

# Teachers' Cultural Capital: Enabling Factors for Māori Teacher Success

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## ABSTRACT

Five factors for Māori teacher success in Aotearoa/New Zealand are identified in the success narratives of alumnae of a pre-service teacher education programme: whānau support, collegial working environments, feeling valued, risk-taking, and pursuing ongoing learning opportunities. Strong links to key Māori values are evident within these factors. Using a kaupapa Māori approach to qualitative research design and implementation, the interplay of these factors is described in relation to how they can support Māori teacher success, and how they can enhance the design and delivery of teacher education programmes.

## Practice paper

### Keywords:

Māori teacher success, Māori values, narrative inquiry

## INTRODUCTION

A Kaupapa Māori approach and Narrative Inquiry Framework are used to share and understand the stories of four Māori teachers in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The aims of this research included exploring the different pathways chosen to achieve professional success, providing role-models to aspire to, and identifying factors contributing to Māori success. Five factors for Māori teacher success that have strong links to Māori values are evident in each of these stories. The success factors are whānau support, collegial working environments, feeling valued, risk-taking, and ongoing learning opportunities. Employing these success factors and the associated Māori values could support Māori teachers and attract more young Māori to the profession of teaching. For example, the Rotorua region has a low proportion of Māori teachers (21 percent) to Māori students (42 percent) (Education Counts, 2015), highlighting a need to attract more Māori to the profession of teaching – especially in light of almost no change in the percentage of Māori teachers since 2004.

## KAUPAPA MĀORI PRINCIPLES AND NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Kaupapa Māori research (Bishop 1999) principles such as culturally-relevant practices, collective ownership and benefit, self-determination, and connectedness guided this qualitative case study. As I had a long term relationship with the participants, a “whānau-of-interest approach” (Bishop, 1999, p. 4) was used to engage participants. Our relationship-based collaborative partnerships maximised the breadth and quality of Māori participation and were guided by the Treaty of Waitangi principles of “partnership, participation and protection” (Durie, 2000 as cited in Thomas, 2000). This collaborative model seeks to gain advice through consultation with the participants about the ways this research benefits Māori, and about ways to ensure the author maintains cultural integrity and culturally-safe interactions (Bishop, 1999).

A collaborative approach with an understanding of collective ownership, the co-constructed development of the stories that the four teachers shared with consented publication of the findings through a journal and conference presentation, was paramount. Collaborative storytelling fits well within a Kaupapa Māori research paradigm; it facilitates a “measure [of] Māori phenomena in its own terms” (Macfarlane, 2006, p. 42). All parts of this research strive to embody *whanaungatanga* (sense of family connection), *manaakitanga* (care for others), *kōtahitanga* (unity), *rangatiratanga* (leadership, autonomy), and *wairuatanga* (spirituality), which Macfarlane (2006) identifies as central to a Kaupapa Māori approach. Including these Māori values throughout the design and research phases of the project ensured the participants felt safe to share their narratives and that the resulting research outputs maintain and embody the project’s kaupapa.

Narrative inquiry is a process of collaboration, involving mutual storytelling and re-storying. It is the study of experience as story, and is constructed within a caring community of researchers and practitioners. The stories told within these research-practitioner

relationships are often stories of self-empowerment for participants (Connelly & Claudinin, 1998). The analysis of the language of narratives allows us to make sense of stories and to examine meaning-making. Wells (2011) points out that “Narrative analysis is a particularly strong tool for unpacking the experience of populations that are often silenced in research” (p. 542). As such, narrative inquiry fits well within the context of a Kaupapa Māori whanau-of-interest approach to this research. I feel privileged to retell the stories of four successful Māori teachers, with whom I have a long-term relationship as their past Professional Inquiry Lecturer, as we explored the theory and practice of teaching together for the first three years of their initial teacher education. Their stories and mine have merged to create new stories of collaborative success. The narratives of participant and researcher become a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry. The sample of Māori teachers in the target population is small and relatively under-represented in research to date focusing on factors contributing to teacher success. The opportunity to hear and share these four Māori women voices made this Kaupapa Māori narrative inquiry approach feel authentic.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

The four research participants were selected from a database of Māori teachers who graduated from the University of Canterbury’s Rotorua Centre’s teacher education programme, lived nearby, and were currently active in a leadership role. The research participants are all female. One is in her early thirties; two are in their forties, and one in her mid-fifties.

Katie has 15 years of teaching experience, the last five years as principal of a rural school with four teachers. Hinei has 12 years of teaching experience at an intermediate school with a 65 percent Māori roll where she has been the deputy principal for the past eight years. Liana has 14 years teaching experience, seven years at the same large primary school where 61 percent of the roll identifies as Māori. Liana had two years as a team leader at this school before moving to an intermediate where she has been a team leader for the past five years. Kristina has seven years of varied teaching experiences. Her first two years of teaching were at a primary school with 11 percent of students Māori. Kristina was then employed in the Pacific Islands, as the deputy principal of a bi-lingual school and then within the Islands Ministry of Education by a newly-established Digital School. Kristina returned home to Rotorua early in 2015 as a deputy principal at a primary school with a school roll that is 96 percent Māori.

The selection criterion that participants be currently active in leadership positions assumes those positions as indicators of the teachers’ successes. The four participants and their current principals were firstly contacted by phone and provided with a one page information letter entitled ‘Celebrating Māori Teacher Success’, which included the purpose/aims of the research followed by a one page consent form for the participants to sign. All consented, and the participants accepted the invitation to tell their success story to me individually, beginning at their graduation from the teacher education programme through to their present contexts. An open-ended, semi-structured interview approach was used with a warm-up prompt being, “Tell me about your teaching journey since graduating”, prior to asking the overarching research question, “What factors do you as a Māori primary teacher attribute to your success?”

The following section details the common factors that emerged from the participants’ narratives.

## **FINDINGS**

A ‘Māori values’ lens identified in literature regarding Māori success was used to identify success factors for the Māori teachers (Simmonds, 2011; Macfarlane, Webber, Cookson-Cox & McRae, 2014). Five factors for success were identified within the analysed narratives: whānau support; collegiality; feeling valued; risk-taking, and professional learning opportunities.

### **Whānau Support - Mana Whānau (a sense of ‘familiness’)**

The importance of family was evident within all narratives. The four participants are married and have children. Each mentioned that the support of whānau (including extended family) was a factor contributing to their success.

Katie’s husband encouraged her to pursue the leadership opportunities at her school when she was “looking for excuses not to”. Katie’s immediate response to the prompt regarding her success as a Māori teacher was her parents: “my dad always had high expectations of us”. The ripple-effect of parental role-modelling and high expectations was very evident from listening to the participants’ storied experiences.

Hinei’s example of the ripple-effect of parental role-modelling is directed at her own children. “My husband and I have put a lot of effort into our tamariki [...] we say nothing is going to stop you [...] so definitely success has drizzled down to our kids as well”. The participants’ successes are now positively affecting aspirations and the achievements of the

next generation of their whānau. Hinei illustrates the support of her husband, children, siblings and parents living in the area, “I would not only say my husband but our extended whānau as well [...] at a drop of a hat they will come and pick up the kids, they’ll come wherever, whenever”.

As well as having a supportive husband, Liana shared that she is ‘God-led’. Her sense of wairuatanga (a Māori value of spirituality and well-being) is evident as she calmly and proudly shares her successful transitions and experiences in teaching that she felt guided by spiritually.

Kristina recalls her mum having passionate conversations with her about solving problems within her profession as an accountant. As a teenager, Kristina admitted not appreciating at the time that her mother was role-modelling both passion and the enjoyment of challenge. However, with age and perspective, Kristina now feels privileged to have since found passion and the enjoyment of challenge within her chosen profession.

Supporting these stories, the Education Review Office in 2010 argued for required targeted approaches such as embracing the wider whānau in order to bring about successful education outcomes. By adopting this strategy, all affected parties will become instrumental in the development of closer relationships resulting in positive outcomes that include a renewed commitment by both school and whānau to work collaboratively (Macfarlane, Webber, Cookson-Cox & McRae, 2014, p. 27).

### **Collegiality - Kōtahitanga (unity) and Manaakitanga (respect and caring)**

Collegiality within their school teams presented as a strong and consistent factor for these Māori teachers, along with mentors who supported them early in their careers. The values of kōtahitanga (unity) and manaakitanga (respect and caring) are evident throughout the teachers’ collegial experiences, as are mana tangatarua (sense of navigating success in two worlds) and mana motuhake (a strong positive self-identity) (Macfarlane, Webber, Cookson-Cox & McRae, 2014, p. 174-175).

Just prior to graduating, Hinei accepted a teaching position at her local intermediate school. The principal of that school was, in many ways, responsible for her pursuing and accepting the position, and their 13 year working relationship has been highly constructive in developing not only Hinei’s professional skills but her own identity as a Māori teacher. Hinei says, “[...] being Māori I felt really comfortable, I felt almost homely [...] we had a connection, a kind of synergy of some kind to be able to work together”.

Hinei’s development has positive downstream effects on the tamariki, staff and community. For example, Hinei has collaboratively redeveloped successful school-wide physical education and mathematics programmes as well as a transition programme for Year 6 contributing students. *Ka Hikitia: Accelerating Success 2013–2017* states, “successful transitions occur when students develop a strong sense of belonging in the new setting and feel proud and supported in their identity, language and culture” (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 23). Such success is evident within Hinei’s narrative of her lead role working within her intermediate and their contributing schools. Furthermore, Hinei shared, the opportunities to learn about leadership and about mentor coaching, especially in the context of organisation management, expanded her own professional capabilities and practices, and put her in a position to pass that knowledge on to team leaders within her school.

For Liana, her first deputy principal quietly guided and encouraged her. Liana says much of her success stemmed from working within a team, using individual and collective strengths to build safe learning environments for the children. Liana remained in this supportive environment for seven years, where she found herself “growing as a teacher and learning the practice of teaching”.

Kristina acknowledges the exemplary models and support she received within her first two years of teaching. “My first two years [...] everything was so beautifully structured ... exceptional practice”. Kristina attributes the book *Ancient Wisdom Modern Solutions* (Bidois, 2009) encouraged the identification of her ‘eagles’. She says “Eagles are people who lift you up [...] give you just aroha really [...] also to give that back by telling them that they were my eagles and why”.

### **Feeling Valued - Manaakitanga (care and respect)**

Collegiality seemed, for all participants sharing their stories, to segue naturally into the importance of feeling valued as Māori. Feeling valued as Māori supported these teachers’ growth into leadership roles. The values of kōtahitanga (unity) and manaakitanga (care and respect), including self-care, were evident within their stories. Each participant’s narrative included personal and institutional support structures that enabled the development of a strong positive self-identity (mana motuhake) as pathways to sustainable success and to meaningful achievement.

Vital components contributing to their successes were communities and schools’ Board of Trustees’ governance. Katie shared how responsive and supportive her current Board of Trustees are to

her needs and requests to support her teaching team's and community's visions for improving learning and teaching at their school. A current focus for Katie and her rural school is community engagement. Katie notes, "You always go back to the whānau concept, [...] high on our list at the moment is our community engagement and getting my families into the school". Katie's leadership "actively encourages, supports, and where appropriate, challenges [...] community to determine how they wish to engage about important matters at the school" (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 6). Katie points out that nurturing and growing community engagement requires consistent, skilful and timely communication, which requires using communication skills that she developed on the pathway to becoming a confident leader of her school while personifying, living and modelling what it is to be Māori. Katie "actively acknowledges [...] community as key stakeholders in the school as expected of culturally-competent school leaders" (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 12).

One of Hinei's many examples of feeling valued was the financial support of her post-graduate study from the Board of Trustees of her school. Without that support, Hinei says, she could not have achieved as much or as far as she has. She characterises the Board as 'always there to listen, acknowledge and celebrate':

As a Māori, I think that is so important that you feel supported, you feel valued ... even it is something to provoke me, to make me ask questions, something to make me uncomfortable.

Feeling valued and looked after emerged as common factors contributing to the participants' sustained success. Participants noted that they felt valued not just as leaders in their respective schools, but as Māori persons. This atmosphere of inclusiveness of cultural history and background embodies respect and care, or *manaakitanga*, for the participants. Also, it facilitates unity around a common vision and purpose, *kōtahitanga*, that can be alternatively characterised as a sense of belonging.

### **Risk-Taking - *Mana Tū* (a sense of courage and resilience)**

All the participants are self-disciplined, self-determined opportunists and innovators who carefully selected their pathways as learners and as teachers. Their narratives demonstrated that they are risk-takers, exhibiting "*Mana Tū*", a sense of courage and resilience (Macfarlane, Webber, Cookson-Cox & McRae, 2014, p. 174). This is, perhaps, most easily exemplified by Kristina's willingness to shift her employment context to gain valuable experience. Kristina proactively sought professional opportunities

within the Pacific Islands. During this time Kristina became heavily involved with Integrating Communication Technology (ICT) to ameliorate isolation and limited resources of her school and to enhance learning. As a result of her efforts, the Islands' Ministry of Education approached Kristina to lead a digital school for 2013-14.

### **Learning Opportunities - *Mana Tū* (a sense of courage and resilience)**

*Mana tū* is also reflected in the participants' persistence in seeking out learning opportunities and, in Hinei's case, pursuit of professional degrees. It was often the case that undertaking learning opportunities required that participants exhibit high degrees of resiliency, for example, when Hinei undertook a fulltime Masters programme in addition to fulltime employment from 2011-13. A self-determination to consistently reflect and learn, with the aim of ensuring ongoing personal and professional growth, was a vital factor attributing to these teachers' success. All four teachers demonstrate *Ako* in that they are "personally committed, and actively work on their own professional learning and development" (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 14).

## **DISCUSSION**

Given the ubiquity of the factors in each of the participants' narratives, it makes sense that other Māori teachers could benefit from support structures that include these factors and their associated values.

"The vision of *Ka Hikitia – Accelerating Success 2013–2017* is 'Māori enjoying and achieving education success as Māori'. This vision means ensuring that all Māori [...] participate in and contribute to an engaging and enjoyable educational journey that recognises and celebrates their unique identity, language and culture" (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 12).

It should be noted that 'culture' should be taken to mean a natural inclusion of Māori values, given that they have the potential to contribute to the enablement of Māori teacher success.

Evident within all four participants narratives are: *whanaungatanga* (sense of familiness), *kōtahitanga* (sense of unity), *manaakitanga* (sense of caring), *mana tū* (sense of courage and resilience), *mana tangatarua* (navigating success in two worlds) and *mana motuhake* (positive sense of Māori identity). The potential benefits of a shared understanding of these Māori values, for teachers and for schools' Boards of Trustees within Aotearoa/New Zealand, needs further work. Collaborative efforts between Pākehā and Māori are essential to developing values-based kaupapa

within schools and educational communities. Within *Ka Hikitia: Accelerating Success 2013–2017* (Ministry of Education, 2013), a goal for organisational success is that “evidence of what works for and with Māori [...] are embedded into all education sector agencies’ planning and accountability processes” (p. 50). The inherent benefits of *Ka Hikitia* (and other programmes raising Māori achievement) requires effective professional development that, according to Smith et al. (2006), needs to include a prevailing culture of trust, collegiality and risk-taking, all within a climate of support.

This paper argues that mana whānau is a fundament for Māori teacher success. Mana whānau (extended family) was found within the Ka Awatea research project (Macfarlane, Webber, Cookson-Cox & McRae, 2014) as vital for Māori student success. Whānau support comes in many forms. For example, the participants each noted the positive affect of (intergenerational) whānau role-modelling is difference-making, not just for themselves, but also their children, their extended families and their ākongā (Māori and non-Māori children).

Teacher education programmes could include and build upon the success factors and values discussed above. Māori values need to be modelled and explicitly practised in and across programmes and in courses as encouraged within ‘*Tātaiako* Cultural Competencies for Teachers [...]’ including on entry into initial teacher education and for graduating teachers (Ministry of Education, 2011). Orientation programmes should be inclusive of whānau. Programmes should ensure that there is appropriate staff, and peer pastoral support for student teachers. *Ka Hikitia: Accelerating Success 2013-17* supports this in expecting tertiary education providers are “integrating or exploring different models of pastoral care [...]”(Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 47) to apply the critical factors for success.

Teacher education providers can leverage their relationships with local schools to press the importance of collegial environments where students undertake the Professional Practice parts of their study. Risk-taking and learning opportunities could be included in both theoretical and practical courses, with the aim to give students perspective and encouragement to continually pursue improvement of their knowledge and skills. Using a Māori values ‘lens’, to reflect on and to evaluate learning and teaching experiences within teacher education programmes, can be the norm.

The participants’ narratives highlight the important role of management and of school governance in enabling and in facilitating learning opportunities for teachers; whether it is formal post-graduate study or professional development opportunities

with the local, national and even global educational communities<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the dispositions and attitudes of *mana tū* (a sense of courage and resilience) were integral to the successful pursuit of learning opportunities amongst the participants.

The successful Māori teachers who shared their stories for this research have a strong sense of self-identity. They manifest mana motuhake, “to be bold and to have a strong will; a belief in and knowledge of one’s self” (Macfarlane, Webber, Cookson-Cox & McRae, 2014, p. 3). Future and ongoing research is needed to ensure that we continue to celebrate and learn from Māori success as we strive for more Māori to aspire to a career in the profession of teaching.

## CONCLUSION

Drawing on Kaupapa Māori principles and a Narrative Inquiry framework, this case study sought four Māori teachers’ perspectives on the factors that attributed to their success. Using a Māori values ‘lens’ to analyse the four participants’ narratives, five broad themes emerged: whānau support; collegiality; feeling valued; being risk-takers, and ongoing learners. From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, several Māori values associate with the identified success factors. Both factors and Māori values need to be nurtured and practised within our educational communities, not only for Māori student success (Macfarlane, Webber, Cookson-Cox & McRae, 2014), but also for Māori teacher success.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ka Hikitia: Accelerating Success* (2013–2017) strategic document (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 23) identifies governance and support of teacher learning as the first critical factor for successful schools through, “Quality provision, leadership, teaching and learning, supported by effective governance”.

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