

Secular Science Meets Sacred Art

The Bi-cultural Work of Tangi Hepi

Tangi Hepi with Elizabeth Denton

Abstract

Tangi Hepi is an experienced and highly regarded drug and alcohol counsellor who brings to his practice his Māori roots and his Pākehā upbringing, as well as his clinical training and experience. As a result, he has developed a bi-cultural approach to counselling that is loosely framed by the conventions of the profession, but has been extended and given depth by the teaching he received from his paternal grandmother when he was a young boy. This article explores the counselling principles that underpin his practice, as well as some of the supporting techniques he has developed over the course of his counselling career. His background is described in some detail in order to locate him within both traditional Māori and contemporary Pākehā cultural contexts, although the discussion of his counselling work focuses on aspects drawn predominantly from his Māori cultural heritage. Questions raised in this discussion are an invitation for further exploration and study.

Keywords: Māori, bi-cultural counselling, creative practice, addiction

A personal note from Elizabeth Denton

I met Tangi Hepi when he came to work as a counsellor at the Wakatipu Abuse Prevention Network, where I was a volunteer. When I noticed the diagrams and working sketches he used in his practice I became curious, and later I saw him personally for supervision. I was immediately struck by the uniqueness of his approach, and asked if he would teach me more about his work. Over several months, I met with Hepi at his home. This article is an attempt to record his work, with his participation and blessing. Some readers will take away practice-based evidence to support their theories, and some may simply find the paper an opportunity for reflection on their own practice.

Others, like me, may find that Hepi's approach provides them with the courage to step into a world enriched by intuition, faith, and interconnectivity—a world that takes into account the contingent behaviours of people and the relationships and contexts within which they live.

As a personal development coach and counsellor, my own work experience and academic background have spanned education, management, and psychology. I am of mixed Scots, Irish and English descent and am a resident of New Zealand.

Tangi Hepi: History and transitions

Tangi Hepi, of the Tainui waka, Rakaunui marae, Ngāti Maniapoto iwi, was born in 1944 in Kawhia, on the west coast of the North Island. He was raised in a traditional ponga house with a dirt floor. He spoke Māori until he attended school at age six, when he was forced to learn English because it was the only language permitted. He did not attend the early years of primary school on a regular basis. At nine years of age he sometimes went to work with his father, taking over the driving of heavy road graders while his father took lunch and tea breaks.

In his childhood, Hepi lived in a Māori community that was adversely affected by European settlement. In the wake of forced acculturation, the community had to cope with the loss of land, the indignities of being regarded by some as an inferior race (Harris, 2008), and a general loss of self-determination. These processes, which began in the mid-19th century, were still ongoing in the 1940s (T. Hepi, personal communication, 6 January 2010). The return of servicemen from the Second World War in the late 1940s brought additional difficulties to his community. This will be discussed further in relation to Figure 6.

Hepi's mother was a strict disciplinarian who believed that hard work, rather than education, was the road to success. Hepi was emotionally closer to his father, who often took him along while working away from home. One of the requirements demanded of his son was that he could only ask twice how to perform his duties. Hepi learned to be a close observer of human behaviour and working processes in order to avoid being corrected.

Hepi believed, in retrospect, that many of his classmates were slow and exhibited poor concentration skills. This often set the Māori children up for criticism as well as some ridicule from the teachers at school (T. Hepi, personal communication, 9 December 2009). Looking back, he wondered whether the heavy drinking within his community at that time might have been responsible. Hepi's mother did not drink, which he believed may have been the reason he became a relatively bright and enquiring

child. He had a close relationship with his kuia, Mange Tumohe Hepi, who was happy to answer his questions and would share her knowledge of the traditional ways with her mokopuna. At her knee, he absorbed some of the wisdom of his people, in addition to the pain and suffering of their distress.

Hepi's koro was a dairy farmer. It was his wish that one of his grandchildren would learn sufficient skills to take over the farm. To this end, Hepi was sent away by his father to learn the ways of the Pākehā. His instruction was to learn how to operate a dairy farm and how Pākehā organised family life, and to find out "how they think."¹ Hepi's education was negotiated by way of a gentlemen's agreement. His father's parting words were, "Feed him, put clothes on his back, and make sure he works hard." Hepi's new family were good to him in many ways. During his time with this Pākehā family he underwent the first of his three name changes. The farmer referred to him as Tom when they were alone together.

Hepi's experiences within his Māori community had made the thought of entering the Pākehā world attractive. He no longer had to hide his Māori bread and cold puha sandwiches from the other kids in the playground at lunchtime. Instead, his food included "posh bread, cake, and afternoon tea." He considered this a big step up for a young Māori boy. The price of his new-found status was that he had to rise at 3.30 a.m. each day. He had a cup of tea and two slices of fruit loaf, and then set off to do the milking. After milking, he cleaned the shed and equipment; fed the calves, dogs, and pigs; and washed and dressed for school. Breakfast was at 8.30 and consisted of lamb chops, sausages, bacon, eggs, porridge, and toast, all served up with "cutlery and finery." It was a rush to get all this done in time for school!

Hepi's second Pākehā "mum," Lorna Reynolds, nurtured him and taught him the refinements and values of the Pākehā world. She also allowed him to use the "flash new Holden" to pick up his girlfriend, and advised him on the etiquette of dating. Within this new world, Hepi found diversity and opportunity.

At age 17 Hepi was employed in the Patea Freezing Works and at age 19 he moved to the Mātaura Freezing Works, near Gore, as a meat inspector. From an early age he had made up his mind that he wanted a wife who was able to look after his children and educate them. At age 21, he married his Pākehā childhood sweetheart, Nyre. Tangi was now Dennis and his transition into the Pākehā world seemed complete.

While, on balance, Hepi felt himself a freer spirit in Pākehā culture, there were aspects to this new world that left a mark. He discovered that telling the truth was viewed as optional provided one had justification, a concept unknown in the Māori world. "With tūpuna looking over your shoulder you don't do the wrong thing, you

don't tell lies or it will come back on you." His awareness began to grow that something was missing in the Pākehā world.

At the age of 33, Hepi finally made his way home to Hawera. His father, who had set him off on his journey, now sensed that his foresight might pay off. He approached his son to take over his grandfather's land negotiations. Dennis once again became Tangi and began to engage with the authorities on behalf of his grandfather.

As the negotiations continued, the enormity of the injustices suffered by his grandfather became clear. He came to reflect upon the difficulties his grandfather had faced and began to formulate a way of understanding the relationship between indigenous people and new settlers, or colonial powers. He later framed this by using the principles of Transactional Analysis (see James & Jongeward, 1996). He could see that his grandfather had been reduced to the role of a child, as there was no ground on which he could communicate adult-to-adult with a system that denied him transparency and fair representation. Hepi met this challenge by dividing himself in two—his Māori self and his Pākehā self. To engage with the authorities, he would step into his Pākehā persona, which enabled him to operate comfortably on an adult-to-adult basis with the representatives of the Crown.

As with the extraordinary circumstances surrounding his early years, Hepi was now once again being placed in a position that would test his resolve for the next 30 years. During that time he had to deal with bureaucratic manoeuvring, unscrupulous agents, and the patronising attitudes of those who felt they knew best about the disposition of his grandfather's land. In the end, his persistence paid off, but not before "Dennis" had played the authorities squarely at their own game.

Over the years, Hepi came to understand that the Pākehā world did not necessarily have all the answers. As a floor manager in the Tomoana Freezing Works in Hawke's Bay, he chose to listen to the experience of the older Māori workers when the men in lab coats could not find a solution to the problem of keeping the floors clean. During his years working in various freezing works across the country Hepi became well known among the largely indigenous workforce. He cared about the people he supervised, a sentiment that was not always shared by management. His sense of disillusionment with his supervisory role grew until a downturn in the industry freed him to strike out in another direction.

At age 45, Tangi Hepi left the freezing works and took a job driving a van for the psychiatric unit of Hastings Hospital. He noticed that many of the Māori patients who attended the hospital left before a fully comprehensive assessment could be made. It

was considered a point of shame for the family to have a relative with mental health problems. Hepi began to encourage whānau to allow a full assessment of their relatives. Reducing the situation to its essence, he suggested to the families that “if the patient’s dial kept flipping between sane and insane, it was likely that one day it would flip the wrong way and not go back.” This ability to convey complex and sometimes completely foreign concepts to his Māori and Pākehā clients in a straightforward way remains a hallmark of Hepi’s work.

As Māori patients began to engage with the mental health service, Hepi came to the notice of David McDougall, the Psychiatric Unit Manager of Hastings Hospital. He approached Hepi to tell him how pleased he was that Māori patients were opting to undergo full assessment and treatment, something that the unit had been trying to achieve for years. He wanted input from Hepi, some of which needed to be included in patient files. To add credibility to those comments, Hepi was encouraged to undertake some formal training in counselling. He worked as a group therapy facilitator under the supervision of Andrew Raven, a psychologist, who became his mentor until he secured a position at Springhill Addiction Centre in Napier. And so was launched a 17-year-long career, during which Tangi Hepi has worked with some of the most challenging addicts and offenders in New Zealand. He has encountered young boys lost and in trouble, mothers who introduced their infant babies to marijuana to make them sleep, the effects of alcohol across generations, and the appalling consequences of methamphetamine use since its first introduction into the New Zealand drug culture in the mid-1990s.

Hepi went on to practise in the fields of mental health (in tangata whai ora/consumer and community contexts) and addiction (in residential, hospital, and community contexts) in a number of regions throughout New Zealand, and across all age groups. He has engaged in counselling practice in the Hawke’s Bay, Manawatū, and Southland regions, for both district health boards and non-governmental organisations, since the 1980s.

Counselling principles and techniques

A number of principles underpin Tangi Hepi’s approach to counselling. They converge on the central belief that wholeness is a prerequisite for good health and responsible behaviour. The therapy consists mainly in bringing the missing parts into the client’s awareness. The tools developed to communicate maladaptive processes or incomplete development are extraordinary in terms of their simplicity as well as their impact.

The cloud diagram

The cloud diagram, as shown in Figure 1, maps out the trajectory of a client's life from conception to the present day. Data are collected during interviews with the client and his or her whānau and then noted on the diagram. The cloud is drawn on butchers' paper large enough to accommodate all the information. The major direction of the enquiry is to discover what has influenced the client over his or her lifespan. The cloud diagram falls into four separate parts: infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. The influences at each stage determine development into the next stage.

Hepi has a particular developmental schema that he prefers to work in when identifying the unresolved issues that clients carry with them.

Phase 1: Infancy. When researching this stage, questions elicit information about the health and habits of a person's mother during the gestation period. The critical information concerns stress, alcohol, and drug use. The influences of significant others during infancy are identified and noted on the diagram. This would typically include mother, father, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles, and other caregivers.

Phase 2: Childhood. Hepi calls this the "running and jumping" stage. In this stage a child is likely to act out much of what he or she has learned in infancy. From the child's games, a great deal can be deduced about the type of environmental influences affecting them.

Phase 3: Adolescence. During adolescence the boundaries of both home and society are tested. This is often a trying time for parents as the behaviours can become risk-laden for young people. They are also vulnerable to peer pressure and exploitation. During this period, Tangi Hepi believes that society should look after the whole peer group rather than the individual. This part of the diagram is less defined because many young people get caught up in activities that prolong the adolescent phase.

Phase 4: Adulthood. There comes a time for most individuals when the adolescent phase of life passes away. Responsibility for oneself and others is assumed, as is becoming accountable for one's own actions. During this period an individual establishes his or her own boundaries and learns respect for the boundaries of others. Adulthood, which may be reached at any age, is shown on the diagram emerging from adolescence as clouds.

These phases are depicted on the cloud diagram. It can be seen that while most people move from adolescence to adulthood, some, particularly those affected by drug or alcohol addiction, remain locked in the adolescent phase. As they progress, they may become a danger both to themselves and to others.

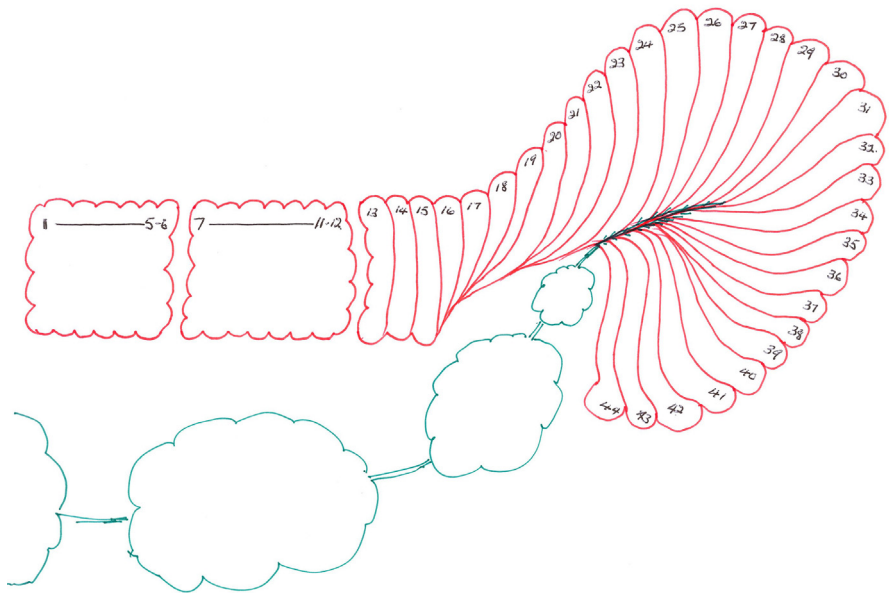


Figure 1: Cloud Diagram Mapping Significant Life Experiences Year by Year

When children are involved, the sections of the adult’s life are redrawn on transparent paper and the details of the child or young person’s life are added. The transparent paper is placed on top of the adult’s cloud diagram. In this way, the client can see how he or she has influenced the growth of the child, and since they have already taken note of how their early lives were shaped by their own parents, their responsibilities and the intergenerational trends become inescapable.

The kākano

From his kuia, Hepi learned the importance of the potential that lies inside us all. Wairua, a sense of oneself as interconnected to a wider world of meaning, something that we can only loosely describe as spirituality, is essential for good health. Sound relationships with one’s whānau, a strong body, and a healthy mind are additional components. Living in the present was one of Mange Tumohe Hepi’s recommendations for good mental health—advice that has a modern resonance.

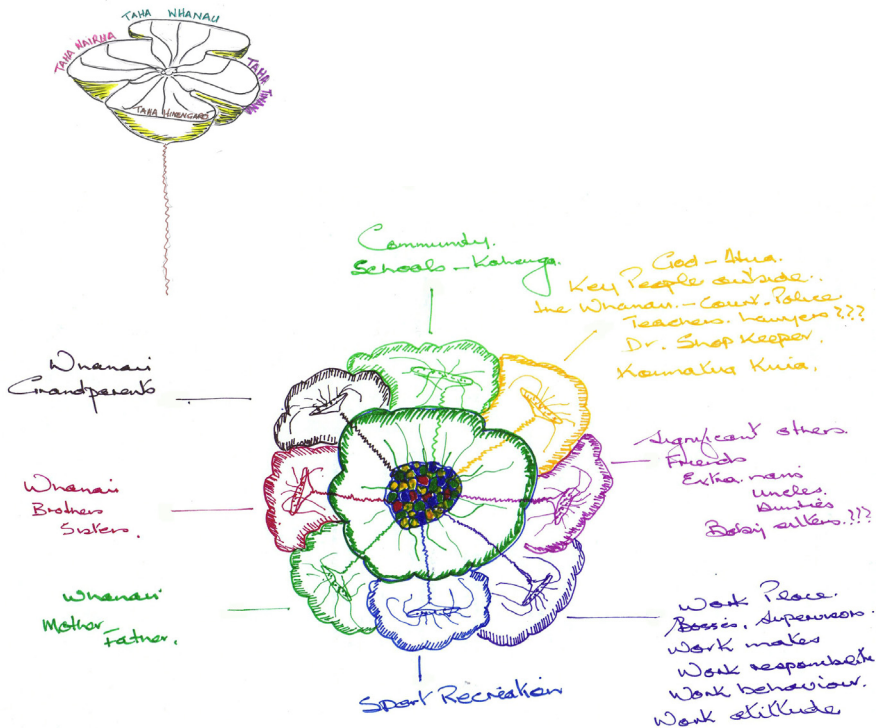


Figure 2: The Kākano

To enable his clients to grasp this concept, Hepi draws the kākano, the seed. The kākano contains the embryonic seeds that are necessary for development. Each one of the four components represents an aspect of growth, as described by his kuia. If any of the four components fails to thrive, the adult will fail to develop fully. The growing seeds must be nurtured by those in the child’s immediate environment; they cannot grow on their own. The influence of those responsible for the development of the child is indicated in Figure 2. The gathering bowls feed the four necessary elements into the kākano. In his work with clients, Hepi is able to help them discover those times in their lives when they have lacked the necessary nourishment for growth. Clients can take comfort that the potential for growth and healing is already inside them. The work is to bring them back to life, to “blow on the ngārahu, to rekindle the flame.”

Of the four components of the *kākanō*, *whānau* is considered to be the most important. For many of Hepi's clients, solidarity within the *whānau* is an overriding principle, although for some it may be transferred from blood lineage to gang allegiance.

Strength and robustness are characteristics commonly associated with Māori. Once again, this component is normally strong in the perception of Māori clients, even if their bodies have become weakened by addiction, inadequate nutrition, stress, or poor living conditions. Physical health may also have been compromised by foetal trauma and deprivation in infancy.

The concept of *wairua* is at the heart of Māori belief. The development of *wairua* is seen as essential to well-being, not only for an individual but for the whole community. This part of the seed has not developed in many of Hepi's clients.

According to Hepi, the mental health of many of his patients is compromised. Mind-altering drugs, including alcohol, reduce mental functioning. He describes this pictorially to his clients by drawing a picture of the human torso and head, encapsulating the heart and the brain. He explains that communication between the head and the heart is necessary for clear functioning. Drugs and alcohol sever the connection, leaving the

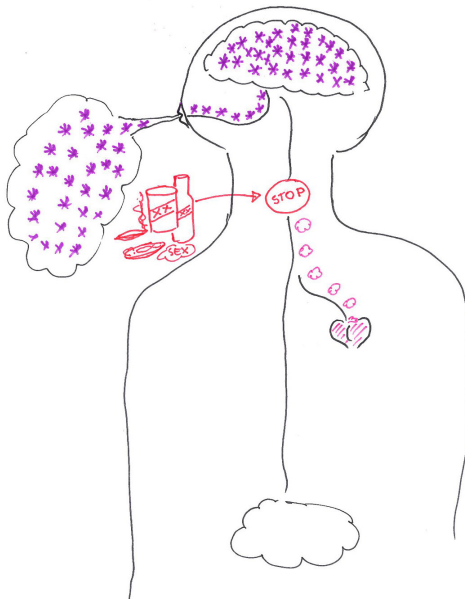


Figure 3: Heart and Mind Severed by Drug and Alcohol Use

patient's mental functioning rudimentary. Without the heart to guide the mental functions, thoughts go around and around until a sort of madness sets in. It is a picture of a mind out of control. The heart, he explains, is what keeps one true.

The skills required to bring about significant change for his clients "are not rocket science," according to Hepi. In his opinion, if any of the key ingredients necessary for well-being is missing, the inner being is also missing. Hepi describes them as "good old fashioned family values." Children who never grow up are abandoned to a perpetual and unguided adolescence.

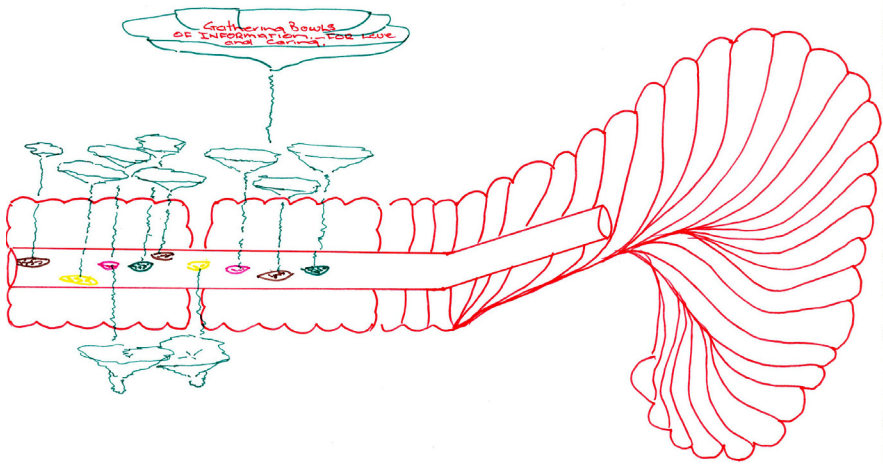


Figure 4: Kākano and Cloud Diagram Integration

Integration of the cloud diagram and kākano

Once the cloud diagram is complete and the concurrent evaluation of the development of the kākano has been carried out, the two are brought together. The visual representation shows the four seeds slowly developing over time, drawn out like an extended umbilical cord stretching from birth to adulthood across the cloud diagram. This illustrates how they began and how they were nurtured, and the resulting state of balance in the adult or in those suspended in arrested adolescence. When clients see the path they have travelled to their current position, as well as the ways in which their kākano has developed, very little has to be said. The matters of concern are self-evident.

The ngākau

The concept of the ngākau lies at the centre of Tangi Hepi's work. It made an enormous impact on him when his kuia came to comfort him as a distressed child.

*Ka kite a hau e moko e tangi tangi ana to ngākau.
I can see, my grandchild, that your ngākau is crying.*

The ngākau, as explained by Hepi's kuia, is like a velvet cushion that supports the heart. Beneath this cushion lies all the deep-seated pain and hurt suffered over a lifetime. It remains mostly locked away, even from the client, until the force of accumulated

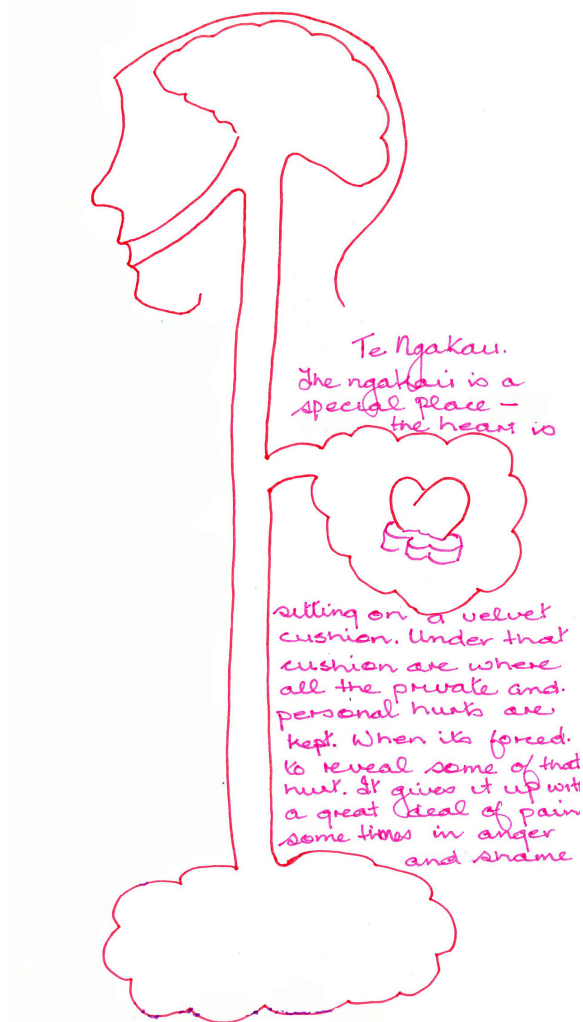


Figure 5: The Ngākau

suffering causes it to overflow so that the ngākau weeps. Often we don't know why it is weeping, but when it chooses to do so, it should be honoured. This concept is enormously powerful for clients from all cultures. It allows an expression of emotion to be recognised and accepted without the need for words.

In Māori culture, communication through emotion can be as important, and indeed more meaningful, than the exchange of words. After listening to the client and hearing his or her story, Hepi will move to the whiteboard and draw a human figure with a heart placed on top of a cushion. He will then tell the story of his kuia, using her exact words. In this way the client's feelings are acknowledged visually and orally, with the additional element of self-disclosure on the part of the counsellor. Altogether this is a powerful acknowledgement of the client's pain, delivered in a way that demonstrates deep empathy and understanding. It is usually cathartic for the client.

The role of puku riri and ngākau in trauma

The small explosive marking found so often in Hepi's drawings indicates the puku riri, the angry stomach. When anger wells up inside a person, it is considered to come from this place. Figure 6 is a diagram that Hepi uses to represent the behaviour of those coping with the effects of trauma.

When a traumatised client drinks to deaden the numbness or pain they feel, the alcohol disrupts mental functioning so that the normal mechanisms of behavioural restraint are no longer available. Their feelings may turn to anger, which, when it reaches a certain level, can erupt, often resulting in violent and abusive behaviour. During this time, those present are often able to pick up from the client an indication of the root of the problem, as it is likely to leak out along with the swearing and abusive language. Once the anger has dissipated, and the puku riri is empty, tears appear, indicating the weeping of the ngākau. In the morning, the client has no knowledge of the contents of the abusive language or of his behaviour and so the cycle begins again.

This was the process described to Hepi by his grandmother with reference to returned servicemen who suffered painfully with the knowledge of the lives they had taken, and the effects on the whānau of those who were killed. She said they would talk of their ngākau biting at them.

Transactional Analysis

Hepi uses concepts from the field of Transactional Analysis (see James & Jongeward, 1996) to help clients understand what is happening for them. The Parent-Adult-Child model is particularly useful and is often applied in his work. For example, when an alcoholic client complains about the behaviour of his or her partner, a diagram showing what happens when he or she arrives home intoxicated can quickly convey to the

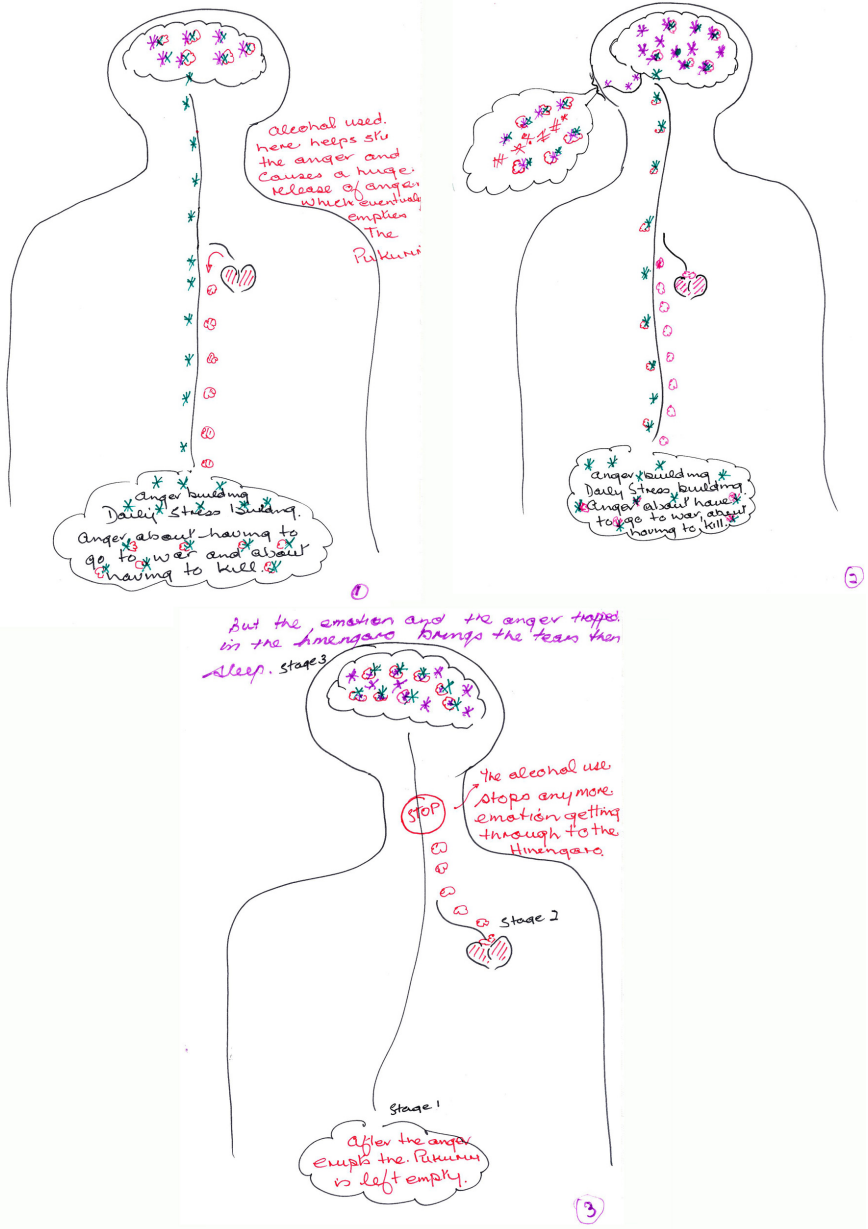


Figure 6: The Role of Puku Riri and the Ngākau in Trauma

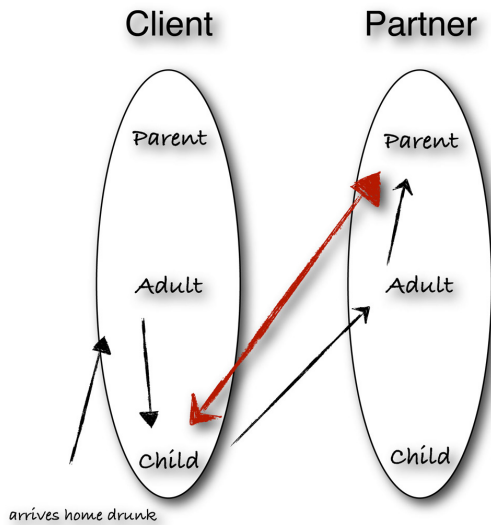


Figure 7: Transactional Analysis: Intoxicated Client and Sober Partner

client that the behaviour is part of a dynamic for which he or she must hold some responsibility. Hepi will lead his client to see that when they arrive home after drinking, they have moved from an “adult” to a “child” role. This forces the partner into a “parental” role, which can quickly ignite the client’s indignation and anger.

Hepi has also found Transactional Analysis to be particularly useful in working with teenagers.

Accountability and responsibility

Client accountability and the necessity for them to take responsibility for their journey into wellness is a critical part of Hepi’s approach. “Why are you here?” he might ask in his slow and considered way. “Are you here for me to pat you on the back and comfort you, or are you here so that you can do something about the problems you are facing?”

Hepi’s approach does not draw back from highlighting a client’s responsibility for his or her actions. Once he presents his client with the drawings containing the information collected during the initial interviews, the trajectory of the client’s life is transparent. The client cannot draw back in retreat.

Belief

Truth-seeking is what many of us do; in academic life, it is the preferred currency. The work of Tangi Hepi, however, is predicated on the sanctity of belief. It is something one senses as being deeply embedded in his worldview, such that a karakia at the lake's edge may serve as the sole therapeutic intervention for one client, but would be inappropriate for another. Honouring a client's worldview seems not so much a contrivance as a natural extension of the principle that the client's belief is an essential part of who he or she is.

Extending this view, it is also apparent in his work that a person is forever located within their lineage, forever touched by those who have gone before, and forever implicated in the lives of those who come after. This form of transgenerational accountability, one that is embedded in immediate personal relationships, can provide strong leverage when dealing with addictions and criminality.

Language

The use of Māori language is effective even when the words are not understood. Hepi is aware of the effect language has on his clients and uses it when he wants to "turn up the dial." The message is conveyed by context and tone. To his Māori clients, it may convey a deep sense of connection. One can imagine that in the throes of despair, the music of one's native tongue might awaken a different state of consciousness.

Additional significance may reside in the use of Māori language in Hepi's work. When he reverts to his native tongue, it is often to make a significant point that is meaningful to him. In this way, the use of te reo indicates something of himself that the client is likely to observe unconsciously. The empathic exchange will be strengthened, allowing the client to sense that he or she is not only heard but also felt.

Wisdom and authenticity

We work constantly to improve our theoretical understanding of what it is that we bring to the therapeutic alliance. The evidence for the efficacy of our different approaches is much less convincing than we would like, but one thing we know for certain is that the relationship between counsellor and client is critical for success (Duncan, Miller, Wampold, & Hubble, 2010). So what is it that a therapist does within that alliance that augurs well for a successful outcome? Irvin Yalom puts it this way:

Formal texts, journal articles, and lectures portray therapy as precise and systematic, with carefully delineated stages, strategic technical interventions, the

methodical development and resolution of transference, analysis of object relations, and a careful, rational program of insight-offering interpretations. Yet I believe deeply that, when no one is looking, the therapist throws in the “real” thing. (Yalom, 1980, p. 3)

The “real thing” that Tangi Hepi throws into the mix is wisdom and authenticity. He possesses a steady, quiet wisdom that engenders trust. He is modest and empathic but at the same time principled and unflinching in holding the mirror to his clients’ issues. Knowledge of his principles and techniques, while useful in the hands of others, would lack in delivery without these elements of wisdom and authenticity.

Discussion

The power of connection

We are social animals. We evolved over the past 150,000 years to live in small groups of perhaps no more than one hundred. To belong is a deeply embedded need, for we could not survive on our own. Within our small tribes, we each knew our place and kept within the boundaries. When danger threatened we were protected by the group. To be cast out was a death sentence.

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Imagine a young Māori boy raised in the city, alienated from his tribal roots, lost and in trouble. Entering the room, he slumps down on the chair, hat drawn over his face and eyes down. He responds to a question grudgingly, folding into himself for protection. From the name and the few words spoken, the counsellor constructs enough to say, “I know you.” “I know your people.” “They come from up Taranaki way.” “I remember when...”

And imagine a young woman in trouble, hurt and grieving, being taken back to the marae where she can be cared for while her ngākau weeps, rocked in the arms of her people, supported until the weeping stops and she can see her way ahead again.

Picture a man so angry that he is holding a hospital ward to ransom. Distressed and slumped behind the door he is holding shut against the noise and mayhem, he hears the sound of a quiet voice in his ear:

E karakia tauwa, e kare?

Shall we have a karakia, my friend?

Put yourself in the place of the psychotic patient who has lost his pet, confused, crying out in despair. Distressed and aggressive, he starts slipping back into psychosis, placing

himself and others at risk. Instead of the usual sting of the syringe, he finds himself held in the grip of another, strong arms holding him fast until the tension and agitation starts to ebb from his body. Gentle rocking accompanied by soothing words and a song offer him the security he needs to release his fears.

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This is the work of Tangi Hepi. In these things we have a coming together. It is a sense of belonging, a sense of connection. These things are central to our nature. Without them we are exposed and vulnerable. To re-connect is to find sanctuary, to find ourselves again within the whole (cf. Durie, 2003; Townsend & McWhirter, 2005).

Rediscovering the sacred

Thomas Moore stands in a long tradition of therapists who turn back to ancient wisdom to find a way of working with ailments of the human condition. His work is necessarily vague. His way of working owes more to a sense of enchantment than science. In his book *Care of the Soul*, he claims that “Psychology is a secular science ... care of the soul is a sacred art” (Moore, 1992, p. xv). The issue for Moore is that psychology has lost its way in its attempt to uncover the working of the human mind. The reason for this, he claims, is that psychology denies the very thing that makes us human. A human being devoid of spirituality cannot be whole, cannot be well. He calls for a rebirth of psychology, one that will see a marriage between spirituality and psychology, which he sees as the only path for a discipline that is capable of truly understanding the human condition.

Healing within a Māori context is a sacred art. Although its origins are lost in time, it is an old culture that lay undisturbed for centuries after the arrival of Māori in Aotearoa some seven hundred years ago. Over this time, the oral tradition was handed down to a chosen few in a highly structured system of schooling. The knowledge is considered sacred and its disclosure has traditionally been seen as tapu. It has a coherent and developed philosophy. The concept of te kākano developed by Hepi is similar to Durie’s (1994) *Whare Tapa Whā* (four sides of the house) model of well-being, which he presents as a structure built of four strong walls, each one representing one of the four elements: physical health, mental health, spirituality, and whānau. In modern medicine the first two of these walls have well-developed bodies of knowledge. Of the third and fourth walls, we find spirituality impoverished to the very edge of existence, while whānau holds some ground in the field of sociology, although it exists more as a distant outpost than a central part of the structure.

The collective unconscious

Carl Jung (1990) developed his theory of the collective unconscious half a century ago. It is not commonly known that Freud, despite his differences with Jung, also made a concession to the concept (Freud, 2005). “If human beings do inherit psychic formations, something analogous to animal instincts, then these are what form the core of the ucs [unconscious]” (ibid., p. 77). In the much more powerful concept of *tūpuna*, Māori culture can be seen as offering further evidence for the passing of knowledge from one generation to the next, predating Western thought by many centuries. If we can give credence to this concept, in spite of so far lacking a firm, identifiable mechanism for transmission, we can see more clearly why removing people from their cultural roots might be confusing and alienating for them.

The communication dynamic

Freud was a man of great compassion who worked tirelessly to develop psychoanalysis as a science of the mind (Grosskurth, 1991). Notwithstanding some important misconceptions, Freud’s work still stands in the annals of scientific endeavour as a significant contribution to our understanding of the mind. He spent many years of his life, sometimes up to ten hours a day (Appignanesi & Forrester, 2000), listening to accounts of the troubled lives of his patients. With this amount of experience clocked up over a lifetime, any observation he might make should not be passed over without serious consideration. Freud commented: “It is a highly remarkable fact that the ucs [unconscious] of one person can act on that of another while bypassing the cs [conscious] completely. This merits more detailed investigation...as a described fact, though it is indisputable” (Freud, 2005, p. 76).

Carl Rogers is another legendary name in the world of counselling. The elements that Rogers deemed necessary for success (see Rogers, 1951) are now standard, and usually compulsory, reading for students of counselling in all its modalities. Rogers also believed that at times during his counselling sessions the communication became one of unconscious to unconscious:

Somehow there is a way in which the inner core of me relates to the inner core of the other person, and I understand better than my mind understands, better than my brain understands—I’ll put it that way. Mind is greater than brain and, somehow, my nonconscious mind understands more than my conscious mind understands, so I’m able to respond to something in this other person that I didn’t know I was responding to. (Rogers & Russell, 2002, p. 285)

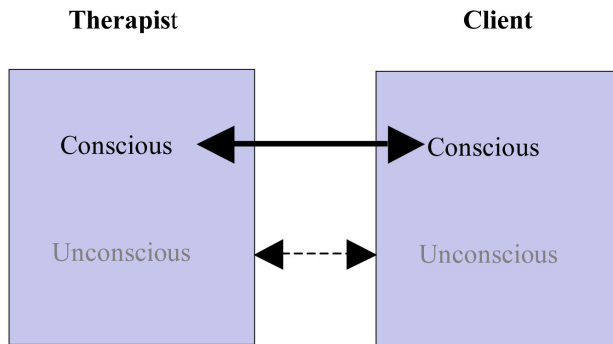


Figure 8: Communication Model of Jung and Freud

Once again, like Freud, we have a suggestion that something a little deeper than normal conversation is going on between therapist and client, with neither Freud nor Rogers making more than a passing comment to that effect.

In very recent years we have started to develop a fledgling understanding of what might be happening when the communication between two people moves into a deeper realm. Working within the field of neuroscience, Dobbs (2006) has demonstrated that when observing the experience of another empathically, mirror neurons in our brains fire in unison with the other. We literally share the experience.

I have placed Hepi in distinguished company. Like Freud, Jung, and Rogers, Hepi has spent many years working with clients, and in the same way he is an empiricist, forming his views by observing human behaviour. His observations have centred not only on individual clients but also on small groups, and groups that stand together as nations. As a disaffected member of New Zealand's indigenous people, he has spent almost half his life fighting the injustices that were inflicted upon his people in the wake of European settlement, and in the process he has learned a great deal about human nature. He worked as a child, and as a man, often in the shadows, where he developed the skill of careful observation. He grew up ill at ease with his own people, a view which did not change until halfway through his life, when he came finally to understand what was happening to them and how they had become impoverished not only financially, but also physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Hepi's understanding of the human condition has not been gained through a textbook or armchair education. Rather, it has been forged by first-hand experience and observation. If he is successful in his work, what can we take from this? Is it possible that

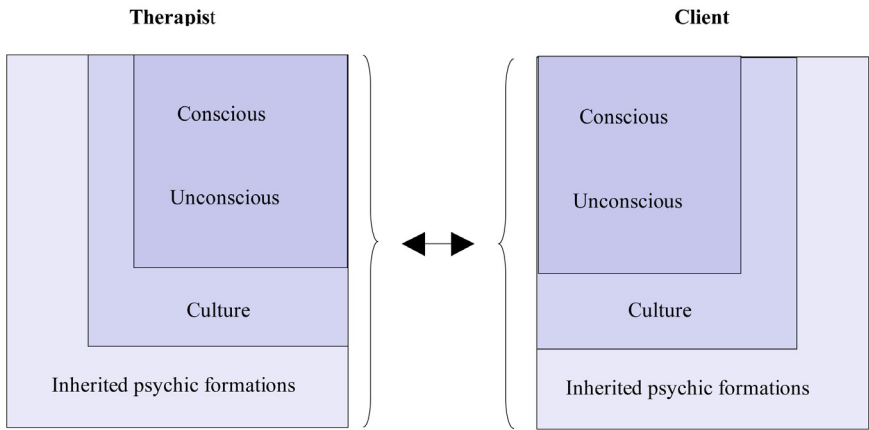


Figure 9: Communication Including Mind, Culture and Inherited Memory

his ability to connect with the core of a client, to bring them to full awareness of their situation, might have something to do with the richness of the communication dynamic within which he operates?

Is it possible that by understanding the route to wholeness, Hepi reawakens in his clients a sense of the sacred? Is it possible that what happens in his consulting room is a meeting not just of minds, conscious or unconscious, but also of spirit and a shared humanity?

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the counselling practices of Tangi Hepi. It could be seen as a simple tribute to his work, which in some respects it is. However, there is another reason that his work deserves attention. Our discipline—which strives for objectivity, for evidence-based methodologies, for the security of scientific validation—can sometimes find itself suddenly caught short. Somewhere between the worlds of what we know and what we can never know, grey areas appear. And we may be allowed to be perplexed, for, suddenly, the knowledge we hold so reverently is overshadowed. Then we may ask, by what? In this instance, by a man who can help his clients see their situation through the use of illustration and metaphor in a way that words and logic fail to achieve. By a man who understands the need to belong and the need for nourishment, not only for the mind and body but also for the spirit.

Or is it something about the counsellor himself, an imparted wisdom perhaps, or being someone in whom a client feels able to place his or her trust? Perhaps the client senses the strength of a lifeline made of four strong parts, or perhaps it is the presence of the tūpuna that give some added dimension.

The question must be asked: With all our emphasis on method and technique, are we overlooking the more important dimensions of a therapeutic alliance? Should we be looking at how well our clients understand their situation, should we focus more on placing our clients in the wider context of family and environment, or should we seek perhaps to help them rediscover the sacred?

Finally, one very big question remains. When clients seek to anchor themselves once again, the anchor must be able to match the depth of the ocean and the force of the current. Perhaps we need to look again and ask whether our effectiveness lies not so much in what we know or how we work, but ultimately in who we are.

Note

- 1 Any quotations that are unreferenced are attributable to Tangi Hepi, spoken in the course of our conversations during October, November, and December 2009 and January 2010.

Glossary of Māori terms

hinengaro	mind, thought, intellect, consciousness, awareness
iwi	tribe
kākano	seed
karakia	prayer or sacred chant
koro	grandfather, old man
kuia	grandmother, old woman
marae	meeting place of a whānau or iwi
mokopuna	grandchild, descendant
ngākau	seat of the affections, heart, mind
ngārahu	ashes
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent
puku riri	angry stomach
tangata whai ora	consumers or service users
tapu	forbidden, sacred
te reo	the (Māori) language

tūpuna	ancestors, grandparents
wairua	spirit, soul, quintessence, the spirit of a person which is interconnected with all things and exists beyond death
waka	canoe
whare tapa whā	four sides of the house
whānau	immediate family

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