

# Chapter 5

## Going with the Flow: Pre-service Teacher Learning in, About and with Community

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### Prologue

‘Kia Orana’ is a salutation consistently used across the Cook Islands community.

‘Kia Orana’ is both a blessing and a wish for good fortune.

‘Kia Orana’ is the essence of our people and islands.

The ‘Kia Orana’ values embody this essence and reflect our aspirations for our islands.

Our visitors will learn and come to appreciate our values, and share these experiences with the world!

<http://www.kiaorana.cookislands.travel/>.

*The spirit of ‘Kia Orana’ was flowing back and forth as we were greeted by the small group of teachers, many of whom were mentors to our pre-service teachers in their schools. They were about to captivate us with their singing—a fund-raising event to support their travel to Australia. The jam session began with drums pulsating, and harmonious voices totally engulfed the space. As I stood at the beach bar and bistro overlooking the tranquil waters of the South Pacific, I was immersed in the beautiful harmonies of music that I was familiar with in the Western world. This time, however, there was a difference—the drums, ukuleles, guitars and beautiful tones of Maori-Polynesian voices. In a very emotional moment for me, on the fifth song, deep rhythms of a beautiful rendition of ‘We are the World’ drifted across the space. I was captivated and astounded—nothing accurately portrays the array of feelings within me in that moment. I had to step into the background to dry my eyes and to compose myself—the moment had literally brought me to tears. As I stepped forward to join the others in my group, I contemplated what had just happened to me. As I looked again to the performance, I watched as our pre-service*

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*teachers were grouped and moving together, and the voices and instruments of the Cook Islands teacher group seeming to flow and connect within and among them. There was some kind of ‘together’ happening, and it absolutely overwhelmed me. The teachers were clearly united and represented such a quintessence of what this enchanting space embodied as a community. Those gathered were so much more than performers and observers. For me, it felt like a phenomena of ‘community’ that was revealing itself. For me, this was so much more than a moment of learning—it was an irrevocable moment of insight into human richness and connection, which generated an emergence of something new to my sense of self as a teacher educator. Such a powerful affective moment inspired me to inquire: How does experiencing the essence of a community transform those who actively contribute to and participate within the community? And what do we learn for and about ourselves from such encounters, personally and professionally?*

## **Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss the processes of my re-conceptualizing the notion of community in my own learning and that of the pre-service teachers who participated in the Cook Islands International Professional Experience (IPE). Community is often defined as an interactive group of people, united by language, traditional cultural practices, and the everyday activities and actions that align to values and morals. A community also unites to establish and achieve everyday connections for ways of being and doing in their life context. From my experiences as leader of the Cook Islands IPE, I have developed new perspectives on what participation in community can bring to our learning and have contemplated what that means for ourselves and others as teachers and learners. In the Cook Islands IPE, what is familiar is challenged through cultural, social, and institutional differences in teaching and ways of being.

## **The Importance of Community and Culture in the Cook Islands**

During my two years of participation in the Cook Islands IPE, I came to see and appreciate the sense of community that permeates all aspects of life in the islands. For example, I was struck by the government and community plans for reigniting Cook Islands Maori language in schools and among the community; the shared moments when we attended church and were emotionally touched by the beautiful voices singing; and a multitude of other learning opportunities such as designing and making the traditional dress fabric of the *pāreu* [sarong]. These were all a mix of traditional and contemporary practices in the community and were so enlightening for us to observe and to participate in. Many changes are being implemented by the Cook Islands Ministry of Education to ensure that the close sense of

community and connections with culture among Cook Islanders is not lost. For example, aspirations for higher qualifications of teaching staff and accrediting schools for their educational programs, with the intention of providing high-quality education for an understanding of the world and the Cook Islanders' place in it, rather than accepting the inevitable population decline that comes from a one-way exit from the islands. Furthermore, there is an aim to broaden the scope for current students' career pathways, to avoid adolescents feeling they have no direction or future in the Islands.

My experiences on the Cook Islands IPE helped me to recognize the importance of an attitude of *'going with the flow'* and watch how participation in school and community activities could facilitate all kinds of deep learning for pre-service teachers, including their sense of self as beginning teachers. The aphorism *'go with the flow'* now holds new and significant meanings for me, as it captures the relaxed and informal nature of the Cook Islands way of life. I found this quality develops in myself, and I observed it in our pre-service teachers through so many meaningful group discussions and individual contemplations.

## The Cook Islands IPE

The year 2015 was the 21st year of Monash University pre-service teachers undertaking their professional experience in the Cook Islands. The significance of this ongoing relationship between the Cook Island community and Monash University became very apparent to me from the early days when I was establishing a sense of my own knowing about the community and pre-service teacher engagement. In 2015, the Cook Islands Ministry of Education invited the Monash team to an official welcome on the first day of the placement. Ministry staff were awarded a well-deserved certificate of appreciation from Monash University for their ongoing collaboration and support of our pre-service teachers over many years. The official welcome also indicated that they valued the pre-service teachers' contributions to the school system and was the beginning of our journey of discovering new ways of being in an unfamiliar space of education and life. Three weeks later, at the farewell dinner for school principals and teacher mentors, the value of the Monash University—Cook Islands collaboration—was once again affirmed. One of the principals stated: *'I have students from other overseas universities, but it is different with these Monash students (as he gestures around the room filled with Monash PSTs). I have had Monash students for many years, they bring so much to us; my teachers [mentors] with Monash students always, always change in big ways after they have worked with every one of these [Monash] students.'* Moments such as these emphasized for me the community perspective and the importance of interrelationships in education. I felt a connection with people I had never met before, in a place I had never been before. I had not anticipated so much richness to my own learning and that of our PSTs—a newness to learning, being, doing, and understanding difference.

## Teaching and Learning in Connection with Community

Thomas and Mucherah (2014) explored self-efficacy of pre-service teachers through immersion in unfamiliar cultural environments. The immersion programs provided ongoing experience in social and cultural environments that pertained to culturally diverse and low-income background ‘minority children and families’ (p. 370). These particular community groups differed greatly to the pre-service teachers’ own communities. The pre-service teachers were assigned a community representative to mentor them through their community involvement. Thomas and Mucherah argued that ‘to develop teacher efficacy, one must face situations with which they are uncomfortable and learn the power to overcome them’ (p. 369). They maintained that connection with those from within a community enables this empowerment. Furthermore, they argued that greater cultural interpretation and authentic participation develops outside the classroom students’ school life. Practice that is immersed beyond the classroom and into the events and values within a community creates a holistic approach for pre-service teachers’ engagement in their students’ development, not only through the school, but also through understanding the students within their family and community too. It can be a distinguishing attribute of teachers’ self-efficacy. Thomas and Mucherah highlighted the importance of pre-service teachers’ consistent opportunities to interpret reflections for learning about themselves through open conversations with and about the place of community in their learning.

Likewise, Nistor et al. (2015) discussed the socio-emotional and interpersonal perspectives of community that bring cohesion and a sense of belonging for individuals in connection with particular communities. The ways in which individuals contribute to and participate in community is more than learning how to do particular actions. It comes back to how we learn as individuals to be ourselves, and how we choose to contribute and participate. The processes of ‘doing’ self include ‘the ways in which people respond to challenges and conflicts in their lives, how they internalize, interpret, and also further develop the sociocultural rules and standards of what it takes to be a human being’ (Stetsenko and Arievitch 2004, p. 494). Conflict can occur within one’s sense of self when seeking to find a sense of belonging in community. Conflict between community belonging and a sense of self is more particular in place and space when cultural and linguistic paradigms differ in regard to social engagement (Babaeff 2013).

## Developing Narratives of Learning

The pre-service teachers’ stories and reflections presented in this chapter are situated in three areas of community—their allocated schools, their participation in activities with the broader Rarotonga community, and the Monash University pre-service teachers’ own unique community of learners. In this study, data were

collected from pre-service teachers during spontaneous reflections, which surfaced almost daily, and which then were expressed more deeply in their written journals, formal interviews, and group discussions. The reflections were rich, frequent, and varied in event, but all seemed to express learning and new perspectives in relation to themselves and teaching. Of all the stories shared, I have selected four that provided significant links to new learning and understanding in relation to participation in the classroom, school, or local community. The participants were Kate, Chad, Brad, and Joel. Kate attended the 2015 IPE for her final three week professional placement requirements during the last year of the Bachelor of Education in Primary/Secondary teaching course, with a specialization in music. Chad also attended the 2015 IPE for his final professional placement of the four-year Bachelor of Education (Secondary), with his methods being English and history. In 2016, Brad and Joel were both specializing in physical education and outdoor recreation, with Joel in his second placement for the first year in the Masters of Education and Brad in his third year of a Bachelor of Education. Both these pre-service teachers were involved in preparing and teaching in and out of the classroom, including content that differed to their prior teaching experiences.

During this IPE, there is no choice to move out of the Cook Islands community. Day and night they are teaching, living, and connecting with and within the school and local community, and with each other. When pre-service teachers are doing their professional experience placements in their home contexts, they can leave their allocated school and go back to their familiar support networks and social community. This is not possible when an eight-hour flight distances the pre-service teachers from their established communities, from which they usually gain support for the successes and challenges that inevitably arise during professional experience. Interestingly, internet access is also not as accessible as they are familiar with.

In the following sections, I narrate the pre-service teachers' experiences of learning by using excerpts from interview data that highlighted their learning through being, doing, and interacting in and with the Cook Islands community. I also discuss how their reflections about their learning prompted thoughts in my head about my own learning as a teacher educator. Through developing stories of the Cook Islands experiences of community connection, links to learning with and within community arose by connecting stories of past, present, and future. The narratives reflect the pre-service teachers' learning as dynamic, as they express their shift in learning and identity through their past to the present and for some into the future.

## **Learning *in* the School Community**

Throughout the Cook Islands IPE, many of the pre-service teachers reflected on the interpersonal approaches they observed between themselves and their mentors, and with the students in their classrooms. There seemed to be a general consensus that the interpersonal approaches between teachers, children, and pre-service teachers

were relaxed, inviting, accepting, respectful, and warm, and that ‘going with the flow’ was very much reflected in the attitudes of many. The PSTs made comparisons between their local (Melbourne) and Cook Island professional experiences and noted the different dynamics in their relationships with their mentor teachers. For example, Chad noted that he had

Never had relationships with anyone like this before in my [professional] school experiences. Mentors [here] are different with pre-service teachers– it made me think about how I would be as a mentor... It was always “here is the space, use it how you want to, and integrate what you need to – just go for it”...Lots of feedback. Mentors saw us as associate teachers. I became more confident as I was treated as teacher not as a pre-service teacher. I felt like an equal. I never felt like I was imposing on anyone. I got more confident in my teaching abilities and the way I think and do, and everything in general.

Reflections such as this showed that Chad was learning about himself and was beginning to discover his identity as a teacher and as a mentor teacher himself in the future. Social cohesion through the interpersonal (Nistor et al. 2015) and the mentor/pre-service teacher relationship suggested that Chad was beginning to see himself as part of the teaching profession, now and as he may be in the future. The comparison made by Chad between his experiences at home and those in the Cook Islands suggests that completing his final placement in an international context prompted him to see himself with more confidence. He appeared to secure his belief in himself that he could and would achieve his ambitions as a teacher. Feeling like ‘an equal’ to his mentor provided expansive scope for learning, as he reflected that ‘lots of feedback’ was given, and that he felt valued and respected by his mentor for his teaching practice. Nistor et al. (2015) determined that a sense of community mediates acceptance of knowledge sharing and is likely to foster ‘membership [that] becomes more valuable and meaningful, and members accept each other more readily’ (Nistor et al. 2015, p. 261).

The experience of community in the relationship he developed with his mentor also seemed to create significant learning for Chad in his approach with the classroom students. He reflected on his experience to consider what this means to him and for his understanding of himself as a teacher. He stated that

I could build the classroom the way I wanted it and the relationships with the students were so real, so I could just get on with it... In terms of my teaching practice, I am very implicit and I learnt that I need to be more explicit, so I can really give the students a sound focus and direction. Working with students was a real eye-opener: relationships matter, so then we don’t have to fight every step of the way, so can really focus on the teaching. I’ve never had relationships with anyone like this before; mentors or [classroom] students.

The reflections that Chad shared persisted with me, and really confirmed for me the importance of ‘going with the flow.’ For my own professional learning, seeing this in action and hearing it in reflections indicated how students began trusting themselves more, and how it increased their confidence to see and put into action different approaches to teaching, sometimes spontaneously. It seemed they were learning new ways and developing different techniques for teaching and trusting themselves to take risks. I affirmed with the students the need to ‘go with the flow’

and to embrace the challenges and anxieties that they might have been feeling as opportunities to learn about teaching, and more specifically about themselves. I found it inspiring to be conversing with individuals who shared their angst in particular situations. These moments of sharing what had occurred, experiencing a dawning realization of their own achievements and potential, were like watching learning in motion. The learning was not only about how to teach, but appeared to be a new way of seeing themselves. I found that as a teacher educator, my role of being an interested and empathetic listener and acknowledger, encouraging them to go with the flow of the school and the classroom, seemed to aid the pre-service teachers' processing about their own teaching and learning.

In another example of the impact of the prevailing culture of the school community on pre-service teacher learning, Joel had been initially concerned about clarity of expectations in terms of his teaching practice. He expressed a need for all to be planned as soon as possible. In my conversations with him, I suggested on a number of occasions he just 'go with the flow' to consider what was presenting for the next step—to see and feel the ambience of what was happening and to move with it. Joel did not initially embrace this approach, and he sought specific direction from his mentor on each lesson. I provided Joel with encouragement to not put too much pressure on himself. After his first week of placement, Joel came to see the value of taking a more relaxed approach to his teaching and he became aware of a change. He recalled that:

At first I thought that 'go with the flow' was so clichéd. As time passed I realised it was really true, it helped me find confidence in myself...that I could really look at and listen to what was happening and take it from there. Early on I had felt [that the mentor] teacher should be telling me what to do...but then I could just go with the flow, and it was working. I felt more confident in my teaching and making quick, related decisions, I realised I can do a whole lot more than I thought I could.

Chad and Joel were not the only ones who felt the culture of the school community permeate their thinking and learning as pre-service teachers. Brad also found his teaching approach developed spontaneously in his classroom. Brad explained that a more relaxed approach brought more than he could have anticipated. Clearly, he felt his teaching became expansive and authentic:

In the Cook Islands they are a relaxed culture and it flows into their education system – bare feet [in the classroom] represents this...I compare [this] to my Australian education experiences [that] had more structured outcomes and objectives with high results...[This] lessens the focus and time for developing passions and interests. Written goals rather than just experiencing waterfalls and rivers in the outdoors [like in the Cook Islands]. My mentor was amazing, it didn't matter what I was teaching so long as learning was taking place. I had a free rein to do what feels right, more freedom to move with where the kids were at. It seemed so meaningful to work on an interdisciplinary approach – maths, statistics, sports, the land and geography – all with kids so engaged. It seemed like profound learning experiences – teaching how to learn. Some structure but not over structured. I'm definitely going to work this way from now on...Going with the flow 100% gives a different flow – I don't want to feel boxed in by expectations of planning to perfection [and] miss other important doors that may open for meaningful learning...[I am] looking at how I can bring this to my teaching.

These narratives illustrate how the relaxed spirit of the Cook Islands community flows into the essence of teaching and learning, and how the pre-service teachers embraced this style as they moved through their placement. They developed more confidence in themselves to flow with their own teaching style as they connected to the more relaxed mode of the islands. What was initially a conflict for what *should* be happening became internalized (Stetsenko and Arievitch 2004) and is now, for these pre-service teachers, a more natural way to be.

## Learning *About* the Local Community

In her learning about teaching in the Cook Islands, Kate discovered the importance of wider social and cultural values of the community to the learning of students in schools. Her desire for authentic learning went beyond the classroom to embrace the wider community concerns about the lack of Maori language in schools. As a music teacher, Kate attempted to connect with the government's desire to reignite Cook Island Maori teaching. During literacy week, Kate designed an activity in which the students presented the words of a song, firstly in English and then in Cook Islands Maori. As a group, the students were asked to write and perform the chorus to the song '*What a wonderful world*' in both English and Maori. Kate knew that music and movement was such a culturally embedded semiotic process in the Cook Islands, so she utilized this cultural practice, and the desire of the community to preserve their Maori language, into her teaching. In working with this unfamiliar language and cultural context, Kate started to see herself not only as a pre-service teacher, but also as a learner. She was teaching her students, but at the same time, learning how to be culturally responsive and respectful of the community in which she was teaching. Kate recalled:

The main thing that I took away from the experience was... [that] it's a different culture, it's a different language some of the time, [and] just very different to what I'm used to... [What] really has shaped me, as a teacher, is that I was forced to be a learner. Sometimes during previous placements it was always... 'alright I am the teacher, I'm the one who needs to be doing the talking and the teaching, and giving the information to the students.' But now... I've begun actually really listening to what the students have to say a lot more ... it's really interesting to take on board what they're saying and actually listening to it more. And being in that position where I'm not just the one who's in charge and the one that knows it all, it's the students who know quite a bit as well. I've begun to take this on. So that's definitely the main thing I took away from that experience - that two-way learning.

Through awareness her being in an unfamiliar context of the classroom and wider community, the taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching that were evident for Kate at home were not present in the Cook Islands. Kate's engagement as a teacher in this community altered when she came to know the students through her daily interactions with them. Her awareness of the wider community goal of preserving the Cook Islands Maori language became an active influence for her own teaching content. Kate spoke about how the government and local community were anxious



to increase the teaching of the Maori language, and how this had implications for her teaching. She stated that:

At the Ministry of Education they made a big point of saying that their Maori language is slowly drifting off. In their households they're speaking a lot of English between the parents and their kids, so they really want to put that back into education and make it a big thing. So that was a real focus for me, as well making sure that they were practising their language. That's where I started developing my unit plan and lesson plans...I think [students] having that feeling of [dance] movement as well, it helped their confidence because it gave them something else to focus on. So it was combining all those elements of music and all those elements of movement and sound...really developed their confidence, as well. And I think it was mainly the cultural sense that showed when they were really close together and they supported each other. I think that's their culture and that was all through their classroom... they would look out for each other.

Kate's experiences in the Cook Islands showed her how important it is for pre-service teachers to take into account the cultural heritage of their students and to build on this background in their teaching. Another significant experience for Kate was her attendance at a community fund-raising event:

I think one [experience] that really stood out for me was attending the fundraiser that the group of my [school's] teachers went to, and it was a great relaxed night, and they were up there singing and performing like it was second nature to them, which it probably was. But for us it was something so new and so special...such a beautiful sight to just see them all laughing and smiling, and singing and playing their instruments...I'm quite a musical person myself, so coming from that background I go, "oh wow... I'd love to be part of that every day." And that was seen across the whole island. They're very musical... [and] they like to bring music in when they're socializing, and when they're at home they often perform or sing together. It was really moving.

I think that's one of the really important things that you can take away from being immersed in another culture...seeing how they express themselves and how different things are built into their traditions and their culture like singing or music... It has really changed how I teach, how I see students, how I see other teachers, and what I want to do in my teaching, as well... The Cook Islands experience has [given]me an understanding that by experiencing things differently, you can bring that in [to teaching] and link it to your understanding of...[their] everyday life. It's opened my mind up to all new possibilities.

Throughout Kate's story, the reflections formed a very emotive perspective of what she was learning through her engagement with the community. Kate appeared to be reflecting on a transformation of her thinking about teaching. She was intrigued by the sustaining of home languages and was surprised that she was able to achieve so much through her teaching in relation to the Maori maintenance program. More than bringing Maori to the classroom, Maori had been brought to Kate. The language is not simply a two-way learning experience—for Kate, new thoughts of culture and language had surfaced.

Her experiences in the Cook Islands not only impacted on Kate's teaching and learning while on placement, but have laid the foundation for her future teaching career. One year after her Cook Island IPE, Kate contacted me to discuss how inspired she was from her experience and to tell me that she was now involved in post-graduate research in relation to community languages and maintaining sources

of heritage. Kate's sharing during the interview and then re-connecting with me one year later to share where her learning with the community had taken her made me reflect on what learning about community means. I have come to see that enriching experiences offered by unfamiliar places and spaces can create aspirations for further knowing and create new possibilities—inspirational encounters can create unforeseen pathways for the future. After the 2016 IPE, this was affirmed for me once again with three of our pre-service teachers returning to the Cook Islands in 2017 to commence their graduate teaching year, after successfully obtaining teaching positions there.

## **Learning *with* the Local Community**

Providing pre-service teachers with the opportunity to contribute to and learn within local communities during IPE enables the learning from their past experiences in education to be utilized in their current teaching and engagement with the local community. Brad reflected on a particular community connection with which he became involved, through a school outreach program for the youth of the Cook Islands community. This event involved helping his students prepare for a school-in-community suicide prevention strategy. Brad expressed that it was quite an intense and confronting experience, in which students from across all year levels were supported in the classroom to develop speeches for 'UMATTER,' an inter-school program that aimed to reduce the high youth suicide rate in the Cook Islands. Brad was involved in supporting students to prepare and deliver speeches on the topic. He described his involvement and the impact on his learning as a teacher in the following way:

The community event was for suicide awareness. I was told that in the last four years there were 26 young male suicides, huge for this island's small population. UMATTER is a community event [that] involved preparing in classroom teaching each day in the weeks leading up to it. Students were writing their own speeches by themselves. We were supporting them to feel like confident participants in their community, [that] they have a voice. [It was] very raw and emotional for 12 year olds to be given such a deep and meaningful task. It all left me with an incredible feeling and so much wanting to be a part of this community. Groundwork [classroom teaching and learning] from start to finish saw the students confident to deliver speeches powerfully. It was so inspiring to see them becoming community leaders [and] inspired me to want to keep giving more...On the night the student speeches were presented it touched the community with tears – it really felt [that] community bonding in a tough time was happening.

Brad's words of wanting to give more and being inspired after watching his students' successful speeches clearly shows he had developed a meaningful connection with his students and the broader community. Hallman (2012) explained there should be a commitment for preparing pre-service teachers, not only for the school environments, but also for understanding that teaching is 'beyond the walls of the classroom and into the world' (p. 241). The community and the students certainly

showed Brad a whole new world, one that overwhelmed him as he came to understand it all, and once again learning was a two-way, reciprocal flow.

Another way in which connections with the wider Cook Islands community were developed outside of the schools was through our involvement with the local Scouts association. We were invited to be involved in a scout activity—a guided cross island hike, led by members of the scout group, many of whom knew our pre-service teachers from their schools. We were told there was no cost but could contribute a donation for their attendance at the New Zealand jamboree. When the hat went around for our collection, a substantial amount was collected, and the ‘Chief’ (Scout leader) expressed how overwhelmed he was at the contribution, so much so that many of their scouts could now attend the jamboree. We all attended the Monday evening Scout meeting to give the donation and to express our appreciation for the guided walk. Before we went, scout leader Ben asked if the students would like to bring an activity idea to the meeting. They spontaneously devised a game which was a rugby/Australian rules football game, and a very engaging match ensued. Once again, the idea of ‘going with the flow’ was in place, as the pre-service teachers responded spontaneously to the invitation to organize a game. This time, however, it reached a different community in the Cook Islands—the Scouts. This was our final week and even though I was officially the leader of our pre-service teachers at this time, beyond the initial connection with the Scouts, the leadership devolved to the pre-service teachers themselves as they contributed to the Scout group activities. Our pre-service teachers were leading and engaging in community activities way beyond any stated requirements for successful completion of their placement. From this activity, the pre-service teachers developed a broader understanding of Rarotonga’s history and geography, and a new network of community connections was established. There was a relaxed atmosphere throughout the afternoon with lots of spontaneous engagement with the Scouts, and the pre-service teachers were showing real interest in the extra-curricula activities of these boys. As the pre-service teachers became involved in an out-of-school activity, it brought a different sense of knowing about these young people and their country. The hike to Rarotonga’s highest point, the ‘Needle,’ was a learning experience for the Monash IPE community, as we were learning about the land, language and culture, and about communities past and present. It certainly was an experience of learning *in, within, and about* community, from so many differing perspectives.

## Conclusion

My two visits to the Cook Islands as leader of this IPE have been a substantial learning journey for me. Through my own reflections, and on hearing the many stories from the pre-service teachers, I came to see how teacher education can be enriched by these experiences. By presenting these stories of learning and experience, the interpersonal influence on learning is highlighted to show what this means

for discovering one's own strengths and for learning different ways to approach teaching. There was an affirming 'flow' throughout the stories about one's self and the potential for action in the future. This was not only for the pre-service teachers, but for me as well. I ask myself: How can I, as a teacher educator, continue to support these processes of learning when we are not in a community of significant difference internationally? How can I continue the learning about and with community when I am in my familiar home context? These questions have stayed with me in my teaching ever since.

Supporting pre-service teachers to embrace difference with confidence in an authentic and purposeful manner becomes possible when immersed in spaces of teaching that are different to our own. Building positive relationships for active and relevant contributions creates a different sense of self for one's own teaching identity and capability. Reflections on what is new and different create a pathway for reflexive action. Change and confidence in approach to teaching can happen as pre-service teachers bring difference, self, and others proactively to their learning and consciousness. There is always difference between schools, even in the local context. Any difference can be embraced as an opportunity for learning, affirming or reflecting upon for change and growth. Supporting pre-service teachers to believe in their own learning from the past, and their ability to learn and develop in present moments, can bring a strong sense of self as teacher and pathways to a future previously unimagined. A major influence for me as teacher educator is the opportunities for pre-service teacher thinking about self and difference without too many preconceived ideas—in other words, to *go with the flow*.

## Epilogue

*Once again, I felt emotionally overwhelmed as I listened to beautiful sounds of harmony. However, there was a difference this time. We were not in the bar at the beach, and the harmonies were coming from our pre-service teachers. They were clearly connecting as a community of appreciative learners. We had invited all the mentor teachers and school principals to a thank-you dinner, and 'thank-you' came flowing through song in the Australian classic Downunder. The harmony of all 24 pre-service teachers was pitch perfect, and the words were altered to connect with their Cook Islands experience of beauty and learning through an intercultural experience. Even more so, there was Maori flowing through the songs as well. 'Kia Orana' was flowing through voice and action. As the presentations and words of appreciation concluded, I was not alone in feeling emotionally overwhelmed. Members of the audience were also wiping a tear, and openly and enthusiastically expressing that they had learnt a great deal themselves, through the pre-service teachers' contributions to their schools and community.*

*The farewell thank you dinner was clearly representing the reciprocal relationships and deep appreciation of one community to another, and between communities. Deep interconnection was present. Now, on their return home, the pre-*

*service teachers continue to connect through social media with each other, and with their Cook Islands associates. Our journeys may differ now, but the relationships and engagement with the Cook Islands schools and community have created relationships that will be with those involved for many years to come.*

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