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Understanding āhurutanga in teaching practice

Introduction

This essay examines and contextualises the principle of āhurutanga. This is then followed by a self-reflection of my teaching practice as a Pacific educator, and how these inform an inclusive and inviting environment for diverse learners. This essay will then identify and appropriately address social, cultural and educational needs of diverse leaners.

Āhurutanga in Māori is defined as warmth and comfort (Moorfield, 2011). As a Te Ao Māori principle āhurutanga incapsulates the importance of a safe space and what is needed to achieve this with people, kaupapa and environment (Gerrard, 2013). Āhurutanga is developed when one creates a way forward without encroaching another's space, its indigenous systems and processes give purpose informing one's behavior and social interactions (Pohuta, 2003). Āhurutanga inquires one to understand their own whakapapa that creates a sense of belonging and therefore, a safe space situated within their own epistemological views. This standpoint is important to understand, as it allows the individual to navigate safely and acknowledge the space of others. The underpinning values of āhurutanga is significant to Te Ao Māori as it adds to their cultural purpose and obligations. These values can also consider āhurutanga as holistic principle for Māori wellbeing (Pohuta, 2003); were one's

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spiritual values and beliefs is considered and integrated into a learning space, āhurutanga is created without one feeling whakamā or threatened (Coley et al. 2019).

In reflection to my own practice, my personal values and beliefs have influenced the āhurutanga of the learners through prayer. As a New Zealand born Samoan, Indo-Fijian who was raised in a Christian household, prayer or karakia plays an integral part in my life. With this value it is essential for me to pray over my lesson before class; I also acknowledge in the space other beliefs and welcome them to start our day in prayer. This acknowledges the various spiritual values and beliefs learners bring therefore creating āhurutanga. As a kaiako with learners ranging between 20 and 60+, it is important for me as their lead to equip myself with the skills of first aid so if ever there was an emergency, I would have some comprehension on ways to assist and manage the situation. Here the āhurutanga of Health and Safety is essential for learners to feel protected and surrounded by confident practitioners in their physical environment. In this space it is also important for me to empower the learners in their space to make aware the emergency exits, location or defibrillators and first aid kits. This knowledge further supports and considers the ethical protocols for the learner and my legal responsibilities as their Kaiako. At the very beginning of the course semester a "Tauira Induction Checklist" form must be completed by each learner before teaching commences. The form outlines the policies, processes and services all learners must be aware of, and prompts the individual to familiarise themselves and understand the information provided. The form is confidential to the learner and kaiako, as medical information is disclosed in the form to ensure the āhurutanga of health and safety needs are meet for each individual. Lastly building a professional relationship with the learner is essential from the beginning to safeguard the ako (learning and teaching) space between kaiako and tauira. Sharing a part of my

lived experience with learners I find builds trust, this trust then allows the learner to feel comfortable being their unfeigned selves, where I then embrace and value them for who they are. This is important to my practice as it scaffolds towards a professional relationship that attributes to āhurutanga.

As an educator it is important for me to consider and become known of the diverse leaners in my classroom, challenges they present, what is needed for a safe learning or working environment for all, and the provision of tools, facilities, and resources to achieve a quality outcome (Kingi, 2010). Drawing from my own experience I had a learner who disclosed to me his difficulty engaging with other tauira and kaiako, his social insecurities where further expressed in his mannerisms and that he described himself as an extreme introvert with anxiety issues. I firstly acknowledge how please I was he had disclosed this with me, then I expressed how I too suffer from anxiety and understand the mental pressures we go through internally. I advised that the learning environment he was coming into was a safe space where his values and insecurities where recognised and accepted. For instance, at any time he could exit the room to get some fresh air to calm his anxiety, it was important for me to provide a space that was flexible and allowed individuals to work in pairs and small focus groups, where the space wasn't so intimidating or centered on one individual. Furthermore, if this individual wanted a one on one session before or after class to go over content, that my door was open to serve his needs. In my teaching experience I also came across tauira who were a lot more technologically inclined and preferred to work online, and receive online resources; again, flexibility was key in this area, as I was forced to become more innovated with my delivery and create an online classroom to allow for blended learning. In a class with diverse cultural needs, it requires more than just flexibility, it draws upon my own competence and willingness to learn and reciprocate

the ako in the space. For example, to create an inclusive and inviting environment for culture I created a show and tell as part of a whakawhanaungatanga (process of establishing relationships, relating well to others) each learner was asked to bring in an object that was significant to their cultural, values or identity. This established a space where cultural knowledge from diverse backgrounds is acknowledged and praised. Lastly learning disabilities can be the most challenging when learners come into the class undiagnosed, in my experience dyslexia is the most common I have come across. A learning space where facilities such as voice recorders, computers and printers for large text are available, can be the most basic but effective resources that can be used to achieve a quality outcome for all learners especially those with dyslexia.

There are many challenges in education that has had significant impact on adult learners, the two most prominent in my field of practice has been social and technological. The development and innovation of information and communication technologies are impacting the way people work, socialise and learn (Bonk & King, 1998); thus, impacting the environment educators teach in and the way they deliver information. For adult learners this presents many social challenges, as their learning capabilities are forced to adjust to the blended delivery systems technology presents. Although the effectiveness of e-learning has been proven in studies, retention rates raise concern (Kim, 2009). In the article *Reaching REMOTE Learners: Successes and Challenges for Students in an Online Graduate Degree Program in the Pacific Islands,* Rao and Giuli (2010) conducted a programme to evaluate issues for an online adult learner in the Pacific. The factors that helped adult learners succeed included personal interactions at the beginning of the course, and opportunities to interact with other learners to form relationships. The face-to-face meeting as part of the first semester was part of an orientation

starter, where the learners met remote instructors and received training for the online technologies. Additionally, the incorporation of the adult learner's community skills and values into the course paper, created an authentic learning context, that considered the cultural connections and relationships for each learner (Rao & Giuli, 2010). The social interaction, paired with the online technology training, and acknowledgment of community values are a few learning and teaching approaches that can be used to empower the adult learner, in an unfamiliar learning environment. These approaches are simple but take time and patience for the educator to succeed and create a learning space that nurtures āhurutanga.

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