Pere argues that Māori world-views are always tribally based, citing John Rangihau's famous statement that "each tribe has its own way of doing things. Each tribe has its own history. And it's not a history that can be shared among others ..." (1975, p. 232). Viewing the idea of *a* (or *the*) Māori world-view as a colonial creation, she summarises Rangihau as follows:

You can only talk about your Tuhoetanga, your Arawatanga, your Waikatotanga. Not your Maoritanga. I have a faint suspicion that this is a term coined by Pakeha to bring the tribes together. Because if you cannot divide and rule, then for tribal people all you can do is bring them together and rule... because then they lose everything by losing their own tribal identity and histories and traditions (Rangihau, as paraphrased in Pere, 1988, p. 10).

The term Pākehā was coined in the context of initial contact between iwi and British/European travellers – missionaries, traders, adventurers, before the ravages of commercial and political colonising ventures (for a useful summary of writing on the origins and various meanings of "Pakeha", see Bell, 2004). It was colonialism that entrenched the use of

oppositional, and homogenising, labels for both “sides” of the imperial divide - Pākehā (comprising individuals, institutions, and systems collectively) and Māori (individuals, iwi, language, etc). The “two world-views” evolved from the positions allocated in colonial discourses (as colonising/ colonised; dominant/ subordinate).

So where does that leave us today in large bureaucratic organizations where Māori are a minority? Are there points of affinity, as well as difference, between these two worldviews? Are large organisations and workplaces *only* “Pākehā” in the sense Hook, Waaka and Raumati suggest? Can this organization-wide idea of “Pākehā” admit only “concepts of individuality and values of autonomy, freedom, self- interest, entitlement, competition and so on”? Or are there other zones of possibilities within “Pākehā-dom” - spaces in which “relationality, collectivity, reciprocity, and connectivity to prior generations” can be, and are, encouraged? Academic work provides an interesting context in which to think about this. What does it mean to do academic work and to mentor less experienced “apprentices” in the various activities and make up the components of such work?

Because the Hook et al. (2007) focus is on organizations in general, (commercial, public sector etc.), some of the special characteristics of academic institutions and academic mentoring are missed. For them, mentoring involves, among other things, helping with career moves, developing professional behaviour and self-esteem, enhancing performance, etc. – goals and qualities centred on furthering individual interests such as competitive advantage. It is indisputable that in contemporary capitalist political regimes dominated by neo-liberal competitive ideals, universities have increasingly been co-opted into, and restructured according to, these commercial values (Peters, 1997). In the current “audit culture”, such as that imposed by the Performance Based Research Fund (or PBRF), even the creative works of a university’s intellectuals and artists are commodified, reconceptualised as “outputs” of monetary value, and universities’ evaluated as accumulators of capital. As one American critic expressed it, the modern university “is not just like a corporation, it *is* a corporation” (Readings, 1996). Mentoring a colleague in these contexts involves helping him or her to become, as one of my own research informants put it, “PBRF-able” (Middleton, 2006). This fits neatly into the version of “Pākehā-ness” outlined by Hook and colleagues (2007). But, emanating as it does from the neo-liberal ideology of corporate global capitalism, it make little sense to appropriate the word “Pākehā” to describe it. While “Pākehā” was an apt descriptor for nineteenth century Victorian colonial capitalism in this country, it seems a misnomer for structures, ideas and policies that are spatially global, their power-bases emanating from far beyond these island shores.

Using “Pākehā” in this broadest sense undermines the word’s cultural and geographical specificity as signifier for a locally based sense of personal identity. As a fifth generation New Zealander (with a sixth generation Pākehā daughter and a seventh generation Pākehā grandson), although a descendent of Danish, Scottish, Australian as well as English forebears, I do not identify myself as English, British or European. I am comfortable with “Pākehā” as a descriptor of my historically and genealogically located “ethnic/cultural” identity. “Pākehā” grounds me and my ancestors and descendants – our pasts and our futures - here, in this place, Aotearoa. It also identifies us as both historically interconnected with, and as other to, Aotearoa’s indigenous inhabitants, Māori, and their diverse tribal inheritances. Family histories and genealogies are becoming important to many of us Pākehā; we too can have feelings of temporal and spatial “connectedness,” while at the same time acknowledging this as “other” to the kinds of spiritual groundings of the “Māori framework” suggested by Hook, Waaka and Raumati. But here I see also affinities between and spaces for translation across the harsh categorical Māori-Pākehā divide.

In a feminist critique of the international literature (in English) on mentoring, Joyce Stalker (1994) identified two prevailing “western” (Pākehā?) models for mentoring. Structural mentoring, similar to the Pākehā model in Hook, Waaka and Raumati’s article, is

hierarchical, and occurs in situations when “an older wiser person advises, counsels and acts as role model to a younger person” (p. 362). But Stalker also identifies a less hierarchical and individualistic model, grounded in feminist scholarship that identifies gender differences in organisational behaviour and learning styles (e.g. Gilligan, 1982). In such mentoring practices, “women’s ways of knowing” (Belenky, Clinchy, Rule, & Tarule, 1986) have informed an “alternative model based on lateral multiple connections rather than hierarchical dyads” (Stalker, 1994, p. 363). Barbara Grant’s commentary concurs that these feminist approaches to mentoring indicate that “Pākehā” may also embrace alternatives to a hierarchical, individualised, objectified, self-interested model.

Stalker’s feminist critique also raises the issue that an important outcome of many mentoring programmes concerns the development of “mentees’ enhanced understanding of their professional identity within academe” (1994, p. 364), an issue not covered in either of the two models in Hook, Waaka and Raumati’s paper, yet crucial to academic life. As academics, our professional identities are constructed *by* us and *for* us (Bernstein, 2000). As academics, we locate or position our work and ourselves in relation to epistemological classifications of disciplines or fields. A sense of belonging is nurtured in allegiances to learned societies, conferences, and journals: professional identity formation involves intellectual, inter-personal and psychological processes of identification. We *identify* as educational psychologists, physicists, etc. Such personal affinities intersect in complex, and sometimes contradictory, ways with the financial and administrative categories whereby institutions allocate students to programmes, distribute resources to departments, and locate bodies in buildings. Professional identity formation is “a continuous and reflexive process, a synthesis of (internal) self definition and the (external) definition of oneself offered by others” (Henkel, 2005, p. 157). The reconfiguration of academic institutions, such as the introduction of the PBRF or other measures of compliance with commercial imperatives, involves a “restructuring not merely of the external conditions of academic and professional practice, but even more fundamentally of the core elements of academic and professional identity” (Beck & Young, 2005, p. 184).

Learning to do academic work (as a student or as a new staff member/mentee) involves multiple, and changing, processes of identity formation. As a teacher, supervisor and manager I have seen many students and new staff (both Pākehā and Māori) struggling to master academic forms of writing. I have sometimes suggested that the metaphor of genealogy provides a translation, or a conceptual bridge, across what can be experienced as a divide between the academic knowledge-making conventions of university disciplines and those of whakapapa and recall in support Rangimarie Rose Pere’s (1983) image of standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before. Academic requirements to reference one’s sources can be seen to share at least a metaphorical affinity with this: for example, when writing about class, I insert referential signposts to Marx, his conceptual descendants, and the contemporary generation working with allied resources and questions. An academic is heir to a field’s “founding fathers and mothers” (academic ancestors) and a work’s bibliography maps, not only its writer’s personal intellectual journey, but also its place in a wider (disciplinary or interdisciplinary) collective story. Even the most brilliant amongst academics are not authorised to claim originary powers, but must always present as heirs to a greater tradition. This analogy is not new on my part: there is a well-known British text called *Academic tribes and territories* (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Intellectual work in this sense overflows the conceptual and experiential boundaries of the atomised individualism often attributed to “the Pākehā world-view.”

As a Pākehā supervisor and teacher of Māori students, and a colleague of Māori staff, I am often overawed by their handling of the multiple, often simultaneous, and sometimes contradictory, demands of their political, personal, economic, and spiritual allegiances to iwi, hapu, whanau, departments, disciplines, theses, research contracts etc. Māori researchers’ projects may be spawned in tribal (communal) settings, with projects oriented towards community needs (Treaty issues, for example). Dreams, visions, and spiritual insights may

infuse their research (Moeke-Maxwell, 2003). When such projects enter the academy, such as in the case of thesis supervision, the epistemological classifications, departmental divisions, architectural configurations, and interpersonal groupings of the university may not “fit” the epistemological, spiritual, familial and conceptual patterns required to address, research and write about the topic. Here the stark differences between a Māori and a Pākehā world-view do come into view. Māori thesis supervisors may find themselves stretched thinly across what are normally the “edges” of their disciplinary comfort zones; students’ work and disciplinary identities become splintered, fragmented across disparate departments and disciplines with no integration or coherence. Some are marginalised out of the institution, but others draw power from the critical edge (Said, 1993), shouting loudly back to the academy from its interstices, critiquing and challenging the academy, creating dynamic and revolutionary works.

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