

Whānau transformation through tribal reconnection

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Abstract: There are over 36,000 Māori within the Canterbury region; the Ngāpuhi population of the area is second only to Ngāi Tahu (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2001). With an ever increasing Māori population comes an increase in issues around loss of identity, reo, tikanga and disconnectedness. As Māori, particularly rangatahi, are becoming urbanised reconnecting to who they are and where they are from becomes increasingly important. This paper seeks to identify innovative and effective methods to assist the Ngāpuhi whānau living in Christchurch to reconnect back home. It discusses the nature and extent of the mātauranga of Ngāpuhi hapū and asks, who are the repositories that have this knowledge, how accessible is it and most importantly how can it be used to assist and transform Ngāpuhi whānau living away from home?

Keywords: identity, repository, transformation,

Introduction

Identity is central to psychological function and is of increased importance for members of displaced ethnic or indigenous groups. Low self esteem, a sense of lack of belonging, and discrimination can combine to erode identity (Phinney, 1990). Such negative impacts on identity are increased when coupled with alienation from culture and environment and are therefore of particular interest for Māori living in areas that are physically and culturally foreign to them.

Identity is a key component contributing to Māori development. Impacts on identity are relevant at all levels, individual, whānau, hapū and iwi. Membership and participation within ethnic groups, families and social units is integral to having a strong identity. Finding positive experiences and interactions with social groups results in the intrinsic cultural and spiritual development of people that eventually is manifested in tangible positive development.

This paper discusses and compares the views and experiences of two kaumātua. Each kaumātua comes from different backgrounds, life experiences, and knowledge base. Contrasting the stories of the two kaumātua will arguably help to reveal important insights into how to best address identity issues for those Ngāpuhi living in Ōtautahi. Finally, this paper explores strategies, particularly information technology, to reconnect and connect the home people to their haukāinga.

Kaumātua one (Kaumātua ahi kā)

Kaumātua ahi kā was born and grew up away from home in Auckland although he kept in contact with the haukāinga through regular family holidays to the area and visits to his marae. He grew up around te reo and his mother and grandparents were fluent speakers. One of the factors assisting his being able to stay connected to home was that he still had close family members living within the tribal district and near the marae.

Kaumātua ahi kā was thirty three when he returned to the tribal area and was motivated in doing so by a desire to manage and reconnect to tribal lands and help his father care for his grandmother. He also wanted to increase his knowledge of te reo which he thought was a “natural progression from beginning to learn te reo Māori.”

Interestingly while living in Auckland the interviewee self identified primarily as Ngāpuhi however once living in the tribal area he identified himself by his hapū. This is common amongst Māori people and has to do with mana whenua and land connections i.e. the closer you are to home the more local your connection becomes.

On returning home Kaumātua ahi kā became heavily involved in Māori development issues both at hapū and iwi levels. He is on the Ngāpuhi rūnanga and the Whakapara marae committee as well as being the only speaker on the taumata for the marae. On returning to the marae he also brought new knowledge that he had learnt from living in Auckland to which the home people were not immediately receptive.

Kaumātua two (Kaumātua ahi tere)

The interview with Kaumātua ahi tere was conducted in te reo Māori reflecting his confidence and ability to stand strong as Ngāpuhi, despite having lived away from home for many years.

Kaumātua ahi tere was born at home within the tribal territory. His family was not wealthy and he worked on the dairy farm. There were fifteen in his whānau and it was not uncommon to go without shoes as money was spent primarily on basic human necessities like food, although they also went without food at times. After becoming dissatisfied with school he left at the age of 14 and worked on a neighbouring farm full time. Shortly after this he saw a relation who was living in Auckland and was envious of his possessions which prompted a move to access work in the city.

He left home to live in Auckland when he was 15 years old in 1970. The city brought an initial culture shock, however he enjoyed the regular and consistent pay days which were unaffected by season. The culture shock of urban living was accentuated by the fast paced and individual life style as well as the proximity of the houses. He knew who his relatives were that were living there however he seldom connected with them as he would have at home because everyone was “doing their own thing”. People were charged to find their own place in the world and provide for themselves ‘māu anō e rapu he oranga mōu’. Eventually once a family was established the priority was to provide for the family ‘whai oranga mō tō whānau’.

Kaumātua ahi tere eventually moved to Canterbury and quickly found that the lack of Māori presence meant he had to work hard to create and develop a whānau environment. Although contact with his home marae is infrequent he has become heavily involved in different Māori and tribal organisations in Canterbury. One of these is Te Whare o Ngāpuhi ki Ōtautahi which was specifically established to support Ngāpuhi living in Ōtautahi. This group aims to travel to the Ngāpuhi region and visit the various marae of those involved.

Kaumātua ahi tere is well established in Ōtautahi. He is a respected and active member of the Māori community who is considered to have a strong knowledge of Māori knowledge and culture.

“Tēnei tō tātou iwi, he iwi kaha ki te tū marae. Heoi anō kei konei e noho ana, engari e kore e putaputa mai, e kore. Koirā te āhua o tō tāua iwi, kia tika rā anō te kaupapa, kātahi anō ka puta mai, kātahi anō ka kite, ētahi.”

This statement reflects a belief by Kaumātua ahi tere that it is possible to effectively establish yourself in new areas. He believes also that when the reasoning is right people will make themselves known and participate in the kaupapa. He then went on to say in English:

“A motivator, for some, for connecting back to te haukāinga has been whānau land issues, Waitangi Claim settlements and the recent fisheries resource allocations. This has

highlighted the huge chasm between the Urban Māori and te iwi kāinga, which at times the fundamentals of our mere existence are sometimes forgotten. The common denominator is our Whakapapa. It is important for our people to know when you were born there is whakapapa upon you. Where ever you go through out the world your whakapapa goes with you.”

Summary

The lives and experiences of the two Kaumātua were at one level vastly different as they spent most of their time living at opposite ends of the country. However, the interviews showed that both participants placed huge importance on their Ngāpuhitanga, on staying connected both physically and culturally. Kaumātua ahi tere although not physically connected to home has had instilled in him the values and ancestral knowledge from a young age and therefore is very much connected to who he is. Similarly, Kaumātua ahi kā has an equally solid foundation although this was not instilled as much at a young age and the primary influence on his identity is the fact that he lives at home.

Why reconnect – how do we encourage people to learn about their identity?

It should be established why people feel the need to reconnect or not reconnect. Māori traditions and philosophies consider all things to be inextricably connected to the natural world. All things were connected through whakapapa and the creation traditions link the natural and spiritual worlds to the human world through Ranginui and Papatūānuku. Throughout Māori knowledge systems, philosophies, myths and practices are symbols that indicate being connected is the essence of being Māori.

Disconnection from ones origins in culture and physical location leads to a fragmentation of identity. Access to ones practices and a sense of belonging to location both physically and within a cultural framework combine to create a security of identity (Durie, 1996). Recent research has found that Māori lacking contact with Māoritanga lack a sense of belonging to place (Johnston, 2006). This study found that those connected with Māori culture were three times less likely to attempt suicide than those who were not. Cultural connection included being able to speak Māori, name their iwi, ancestors and marae, having visited their marae and having access to their whānau. In effect this means that those who can say where they have a place of belonging and a secure identity are more likely to succeed as Māori. Durie points out the importance of identity below:

All are linked to identity and more specifically to the conditions which promote security of identity. The first point recognises that the alienation of people from their land and their culture subjects them to a fragmentation of identity and, along with loss of possessions, a loss of spirit. The second point is that although the law does not create an identity, laws have the capacity to enhance identity or at the very least not to destroy a sense of positive identity. And the third point is simply that identity can be secured more firmly if people are able to feel a sense of participation in the affairs of the nation and can relate to the symbols of nationhood. (Durie, 1996, p. 1)

Another point of difference is that the focus here is finding a place where the people belong as opposed to having a place that belongs to the people. This can be a physical place although it is not limited to this. Belonging in a social construct is also important; in effect that is what Hawaiki is.

In the beginning land was not something that could be owned or traded. Māoris did not seek to own or possess anything, but to belong. One belonged to a family that belonged to

a hapū that belonged to a tribe. One did not own land. One belonged to the land. (Durie, 1987, p.78)

Kaumātua ahi kā stressed the importance of taking control over whanau land as one of the main reasons for returning to the haukāinga. There was also a sense of responsibility to help his father look after his grandmother and a desire to learn the reo which he thought was a natural progression. In returning to the haukāinga he was reconnecting with the social fabric which had traditionally given strength, support and a strong sense of belonging (Bowler & Drummond, 1997). Therefore the move would ground the new knowledge and give more value and validity to the things learnt. He was in essence returning to where the connections between mātauranga and environment were the strongest.

Identity or claiming to identify as Māori is not a simple act but a combination of applied choice and effort (Phinney, 1990:502). There are external factors which will influence what identity the individual will choose to accept as their own. How freely will somebody find where they belong and identify with who they are when it is unfashionable to do so? If Māori are overrepresented in crime would this make somebody involved in criminal activity more likely to identify as Māori. Or conversely one might not wish to identify as Māori as it may somehow taint their success to be associated with an ethnic group with negative connotations associated to it.

Association and identity can also relate to location as was seen in the case of the Kaumātua ahi kā who identified as Ngāpuhi while in Auckland and by hapū while at the haukāinga. It is also interesting to note that he added Ngāpuhi were referred to as Ngābush giving insight into how the thousands of Ngāpuhi people moving to Auckland were perceived at the time.

Strategies to help Ngāpuhi living in Ōtautahi to reconnect to who they are

As alternative groups resembling hapū have emerged so to have alternative strategies and structures to provide for the wellbeing and identity of urban Māori. Social groups have been formed in urban locations based on commonalities such as location, religion or descent from an iwi group as opposed to the traditional association of whānau. These groups have provided places where people can socialise with and feel comfortable with people with common interests, beliefs and values.

Physically returning to the haukāinga however does still have a very holistic value. Seeing places where significant events took place or seeing where ancestors were hosted can provide benefit in a way hard to measure. To help overcome a feeling of unfamiliarity however means can be applied to improve knowledge of the area and the people as well as becoming more known.

Various mass communication methods have been adapted using both cell phones and the internet. These make it easy for information to be shared with multiple recipients and accessed easily by the recipients. This part of the paper will look at two of these options as reconnection tools.

E text

E text is a scenario set up by Telecom where text messages can be sent to multiple recipients from a central source, i.e. a computer. The initial advantage of this is the high percentage of cell phone ownership as well as the advantage of almost instantaneous alert that reaches the people without effort on their part such as having to check emails. This could be a useful means of providing updates to key people who can then pass on the information to their family or social group.

The limitations of message size mean that it would not be suitable for sharing large pieces of information but more suited to alerts or changes in details for hui. Costs involved are a \$99 set up fee plus a \$10 monthly rental. Usage costs include 10c texts to telecom phones and 17c to 021 phones. There is also a business cap of 500 texts per 24 hours which means messages to more than 500 people would need to be sent over a 2 day period.

Pod casting

Māori internet access in 1995 was reported at 72% although this was not within the home. This makes the internet a very efficient tool for reaching the population (Himona, 2005). Pod casting is an online method of communication which allows different types of media to be uploaded to a host server and accessed from the website. They can then be downloaded to mp3 players or viewed from their computer. This can include mp3 files as well as PDF and video formats. Updates are then received by subscribers at a chosen frequency. This means that the subscriber can elect to have updates checked on a daily basis or otherwise. Pod casting is typically associated with itunes which is subscribed to by users for updates. Alternative methods using flash can be used to host files in a similar fashion without the subscription to itunes being necessary.

Benefits to the marae and members include the ability to share events or provide information to those living elsewhere. This could be video coverage of events or kapahaka sessions. Text files can also be posted to aid in the learning of songs. With identity referring to what similarities and differences you have with others language and tikanga lessons could be hosted promoting the use of iwi specific words and philosophy. This also provides an alternative to, or means of participating in wānanga.

The overriding desired outcome would be an improved Māori presence on the internet and increased participation between urban and rural communities. This could however provide negative effects by lowering physical participation through negating the need to return to learn. Improved access to information could result in a take, take, take style of participation. Learning in this style where people can learn whatever they find appealing. This removes the personal accountability associated with some mātauranga Māori.

Learning in a face to face way provides an opportunity to build a more personal relationship with the teacher as well as providing an opportunity to give something back. This has typically been seen in the form of gifts or work carried out. In spending time with the person possessing the knowledge supporting information is also learnt thus whakapapa is seen not only as a list of names and significance of historical events can be more readily understood.

Information shared over the internet would need to be monitored to maintain a balance in tikanga and participation. Information such as whakapapa carries a lot of protocols in order for it to be learnt correctly. Similarly karakia and tauparapara carry meaning not always understood from reading the words alone. It may therefore be fitting to keep the transmission of some mātauranga as face to face only to ensure the appropriate understanding and significance.

Requirements

A safe estimate of requirements based on current web page activity would be a website host providing 100mb of disk space and 4 GB of bandwidth. Bandwidth is a measure of information transfer from the server to subscribers. Therefore it is a sellable commodity requiring more with higher levels of participation and larger file sizes. Plans on the market currently offer a package which would suit moderate use in this way priced around \$15 a month. Bigger plans may be necessary if user numbers were to increase dramatically however higher limits of bandwidth and disk space can be purchases as needed. Further requirements

include a microphone for audio and a video camera for video. The video camera however could be used for either potentially making the microphone unnecessary.

There may also be potential to have a bigger group host postings for each marae with a link provided from the marae website. This could be in the form of Ngāpuhi as a whole hosting the information from other marae while the marae websites provide the links to the information. Limitations can then be put on file sizes hosted to regulate the bandwidth consumption.

Conclusions

From the time of Māori arrival to Aotearoa Māori society has been ever evolving to suit the different environment. A significant change to the Māori environment was the arrival of the Pākehā. A result of this has been the urbanisation of a high percentage of the Māori population, an adoption of foreign technology and philosophies and an alienation of identity giving principles. This has produced a fragmentation of identity reflected negatively when amongst other things has been found to increase the frequency of suicide attempts.

A secure identity therefore provides confidence to function effectively as well as improving the ability to function independent of the larger group. Kaumātua ahi tere was an example of this where his early exposure to iwi philosophy and language reduced the need to associate specifically with his hapū. Also evident is the fact that it is not un-Māori to establish yourself outside of the tribal area however the reasoning for doing so can be the un-Māori aspect. The issues that arise from relocation are not related solely to location but also to the social satisfaction available.

For Māori born in the cities who are not as exposed to the identity giving principles interaction with the home marae may be a higher priority. Benefits from doing so can be seen for both the urban Māori as well as for the home hapū. Interaction provides the urban Māori with the identity giving principles while the hapū gains access to a bigger experience and skill base.

Relevant to experiences of urban and rural Māori an analysis of traditional and contemporary values could be the key to provide the appropriate foundation for development. This would provide the balance for using new technology in a way underpinned by policies made of traditional philosophy to address both contemporary and traditional issues. Thus avoiding assimilation and empowering people through an increased capacity to apply and practise traditional ethics.

Application of tikanga in this way can provide tangible outcomes more easily recognised by participants. This can raise the perception of those involved and encourage further participation and association from descendants of the same group. An increase in participation and satisfaction may also reduce the need for alternative groups of association such as gangs.

The appropriate use of technologies in reconnection could provide alternative online communities less reliant on location. The emphasis would therefore be on the binding factor of people to the marae and to their histories. This could see communities of urban and rural participants providing a place of belonging for those who have become physically alienated and preventing cultural alienation. Participation with the home marae would also be beneficial in political identity particularly when land interests or treaty settlements are involved.

It therefore becomes evident that from within the world of modernism, which has caused the alienation of people from their culture and negative effects on identity, may come the answer to reinforce identity through contemporary application of traditional philosophy and improved interaction between people and their descent groups.

The depth of issues covered in this project such as the relationship of tikanga and technology would require far more research as relevant issues relate to other subject areas. An example of this is intellectual property rights and the development of ways to ensure knowledge is not lost when people die but principles such as tapu are maintained. This is of particular importance in the relationship of availability and restrictions on certain aspects of mātauranga Māori such as whakapapa. Further research may be most beneficial if carried out in iwi/hapū specific projects to maintain the similarities and differences between iwi that give them their identity. These issues are becoming increasingly relevant with more Māori being born in the cities, elderly people dying and technologies changing. Without active pursuit of resolutions a lot stands to be lost.

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