

conservation

Low carbon urban living transitions to sustainability

Consumer/citizen participation in above (i.e. environmental conservation).

Citizens, communities, commerce and councils (local governments) working together to contribute to sustainable urban development.

The formation of people-networks that encourage new ideas and promote the learning, experimentation and creative problem solving required for resilient communities.

Note that psychologists in many parts of the world are moving to use their expertise in these endeavours. Health professionals will be increasingly involved in a comprehensive response to climate change and the transition required to sustainability. The NZPsS responsibility is to ensure that our own psychologists have the opportunity to contribute to these endeavours in the near future.

**This statement was posted April 2018 at [www.psychology.org.nz/about-nzps/position-statements](http://www.psychology.org.nz/about-nzps/position-statements)**

## An interview with Dr Tia Neha, Māori and Indigenous Psychology lecturer at Victoria University of Wellington



*Dr Tia Neha is the Māori and Indigenous Psychology lecturer at Victoria University of Wellington. She is currently a Fellow of the Centre for Applied Cross-Cultural Research. Tia was awarded the New Zealand Psychological Society Karahipi Tumuaki President's Scholarship in 2012. This scholarship assisted towards her Fulbright tour to North America where she gave eighteen*

*presentations on her doctoral research at various institutions. The title of her dissertation was "He maumahara ki ngā korero a ngā whānau ki Te Waipounamu: Family recollections and social contributions to Māori children's learning in the South Island, New Zealand". Tia is currently continuing with a follow-up study from her PhD. This work addresses whether there is home to school connectedness or dissonance and the associations to Māori pre-adolescents to adolescents learning and wellbeing outcomes.*

**Tia, could you tell us about your iwi, whānau and the place you grew up?**

Kia Ora

Nō Ngāti Hau, Te Aitanga A Mate, Hiruharama, Te Whānau o Harāwaka me Ngai Te Apatu ōku hapu. My hapu connections are from Whakapara, Makarika, Hiruharama, Hawaii and Wairoa. Nō Ngā Puhī, Ngāti Porou, Te Whānau Ā Apanui me Ngāti Kahungunu ōku iwi. My iwi affiliations hail from Northland, East Coast, East Cape and the Hawkes Bay. As a child to the present, I have spent some of my time with my whānau that live in a Ngāti Porou village called Makarika. My whānau marae are called Rongo i te Kai and Rongohaere. My mother was raised by my great great grandmother on our marae Rongo i te Kai. My Nanny's name was Henrietta Makarini Puhata or commonly known as Sei Kuia. She was an expert in what is known as kapahaka and waiata and well respected in the Ngāti Porou region. She was a mentor and advisor to Sir Apirana Ngata where they travelled extensively around New Zealand revitalising Te Reo and kapa haka. Sir Apirana Ngata commissioned the building of Rongo i te Kai marae for Nanny and her future generations of mokopuna to come. She is buried at our whānau cemetery with my great grandfather, grandmother, my Aunty Tia who I was named after and my two uncles. My late father and my grandparents on that side are buried in our whānau cemetery called

Pungawerewere which is close to Rongohaere marae. My grandmother (Dad's Mum) was an expert in Māori medicine. Her rongoa (healing medicines) are what saved my life. I was a child who had lots of life threatening illnesses and so I am indebted to my Nanny Mac. I feel fortunate to be a mokopuna of my many Koro, Kuia and the eldest child of my mātua. Without them I would not be here.

In the 1960s, my parents moved to Dunedin to start a new life from their homelands in Makarika. Both sets of grandparents also came to live with us and Te Reo was the first language that was spoken in my whānau. It must have been a foreign context to my whānau as we were one of the very few whānau Māori in Broad Bay (a semi-rural suburb of Dunedin) for 25 years. I love my home city Dunedin as this city has helped to shape the person I am today. I grew up in a whānau environment that spoke a lot of Te Reo which enabled me to know where I came from and how I connected to my whakapapa. Having a strong sense of the collective self enabled me to navigate confidently between my whānau and school life (which was predominantly in English instruction). My mother was invited to teach tikanga and Te Reo at my school and it was lovely knowing that what I learned at home was being mirrored in the school setting.

### **What do you remember most about your childhood?**

I remember lots of things from my childhood but the best thing I dearly loved was my pet cat Pixie. He was so kind and tolerant of my childhood behaviours and kept me company when I was ailing or sad. Pixie made sure to wake me up to come and play with him. It was one of his ways of making sure I didn't dwell on my illnesses. When I was mobile I would

follow him around our home and he would allow me to sit on him as my own private horse. We would play with each other and he would be always waiting for me when I returned home from school. Pixie taught me a lot about friendship, compassion and empathy and when he passed away I became incredibly lonely for my friend. From Pixie I have gone on to have six more cats where each one of them have shown me how to love and they have forgiven me almost instantly for my human frailties and emotions. My cats have been the bedrock for me and from my childhood to becoming an adult and are definitely part of my whānau. So much so that my dear feline friends feature on my acknowledgements page of my PhD. I may be described as a cray cray cat lady but I wear that badge with pride.

### **Where did your schooling take place?**

My early childhood education took place at Broad Bay Playcentre, Dunedin. It was a community of parents as first teachers that first exposed me to peer socialisation away from home. Just like at home, I learnt that the Playcentre routines were to be abided by and that playing was our learning. I loved the water play and remember floating the sunlight detergent bottles and the walnut shells filled with putty or plasticine and a sail inserted in them to represent little sailing ships in the big tub. However, I was forever being told to put on an apron to stay dry but it would soon go off once the supervisor had her back turned. The same process with the apron would happen with the painting activity.

My primary schooling took place at Broad Bay school. It was a small semi-rural school of 66 pupils. Most of my class I already knew from Playcentre and we transitioned into the Primmers, Standards through to

Form 2. Most of my classmates in my year group have gone on to become life time friends. My favourite teacher was Mrs Duffy. She was a firm but fair teacher who taught me how to handwrite. From her instruction I went on to win lots of handwriting competitions at school. One day on the mat, she was reading how Maui caught the sun. She pronounced his name like Mowee and as a six year I told her that, "my mother doesn't say Mowee she says Maui". Mrs Duffy rang Mum and told her what had happened. Mum agreed that I was right and Maui was pronounced Maui. Mrs Duffy then invited Mum to come to school to read lots of traditional Māori stories. I was really thrilled because I knew and loved the Maui stories and Mum was coming to school to teach us. Mum was then asked to teach Te Reo and lots of tikanga based activities like poi making and accompanied waiata and ti rakau. It was lots of fun to have Mum at school. Again at six my Dad would sit me down after he came home from work and would teach me mental arithmetic and the timestables. He showed me how to do long division and percentages and would relate a lot of the mathematical operations in Te Reo. I loved doing Math at home because I got to go on excursions with my Dad who would tell me in Te Reo what the concepts of binary operations were when dealing with eeling, fishing and watching the birds. He would then relate them back to his childhood days in Northland. These valuable experiences and input from my parents were what led me to loving to learn.

I attended a Māori girls private boarding school in Auckland. It was called Queen Victoria College. The transition to high school was internally hard as I knew no one at the school and I was one of the very few girls from the South Island. Most of the

girls knew each other or their taste of music was different from mine. I watched with dread as my whānau left the school grounds and I thought my world was destroyed. I was really cross with my parents because I couldn't go to one of the local schools in Dunedin and I had no say in the matter with attending this boarding school or not. Little did I know my parents made multiple sacrifices. My Dad would always be teary eyed when I would return back to Auckland after the school holidays. And my parents worked in four jobs to provide me a greater exposure to my Māori culture in education whilst also providing for my three other siblings. I pulled my socks up and went on to be awarded many scholarships at high school to support my parents paying exorbitant school fees. At this school a lot of classmates showed fantastic leadership and achievement by later becoming lawyers, researchers, accountants, teachers, judges and scientists. The best part I loved about Queen Vic was the wairua. This was demonstrated in the beautiful waiata and harmony when we performed in many cultural events, during church and overseas trips. Whenever I reunite with my friends the beautiful harmony still remains when we sing and there is no other harmony to date that hits the same notes or harmony of our waiata in the world. Yes, this is a form of implicit bias but you have to see it and feel it to believe it.

#### **What did you do after completing your schooling?**

This was a time for work experimentation in working as a roustabout, a basic secretarial course, a yard hand, a lab technician for the Department of Agriculture, a quality assurance person in electronics, a youth leader in literacy, a courier despatcher. I then decided to train as a teacher and stayed in the field for nearly 20 years.

#### **Were there people who encouraged you to take your education further?**

Not really. I was the first person in my whānau to receive university degrees and teachers' college diplomas. Although my whānau encouraged me and they meant well there were no role models to help on the navigation of the university system and learning on discipline specifics. What drove me to take my education further was a decision I made when I was seven years old. I witnessed lots of things that a young child should not have had to experience and decided there and then that I did not want to be like these adults. I witnessed the impact of colonisation and the disruption it had on my whānau but not to the same degree as my parents and grandparents generations. I made a solemn promise to my grandmother at her tangi that I would go to the highest level of learning I could attain and I achieved this by obtaining my PhD. My education has

led me to understanding whānau at the core based on my life experiences and my educational insights. In turn this means my role as a lecturer is to help facilitate students to understand a whānau lens with the view of them potentially working alongside whānau in a collaborative and empowering way.

#### **What attracted you to psychology and working with children?**

At one part of my life I was going to become a teacher or a lawyer. However, I kept falling asleep during the law classes and decided to try my hand in education. I have not looked back since I enrolled in education and psychology. I really loved the psychology of education and special education and so my love for psychology and children stemmed from both areas. The children I loved working with were the children that the education system has failed. Every day my kete of skills was tested but it kept me honest in my job. The children were my greatest teachers and in the last school I worked in, the system had given up on them. Over three years my team and I enabled these young people in their education. I would like to think our team had some small input into helping to shape these people into respectable citizens with good educational achievement, jobs, children and positive futures.

I moved sideways to psychology as education changed with the implementation of the Government's Tomorrow School's initiative. I knew changes were afoot in the classroom and the level of administration compliance would increase over time and I departed teaching but not in a disillusioned or a position of resentment. My transition to psychology was a seamless one and the areas that I gravitated towards were child development, family psychology and experimental analysis of behaviour. I was warned not to dabble with child and animal research. If you recall I did not like wearing aprons during painting and water play and it did not hurt me. So I did my Honours, Masters and Doctoral research with children, whānau and pigeons and doing this research did not hurt me.

#### **You went on to complete a PhD – can you tell us something about that journey?**

As you know, a PhD is not for the faint hearted let alone a walk in the park. Juggling between whānau, the wider whānau, my job as the Departmental Kaiawhina and university requirements was always going to be a tough road to navigate. So I needed something to fulfil my ngakau and keep my feet on the ground. This was my pet cat Mucki who I got as a kitten and he was to be the best friend that I had during my PhD. Mucki taught me to leave my work at the university gate because as soon as I

got home he was the centre of my attention. During the days where I couldn't face doing my PhD he would routinely wake me up and it would be time to start my day. I talked to him everyday about my whole PhD during the proposal, progression, application through to completion. He would settle my monologues and rants by sleeping on my lap. The days I went to do my PhD and Kaiawhina work he would always get the first and last lines of attention. In essence, he was my boss and I was more than happy to comply with his list of rules that he had specified in our relationship. My mother attested to this relationship and marvelled as to how compliant I had become as my personality did not normally kowtow to others' rules and regulations unless I saw some common sense in them. At 10 years old, my dear Mucki passed away and his passing was an incredible loss to my whānau and me. The greatest gift he gave me was giving me the strength to overcome lots of challenges that arose during my PhD. That is, those challenges would cease to matter whenever I came home to Mucki waiting at the door for his Mama. Ka aroha i tāku ngeru. Ka mokemoke i tō Mama.

**You are now at Victoria University of Wellington – can you tell us about your role?**

It would not have been made possible with the help of senior colleagues in the School that proposed and had the foresight to provide the viability of my strategic position. And so I am grateful to them for believing that after my appointment I would have the ability to carry out such a role for my people, the university and beyond. Ngā mihi maioha e ngā kaiwhakahaere me kaihautu hoki.

As mentioned at the beginning I am the Māori and Indigenous Psychology lecturer in the School of Psychology

at Victoria University of Wellington. I have been in this role for nearly 18 months. This role consists of opening up the whānau portals in psychology to a wide range of students and in particular growing research capacity from a whānau and Indigenous worldview. In other words, I will grow a programme that engenders students to theoretically understand and in tandem gain experience and apply these teachings when working alongside whānau in multiple contexts e.g., carrying out well-being and strength based work that enables whānau, community, educational, health and clinical contexts. To achieve these aims, I am team-teaching in the Abnormal, Developmental and Cross-Cultural Psychology papers in the undergraduate programme. I am co-ordinating an Indigenous Psychology paper and co-coordinating in a Culture and Human Development paper at the postgraduate level.

This role is exciting and forges lots of opportunities for working alongside whānau in the community which I love getting amongst and documenting their successes and achievements to give voice to their tino rangatiratanga. I look forward to passing on my skills to students and hope they will share my passion when working with whānau.

**If you were to give three tips to Māori psychology students what would they be?**

1. Maximise the use of Māori support services offered at the university or the outreach initiatives. For example, we have a Kaiawhina Tauira in Te Kura Mātai Hinengaro / School of Psychology at Victoria University of Wellington
2. If you decide to do postgraduate study, come and talk with a faculty member or the Kaiawhina

Tauira to help provide a road map on how you would like to scope out your postgraduate plan and job opportunities after you have completed your studies.

3. Māori and university scholarships are becoming more competitive over time because there is no funding allocated to students after you have completed your Honours year. Therefore the better you do in the the third and fourth year studies the better chances you have at qualifying for these scholarships.

**What in your view marks a well-lived life?**

Life is too short. Therefore, spending quality time with your loved ones and making sure that work does not tend to consume one's life is the major key to a well-lived life. Kia Ora.