

Reimagining teaching as a Social Work Educator: A Critical Reflection

Selina Akhter

Lecturer, Unitec Institute of Technology, Auckland.

Address for Correspondence:

Email: sakhter2@unitec.ac.nz

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the paper is to explore how the Bachelor of Social Work (bi-culturalism in practice) programme of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa has influenced the author to rethink her teaching style, attitude towards using spirituality in social work, and epistemological stance in research. A critical reflexive method was used to deconstruct the author's previous assumptions and to reconstruct them. Three previous and reimagined assumptions were explored. First, before the reconstruction, the author's assumption was "teachers are always experts". The reconstructed assumption is, "teachers are not always experts but humble knowers and learners". Second, the author believed that, as spirituality was personal and subjective it would not be taught in social work; and the author also considered only verifiable theories as valid knowledge. Now the author reimagines that social workers need spiritual theories and principles as well. Finally, as to research, the reimagination has made the author shift her epistemological stance from a positivistic paradigm to an Indigenous Māori paradigm of *whakapapa* (genealogy) that has inspired her to rediscover the *whakapapa* of her ancestors' knowledge. The reflective accounts of reconstruction were explored by using the author's teaching practice at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, her contextual background and her own spiritual identity.

Keywords: *Bachelor of Social Work; Bi-culturalism in practice; Indigenous spirituality; Critical reflection; Takepu-principled approach; Deconstruction; Reconstruction*

INTRODUCTIONS

Postmodern social work navigates from the platform of the constructivist paradigm that believes in bringing the notion of multiple truths instead of a “one-theory-fits-all” to education and practice. The paradigm of “constructivism” has been revolutionary and powerful in inviting Indigenous communities and providing them a safe space for reclaiming their ancestors’ ways of life that were lost in colonisation (Eketone, 2008; Salas, Sen, & Segal, 2010). The Bachelor of Social Work (bi-culturalism in practice) (BSW (BIP)) programme taught in Te Wānanga o Aotearoa is one of the Indigenous education programmes that has invited both teachers and students to reclaim their ancestors’ knowledge in the context of social work in Aotearoa. Research (Akhter & Leonard, 2014; Anderson, 2011; Freeman, 2011) revealed that both students and teachers perceived the course as an emancipatory tool to explore their Indigenous identity, challenge their hegemonic thinking, and reclaim cultural and spiritual principles and framework.

In this paper I will reflect on my experience of teaching on the Bachelor of Social Work bi-culturalism in practice programme of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, which has involved a shift of consciousness that has altered my insights as an educator. In particular, I will examine how I am reimagining my assumptions about my teaching style, my attitude towards using spirituality in social work and epistemological approaches of research.

BACKGROUND TO THE CONTEXT

Locating the author

My identity is a complex construction of spirituality and culture. Spiritually, I am a Muslim who believes in Islam and culturally, a Bangladeshi. Bangladesh is situated in South Asia, surrounded by India. My mother tongue is Bangla which is derived from Sanskrit, an old Indian language which goes back to the Aryans who arrived in India about 1750BC. My cultural heritage, traditions and ways of life are more or less similar to those of an Indian. My Islamic spirituality intersects with the culture. Bangladeshi society is hierarchical with strict divisions of class, age and gender. As I used to teach social work in Bangladesh I wanted to explore the complexities of the hierarchy I grew up in. Also, as a mother, I observed how my child was treated by teachers with the same hierarchical background. In that context a child’s ability to compete is regarded as the highest attribute. My natural instinct to learn more about this phenomenon was so strong that I chose to study “self-determination and autonomy of children” in my PhD pursued at Macquarie University, Australia. The PhD model was completely based on western theories and the positivistic paradigm. Later, I anchored at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa and taught BSW (BIP). My reflection portrayed in the following sections is based on the background described above. Now I have started a new journey at Unitec as a teacher of social practice. I hope to continue my reflection to search for a new perspective.

Bachelor of Social Work (Bi-culturalism in Practice) BSW (BIP)

The BSW (BIP) is a three-year, full-time, social work degree programme of 360 credits consisting of 21 *kōnae ako* (papers) at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa and accredited by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) (Pohatu, 2010). The bicultural notion of BSW recognises the historical foundation of the nation Aotearoa and consciously creates equal

space for Māori bodies of knowledge to be constructed alongside non-Māori bodies of knowledge. This mirrors Apirana Ngata's vision that states "Māori philosophic utterances may exist in parallel columns alongside those of any other races" (Te Apirana Turupa Ngata, 1929, cited in Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, 2013). Dr Rongo Wetere signalled the significance of this organic philosophy by setting up a bicultural framework within social work education in Aotearoa society. Taina Pohatu, the designer of the programme, named it Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) (bi-culturalism in practice (BIP) (Akhter & Leonard, 2014). The vehicle to achieve the bi-culturalism is an approach which has been conceptualised as a *takepu*-principled approach (Pohatu, 2008).

The Takepu-principled approach

According to Pohatu (2010), best practice always includes *takepu*-applied principles which inform practice and are more relevant than abstract theories. The concept of *takepu* includes Māori wisdom, culture, applied principles, ethical positions and ways of life to convey ways of humanness to guide *Te Ao Māori*. According to Pohatu (2008), "Takepu as applied principles signposts to generations how to live, to behave, then engage with people as they pursue the quest of their aspirations and needs" (p. 2). *Takepu* is fundamental to every BSW (BIP) class, to the content, assessments and the delivery methods. The six selected *takepu* of the degree are: *āhurutanga* (safe space), *te whakakoharangatiratanga* (respectful relationship), *kaitiakitanga* (responsible trusteeship and guardianship), *tinorangatiratanga* (absolute integrity), *tau kumekume* (positive and negative tensions) and *mauri ora* (wellbeing) (Pohatu, 2003). The *takepu āhurutanga* and *te whakakoharangatiratanga* have been seen to be very effective. *Takepu āhurutanga* creates and maintains quality space for study. In the learning environment, *mauri* or the life force can be felt. Teaching has a humane feeling to it. The continuous enquiries around "do you understand?", "shall we go through the lesson?" "do you require more time?" allow everyone to learn at their own pace and to open up. The *takepu te whakakoharangatiratanga* recognises that successful engagement and endeavour require conscious application of respectful relationships with *kaupapa* (topic) and people at social, cultural, emotional and spiritual levels. It is crucial to be humble in BSW about knowing others' perspectives. The humble knowers honour and value others' perspectives (Clark, 2006). They do not interfere with others' valuable construction of reality. The students and teachers of BSW constantly ask themselves "Are we imposing anything that does not fit others' worldviews?" In addition, the *takepu tinorangatiratanga* maintains and protects the absolute integrity of people. The *takepu kaitiakitanga* ensures people undertake stewardship and obligations. The *takepu tau kumekume* acknowledges the ever-present tensions in any *kaupapa* and relationship – positive or negative – and that offers insight and interpretation. The programme constantly acknowledges the essence of *takepu mauri ora* (wellbeing) which is at the core of all *kaupapa* (topic) and relationships in the BSW (Pohatu, 2003). These *takepu* interact in a holistic manner and have been conceived as a conceptual framework to be utilised in all content, assessments and pedagogies.

The takepu-principled approach: a transformation

The *takepu*-principled approach utilizes some key elements including uniqueness (who they are), contextualisation, conscientization and open curriculum (Pohatu, 2010) to bring a sense of transformation in class.

This question, “who are they?”, is explored by asking students an ontological question: “what is their purpose for being or reasons for being or why do they exist in this world?” This existential question allows them to explore their worldviews, belief systems, principles, values, orientations, etc. Thus students go back to their cultural and spiritual principles and values and find that their identities have already been constructed by their ancestors and by structural constructs. When they know their own values and orientations they become closer to themselves.

The BSW utilises a contextualisation process by which students share their stories, old knowing, and lived experience. It is not only sharing, listening and being empathetic to each other but also engaging in a dialogue to make sense of what was told. While the story is clear to the teller, the listeners try to make it useful for them. In other words they want to know how much of the stories/experience from other contexts can be utilised in the present context of Aotearoa social work. They try to unlock their door of experience (Pohatu, 2010, 2011). Sharing stories gives the students a chance to reflect on another time and space so that they can find another layer of meaning for their beliefs in new contexts. As they make new meanings, they ask, “how do I understand another person’s frame of reference?” (Clark, 2006).

When students share their stories, they become more critically aware because they hear of each other’s sufferings, loss and oppression. They come to realise how one’s own experience and background affects understandings and actions in the world. They become conscientized and they question traditions. The stories give a time and space to heal as they deconstruct by being critically aware of their not knowing the effects of their own perspective (Fred, 2009). This is an educational process that develops a greater ability to think critically; that is the ability to read one’s world more deeply and ask meaningful “why” questions – the central theme of Paulo Freire’s framework of conscientization (Freire, 1972). This promotes transformation (Fred, 2009).

The curriculum of the BSW (BIP) is not as highly structured as a typical modern curriculum. Instead, specific contents are open and emerge via dialogue and reflections. The cultural and multiple truths/contents emerge through a number of core exercises promoting how to take a strong cultural positioning to question tradition and how to use history and colonisation to dismantle a modernistic view of social work. Regarding teaching, according to Pohatu (2010), the process of lectures, *hui* (meetings) and reflections is a normal, yet a vital, part of learning. So students bring lived experience, construct their own ideas via dialogue, critique and comparison with existing bodies of knowledge for validation. Students come out with a challenged position. When they see and feel that their experience is valued, they can think further. This process allows them to enter an enjoyable journey to reclaim cultural truths (Akhter & Leonard, 2014).

A research study (Akhter & Leonard, 2014) provided evidence of the takepu-based social work programme’s intention to contribute to bi-culturalism-transformed students. The BSW (BIP) awakened the students’ consciousness to knowing who they are. Even some students who were aware of who they were did not want to be awakened because of generational depression of colonisation and assimilation. Before entering the course some

Māori students did not want to be awakened to their own worldviews. After the course they thought that they could no longer walk in ignorance. As one student reflected: “It was an experience where I found at first I did not like being awakened to our world view and now that I knew what I knew I could no longer walk in ignorance” (Akhter & Leonard, 2014, p. 10). The principled approach influenced their attitude towards being proactive in reclaiming their Māori cultural values and principles. Through the BSW (BIP) degree, a number of students who came from the dominant worldview deconstructed their hegemonic thinking. They reflected that, when they started the BSW (BIP), their thinking was dominated by notions of institutional racism, hegemony or dominant worldview, the supremacy of colonisation, etc. As social workers they had little understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi, Māori and other cultures. The course challenged their values and beliefs in dominant worldviews. Now they felt more cultured, more enriched in understanding both Māori and other cultures (Akhter & Leonard, 2014). In the following section I will examine how the BSW (BIP) inspired me to identify the areas of my teaching that needed to be deconstructed and gave me the strength to challenge my practice.

METHOD

I have used a critical reflexive method to deconstruct my practice. According to Fook (2004), reflexivity as a research method allows a practitioner to research his or her own practice in order to change or improve and also opens up the possibility for challenging hegemonic assumptions to facilitate the generation of alternative ways of knowing. It involves looking at one’s own assumption, biases, beliefs, attitude, emotions and background and how these influence practice. Critical reflexivity challenges individuals to deconstruct their existing assumptions and helps *re*construct alternative ways of knowing which can improve practice (Allen, 2009). This new awareness can arouse strong emotions such as anger, hurt, sadness, surprise and frustration and for many can be the turning point for new practice. The critical reflexivity approach suits the context of the present reflection. I experienced strong, emotional moments of not knowing, fear of whether the integrity of my knowledge would be questioned, and anxiety, frustration and helplessness. These feelings challenged and questioned my practice, my own banking knowledge (Freire, 1972) and languages. Although it was a struggle, I enjoyed it as it made me believe in what I know “as who I am”, a valuable insight for teaching.

I have used a few questions from the framework of Fook (2004) as cited by Allen (2009) to guide me in the reflexive process through two stages of questioning about the practice: 1) deconstructing the practice (analysing what happened); and 2) reconstructing meaning (identifying strategies for action or change). The purpose of these two stages of questioning is to explore assumptions, beliefs, and biases as well as to explain how they have been constructed. The questioning process is designed to draw attention to power dynamics, knowledge and theory. During the reconstruction phase it is important to identify how practice or action needs to change to fit with desired practice, and what skills, support and knowledge are necessary to endorse those changes.

Questions for deconstruction (stage 1)

- What are my assumptions?
- Where did they originate? Are they mine personally or have I inherited them?
- What theory or power dynamic supports those assumptions?
- What impacts did my assumptions have in my practice?
- Are they relevant and appropriate to the situation at hand?
- How did I feel? Discomfort or reawakening?

Questions for reconstruction (stage 2)

- What needs to be changed?
- What strategies can I use to make these changes?
- What theories and interpretations support this reimagining assumption?

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier, I have used two sets of questions to deconstruct my previous assumptions and reframe those to fit in three aspects of my practice. These are summarised in Table 1 (Reimagining assumptions as an educator), with a description of the deconstructive and reconstructive processes following.

Table 1. Reimagining Assumptions as an Educator

Assumptions	‘Reimagining’ teaching assumptions
<p>Assumption 1 Previous assumption: Teachers are always the experts</p>	<p>Reimagining assumption: Teachers are not always the experts but are humble knowers and are also always learning</p>
<p>Assumption 2 Previous assumption: Social workers use social psychological theories and professional principles</p>	<p>Reimagining assumption: Social workers need spiritual values/ principles and holistic approaches</p>
<p>Assumption 3 Previous assumption: Research is a process of establishing observable and verifiable truths.</p>	<p>Reimagining assumption: research also involves a process of reclaiming unseen and unobservable truth</p>

The resulting previous, and the reimagining assumptions, are presented as findings in the next section.

Assumption 1

Previous assumption: Teachers are always the experts

Reimagining assumption: Teachers are not always the experts but are humble knowers, learners

Deconstruction

I come from Bangladesh, a traditional society which views teachers as having expertise and content knowledge. In this society, teacher–student status is hierarchical with students below the teacher. Teachers’ knowledge is dominant. This can be discussed from the view of Paulo Freire’s theory of banking education where teachers impart and students receive without any questions or critique (Freire, 1972). However, in the Wānanga, the teachers and the students enjoy equal status. Both are learners and teachers and both learn from each other. This derives from the framework of *Ako* in the Kaupapa Māori tradition of education (Pere, 1994). At the Wānanga, teachers are not considered as experts or authorities with a bank of knowledge; rather they are humble knowers. The teachers are transformers, not lecturers, not even facilitators; both teachers and students co-construct the meaning of the learning outcomes.

In the beginning of my teaching at the Wānanga it came as a surprise to me to know that students could develop their own model of practice from their lived experience. My belief was that the students’ ability to build knowledge and model from their lived experience required higher level of conceptualisation, validity and reliability and research literacy. This was a moment of “not knowing” of Indigenous way of teaching – a surprising and a significant realisation for me.

During the deconstruction phase I was eager to see the skills of research that the students used when they presented their models of practice. I was frustrated to see that most of the students’ presentations had no literature review, no methodology, no results and were full of emotion, personal stories, spiritual insights, upbringing, history of colonisation and hegemony. I assumed those would not be recognised as valid knowledge. For example stories of *whakapapa* (genealogy): how Māori are connected to the universe and their place in it through the principle of *whakapapa*. The stories tell that they are the seeds and direct descendants from heaven. Through this principle Māori trace their heritage to the very beginning of time (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I thought this did not have a direct link to the modern social work course content such as risk assessments, intervention, models of advocacy, community development, group work and so forth, but they were heartfelt. In most cases they used proverbs, songs, music, aesthetic elements and cultural frameworks instead of scientific theories. Every time I observed their presentations of model of practice in conferences I had to revisit and reflect on my background; what I missed, how I coped with social structural and political constraints in constructing my identity. The power of students’ stories was so emancipatory that I learned how to tell stories about my roots.

Reconstruction

After continuous and long reflection, professional development training, and readings from Indigenous university research (Hawai’ian, Aborigine Australian, Canadian First Nations), I started reimagining that the model-building process does not have to follow the structured logical process of modern research. Each model that a student presented was unique in terms of “who they are”. They are the living authors of cultural theories. They are the living examples of models that everyone in the group can feel, see, sense, act towards and hence establish reliability and validity. I went back to trace our Indigenous treasures and found values that my mom used to teach me. Even though books with those treasures were available, before this re-imagination, I never read any. I thought they were written by non-university authors, so I did not believe in the knowledge of those books. Now I started believing those sources.

The continuous exercise of reclaiming helped me reconstruct my position from expert teacher to humble knower. The humble knower position made me think of myself as a learner who honours many ways of knowing. It is a moving away from that expert stance that is where the humility comes from. I think it is a belief in not overvaluing a particular way (Clark, 2006). I have to respect my students as being experts in their own bodies of knowledge. Attention to meaning is important. We have to understand what this means for others within their own context because we may not be able to understand it. They speak the truth to people about the reality of their lives. As part of my new awareness I am not going to assume anything anymore. I want to become more aware of my assumptions and stay open to examining them.

Assumption 2

Previous assumption: Social workers use social psychological theories and professional principles.

Reimagining assumption: But for professional practice social workers also need spiritual theories and principles.

Deconstruction

Before coming to the Wānanga, my conceptualisation about teaching was guided by the “fact” that all topics can be understood and taught by scientifically established and published theories and principles. Each argument might be verified by literature and references. This assumption originated from my academic and research background and early teaching. It was my strong belief that only principles of professional social work and the theories from other social, political, economic and psychological disciplines would be used in social work education. This is the positivistic view: the one-fits-all approach. However, in the Wānanga, alongside the social and psychological theories and professional principles, the Māori spiritual/cultural framework and takepu principles are taught to fulfil the requirements of the bicultural intent of the degree.

At the Wānanga, in the beginning, I taught theories and westernised views which I did not perceive to be effective for the BSW students. It was because the intent of the programme was to develop bicultural social work practitioners. Imparting only the knowledge and

skills of western theories in a Māori context would not help students to assess spiritual and cultural needs as those theories were not constructed in the indigenous context. I became aware of the fact that teachers were encouraged not to use only western theories but also to contextualise those within students' lived contexts so that students could relate them with their own realities. This was a struggle for me. I felt that I had no resources to teach as I was not able to use those theories. I gathered a number of critical theories that I thought would be culturally appropriate but they were limited as the writers were not Indigenous and they did not capture the reality of the worldview of Māori and other Indigenous people. Most often the writers were not Indigenous nor insiders to the topic. My attempt to find external resources was not worthwhile. I was surprised to see how Māori teachers used spiritual sacred knowledge, mythologies, unseen power, *noa* (common sense), *tapu* (sacredness), *whānau*, *hapu*, *iwi* (collective spirituality), *whakapapa* (past, present, future), *powhiri* (welcome), *marae* and so forth as a framework for bi-cultural social work (Phillips, 2010). The cultural frameworks from a Māori worldview such as *Te Whare Tapa Wha*, *Ngā Pou Mana*, *Te Wheke*, *Takepu*, *Kaitiakitanga*, *Manakitanga*, *Ata*, *Hui*, *Mauri*, *Powhiri*, *Poutama*, *Tangihanga* and so forth were rewarding for me. Everything was linked with the wholeness and, in most of the models, the spirituality was interwoven via *whakapapa*. In the Māori worldview, all things descend from *Papatuanuku* (the earth mother) and *Ranginui* (the Sky Father). The worldview articulates spiritual connections with the land, the sky and the waterways (Anderson, 2011). It opened a door to my spiritual world. My Islamic spirituality is a part and parcel of what it means for me to be human. This created an excitement within me, knowing that my bodies of knowledge were useful. I was practising them in everyday life but not in my profession. I struggled with how to articulate them in a professional manner.

Reconstruction

As a part of reconstructing my taken-for-granted assumptions, I started to read the literature on spirituality, Islamic worldviews and social work; before I had detached myself from this wealth of literature. Now I realised that the social work profession revitalised the place of spirituality in its practice, something which was abandoned in the early 20th century when social work was striving to become a profession (Brenner & Homonoff, 2004). From this literature I came to know that the postmodern world celebrated the importance of the spiritual dimension of existence (Graham, Coholic, & Coates, 2006). Also I went to a course on Islamic spirituality which made me understand how my heart, spirit and soul work together. Previously I used to use my Islamic principles with dogma. Before, I internalised them as a duty without knowing how to make sense of my beliefs via my inner self and connect it with my outer body. Now I know "knowing must touch your heart". The heart has wisdom and love that must be used in building one's knowledge. Intention, desire and intuition need to be felt, understood and seen via inner senses which help people to make sense and become creative (Fred, 2009). I was able to share my spiritual models and principles with my students. The most powerful exploration of the reconstruction was Ghazali's Islamic model of wellbeing.

According to Ghazali (Study Circle, 2010) the heart is a vessel and it has three parts: 1) the *ruh*, or spirit, is the seat of truth and an agency, an ethereal substance of the heart by which it knows and perceives; 2) the *nafs*, or soul, is the capacity that gives the vessel its

human nature; 3) *akal*, or intellect, that is the ability of a human to know the truth and its purpose. I have come to know how an Islamic meditation dhikr (repeated pronouncement of a certain sacred formula) can be used to direct concentration to feel our insights and can be used to deal with our stress, emotions and mind-set (Ayad, 2008). In postmodern social work this spiritual component has been recognised (Graham et al., 2006). Also the *takepu* principles of the BSW encouraged me to identify a number of key *takepu* principles from the Islamic worldview. Some of these are: *Tawbah* (repentance), *Sabr* (Patience), *Shukr* (Gratitude), *adal* (justice), *hikmah* (wisdom), *haya* (modesty), *bala* (tensions) and *amal* (practice). These are some of the examples of high principles of Islam that can be easily used within the strength-based perspective of social work.

Assumption 3

Previous assumption: Research is a process of establishing observable and verifiable truths.

Reimagining assumption: Research also involves processes of reclaiming unseen and unobservable truth.

Deconstruction

As mentioned earlier, I held a positivistic view of conducting research to build knowledge or find the truth. My focus was on structural equation modelling, path analysis, regression, etc. (Akhter, 2004), which were based on a quantitative approach. This was viewed by Māori research as a western hegemonic method which categorises and compares human behaviour. This paradigm labels and compartmentalises human beings by separating them from their own contexts. Another interesting area of BSW research is the critical paradigm which assumes that reality is created by people with power and authority. As a quantitative researcher, my knowledge had little value in that paradigm. In the beginning I felt sad and frustrated for not being able to teach quantitative research there. At the same time it was so empowering and rewarding to know how powerful people construct knowledge about groups of cultural minorities and oppress them. Although the language of critical research was new to me, I enjoyed the critique because I was able to connect my cultural context which was both colonised and oppressed. Now I enjoy teaching and doing research by using the critical, Indigenous and emancipatory paradigm of the interpretive tradition. In addition, the intent of BSW research is considering the application and exploration of the truths of earlier generation as old friends in a new time and place (Pohatu, 2010). Within this “old friend new time” notion, the truth is constructed generation to generation, not by powerful people. This is the value of coming back and reclaiming ancestors’ truths. These truths come from best lived experts, not from statistical experts.

Reconstruction

It was interesting for me to find out about the process of reclaiming unobservable truth that came from earlier generations. In this quest I started to trace the generational source of Islamic truths. In the Islamic worldview, knowledge comes from divine revelations written in the *Qur'an* (holy book) and Hadith/Sunnah (Prophet Muhammad’s (Peace be upon him)). This knowledge is highly sacred. Researchers who want to discover the truth of Islam must be, and should be, highly spiritual and act according to Islamic beliefs which are *iman* (light and doctrine) and *Ihsan* (station of vigilance and divine witnessing, you worship

God as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him then you know that He sees you) (Al-Qadir'Isa, 2009). The scientific process of objectivity and reliability of modern research has no role in discovering these unseen truths.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this paper is to explore how the BSW (BIP) programme of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa has influenced me to rethink my teaching style, attitude towards using spirituality in social work, and epistemological stance in research.

In regard to the style of teaching, the reconstructed assumption, “teachers are not always the experts, but are humble knowers and learners”, is consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Clark (2006). According to Clark, to understand the experiential knowledge and meaning-making systems of service users, the primary emphasis is on the need for practitioners to position themselves as learners, not as experts, and to dialogically explore the client’s worldview and meanings. Practitioners’ positioning as learners emphasizes an epistemological humility which supports the belief of not overvaluing a particular way of knowing. According to Clark (2006), it is crucial to be humble about knowing. It is a stance where one acknowledges the partiality of one’s own knowledge, recognizes many ways of knowing, and humbly seeks to understand others’ knowledge, perspective and meanings. This supports the notion of a postmodern transformative framework of teaching that brings the learners in a space where learners learn to believe how to value what they know. They draw their knowledge from the context that they have been part of (Freire, 1972; Pohatu, 2010).

The reconstructed assumption that “spiritual principles and theories are needed in professional social work” can be discussed from the perspective of meaning-making (Allen, 2009; Clark, 2006). The spirituality has been reconceptualised as a worldview and a contextual factor which is not only regarded as a means of coping and healing but also a tool for making sense of, and making meaning of, ways of being (Allen, 2009). Spirituality and religion are integral dimensions of the worldview and meaning systems that people use to interpret their experience and make sense of their world. The social work profession has started to assess spirituality as a distinct element. However, spiritually sensitive social work practice requires far more than an assessment of spiritual beliefs and practices. Rather, it requires a holistic and integrative understanding of the multiple and intersecting meanings, and the source of meanings, that people use to construct their view of the world (Clark, 2006). There is a need to reclaim spiritual frameworks and models to understand the worldviews of people. So it is not only for healing but for ways of being and doing – a way of life.

The final reconstructed assumption is that “the research is not only a process of establishing observable and verifiable truths but it also involves processes of reclaiming unseen and unobservable truths”. This reconstructed assumption was contextualized in the context of the author’s Islamic worldview. To reclaim ancestors’ knowledge, Islamic scholars should follow the generational sources of Islamic truths. This is consistent with the view of Ul-Haq and Westwood (2012) that an Islamic “system of knowing, being and doing” is

embedded in its theological sources, including the *Qur'an* (considered as the word of God as transmitted to his Prophet, Muhammad — peace be upon him) and the Sunnah (the acts and sayings of the Prophet, as transmitted through traditions known as hadith). There have been studies using an Islamic worldview but their categorisation comes from western theories. A close reading of the articles shows that many of these sources were only referred to in a cursory manner. There were a very limited number of articles where the analysis, theory or discussions were driven by what could be considered a fully Islamic perspective (Ul Haq & Westwood, 2012). So metaphysical and Islamic theological epistemology that is linked to the generational sources is needed to reclaim Islamic truths in research.

CONCLUSION

I wanted to explore how I was rethinking as an educator at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa and what influences it has had on my teaching and understanding of my own spiritual identity and research. I have explained key elements of the programme: bi-culturalism and *takepu* principles. Three previous and reimagined assumptions were identified and discussed by using the deconstruction and reconstruction questions. The most enjoyable exploration is coming to know my heart and how the unseen truth of spirituality has been revitalised as a structural element in the context of postmodern social work education. Another powerful reconstructed assumption was that teachers are not always experts but are humble knowers and learners. I have developed a strong belief in not overvaluing a particular way and I have to respect my students as being experts in their perspectives. This has made me think of myself as a teacher who honours many ways of knowing. This is consistent with the notion of constructivist teaching that invites indigenous and multiple worldviews to be explored in social work education. The reflection suggests that the *takepu*-based pedagogy may be useful for Indigenous social work education in Aotearoa as well as in other Indigenous contexts.

As this paper is a personal reflection, the discussion should be applied in other contexts with caution. This area needs further study. For example, research is needed to examine the processes that influence transformation in teaching and learning, such as the analysis of videos of classroom observation about students' and teachers' dialogue and engagement and students' sharing of their own examples within and between groups in classrooms of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. Further research is needed to see how people make sense of their spirituality or make it meaningful or useful in a new context. Also there is a need to review the literature of social work and Islamic spirituality to see how researchers have used their epistemological stance and generational interpretations of major concepts of Islam within the current context of social work.

References

- Akhter, S., & Leonard, R. (2014). Takepu principled approach: A new vision for teaching social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. In J. Duke, M. Henrickson, & E. Beddoe Eds.), *Protecting the public – Enhancing the profession*. (pp.93-104). Wellington, NZ: Social Work Registration Board.
- Akhter, S. (2004). Teachers' control and students' motivation. *The International Principal*, 8(3), 4–7.
- Al-Qadir'Isa, Shaykh'Abd. (2009). *Realities of Sufism*. The Netherlands: Sunni Publications.
- Allen, E. J. (2009). *Constructing the spiritual in social work: A critically reflexive, autoethnographic process*. (Unpublished master's thesis). Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

- Anderson, R. (2011). Reclaiming of identity through Kaupapa Wānangā, *Toroa-Te-Nukuroa*, 6 (pp. 66–75). Te Awamutu, NZ: Te Wānangā o Aotearoa.
- Ayad, A. (2008). *Healing body and soul*. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Samo Press Group.
- Brenner, M., & Homonoff, E. (2004). Zen and clinical social work: A Spiritual approach to practice. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 85(2), 261-269. doi:10.1606/1044-3894.315
- Clark, J. (2006). Listening for meaning: A research-based model for attending spirituality, culture and worldviews in social work practice. *Critical Social Work*, 7(1). Retrieved from <http://www1.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/>
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). California, USA: Sage Publications.
- Eketone, A. (2008). *Theoretical underpinnings of Kaupapa Māori directed practice*. MAI Review, 1, 11. Retrieved from <http://www.review.mai.ac.nz>
- Fook, J. (2004). Critical reflection and transformative possibilities. In L. Davis & P. Leonard (Eds.), *Social work in a corporate era: Practice of power and resistance* (pp. 28–42). Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing.
- Fred, M. (2009). *A multiperspectival conceptual model of transformative meaning making*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). : Saybrook University, San Francisco, CA. Retrieved from ProQuest LLC. UMI 3391149
- Freeman, J. (2011). Journey of transformation. *Toroa-te Nukuroa*, 6, 19–23. Te Awamutu, NZ: Te Wānangā o Aotearoa.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.
- Graham, J., Coholic, D., & Coates, J. (2006). Spirituality as a guiding construct in the development of Canadian social work: Past and present consideration. *Critical Social Work*, 7(2). Retrieved from <http://www1.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/>
- Pere, R. (1994). *Ako: Concepts and learning in the Māori tradition*. A Monograph. New Zealand: Te Kohangā Reo National Trust Board.
- Phillips, A. C. (2010). *Spirituality in social work education and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand*. (Unpublished master's thesis). Massey University, New Zealand. Retrieved from http://mro.massey.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10179/2487/01_front.pdf?sequence=2
- Pohatu, W. T. (2003). Māori worldviews: Sources of innovative choices for social work practices. *New Zealand Social Work Review: Te Komako*, 15(3), 16–24.
- Pohatu, W. T. (2008, June). *Takepu: Principled approaches to healthy relationships*. Paper presented at the Traditional Knowledge Conference: Te Tatau Pounamu, Auckland: University of Auckland.
- Pohatu, W. T. (2010). *Rangāhau report*. Te Wānangā o Aotearoa: Te Awamutu.
- Pohatu, W. T. (2011). He ara tohu: Signposting a way. *Toroa-te Nukuroa, Te Wānangā o Aotearoa*, 6, 8–17.
- Salas, M. L., Sen, S., & Segal, A. E. (2010). Critical theory: Pathway from dichotomous to integrated social work practice. *Families in Society*, 91(1), 91–96.
- Study Circle. (2010). *Marvels of heart*. Australia: Al Ghazali Centre for Islamic Sciences and Human Development.
- Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. (2013). *Te tohu paetahi ngā poutoko whakarara orangā: Bachelor of Social Work (Bi-culturalism in Practice) programme document*. Te Awamutu, NZ: Author.
- Ul-Haq, S., & Westwood, R. (2012). The politics of knowledge, epistemological occlusion and Islamic management and organization knowledge. *Organization*, 19(2), 229-257.