

Whakapapa

Nikki Hurst and Annabel Prescott



"We are a story that has been told for millennia and centuries, we are the present manifestation of that story. The ability to influence the future of that story is the power a young person wields, however they themselves have been influenced by the story of the past. Love that whakapapa is identified and allocated a place of importance."

A contributor to feedback on Mana Taiohi

Openings

Whakapapa as a concept is almost too large to define. It has multiple meanings and interpretations, let alone before you consider the role whakapapa plays in our personal and societal lives. It is a part of who we are, the stories we hold and tell, and how we experience the world. It can provide us with connection, identity and empathy for others. It can also provide us with challenges, sorrow and grief. It acknowledges our shared stories and experiences. It is the map of where we stand. It is who we are ourselves and alongside one another. It is crucial in our mahi alongside young people - the whakapapa of the individual themselves, the places they stand and of their tīpuna.

Ko wai au?

As two Aotearoa born wāhine we share experiences, stories and history and own our individual versions of these. Our personal whakapapa overlaps in places and is distinctly separate in others. Annabel's whakapapa is impacted by colonisation, Nikki's whakapapa is that of the coloniser.

Annabel:

I have always felt fraudulent when it comes to a kōrero about whakapapa and my own lack of knowledge and inability to complete a pepeha.

Kāore au e mōhio ko wai tōku iwi, nā te mea e whāngaihia au ki te iwi Māori.

Ko te whānau Alexander tōku whānau whāngai, i tipu ake au i Tāmaki Makaurau

Nō Te Tāmaki Makaurau a Tara ahau

Kei Taupō e noho ana

Part of colonisation was to dehumanise indigenous people and block indigenous taonga like whakapapa. So when asked to write about

what whakapapa means to youth work, I have to understand my whakapapa and a young person's whakapapa in the context of colonisation. I have to be cognisant of decolonising whakapapa for myself, my tamariki and young people that I work with.

Nikki:

Stories are important in my whānau, and I'm privileged to have been raised with the legends of my tīpuna and their deeds and doings ringing in my ears. We whakapapa back to Scotland, Ireland and England with the earliest arrivals in Aotearoa occurring just prior to te Tiriti being signed. We are firmly the coloniser.

The largest part of my maternal line arrived in the 1860's from Ireland, having fled Scotland after the final loss to the English at Culloden. As a group they settled in Pukekohe and Waiau Pā (South-South Auckland) and until recently most were farmers and market gardeners.

My son is 10th generation New Zealander and I continue to share with him the stories of his ancestors. Those who fought in the Waikato Wars, signed the petition for Women's suffrage and who started a white power group in early Franklin County. On this side I have a deep connection to what I see as my tūrangawaewae, Clarks Beach near Waiau Pā.

My father's side are more recent arrivals with stories no less interesting, but less well known. That side seem to be explorers and adventurers with few staying in one place for long. They were gold and coal miners, recipients of Queen's honours and all have petrol in their veins somehow.

I was raised by both sets of grandparents to hold and collect the stories of my tīpuna and to be my generations place for this knowledge to be protected, accrued and passed along. They grew in me a passion for the whakapapa of Aotearoa as a nation, and the impact settlers like my ancestors

have had and continue to have on our society today.

I firmly believe that knowing who you are, and where you have come from is an honour and a necessity even if (as in my case) some of it is deeply challenging.

Some pathways to understanding

From a youth development perspective, there are many ways to understand the whakapapa of young people and the impact that this has on our rangatahi in Aotearoa. Unlike many other social services, leading academics and researchers across Aotearoa see youth development and Youth Work as being underpinned by sociology and history (Beals, Foaese, Miller, Perkins & Sargent; 2018). In order to begin to understand the world of a young person we need first to clearly understand their place in society and the impact of the past on the present. Here in Aotearoa, whakapapa is the glue that binds.

Deane, Dutton and Kerekere (2019) argue that a helpful way to understand Whakapapa is through the old YDSA principle, "Youth Work is informed by the big picture". By this they mean the societal impacts on young people that have accrued over time. They also indicate that this relates to the big picture experiences of groups that young people may have membership in, for instance, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc...

Bronfenbrenner and his ecological model have always been a popular way to explore the world of a young person as are more individualised tools such as genograms (Derksen, 2010). How and why we experience our whakapapa is heavily influenced by the systems that surround us and the clear and not so clear influences on a young person.

These approaches connect to the work of Ware and Walsh-Taipata (2010) and Baxter and Caddie (2016) and the impact of pūrākau and whakatauki can have in our mahi alongside young people. Explorations of how narrative can play a part in mahi with young people has demonstrated effectiveness in relation to connection (Ware, Breheny & Forster, 2018). It's one thing to explore with a young person their broader context and the impact of historicity. But for that to be valuable, the young person needs space and agency to tell their story and to be invited to explore the stories that have come before. The above researchers show clearly how to do so, and the impact this can have for young people and those working alongside them.

For many young people, the stories and whakapapa of the groups that they identify with may be more immediately meaningful. Across time youth subcultures have emerged, grown and changed alongside our understandings of them (Woodman & Wyn, 2015). Regardless of the

specific subculture, a clear part of belonging is in knowing the whakapapa of the group, even just a little. For instance, many young people in the rainbow community will be aware of the rich and challenging history of the slow emergence of their rights over time. From these stories they may gain confidence, connection and inspiration. They may also use the mana of those who have come before them to inspire the on-going fight for full rights.

Whakapapa is a part of who we all are, the stories we own and the connections and influences we make as a result of this.

Engagement with young people and their whakapapa

We asked a small group of rangatahi Māori in Taupō, "What does whakapapa mean to you?" This was then expanded to, "When you're with an adult, how do you want them to consider your whakapapa?"

Our young people were able to articulate that they wanted whakapapa to take into consideration that whakapapa is broad, particularly in a smaller town in Aotearoa. Our young people wanted youth-workers not to be discriminatory or biased if the kōrero of their whakapapa was negative. Our young people wanted to be held as taonga, to be viewed in a way that was aspirational for their futures.

Similar stories emerged through the media from the young people demanding a compulsory Aotearoa history curriculum. These young people fought hard to show their ownership of their learning, and the powerful mana that emerges from knowing your whakapapa and that of the place where you stand. Connected to this are the multiple reports from the Office of the Children's Commissioner that indicate on-going racism experienced by many in Aotearoa, particularly in educational settings (Office of the Children's Commission, 2018). Knowing and experiencing with honesty the stories of your place is a powerful foil to less evidence based narratives.

Similarly, those working with rangatahi who whakapapa recently to other nations will need to be very aware of this and open to learning about their journey and their tīpuna. Knowledge of the variety and differences in Pacifica, across Asia and the Middle East and their experiences here in Aotearoa are invaluable, but the stories of the individuals are the taonga.

Having the skills and knowledge to understand the societal impacts of the past on the present helps our rangatahi to understand one another, irrespective of the place a person has come from. History as a concept may seem boring, but the history of a person and the connections that emerge as we co-share this space is powerful.

The wero

There is a need to own and understand our own histories and places we stand. And to see where these overlap or don't with the young people and communities that we engage with.

Returning to the context of colonisation, we need to consider as youth workers how this influences our lens when engaging with young people. Is there any deficit view of young people I could be interrupting? What can I take to supervision and who can help me?

It means that the wero is for us to keep learning. Not simply the latest tools, tips and tricks at conferences and workshops, but to find ways to understand the history of the young people we work alongside. This may be the journey of Aotearoa, but equally it may be that of a far off land. It may be the history of a movement, or it may be the stories and understandings of a place or locality.

It can be taking the time to connect to elders in our communities and support creating intergenerational bonds (Caspar, Davis, McNeill & Kellett, 2019). It can be making space for young people to lead our education in this area, a powerful way for young people to experience their own rangatiratanga.

It can support the continuation and celebration of pūrākau, and creating new liminal moments, celebrations and rites of passage with young people (Beals, 2014). It is place-making with our young people, where we ensure that we awahi the place through knowing its whakapapa too.

Thriving looks and means different things to different people. It requires growth of our capacity to sit in our discomfort if it's going differently than what we had planned. And being excited by and energised by this.

Closings

Whakapapa is a call to us all to know and own our stories. To support and create alongside young people how they will engage with their whakapapa, on multiple levels. It provides us with a deep sense of connection. It is the woven heart of all of the other principles of Mana Taiohi. None can exist without the other and all require knowing where we have stood, what deeds we have achieved and committed and what this means for us now. Whakapapa fosters connection, the heart of youth work.

Annabel Prescott provides incredible leadership of the Anamata Cafe YOSS in Taupō as well as recently joining the board of Ara Taiohi.

Nikki Hurst is a Senior Lecturer in Youth Development at Unitec and hates to be left out so is also doing lots of stuff with Ara Taiohi and Korowai Tupu, is on the board of Sticks 'n' Stones, and is chief glitter-provider for the History Zoology Dinosaur Buildosaurus Club.

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