Bridges to success for Māori: An aspirational lens
Angus Macfarlane, Sonja Macfarlane, Melissa Derby, Melinda Webber

Angus Hikairo Macfarlane (Ngāti Whakaue) is Professor of Māori Research at the University of Canterbury, Director of Tē Ru Rangahau: The Māori Research Laboratory, and Kaihautū of the New Zealand Psychological Society. His research focuses on exploring Indigenous and sociocultural imperatives that influence education and psychology. Avid about Māori advancement, he has pioneered several theoretical frameworks associated with culturally-responsive approaches for professionals working in these disciplines. Professor Macfarlane’s prolific publication portfolio and exemplary teaching abilities have earned him national and international standing in his field of scholarship. In 2010, he received the Tohu Pae Tawhiti Award from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research for outstanding contributions to Māori research. In 2013, he was awarded the University of Canterbury Research Medal – the highest honour that the UC Council can extend to its academic staff. In 2015, he received the national Ako Aotearoa Tertiary Teaching Excellence Award for specialist services in the field of kaupapa Māori.

Sonja Macfarlane (Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Waewae) is Associate Professor in the School of Health Sciences at the University of Canterbury, a Senior Research Fellow on A Better Start National Science Challenge, and a member of the New Zealand Psychological Society. Her research, publications and teaching focus on culturally-responsive evidence-based practices in education, psychology, counselling and human development. Her career pathway has seen her move from classroom teacher to itinerant teacher, to special education advisor, to the National Professional Practice Leader: Services to Māori (Pouhikahurea) in the Ministry of Education, Special Education. In 2014, Dr Macfarlane received a University of Canterbury Research Award, and in 2015 the Research Team Award was conferred by the University’s College of Education, Health and Human Development. Her most recent distinction was the Tohu Pae Tawhiti Award from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research for outstanding contributions to Māori research, which she received in 2017. Dr Macfarlane is a research and advisory member on several ministerial-funded projects.

Associate Professor Melinda Webber (Ngāti Whakaue, Ngāpuhi) is a former Fulbright/Nga Pae o te Maramatanga Scholar who has published widely on the nature of Māori identity. Melinda’s research examines the ways race, ethnicity, culture and identity impact the lives of young people, particularly Māori. In 2016, Melinda was awarded a prestigious Marsden Fast-Start grant to undertake a research project examining the distinctive identity traits of Ngāpuhi, New Zealand’s largest iwi. In 2017 Melinda was awarded an esteemed Rutherford Discovery Fellowship to tackle an important question facing educators – ‘How can we foster cultural pride and academic aspiration among Māori students?’ Melinda spent four years working as a researcher on the Starpath Project from 2011-2014 identifying and addressing the barriers that prevent participation and success in degree-level education especially for Māori, Pacific, and others from low socio-economic communities. She also spent six years as a co-principal investigator on the Ka Awatea Project examining the nature of teaching, learning and home psychosocial patterns that enable Māori learners to excel.

Melissa Derby (Ngāti Ranginui) is a doctoral scholar at the University of Canterbury, whose thesis is part of A Better Start National Science Challenge. Melissa is a member of the New Zealand Psychological Society, and has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Victoria University of Wellington. She graduated with a Master of Arts with first class honours from Auckland University of Technology, and her thesis made the Dean’s List for Exceptional Theses. She also holds a Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Studies from Columbia University in New York. Her scholarship has been recognised through a range awards, including a Whāia Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Doctoral Excellence Scholarship from the Māori Centre of Research Excellence, a SAGE Young Writer’s Award, and the Brownlie Scholarship, which is awarded to the highest ranked doctoral scholar at the University of Canterbury.
Introduction

This paper offers a position on factors contributing to Māori success. It presents findings from a seminal study, *Ka Awa te Ata*¹, which explored aspects of Māori learner success in eight secondary schools in the Rotorua rohe (district). While the findings emerged from a study in the field of education, it is contended that the cultural constructs presented in this position paper are far-reaching and are able to be applied within a range of workplaces and professional disciplines such as psychology, economics, and innovation. The paper commences by offering a snapshot of the discourse on Māori success in education, and outlines the pathway that led to the *Ka Awa te Ata* study. It then proceeds to describe and explain the main findings of the study and proposes some recommendations for potential stakeholders who may hold the key to Māori success.

Māori Learner Success – a snapshot of the discourse

Few New Zealand scholars have focussed their attention on the attributes of successful Māori, both in mainstream (sic) education and beyond. Instead, the focus has remained largely on identifying Māori deficits, and this, combined with a reluctance to incorporate a Māori worldview into areas such as the national curriculum framework and institutional policies and practices, and the undervaluing of Te Reo Māori (the Māori language), has contributed to an overall lack of positive outcomes for Māori (Penetito, 2010; G.H. Smith, 1992; Turner, 2013, Webber & Macfarlane, 2018). The body of research on Māori achievement has, for so long, positioned Māori as simply ‘another’ cohort among a homogenous school, professional, or workplace population. This positioning seeks to assimilate Māori within the dominant culture in an invisible fashion, rather than seeing Māori as cultural bearers, distinctively unique and highly dynamic as any Indigenous group of people can be (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2007; Webber & Macfarlane, 2018).

¹ The *Ka Awa te Ata* study was supported by a grant from Ngā Pa i o te Māramatanga, the Centre of Research Excellence funded by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) and hosted by The University of Auckland. The University of Canterbury was commissioned to undertake the research, and procured an alliance with The University of Auckland, Victoria University of Wellington, and Ua-Cox Consulting Ltd. The foremost contributors were the research participants: learners, teachers, principals, whānau, former learners, and community leaders. To access the full manuscript, see http://www.maramatanga.co.nz/project/ka-awa-te-atia-wi-case-study-mori-learners-experiencing-success

The body of research on Māori achievement has, for so long, positioned Māori as simply ‘another’ cohort among a homogenous school, professional, or workplace population.

Historically, the official government policy was one of assimilation, where the focus was on all Māori acquiring the culture, customs, language and knowledge base of the Pākehā (British settlers and their descendants). The resultant undervaluing of mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge), including language and customs, has had serious consequences for generations of Māori. Research illustrates that as a result, many Māori learners experience early disengagement from education, which has often led to high levels of unemployment, early patterns of delinquency and criminal involvement, increased risk of mental illness and predictable loss of potential for future success (Sherrif, 2010; Education Review Office, 2006; Macfarlane, Glynn, Cavanagh & Bateman, 2007). Surpassing the low expectations of others has proved challenging for many Māori, but increasingly more Māori are attaining high levels of academic and workplace success.

Yet despite this increase in outcomes of success, little work has been done to identify what factors have contributed to this success. In addition, there is relatively little knowledge about how the various school, home, community and personal factors are interrelated. Not since Mitchell and Mitchell (1988) profiled Māori learners with high marks in School Certificate English and Mathematics, was the subject of Māori success and its intrinsic link to culture examined again in any depth. The *Ka Awa te Ata* study delved into the literature on successful Māori learners specifically, and explored some of the issues facing Māori learners in mainstream education today with a particular focus on factors that impede their progress. However, it did not dwell there, preferring to place greater emphasis on identifying those factors that support successful outcomes and investigating strategies that could promote a more inclusive framework for Māori both in a school and community environments (Macfarlane, 2010; Webber, 2015). There is growing evidence and acceptance of the importance of making culture count in such a way that illuminates a pathway forward, thereby increasing the potential for Māori learners’ success. In essence, *Ka Awa te Ata* promoted an agenda that is mindful of the unique position a culturally-centred Māori individual should occupy in an educational or workplace environment – where Māori individuals are seen as capable, productive and competent members of their whānau (family), hapū (tribe), iwi (extended tribe), school, and other communities (Ministry of Education, 1998; 2002; 2006; 2013).

Having recognised the shortage of
Four constructs and an overarching lever

It is generally accepted that success is built upon a range of key ingredients. Analyses of the data from Ka Awatea revealed that positive Māori identity and cultural efficacy are shown to be closely linked to resilience, with knowledge of one's whakapapa (genealogy) and mana tangata (a sense of belonging) also emerging as key influences. Cultural knowledge and engagement also tend to support connections in the wider community and an individual’s access to social support and positive role models. Similarly, whānau, hapū and iwi help individuals to develop fundamental psycho-social imperatives such as a sense of their collective belonging, cultural connectedness, and responsibilities to others. According to all of the participants in the study, their Māori identity lay at the heart of all things important to them and their achievement was considered complementary to this. These data sets emerged as four broad themes, these being: a strong sense of identity and belonging; a sense of resilience; a sense of connection to place, and a sense of being at ease in two worlds - and one overarching lever: whānau dynamics.

Mana Motuhake: A positive sense of identity

Mana motuhake, or a positive sense of identity as Māori, is critical to success as Māori, and is experienced via developing a sense of cultural efficacy. This includes the ability and knowledge that individuals can engage meaningfully with Māori culture and an ability to put this into practice, and where their psycho-social behaviour is informed by Māori values such as manaakitanga (care) and māhaki (humility). Māori experiencing success are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to others in their whānau, school, workplace and community. Whānau play the most important role in terms of socialising their members into the Māori world and helping them to develop cultural efficacy. The findings that emerged from Ka Awatea indicate that there is a significant opportunity for schools and workplaces to play an important role in enabling Māori identity to be developed, and to purposefully engage with Māori in activities that foster a strong sense of identity.

Mana Tū: A sense of courage and resilience

Successful Māori individuals develop psychological attributes that include positive self-efficacy, positive self-concept, resilience, and an internal locus of control. These attributes contribute to a sense of courage and resilience that allows them to thrive in the school context and beyond. Successful Māori individuals tend to be aspirational, have high expectations and enjoy overall physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. A healthy home environment that supports an holistic sense of wellbeing is a key factor in fostering courage and resilience, where whānau members model practical resilience strategies, such as a firm work ethic, perseverance, determination and discipline. Complementing this are people who act as mentors and as confidantes. These mentors look for the good in the individual, articulate their potential, and have realistic expectations. Māori experiencing success see themselves as engaged and contributing community members. They want the community to provide opportunities for them to meaningfully participate in the broader success of their whānau, hapū and iwi.

Mana Ukaipo: A sense of place

A strong connection between learning and the physical and socio-historical environment in which the learning occurs is pivotal to Māori success. Essentially, successful Māori seek a synergy between their school or place of work and the unique context in which the school or place of work is located. They want to see local role models of success made visible and prominent in schools and workplaces. There is a better chance that they will thrive when local customs and culture have some resonance with their educational and community activities, and they expect these phenomena, which they view as a viable platform for ongoing aspirations and achievement, to occupy a position of importance in areas such as the school curriculum and workplace environment.
Mana Tangatarua: A sense of inclusivity

Every participant had a culturally inclusive aptitude, a sense for navigating success in two paradigms – Te Ao Māori (a Māori world) and Auraki (a Western world), but held to a contention that educational and workplace success should not come at the expense of Māori identity. They saw both their Māori and Auraki experiences as vital to overall success, noting they need the appropriate navigational skills and role models, and a strong sense of psychological and spiritual wellbeing to navigate a bicultural Aotearoa New Zealand, successfully. Supportive and galvanic relationships are essential to success whereby whānau are primarily responsible for Māori success as Māori and should model what this looks like. Schools and workplaces are well-positioned to contribute largely to Māori success because they offer numerous opportunities to be innovative and creative, to try new things and to take risks, and in doing so, provide the kind of terrain that encourages both distinctiveness and diversity to flourish.

Mana Whānau: The overarching lever

The findings from Ka Awatea revealed that successful Māori individuals occupy a valued position within their whānau. They are nurtured into succeeding in both worlds by their whānau, are socio-psychologically capable and have a developing sense of belonging across a number of contexts. Māori experiencing success appreciate that their whānau appreciates education and workplace roles, and that their success is important to the whole whānau because it contributes to the overall success of the whānau. The four themes and the overarching lever emerged as key ingredients in a recipe for educational and workplace success. If the education and workplace sectors are committed to successful learning and development for Māori then they must also be committed to enhancing cultural continuity and cultural growth in their respective modus-operandi.

The four themes and the overarching lever emerged as key ingredients in a recipe for educational and workplace success. If the education and workplace sectors are committed to successful learning and development for Māori then they must also be committed to enhancing cultural continuity and cultural growth in their respective modus-operandi.

The full Ka Awatea report offered 40 recommendations, eight each for Māori learners, whānau, schools, iwi, and policy-makers. A selection of the recommendations are:

- Hold fast to your deeply held cultural values and moral standards.
- Value your mentors and friends within the context of the school or professional community because they are valuable sources of knowledge and support in times of struggle.
- Ensure that your home environment is positive, safe, caring and nurturing. Individuals who are products of such environments are more content, emotionally secure and resilient.
- Value Māori cultural distinctiveness and foster the development of a degree of academic, social, and cultural self-confidence and self-belief.
- Ensure educational and workplace programmes have meaningful links to the local people, their history and their language.
- Make provision for visionary and proactive leadership – ‘reach in’ to schools and workplaces; don’t wait for schools and workplaces to ‘reach out’.
- Familiarise administrators with local tikanga (customs) and kawa (protocols).
- Institutionalise a clearly marked path to success for Māori.

Conclusion

The four themes and overarching lever that emerged from Ka Awatea propose a position on Māori success, which in turn, have guided recommendations for key stakeholders who are charged with fostering success for Māori. The challenge remains for schools and workplaces to adopt models of practice to include both individual and collective aspirations of success for Māori. Schools and workplaces that have embraced this duality will be seen to be responding to Māori potential by creating innovative ways in which an holistic approach can be implemented alongside Western methodologies and practices (see Gillon & Macfarlane, 2017; Macfarlane, Macfarlane & Gillon, 2015).

There is a clear correlation between the recognition of and support for an individual’s cultural identity and their subsequent ability to translate that into the attainment of knowledge and skills. The proposition that emerges from the data stories of the Ka Awatea study is that Māori individuals will improve their chances of success if the mana factors (motuhake, tū, ūkaipō, tangatarua, and whānau) play a part in their lives. A further proposition is that ambitious schools and workplaces with high numbers of successful Māori have recognised this fact, and have engineered positive spaces and shared understandings that augment Indigenous knowledge alongside Western knowledge - thus enhancing the experiences for all. A final proposition is to concede that many
Māori excel despite the absence of the mana factors outlined above, such is the enigmatic nature of circumstance. As the number of Māori experiencing success increases, so too do the calls for changes to school and workplace environments, communities, curricula, and policies to support and assure continued growth. More and more, schools and workplaces need to embrace and celebrate difference, and to manage these imperatives in such a way that promotes a way forward for Māori, and indeed for all. And most do – potentially they provide a rich tapestry of human existence that are points along a continuum toward a distinctly democratic and culturally-just ecosystem where Indigeneity and diversity are celebrated and encouraged phenomena.

References


