

Te Hui Whakatika: Culturally responsive, self determining interventions for restoring harmony

An excerpt from an article in Kairaranga Journal of Education Practice,
(Bateman & Berryman, 2007).

The following excerpt describes key aspects of a successful Hui Whakatika (literally, a meeting that seeks to resolve issues and make amends), facilitated by a Ministry of Education, special education kaitakawaenga as he works collaboratively with whānau members to seek resolution and restore harmony. The role of the kaitakawaenga is to work alongside non-Māori specialists who are working with Māori families. Their cultural expertise and knowledge is invaluable as they are able to draw from kaupapa Māori ways of knowing and engaging.

Hui whakatika is underpinned by four quintessential concepts of traditional or pre-European Māori discipline. These are:

1. *reaching consensus* through a process of collaborative decision-making involving all parties;
2. *reconciliation*: reaching settlement that is acceptable to all parties rather than isolating and punishing;
3. *examining* the wider reason for the wrong with an implicit assumption that there was often wrong on both sides - not apportioning blame;
4. less concern with whether or not there had been a breach; more concern with the *restoration* of harmony.

(Olsen, Maxwell and Morris, cited in McElrea, 1994).

These features are critical to an effective hui whakatika, and continue to guide contemporary Māori society when responding to issues of concern or conflict. The four distinct phases to a hui whakatika process include:

1. **The pre-hui phase**: preparing the whaariki (foundation)
2. **The hui phase** (the hui proper):
 - o Beginning
 - Mihimihi (greetings) / karakia (prayer)
 - Response from manuhiri
 - Reiterating the purpose of the hui
 - Whakawhanaungatanga (introductions / making connections)
 - Sharing kai
 - o Developing
 - How we are being affected, how we are feeling
 - Successes to date, strengths
 - Barriers / enemies to success
 - Seeking out a new story (restorying); determining and agreeing on the way forward: *What we will do, who will do what...*
 - Setting a time / venue for phase 3
 - o Closing: poroporoaki - rituals of farewell
 - Whakakapi (summing up)
 - Final comments by members
 - Karakia
 - Sharing kai
 - Informal discussion
3. **Forming / consolidating the plan**
4. **Follow-up and review** (at a later date)

Each of these phases is critical to the overall success of a hui whakatika (Macfarlane, 2007). Sufficient time and effort must be invested in the pre-hui phase, as this is equally as important as the hui itself. This involves determining who needs to be involved, establishing a willingness from all parties to participate, meeting with all parties separately in order to explain the process and prepare them for what will happen, hearing their stories, and selecting a venue and time. Phase two, the 'hui proper', follows the protocols of engagement as represented by a pōwhiri process. Effective facilitation of this phase is crucial.

This kaitakawaenga had been engaged in order to assist a special education advisor (SEA) working in a mainstream primary school with two brothers (Māori), who had been referred for their severe and challenging behaviours at school. The brothers, less than a year apart in age, were in the same Year 6 class. Their parents were separated, and custodial arrangements meant that they had both boys, week about.

Due to the apparent severity of the boys' behaviours at school, the SEA had hastily put in place a behaviour intervention plan with little input sought from the whānau. Subsequently, they had ceased to engage in any of the tasks that had been allocated to them in the plan. The boys' behaviours had escalated since the plan had been initiated; the class teacher and principal were extremely frustrated and wanted immediate action in order to prevent the boys from being suspended or excluded. The SEA therefore sought help from the kaitakawaenga.

Phase 1: The pre hui phase

It was determined that a hui whakatika would be convened. The kaitakawaenga met with both parents, initially separately, and then together, to ensure that there was willingness on their part to attend. The parents explained that they wanted to resolve the issues but were suspicious of the school's motives, and were consequently reluctant to meet at the school grounds. The kaitakawaenga listened to the concerns and aspirations that they both had for their sons. He explained the hui process mentioning that he would facilitate with the support of his kaumatua, who would welcome them and any other whānau members they wanted to bring with them. The kaitakawaenga also met with the class teacher, the principal, and the SEA and went through the same process. These meetings were critical to gauge commitment, and to clarify the protocols and purpose of the hui. The venue was then organised, the room set up, and food ordered.

Phase 2: The hui phase

The hui was held at the Ministry of Education, special education office, in a room that was regularly used for hui, and reflected many of the cultural icons of the local iwi. The parents and boys opted to bring along whānau support, including the maternal grandmother, the paternal grandfather, an aunty, and an older cousin. The classroom teacher, senior teacher, principal, SEA, kaitakawaenga and special education kaumatua were also in attendance; 14 people in all.

The kaumatua began the meeting with mihimihi and karakia in order to clear the pathway for the rest of the hui. The grandfather responded in te reo Māori, declaring the family's willingness to contribute and participate. The kaitakawaenga briefly reiterated the kaupapa and intended flow of the hui, and then started the process of whakawhanaungatanga, whereby everyone introduced themselves, and made a brief comment about what they hoped to achieve at the hui. Everyone then had a cup of tea and a biscuit.

The members listened to everyone else's stories and perspectives without interruption. Although initially whakamā (shy, reserved), whānau members, including the boys, began to contribute more as the hui progressed. The hui worked from a strengths based approach, where positive perspectives were shared. Honesty was also a key component, and people were encouraged to share how they were feeling. The kaitakawaenga observed the ahua (demeanour) of the group gradually change as they listened to each other's issues and frustrations. Several constructive and affirming statements were shared, which challenged many previously-held assumptions.

Members started offering positive and supportive comments which became solution-focused; they also began to see where they perhaps needed to take more responsibility for their own attitudes and actions. There was an obvious willingness to remain respectful of each other, and to remain committed to the kaupapa. A list of possible actions was then brainstormed and collated, to be reconstructed into a more formal plan at a subsequent meeting attended by all members. Both of the boys contributed to the final discussion, and offered some suggestions, which were added to the planning list. The kaitakawaenga then summed up, everyone was given a final opportunity to comment, and the kaumatua concluded with a karakia. Formulation of the plan (Phase 3) took place two days later.

Phase 3: Forming the Plan

At the request of all members, the planning meeting followed the same pōwhiri process. Several members of the group commented that having the two days interim space allowed them to reflect on the things that had transpired during the hui. According to the whānau, it had also enabled them to gain even greater strength and resolve moving forward.

The plan focused on three key areas:

- achieving a consistency of routines and expectations
- maintaining regular and ongoing communications
- developing and maintaining positive and productive relationships

Both parents openly discussed the inconsistencies that existed between the respective home settings, and defined some new kawa (protocols) that would be put in place across both contexts.

These kawa included being more clear and consistent in their instructions and expectations of the boys, and also included the boys taking on greater responsibility for their actions, with incentives and rewards playing a role. The boys agreed that this was fair and reasonable. Communication protocols were also constructed collaboratively. These involved setting up home-to-school positive notebooks, regular phone calls both ways, and an end-of-week group debrief for the first four weeks. Building positive relationships required all parties to make time for each other. The teacher made adaptations to the classroom programme (content, lesson structure, pace, classroom responsibilities) and promised to provide more regular and specific feedback. The teacher and principal wanted the parents to feel welcome at school, and reiterated the 'open door' approach that they wished to maintain. Weekly debriefs were planned for Friday lunchtime, and would include all group members, and kai. A follow-up and review meeting was scheduled for four weeks time, with the option of calling one sooner should the need arise.

Phase 4: Follow-up and Review

The hui whakatika took place early in April. At the follow up and review meeting in May, feedback from all parties was extremely positive. The boys were much easier to manage in both home settings as well as at school, and were actively engaged in learning. Both parents had been using positive and consistent strategies in their respective homes, and the boys had achieved several small rewards. Over the next few months, both boys also received achievement awards at school.

There were only two minor incidents that occurred at school post the hui whakatika. School staff said that both incidents were easily dealt with and were no more challenging than others that they had to deal with regularly. In early October that same year, the boys were transitioned to the Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) service over a two week period.

The parents both stated that they finally felt as if they had a voice in their sons' education, and were now in partnership with the school. They put this down to the barriers that had been broken down during the hui whakatika. School staff felt more inclined to approach the parents and seek their ideas and perspectives in terms of the boys' education needs - something they would not have actively done prior to the hui whakatika. At the last RTLB transition meeting, one of the boys mentioned that he had not been in much trouble lately. When asked by the kaitakawaenga if he thought that was better, he said "*Yeah, cos I get to learn more stuff so I am getting more clever*".