



STITCHERY ME, STITCHERY DO

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Julie Brien is a doctoral student, secondary teacher, and mother who loves to make things. She is intrigued by identity formation, craft as an art form, arts based research and culturally responsiveness. Her PhD study in 2018 will focus on these areas.

Abstract: While seeking to understand teachers' philosophy on culturally responsive practice in the classroom, I used quilt-making to physically manifest my own story and those of my participants as method in an autoethnographic project. The craft of quilt-making became a metaphor for my past, yet spoke so much of my present and my future and provided something tangible with which we could all connect. Through the crafting and construction of the quilt I was able to explore and connect my experiences with those of my participants, our beliefs and personal philosophies of being Pākehā (descendant of settler ancestors) teachers in secondary classrooms. The craft and autoethnography were in response to the project yet they speak louder than the project itself.

Keywords: autoethnography; quilting; culturally responsive practice, identity; craft

A Quilting Story: Introduction

Quilting connects us to the women who preceded us and binds us to our contemporaries, a connection without conflict and filled with joy of beauty, creativity and friendship.
(Cory & McKelvey, 1995, p. 11)

The Stitch Ripper

The quilt was almost complete. My joy at completing the final stitches on the quilting blocks quickly reminded me of what I had known for some time . . . some stitches were out of place. When I first saw them, I knew. I knew they were too close, too close to the edge, and I would not be able to forget them, no matter how hard I tried. But I kept going, thinking I could forget them. As I tied the knot on the last thread, smoothed out the blocks in front of me, they were still there. Too close, too close to the seam. They stared at me, called me to recognize them.

In that moment of one thousand thoughts, I grabbed the stitch ripper, and ripped. I revealed the quilt's inner-most secrets. I revealed how the quilt works, how it keeps you warm, how it connects, how it comforts, and how its layers work together. I revealed that it could go back together in a new way. It was like my Grama was with me, truly speaking and stitching with me. Her last words to me echoed in my heart, "If it doesn't work, it's ok, just [go] back." (J. Glenn, personal communication, December 1992)

In this paper, I tell the story of making a quilt. I have always been a crafter, and a sometimes quilt maker. This project was no different. Quilting, crafting and creative writing allowed this project to respond instinctively to my own stories and those of the participants, and also opened a pathway for me to embody the project in a tangible way. Using autoethnography, I explored my own beliefs and practice juxtaposed alongside six other teachers' stories of practice, and our relationships with students, in culturally responsive secondary classrooms in New Zealand. All teachers in this project, including me were Pākehā (descendants of settler ancestors). The six participants volunteered to be part of this study seeking to further illuminate and understanding their culturally responsive relationships with students.

The focus of this paper is the purpose and experience of making a quilt as one aspect of a larger study (see Brien, 2017). I first discuss the justification for using quilt-making as method in this project. Next, I offer a brief history of quilt-making as a feminist and deeply human activity. Third, I tell my own story of quilt-making, a craft that is emotionally and physically part of who I am. My story of quilt-making inside the research journey is then described – the tensions, the learning, and the findings. It is a story of becoming, through exploring my history, through relationships with my participants, and through making a quilt.

Craft-making as a method is an integral part of who I am as a person and as an educator, so there was a very natural inclusion of craft in this project. It was not a tokenistic or cute addition, but a tangible link between the participants, me and the research we carried out, as well as a link to my own ancestry and feminist pursuits. Craft-making was a way for me to explore and engage in the project where arts-based research created a space for understanding and rethinking. When presenting the opportunity to create and explore within this project using craft-based methods, I was buoyed by the participants' enthusiasm. As the participants' identities have remained anonymous, even from one another, I felt it appropriate and necessary to create something from their shared stories, something lasting and personal that could be further shared.

The making of a quilt became a central metaphor in this project. Like the making of a quilt, student/teacher relationships require careful stitching together. This research project stemmed from my desire to understand student/teacher relationships better and I wanted to explore what it meant to be a Pākehā teacher in a culturally responsive classroom. I wanted something tangible to speak of, to embody what this was, once discovered. The decision to use quilting was an instinctive one that spoke of, and to, me as an educator. I see the relationship between students and teachers much like the creation of a quilt. They both involve construction, adaptation, progression, and addition. As teachers embark on relationships with students, they adapt their behaviour, language, and processes as they get to know them, adding to their own knowledge, and ability to interact with them, in a positive way. As exemplified in the narrative above, the embodied experience of making the quilt throughout this project was an important part of the learning process that allowed us all to explore our attitudes and philosophies while crafting, bonding, depicting, and representing ourselves through craft.

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As an autoethnographic work, this project explored my own stories of creating and sustaining a culturally responsive practice, and juxtaposed these alongside the stories of six participants. Qualitative data was generated through the use of semi-structured interviews and creative writing practices. Thematic analysis and art-based methods were employed to make sense of the data, including, as an autoethnographer, the making of a quilt. This paper focuses on my experience of making a quilt as a way of embodied knowing.

The Purpose, Art and Act of Quilting

Quilting was a common activity, in the 18th and 19th centuries, for women in the USA, England and Europe, with flowers and feathers being popular designs often used to show a woman's handiwork (Lipsett, 1985). During the 19th century, American patchwork quilts grew in popularity and were very much associated with the traditional roles women had in the household and in the family. The first American quilted items were utility blankets for warmth, which developed in appearance and skill once the industrial revolution brought colourful thread and cotton, and affordable supplies, to the USA. Towards the end of the 19th century

quilting started to become pieced and appliqued together (Freeman, 1983), which resulted in the more familiar forms and patterns of today.

Patchwork quilts were used as a necessity for warmth, as keepsake gifts, to represent kinship, to show mutual support and as a hobby craft for women. Quilts became a way of telling a story: they became a way to document people, family and history. In the changing times of the late 1800s, women found “comfort in affirming family, friendship and love” (Cory & McKelvey, 1995, p. 11) with quilt-making, as a feminist activity and as a way of coping with their lives, and “serving to strengthen [their] relationships” (p. 11). This example of stitched embodied practice is further demonstrated in Chile, where women collectively create arpilleras – colourful pictures, made out of fabric that became a form of resistance during the Pinochet dictatorship (Moya-Raggio, 1984, p. 277). These arpilleras allow a woman to speak with no words, using a skill traditionally considered feminine, “where [her] needlework becomes testimony based on the daily happenings of the inner history of a people” (p. 279). This feminine activity is an embodied practice and voice of a deeply human activity used as “their response to the reality which surrounds them [and] comes through their collective work” (p. 280). The quilts of the 1800s and 1990s were very much a history and documentation of family, home and life.

My Quilting Story

From a young age, I enjoyed various arts and crafts. While my mother was not skilled in needle crafts, there were two very influential women in my family who were – my Grama (my mother’s mother) and my Aunt. My Grama was a hand quilter, and her quilts were beautiful. I remember looking closely at the fabric and examining the details of the patterns. She was always making something with fabric. She made me cooking aprons and painting smocks, sleeping bags for a new puppy, and one day when I was 7, a Holly Hobbie¹ quilt arrived in the post. It had 16 Holly Hobbie profiles inside a light-yellow grid. I adored Holly Hobbie and was careful with this special blanket. When I see it now, I can remember each fabric pattern like an old family photo. I retrace the bonnets and dresses remembering each one. I look closer at each stitch, knowing my Grama did each one by hand. I do this still, now, with my own daughter, as the quilt lies on her bed. I can draw a line from my daughter now, back to me, back to this quilt, and back to my Grama and my love of stitching and creating, and back to a skill I have inherited from her. This line is direct.

I do not remember my Grama sitting me down and showing me what to do, showing me how to quilt. Somehow, that just happened. I do remember threading her needles because her eyes could not find the eye for the thread anymore. I would sit very close to her, standing-lamp on, squatting on the couch, as I tried to see over her shoulder, while getting in the light. I remember asking her what the needle looked like through her eyes, and tried to imagine the needle and thread a wee bit blurry, but still a needle and thread. This is how I learned to quilt. Watching her, while watching TV, and threading her needles. As an adult, someone asked me how I learned to quilt, but I am not sure. There was no moment it happened. I said I was self-taught, by watching and remembering my Grama. That is still the best way I can describe it.

My aunt became part of my family when I was 5 years old and she married my mother's brother. She is very no-nonsense, and very crafty. I spent many summer holidays and Christmas breaks with her teaching me to weave, knit, and make anything imaginable by stitching on plastic canvas. When I was 10, she finally taught me to cross-stitch. I remember how special that moment was. I remember when we chose a pattern, my colours, looped my thread around a cut up cereal box and bought some aida cloth to stitch on. I sat on her couch and stitched for the next week solidly. I went home with something I had made to proudly show my mom. Throughout my teenage years, I continued to cross-stitch, mainly gifts for my mom and family. As with my Grama, I do not really remember the teaching and learning, but the process of making and watching. As an adult, I am still very crafty and continue to quilt and cross-stitch every year. This is not just something that I love to do or get joy from; it is not just the making of something for a new baby born into my family as a way to welcome them or for the parents to cherish; this is part of who I am. There is a part of me in each piece, part of my connection to my family and to my Grama that I continually revisit in this making process. This is my embodiment.

Collaborative Quilt-making in this Project

Material behaviour includes not only objects that people construct but also the processes by which their artificers conceptualize them, fashion them and use them to make available for others to utilize . . . material behaviour encompasses matters of personality, psychological states and processes and social interaction in relation to artefacts. It also comprises ideas that people associate with objects, the meaning they attribute to them, and the way in which they use them symbolically and instrumentally. (Owen Jones, 1998, as cited in Horton, 2005, p. 3)

In the first stage of this project, I used autoethnography to examine and reflect on my own practice and pedagogy as an educator. I wanted to first illuminate my own philosophies and beliefs, while also seeking to understand questions and tensions I had experienced in the classroom. In the second stage of the project, I held two 30 minute interviews with each of the six participants to engage them in telling their own stories of culturally responsive practice. At the end of the first interview, I spoke to the participants about creating a quilting project, as a way to further analyze and respond to the autoethnographic data generated during the interviews. They were overwhelmingly positive about the project and about being able to contribute in a creative and collaborative way. One participant had prior quilting experience. I explained that they would be able to contribute language and fabric of their choice, as well as contribute to the pattern to be used for the stitched project that I would then create for us all. I could *feel* their interest to participate in something new and something tangible. This was unexpected.

Participants were given three options to obtain fabric: 1) I could bring in my personal collection and they could choose from it; 2) they could go to a local fabric shop and choose; or 3) they could bring some fabric from home. Three participants went to a local quilting shop and chose their own fabric, and three brought in fabric from home (see Figure 1 below). I had originally planned to present one quilting pattern for this collaborative stitched work to each participant, however, immediately prior to the interviews, I realized that in doing

so, I was totally going against the ethos of what it means to be culturally responsive, what it means to be collaborative. I, in the role of interviewer, was dictating to the interviewees what our project would be and what it would look like. I was surprised at myself. I decided that I would present the three patterns I had chosen while researching, and ask the participants individually which one they would like to create, instead of leaving them out of this part of the decision-making process. This felt much more in line with my philosophy of teaching and my process in the classroom.



Figure 1. Swatches of fabric participants contributed to project.

At the second interview, participants discussed their fabric choices and spoke about what the fabric meant to them or how it represented them. They also contributed a single word about their practice or pedagogy, and wrote it onto a separate piece of fabric I had brought along. They were not asked to expand on their word choices, but rather to contribute a part of themselves, a piece of their own journey that could be included on the quilt for viewers to further make sense of. Participants contributed the words Straight Up, Confidence, Growth, Puddles, Be Authentic, Pride and Compass. I was not exactly sure what I was going to do with these words on the fabric, but it felt appropriate to do this, to mark their presence in a visual way. Traditionally, blankets, cross-stitching and needlework includes the names of their makers, who the piece is for or the purpose of the piece (e.g. a wedding quilt). As this was an anonymous project, it seemed fitting to add a word for each participant as a way to include them visually within the work, and to document their presence. I saw the second set of interviews as collaborative autoethnography: ethnography being the study of a cultural group (teachers), and autobiography as the study of self – me and my participants (Chang, Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2012). Our ideas, thoughts, fabric and history became one collaborative stitched project that would speak of us all. Including quilt-making through the autoethnographic project addressed the “ethical issue of representing, speaking for, or appropriating the voice of others” (Lapadat, 2017) that can occur when researching using collaborative autoethnography. The quilt created an accessible medium that was shared, yet represented individual stories.

The Quilting Block Options

Participants were given the history of the three traditional quilting patterns that I had researched beforehand, including images of each one. They were asked to choose one they felt represented both themselves and what culturally responsive teaching meant to them. I presented them with the friendship star, the nine patch, and the log cabin, as three possibilities that could speak to what it means to be a culturally responsive educator.



Figure 2. Friendship star quilt block.

The *friendship star* block originated with pioneer women in America who had received the quilt as a parting gift from other women, typically before they travelled from the East to the West towards the uncertainty of a new life. These quilts were a group effort, often done in secret, with each block sewn by a friend or relative, with her name embroidered in the centre as a way to keep alive the memory and sense of connection to the recipient's former life (Eddy, 2005, p. 152). I chose this pattern because I felt that, as teachers, we rely on each other in the same ways these pioneer women did, for advice, comfort and companionship. This project was collaborative, as the lives of pioneer women once were. I also view culturally responsive classrooms this way, as spaces where teachers work together in collaborative ways for a larger purpose. Teachers also seem to trace their practice and pedagogy back to specific moments or specific individuals, possibly to names that we would put on a quilt of our teaching career.

The *nine patch* block was also a pattern popular with pioneer women who did not have a lot of time or fabric to spare. Quilts were often sewn together quickly, for necessity. The nine patch is one of the simplest patterns to make and was typically the first quilt made

by girls as young as three or four when they were taught, what was traditionally considered, the essential skill of sewing (Quilting in America, 2009, para. 5). I chose the nine patch as a possible pattern, as I felt that, in the classroom, teachers often have to improvise or throw something together quickly to suit a particular purpose. I believe culturally responsive teaching is improvising, it is putting together what a teacher has, to match what a student needs. As with the nine patch, teachers work with what they have, to meet the needs of those in front of them.

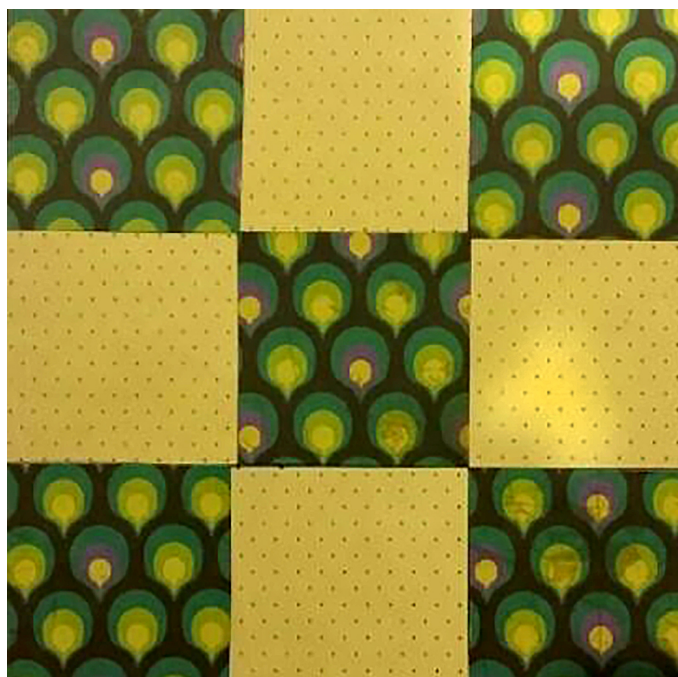


Figure 3. The nine patch block.

The final possibility was the *log cabin* block. It is a well-known patchwork pattern used by pioneers to symbolise home, warmth, love and security. The centre square was red and represented the home, the hearth, and the fire as the centre of life in the home (Eddy, 2005, p. 130). I felt that culturally responsive teachers strive to create warm, welcoming spaces for students to create and learn in. This pattern spoke to me as also representing the classroom physically – suitable wall displays, furniture placement and the ambience a teacher creates in classrooms. I was also moved by the historical assertion that a log cabin quilt created with a black centre, and hung in a window or on a clothes line, symbolised a safe place for African Americans to stop along the “Underground Railroad” during the American Civil War (Tobin & Dobard, 2000). There is no solid evidence to prove the assertions made by Tobin and Dobard; there are claims this oral history is a mnemonic device. I found a connection to this compelling tale which has made its way into myth and folklore. I wanted it to be true and so the story has stuck with me, true or myth. I found a further link to schools as they can also often be a safe haven for students to discover their interests and to learn who they are as they embark on their life journeys.

After I showed the participants each pattern and gave them a brief history of each, they were given time in the interview to reflect and choose the pattern that they felt best

represented them or their teaching philosophy. Individually, and independently of each other, participants chose the log cabin. I was incredibly surprised by this, but also felt very heartened by the symbolic representation of the log cabin and how the participants saw their role as teachers. Serendipitously, this was also the pattern that I had originally believed would suit our project. This seemingly small, synchronistic event somehow further connected us and made me believe that I was truly creating a project for, and of, us all.

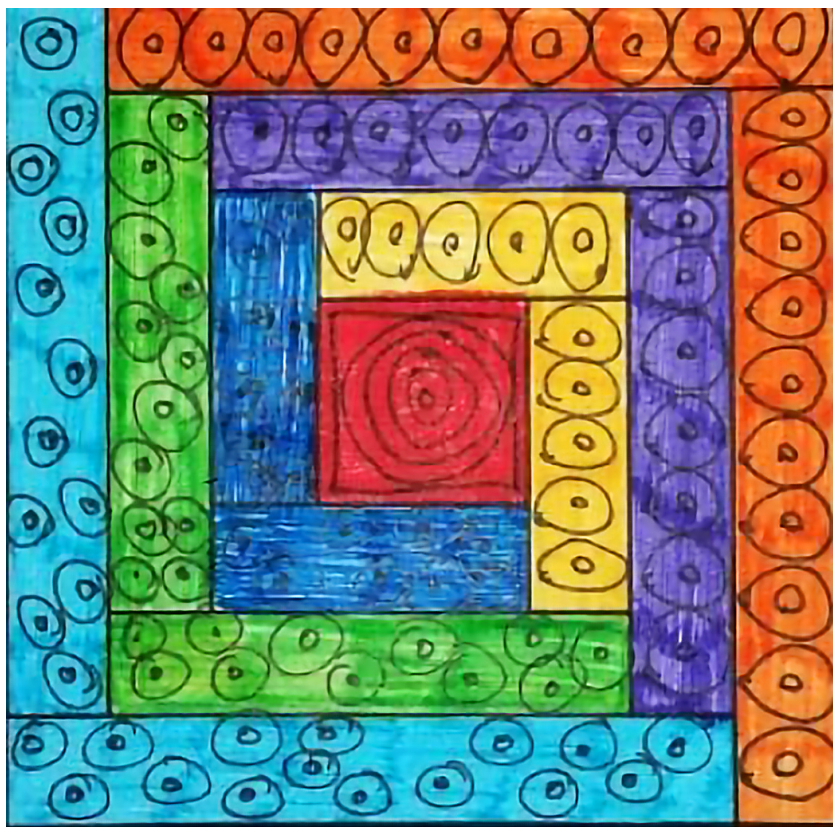


Figure 4. The log cabin block.

What Was Created?

After the interviews, I worked with the fabric, the words contributed by each participant, and the log cabin pattern and its history. It did not feel right to just quickly use our fabric to make a log cabin block, that was too easy. As an artistic component and reflection of this project, I felt that the fabric, the words, and the pattern, needed to sit with me for a while. In the interviews, participants revealed their beliefs, their personal philosophies, the how and the why they became educators and what made them keep returning to the classroom each year. They shared their highest and lowest moments and all expressed their desires to support students on a path of discovery. Even though all the interviews were held separately, the participants used their own stories as a way to express and convey their beliefs. So, this intimate sharing required contemplation while I transcribed the interviews, worked with their data and processed the combination of it all before I could finally piece the quilt together.

As an artist, I do not just walk up to a canvas, and paint something because I am asked to. Creating, for me, is a very internal process that, ultimately, reveals itself externally. While the action of creating art itself can be rushed, the internal processing behind it, for me, cannot. I approached this collaborative stitched project in the same way, in an embodied way, as something not to be rushed, as something that needed to simmer and to reveal itself once developed.

Throughout this project, I sought to represent all of our teacher stories, as co-participants, bringing them together in a way that could speak of us all separately and together, through an arts-based response. How could fabric represent us and convey our messages, ideas and beliefs? Denzin (2012) believes, albeit in relation to sports studies, that “an embodied ... project that matters must locate the body within the radically contextual politics. It must focus on the active, agentic flesh-and-blood human body” (p. 298). I wanted the quilting to speak of teaching, teachers, cultural responsiveness, relationships in the classroom, the tradition of stitching and the very emergent and innovative way of using it within academic research. Pelias (2004) describes this desire of mine, as a *methodology of the heart*, located in the researcher physically, through which “a body is deployed, not as a narcissistic display but on behalf of others, a body that invites identification and empathetic connection, a body that takes as its charge to be fully human” (p. 1).

While it can be argued that in the 19th century “sewing [is] oppressive” and “women who [become] socially and politically more assertive [tend] to abandon it” (Freeman, 1983, p. 16), Freeman argues that “group sewing in quilting, drawing women together in work and friendship, seems to offer a setting in which a new social consciousness could develop” (p. 16). The stitching in this project represented all of the participants, our fabric, our language and our philosophy of teaching from a culturally responsive standpoint. I used the data generated as a guide as I stitched a response to share. Koelsch (2012) suggests that the self is perhaps best understood metaphorically, and an adequate metaphor is one that captures the tensions between the historical Western viewpoint of the self as functioning somewhat independently and the contemporary social-science understanding of the self as at least partially shaped by larger cultural forces. One such metaphor is that of a patchwork quilt (Koelsch, 2012).

Quilting – A Metaphor of Becoming

Art is partly communication, but only partly. The rest is discovery.
(William Golding, 1959, p. 102)

Quilting became a significant aspect of embodied knowledge, through the process of this study, as I analysed the data. The process of making a quilt resonated with the storied experiences of becoming an educator. Using the fabric participants contributed during the interviews, I created three quilted blocks as a collaborative stitched response to this project. During the initial interviews, participants had each individually chosen the log cabin pattern as their choice for this project. They had also each contributed two swatches of fabric. The participants' further contributions included one word for me to work with that they felt was

part of their pedagogical practice or possibly a word that defined their educational philosophy.

Throughout this project, I found myself being drawn to the *spiralling* and *dialogic* theories and elements that were reoccurring in the literature (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2007; Duffy, 1998; Jasso & Jasso, 1995; Wink, 2005). These included the two images representing Te Kotahitanga (see Figure 5, below) and Kia Eke Panuku (see Figure 6, below). Te Kotahitanga and Kia Eke Panuku are both culturally responsive programs used within some New Zealand secondary classrooms, where schools opted into these government funded programs. Te Kotahitanga completed five phases of development between 2001 and 2013 and was developed by Mere Berryman and Russell Bishop. Te Kotahitanga has now become Kia Eke Panuku, developed with the gains and understandings of five previous New Zealand culturally responsive programs. The images below used by the researchers visually spoke to me as a teaching and learning method – continual and building.

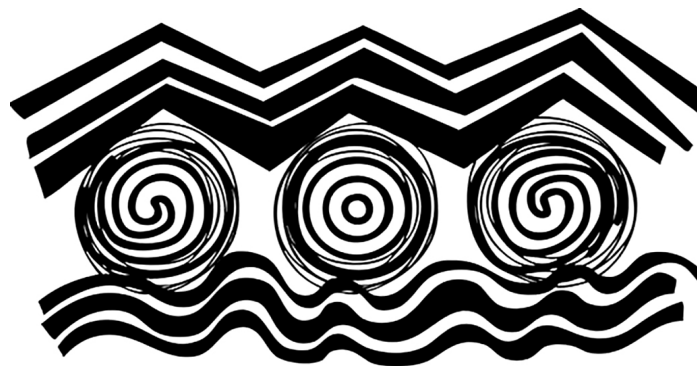


Figure 5. Te Kotahitanga. (Bishop et al., 2007, p. 48)



Figure 6. Kōringoringo. (Berryman, 2008, p. 258)

These spiralling and dialogic theories are based on the idea that “learning is interactive, dialogic and spirals; where participants are connected to one another through the establishment of a common vision for what constitutes excellence in educational outcomes” (Bishop et al., 2007, p. 1). The spiralling quality is a reminder that not only does critical pedagogy evolve, but it is a process. It is dialectic. It is about doing and living as a way of life rather than as a method (Jasso & Jasso, 1995).

I continued to find spiralling and dialogic elements in the participants’ interview data. Their shared stories detailed how they worked with students in circular models of communication rather than linear transmission models. Participants used phrases in the interviews such as “I found out that,” “we responded with,” “they were learning about” and “we discovered” when speaking about their interactions with students. The spiralling was part of their own learning as it represented *ako*, where *ako* means to teach as well as to learn. Metge (1983) defines *ako* as a “unified cooperation of teacher and learner in a single enterprise” (p. 2); it is the reciprocity of being both a teacher and a learner at the same time. Teachers were able to see their practices as not only a way to teach, but also as a way to learn with students. I saw the action of *ako*, the spiralling of knowledge, and teaching and learning between teachers and students, as a long, never-ending process, where knowledge was interactive and co-constructed. I also saw it within myself, as a researcher, as I learned just as much about the participants as I did about myself throughout. I saw cultural responsiveness echoed in the spirals, and reflected, as this project spoke of one of us, of all of us, and of our students, all at the same time.



Figure 7. Spiralling log cabin #1.

With these images in mind, I sought to incorporate them into the quilting blocks – to have that idea resonate with the viewer and reader. I started experimenting and looking at variations of the traditional log cabin design and felt that the quilt pattern needed to become the spiral itself (see Figures 7 above and 11 below). This, in turn, reflected the participants' stories and experiences, their choices for the project, my findings within the literature as well as the theories related to culturally responsive teaching.

Get Stitching

The spiralling and dialogic ideas in this project became a significant aspect of my inquiry and the creation of knowledge. Once I had the pattern for the spiral log cabin, I went to a local quilting shop to explore how I would stitch the pieces together. While I have made many quilts, I felt that I needed some expert advice to ensure I was using the appropriate technique for this pattern. Arts-based research implores the researcher to respect their *craft*; as Adamson (2008) states, people “value the integrity of the well-made object, the time and care it demands. Therefore, what we most want out of our craft is something like perfection” (p. 38). The word *craft* itself denotes something well made. Something that is *crafted* is created with care, time, diligence, skill and technique, whereas the word *mastery* is associated with skill and technique (Shiner, 2012) further elevating the perfection of craft work. I wanted to ensure that I not only honoured the tradition of quilting, for myself and this project and its participants, but executed it to the highest technical standard in order to honour my lineage and my connection to my Grama as my teacher.

To create the log cabin blocks, I used a technique called *foundation piecing*, which was new to me. My local quilting shop expert patiently explained this technique, while a line of fabric lovers slowly formed behind me, interested yet growing impatient to get to their own projects. I agreed with the expert who suggested I contact another local quilter who ran classes in her home for advice and tuition on foundation piecing. Inspired and curious about foundation piecing, I went home and searched YouTube, hoping to find something to view, so I had an idea of this technique before attending a class. As it turned out, I had already watched the top result for foundation piecing on YouTube. This was strange. I clicked on the video and realized I had viewed this video before. The memory of the video, the voices and the quilting came back to me. Prior to this moment, I had no recollection of foundation piecing or this video. I found this to be such an interesting intersection in this project as it reverberated within me: the quilting component of this project mirrored the underlying process of classroom interaction, where the value of information, experience and technique gathered, may not be known or used right away, but will be, at some point in the future. All our interactions and experiences are spiralling, one on top of the other, building our knowledge so when we need to use it, it has been woven, stitched into our existence. It is part of our memory that we can recall.

I spent two mornings a week for four weeks at the quilting classes. While I was just seeking some guidance with this particular project, I found so much more. There was a bond between these women in these classes. While everyone did attend to quilt, the friendships, support, advice and dialogue they experienced were just as important to these

women. It was a coming together of women to create stitched artefacts that I found reminiscent of women's quilting groups from over 100 years ago. This "need for others," as described by Mitchell, Reilly and Logue (2009) in relation to education, is "particularly apparent when teachers attempt to engage in reflection or conversation about their practice" (p. 5). The group becomes the listeners, the sounding board, the advisors, the questioners, and the support, as we make our way through new or difficult situations. The quilting classes were a time to create keepsakes, gifts, support one another and pursue a hobby craft where the quilts told stories, documented lives, and the people around them. This was women supporting women, and as referenced earlier, it was quilt-making as a feminine activity and as a way to cope with their lives "serving to strengthen relationships" (Cory & McKelvey, 1995, p. 11). In my small town, I had found the stitched embodied practice demonstrated in Chile by women who collectively work together on arpilleras (Fitzpatrick & Bell, 2016; Moya-Raggio, 1984) as a reflection of their lives, their history and as a way to connect family, lineage and places. I also found a way to reconnect with myself and with my Grama and Aunt. They were there with me as I built on the skills I had learnt from them.

Back in the Stitch of It

Foundation piecing is created using a paper pattern of what you want to create and sewing fabric onto the back. Both of the "right sides" of the fabric and pattern are facing out (see Figures 8 and 9). This process entails building up the block one piece of fabric at a time, constantly flipping the paper making sure it all fits together; it is done in a seemingly backwards way to how one would normally think about quilting. This process of quilt-making reflected back to me the classroom experience of building up your practice and pedagogy as a teacher. You have patterns of function and expectation from the school, and also the Ministry of Education, that you need to adhere to. So, as a teacher, one tries to add parts of oneself to that, one layer at a time, figuring out who you are and how you can create something beautiful, something that means something to you, out of these patterns and pieces, like layers of your own cultural identity.

At the beginning, similar to my teaching practice, it did not feel as though the pieces would fit; I was constantly asking my mentor, or other experts – "is this right?" "how does this look now?" or saying "oops, I think I have made a mistake," constantly flipping pieces back and forth trying to make sense of it all. Duffy (1998) describes this process for teachers as something like trying to "balance round stones," where classroom teachers "must bring seemingly incompatible forces into harmony" (p. 777) as they figure out who they are as educators, and the philosophy they adhere to. As quilting is a process of becoming, nothing is ever a mistake, every stitch can be unpicked and re-sewn, every piece of fabric can be re-cut or exchanged with another, while creating anything one chooses, just as in the development of teaching practice. None of my teaching moments have ever been real mistakes. They all built up to me knowing who I was, who I was becoming and informing how and who I wanted to be in the classroom, as I took pieces from myself, from others and from my experience, to create the *foundation piece* of who I was becoming as an educator. This struggle and attempt to balance round stones, teaches one who they are as an educator, what works for them and how *they* get those stones to balance.



Figure 8. Foundation piecing.



Figure 9. Foundation coming together.

As I created the spiralling log cabin, I knew it could not sit alone. I decided to add in a second block, a traditional log cabin (see Figures 7 and 10), to show how the stitched component was formulated and reconstructed, and informed by the project and the literature – how teaching practice can be informed and transformed. The third block, a second spiral log cabin, became necessary, like the learning, unlearning and relearning experienced in the classroom. I felt that the three blocks reflected the three spirals in Te Kotahitanga (see Figure 12). I added the words participants' contributed in the interviews which became, in the quilt, the wavy lines, the sea and the taniwha (a water monster of Māori legend) as support on the journey. The centre spiral represented the trained teacher, with the students, and the teachers' practice, on either side. These two spirals supported the teacher in their journey to knowing who they were as educators, helping to inform their next steps. The three blocks seemed to embody this project, the participants' stories, the literature and my journey through it. I realized I sought not just to understand Pākehā teachers and culturally responsive pedagogy, but my own self as a Pākehā, as an educator, and as a quilter (see Figure 12). This was me leading, possibly enabling, students and fellow educators to also find their way. This was part of my own *foundation piece*, part of my own *becoming*.

My own becoming as an educator has been a communal journey, informed and developed along the way. I can remember where I distinctly began my journey as a culturally responsive teacher – with the principal in my first practicum. I had to interview the principal as part of an assignment and I naively and innocently asked the question, "so why are the Māori students segregated by their grades and race from everyone else?" I can only really remember the look on their face as they answered the question, saying, "this is not segregation," but I cannot remember anything else they said, as I quickly shuffled out of the room. Soon after, I asked my associate teacher to help me understand, in a genuine attempt to understand my new profession and to help form my emerging teaching



Figure 10. Traditional log cabin with words.



Figure 11. Spiralling log cabin #2

philosophy. The reply was, “listen, this is the way it is; it’s not going to change, so just do it.” I sensed hostility and exasperation and I did not know why. It was not until I had my first position and attended a hui (meeting) on Te Kotahitanga (a culturally responsive teaching program in New Zealand) that I started to really understand what culturally responsive education was, why it was needed and important, and what my role was as an educator. Five years later, I now feel I can engage and speak to that beginning teacher, to myself, and can also reply with what my role is and has been as a Pākehā educator in a culturally responsive environment.

Figure 12 is the final quilted piece for this project. The spiralling and dialogic patterns are on either side of a traditional log cabin block, in the centre, with the participants’ contributed words embroidered around the centre block. This final piece tells the story of Te Kotahitanga, of the past and of the future, of the participants’ practices, pedagogies and philosophies. All the participants are included, with their chosen patterns, fabrics and words for everyone to read, interpret and add to their own stories. This quilting block story is as much about one of us, as it is about all of us.

As I quilted our fabric and stitched our words together, I felt myself responding to everything I had heard and felt and learnt in the interviews. I was not alone as the final piece was coming together, or as I transcribed the interviews or as I looked through possible patterns for us to use. Reflecting on this time, I am drawn to my own sense of togetherness with which and through which I was working, and how this relates to quilting, culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching. What of the participants? How are they connected? I can recall completing the project and presenting it to the board of trustees for the school. I presented them with the completed quilt and saw how they marvelled over the tangible manifestation of the participants’ words and ideas. A few weeks later, I entered the staffroom and the principal presented the quilt to the staff and me. He noted that it had been framed by the school caretaker in rimu wood that had been physically part of the school at one time. It was to be hung at the entrance of the staffroom.

I found myself heartened by his action, as one by one the participants pride hung along with the now framed quilt. The rimu wood used to make the frame is a treasured native timber in New Zealand. The timber is strong and towers above other trees in the forest canopy. I found the act of framing the quilt in rimu resonant to cultural responsiveness. Without realizing it, the principal had further woven us together with the rest of the staff as the quilt became part of the school and part of its framework. Culturally responsive pedagogy is a framework for actions and relationships in the classroom.

In this project, I heard what teachers believed culturally responsive pedagogy to be and saw how their beliefs were actualized in practice. Their combined words provided the inspiration and framework to create something tangible that spoke for us all individually and as a group. Further, the groups was dedicated in the use of craft as a way to speak to the audience.

Implications

Using craft within this project has been an inspiring experience for me. I was able to include myself and link my family connections to the study as well as to my own journey to further understand who I am, and who I am as an educator. This process and inclusion has enabled me to delve in deeply, reflexively and in a more embodied way to the research – to generate rich stories that speak to the essence of what it means to be a Pākehā educator. In this study, I found the participants had a genuine interest in creating something tangible. The use of craft spoke to the participants and also provided another platform for the reader to access and identify with the study. This study is an example of how individuals can come together through craft and create deeper, lasting messages that can speak to researchers, collaborators and audiences in a multitude of ways. The study further imbeds the value of craft-making as a form of expression, contemplation and knowledge building while creating access to these and the arts. I believe craft used in this way should be considered a taonga (in Māori meaning an object or natural resource which is highly prized) as it speaks with, for and through our research.

Personally, I have found this study has illuminated the responsibility for me to continue to examine my own practice as my pedagogy evolves, while advocating for all educators to do the same. Through this study, I was able to remember and revisit that beginning teacher I was who sought to understand the need for segregated grades for Māori students. I was able to see how I worked to answer these questions through examining myself, my actions and beliefs, both in and out of the classroom and what I saw happening around me in a school. Through such examination, I believe we can find real and tangible potential to address equity in our classrooms and support others to do the same. In this project, I found the use of craft, arts-based research and collaborative research supported the participants and me to delve into the spaces required to create change. And last, but not least, this study has shown and reminded me of the power that the arts has to connect us and to speak for us in ways we cannot yet do ourselves.

The Re-Stitcher

I plugged in the iron to heat up while negotiating the ironing board to open. Once again, I smoothed out the blocks by hand on the ironing board, testing the folds where the new stitches would go. The lining was too fat in places and had to be trimmed. There is no going back once you actually cut fabric at this point in a project – once you go back into the fray. I folded and cut and flipped and flopped the quilt about. I could not speak. I could not verbalize what I was doing or why it was so important to me to do it. I pressed the folds, pinning them safely in place. With the needle threaded, I began to hand stitch the base of the quilt. I was careful not to let the thread go all the way through to the front, I was careful to make my stitches the same length, the same distance apart. I was very careful.



Figure 12. A/r/tographic, collaborative stitched cabins.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Holly Hobbie is a character and doll created in the 1960's easily identified by her giant bonnet and rag patch dress.