Chapter 23

Biculturalism in Social Work Practice:
Transforming the Dominant Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Social work education and practice has primarily been dominated by a medical model worldview. Traditional social work frameworks and medical models have focused on deficits or psychopathology and limited wellness to bio-psycho-social dimensions. In 2005, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa (TWOA) introduced a social work degree that incorporates Māori holistic models of well-being and practice. The degree was further developed into a four-year degree in 2016. This chapter looks at the contribution made by this bicultural social work degree to social work education and practice. This innovative and bold initiative by TWOA accords privilege to Māori and other indigenous bodies of knowledge and practice frameworks equal to those of western theories and frameworks. The bicultural degree argues that an indigenous approach to social work education and practice frameworks are not in competition or antithesis to western frameworks but are complementary and complete the helping process.

INTRODUCTION

Social work education and practice has primarily been dominated by a medical model (American Psychiatric Association, 2004) worldview. Traditional social work frameworks and medical models have focussed on deficits or psychopathology and limited wellness to bio-psycho-social dimensions. In 2005, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa (TWOA) introduced a social work degree that incorporates Māori holistic models of wellbeing and practice. The degree was further developed into a four-year degree in 2016. This chapter looks at the contribution made by this bicultural social work degree to social work education and practice. This innovative and bold initiative by TWOA accords privilege to Māori and other indigenous bodies of knowledge and practice frameworks equal to those of western theories and frameworks. The bicultural degree argues that an indigenous approach to social work education and

practice frameworks are not in competition or antithesis to western frameworks but are complementary and complete the helping process.

The Genesis of Wānanga

The most significant developments in the area of Māori renaissance have been in the establishment of Māori educational institutions (Pihama, Smith, Taki, & Lee, 2004*). Kohanga Reo (pre-school Māori language 'nests') were established in the 1980s and were then followed by Kura Kaupapa Māori (Māori language immersion schools) and Whare Kura (Māori secondary schools) (ibid). The aspirations of Māori to raise their achievements in a tertiary environment have also resulted in the establishment of three Wānanga, Te Wānanga o Raukawa in Otaki in 1981, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in Te Awamutu in 1984 and Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiarangi in Whakatane in 1992 (Calman, 2012). After a hard won battle, all three Wānanga received equal status with universities, polytechnics and colleges of education in 1990 by an amendment to the Education Act 1989. Section 162 (4)(b)(iv) of the Act defines Wānanga as institutions

...characterised by teaching and research that maintains, advances, and disseminates knowledge and develops intellectual independence, and assists the application of knowledge regarding ahuatanga Māori (Māori tradition) according to tikanga Māori (Māori custom).

The beginnings of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa started in 1983 with a vision by Dr Rongo Wetere to build a Marae (Māori meeting house) on the grounds of Te Awamutu College. A place, that could be utilised to deliver Marae based learning to students who were failing or not engaging in mainstream education. This was supported by the board of trustees for Te Awamutu College, and with a group of unemployed former students of Te Awamutu College, planning and building of a centre commenced.

This initiative led to the establishment of Waipa Kokiri Arts Centre (Centre) in 1984, as a structure for participating students to be supported in continuing studies within the College.

These initial stages were not easy, as local residents opposed the building of the centre in certain areas of the town, banks refused to finance the project and the site, previously 'the dump' was the only one that they could get consent for. With the help of volunteers and a small grant from the Department of Māori Affairs, building began. The acute financial hardships faced by the Centre saw many staff mortgaging their own houses and teaching on a voluntary basis. Despite this, the Centre flourished, and training in carving commenced which then expanded to plumbing and other trades.

By 1988 campuses were opened in Hamilton and Manukau, and a waka building facility was set up in addition to other courses. TWOA lodged an application for TEI status as a polytechnic in 1988, and then received Wānanga Status in 1993 along with Te Wānanga o Raukawa and Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiarangi. TWOAs' growth continued with further campuses being established in Rotorua in 1993, Porirua in 1997, Tokoroa in 1999, and Gisborne, Palmerston North and Huntly in 2000. By 2017, TWOA delivers its programmes from 80 locations across Aotearoa New Zealand. (TWOA, 2017)

In 2000, Dr. Rongo Wetere sought to establish a Bachelor's degree in Social Work with a focus on bicultural content and a bicultural approach that reflected the reality and challenges of Aotearoa New Zealand society (Pohatu, 2009). In 2003, TWOA set up the School of Applied Social Sciences that was founded on the New Zealand Institute of Training in Social Services (acquired by TWOA in 2003). In

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