

4.3 Cultural Responsiveness¹

The Treaty stated in several different ways that tangata whenua cultures would be respected and protected; specifically, Captain Hobson promised:

E mea ana ate Kawana ko ngā a whakapono katoa o Ingarangi, o ngā a Weteriana, o Roma, me te ritenga Māori hoki e tiakina ngā atahitia e ia.

The several faiths/beliefs of England of the Wesleyans, of Rome, and also Māori custom, shall alike be protected by him.

Many people are surprised to find out that the Treaty says nothing about tangata tiriti becoming competent in tangata whenua cultures, or even becoming bicultural; in fact, tangata whenua were quite tolerant of Europeans retaining some aspects of their own cultures, but did not expect outsiders to bring a culture of domination with them.

When the Treaty was signed in 1840, tangata whenua cultures were flourishing from their engagement with Western people and their cultures. In the decades following 1840 this became less and less the case particularly because one of the specific policies of colonisation was to try to assimilate Māori into Pākehā culture. As a result, many Treaty initiatives have been in relation to promoting awareness of, and sensitivity to, Māori cultures. One of the persistent challenges in this is how can we respect and support Māori cultures without appropriating them, given current power inequities. For example, distortions arise when trying to teach about Māori cultures in a tangata tiriti contexts. Another challenge is to develop ways of acknowledging things that are culturally important for Māori in ways that are also culturally appropriate for tangata tiriti.

Cultural differences can be viewed as creative tensions that provide opportunities for genuine collaboration; constructive negotiation of the spaces between the groups has the potential for outcomes that are positive for all involved. A good example has been the response to challenges to nursing practice by Māori resulting in development of the concept of kawa whakaruruhau or cultural safety.

¹ From: *Treaty Journeys: International Aid Agencies respond to the Treaty of Waitangi*. Council for International Development. 2007. Used by permission.

Reflecting on Experiences²

- **Organisations engage with different aspects of culture**

FPA receives a lot of international visitors – there are powhiri, depending on the status of the guests, and opportunities for them to meet with tangata whenua.

(participant from Family Planning Association of New Zealand - FPANZ)

We would never start a meeting without some sort of mihi or finish without some sort of waiata, closing or poroporoaki. For regional training it's a full powhiri, a really formal poroporoaki. In all aspects, the place of kai, the dress code, the shoe code, everything has been done Māori.

(participant from YWCA)

Simple things like actually having the right fonts on our computers and on our website and to be able to write Māori words properly with the macrons. It sounds really small, but it was important to get the basics right in the beginning.

(participant from Development Resource Centre - DRC)

- **and for different reasons**

We begin each staff meeting with karakia and waiata as a reminder of where we live and what we're about. It is a deliberate way of engaging all the staff in recognition that there is a spirituality and reality in this land that we can acknowledge.

(participant from Christian World Service - CWS)

We have Māori volunteers and Sri Lankans and Africans, new New Zealanders. The feedback from them is that the selection processes that we use are accommodating for them. In a way, if we can get our processes right for Māori people then that opens the door to be inclusive of other cultures as well.

(participant from Volunteer Service Abroad - VSA)

- **but all find it challenging**

At the end of the day, it's about respect for other peoples' religious beliefs. From a Māori point of view, whether it's God, or whether it's Io Matua-Te-Kore or Buddha, it's the same source. It's just us who put those different definitions on it. You learn to ride those things because they come up all the time, not just around karakia.

(participant from DRC – External Maori consultant)

We found out, in the process of working out what the name was going to be, that it needs to be gifted to us. I was so pleased that we discovered that because we could inadvertently have done something that was really not appropriate. Even with the best will in the world people can still put their foot in it.

(participant from Leprosy Mission)

Staff are used to peer-reviewed competency based assessments and to the language as the health sector is used to more competency-based assessment. So we've started – though it will still be complex to do cultural competency in a safe, considered, careful way.

(participant from FPANZ)

² NOTE: The views expressed here are the participants' own, at the time of the interview, and do not necessarily represent their current views or those of their agencies.