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JOURNEY TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING

The place of whakapapa as a Māori academic

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He whakarāpopoto

This article was written as a result of my personal journey toward understanding my whakapapa and my place within academia. As a newly appointed academic I utilise the four stages of Kolb's experiential model to provide concrete examples of complex situations, reflect on their meanings, conceptualise these meanings to make sense of them and move towards locating self as a Māori academic and researcher. I provide comment on my search for authenticity and the barriers to exploring whakapapa. I make a case for academics who are Māori to explore their cultural identity, to further understand issues of equity and identity for Māori students and colleagues.

Kupu matua

authenticity, kete mātauranga, Kolb's experiential model,
Māori academic, Pākehā paralysis, whakapapa

Mihimihi

Ko Hananui, ko Tākitimu ngā maunga	Hananui and Tākitimu are the mountains
Ko Ōreti, ko Waihōpai ngā awa	Ōreti and Waihōpai are the rivers
Ko Uruao, ko Tākitimu ngā waka	Uruao and Tākitimu are the voyaging canoes
Ko Murihiku te marae	Murihiku is the meeting place
Ko Ngāi Tahu te iwi	Ngāi Tahu is the tribe
Ko Jan Dewar tōku ingoa	My name is Jan Dewar

Tīmatanga kōrero

I begin with a formal introduction, but, until I was 25 years old, I was unaware of my rich Māori history. Growing up in rural Southland, I was not told of my link to Ngāi Tahu, and it was not until a cousin mentioned it that I became aware of my whakapapa. According to the records held by the Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu (n.d.-b), my ancestry links back to Te More, Horetai and Pii Kowhiowhio. This whakapapa is found through my mother, grandmother and great-grandfather. Because my grandmother passed away at the age of 28, when my mother was only five years old, I did not have the privilege of ever knowing her.

I am an experienced nurse leader and recently completed my doctorate, which has led to me

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being appointed to an academic position at the Auckland University of Technology. With this appointment, I feel the desire to fulfil a long-held ambition to make sense of my world in relation to my whakapapa by tracing my family history as a member of Ngāi Tahu. My aim is not only to discover and understand more about my roots, but also to discover what this means for me as a higher education teacher. I feel a vulnerability about this as I proceed into the unknown. At the same time, however, I have observed the benefits gained by others from knowing one's heritage and am therefore willing to take this risk. I am also acutely aware of how little I really know about all things Māori. I am beginning this journey in humility, knowing that I have so much to learn and that I am at such an early stage of this journey that there is a sense of unreality about it. Imposter syndrome, a sense of doubt in my abilities, and fear of being seen as a fraud are close at hand. According to Mullangi and Jagsi (2019), imposter syndrome is the symptom; inequity is the disease. I am encouraged by Palmer's (2007) emphasis on the importance of teacher integrity and identity. I am also mindful of the complexity of human experience, as outlined by Van Manen (2007):

> Rationality expresses a faith that we can share this world, that we can make things understandable to each other, that experience can be made intelligible. But a human science perspective also assumes that lived human experience is always more complex than the result of any singular description, and that there is always an element of the ineffable to life. (p. 16)

I realise that my experience will be just that—*my* experience—but unpacking it may be helpful to others. I am shaped by my context (Webber, 2009). Perhaps it is time for Māori academics who have not done so already to discover their heritage, to trace their whakapapa as part of a journey towards equity that is so lacking in Aotearoa New Zealand (Reid et al., 2017).

I place importance on authenticity in the way I live my life and the way I am in the world. The philosopher Heidegger taught that we are not independent of our world but immersed and involved in it, even if we feel alienated or vulnerable (Harman, 2007). My context shapes me, and yet I am hopeful that this journey will be helpful not only for me, but for others who are seeking to understand their background (Webber, 2009). As I think about and discover my heritage, my hope is to "call others to thinking" about their own journey. As Smythe and Spence (2012) observe, "To call one to thinking is not to 'tell' but rather to take the reader on their own journey of seeing, that they too may have their own call to think" (p. 21).

The goal of my journey is to answer the question "What does it mean to be Māori in an academic setting, and how do I authentically be a member of Ngāi Tahu in this space?"

Te kete kōrero

As a way to order my thinking in this article, I will use Kolb's experiential learning cycle (Kolb & Kolb, 2018). This provides a guiding structure that will allow me to focus on my individual experiences and thinking (Turesky & Gallagher, 2011). Knowledge is created from experience—through choices made that may in turn influence future choices (Bergsteiner et al., 2010). As a nurse, much of my learning has been experiential. Within nursing there is constant attention given to ensuring the theory-practice gap is addressed. Kolb's model presents a way to integrate theory and practice (Lisko & O'Dell, 2010).

There are four essential components of Kolb's experiential learning cycle. The components of *concrete experience* and *abstract conceptualisation* enable learning to occur. In order to transform experience, the two dialectical modes of *reflective observation* and *active experimentation* are needed (Atkinson & Murrell, 1988; Turesky & Gallagher, 2011).

Concrete experience refers to being fully immersed in an experience—in an experience that has meaning (Matsuo, 2015; Morris, 2020). The experiences that I will describe in relation to my role as an academic who is Māori are meaningful and inspire me to look further and deeper to learn more about what it means to be Māori in an academic setting.

Reflective observation is needed to effectively solve problems. While Kolb does not emphasise the need for *critical* reflection, I agree with Morris (2020) that this is necessary to fully enhance learning.

Abstract conceptualisation adds depth of understanding to concrete experience. I will focus here on concepts that are found in my specific situation as all learning is context-specific, and may change as the context changes (Morris, 2020). Abstract conceptualisation serves to heighten my awareness of the concrete experiences I have, as settling on exactly what should happen in any given situation is subject to change.

The idea of active experimentation enables pragmatic action within the learning cycle (Morris,

2020). Grimwood et al. (2018) suggest that the process of experiential learning can "push the edges of what they [the learners] are familiar with" (p. 9). This is certainly how this process feels to me as a learner.

The learning experience, according to Kolb, involves all four components of the learning cycle. It is not necessary to engage the phases of the model in a prescribed order, however. Experienced leaders are able to rely on aspects of the model in any given situation to achieve continuous learning in complex situations (Bergsteiner et al., 2010; Turesky & Gallagher, 2011). The cyclical nature of the model facilitates integration of direct learning experience and abstract generalisation, with reflection as the linking function (Kolb & Kolb, 2018; Konak et al., 2014).

Kolb's model has been criticised for its focus on the individual learning experience at the expense of the social and political situation in which the learning occurs. The things that are taken for granted, such as power and control, may be overlooked (Matsuo, 2015). Given the focus that I have on examining my own learning in the process of discovering what it means for me to be Māori in an academic environment, Kolb's model is a useful starting point. I am drawn to the importance of reflection in the learning experience. It must be understood that experiential learning can be an emotionally intense experience (Morris, 2020), and this has been the case for me in my exploration. The potential to learn from and transform experiences into new learning that will ultimately guide my actions makes this journey worthwhile.

Taku haerenga ako wheako

This section describes my experiential learning journey so far. I have structured it according to the four stages of Kolb's experiential learning cycle as described above.

Concrete experience: Being Māori and Ngāi Tahu in an academic setting

What is an experience? According to Kolb and Kolb (2018), it is feelings relating to an event. The concrete-abstract continuum is about how learning is grasped from the environment; this occurs on a continuum ranging from active participation to a decision to be an abstract observer (Atkinson & Murrell, 1988). One way to illuminate concrete experiences is to write about past experiences and decisions. What follows is a small selection of experiences that have left me with questions about my place as a Māori academic. These are presented as reflective notes, a snapshot of my thinking at that time.

The interview: Having handed in my Doctor of Health Science thesis, I was invited for an interview for the role I had recently applied for (Lecturer/Senior Lecturer). After 15 years in senior nursing leadership positions in a clinical context, the potential of moving into an academic (and therefore unknown) context was both exciting and challenging. At the very end of the interview, I mentioned my interest in exploring my Māori whakapapa, telling the panel, "I am on a journey. I have not reached a destination but am very interested and keen to further explore my whakapapa and follow this path to finding what this may mean for me." Their final question was "So are you happy to be known as a Māori academic?" I answered, "Well, I am Māori." Reflecting on the experience, I realise that I did not really understand what this meant at the time. My answer catapulted me into this phase of my life in which I am exploring what it is to be Māori in an academic setting. I had long wondered exactly what it means to be Ngāi Tahu. I wondered if there were any special characteristics to Ngāi Tahu, in contrast to other iwi, and wanted to discover them.

The introduction: I was successful in securing the position, and my first day in the role happened to be on the day of a full staff meeting. I was asked to introduce myself and I recited my pepeha (glancing at my notes). The meeting felt awkward with approximately half of the staff online, the rest face to face. This was followed by an announcement that I was the new Māori academic.

The support: A Māori colleague took me under her wing, which was such a relief. She was empathetic, understanding, welcoming and warm. She did everything she could to support me in my tentative beginning in the role. I felt so grateful. She was reassuring and helped the uncomfortable beginning fade into the background. She helped me feel less like an imposter. Another Māori colleague came alongside. We had cups of tea, we talked, and they applied no pressure. What wonderful women they both are! Those first few bewildering weeks were made so much more bearable by their welcome.

The next challenge: I joined Wharangi Ruamano, a national group of Māori nurse educators and academics. I was so nervous at the first meeting. Once again, they were very welcoming and accepting. It felt lovely to be part of the group. I managed a mihimihi, albeit tentatively, and no one batted an eye. Other members introduced themselves in English, and no one

reacted. It was a wonderful meeting with wonderful people. That meeting helped me to feel a little more settled. It also exposed me to some of the politics at play for Māori nurses and helped me begin to understand the immense challenges facing individuals in the group.

The ongoing journey: One of my Māori colleagues was course leader for a Māori health paper. As I was working alongside her, she invited me to give the two-hour lecture on equity to the Māori health undergraduate class. I wondered if I knew enough to do this. She gave me her previous presentation and after a lot of preparation, reading of research, and new learning for me I presented my thoughts in lecture form. Reassuringly, she was there to oversee and support. Lovely, encouraging feedback was given afterwards. At that time, one of the nurse educators commented to me that they wanted to work only in courses where they felt confident. They did not want to be "building the plane and flying it at the same time"—this was a familiar feeling!

Other things: A Kawa Whakaruruhau Komiti is in place in the department. As a Māori academic staff member, I belong to this rōpū. This is a real place of learning where ideas around Māori scholarship and the art of retaining Māori students and enabling them to thrive is important. I have observed in these committee meetings that some members are very well versed in the specifics of their iwi. Statements are made such as "I'm Ngāti Porou, and we . . . [a belief, value or action is described]." This planted a thought and a drive to find out what Ngāi Tahu customs, beliefs or actions would be important in similar situations. This feels like the beginning of a lifelong journey of discovery. It is one that I am excited about, but I am also slightly nervous about where it might take me.

Reflective observation: Mahi rangahau Māori—researching "being Māori"

I have sought advice from Māori academic colleagues, and they have made suggestions about where to start. I therefore begin with a process of decolonising my mind. This involves pulling apart and critically examining thoughts and values, and being aware of attitudes presented as "normal" in my childhood. Through previous work with the Health Quality & Safety Commission (2019) patient deterioration programme, I am acutely aware that I will have unconscious bias. Recognising and challenging my bias will be an ongoing evolving process.

It is important to understand that "Māori culture allows anyone with Māori whakapapa (genealogy or heritage) to refer to themselves as Māori" (Grennell-Hawke & Tudor, 2018). Coming to realise, understand and believe this has enabled me to move towards a more open exploration of what it means for me. It was helpful when a colleague commented that I had probably been "socially assigned Pākehā", referring to the pale nature of my skin. Somehow that helped me to accept where I found myself and make choices about how to proceed. For a long time, I was reluctant to do this. Mostly I was fearful of getting it "wrong". This feeling is often described as "Pākehā paralysis", which is defined by Hotere-Barnes (2015) as:

> emotional and intellectual difficulties that Pākehā can experience when engaging in social, cultural, economic and political relations with Māori because of: a fear of getting it wrong; concern about perpetuating Māori cultural tokenism; negative previous experiences with Māori; confusion about what the "right" course of action may be. (p. 41)

In describing Pākehā paralysis, Tolich (2002) outlines the complexities for Pākehā researchers seeking to understand how best to work with Māori participants. He supports the cultural safety focus of the Nursing Council of New Zealand (2011), which believes that the process of understanding one's own culture and its impact on another is the responsibility of both parties. This may be an important step towards addressing the paralysis felt by many. Although I am Māori and Pākehā, my upbringing means that when it comes to exploring my Māori place, I am familiar with feelings of paralysis. The doubt and discomfort described as Pākehā paralysis can be applied to me as someone who identifies as both Māori and Pākehā. As I reflect further and learn more about my identity, my hope is that this will resolve somewhat along the way.

My reason for undertaking this personal exploration is to discover something of what Ngāi Tahu identity means within the Māori world. As an aside, it is helpful to note that some say "Ngāi Tahu" and others "Kāi Tahu". This difference is one of dialect, with the more southern iwi members tending to replace the "Ng" of "Ngāi" with a "K" (O'Regan, 2001). When referring to documents or other information, I have used "Ng" or "K" according to what the writer preferred. The driver for this exploration of my whakapapa has been my observation and admiration of those who understand the complexity of their iwi and the richness and guidance

that this provides. According to O'Regan (2001), Kāi Tahu cannot be contained in a conclusive definition at a particular moment in time—it is in fact a "constantly shifting relational category" (p. 28). Identity "is about feeling, belief and perception. . . . It is about one's consciousness and sub-consciousness, one's relationships and interactions, one's experiences within the world" (O'Regan, 2001, p. 28). As I seek to understand where I have come from and how this can shape my future, I am acutely aware of the newness of this search for me. I am concerned with authenticity, with being true to the search, with avoiding any hint of tokenism or a disingenuous action. As Overton (2021) observes, the last thing one wants is to be seen claiming an identity that is not theirs to claim.

I begin by examining what being Ngāi Tahu means to individuals. This may seem counterintuitive when much of Māori culture is collective. However, looking at shared values may be a place to start my journey. According to the Ngāi Tahu website, a shared set of values are in place:

> **Whanaungatanga**
> *(family)*
> We will respect, foster and maintain important relationships within the organisation, within the iwi and within the community.
>
> **Manaakitanga**
> *(looking after our people)*
> We will pay respect to each other, to iwi members and to all others in accordance with our tikanga (customs).
>
> **Tohungatanga**
> *(expertise)*
> We will pursue knowledge and ideas that will strengthen and grow Ngāi Tahu and our community.
>
> **Kaitiakitanga**
> *(stewardship)*
> We will work actively to protect the people, environment, knowledge, culture, language and resources important to Ngāi Tahu for future generations.
>
> **Tikanga**
> *(appropriate action)*
> We will strive to ensure that the tikanga of Ngāi Tahu is actioned and acknowledged in all of our outcomes.
>
> **Rangatiratanga**
> *(leadership)*
> We will strive to maintain a high degree of personal integrity and ethical behaviour in all actions and decisions we undertake. (Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, n.d.-a)

While these values are consistent with my personal values, what follows is what they mean to individuals within Ngāi Tahu. To begin to understand what Ngāi Tahu means for me, it seems important to listen to the wisdom and leadership of others.

To do this, I turn to a study by O'Regan (2001), in which she interviewed eight Kāi Tahu members who were active participants in local and tribal activities. These generous people shared their personal experiences about what being Kāi Tahu meant to them. More recently, a personal reflection by Overton (2021) on being a member of Ngāi Tahu whose childhood was not spent in the tribal context provides additional insight.

According to O'Regan (2001), core factors influencing Kāi Tahu identity are "whakapapa and land, language, tikaka, the Claim, legal identity and mahika kai" (p. 164). Her book sees these aspects through the personal experiences, political views and dreams of the participants in her study. As I have experienced in my interaction with Māori in various committees and workplace gatherings, Kāi Tahu has a specific place as a separate entity, while being within a larger group of peoples called Māori. This was recognised by the Crown with the Te Rūnanga Ngāi Tahu Act 1996 and the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998 (O'Regan, 2001).

So, what are the specific elements that contribute to the unique place of Ngāi Tahu? Whānau, hapū and iwi are bound by the common thread of whakapapa. Whakapapa links a person back to the land. The significance of this is that the land is about the survival of the collective—it provides food and materials for survival. The land has a spiritual aspect as it holds the histories of the iwi—that is, where those that have gone before are buried. If one has whakapapa back to Ngāi Tahu (the one essential criterion for this tribal identity), one has a link to the land. This is present in the oratory where collective identity is often expressed. One way to do this is through a pepeha, and I opened this article with mine. There is often one pepeha that links the whole iwi, and additional layers that identify individual links. The collective always comes first because that is the important linkage—being one together.

For Ngāi Tahu, whakapapa is validated through the official census list of all Ngāi Tahu

kaumātua who were alive in 1848 (Ngāitahu Māori Trust Board, 1967/2002), which is often referred to as the "Blue Book". As a result of colonisation, Māori have often been depicted as "other". This "othering" was something that was considered normal in my upbringing. To identify myself as Ngāi Tahu (which is indisputable), rather than Māori in the context of Māori versus non-Māori, subtly shifts the conversation. As Tā Tipene O'Regan observed when he realised this, "I felt enormously liberated from any compulsion to front up as Māori" (as cited in O'Regan, 2001, p. 55). Or, in the words of George Te Au, "Ngāi Tahu identity to me is very important, cause I can proclaim to the world, that not only am I a Māori – but my tribal identity is Ngāi Tahu, and nothing else" (as cited in O'Regan, 2001, p. 55). Like others before me, I am a New Zealander, and I am proud of the Western tradition that lies behind my Scottish descent. But it is my Ngāi Tahu descent that makes me uniquely of this place. I do not feel a need to reject one aspect of my heritage for another—it is possible to hold more than one ethnic identity concurrently.

As I read about the cultural traditions and customs of Ngāi Tahu, it was interesting to note that in the late 1960s there was a felt need to define these and a perceived lack of tikanga. This began a process to define marae protocols, and a paper outlining Kāi Tahu kawa was produced for circulation (O'Regan, 2001). There has been criticism of Kāi Tahu around "authenticity"—that today's tribal customs and practices are not "original", "ancient" or "true" (O'Regan, 2001, p. 74). This is based on an idea that ideologies, world views, practices and other aspects of life remain unchanged over time. I have a commitment to authenticity, and it would seem that Ngāi Tahu does too. As a people, we can choose how to represent ourselves. As Tā Tipene O'Regan has commented, "We have a right, inherent in ourselves, to build and rebuild our traditions. Not necessarily our core knowledge — or whakapapas. . . . I'm talking about the *tikanga*, of what we do in our custom" (as cited in O'Regan, 2001, p. 77).

Whakapapa is a key element of my identity, but to deepen my understanding I need to understand mātauranga Māori, a concept that includes Indigenous knowledge, culture, values and world views (Wilkinson et al., 2020). According to Wilkinson et al. (2020), mātauranga Māori is more than knowledge itself—it is "a method of expressing knowledge through language, cultural practices, values, principles and ethics" (p. 598). It is important to build relationships with others through shared connection to places and histories. This will grow my understanding of who I am and where I have come from.

Abstract conceptualisation: Mahi Kaupapa Māori—authenticity and positioning

I am familiar with the work of the philosopher Heidegger, and his thoughts on authenticity point to a way of understanding the journey I am on. According to Heidegger (2008), human beings find themselves thrown into the inevitabilities of being human, and this cannot be avoided. However, the way we live in our "thrownness" can be authentic or inauthentic. For Heidegger, the presence of the "they", as in "they say we should", is inevitable because existence causes us to be thrown into a culture without choice. In academia, and society in general, there does seem to be a focus on what one *should* do or say. This seems to be present in the application of cultural practices such as karakia and whakawhanaungatanga, and the use of pepeha. To live according to the "they" is described by Heidegger as inauthentic living (see Scott, 2010). Though we are thrown into an unpredictable and unknown culture, we seem to have a self-understanding of how to survive. As Whitinui (2014) points out, "Our lives and our cultures are composed of overlapping stories. Inherent in every story is the desire to find one's authentic voice" (p. 467). It has become clear to me through this study that there is no one authentic or universal way "to be Ngāi Tahu" or "to be Māori" (Whitinui, 2014). Webber (2009) agrees and comments that "what makes one Māori is never clear cut and, like culture, it is dynamic, contextual, and situational" (p. 2).

The idea of "belonging and not belonging" brings with it personal challenges of authenticity. What does exist is a world view, a well-developed approach to making sense of the world. As I seek to understand more and be connected to this world, I am grateful to those who have helped me and who continue to help me. This began with the close mentoring of a colleague and continues with opportunities to be mentored by and to assist others. It is said that before one can change, one must be challenged (Ruka, 2017). I am conscious of the challenge and the growth taking place. My ongoing efforts to locate "self" are deeply personal. My authentic response is to take my past experiences forward into the future with me. My past informs and is the basis for my future. This is unavoidable—it just *is*. In regard to my presence as a Māori academic, Kreber (2010)

describes authenticity (or self-authorship) as an important outcome of higher education. This is enhanced when the teacher has well-developed self-knowledge (Kreber, 2010). This is my aim as I continue to grow, change and understand more about both worlds: the world of being Māori and the world of academia.

As I embarked on this journey, a wise friend advised me to take time to watch and to listen, and to not be in a hurry. It seems that there is an exciting and challenging road ahead, with many worthwhile detours. I am aware that there are many views about where people with Ngāi Tahu whakapapa may be positioned. As is beautifully described by O'Regan (2001) when citing a study by Daniel J. Elazar into American Jewry, there are different levels of identification to and participation in a cultural group living within a wider societal structure. A continuum exists between those with a strong cultural identity, world view and way of life and those who are on the periphery, who are either unaware of their whakapapa or have a negative attitude toward it. As I ponder my position, I understand that I have dwelt on the periphery for much of my life. My hope is that through continued exploration, I can move towards a more involved and connected cultural existence.

I am hopeful that, in time, I can understand and answer the questions posed by Whitinui (2014):

1. Who am I and where am I from?
2. How well do I know myself as an indigenous person?
3. What do I believe as an indigenous person?
4. What angers me or lifts my spirits as an indigenous person?
5. What are the rules of conduct I set for myself as I make my way in the world and how do these rules relate to who I am as an indigenous person?
6. What am I willing to defend as an indigenous person and what lengths am I willing to go to defend it? (p. 467)

Active experimentation: Mahi tangata whenua—locating "self" as a "native" Māori researcher

In this section I will reflect briefly on what has helped to move me along on this journey. Firstly, there have been a number of respectful, helpful, welcoming people who have come alongside and gently guided me. My previous fears around my whakapapa and engaging in the Māori world have been proven to be largely unfounded. Recently, I was privileged to attend a national student hui. Through modelling, this event demonstrated Māori ways of being, including hui processes, marae protocols and traditions around kai. There was a strong emphasis on supporting Māori students, on mentoring and teaching care in health through a Māori lens. There was also a shared sense of purpose, and it was an uplifting experience.

Additionally, I have been more focused on seeking out Māori knowledge and on being alongside and with Māori colleagues in shared endeavours. I have lost some of my "Pākehā paralysis" feelings and my sense of imposter syndrome through deepening my understanding of where I am placed in the world. I have come to realise that it is important to be unapologetic about who I am.

Ngā kōrero

It is easy to say that one is decolonising one's mind, but I see this process as an ongoing exercise that has no end. Already this has been uncomfortable at times, but the discomfort brings with it reflection. This is a necessary part of discovery (Middleton, 2021). It is important to take the time to pause and consider what norm is being challenged, what I have accepted as the "correct" way to think, and what this is based on. A colleague gave me advice about this:

> In my experience, expanding one's identity involves feeling ignorant and sitting with various uncomfortable sensations, memories and emotions at times. I don't think these can be avoided, really — tē taea te karo. I sat with my own reactions, unpacked them, and came to understand them as part of the journey. (A. Middleton, personal communication, 2021)

I have had many discussions with my Māori colleagues about the long, slow journey they have been on to get to a place where all staff are open to collectively making room for Māori ways of thinking and being. It is only through strong leadership (both Māori and non-Māori) that this is becoming possible. Because of my previous leadership experience (not Indigenous leadership), I am involved in two conversations, one listening and supporting, and the other sitting at my Māori colleagues' feet and learning. I am so appreciative of their commitment to all the Māori staff in my workplace, supporting each of us as we develop at our own pace. This has not been easy for them: the manaakitanga offered often comes on top of their already very full workload. Their efforts, however,

help all of us to maintain a sense of equilibrium. To know support and understanding is there and to offer this to others is so precious and so necessary.

Like my exploration of my whakapapa, my discussion of my academic journey with my family and whānau and wider friend group has been slow and tentative. I have made some aware of my exploration, but not yet in any depth. I have been in the company of friends while visiting my Southland family home who are very intolerant about anything Māori, are strongly reactive to the use of te reo, and have very strong views of what success looks like. I have found this quite shocking and challenging. It has been an abrupt reminder of the simmering feelings and underlying (or in fact directly expressed) negative views about Māori that exist. I can feel a distancing happening, and this feels incredibly difficult. I am trying to be mindful of my ability to respond to these views at this stage. I have discussed this with colleagues and mentors, and realise that I am working towards understanding, but what I will do with that I cannot honestly say. I am acutely aware that I want to settle with my own thoughts and not come across as someone full of a new knowing, pushing my views on others—that is not my way. Meanwhile, I am aware that the time may come—no doubt *will* come—when I will need to confront my own feelings and have some honest discussions.

A significant part of my journey towards understanding is going to relate to language, specifically my knowledge of and ability to speak te reo Māori. The importance of language to cultural identity is a huge topic in itself. A study by Te Huia (2017) concluded that initiating and sustaining language learning for those who have Māori whakapapa was primarily motivated by a search for greater cultural identity. Making connections and building relationships with others who value the effort to learn te reo Māori can provide motivation to keep going. The issue of guilt and shame for not knowing or speaking te reo Māori has also been raised, and some may view the ability to speak te reo Māori as a core component of Māori identity (Te Huia, 2017).

In relation to learning to speak te reo, I realise that getting over my sense of imposter syndrome and constantly trying to improve will be key. To describe this journey, Hinemoa Elder (2020) uses the words of a whakataukī: "Tūwhitia te hopo! [Banish your fears!]" (p. 15). Or, as one would say in English, "Feel the fear and do it anyway!" I follow Elder's approach in naming my fears, drawing strength from others in an effort to connect and find mutual support, and keeping going.

The marae is a focal point for Māori. My marae is Murihiku, I have been on my marae as a student nurse, before I had knowledge of my whakapapa. This is a vital connection point, in terms of both the past and the future. It would be a privilege to learn more and to connect with the people of Murihiku, to understand the perspectives, dialect and practices important to Kāi Tahu of the far south, who in time I hope to be able to authentically refer to as my people.

He whakaaro whakamutunga

I began this exploration of my whakapapa feeling apprehension about how I might be accepted by my Māori academic colleagues. I used Kolb's experiential learning cycle to order my thoughts, which reflected my lack of knowledge about te ao Māori. As I explored my whakapapa, the values of Ngāi Tahu emerged as an important lens for further reflection. I have found that it is more likely to be my non-Māori friends and wider contacts who are unsupportive or challenge my authenticity. As I continue, I have a constant awareness of the value I place on authenticity. Alongside this I need to be prepared to step into new arenas and experience the discomfort of "not knowing". I discovered that the term "Pākehā paralysis"—fear of the unknown, fear of discomfort—applies to me at times as well. At the same time, I have been heartened by the encouragement of my Māori colleagues who have been nothing but encouraging, giving me a sense of kinship. This relationship building has been the most encouraging and helpful aspect of my journey. Without it, I may have shrunk back, given up and hidden. Instead, I feel encouraged to continue my tentative but determined journey to improve my understanding of the Māori world of which I am a part. I intend to continue this journey of connection to cultural sites, spaces and struggles that relate to my past, present and future with the aim of strengthening my relationships with people and the environment. In the words of Middleton (2021), I intend to "go forth and whaowhia te kete mātauranga. Fill [my] kete with a different type of knowledge." I am hopeful that others will be inspired to do the same.

Kuputaka

hapū	subtribe, clan
he whakaaro whakamutunga	Final thoughts
He whakarāpopoto	Abstract
hui	meeting, gathering

iwi	tribe, people, nation
kai	food; eat, dine
kaitiakitanga	guardianship
karakia	prayer, chant
kaumātua	elder
Kaupapa Māori	Māori approach or methodology
kawa	marae protocols
Kawa Whakaruruhau Komiti	Cultural Safety Committee
kete	basket
kōrero	speak, talk, discuss; discussion
Kupu matua	Keywords
Kuputaka	Glossary
mahi	work
mahika kai	garden, cultivation, food-gathering place
manaakitanga	hospitality
marae	meeting house
mātauranga Māori	knowledge, culture, values and world views held by Māori
mihi	greet
Ngā kōrero	Discussion
Ngāi Tahu/Kāi Tahu	the principal Māori iwi of the South Island
Pākehā	a person of predominantly European descent
pepeha	proverb, motto
rangahau	research
Rangatiratanga	self determination, autonomy
rōpū	group
Tā	Sir
Taku haerenga ako wheako	My experiential learning journey
tangata whenua	people of the land
te ao Māori	the Māori world
Te kete kōrero	Theoretical framework
te reo	Māori language
tē taea te karo	it can't be avoided
tikaka	customs, practices
tikanga	custom, obligations and conditions
Timatanga kōrero	Introduction
Tohungatanga	expertise, competence, proficiency
Tohutoru	References
whakapapa	genealogy, family tree, cultural identity
whakataukī	Māori proverb
whakawhanaungatanga	relationship, kinship, group dynamic
whānau	extended family
Whanaungatanga	the interrelationship of Māori with their ancestors, their whānau, hapū, iwi
Wharangi Ruamano	National Māori Nurse Educators and Academics

Ngā whakahuahua

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