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Mahi tahi builds relationships and identity

By Education Gazette editors

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On a former pā site with sweeping views of Te Matau-a-Māui Hawke's Bay, a group of ākonga re-enacted a scene from the lives of their tīpuna which took them back more than 200 years and gave them a deep sense of mana and pride in their roots.



Ākonga from Tamariki Wānanga Rōpū look towards Te Whanganui-a-Orotu, also known as the Ahuriri Harbour or Napier Inner Harbour. They were amazed to think that the whole area was once under water, with abundant kai moana and that they were standing on what was originally an island where their tīpuna once walked.

Napier's Ahuriri Kāhui Ako has been working together (mahi tahi) on a range of across-school initiatives to build connections and identity for ākonga from six schools and four early learning services in the suburb of Tamatea, which has been named after tīpuna, Tamatea-Pokai-Whenua.

Around 50 percent of tamariki and rangatahi in the kāhui ako are mana whenua – many whakapapa to Ngāti Kahungunu.

In 2018, facilitators from the University of Waikato worked with kaiako on Rongohia te Hau [effective support for culturally responsive teaching] gathering evidence, including survey responses from learners, whānau and teachers, and observations of teaching, to inform and develop culturally responsive teaching and leadership.

“The Rongohia te Hau process is about putting a line in the sand and seeing where we are in terms of cultural capabilities, relational and responsive pedagogy. I like the fact that it’s triangulated data – observation of teachers’ cultural practices, student and whānau voice. Often there are very different perceptions,” says Nicky Anderson, deputy principal at Tamatea High School and kāhui ako lead.

Growth tool

In 2019, the kāhui ako conducted a strategic review that identified a need to build the cultural competency of teachers from early learning through to secondary school across the kāhui ako.



Mahi tahi has seen strong across-school tuakana teina relationships forged: From left: Deejay, Year 9, Oakleigh, Year 10, Pitama, Year 6, Tai, Year 6.

Meredith Ellingham, one of two across-school teachers for the kāhui ako, says that although Covid put a spanner in the works, the kāhui began to build relationships and make a strong start on their achievement challenges: strengthening culturally responsive and relational pedagogy, ensuring effective transitions within and between schools, and promoting and developing wellbeing and hauora for ākongā.

“That [2018] was the last time we had any baseline data, but when we looked at the data, we knew that we needed to support kaiako in enhancing their cultural responsiveness,” she says.

“The major drive for the change was around the growth tool and the ‘observation to learn’ conversations. Before we did Rongohia te Hau, we were trained in the use of the growth tool, which we use in our schools.”

“The growth tool sits alongside Rongohia te Hau – it’s about changing practice. You get overall data which provides a big picture and then the growth (observation) tool is about teachers identifying areas of culturally responsive and relational pedagogy that they are strong in and then areas they need to develop further,” adds Nicky.

Nicky explains that mahi tahi also involves teachers and students working together to achieve desired outcomes.

“That’s co-construction, or power sharing, so that students know what they’re learning and why they’re learning it. For some of our teachers, that’s a scary transition, from holding the power to sharing it with students.”

Walking in footsteps of tīpuna

One of the kāhui ako’s first initiatives, Tamariki Wānanga Rōpū, saw a group of Year 5–10 ākonga who whakapapa to local hapū and were potentially at risk of disengagement, visiting the places where Tamatea-Pokai-Whenua once walked, hunted and gathered to feed his extended whānau.

This was led by local historians (mana whenua) who shared mātauranga and pūrākau of the local area.

“The Wānanga Rōpū was about connecting students to the whenua. Students were selected by schools on the basis of the potential benefit to their personal growth and development. The model is about knowing who you are, where you are from and what you bring to the collective,” says Nicky.

“On one trip we went to Otiere Pā, a site where there’s an incredible view. You can see the whole bay – you would have seen waka coming in,” says Vanessa Harlow, a teacher at Porritt School and an across-school teacher.

“We pretended that we were the hapū that lived there. We had half our students be the manuhiri and half be tangata whenua. We did a pōwhiri and re-enacted how you would know if these visitors were friend or foe. It was a beautiful day, slightly windy so we could hear the wind echoing eerily around the hills, and it was almost like we were back in time. That’s what would have happened 200 or more years ago,” she says.

Vanessa says the wānanga experiences have improved students’ confidence as they learned more about their Māori tīpuna.

“More than anything it has improved their confidence as learners because they have this special whakapapa and they are starting to understand how Tamatea-Pokai-Whenua was a keen explorer, a navigator, a doctor and a scientist. It’s really important for our students to see that they come from tīpuna who were incredibly intelligent, resourceful and creative,” she says.

Meredith agrees, saying the wānanga experience gave the students the opportunity to experience success as Māori.

“It gave them the opportunity to be confident in who they are as Māori and to be able to take that back to their kura: mahi tahi is power sharing. Their cultural toolkit was acknowledged, and they were the tuakana helping the kaiako to learn,” says Meredith.

Schools reported that the students became leaders in their own right.

“They didn’t have the labels of the naughty, or disengaged kids. We saw their mana grow and develop, particularly with our Year 10s. The Year 5s were hanging off these older students saying, ‘I can’t wait to get to Tamatea High School’. That transition is part of it as well,” says Nicky.

“One of our achievement challenges was developing relationships across the kura. They became a tightknit bunch of tamariki,” adds Meredith.



There's a whakataukī about the ocean and the foreshore: Ko rua tē paia ko Te Whanga – the store that never closes is Te Whanga. Ākonga hunt for pūpū (periwinkles) in the lagoon at a kai moana gathering spot.

Supported by mana whenua

A highlight of term 3 was a combined kapa haka festival which included the whole kāhui ako and was supported by mana whenua. It was held at Napier's Pettigrew Green Arena, attended by over 1,000 people, with 250–300 students participating.

All the schools were involved in performing a mōteatea, Tamatea-Pokai-Whenua's pepeha which talks of places of significance in Ahuriri Napier.

Two years in the making, the event was led by Meredith as the across-school teacher in charge of the culturally responsive and relational pedagogy achievement challenge.

"We brought whānau in with a mihi whakatau. Tangata whenua welcomed the guests – it was spine-chilling stuff. That was a first for the schools," recalls Vanessa.

"The focus was around identity. We all identify with the Ngāti Kahungunu lens and that's what we brought it back to. We approached mana whenua and had them involved so we were all a part of it, and a lot of connections were made," she says.

Relationships between the schools and mana whenua continue to grow. Since the festival, tamariki from several schools in the kāhui ako have had overnight stays at local marae and kaiako and ākonga supported the recent reopening of Wharerangi Marae.

The Ahuriri Kāhui Ako has also been involved in the Ministry-funded Te Ahu o te Reo Māori, which aims to grow and strengthen an education workforce that can integrate te reo Māori into the learning of all ākonga in Aotearoa.

Smooth transitions

Stronger relationships between early learning centres and schools have resulted in smoother transition pathways between educational settings.

Early learning and school kaiako meet regularly as a Learning Support Rōpū to discuss and share effective practice. A significant achievement of this group has been the development of a tool for sharing information. Based on the Ministry of Education's Te Rito tool, this has been further developed into a Napier-wide tool for sharing student information.

“They visited the contributing schools and brought students from Tamatea Intermediate who ran workshops and then they watched our students interacting. They could see the way that they did things and could ask questions right there of the teachers like, ‘What happens when this child does this? How do you get them back on track?’ It’s a much easier way of getting to know students,” explains Vanessa, who leads the kāhui ako’s transitions team.

“It was a twofold thing – teachers saw those children in an environment where they were fairly confident and comfortable rather than when they visit their school and feel a bit overwhelmed. Secondly, those children got to know who their teachers are going to be – they’ve already got connections. We did a couple of those visits and then we visited the intermediate,” she says.

A similar programme, with a focus on building strong relationships between kaiako and ākonga between intermediate and high school, has also been trialed. The transitions team is also working on a process for transitions from early learning to primary school.



Ahuriri Kāhui Ako leaders, Vanessa Harlow, Meredith Ellingham and Nicky Anderson in front of Warren Pohatu’s painting: Tamatea-Arikinui: Takitimu.

Future plans

While Nicky, Meredith and Vanessa all stepped down from their kāhui ako roles at the end of 2022, they are all looking forward to what the future holds, with the new leadership committed to carrying on their mahi tahi.

“Meredith and I are working with Hawke’s Bay Fish & Game, developing a curriculum which I’m writing with local hapū for Years 4–10,” says Nicky.

Named *Turangawaewae*, the curriculum will cover science, social science, mathematics and digital technologies with learning contexts including biodiversity, environmental threats and survival: past, present and future.

“Fish & Game have provided some funding to release teachers in a way that we can create curriculum. We will then develop lessons with students, so they’re going to be creating the learning for other students to enjoy.

“We’ve applied for other PLD (professional learning development) for digital technology. Meredith has been working closely with a facilitator to develop digital resources that can be shared with schools and teachers. The

next step is to work with a curriculum lead at the Ministry to develop this localised curriculum – and we're bringing to life the Aotearoa New Zealand's histories curriculum," says Nicky.

There's also PLD funding to work with other kāhui ako in Ahuriri to build better connections with local hapū.

"The work has only just begun – it's so neat being in a kāhui ako where mātauranga Māori has parity with a western view. It's so awesome to teach with that mātauranga Māori lens," concludes Meredith.

"Our collective knowledge is growing with kaiako, ākonga and whānau, learning more about our place. We're on a journey with a commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We're changing the power dynamic," adds Nicky.

The Kāhui Ako team would like to acknowledge many people who have contributed to the mahi: particularly school principals and early learning head teachers, past across-school teachers Lisa Hooper and Tony Parker, within-school teachers from each kura as well as PLD providers and other external support.



ākonga from Napier's Ahuriri Kāhui Ako felt privileged to be walking in the footsteps of their tīpuna.

Kāhui kōrero

Some participants in the Tamariki Wānanga Rōpū, share their thoughts.

I was just 'wow' my ancestors have been here and now I am walking the same footsteps where they put their feet. That is so special to me and I will never forget this feeling. **Sha'la, Year 9**

I felt privileged to be given the opportunity to learn about the sacred pā sites and how my ancestors lived. Making new friends in the different kura was awesome because now we know each other when some of them get to our high school. **Oakleigh, Year 10**

This opportunity has allowed my children to connect with me in open discussions about our ancestors (even tell me where rongoa is!) and we as a whānau are now in a more reflective space of awareness to really appreciate the journey and impact that our ancestors have had on the whenua. **Dineel, parent**

I feel so much more connected and included in my son's education through his involvement in the Tamariki Wānanga. He has shared his knowledge of the pūrakau which I have loved hearing about. **Taiatini, parent**

Having students facilitate the learning in the class has changed my class engagement levels. **Teacher**



Ākonga brainstorm how they will share their knowledge with other kaiako and tamariki about Tamatea-Pōkai-Whenua the explorer. From top left: Oakleigh, Year 10, Kiera, Year 6, Meredith Ellingham (kaiako), Vanessa Harlow (kaiako), Pitama, Year 6, Sha'la, Year 9 (with back to photo), Deejay, Year 9, Tai, Year 6.

Reading and resources

[Rongohia te Hau: Driving transformative change\(external link\)](#)

(<https://gazette.education.govt.nz/articles/rongohia-te-hau-driving-transformative-change/>) – *Education Gazette*

[Rongohia te Hau: Building culturally responsive pedagogy\(external link\)](#)

(<https://gazette.education.govt.nz/articles/rongohia-te-hau-building-culturally-responsive-pedagogy/>) – *Education Gazette*

[Home Page | Te Rito\(external link\)](#) (<https://terito.govt.nz/>)

[Te Ahu o te Reo Māori – Education in New Zealand\(external link\)](#) (<https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/overall-strategies-and-policies/te-ahu-o-te-reo-maori-fostering-education-in-te-reo-maori/>)



BY Education Gazette editors

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