



Shielia, Gloria, Robyn, and DeDe at YVR before departing for Aotearoa / New Zealand.

Reflections on our trip to Aotearoa / New Zealand

By: Shielia Austin and Gloria Cole

Four educators [Shielia Austin, Gloria Cole, Robyn Gray, and DeDe DeRose] left Vancouver on Thursday, 22 July with their sights set on New Zealand and exploring the educational similarities and differences of Indigenous Education. Upon arrival in Auckland their paths were separated with the two teachers [Shielia and Gloria] going to Whakatane and the two Administrators [Robyn and DeDe] heading to Tauranga.

Upon our [Shielia and Gloria] arrival to Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiarangi (TWWoA), Whakatane Campus we were welcomed with a powhiri (a traditional Maori welcome), along with the new students beginning their new term. The powhiri occurs whenever guests visit or new students start their courses.

Each morning 8:30 – 9:00 we attended Karakia (morning prayer and songs). This is a Maori practice, which is lead by the students. We sensed or observed that there was no obvious hierarchy. Everyone was on a level playing field, which was evident by students leading and staff participating. We believe that Karakia creates a sense of belonging and unity for students and staff.

A Maori Philosophy according to Professor Te Makarini is “spreading potential” is what it’s all about. Everything is connected through their Tikanga, their traditional practices or guiding principles. It is evident in the various Programmes offered at TWWoA. Programmes offered at this campus are: Education, Visual Arts, media Studies, Environmental Studies, Early Childhood Education, Adult Community Education Bridging, Diploma Degree, Masters, and soon a Doctorate.

We had the opportunity to visit Language Nests, a new school struggling to establish themselves. There was an Adult, who was not paid, but the teacher was and the husband of the adult aide picked up the children in his van. The school was operating under the leadership of an administrator at another school, which was quite a distance away.

Community pre-schools known as Te Kohanga Reo (Language Nests) are important bridges for Maori children, ages six months to five years old prior to attending school. This is where the children are immersed in Maori language. Upon their fifth birthday, they are then enrolled into Kindergarten. It is not a Daycare. There is a planned curriculum that is taught by trained Early Childhood Educators. There is a planned thematic approach. For example, the day we visited, it was clearly visible that the children were learning about the Universe.

We visited three Primary Maori Immersion schools, K – 7, and one Area school which was K – 12. At each of the schools our arrival was celebrated with a Powhiri (the traditional Maori welcome).

We were given the opportunity to share a bit of whom we were, where we came from and why we were visiting. Children asked questions, as did some staff. We were also treated to listening to the children sing their songs and the young boys perform their haka (a traditional dance).

Upon visiting classrooms, we observed that the classrooms were overwhelmingly laden with Maori resources funded by the Ministry of Education (MoE). These resources were contracted out to the Maori community for development. For example, levelled readers, poetry, the Maori alphabet frieze, Math and Science charts.

We participated in a weekend Adult Community Education program offered on a Marae. [The Marae is a traditional, ceremonial meeting house and accompanying grounds similar in some ways to the long house of the Coastal Peoples here.] The program is offered to all Maori throughout New Zealand. It is to enhance and promote hapu (sub-tribe) cultural uniqueness. It is a time for them to gather to develop learning outcomes or achievable goals to reflect cultural learning needs.

The hapu members committed themselves to attend this weekend program for 30 hours. Some slept on the Marae, others returned at 7:30 the following morning, staying all day Saturday until 10:00 pm and ending the weekend session at 5:00 pm Sunday.

There is a strong commitment by the students, staff and community to continue to not only revitalize the Maori language and culture but to celebrate and live being Maori in a contemporary society in a meaningful way. To validate who they are and where they come from as well as where they are going in the future!