

Kaupapa Māori arts therapy: The application of arts therapy in a Kaupapa Māori setting

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Abstract

This paper presents a case study of Kaupapa Māori arts therapy, which can be described as arts therapy practice conducted under Māori concepts, philosophies and belief systems, or a Kaupapa Māori setting. As an arts therapist with ancestral links that are Tainui, Dalmatian and Scottish, and a passion for working with colonised people, Kaupapa Māori arts therapy concepts and philosophies resonated with me. Kaupapa Māori arts therapy provides a process for strengthening identity and building resilience using indigenous knowledge. Amongst other things, Kaupapa Māori arts therapy observes tikanga Māori (protocols), and makes use of Māori concepts, philosophies, tools and models in conjunction with Western arts therapy methods. It is an effective therapeutic process that is distinctly Māori, but also has relevance to other Indigenous peoples.

Keywords

Arts therapy, identity, Kaupapa Māori, Indigenous Knowledge Systems¹

Introduction

Kaupapa Māori arts therapy is an emerging practice. It is a form of arts therapy that I have developed in collaboration with my clients and that I describe for the first time in this article. It is arts therapy conceptualised within a Māori worldview and works with Māori models of health such as the four-sided construct of Māori well-being, Te Whare Tapa Whā². Kaupapa Māori arts therapy can only be understood in relation to a definition of Kaupapa Māori within the context of the history, development and current practices of Kaupapa Māori health services.

Kaupapa Māori

Kaupapa Māori is quite simply ‘a Māori way’ of doing things, and is based on Te Ao Māori, a Māori worldview (Smith, 1999). Smith (2004) describes Kaupapa Māori as:

- Related to ‘being Māori’;
- Connected to Māori philosophy and principles;
- Taking for granted the validity and legitimacy of Māori;
- Taking for granted the importance of Māori language and culture; and
- Concerned with the ‘struggle for autonomy over our own cultural well-being’.

Moreover, according to Nepe, “Kaupapa Maori... is knowledge that validates a Maori worldview and is not only Maori owned but also Maori controlled” (1991, p.16). A Kaupapa Māori organisation is, therefore, owned by Māori, controlled by Māori and operates under the philosophy of Kaupapa Māori or a Māori worldview. According to Smith, “A Kaupapa Māori organisation operates in a Kaupapa Māori setting: one that asserts Māori language and cultural values as integral to its practice” (Smith, 1997; Smith, 1999).

Kaupapa Māori in Health Services

According to the Ministry of Health (1996), Māori health service organisations have been in existence for over 50 years, but their number increased dramatically following the privatisation of the New Zealand health sector in 1990s. The Ministry of Health defined such organisations as ‘by Māori for Māori’ health services, targeted at addressing the specific health needs of Māori (Ministry of Health Policy Guidelines, 1996). They have since evolved into Kaupapa Māori health services, which can be accessed by anyone, and they continue to operate like this today.

The Kaupapa Māori organisation where the arts therapy described in this article took place

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