

PRESENTATION TITLE: The nuance of ‘family’ – who knew ‘family’ was such a loaded term?

ABSTRACT

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, pre-colonial Māori (indigenous) societies (*iwi* – kin-based tribal groups) situated themselves in a symbiotic relationship between place (environment) and people, at individual and collective (*whānau* – the core primary social and intergenerational familial unit) levels. The processes of *raupatu* (land confiscation and alienation leading to a loss of traditional economies), sharply followed by other mechanisms of colonisation such as religious conversion and introduction of a compulsory colonial education and health systems with assimilative agendas, disrupted this symbiosis. The social organising principles and ‘lore’ such as *whakapapa*, *tapu*, *noa* and *mana* which traditionally promoted this symbiosis between people and environment (and, between individuals within the collective kinship group of *whānau*) were also disrupted by these colonial mechanisms. Fast-forward 250 years from when the English Captain, James Cook first began mapping the contours of Aotearoa/New Zealand, and we see the impacts of intergenerational trauma amongst Māori manifested in complex ways at the core of the primary social and intergenerational familial unit – *whānau*. Māori academics and leaders have identified *whānau* as *the* critical space for transformative praxis, the site where we can start to re-instate indigenous ‘lore’ and where we can promote symbiosis between individual, *whānau*, the intergenerational kin-group and, place. All of this works toward a philosophy of *Whānau Ora* – or, symbiosis between people and place.

Whānau Ora is not easily translated into English, Māori would cringe if you called it ‘family-wellbeing’ – simply because it is more, much more than this. Nor is it well understood across policy-makers and health and education practitioners. In fact, over the last 20 years we have seen *Whānau Ora* emerge as a form of an underground ‘family-centred’ practice (used by Māori health providers and practitioners who were influenced by Māori models of health and wellbeing), to become a politically endorsed and funded model of practice, policy, outcome and philosophy operationalised across health, education and social services. The shift of *Whānau Ora* to the political spotlight also paralleled my Doctoral and Post-Doctoral research which aimed to which examined the experiences of Māori *whānau* raising Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and tells two stories. One story gives stage to the rich-narratives of *whānau*-experience and the second canvasses how a newly formed Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Programme described themselves and grappled with how to operationalise an approach which would deliver equitable outcomes for Māori. The International Consensus statement provides much needed structure and guidance to nations like Aotearoa/New Zealand; however, there are still lessons to explore and learn. In this presentation I explore how we must consider the ‘nuance of context’ when using a document like the International Consensus Statement, and gives an example of how the use of a simple term like ‘family’ can be potentially ‘loaded’ with connotations which are not universally shared.