
Do Maori initiatives by Maori and for Maori really help Maori?

Newton Thompson

Newton Thompson (Ngati Raukawa ki Waikato) is in the final semester of a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work and Community Development at the University of Otago.

Do Maori initiatives by Maori and for Maori really help Maori? In order for me to answer this question I will discuss 'Hokowhitu', a rangatahi life-skills programme designed specifically for Maori, by Maori, using a kaupapa Maori approach. The programme was part of a research project undertaken by the School of Physical Education at the University of Otago and was aimed at Maori rangatahi who were susceptible to alcohol and drug abuse within their micro-interactive surroundings. After a description of the programme I will finish with a discussion on how the programme influenced me personally with a critical analysis based entirely on my personal thoughts which should not be used to undermine the objectives of the creator of the programme.

Alcohol and drug abuse is widely experienced throughout this country no matter age, race or sex. However, it is the ease with which these two substances grab hold of society and individuals that crushes them to their knees. Maori youth are at the forefront of this dilemma. The notion is that trying to hide youth from the world is not going to work, rather we should be trying to educate them on how and why to say no.

The Hokowhitu programme was created by Justin Ihirangi Heke, and inspired by the GOAL programme from overseas. The vision Heke had was to develop a sport-based life-skills programme that increased drug and alcohol awareness, academic self-esteem, intrinsic motivation for schoolwork and career awareness in adolescent Maori (Heke, 2005) by teaching 'life-skills' such as goal-setting, problem-solving, emotional control, leadership, confidence, social support and increasing self-esteem' (School of Physical Education, 2002).

The programme used year 12 and 13 high school students from Tokoroa who were trained to take 10 two-hour workshops which they then taught to students at a local intermediate school. The workshops concentrated on showing students how they could 'make better life decisions'. Each session included involvement in playing a sport, which was then used as a 'motif for change' (Massey News, 2001).

Heke found that there were many implications for both running a programme and doing research with Maori, particularly around the research paradigm in which the study would be undertaken. The research study therefore came from an indigenous perspective, namely a kaupapa Maori-styled approach. This decision was reached because it best suited the interests of the desired participants, and empowered all the people involved. A core part of a kaupapa Maori approach is that, ideally, anyone attempting to undertake a Maori-preferred approach would allow Maori to define their own social prerogatives and ethnic identity and it would not occur merely as products of non-Maori academic validation (Heke, 2005).

In regards to the programme itself, according to Bishop (1996), the struggle for recognition of Maori-preferred learning methods can only be achieved when the location of power and control over issues such as who initiates the programme, who benefits from it, whose values are represented, who legitimates it and who is the programme accountable to, is held in the hands of Maori.

The Hokowhitu approach was unique in that it allowed the participants to assume a position of power and as equal contributors to the Hokowhitu research initiative. I was an active participant in the foundation of the programme. I was a seventh form pupil and attended Forest View High School in Tokoroa, and was chosen to be part of this programme as apparently some people saw some leadership potential in me.

The programme involved our families through the concept and process of whanaungatanga, which required their consent to allow us to participate. It also required the participants to fly to Dunedin to carry out the core training at the University of Otago. The biggest impact for me was exposing our group to the opportunities that were open to us. We were Maori youth from a town which experiences high unemployment, crime and drug abuse and has a heavy reputation for organised crime. Freire (1972), in his book titled *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, states that 'educational activity in the lived experience of participants may open up a series of possibilities for the way informal educators can approach practice which will enhance the participants' self empowerment'. A kaupapa Maori approach in today's context displays many similarities to Freire's concepts. The use of this initiative increased my self-motivation for learning instantly, which at the same time gave me that feeling of empowerment.

When the training began, the Hokowhitu programme immediately placed an emphasis on how we, as individuals, would need to react when placed in a position of pressure. We were given detailed descriptions of the objectives of the programme and tried to navigate ourselves through scenarios on how we would deal with taking teaching sessions. The most important facet of the programme method was that it took away the power associated with western-styled education, in that the teaching would occur under the tikanga of 'tuakana, teina'. This compares to the power dynamic associated with the dominant culture approach, where the focus is on the teaching methods and knowledge that validates their culture (Dale, 2000). This western method has been found to be of limited use to Maori, and has been a significant factor in contributing to the underachievement in learning outcomes by Maori youth. It is a known fact that Maori are underachieving within the realm of education. However, a number of researchers believe that the problem of Maori educational failure is significantly impacted on by the western-based techniques used throughout the education system within New Zealand (Fleras & Spoonley, 1999). Traditionally, Maori techniques to learning involved wananga-styled learning, where all participants interacted and provided dialogue towards the session, and where participants indulge in the learning personally and critically evaluate what information is explicit to them personally.

Through the Hokowhitu programme, I personally was able to use the material supplied with the course and apply it to myself. At that stage of my life I was going through a transition phase, and needed to map out what I wanted to do with my future.

It was interesting from a tuakana perspective that the strategies and objectives aimed at the teina were some of the same key problems that applied to the tuakana. We were nearing legal age to be able to drink in public. The processes that we learnt whilst delivering the Hokowhitu programme held us in good stead for what we were to encounter if we chose the varsity lifestyle. When we were in Dunedin, we were shown what the typical student got up to and how they lived, in general. The stereotype of varsity students as being drunks, slobs and out-and-out mischief people proved to be true in a lot of cases. However, what was astounding to us was the manner in which they still fulfilled their academic pursuits, in spite of being drunk and hung-over. They who were Maori students at Otago University still could distinguish what their priorities were, and dealt with those priorities accordingly. For rangatahi from a town where drinking, violence and other criminal activity was to the forefront, we had never seen people be able to drink and not let it affect their lives. In a town where positive role models are hard to come by, it opened our eyes to different perspectives where the role modelling of the people involved inspired me and others to achieve.

Having the chance to participate in the programme opened my eyes to other opportunities. The fact that we had travelled to Dunedin and got to see Otago University was a huge bonus for me. I knew then and there, that one day I would attend university but more specifically, Otago.

To me the Hokowhitu programme was a step in the right direction, as all the objectives were met both within the classroom and through the work done with the teina group. Also, it empowered us, the tuakana, to fulfil life goals and aspirations to reverse the trends that have so heavily impacted upon Maori around us. In my opinion, however, the programme could have gone a bit further in enhancing its impact upon the wider Maori community. For me personally, I always thought that the programme should have been conducted on the local marae. In completing the programme under the auspice of Tokoroa Intermediate School, the power dynamic still rested with the state. Even though this programme was driven from a kaupapa Maori perspective, to me, it felt like a smoke screen in some ways, where the school would allow their children to participate as long as they could oversee it, despite the fact that they were struggling with the rangatahi in mainstream anyway. In having the programme run in their school, therefore, it enabled them to maintain the power, with the opportunity to check up on progress at any time they felt fit to do so, even if it was at an inappropriate time.

Another reason for me wishing that the marae had been incorporated into the programme was that it would have had an even more dramatic influence amongst the children and rangatahi involved. The marae would have enhanced the feeling of wairua, whanaungatanga, maanaki and aroha amongst all. It is only on the marae that these concepts can truly be beneficial for children partaking in this kind of programme. These concepts in the context of the marae takes us to a place where we feel the life of our ancestors and where the kaupapa Maori perspective is still upheld today and maintains a mana that is unmatched. It is also a place where the power associated with western-styled education is removed.

While the programme was successful and a great initiative, it still affected only a small part of our community. I acknowledge that to make a wider difference in the community, changes at the macro level are also necessary, but in terms of emancipation for iwi, hapu and community, initiatives like this are desperately needed and need to be spread more widely.

Although Maori are not a homogenous group, I do believe that many other communities are struggling with the same issues, and this was a valuable programme both for the teina and the tuakana and I am sure it will be valuable to others.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Hokowhitu programme changed my life. It provided me with the motivation to seek better life opportunities for myself and my whanau through education that would never have been possible if it weren't for my participation with the programme. If it wasn't for the programme I honestly don't think I would have been at university today. I had no plans of going on to tertiary study as I thought my skill level was not up to standard, but through the ups and downs I have survived and will hopefully soon graduate. To me the Hokowhitu programme placed me in a position where I could make informed decisions as to where I wanted to head in my life and the opportunity was there for me to do this through education. And so to finish with the answer to the question I posed at the beginning. Do Maori initiatives by Maori and for Maori really help Maori? In my case the answer is a definite YES.

References

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