



International Network for School Social Work

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My Professional and Personal Experience at the 4th International School Social Work Conference in New Zealand, by Leticia A. Kubisiak, MSW

I am a licensed School Social Worker in the State of Wisconsin, serving as the chairperson of the School Social Work department with my school district and providing services at three elementary schools, which is the average load for our department. This is my seventh year working in the schools.

I attended the 4th International School Social Work conference in Auckland, New Zealand, as a required part of a course with Minnesota University Mankato. I learned much more than I had expected having taken this course and traveling seventeen hours to the other side of the world for a social work conference. Three of the most significant experiences I take away are my discovery of the Maori culture, my realization that the school social work profession is universal, and the strategy of truly attempting to connect with students and families.

Prior to this conference I knew little of the culture and ethnic make-up of New Zealand. I was even less aware of the indigenous culture of the Maori. The Powhiri opening ceremony where we were welcomed with songs and prayer, closing with the hongi, is an experience I will never forget. The ceremony immediately gave me a sense of peace and welcome. The close, face-to-face touch and physical connection was a nice way to officially meet people from New Zealand. I was instantly comforted and felt embraced by their warm welcome. At the reception, I had the opportunity to speak with Maori school social workers (called "Social Worker in Schools" in New Zealand) and we shared both professional and personal information about our jobs and families.

Before attending the conference in New Zealand, I did not have a true understanding of how universal the School Social Work profession is. My awareness of School Social Workers was limited to the United States of America. It was both inspiring and enlightening to meet School Social Workers from Hong Kong, Korea, Sweden, New Zealand and Finland.

The strategy and notion of making a wholehearted attempt to really understand and get to know students and their families, was not foreign to me but seems to have been renewed in me. I am so busy with crisis intervention, responsive services, and striving to meet the mandated services for students with Individualized Education Plans that I forget about making a genuine connection with students and families. It has become almost robotic to provide individual and group counseling to

students with behavioral issues. The Maori School Social Workers impressed upon me the one most important strategy or intervention in working with students and their families, and that is to respect and embrace families prior to any discussion of problems at school.

I am delighted with the conference and feel that I benefited professionally and personally from the conference and experiencing another country, if only for 8 days. I take a renewed sense of pride in my profession, a refreshed sense of the importance of connecting with families and an appreciation for the vast resources and community services available for our families in Wisconsin.

An international perspective of school social work: Social Issues, Cultural Competency, and Substance Abuse Prevention, by LaShelle Newland-Jordan

<i>Ko tou rourou!</i>	With your basket!
<i>Ko taku rourou!</i>	With my basket!
<i>Kia ora ai nga</i>	We will help the well being of the people!

I am an MSW candidate at DePaul University's Social Work program. My internship as a Drug/Alcohol Therapist for ex-offenders encouraged my interest in learning about substance abuse prevention in schools. So, attending the 4th International School Social Work Conference in New Zealand through a "study abroad" program gave me the chance to explore school-based programs, with the added advantage of an international perspective on cultural competency.

During the conference I interacted with people from many different countries and cultures, including Hong Kong, Korea, Sweden, Japan, Pacific Islands and Sweden. I also experienced the local culture through the social events at the conference. My first cultural experience was the Powhiri, a traditional Maori welcome, conducted in the Maori Language. An opening speech was followed with the Hongi, the traditional pressing of noses to exchange *ha* (air). After the ceremony, I inquired as to the meaning and purpose of the Hongi. I was told "Thanks were given for the safe travels to be able to come together, and that visitors were now a part of the extended community." I felt welcomed to begin a learning process of understanding other cultures that extended past ethnicity and race: it included the culture of a community, a profession, and social issues.

One of the conference sessions addressed "Bullying amongst Swedish Girls". A video showcased girls who bullied and socially ousted individuals who were different from them. The victim in this documentary was placed in a situation in which she had to choose between being socially ousted or accepted by engaging in their social activities, such as drinking and smoking. Another session addressed the refusal of students to attend school in Japan, in which part of the issue is attributed to social problems at the school, including bullying and social outcasting.

I co-presented "Best Practices in School Based Drug/Alcohol Intervention/Prevention Programs". During the session we discussed our findings regarding the successes and challenges of school based programming. During discussion of participants' experiences, one person indicated that a challenge to alcohol/drug education was that it was as taboo as discussing sex education, a new cultural perspective for me. At the last session of the conference, we discussed the commonalities amongst School Social Workers and an international call to action to assist one another. The conference began with the ceremonial welcoming of visitors, and ended with a discussion amongst a newly connected international community of social workers. I had to admit that my understanding of cultural competency had been limited to socio-cultural factors such as race and ethnicity. I had little understanding of social issues outside the U.S. The conference was a wonderful combination of formal and informal learning. I can't wait to attend the next one.

Powhiri



Hono

