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Review of Learning

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Master of Professional Practice

Te Kura Matatini ki Otago Capable NZ 2019

In this review of learning I will narrate an account of my early years and adolescents. During these periods I struggled within mainstream education in *Aotearoa* (New Zealand) due to learning disabilities. I will reflect on nurturing experiences in *kaupapa* (platform) *Māori* (Indigenous People) education settings, that resonated with my values. I will discuss leaving *Aotearoa* to find meaningful employment in England and following my passion for the outdoors. I will demonstrate how I turned my experience of learning disabilities into skills to support vulnerable children and young people.

I will then consider my current role at He Manu Hou (bilingual early childhood centre) Trust as a *Pākehā* (white person) manager whose practice is based on anti-oppressive, anti-racist community work practice. I will explore how consultation and seeking guidance is essential to key making decisions, for *Pākehā* workers in *Aotearoa*. And how I have intentionally developed practice that builds connections between people, *tikanga* (customs) and the *whenua* (Land). Themes in my profession and life have included, *safe spaces, exploring risk, being in nature and sustainability*; as vital to holistic and productive learning environments. I will demonstrate how my practice has developed because of trusting relationships with *kaumātua* (elder) who have steered decisions and enabled the creation of a new *Māori* language centre. Finally, I will outline the concept inquiry which commits to developing culturally safely environments and considers how to be effective as a *Pākehā* anti-racist practitioner in *Aotearoa*.

From a *Pākehā* family I am the eldest of three girls born and raised in Timaru, *Aotearoa*. I am from a kind and compassionate family; my Catholic parents were born in *Aotearoa* and are passionate about their jobs and their community. My father Paul is a second-generation business owner and a practicing podiatrist who has been involved with local sport as a player and coach. My mother Cynthia a secondary school teacher who has great rapport with teachers and students, enabling students achieve their goals. My grandmother Elma who I enjoyed visiting, would read to me and we would play cards. My grandmother with the soothing sound of her voice and her stories brought

the pleasure of reading into my world. In my early childhood years, I loved to climb a favourite tree at kindergarten where I would sit and enjoy solitude. I loved observing and *nature* from the beginning.

I entered a Catholic School System with predominately Pākehā students with optimism and I was enthused to learn. However, this faded when I did not progress academically. I was conscious of how I 'should' be progressing from observing my peers. Academic achievement was extremely important to me and I felt distressed by my situation, I had ambition to be a teacher, or a police officer. Throughout my school years I failed to reach the minimum benchmark set by the education system. Failing academically meant I could not be confident, and I had to focus on flying under the radar at school. Dominelli (Dominelli, p. 2002) discusses the privileges of those who are considered 'us' and deemed to 'belong' in comparison to the 'other' stating that:

'Othering' is an important aspect of the process of oppression. 'Othering' involves constructing an individual or group as the 'other' that is, as someone who is excluded from the normal hierarchies of the power and labelled inferior... Dominelli (2002, p. 18).

Similarly, I was consciously aware that I had transitioned from a young girl instilled with optimism to finding myself 'othered' in the education system. This was a significant realisation in my life. From Primary School onwards, I promised to remember my peers who were also being dragged through the education system, I saw their powerlessness and understood why they had to withdraw to survive. This has heightened my awareness of how students can experience mainstream as oppressive practices and I have been critically aware of the power dynamics operating in the education system. I felt a great deal of shame for attending classes that students referred to as "cabbages classes".

When forming oppressive relationships, people engage in strategic decisions that exclude certain groups or individuals from formally and legitimately accessing power and resources (Dominelli, 2002, p. 8).

I witnessed what I considered unfair disparities between resourcing for mainstream students who were achieving and noticed they were predominately middle class Pākehā. In contrast were the so called “cabbages classes”, who taught by retired nuns who volunteered their time. The students who needed the additional support appeared to come from mostly working-class background and or had learning disabilities. *Te Reo Māori* (Māori language) was considered an expensive resource, discouraged by teachers as an option and only reserved for a minority of Māori students.

In secondary school my self-esteem continued plummet as I saw achievement in the classroom as essential to having a future. Having to hide negative emotions reduced my energy and desire to build friendships, because I could not explain my difficulties to peers. I considered myself to be intelligent and I felt that the school system disregarding the needs of the students who did not fit a narrow student profile. I saw many students with learning disabilities left to drift and struggle. I continued to seek help and I was assessed by a psychologist at fourteen years of age and diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder and an ‘non-specific learning disability’. The diagnosis failed to offer any strategies that were able to improve my situation.

I joined the school group *Ka Awatea* (the new dawn) Kapa Haka (cultural performing group), which was tutored by Matua Dan DeHar. In my youth the positive role models that I remember were Māori. I saw Matua Dan’s leadership and *manaakitanga* (support, kindness) in the community and it made a lasting impression on me. I enjoyed practicing and performing, it was a healthy release for me as a student who struggled to engage meaningfully. Our kapa group attended Manu Korero the national speech competition. Being able to engage in kapa haka and identify as a group member gave me a sense of purpose and focus and I could withstand my own uncomfortableness of being Pākehā in a Māori group. Being the minority was not a worry for me, (a non-Māori in Māori settings) because I felt like I was in the minority at school with my learning disabilities. I had therefore, built some tolerance to being outside of my comfort zone.

During the school holidays I went to various marae for several weeklong *noho* (live in's). These *wānanga* (forums) were for girls who had low self-esteem. Kapa haka and other activities were experienced in an intergenerational group of women, who all enjoyed connecting. I recalled a life changing *wānanga* where I experienced feeling optimism and hopefulness. Being able to express a range of emotions as we sung *waiata* (songs) and learnt chants enabled me to connect and engage and it had lasting positive effects. I felt belonging within the group, due to being vulnerable and a young woman. I recognised I was not Māori, but I valued the connection of tikanga like manaakitanga and *whanaungatanga* (Kinship). I could see how these could be valuable to any education setting but they were not embraced, this could have been because the Pākehā teachers had little knowledge of Te Ao Māori.

The personal experience of a learning disability has helped me recognise oppression. I noticed racism at school, even though it was not spoken about. I generally recognised how students acted when they were being oppressed within society and how they reacted in various ways to the pressure. While I did not experience racism, I did relate to feeling outside the dominant group. It would have been useful to have a youth worker to support me as I developed my world view of what it means to be Pākehā and anti-racist.

I could connect my ethnicity to colonialism which I had learnt about at the marae. I could see Pākehā people acting superior to Māori and people with less power at school. I was frustrated as I did not have the skills to advocate for others and challenge these issues. In South Africa Biko (1978), described the need to defeat the problem of 'superiority' and I agree that this is an issue that continues today which is summarised by Ryde. "*More recently this colonization has been a cultural one in which the colonizer makes use of political and economic pressure. Much of this has been achieved by asserting a superiority of the 'white race'* (p. 54). (Ryde, 2009, p. 54).

At one point I was asked by a Pākehā teacher “when will you be leaving school?” The school didn’t have any significant reason to ask me to leave, other than I was not engaging well. My parents supported me to research other options and my decision to stay in school as there were no suitable opportunities with my learning issues. I found that the teachers were unaware of the pressure they put on students who didn’t fit the stereotype of a “good student”. The Pākehā teachers were unconscious to their own privilege, McIntosh (1989) discusses how white people are not taught to see their own privilege, she describes the ‘invisible knapsack’ as a package of unearned assets at white people disposal.

Going into tertiary education I did consider Te Reo Māori studies or outdoor education. The school’s only option for learning Te Reo was by correspondence and I applied to the school but was denied due to not being a Māori student therefore, I didn’t have the foundation knowledge to apply at tertiary level. Studying outdoor education was a good option as it enabled adventures, I camped in my one-person tent for twenty weeks per year, over a two-year period. Living with students who held alternative values, a range of learning styles and were committed environmentalists, helped me accept myself within a diverse group of learners.

I found my passion for kayaking, the mountains and solo hitchhiking trips around the country. Epic student expeditions in the *Aoraki* (Mt Cook) mountain region, developed a great respect for the mountains and the outdoor. Following these experiences, I reflected on my capabilities and my judgement of risk assessment. I am confident to raise concerns stay true to my values even if it is not a popular view. I failed the outdoor course when my literacy obstructed the paperwork component which left me feeling completely gutted. By this point I was firm in my view education needed to be holistic and offer pathways forward, especially for vulnerable people.

Following the course, I applied to the New Zealand Army, Navy and the Ambulance service, but again I was rejected, I was unable to gain meaningful employment in Aotearoa. The best employment opportunity I could achieve was to manage a petrol station, which didn't feel right in terms of me striving for my potential. I felt going overseas and saving for a house, were my best options. My partner Andrew, a Pākehā young man from Timaru was coaching and playing cricket in Oxfordshire and I was excited to leave New Zealand and move to England in 2002 at 21 years I saw this as a fresh start.

I was employed by Oxfordshire County Council and had several significant employment positions over a ten years period. While I was working, I was being guided by an experienced youth worker Mark Dewhurst. My employment involved working with children and young people lived who lived in homeless shelters and poor housing estates and a mixture of backgrounds. Various roles included; drug and alcohol key worker, support teacher and outdoor educator. I could relate to the young people struggles and I recognised how powerless they were over their situations. I reflected on education for vulnerable students and recognised the importance of trustworthy relationships that Mark demonstrated. I had empathy and genuinely liked the students and noticed their good qualities. I started to develop practical skills set for working alongside clients with trauma. This was around my body language and tone of voice, ensuring a calm setting was essential for safety. I enjoyed taking young people out of their comfort zones and developing their understanding of *risk* and building relationships of *trust*.

I started to develop diagnostic skills to understand power dynamics in groups and with colleagues. I did unsuccessfully challenge an older male colleague regarding inappropriate comments. This was a significant life lesson in which I failed to address my frustrations or seek guidance. My mismanagement of the situation created a stressful period of my working life that highlighted my

lack of maturity for handling conflict in the workplace. While my colleague was inappropriate, I needed a range of constructive options to resolve the conflict.

I was also involved as a volunteer coach. Experienced coach Rob Yates supported my progression as a white-water kayaker. The British Canoe Union offered an awards pathway and after four years paddling, I gained the advanced leadership award for white-water kayaking in the French Alps. I was able to achieve another leadership award for canoeing. Following this I support several eight-day expeditions to Norway, Sweden and France in a leadership capacity. Paddling in Britain and Europe and working in the outdoors with Rob and Mark was a major focus of my life between 2003-2010. I developed significantly over this period both mentally and emotionally, I was able to design, deliver and support staff and vulnerable young people in a wide scope of educational and wilderness settings.

The council developed new Early Intervention Hubs and I was ready for the challenge of being part of a new organisation. I was motivated and enthusiastic to work in a multi-professional team to support children, families and education providers. The hub was managed by social workers and the service was run similar to social work teams, we took turns to operate a duty desk and pupil referrals. I did have concerns for the support workers who had not engaged in professional training. I recognised the *risk* of having untrained workers with complex caseloads, but there were experienced practitioners available to support practitioners. Each practitioner had appointments and cancellations were common. The aim was for practitioners to close cases quickly, but often on-going support was required. The young people faced multiple oppressions, so adventures and feeding young people meant I had a good inroad to relationships as a youth worker.

The hubs were being affective but were eventually closed through government funding-cuts. The closure affected the wellbeing of the staff and young people. This concreated my view that any organisation that I became involved with, had to be capable of becoming reliable and *sustainable*.

The council, as my employer offered to support me to study at degree level. They paid for my fees and attendance time at college one day per week for four years, and I studied in my weekends. Ruskin College has strong links to the working-class education and the trade unions. Each year I studied with a group of students who were diverse age, gender, race, class and disability. Students were Black, White, British Muslim and, some had come to England as refuges.

The college tutors were excellent group facilitators, they were robust in challenging our views and attitudes within a *safe space*. We discussed anti-oppressive practice and conversation included class, race, disability and sexuality. We discussed the impact of oppression on our lives, the communities and young people we worked with. I felt more connection to the Black students who I shared tutorials and assignment tasks, I associated this to my past connections as a non-Māori person in Māori settings. One tutor Steph Green has been critically influential supporting my research into anti-racism. Now I can reflect and identify subtle forms of racism within my own actions and be reflexive in my actions, I am committed to the lifelong anti-racism journey. 'Cycle of White Awareness' Ryde's (2009) is a model that supported white people to understand the stages that white people experience as they develop their awareness to developing effective intercultural practice. Often white people are locked in the areas of guilt and shame and resist therefore, becoming stuck. It is a useful a useful model in my practice as a manager because it underpinned with anti-racism theory and community work ethics.

My illiteracy was limited when I began to study, and I continually sought new resources to develop my abilities. I hired several study skills tutors through the disabled student support allowance available in England. It was empowering to recruit and employ tutors of my choice. After six tutors, I hired a life coach and did several coaching programmes that gave me the tools to rebuild my confidence. I gave birth to my first son a week after I handed in my dissertation and baby Otis came to my graduation at eight weeks old. I graduated in 2012 with a First-Class Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Youth and Community Work and I had gained awards for the academic prize, and another for supporting students. At the end of my maternity leave I was pregnant with Lennox, after thirteen years in Oxfordshire Andrew and I decided it was time to return to Aotearoa to raise our children.

Before I arrived back to Aotearoa, there was a Timaru community hui held in 2013 which was well attended by whānau and kaumātua from the area. The decision was made to establish a bilingual early childhood centre. Te Kohanga Reo (Māori medium early childhood) had ended more than ten years previously in the local area the whānau said they wanted a more inclusive service where they could have the best of *Te Ao Māori* (the Māori world) and the Pākehā world. The Ministry of Education (MOE) agreed and the *He Manu Hou* (Bilingual Early Childhood Centre) Trust was established. Unfortunately, the whānau who established the trust left the area and the kaupapa sat untouched for the next two years.

I arrived back to Timaru and I was desperate for my kids to attend *Te Kohanga Reo* but the three in the area had closed more than ten years ago. I attended several mainstream playgroups and I was shocked by the monoculture and lack of inclusivity. I also attend several *Te Reo* Māori playgroups, which were inspiring but only operated about eight hours per month. I was needing a teacher lead service, open at least thirty hours per week so I could leave my *tamariki* (children) in care, in a culturally safe learning environment and return to work.

Returning to work I had some criteria for employment, I was not willing to work in social work services for children, mental health, Police or for the church. I believed in the early intervention approach, rather than a job earning money from the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff services. I wanted an employer who was responsive to the community and not tied to the dogma of large historical institutions.

As there were limited employment opportunities in Timaru, I volunteered to build relationships with a local organisation and young people. I was shocked by staff's limited understanding of ethics in youth work and their tokenistic attitudes towards the young people. I was highly motivated by my anti-racism research, but I did not have the confidence or the connections to set-up a professional development consultation business. I had just moved back to Aotearoa and I had two babies with no money for childcare. I concluded that volunteering was the best option and working around my tamariki. I could see the benefits for the community to have a culturally *safe space* and to learn Te Reo and support the tamariki and whānau.

In 2015 I had finally made the decision to drive the set-up phase for He Manu Hou (HMH). I debated for months if it was *tika* (right), for me as a Pākehā practitioner to take on the position of project manager for HMH forward. Beko (1978) an anti-racism theorist said that white people should solely focus on the removal of white racism, which I agreed with. However, there was no platform for anti-racist work in Timaru with white people. I saw HMH as an opportunity to revive a positive community space and offer culturally safe employment and education. I felt there was an argument to undertake the project managers role as I would predominately volunteer, and the key decisions had already been made by kaumātua. I saw my role to transition the kaumātua ideas to realities and what I thought might be a six-month start-up turned into three years project.

I started the process, but the project became stuck, I could not progress forward or back, I was really concerned I had made a bad decision for the community. After a long uncomfortable period by chance I met kaumātua Whaea *Maria who offered a nurturing space and guidance to navigate a path forward. The crucial decision maker and supporter for the project has been Matua *George local businessperson who is my line manager. Matua *George and I met weekly to discuss the application of Tikanga, business and the approach needed for the successful launch of HMH.

Matua *George and I then recruited the HMH Board of Trustees (BoT). The BoT knowledge included; cultural, accounting, business, local and legal skillsets. Chartered accountant *Ben and I worked to apply set up the Not-For-Profit and raised the goal amount of \$230,000 to open. Working with the BoT, I managed the appointment process and employment contracts, for the July 2018 opening. The budget endured the set-up phase largely due to the generosity of kaumātua, the BoT, my own contribution and work with Timaru Corrections, which is estimated to be 3000 volunteer hours. The HMH opening journey was personally demanding and only possible because my husband Andrew support and my parents and sisters supported with additional childcare.

HMH opened the service with Head Teacher Whaea Missy and Senior Teacher Whaea Nicki, three tamariki and my part-time manage role. Now we have 4.5 full time equivalent teachers and a management team of 1.5. Meaning we started with 95 hours of paid employment per week and now finance the employment of a minimum of 250 hours per week. We currently offer regular employment for 10 people and have 32 tamariki enrolled, with a turnover that cover our basic costs.

During the set-up phase I had a number of long waits and I would remind myself to 'sit with uncomfortableness' until the right 'tika' solution or outcome was been found. I consciously worked to manage my emotions and held faith that the path forward would eventuate. I also learnt to move

before I felt ready, in order to keep the momentum. It was uncomfortable and demanding having to figure out each step of the MOE licencing process, I learnt how to work under pressure for months at a time and my confidence developed as a result.

The project was exceptionally supported by Matua *James and *Te Puni Kōkiri*, (TPK) in the set-up phase and for the kaiako wages for first twelve weeks. The dialog with Matua *James was another excellent mentor with his background in education he understood all the challenges and complexities, we faced as a new Māori education provider. Partnering with TPK a Māori organisation, enables us to keep building our vision for sustainable Te Reo education growth in the area. I personally learnt to manage stressful elements of a lean start-ups and tight management of cashflow, essential for managing the budget particularly for wages. I reduced the *risk* to cashflow by volunteering 20 hours per week for six months this saved on the relief teaching and administration budgets. Outside of my area of expertise I set-up the office and unfortunately, the technology budget was minimal, and the quality of equipment did not meet the needs of the teachers. As the budget has permitted the staff team now includes skilled administrators, appropriate technology systems and procedures.

HMH is nestled in the beautiful grounds of *Te Aitarakihi Trust* (TAT) Multicultural Centre. Te Aitarakihi operates with all the *tikanga* (lore) and buildings which you would see at a marae however, it is referred to as a 'multicultural centre'. Creating a home away from home, for North Island Māori and a place to hold *tangi* (funerals). Before HMH opened the whole complex was being used regularly for 20 hours per month and the purposes of the He Manu Hou kaupapa has been to breathe new life into the multicultural centre. The multicultural centre does not receive any regular funding, just the minimal rental income and grants on occasions.

I became involved with TAT so that my fundraising knowledge could be utilised. I had recognised the financial risk TAT was under, receiving no regular funding. I currently sit on the TAT BOT; I recently drafted the trusts application to TPK under the guidance of Matua *James for a 16-week strategic planning process for TAT. I supported the recruitment of a highly skilled strategic planner Aroha Pedersen who had an in-depth understanding of Tikanga and Te Reo. My role will include communicating the strategic planner and the funder with the intention to support the transition of the project into the next phase. I am also a volunteer committee member of Kā Toi Māori o Aoraki, a local trust who organise the Kapa Haka events throughout the year, my role is to support the fundraising committee.

HMH has undertaken a consultation process within the first year reviewing our philosophy, policy, and curriculum focus to build the *sustainability* of the centre. Head Teacher Whaea Missy and I met with various sub-groups with the BOT, *kaiako* (teacher) and whānau, the theme that emerged was *whanaungatanga* (respectful, trusting relationships). Whanaungatanga is focus of the teaching curriculum and the business model. As a robust community organisation whānau are involved at all levels of decision-making which is consistent to a whānau ora (holistic whānau wellbeing) approach. We involve whānau in activities outside of opening hours to build their sense of identity as a valued HMH whānau member.

Whānau and MOE have noted the welcoming atmosphere and respectful communication, meaning HMH is a *safe space* for all to enjoy. We ensure that the *nature* environment is available for tamariki make connections and they move freely between indoor and outdoor areas. The curriculum and business framework underpinning the centre have been engineered for *sustainability* and we have the capacity to be responsiveness to whānau needs. HMH is well set-up for future opportunities to diversify our service. As we have strong foundations which can accommodate other structures, we are looking for our next opportunity and researching possibilities.

Identifying a network of kaumātua and professionals who are willing to offer guidance has been a key development in my practice. I recognised my need for a *safe space*, dialog and guidance to navigate tikanga and values linking them to theory and practice. I have been privileged through kaumātua mentoring to receive encouragement experience trusting relationships that have extended my understanding of community work.

Organisation change is not a comfortable process and many people had to be consulted which was challenging. I didn't always cope well with criticism and it knocked my confidence at times. I am learning to manage my emotions more effectively and to hear critical comments. In previous employment I was not able to resolve conflict effectively. This time by seeking guidance I was able to develop new strategies with kaumātua to be more affective in my practice. Kaumātua wisely pointed out poor management of my emotions would have derailed the project.

Ensuring that *tikanga* and cultural values are integral to the decision-making process was key. I would educate myself by reading and following relevant online conversations. Having collected knowledge from my own resources I could then communicate with kaumātua on a deeper level. Carrying out my own research as a first step to deepening understanding of *tikanga*, is important to me, as it enabled dialog that was effective for understanding issues and discuss values and priorities.

Kaumātua made the key decisions, were willing to make time for the project, as they could hear the progression and see the impact they were having. I believe they made their time available because they wanted to nurture kaupapa Māori early childhood and its potential to support Te Reo within the local community. I recognised that my access to kaumātua was a privilege, and I did not take for granted.

I found small ways to foster *manaakitanga* by bringing lunch or a coffee to our hui, as sharing kai is a great aspect of tikanga and building relationships. Expressing gratitude has also been essential for me as I recognise how key the supporters are to this process and their guidance has protected the kaupapa to keep growing. These conversations with kaumātua have educated me, to transitioned from an individual mindset to a collective approach. I have reflected upon this development as a significant evolution towards inclusive Māori practice which is necessary for workers in Aotearoa. Connections between my practice and tikanga have enabled *trusting relationships* and further dialog for future visions and opportunities that were not previously possible.

Values not only shaped our thoughts and feelings but also our actions. Therefore, if we are not aware of what values are influencing these three important dimensions of our practice, we are largely working in the dark ... (Thompson & Thompson, 2008, p. 47).

As a worker who is wanting to develop my understanding of bicultural practice, I can identify time with kaumātua as a significant phase in understanding values that are impacting my thought and actions. This is essential to working in Aotearoa, and I can see this will lead to deepening levels of understanding, going forward. I am currently questioning if the term 'bicultural practice' is an effective approach to create change? I have more experience with anti-racist practice than bicultural, which is not a term that is familiar to me. Using anti-racism practice, I try to consider my power in the situation. During hui, I internally question if my input is required, I do not participate in discussion regarding cultural matters which is for Māori to discuss and decide, as Pākehā I am aware when other Pākehā unconsciously take up space.

As a manager I consciously ensure the head teacher and the kaiako are making decisions, I respect their learning journey in this process, and ensure they have the agency to develop the centre. I have needed to arrange cultural events like blessings, and I managed these times by seeking guidance

from kaumātua as to what needs to happen, I will arrange practicalities. However, I will refer conversations to the head teacher or kaumātua if I feel I would be crossing a boundary in decision making.

I have recognised the historical impact of colonialism and how that relates to me being a Pākehā community work practitioner who is part of the dominant group. I need to continually develop, with caution and awareness of the ways that Pākehā continue to racially oppress Māori. I am aware of the power that I hold as manager and look to equalise that power, so I am approachable and build *trusting* relationships with employees and stakeholders. My curious nature and passion for fairness has ensured I remain motivated to develop inclusive bicultural practices and recognise when I have made mistakes. I now comprehend the unique place of mana whenua and *tangata whenua* (people of the land) as key stakeholders within all services in Aotearoa, which I feel was not obvious growing up in Aotearoa.

My previous employment focused on adolescents however; I felt the shift to engage with babies and tamariki was justified. I attended several talks by a well-known New Zealand Child Educator Nathan Mikaere Wallis who spoke about the brain plasticity in children, trauma and attachment. These helped me connect my knowledge of working in England to make links to the context of Aotearoa. Transforming previous experiences of early intervention and seeing its strengths and weaknesses has driven me to ensure that HMH is *sustainable*. HMH is a whānau focused centre with most staff being Māori they are confident in their cultural identity and making decision within a *kaupapa* (theme) Māori setting.

A significant development in my career has been to manage employment appointments, kaiako are self-managing and have strong respectful relationships. I have enabled *sustainable* employment

and consistent opening hours at the centre. I am responsive to requests of support from staff and whānau and have implemented a wide range of systems improvements, like reviews and feedback. HMH is a holistic wrap-around model of care that mirrors the values of *Māoritanga* (Māori culture) that I learnt about as a young person when I stayed on the marae. My marae experiences happened at critical points and have inspired me to ensure that others can also engage with these experiences. Provisioning Māori educational experiences for *tamariki* (children) and whānau means reaching people at critical points with lifelong benefits that strengthen our community. My passion to take action to support Māori education comes from my own experience of feeling vulnerable as a young person. It was how I found hope and a sense of who I was, it opened doors for me to have other life experiences.

The research will come from my position as a Pākehā Community Work Practitioner who wants to unpack my professional identity in Aotearoa. I am committed to developing my anti-oppressive practice as a *kaiwhakahaere* (manager), and board member in biracial settings. I am aware that as a new service and my role as *kaiwhakahaere*, anti-oppressive practice can have a significant impact on the wellbeing of the workplace.

I want to ensure that my practice is ethical, and I am working for the benefit the Māori community or resign and find a position where I can be better positioned to support anti-racism education. I intend to learn about *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (Treaty between the Māori Chiefs and British Crown) as it is a significant historical event that has shaped Aotearoa. I will also explore the way that racial oppression occurs in the context of Aotearoa, which will further develop my anti-racist values. I intend to contact academics and activists who are also passionate about anti-racism, filling knowledge gaps.

I will also better understand the types of social justice opportunities that could be created in the area. Within my locality there are several opportunities being discussed that could benefit from a research-based inquiry. Master level research will build my confidence, equipping me to safely navigate the complexities within Te Ao Māori and Te Ao Pākehā. Following the masters, I intend to research at doctorate level identifying ways to engage with anti-racism education.

*Names have been changed for privacy reasons

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