

## **LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS IN A MULTICULTURAL, DIVERSE LEARNING ORGANISATION: HOW DO PROVIDERS OF QUALITY EDUCATION MAINTAIN AND VALUE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THEIR STUDENTS?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The advantages of lived experiences are the relevance of the experience which marries to the theory and the practice in the particular fields that many learners are currently involved. Educational theory and practice takes the teaching and learning process into a global state of thinking, to be a 21<sup>st</sup> century learner means to solidify a strong grounding and knowledge which excels in the areas in which they are applied. This research will not dismiss the advantages of many teaching and learning tools, such as theory, as many of these tools are what provide the basis for excellence in the teaching and learning environment and re-thinking the steps towards a proficiency in all areas of success in education. The literature I use in this paper have maintain the interest in the development of students and teachers in all areas of teaching and learning, and maintain a high level of participation of the learner to develop a pedagogy suited to their learning and to be supported by multiple methodologies used by educators, to provide excellence.

Throughout this paper there will be specific references to the importance of maintaining support for students own knowledge and what is done to encourage usefulness for this knowledge. Having lived experiences in a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment will maintain that knowledge and experience which many students possess and what makes them unique to their peers in their learning space. Knowing what students know does not derive from a theoretical lens only; it is by the practical lens that students have these experiences. Lived experiences in a tertiary organisation collaborates

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### **MAIN TEXT**

Studies have proven that lived experiences which come in a diverse range in educational organisations, are being overshadowed by theory, and dispelling practice to prove the theory. In my opinion, theory requires practice to inform its validity. Practice provides a solid, well informed foundation to support the theory and content of that particular theory. Smith, H. (2008), states that theory is imperative; however the practice to provide sustainable outcomes to the theory, valid practice, must be present. This research looks at the validity of practice and what makes it valid is the alignment it has with the study informing the theory and the theory itself. I will be focussing on research which suggests lived experiences are as much an important teacher of substantial educational outputs, than the written works provided by scholars in a society whose history has a story of its own.

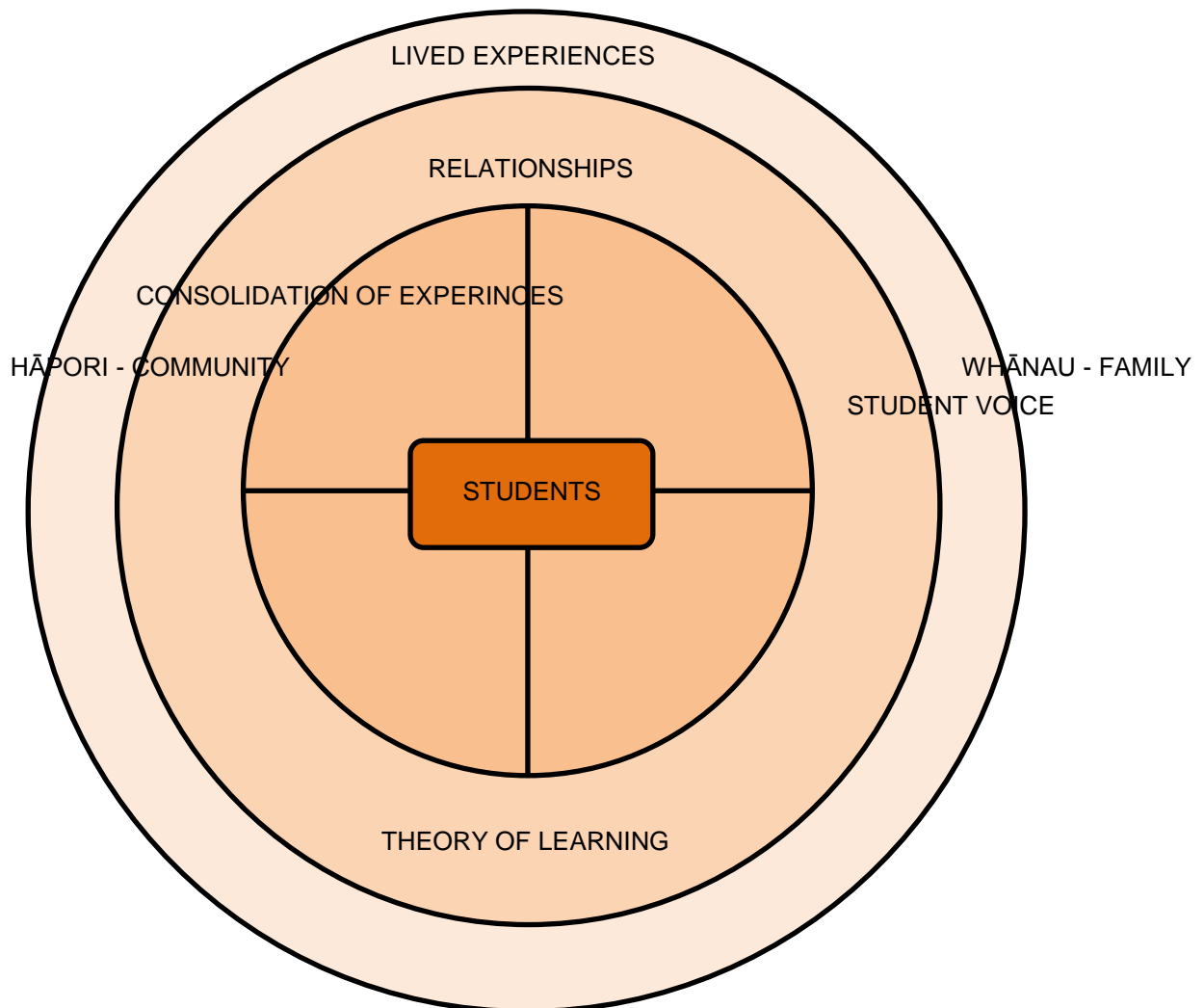
Three important questions will be asked in this study; 1) what makes some experiences a lived experience? 2) Will lived experiences be more informative than theory if theory is without practice? 3) How do we contextualise theory if the lived experiences of students in an educational organisation are not recognised? In order to ensure these questions are addressed throughout this study, I endeavour to make clear links to actual events throughout my lives and that of my whanau (family). I have put myself in this so that I do not misconstrued events of others outside of my whānau.

Family experiences in many cultures can be organised with theory in mind, therefore illustrating many of those experiences through articles relevant to the student and their organisation. Lived experiences maintain the relationship with the family and the student, it maintains the integrity of the student and it allows the maintenance of those experiences as the student endeavours to concrete their beliefs within the organisation. There was a study completed by Professor Timoti Karetu, on the language revitalisation of the

Maori language, which showed that many students who had grown up throughout their lives speaking Te Reo Maori had multiple lived experiences which allowed them to become more connected with their language as well as their surroundings. Karetu (1992) also spoke about the importance of lived experiences and how students use this knowledge to inform their writing as well as oral skill.

The following model is an encapsulation of the importance of lived experiences to students within the learning environment. It looks at the connection between the family, the community, the organisation and the lived experiences. It also illustrates that there is always a connect between student and literature, and that this connect is continually being fostered by the experiences which are lived.

Figure 1 – Students Lived Experience



Appendix 1 will take more theoretical form throughout the study as you will see a connection between the theory and the practice that many students come to an organisation and advance their knowledge by application of lived experiences. Lived experiences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are beginning to be a lost recollection placed into the history books, there is no way a disrespect for the 21<sup>st</sup> century technology, however to enhance and maintain this, the model takes into account the advancement of students from their micro-world to the learning space and beyond.

Bishop (2003) argues that schools must create the opportunities for Family (whānau) to be involved in the learning journey of their children. The whanau system promotes these opportunities, particularly through academic counselling and student achievement conferences. This area of the model informs us of the importance of being a part of a family unit and the importance of the structures of the family unit. In order to be an interface with their lived experiences, students need to be around those that influence those

experiences. Experiences that are encouraged by family are consolidated within the learning experiences in some tertiary organisation, where students are able to write about what they have experienced and place emphasis on how academic literature can support students and their lived experiences.

Contextualising lived experiences within a tertiary organisation, means to break down the discourses which prevent the student to use their own knowledge within that organisation. Educational discourse requires most, if not all, aspects of academic rigour to have more elements of readings as part of your academic writing. In order to have a consolidation of thinking in your writing it is more desired, by academics, lecturers, scholars that your writing is ladled with academic theory to ensure that you understand the links between your knowledge as well as the academic writing. Lived experiences within a tertiary organisation remain the students, however when matched with scholarly writing it becomes a part of a bigger academic picture and somewhat loses the essence and understanding of that experience.

Although further into this paper I have developed a more elaborate model, this model shares the story that learners have a story that can be told through their academic success. The use of their lived experiences in the academic rigour helps to consolidate their thinking as well as give some embellishment to their own knowledge.

To be able to maintain a significant quality of assurance, students need to be seen not as an empty vessel, but as a half full vessel. As they bring to the organisation a range of experiences, they will be seen as vessels that have room for theoretical experiencers to be a part of the learning process in which they choose to be engaged. Being engaged in a process of theoretical proportion requires an academic to critically analyse what they read how they interpret that reading as well as the significance of that reading. Smith, H. (2004) states that the significance of teaching and learning and the lived experiences in different worlds, is because of the upbringing which many people have in their lives, and them being forced to better their education means to take those experiences into the organisation and allow for the two to consolidate each other and their experiences.

Although this paper speaks of the wide experiences that many students bring to an educational organisation, lived experiences in a wānanga (learning environment) supports many Maori, and other cultures, to be able to provide an insight into their own lives and how many cultures have some similarities and how these learning's can be used in the educational context. Because every experience is a potential for learning, which Boud, Cohen and Walker (1993) also describe as the means to a successful end, many lived experiences take on the cognitive approach to student success as a mono-standard of educational success, compared to the factual information or experiences of a student which are brought to the organisation and used in their learning space.

The model that I have developed allows students which bring a range of experiences to the organisation and maintain a higher level of thinking that will support their journey in an organisation which prides them on educational success. Māori lived experiences and compulsory educational lived experiences differ in many instances. The examples that follow are taken from a range of students in two different organisations, the information was not collected from a study which was formatted, and this was taken from a discussion, quite robust, which took place in the comforts which both groups were familiar.

The dialogue engaged went along these lines:

I flippantly asked the question of this group of current students from two different organisations, if they thought lived experiences in an organisation such as those they are currently studying at, should be validated and should be used to support the learner?

**Person 1:** "What does it matter if there are lived experiences, when we are in an academic organisation, lived experiences do not matter? Why should we bother using our lived experiences to motivate the pathway we are taking?"

**Person 2:** "*Lived experiences mean that there is a link between the knowledge that you have and the knowledge that you obtain through academics readings. What makes you unique in your learning space should always matter when the different aspects pertain to you as a person and to your iwi (people).*"

**Person 1:** "*But when do you as a person find time to research what matches what you see as academic to your own personal lived experiences? Your lived experiences will not prove your existence alone.*"

**Person 2:** "*But neither will the academic writings .....*"

**Person 3:** "*If I was able to relate my learning's from my tūpuna (ancestors) to the writings of many scholarly writers, I would because I would be able to consolidate that my tūpuna were correct. For example, when my*

*tūpuna grew up, they were condemned for speaking Te Reo Māori (The Maori language) in the school, they were punished by the authorities within their school and their parents were brought into school and they were punished again by their parents.”*

This conversation carried on for two hours, it is not fully verbatim, it brought out some heated discussions which were true testament to the passion which many of these students have, no matter what side they were taking. In particular those students who choose to use their lived experiences to motivate their thinking in an organisation overflowed with Mātauranga Māori (Māori Education). Smith (2003) speaks of the transformation that takes place when using lived experiences that allow students in Maori education to succeed unconditionally through academic rigour and the connections made with lived experiences in their lives.

The conversation in the example I used took place by chance, and reflected the abilities of Taurira, irrespective of the organisation they belong to, to make informed comment on the Kaupapa (topic) which was evidently the basis of the conversation. Sullivan and Glanz (2006) concur that there is a significant amount of information which many students bring to an organisation by what they see in their lives outside of the community of that organisation. To be able to contextualise lived experiences requires that the owner(s) of those lived experiences be supported by organisations which consolidate their lived experiences through required readings as well as prescribed texts.

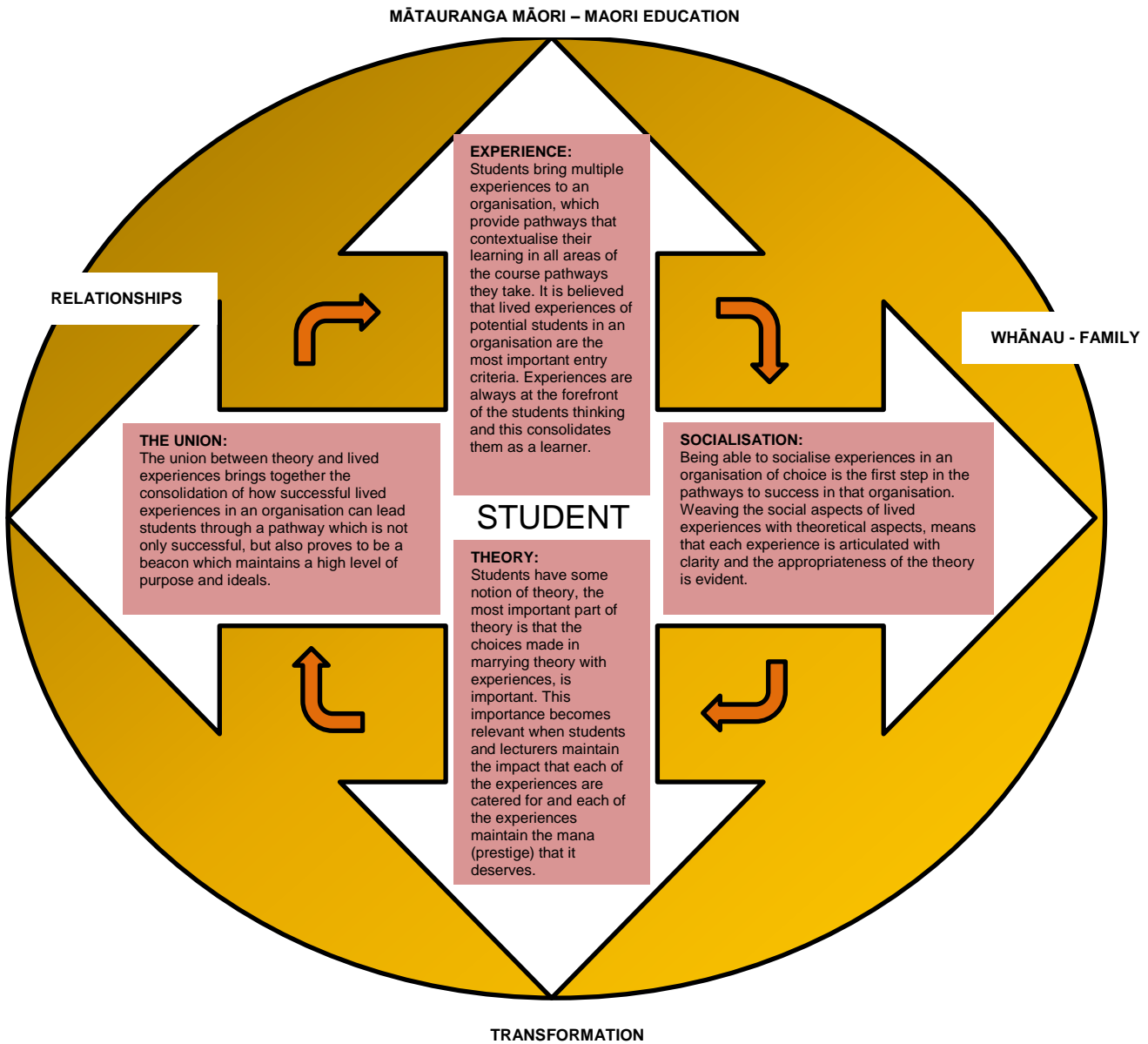
The conceptual model which I developed helps us to see an exclusive angle of how students learning in an environment are consolidated by community input. In organisations which use Mātauranga Maori (Maori Education) as a means to support the learner, however continuing to be inclusive of specific readings which help the learner in their journey, it is important that within that journey there is a connection between literacy and lived experiences, to ensure there is a specific practice which maintains a higher level of thinking and consolidation of teaching and learning.

Lived experiences allows students to be creative in their thinking, however if this creativity requires that students think outside the covers of a text book, it is imperative that organisations are not only driven by the academic literature, as this becomes all about what others think and say and not about the lived experience of the current thinker. Although literature is imperative to the rigour of all academic writing, and has its place in teaching, to be successful in an organisation; however we as educators must provide a pathway best suited to all learners in the organisation, irrespective of the lived experiences they bring to the learning environment. Lived experiences in a Maori wānanga (university) are used to contextualise learning in a teaching and learning environment which consolidates experiences which students bring to the classroom in schools. The Initial Tertiary Education (ITE) sector in Aotearoa/New Zealand seeks to provide a continuity which applies to potential students enrolling into an ITE sector organisation.

Maori Education (Mātauranga Māori) allows Māori students to be engaged with their past and as an organisation which forms ideas that are based around the four main values from which we teach, Ngā Takepu, it is imperative that all of our students lived experiences are being consolidated by theory and what it stands to represent as a student. For a student to excel in their chosen pathways there needs to be a connection between what they know and what the desire is to want to know. If there is a disconnect between theory and lived experiences, it is because there is no validity in organisations for those lived experiences to be recognised.

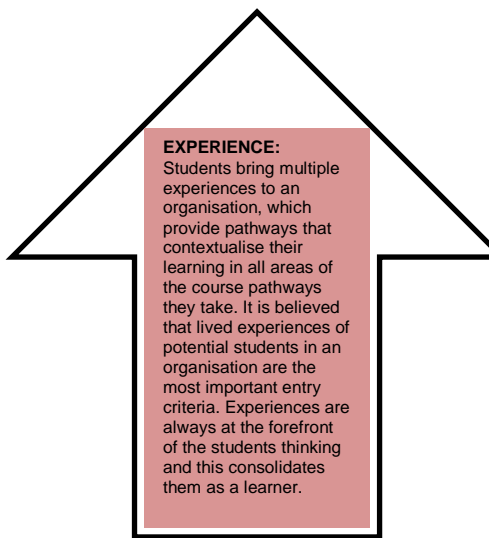
The following model, which I developed whilst thinking about the effects lived experiences have on teaching and learning in a tertiary education setting, will give a visual explanation of the direct effects lived experiences and how they can be used in a tertiary organisation work in cohesion. This more extensive model looks closely at the attributes of the lived experiences and how these experiences are connected to the academic writings as well as the academic input which is exercised by scholars within the organisation.

Figure 2: Lived experiences in a Tertiary organisation, how will it work?



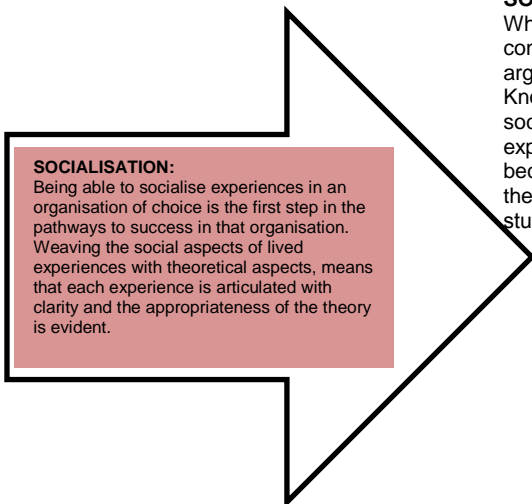
This model shows the importance of lived experiences and when married to a conceptual sub-heading provides an insight into the characteristics of that experience, as well as the participants, and assures the student of the importance of their experiences and the validation which reinforces learning in an organisation. Within a Māori educational setting, many of the teaching and learning areas takes theory as a way to back-up and consolidate all thinking around the experiences that students bring to the learning space within a tertiary organisation.

The exploration of lived experiences requires the owner of that experience to become aware of the extent that which these experiences can be taken. Academic rigour requires students to be of sound knowledge within their chosen pathways, but to discourage the use of lived experiences, means that there is no specific connect to the student and the disconnect becomes apparent within the organisation when students are forced to only use academic writings in their papers.



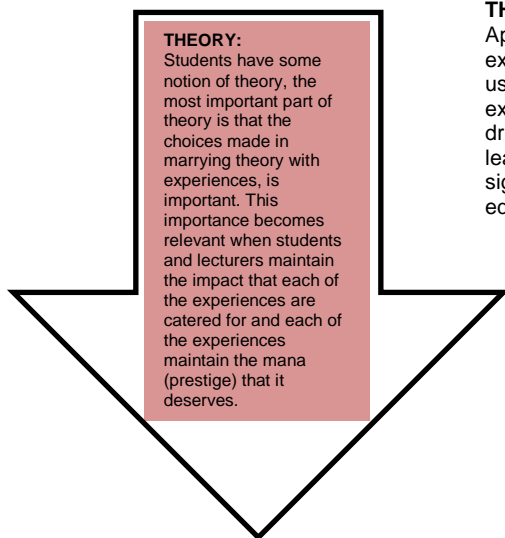
**EXPERIENCES:**

Lived experiences within a tertiary organisation would support the pathway students are following in achieving their learning outcomes. Maori Education maintains that the lived experiences of students within an educational organisation can be consolidated by theory, if that theory maintains the integrity of the students' knowledge and the experiences which are usually left to mature without direct reference throughout the pursuit of excellence. Many writings around the area of lived experiences make reference to lived experiences in a sociological way and how these experiences can influence teaching and learning in a tertiary environment. Monzo and Rueda (2008) concur that experiences of students and academic staff impact on the success within the organisation to consolidate success. It is argued that some lived experiences are not used in academic research or academic success, because it could be the demise of the researchers success, Ironside (2003) argues that there are underlying assumptions that students lived experiences will always illustrate a clearly defined structure within the parameters of the field in which they have chosen, however, she also argues that there is a stigma that when students apply their own knowledge in the chosen field, there is not a lot of consolidation between them (the client) and the recommended readings from the practitioner.



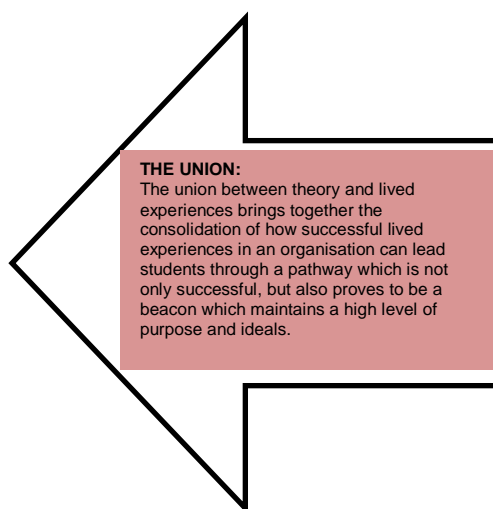
**SOCIALISATION:**

When socialising lived experiences in an educational organisation, there is a connect between that student which means that there is always clearly defined arguments that can be made to support that thinking and that knowledge. Knowing the importance of the lived experience means more to the student when socialising that knowledge. The academic rigour, which relates to the lived experience then, becomes consolidated through readings and knowledge becoming one in the same. Readings within an organisation as recommended by the academic body are important to socialise lived experiences and support the students' knowledge, which allows that lived experience to become more valid.



**THEORY:**

Apple (1999) argues that there is a fine line between theory and lived experiences, however what he does agree with, particularly with scholars that use theory to support their arguments, is that theory does not drive the experiences, they support the experiences in the and the experience is what drives the theory. Apple (1999) also argues that there is a consolidation of learning in the educational space, which allows all students to be aware of the significance of their lived experiences within the academic structures of the educational organisation.

**THE UNION:**

Becker's (1992) paper on phenomenology speaks of the importance of everyday living and how the rich learning of lived experiences can be a blend of research as well as the relationships made to consolidate those lived phenomenon. Lived experiences in an academic world provide the union which sees student's success derive from their own teaching and learning space within their experiences. This also looks closely at the matches made between student experiences and the academic literature, this match ensures there will always be literature to support thinking, however it is with the support of the organisation that the students lived experiences are seen to have some validity and some strength within their writing at an academic level.

The model looks at the inclusiveness which consolidates learning in the organisation to ensure the transitional process for students is maintained and there is always a union which will provide a solidified stepping stone for students with the experiences which they hold fast to their academic success. Studies have shown that there is validity within the union between lived experiences and theory; this forms a grounding which supports the students' ideas and voice in the educational environment. Lived experiences and theory work in cohesion to form ideas based on the holistic view of the student, that holistic view maintains that there is a well sourced pathway for the student and their experiences.

Maori Education, Family, Transformation and Relationships within this contextual model, maintains that there is a connection that will also support the student and their journey throughout the educational organisation. Lived experiences are also contextualised through these specific areas as a consolidation of teaching and learning within the organisation. Maori education, which is the principles of education for Maori students to succeed in a system which was founded to support mainstream education, requires a formula which will support the Māori learners, and encourages their experiences to be at the forefront of their thinking when writing an academic piece of writing.

Family in education plays an important part in the development of the person of the academic writer of the lived experiences which continue to use the some theoretical input to support and guide the student to their success. Knowing that there is family, or whanau, around the learner is a knowledge which all learners have because they have come from the unit and they have seen the importance of those experiences, furthermore have seen how academic literature can work with those experiences to add to the success of the students.

Strauss and Smedley (2009) suggest that the community, in which the organisation is situated, has an important role to play with the development of the lived experiences students have to offer in an organisation for learning. It is imperative that more than just the workload which students face is the most important part of the academic success of the student. To ensure that the success of the student and their lived experiences are working collectively, there is a need for students to be allowed to focus on their own experiences and to confirm that all aspects of their learning and experiences are validated.

**CONCLUSION**

If lived experience has become a thing of the past, this means that all accounts of history has gone with it, however this is far from the fact. Although there are many students in organisations who have the ability to use the appropriate literature to guide their thinking, there are some students that require a blast from the past injected into their writing, and in order to do that, lived experiences are validated through the socialising of the experience, the knowledge of the experience, the contextualisation of the experience and the matching of the experience to relevant literature. Important to the points made in this paper, is that the lived experiences of students do not out way the academic literature, it merely is supported by this literature, likewise with the academic literature, it is a support mechanism for ideas around the topic the student has elected to cover in their study.

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