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Māori Research(er) in Three Poems

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Abstract

These three poems re-present the findings from a research project that took place in 2013 (Kidd et al. 2018, Kidd et al. 2014). The research explored what health literacy meant for Māori patients and whānau when they accessed palliative care. Through face-to-face interviews and focus groups we engaged with 81 people including patients, whānau, bereaved loved ones, support workers and health professionals. The poems are composite, written to bring some of our themes to life.

The first poem is titled Aue. This is a Māori lament that aligns to English words such as ‘oh no’, or ‘arrgh’, or ‘awww’. Each stanza of the poem re-presents some of the stories we heard throughout the research.

The second poem is called Tikanga. This is a Māori concept that encompasses customs, traditions and protocols. There are tikanga rituals and processes that guide all aspects of life, death, and relationships. This poem was inspired by an elderly man who explained that he would avoid seeking help from a hospice because ‘they leave tikanga at the door at those places’. His choice was to bear his pain bravely, with pride, within his cultural identity.

The third poem is called ‘People Like Me’. This is an autoethnographical reflection of what I experienced as a researcher which draws on the work of scholars such as bell hooks (1984), Laurel Richardson (1997) and Ruth Behar (1996). These and many other authors encourage researchers to use frustration and anger to inform our writing; to use our tears to fuel our need to publish our research.

1. Aue

Aue, e koro,

as you sit quietly in your armchair,

twisted hands resting atop your walking stick.

Head bowed,

grieving.

“They were so rude to her, our whaea.

I hated (*fierce eyes*)

seeing how she got smaller – you know?”



Aue, e te whānau

“We cared for our mum first, then our dad

both so sick, but

we loved them and helped them to die peacefully

At home.

We taught those nurses, aye girls? And they taught us too

Team awesome, that’s us!

Take your shoes off

Wash your hands with this stuff before you touch her

Introduce yourself and wait, listen to her silences

Give this medicine if she’s in pain, and this one if she vomits

Look at her, really look, and be patient

Call this number, any time day or night, if you’re worried

We wrote down everything that happened. Listen to us, we know.

Change the tubing like this . . .

Have some kai with us, or a cup of tea

Use this on her lips

Ahhh, she’s leaving us soon

Yes, she’s leaving you soon.”

Aue.

2. Tikanga

Staunch man, moving proudly (but frail)

in his immaculate kitchen,

“I’m making you some tea, dear. Do you want a biscuit?”

Tikanga.

This research business can wait

until the important work of

knowing each other

is accomplished.

“Where are you from? Who is your whānau?

Have another biscuit. Another cuppa?”

Tikanga.

Settled, familiar

Now we move

cautiously

into new space.

“What do you want me to do, dear?”

Green handbag out of place

rummaging for

White, sharp-edged papers to sign

with a Cold Blue Pen

Black shiny tape recorder

blinking red light

Clashing colours intruding into this

peaceful space.

Language jarring:

Consent form

Support person

Interpreter

He aha?

Just tell me (lovely man)

Tell me your life!

You are so sick,

so proud,

so heartbreakingly alive

(for now)

Sweet crumbs on my tongue, washed away with milky tea.

“What has happened to you since your diagnosis?”

“Ahhh, well it’s too late for me.

The doctor said, and the nurse too

I left it too late.

You should have come to us when you got your cough.

Now it’s too late.”

I want to cry “why? What stopped you?”

But that’s not why I’m here.

Not The Research Question

Smiling, (he knows me now)

he talks about the hidden subject

anyway.

“Too tough for my own bloody good, I am.

Driving a truck

Supporting my whānau

I’m fine

Nothing but a cough

It’ll pass.

And I'm thinking

Men don't cry to the doctor.

Besides

If something happens to me, then

Who would I be? (nothing, that's who)

Who would look after them? (no-one. There's no-one else. Only me.)

It's all I know

being the man

the provider.

I'm real good at that, you know?"

* * *

"Are you getting care from hospice?"

"I am now, when they can find me!

But I was late for that, too! (laughs breathlessly)

You see, dear, you can't leave tikanga at the door.

I see those places, and

I know.

Tikanga is a hanger-on there

something to do after the pills,

the sponge baths,

The dying.

I'm close to my God, Io Matua Kore, the One

so I know I have this sickness . . .

the pain

sent to me by Io

is my burden.

It's also my pride.

I can bear this

I can make my whānau

my tūpuna

proud.

That place?

Hospice?

It's the place I'll go when I'm ready to

give up.

They'll probably have to take me there in a bed

'cos I'll be leaving in a box (laughs and coughs)

That place isn't for me."

Tikanga.

* * *

I sit in the warm car

Thinking.

Conflicted.

I am a nurse; this is a tragedy.

Preventable with screening, education, early intervention.

Health literacy

Late access is

Never OK.

But . . .

I am a part of him now; this is *his* journey. *His* choice.

It has purpose

meaning

depth

identity

Tikanga.

3. People Like Me

There are no words that can epitomise
the betrayal of a health *care* system that doesn't care.

People like me

write, talk, argue, *care*, shelter

futile, pushing shit uphill endlessly day after day without pause

burn out.

Professionals like me

dismiss, ignore, walk past, abandon

if you can't beat them join them

settle.

Settlers shelter inside a health *care* system that is

staunch in its racism

proud in its absolutism

unwavering in its rightness, whiteness

Survivors find shelter outside the health *care* system that marginalises

patients, whānau, hapū, iwi

Survivors find strength in community

connections, aroha

Survivors survive.

People like me

challenge, publish, Tweet

listen to the kōrero of the disaffected, the hurt, the betrayed

write poetry.

Still working

I have a huge struggle with writing conclusions; even using the word as a heading suggests that the work is completed. I am still writing, still researching, still working. I'm not done with shouting about inequities in our health care system, or crying with/for Māori who are disaffected, colonised, sick and dying. I hope that my poems have given colour to the black and white statistics about health inequities. I hope this part of my work reaches into your centre of emotions to create change for Māori. *Mā te wā*; until next time.

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Glossary

Aroha: love

Aue: a lament, oh no!

Hapū: sub-tribe

He aha?: what's this?

Iwi: tribe

Kai: food

Kare: term of endearment

Kōrero: talk, speech

Koro: old man (informal)

Moko: grandchildren (short for mokopuna)

Pepe: baby

Tane: man

Tikanga: customs and traditions, protocols

Tūpuna: ancestors

Wahine ma: women

Wahine toa: female warrior, strong woman

Whaea: mother, aunty

Whānau: family