# Transition into social work practice:
## Experiences of newly qualified Māori social workers

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## ABSTRACT

**INTRODUCTION:** Research is scarce about the experiences of newly qualified social work students, as they transition into the workplace after a 4-year Bachelor of Social Work degree in Aotearoa New Zealand. There has been little interest in the spaces where a student and beginning practitioner navigate the complexities of social work theory and actual social work practice. Additionally, research into the experiences of newly qualified Māori social workers (NQMSWs) is also rare. This research is aimed at capturing the transitional experiences of NQMSWs from the Bachelor of Social Work at Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology (Bachelor of Social Work Te Tohu Paetahi Tū Tāngata) as they embark on social work practice.

**METHODS:** Māori graduates of the Bachelor of Social Work Te Tohu Paetahi Tū Tāngata were invited to engage in one-to-one interviews, in a qualitative research study underpinned by the values of Kaupapa Māori Research that highlighted a cultural nuance of the graduates' first experiences of being independent practitioners.

**CONCLUSION:** Findings include the alignment of whakawhanaungatanga and manaakitanga which underpin the sense of safety that the NQMSWs expressed as supportive for this transition. Additionally, these Māori concepts were embedded during the time of their studies in the Bachelor of Social Work Te Tohu Paetahi Tū Tāngata, and provided a transitional space that encouraged and propelled them to seek those types of relational skills of practice when engaging with clients in their everyday mahi (work).

**Keywords:** Newly qualified Māori social workers, transition, whakawhanaungatanga, manaakitanga, tuākana/teina

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the beginning of social care has its whakapapa ties linking to tangata whenua and iwi structures, within pre-colonial times. During this time Māori had a robust and flourishing system of social guardianship and support that encompassed whānau, hapū and iwi (Kingi, 2005). Moreover, throughout the colonial process of British settlers migrating to Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori cultural practices including those related to social care were often oppressed, and Eurocentric ideologies were privileged (Pihama, 2019). Te Tiriti o Waitangi was eventually signed between 1840–1844 constituting a broad statement of principles linked to an exchange of promises between British officials and Māori chiefs who made a political covenant to create a nation-state, and to build a government (Taiuru, 2020). Additionally, this founding ideology creates a base for civil government to protect and acknowledge Māori rights and

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interests. It is often argued that Te Tiriti o Waitangi has influenced and shaped the way in which social work is provided throughout Aotearoa New Zealand (Beddoe et al., 2018).

A key issue that impacted the way in which social work developed in Aotearoa New Zealand relates to the late emergence of formal social work, linked to the first formal qualification in this profession being established post-World War II in 1949, with the founding of the School of Social Science at the University College of Victoria in Wellington (Nash, 1998). Social work in Aotearoa grew out of a welfare state that was ambivalent about the role a social worker should play, alongside being developed within two different cultural contexts. This included the tensions that exists between them (Staniforth, 2010). When it comes to social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand, this sits within the development of social work which is similar to other countries (Beddoe et al., 2018).

In 1998, the programme for the Waiariki Bachelor of Applied Social Science (Social Work) was developed for ākonga in the Bay of Plenty. In 2016, the Bachelor of Social Work Te Tohu Paetahi Tū Tāngata was implemented by Waiariki Institute of Technology in response to the requirements of the Social Workers Registration Board and to what was essential for accreditation and service delivery of education in terms of changing from a 3- to a 4-year degree (Department of Education, Social Science and Languages, 2016). Additionally, Waiariki merged with the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic in 2016, and was renamed Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology. In 2023, there remains a strong focus on culturally appropriate, fundamental theory and praxis learning opportunities for social work ākonga that incorporates valuing Indigenous learning in the Bachelor of Social Work Te Tohu Paetahi Tū Tāngata. These understandings are founded on biculturalism that supports the development of both Māori and other cultural worldviews facilitating and enriching the development of a beginning

social work practitioners' identity. The Bachelor of Social Work Te Tohu Paetahi Tū Tāngata, unlike most programmes in Aotearoa, has 60 credits (four courses over 2 years) of te reo Māori and 45 credits (three courses: Year 1, 2 and 3) of specific learning linked to social work practice with Māori clients. This links to the strong bicultural focus of the degree that in part was a response to the original designers who wanted to acknowledge the high percentage of Māori living and working in the Bay of Plenty.

There have been no specific studies done for Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology for NQMSW experiences of practice, beyond holding information on graduate destinations on a yearly basis. According to Hunt et al. (2016), readiness of newly qualified social workers in Aotearoa is a topic that highlights the challenges of new practitioners as they develop their practice and construct their identity across a space of diverse agency service provisions and fields of practice when working in the community. Māori social workers integrate their culture into their practice, according to Hollis-English (2015). Therefore, identity, values and beliefs are incorporated across the transitional spaces of personal and professional, highlighting the conduit of work, home, and the community. Social work practice does not happen in a vacuum and Laming (2009) described the complexity of managing risk and working autonomously through critical reflection and evaluation, which has an added layer of public and media scrutiny, as part of the everyday experience of the new graduate.

Newly qualified social workers are viewed as being novices in, and yet untested within, the profession of social work, and the first professional employment experience is far from the guided and protected space of the educational institution, with field educators and lecturers close at hand (Franklin, 2011; Hay et al., 2012; Hunt et al., 2016). This underpins the rationale for this research to understand what this experience is like for

a NQMSW in contemporary social work that is being delivered in the current social and political climate and what learning and practices from the Bachelor of Social Work Te Tohu Paetahi Tū Tāngata has helped this transition into practice.

## Methodology

This research employed a qualitative research design and was underpinned by Kaupapa Māori theory capturing an authentic experience of being Māori and being a NQMSW in what is still considered as a western oriented system of social services. The employment of Kaupapa Māori theory in this research embraced the participants in a space aligning with te ao Māori and a Māori way of knowing placing the participants as creators of their own knowledge and privileging their voice above other aspects of research which is often oppressed in a western paradigm. This methodology highlights the legitimisation of Māori worldviews and firmly asserts the eclectic nature of Kaupapa Māori Theory as welcoming and affirming to other methodologies (Lipsham, 2020; Pihama, 2001; Smith, 1997). A lens and the tools of pūrākau were employed through story-telling and Māori narratives supporting the theoretical gaze of Kaupapa Māori theory where a critical theory edge of rangahau was important. Pūrākau is an ancient form of transmitting knowledge to create shared knowledge and therefore identity (Cherrington, 2003; Lee, 2009; Stansfield, 2020). The telling of stories about experiences of NQMSWs provided a space for critical reflection which is a core element of social work practice (Lipsham, 2020). Moreover, Kaupapa Māori theory allowed for an exploration of te ao Māori to interpret and analyse findings of this research through a lens of culture that privileges a Māori way of knowing the world as authentic and robust.

## Method

Santana Williams, a recent graduate of the Bachelor of Social Work Te Tohu Paetahi

Tū Tāngata in 2023 and co-researcher, contacted six Māori graduates of the Bachelor of Social Work Te Tohu Paetahi Tū Tāngata. Santana conducted the kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) interviews with the oversight of the main researcher. A general set of semi-structured questions were used to elicit kōrero (discussion) from the participants during the interviews in a relaxed and informal manner and were recorded for the purposes of transcribing them as data for the research. The recordings were transcribed verbatim. The vignettes provided in this article are samples directly from the transcripts. Both researchers collaborated in the analysis of the transcripts and field notes taken by Santana during the interviews.

## Analysis

The experiential orientation of thematic analysis points to data that aligns with the thoughts, feeling and actions of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This is important to the understanding of how Kaupapa Māori Theory and pūrākau becomes a vital tool in this research. The participants were NQMSWs and therefore to capture the nuances of how they developed their identity through this transition into social work practice and being Māori were highlighted in the stories of their experiences and their point of view of the first year of their practice. Common words, thoughts, Māori concepts, and understandings created patterns across the data. Additionally, unique words, thoughts, Māori concepts, and understandings produced more individual experiences and therefore different data. Both approaches when coded and themed, supported identification of what is in the data in terms of meaning and creates a space for interpretation. Kaupapa Māori theory was employed to underpin te ao Māori concepts in the kōrero of the participants privileging their knowledge or pūrākau as legitimate.

Pūrākau or storytelling has long been a tool used by Māori to pass down

traditional narratives of philosophical and cultural understanding. According to Lee (2009), this te ao Māori context aligns with how Māori identify themselves both historically and in contemporary times, and privileges Māori knowledge as legitimate. The kōrero of the participants is privileged as their authentic experience without the need to validate this through isolable units of measurement. Instead, their reoccurring kupu (words) and concepts from the data held cultural meaning when pūrākau was the lens that the discussion was shone through and then interpreted by the researchers.

The research identified that all the participants worked in social work practice in the contemporary social and political space that Aotearoa New Zealand is currently experiencing by supporting whānau and extended whānau with their individual or collective social circumstances. This comprised of social work within the whānau across the lifespan; disability; family harm; mental health and wellbeing, alcohol and addiction services and social housing, although this is not an exhaustive list. Five out of six NQMSWs were fully registered with the Social Workers Registration Board supported by their agencies through payments for an Annual Practising Certificate at the time of this research. Most agencies had other registered professional services including mental health teams, registered nurses, occupational therapists and cultural advisors.

This research wanted to assess the social work models used in the agencies and encountered by the NQMSWs as part of their everyday mahi (work). Bachelor of Social Work Te Tohu Paetahi Tū Tāngata has a strong focus on practising with Māori and includes 2 years of learning te reo Māori and 3 years of understanding Te Tiriti o Waitangi and practising social work with Māori. Additionally, the use of Māori models of health and wellbeing were prominent alongside humanistic approaches to working with whānau.

Te Whare Tapa Whā has always been something that we utilise, within our whānau that we work with … as soon as you pull out a blank piece of paper, draw 4 squares, identify the different areas of Te Whare Tapa Whā they know what it is … I give a whānau a blank piece of paper and say … do you want to work on your Te Whare Tapa Whā today? They can do a whole page of Te Whare Tapa Whā which is really good … I think Kaupapa Māori is prominent everywhere in our organisation. I often reflect on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and often when, within Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs you can't really excel to the next level until, the first level has been accomplished … a lot of people are still sitting in basic needs … they don't have food and shelter. (Participant 2)

Well, let's face it the main one would be Te Whare Tapa Whā, that's well ingrained … we look at the whānau, the hinengaro, tinana and wairua, so anything that's impacting those or how we can strengthen that … we use strength-based models. (Participant 4)

I will always use Te Whare Tapa Whā, always! Because it is holistic, simple and I don't have to remember all parts of the model, people are familiar with it, so this is what I use in most of my practice. It's a great model to use as it can be utilised with varying cultures, which is important within the community because practitioners are engaging with many different cultures. We do the violence wheel; we do the self-care wheel and that just helps them to understand where they are. So yeah, you don't often see models until it comes to a space where you are explaining things, if that makes sense. You barely see it, it's a natural thing. (Participant 5)

It is a Kaupapa Māori organisation, without having to think about how you are practicing Kaupapa Māori it is just naturally happening…we draw on

pūrākau with our programmes with our workshops, so everything that we deliver from here has a purpose and a reason and the intension is drawn from mātauranga from way back … being Māori and working with Māori, working in a Māori realm of thinking. (Participant 6).

The Bachelor of Social Work is a 4-year degree full time with 480 credits, 16 semesters and 28 courses. During this journey of study, the NQMSWs had explored their core values, and what experiences had created them. Now that they were practising in the community, what comes into sharp focus linked to the realisation that they have a strong sense of who they are and how this influences their practice.

The learning that came from the Bachelor of Social Work was about me. It really picks apart your life, it hones in on your core values, as well as the models and theories and what social work is all about. It is about you and the way you practice. So, the learnings I have taken from the degree are implemented into my mahi because of who I am. So, because of my values and beliefs that's how I implement them into my mahi as a Māori practitioner in social work, that doesn't mean I have to only be working with Māori to do that. You know who you are, so you are pou [pillar] to yourself. (Participant 1)

We often have similar circumstances and background and history [as the clients] and it's good because, you know, I try and not come in with the flash words and the academics of it … but when they know that I've got just as much family as them, and that we have all our family dynamics, they understand that we are similar. You know how I was speaking about the values, I think one beautiful thing, about what I have taken from my Bachelors is … understand yourself … like your knowledge, your also developing yourself, your exploring yourself, for example, like as a Māori

learning about the treaty hit really hard at first and it was really mamae (painful/sore), because it was like facing the reality of what you were like and how you did not help that, you know, and yourself worth as well. (Participant 2)

That very last end of it … advanced social work practice … we did the integrated model, it drew it in for me, so it wasn't until that point, I thought gosh! Who am I? I still to this day give credit to the Bachelor of Social Work for allowing me, to find me. I thought I knew who I was, until I didn't, yeah, I would recommend the Bachelor of Social Work the way I got it … it hit all the spots it was supposed to. In terms of challenging my whakaaro, challenging those biases that you have, I was challenged to the max, to the max. (Participant 3)

Identifying the experiences of transition into employment as NQMSWs highlights the kind of support from agencies that were appreciated and valued in terms of employment. These supportive factors included an agency that was assessed by the participants as aligning with their own values of te ao Māori, tikanga and being whānau centred in their practices. The participants also discussed the feeling of being included and welcomed as Māori practitioners and being provided autonomy as a tool for developing their practice.

I'm valued in my mahi, my opinions matter, who I am as a Māori social worker matters … [I am] able to work the role how I wanted to work it. (Participant 1)

I think for me it's quite funny because I think a lot of my placement … I may have come off as a bit clever, that kind of built the assumption that I am a competent practitioner, but to myself I wouldn't consider myself fully competent in being able to, you know do everything within social work. (Participant 2)

But yeah, no I've been extremely privileged, and everyone's been super supportive, I think my personality helped, I think, I can be a little bit cheeky you know … all in all it's been an absolute privilege working here, it's also allowed me to connect with my mum's side of the whakapapa, so my marae is … literally around the corner, you know, so working here with my ancestors and I feel grounded on this whenua because it grounds me. (Participant 5)

My experience of this transition into this place has been amazing, well supported and I think because of the kind of service I have come into, it aligns with my values and with where I am heading, that hasn't been hard, everything has been comfortable, I'm well supported, and if anything goes wrong it's an easy kōrero to have with my managers. (Participant 6)

Gaps in learning from the degree and transition into work included a lack of understanding of how to become provisionally registered as a social worker with the Social Workers Registration Board. Identified gaps in the degree when compared with transitioning into practice included spaces in the skills associated with self-care and time management. Other discussion around gaps in learning included a lack of knowledge of the service provisions of various social work agencies in the community.

We didn't know where we stood in terms of what it looked like to be registered, how do we register? Do we need to be registered to get mahi, when are we able to be registered. How much it cost that was vital. Also, there was a big gap in making sure we were ready. (Participant 1)

Yeah, which is very difficult … case noting would be one thing that I think, that it would of, because our job is a lot focused on admin stuff. Yeah, you know we do goal setting and strengths and needs assessments and sometimes screening and things, but it would be when you've got to put that down on paper and the timelines … are you doing justice to the people you are talking about are you representing them well enough for them to have their mana upheld. (Participant 2)

I think there is a gap between what an NGO [non-government organisation] looks like and a government agency, so there's a huge gap there. (Participant 3)

So, I think another thing where they could go more in depth with, is what safety looks like, because sometimes when you think you are safe out there … you are not. (Participant 5)

Oranga Tamariki, they have all these sections … my first encounter with Oranga Tamariki on my own she expected me to know this and even though I let her know that I am a new social worker, she expected me to have an idea about what the section blah blah blah was … maybe some learning if that was possible around that … other than that there hasn't really been much of "oh I wish I learned that". (Participant 6)

The final question in this research asked what it was like being a NQMSW and transitioning into practice. The participants described the connection to self, their identity, to their whānau and to the communities they serve as being highly motivating and affirming. Participants talked about the pride they had for themselves as being NQMSWs and how the relationships they held with their lecturers, fellow students, their agencies and the people the NQMSWs engaged with in their daily practice, made a difference in how they saw themselves. In addition to this, the current political environment is influential within contemporary social work practice.

I feel I came out of the degree well equipped and when I did my 4th year placement. There was a cohort from [a university] and then there was us from Toi Ohomai, the difference between the cohorts was huge. It was huge in terms of what their learning had been like compared to what our learning had been like. I'm going to be biased here by saying, we were on top. So, one thing we were told, when studying, was how valued we are as social workers and especially as Māori social workers. We were told this, numerous amounts of times by [two of our lecturers]. What they also said to us was, this is what you are worth … know your worth … when you go to an interview you negotiate, because this is what you are worth, so they gave me the power, within myself to think, yeah nah you're bloody right, I am worth it. I've just finished [4] years of training, come out of there with all these skills and as a better person. (Participant 1)

You know before the elections, it was so cool to be brown, it felt like we were a part of a bigger picture that was moving in our history and then decolonisation was happening and it's kind of come to a standstill or a reverse. I'm so proud to have done our te reo papers within our degree and learning all of those things and being a part of a Kaupapa Māori organisation, having te reo spoken freely, having Waiata … karakia every morning, wananga every so often it feels so good to be Māori and I was a whakama [shy] Māori … I am still whakama; to be able to speak te reo and things, you know you get people who might think that we don't matatau te reo or that matatau mātauranga but just to have an inkling of some recognition as a Māori, it's nice. (Participant 2)

[The lecturers] made it real for me, they made me think I was actually going to be a practitioner leaving that space. (Participant 3)

It's connected me to my whenua, its connected me to me as a Māori, to me as a wahine and to me as a māmā, so it's opened different windows and doors that I want to go through. (Participant 4)

I think from where I sit, I come from, even though I don't come from the richest family, I still sit in privilege, but you know, this job has allowed me to provide for my own whānau. I can give back now and that helped with my overall health. (Participant 5)

I think that just it's a very proud space to be in as a Māori regardless of if you're a social worker or a navigator or whatever you are. It's a mean position to be in as a Māori working with Māori and providing outcomes that benefit not just that one whānau Māori but Māori in general. Yeah I think that's all my feedback I just love it. I can't wait to be able to provide a bigger change for our whānau rather than just a service, something bigger. (Participant 6)

## Findings

Three major concepts were illuminated through the transcripts where reading and re-reading the participant kōrero. Discussions between both researchers supported the allocation of broad themes for this research. The themes included whakawhanaungatanga, manaakitanga and tuakana/teina as the cultural nuance to the data analysis and are te ao Māori concepts.

### *Whakawhanaungatanga*

Whakawhanaungatanga is closely related to the connections that Māori have through ancestral, spiritual, and traditional philosophy (Ritchie, 1992). The theme of relationships featured in the transcripts and was reflected in the NQMSWs acknowledging growth in their social work practice and reflective skills, supporting their ability to complete their jobs with competence by utilising Māori models of

health and, in particular, Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1994). The first relationship the NQMSWs discussed was the relationship with themselves. This connected to the space of knowing who they were, bringing into sharp focus where they are from, or a place where they felt grounded and safe. The identification of values and beliefs of being Māori and feeling valued as new Māori graduates was a strong indication of the relationship the NQMSWs held about themselves. Ruwhiu (2001) described the mana-building strategies that support wellbeing for clients—this is also reciprocated for those who are implementing these techniques, enhancing the mana of both parties. It can be argued that enhancing the wellbeing of others has a beneficial effect for the NQMSWs' identity and therefore, their sense of selves as Māori, and as social workers.

The second relationship relating to whakawhanaungatanga links to the relationship between the clients and the NQMSWs. Whakawhanaungatanga in this space is described by Mead (2003) as an indication of obligation to those people around us to be treated and protected as if they were whānau. Another concept of this second type of relationship of whakawhanaungatanga is associated with the understanding that the inherent status of all parties is brought into a space or environment during human interaction (Bishop et al., 2003). Moreover, this status has a transactional quality where all parties within the relationship benefit from each other. This was identified in the research where the NQMSWs supported clients to get to court and doctors' appointments; learning to negotiate and advocate across different sectors of the social and health sectors. This supported the clients in their basic needs, and the experiences supported practice development for the NQMSWs. It can be argued that this reciprocity transitioned across a space where the NQMSWs supported and protected the clients as an expression of them being whānau.

### Manaakitanga

Manaakitanga was another te ao Māori concept identified in the research and has been described as a transitional space where reciprocity and relationships are brought from tapu (sacredness) to noa (neutrality) (Wright & Heaton, 2021). Collaboration and the obligation to support those in need is discussed by Ritchie (1992) as the ritual processes linked to generosity and respect and underpins the understanding of manaakitanga. Manaakitanga in the research related to supporting clients through communication, connection and supporting their voice to be heard in the decision-making process of social work practice. We are informed by literature that the voice of Māori is often silenced and ignored through the processes of racism, marginalisation, and a blamed, othered analogy regarding their social circumstances (Elers & Elers, 2017; Harris et al., 2006; Houkamau et al., 2016). This identifies the importance of having a social worker who is passionate and protective of those people that they serve. In addition, manaakitanga can be linked to the care of, and sharing of, resources, linked to the availability of kai (food) parcels or other forms of funding and immediate relief related to health and welfare for whānau. Another type of manaakitanga can be linked to the provision of housing for those who are finding it difficult to acquire suitable and safe accommodation. NQMSWs are in the forefront of emergency housing in Aotearoa and so are working with whānau and landlords to secure the most basic requirement of shelter—having a home to live in.

### Tuakana/teina

The final te ao Māori concept linked to social work practice identified in the transcripts was that of tuakana/teina. Tuakana/teina relates to a traditional understanding founded on whakapapa (lineage). We are informed through cultural practices that tuakana/teina engaged through a process of genealogical order of birth is defined as an older brother of the male, an older sister of a female, or a cousin from an older branch of whānau who

are of the same sex (Reilly, 2010). Therefore, a teina is a younger brother of a male, a sister of a female or a younger cousin of the same sex from a younger branch of the whānau. The reciprocity of this relationship is perpetuated through generations of a whānau ancestry (Mead, 2003). This context of an older, more knowledgeable person supporting another, less knowledgeable, person can be identified in the transcripts through the relationships between the Bachelor of Social Work teaching team at Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology and the NQMSWs. The concept is mimicked through each person passing down practice or other types of knowledge to guide and support safe social work practice and therefore, providing the possibility of a positive outcome for whānau using the services of an agency. Additionally, it is argued that this concept of passing down knowledge aligns with the NQMSWs, and their learning from their degree that was provided to their clients or in the service of their clients.

## Gaps in learning

Aspects identified by the NQMSWs that they felt were missing from their learning in the Bachelor of Social Work Te Tohu Paetahi Tū Tāngata, included information regarding the process of registration after completing their 4-year degree. Additionally, practice skills including client note taking were also highlighted as a gap in learning. Social worker safety whilst working was discussed in the transcript providing a valid point regarding the need to have concentrated learning on how to maintain personal safety when interacting with clients.

## Conclusion

Kaupapa Māori Theory guided the research methodology through privileging the knowledge provided by the NQMSWs as legitimate and authentic. Additionally, this allowed the foregrounding of Māori ways of knowing that supported the NQMSWs to feel valued and heard as they developed their sense of identity and how they wanted

to practise. Transition into agency social work practice after completing the Bachelor of Social Work Te Tohu Paetahi Tū Tāngata was supported by a sense of safety that was associated with the te ao Māori concepts of whakawhanaungatanga and manaakitanga acting as a transitional space or bridge to what still is defined as a Western oriented profession of social work in Aotearoa. Everyday interactions by the NQMSWs with agencies and clients were guided by the navigation of Māori values and beliefs including the use of te reo Māori, and Māori models of health including Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1994). By practising in a manner that protected their clients as if they were actual whānau linked to whakawhanaungatanga. Manaakitanga as a theme linked to enhancing client mana through access to resources that supported their physical and spiritual wellbeing. The concept of tuakana/teina was highlighted through the process of passing down knowledge through two spaces. This was highlighted as being between lecturers teaching on the Bachelor of Social Work and the NQMSWs, followed by knowledge from NQMSWs being passed to the clients accessing their services. A sense of identity relating to knowing yourself functioned as a strong protective factor for the ongoing development of practice far from the security of a tertiary classroom for the NQMSWs. Māori models of health and wellbeing played a dual role of familiarity from the learning in the Bachelor of Social Work Te Tohu Paetahi Tū Tāngata and the implementation of this model in Māori agencies. NQMSWs actively navigated towards those agencies that supported and honoured these cultural nuances and practices as their first place of employment further supporting and propelling their knowledge learned in the degree.

It can be argued that the current Bachelor of Social Work Te Tohu Paetahi Tū Tāngata offers a supportive journey for Māori social work students with theory, skills, and practical education alongside the building of capacity of cultural competence and safety. This research project offers a reflective space for the te ao Māori concepts of

whakawhanaungatanga, manaakitanga, and tuakana / teina in how they relate to social work education in the future. Learning te reo Māori was highlighted by the participants as being beneficial. Additionally, familiarity of Māori models of health and wellbeing proved essential in everyday practice. Knowing oneself as being Māori, and valued for this, supported confidence, and a sense of duty towards clients that can be embraced, nurtured, and propagated within te ao Māori aspects of whakawhanaungatanga, manaakitanga and tuakana / teina. This illuminates an important finding of this research that suggests social work education needs to provide comprehensive learning in these areas for future social work practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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