

# Te Pā Harakeke: Māori and non-Māori parent (whānau) support of culturally responsive teaching pedagogies

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This strengths-based paper draws on the qualitative and quantitative survey results from *whānau* (family members) of *tamariki* (children) attending 12 schools in an urban area in New Zealand with a high proportion of Māori people. The paper describes the positive impact of effective family engagement on *tamariki*, from the perspectives of *whānau*, paying particular interest to the differences between Māori and non-Māori *whānau*. The views of all *whānau* who participated in the project support the importance of relational and culturally sustaining aspects of teaching, and challenge commonly held stereotypes about indigenous parents' low expectations in relation to their children's education. The paper amplifies *whānau* voice about their children's school enjoyment, perceptions of teacher support and future career aspirations for their *tamariki*.

**Keywords:** Māori children, school enjoyment, family engagement

## Introduction

In Māori culture, *te pā harakeke* (a stand of flax) is a metaphor for the family unit, where the *rito* (centre shoot) or growing point is likened to a child and the shoots immediately either side of the *rito* are *awhi rito* (parents), and the following shoots the grandparents. This metaphor is often used when making reference to social contexts that support children's development. Many schools in Aotearoa New Zealand have increasingly focused on promoting strong home-school relationships in order to ensure all *whānau* (family members) feel welcomed and a part of the school community. The word "whānau" in this research project refers to the relational position of the adults that completed surveys, because they were responsible for the children who attended the schools who also participated in the research project. These adults were parents, aunts or uncles, grandparents or any other adult in the child's life who cared for them in the home. School leaders' and teachers' efforts to connect with *whānau* are premised on a belief that parental involvement at school will aid student engagement and learning outcomes. This belief is supported by research that posits that *whānau* engagement, along with high teacher expectations and culturally responsive practice, are central pillars in supporting student engagement and achievement, particularly for Māori students (Rubie-Davies et al., 2018). Previous studies investigating the factors that contribute to Māori success have found that *whānau* are strong role models for their children and can be instrumental in facilitating supportive learning environments (Macfarlane et al., 2014; Webber et al., 2021). These studies argue that *whānau* expectations and aspirations impact children's motivation to persist and strive at school. The New Zealand Curriculum also emphasises the importance of *whānau* involvement in schooling and challenges leaders and teachers to develop programs and practices which

(1) reflect the values and aspirations of whānau, (2) are meaningful and relevant to students, and (3) engage whānau in their child's learning (Ministry of Education, 2007; 2020). It is therefore important to understand whānau perspectives on these matters to inform effective and culturally responsive practice, pedagogy and leadership. The specific research questions that have underpinned the investigation include:

1. In what ways do whānau expect school leaders and teachers to support their children's academic and social development?
2. How do Māori whānau expectations and non-Māori parents compare?
3. What are Māori whānau hopes for their children's futures?

This paper reports the results from whānau data gathered through a research project that was focused on understanding the enablers of school success for Māori students. The project, called *Mana Ūkaipō: Enhancing Māori Engagement through Pedagogies of Connection and Belonging*, was undertaken with students, whānau and teachers from 12 schools in Rotorua, New Zealand (Highfield & Webber, 2021). Rotorua is the home of the Te Arawa *iwi* (tribal nation). The research project involved school leaders as researcher-practitioners, many of whom *whakapapa* (have genealogy) to Te Arawa. They worked alongside academic researchers in a research-practice partnership (Coburn et al., 2013) to identify the specific interventions, as well as teacher and leadership practices, that Māori students and their whānau identified as supporting them to be successful on their own terms. This data provides important insights and understandings into the aspirations and educational perspectives of whānau, and pays particular attention to the differences between Māori and non-Māori whānau perspectives.

The data for this project was gathered via questionnaires completed during the time of the COVID-19 lockdowns in New Zealand in 2020. The government-imposed alert levels and border closures had significant impacts on areas of New Zealand such as Rotorua, where this research took place, as tourism is a major source of income. Tourism accounts for 12.5% of the national workforce and 6% of gross domestic product and, according to Kiernan and Stroombergen (2020), 23% of the workforce in Rotorua was negatively impacted because border closures meant loss of employment in tourism. Many whānau who participated in this research project during the alert levels of 2020 would have been acutely aware of the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic locally, nationally and globally. This will likely have impacted their responses to the study survey.

## Historical context

Acknowledgement and understanding of the colonised history of the Te Arawa whānau and *tamariki* (children) who participated in this research project is critical to this study. Te Arawa have always placed high value on education. Prior to colonisation, Te Arawa knowledge was taught in ways which honoured the past and the values of the tribe, through "*waiata* (songs), *whakatauki* (proverbs, aphorisms), *purakau* (stories) and *whakapapa* [genealogy]" (Macfarlane et al., 2014, p. 20). The arrival of Pākehā (British settlers) to the area provided Te Arawa further education options. Te Arawa eagerly engaged with early missionaries to the area, in part because they provided them an opportunity to learn English. The *Native Schools Act 1867* formalised a national primary school system for all Māori *tamariki* in Aotearoa New Zealand. Te Arawa enthusiasm for education is evidenced in the generous gifting of school land and the subsidisation of the schoolhouse, teacher salary and teaching resources (Macfarlane et al., 2014).

However, during the 19th century, government policy aimed to assimilate Māori and the education system played a key role in facilitating this (Macfarlane et al., 2014). Despite considerable investment by Māori in local schools throughout Aotearoa, English was promoted as the only legitimate language for learning, and *mātauranga Māori* (Māori knowledge) was ignored in favour of a curriculum based on British norms and knowledge systems (Macfarlane et al., 2014). Māori students continue to be underserved by an education system which undervalues Māori culture and language, negatively stereotypes Māori students, favours individual outcomes over collaborative approaches to learning and predominately uses Western-based assessment practices. The effects of past assimilationist policies and practices continue in the present structures and policies of the New Zealand education system.

## Current education context

In line with international research, there is a historical and continuing achievement gap between Māori and non-Māori students in New Zealand with numerous reasons cited for this enduring educational problem. Biddulph et al. (2003) have argued that Māori whānau are disproportionately represented in the statistics for poverty and disadvantage, and therefore the impact of low socioeconomic status on their children's educational success cannot be under-estimated. However, while Biddulph et al. (2003) note the link between socioeconomic status and achievement, they also argue that low academic achievement is not inevitable for children growing up in low socioeconomic households and the factors affecting academic performance are complex (Biddulph et al., 2003).

Recent research in New Zealand places emphasis on the instrumental role teachers play in the educational lives of students and in enabling (or hindering) their school success (Bishop et al., 2009; Macfarlane et al., 2014). Many teachers have cited low family aspirations (Turner et al., 2015) and blame the achievement gap on factors including low socioeconomic status, lack of family resources and family instability (Bishop et al., 2009). More recently, researchers have emphasised strengths-based research approaches, examining the ways teachers utilise students' culture, language and identity as learning assets and partner with Māori whānau, thus adapting their teaching to become more culturally sustaining. These researchers have consequently proposed that culture must be considered when viewing the educational achievement of Māori students, especially when the dominant school culture is at odds with the traditional learning approaches within the classroom (Bishop et al., 2009; Highfield & Webber, 2021; Webber & Macfarlane, 2020). Culturally responsive teaching situates Māori student achievement within a broader context and encourages teachers to respond in ways that challenge existing biases.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education has set clear goals and policy directives to improve outcomes for Māori by requiring school leaders to create a culturally rich environment which supports Māori enjoying educational success *as Māori* (Ministry of Education, 2009) and by ensuring all students learn material which is relevant to them and which builds on their existing cultural knowledge (Hall, 2014; Hallman, 2018; Whitinui, 2017). For the purposes of this paper, a culturally supportive learning context is understood as one where Māori students are cared for and encouraged by teachers who understand *te ao Māori* (the Māori world), where teachers endeavour to learn about students' strengths, interests and aspirations, and take the time to develop relationships with Māori students' whānau and the wider community (Education Review Office 2008; Hall, 2014; Hallman, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2009; Whitinui, 2017).

This study investigated Māori whānau expectations, especially with regard to the ways they expect schools and teachers to support their children's academic and social development. This paper, including the literature review that follows, investigates the aspirations of Māori whānau for their tamariki and the types of home-school interactions which are most likely to support Māori children to achieve their academic, social and cultural aspirations. Particular attention is paid to the differences or, as is the case in this study, similarities between Māori and non-Māori whānau perspectives.

## Whānau expectations

One of the stereotypes evident in the teacher-expectation literature concerning Māori students is the misconception that Māori whānau have lower aspirations for their tamariki than non-Māori whānau, and that this contributes to the achievement gap (Bishop et al., 2009; Turner et al., 2015). On the contrary, research clearly illustrates that Māori whānau *expect* their tamariki to succeed at school (Education Review Office, 2008). Furthermore, a 2008 comparison of expectations on the basis of ethnicity between Māori and non-Māori whānau showed that there were no material differences in whānau aspiration for their children's educational success, or of schools' ability to support their children to achieve (Dixon et al., 2008). In the study by Dixon et al. (2008), Māori whānau placed high value on their child's success and believed that they could support their children to do well. The study showed that 80% of Māori whānau expected their children to stay at school until year 13 (age 18), although fewer Māori whānau expected their children to achieve the final leaving year qualification and go on to university. The study revealed both Māori and non-Māori whānau had high expectations of their tamariki.

Māori whānau have high expectations for their children's education and see success at school as providing an important foundation for their children's future (Dixon et al., 2008; Hutchings et al., 2012; Macfarlane, et al., 2014; McKinley, 2000; Rubie-Davies et al., 2006). Education is valued in Māori whānau for the extra opportunities and choices it provides to children and for equipping them with the tools they need to lead successful lives (Macfarlane et al., 2014; McKinley, 2000; Rubie-Davies et al., 2006). Given their experiences contending with negative stereotypes and institutional racism, Māori whānau also want their children to have an easier life than they may have led, and education is recognised as one of the tools to achieve those aspirations (Macfarlane et al., 2014; McKinley, 2000). Rubie-Davies et al. (2006) found that Māori whānau recognised the importance of gaining qualifications, although they also placed emphasis on their children becoming well-rounded and confident adults. An Education Review Office (ERO) study from 2008 reported on the views of diverse parents including Māori, Pacific, refugee, migrant and special needs; it found that "all parents, regardless of their background or where they choose to have their children educated, expect the best education for their children" (p. 12). Whānau in the ERO study expressed a desire for school leaders and teachers to communicate clearly about their child's progress and about what is expected of them at home. Effective school-home relationships are contingent on educators understanding the cultural backgrounds of their school community, and the school's ability to create an environment where whānau feel welcomed and encouraged to be involved (Education Review Office, 2008).

## Māori whānau educational aspirations

The educational aspirations of Māori whānau are vast and include dimensions such as their child's happiness, the development of strong cultural values, a sense of belonging, responsibility and integrity for others in the community (Barnes et al., 2012; Hutchings et al., 2012; Macfarlane et al., 2014; Whitinui, 2017). Whitinui (2017) explored whānau educational aspirations in two primary schools in the South

Island of New Zealand. He found a disjunct between teacher and whānau conceptions of success. Teachers were more likely to focus solely on academic achievement, whereas Māori whānau and tamariki prioritised cultural and social factors such as happiness and wellbeing, positive relationships and participation in sport (Whitinui, 2017). The literature contends that school leaders and teachers often focus on academic expectations, whereas Māori whānau expectations are more often aligned with aspirations for the development of the “whole child” (Barnes et al., 2012; Hutchings et al., 2012; Macfarlane et al., 2014; Whitinui, 2017).

Hutchings et al. (2012) found that Māori whānau from English-medium school settings believed that schools focused on non-Māori definitions of success, placing attention primarily on academic achievement. Māori whānau wanted schools to support their tamariki to grow culturally, socially, spiritually and academically, and wanted success at school to be measured along these lines by focusing on “developing the heart and then the head” (Hutchings et al., 2012, p. 19). Tamariki in Māori-medium settings were encouraged to develop integrity, be responsible, have respect for themselves and others, and understand what it means to contribute to their community. The same students were prepared for academic pathways into university, as well as their future roles as contributing members of their communities, through the development of strong cultural values. Research shows that when school leaders and teachers provide an environment which supports Māori tamariki to develop a strong cultural identity, they are more likely to satisfy the aspirations of whānau (Hall, 2014; Hill, 2017; Hutchings et al., 2012; Macfarlane et al., 2014).

Strong cultural identity is important to the success of Māori tamariki (Hall, 2014; Macfarlane et al., 2014; Hutchings et al., 2012; Whitinui, 2017). Macfarlane et al. (2014) found whānau pass on cultural knowledge to their children in multiple ways. Whānau involve their children in events at the marae, enrol their children in Māori immersion schools and value the input of wider whānau members. Whānau in the study by Macfarlane et al. (2014) spoke of returning to New Zealand from overseas in order to ensure their children could attend Māori-medium schooling, and others spoke of enrolling in *te reo Māori* (Māori language) classes in order to support their children’s learning of the Māori language. The research shows that many whānau place considerable emphasis on the cultural knowledge their children learn, and when they lack that knowledge themselves, will turn to schools to provide the support needed (Hill, 2017; Macfarlane et al., 2014). It is important to note that the vast majority of tamariki Māori are developing their cultural identity within English-medium schooling contexts.

Integrating Māori cultural views and values throughout the curriculum improves whānau engagement and leads to successful student outcomes (Gorinski & Abernethy, 2005; Hall, 2014; Hutchings et al., 2012; Macfarlane et al., 2014; Whitinui, 2017). A strong cultural identity is closely linked to Māori student success and academic resilience (Macfarlane et al., 2014; Webber, 2012). A strong Māori identity is shaped when tamariki believe that their cultural stories, values, traditions and language are valued by the school community and integrated throughout all areas of school life (Hall, 2014; Macfarlane et al., 2014; Whitinui, 2017). When schools create an environment that incorporates principles of Māori knowledge along with the dominant Western forms of education, Māori tamariki are encouraged to participate and succeed in their own right (Macfarlane et al., 2014).

In order to incorporate Māori knowledge and culture in meaningful ways, collaboration with Māori whānau and communities is imperative. As Rubie-Davies and colleagues (2018) have argued, “schools and teachers must ensure that whānau expectations are articulated, acknowledged, and acted upon, in order for Māori success and potential to be realised in classrooms” (p. 229). This includes whānau desire to be involved in their child’s school and to be invited to contribute, as well as their expectation that

schools will support their children's learning through making programs of Māori language and cultural activities available (Education Review Office, 2008). This provision can enable a synergy between Māori students' home and school lives, ensuring that success at school does not jeopardise success within one's culture and vice versa; this is a key tenet of culturally responsive teaching (Rubie-Davies et al., 2018).

## Home–school interactions that support whānau engagement

Home–school interactions which are premised on strong reciprocal relationships between student, teacher and whānau are more likely to lead to successful student outcomes and/or increased whānau engagement at school (Gorinski & Abernethy, 2005; Hall, 2014; Hutchings et al., 2012; Macfarlane et al., 2014; Ministry of Education, 2018; Rubie-Davies et al., 2018; Webber et al., 2016). Key effective strategies that have been identified in the literature to foster reciprocal relationships are open communication, whānau *hui* (family meeting) and restructuring parent–student–teacher conferences to prioritise the relationship between teacher and student (Hutchings et al., 2012; Macfarlane et al., 2014; Webber et al., 2016). Teachers and school leaders are in a crucial position to introduce these strategies and teach and communicate with a whānau-led approach.

Two studies have analysed the effectiveness of school–home partnerships, illustrating best practice. Firstly, Bull et al. (2008) argued that home–school partnerships which are focused on learning have the greatest influence on student achievement. Furthermore, when home–school practices are aligned, reciprocal and built from the context of the school community they are more likely to be effective (Bull et al., 2008). Secondly, meta-analysis by Alton-Lee et al. (2009), which included 37 studies (16 of which were in New Zealand), concluded that “proactive strategies to create and sustain educationally powerful school–home connections can have a significant impact” on students' social and academic outcomes (p. 150). They found that the approaches that had the most impact were joint parent/whānau and teaching interventions, teacher designed interactive homework with parents, strategies to access family and/or community funds of knowledge, teacher feedback on homework, parent intervention and parent involvement (pp. 144–146). Evidently, home–school connections can be utilised to increase student achievement.

## School professional development and research context

The context for this research was a professional learning and development initiative within a *Kāhui Ako* (Community of Learning) involving 12 schools in the Rotorua region. In 2014 the Aotearoa New Zealand Government announced an initiative for schools to form local school clusters called Communities of Learning / *Kāhui Ako* with a specific focus on collaborating to better serve students that are most at risk of underachieving (Ministry of Education, 2022). In 2019, most *Kāhui Ako* had identified improving culturally responsive practice as a core objective of their community (Aim, 2019). The research component was funded by the Teaching, Learning and Research Initiative (Highfield & Webber, 2021). For the past three years, the appointed community teacher-leaders within this *Kāhui Ako* participated in cohesive collaborative inquiry groups to investigate approaches that improved engagement for their large cohort of Māori students (approximately 64% of students enrolled in the 12 schools). The overall research aim was for researchers and practitioners to work collaboratively to investigate the specific approaches and school intervention programs that have made the biggest impact on Māori students within the *Kāhui Ako*.

The Kāhui Ako is comprised of one large secondary school, an intermediate school, three full primary schools, six contributing schools and one special school. In this Kāhui Ako, the major aim of the community was to broaden and improve the pedagogical and leadership response to Māori students and their whānau, and improve achievement, retention, engagement and attendance of Māori students. Prior to this project, teachers had been utilising a framework called Ngā Pūmanawa e Waru (Webber & Macfarlane, 2019) to support development of a localised curriculum. This framework identifies eight key qualities of successful Māori students, and has formed the basis of many of the collaborative inquiry projects in this region focused on addressing equity outcomes for Māori students. As such, this current project is built on a solid, contextually appropriate framework and employs *kaupapa* (theme) Māori-informed analysis approaches.

## Methodology

This project employed a mixed-methods case-study design, gathering quantitative and qualitative data from teachers, principals, students and whānau within a one-year period. The results reported in this paper are data collected from the whānau participants who completed the Kia Tū Rangatira Ai Survey (Alansari et al., 2022; Webber, 2019). This survey, developed by one of the authors of this paper, was designed to elicit student, whānau and teacher perspectives about how students develop positive attitudes, motivation and engagement towards school, their future aspirations, and to describe who their role-models for success are. The survey findings were utilised to produce individualised school reports and a collated Kāhui Ako report, while also providing comparison data in the form of matched results from similar communities of schools. The surveys were administered in all 12 schools to students, whānau and teachers/leaders with the support of the Kāhui Ako leaders. The results reported in this paper relate to responses from 338 Māori and 356 non-Māori whānau participants (Table 1). The surveys were completed between February 2020 and September 2020 during the first COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in New Zealand. They provided a descriptive data set which enabled measurement of the extent to which whānau felt the schools their children were attending were providing opportunities for all tamariki to achieve educational success.

**Table 1: Study participants: Whānau**

Measure	N
All family/whānau members	694
Māori whānau/family members	338 (49%)
Non-Māori whānau/family members	356 (51%)

The survey contained 26 categorical questions using a 5-point response framework (“not at all true”, “a little bit true”, “somewhat true”, “mostly true” and “very true”) on a range of topics including whānau encouragement of learning at home and at school, motivating factors for educational achievement and future aspirations. Using a principal component analysis in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software) with oblimin rotation, a series of four factors were identified from the 26 items in the questionnaire (Rahman & Mukhtadir, 2021). These factors led to the creation of condensed statements which described the relationships between the variables and enabled responses to similar questions to be grouped together. These were: “Our tamariki enjoy learning”, “We encourage tamariki to be diligent”,

“We encourage tamariki because we believe in the value of education” and “We encourage tamariki so they will be successful in their future”.

Qualitative data was coded using an inductive approach to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The survey included questions which elicited parental perceptions of the things tamariki like most about school and also asked parents to comment on how they believe teachers can best support tamariki to learn. Parental responses were placed into initial codes, differentiated by their response to each survey question. Once the initial coding was complete, the research team met to discuss the findings and further refine themes in order to reflect the diverse range of parental responses.

## Results

Overall, there were no noteworthy differences in any of the quantitative findings between Māori whānau ( $N = 338$ ) and non-Māori whānau ( $N = 356$ ). This was evident in the results for “Our tamariki enjoy learning” where 80% of Māori whānau indicated this was mostly or very true, and 76% of non-Māori whānau indicated this was mostly or very true. In regard to the statement “We encourage tamariki to be diligent”, both Māori and non-Māori whānau indicated that for 78% of the respondents this was very true. The results for the statement “We encourage tamariki because we believe in the value of education” were more distributed across the scale, but there were very similar response rates between Māori and non-Māori whānau. Both sets of respondents (30%) described this as mostly true; 14% of Māori and 15% of non-Māori described this as somewhat true, with 50% as very true. The results were less positive for the statement “We encourage tamariki so they will be successful in their future”. An average of 11% of Māori and 14% of non-Māori whānau described this as not at all true or a little bit true, with 22% of Māori whānau indicating this was somewhat true compared to 24% of non-Māori whānau. This left 41% Māori and 35% of non-Māori whānau who stated this was very true, revealing that 6% of Māori whānau had greater aspirations for their child’s future than non-Māori.

The questionnaire contained a section for open-ended responses in order to investigate whānau perceptions of school, aspirations for their tamariki and the qualities of effective teachers. Again, there were only very small differences between Māori and non-Māori whānau responses evident in the qualitative data. We asked whānau what their tamariki liked most about school. We received a total of 736 suggestions which formed the basis of nine key themes, summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2: Parent perceptions about what tamariki like most about school**

What does your child enjoy most about school?	% of comments	Example quote
Social aspects and friendships	31.39%	Seeing her friends, doing activities with her classroom and she loves helping <i>whāea</i> <sup>1</sup> . (Māori parent, year 0–3)
Enjoys learning new things	24.73%	Learning new things, being appreciated or praised when new things are mastered. (Māori parent, year 0–3)

<sup>1</sup> The literal translation is “aunty”, but in the New Zealand education context this word is often used to describe a teacher (<https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?keywords=whaea>).

Curricular – maths/science/technology	19.57%	Maths, arts and crafts, te reo Māori. (Māori parent, year 0–3)
Sports and extracurricular activities	8.15%	Learning experiences, sports, <i>kapa haka</i> <sup>2</sup> , helping others and values friendships. (Māori parent, year 4–6)
Highly effective teachers	6.39%	How her teacher makes her feel when doing school work and achieving even when she struggles with something. (non-Māori parent, year 4–6)
Learning collaboratively	1.77%	Learning with friends makes him learn faster and better. (non-Māori parent, year 0–3)
Utilising resources and technology	1.49%	Using technology like his Chromebook. (Māori parent, year 4–6)
Mātauranga, <i>tikanga</i> (customs) and te ao Māori	0.95%	Learning new things about their culture. (Māori parent, year 7–8)
Other (e.g., self-determination, positive learning environments)	5.57%	We appreciate the model of <i>tuakana teina</i> * they instil in our tamariki. (Māori parent, year 4–6)

\**Tuakana-teina* is a concept from te ao Māori and refers to the relationship between an older (*tuakana*) person and a younger (*teina*) person. Within teaching and learning contexts, this can take a variety of forms such as peer to peer, younger to older, older to younger, or able/expert to less able/expert.

A further set of questions asked participants about their aspirations for their tamariki once they completed their time at school, and what careers whānau thought would suit their children in the future. Most whānau (65%) suggested they wanted their children to go on to higher education, such as polytech or university, and this was consistent across Māori and non-Māori whānau. Some respondents suggested their tamariki should go straight into the workforce (12%). Small proportions suggested other pathways: apprenticeships (1%), travel (1%), community service (<1%) or join the defence forces (<1%). Many whānau (19%) indicated they did not mind what their tamariki did in the future, as long as they were happy and kind. When asked what jobs might suit their tamariki in future, just over one-third suggested a career in one of the sciences or in teaching would best suit their children, who were described as intelligent, curious, enterprising and helpful. The remaining 61% gave a variety of different roles from film producer to farmer. Sporting and nutrition/wellbeing was supported by 8% of Māori whānau as a suitable career; 5% of Māori whānau supported the notion of their tamariki learning a trade; and 5% supported their tamariki joining the defence force.

The questionnaire also asked whānau what teachers can do to help their tamariki learn and succeed in school. Many of the parents' comments about effective teaching pedagogy aligned with culturally responsive and relational practice (CRRP). In general, whānau wanted their tamariki to be in learning environments that were positive and safe, and where children could direct their own learning towards their own interests. Some whānau, however, preferred a more traditional classroom environment with a focus on the curriculum (6%) and more boundaries for behaviour management in the classroom (8%).

<sup>2</sup> Māori performing group (<https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?keywords=kapa+haka>).

The findings are summarised in Table 3. CRRP themes are explained further in the subsequent Discussion section.

**Table 3: Parents perceptions of teachers' pedagogy that supports learning**

<b>What can teachers do to help your tamariki learn best?</b>	<b>% of comments</b>	<b>Example comment</b>	<b>CRRP theme</b>
Listen to them	16.91%	Listen and be on the same level as the kids. (Māori parent, year 4–6)	<i>Ako</i>
Give them praise and encouragement	15.61%	Celebrate their successes and make them feel valued. (non-Māori parent, year 0–3)	<i>Whānaungatanga</i>
Have a genuine interest and care for them as individuals	14.74%	Let the child know you care, they turn off if they feel the teacher doesn't like them. (non-Māori parent, year 7–8)	Whānaungatanga
Use a range of strategies to help all learners	9.68%	Teach the child as an individual. Some kids don't learn the same as others. (Māori parent, year 4–6)	<i>Wānanga</i>
Be patient, understanding and kind	9.10%	Keep teaching and be patient and encourage and help them in areas they need help the most. (Māori parent, year 0–3)	<i>Manaakitanga (kindness)</i>
Classroom/behaviour management	7.93%	Set firm boundaries. A sense of belonging and knowing what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. (non-Māori parent, year 0–3)	Kaupapa
Nurturing learning environment	6.92%	Provide a safe environment where children can try things without fear of mistakes. (non-Māori parent, year 0–3)	Kaupapa
Have and encourage high expectations	6.07%	Encourage them to work hard and be the best person they can be, doing what they love ... find that passion or talent!!! (Māori parent, year 4–6)	Kaupapa
Ensure curriculum is appropriate and interesting	5.64%	Teach children life skills, cooking, cleaning, finance, etc. Sets them up for life in the future. (non-Māori parent, year 0–3)	Wānanga
Help them find their passion/strengths	3.61%	Know what special interests and skills they have so these can be encouraged. (non-Māori parent, year 4–6)	<i>Mahi tahi</i>
Be fair, don't discriminate	2.89%	Fair judgement on all students. (non-Māori parent, year 0–3)	<i>Kotahitanga</i>
Involve the whānau more	2.31%	Keep a good line of communication with the parents. (non-Māori parent, year 4–6)	Whānaungatanga

Other (e.g., 1:1 time, groupwork, tuakana/teina)	5.78%	Never give up, a child is like a sponge they keep on absorbing not only knowledge but experiences, life skills and such. (Māori parent, year 7–8)	Whānaungatanga/ Kaupapa
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## Discussion

### Whānau responses demonstrate support of CRRP

The research question regarding the expectations of whānau about how school leaders and teachers can support their children's academic and social development are evident in the results. The quantitative and qualitative data from the whānau surveys clearly demonstrated that, in the 12 schools who participated in this case study, whānau understood that their tamariki benefited and enjoyed a culturally responsive teaching and school environment. CRRP fosters learning contexts where:

Relationships of care and connectedness are fundamental (whānaungatanga); power is shared and learners have the right to equity and self-determination (mahi tahi, kotahitanga); culture counts, learners' understandings form the basis of their identity and learning (whakapapa); sense-making is dialogic, interactive and ongoing (ako); decision-making and practice is responsive to relevant evidence (wānanga); our common vision and interdependent roles and responsibilities focus on the potential of learners—Māori students achieving and enjoying educational success as Māori (kaupapa). (Kia Eke Panuku, 2015, p. 1)

The responses largely matched a pedagogy that is culturally responsive, relational, and facilitative of Māori student motivation, engagement and achievement.

The findings of this study support Bishop and Berryman's (2006) assertion that teachers who implement pedagogies that support interdependence and power sharing are respectful of culture. They also create opportunities for learning that are interactive and dialogic, and acknowledge the importance of relational connectedness to ensure Māori learners can enjoy and achieve education success *as* Māori. The qualitative results of this project show that many whānau value teachers who provide a nurturing learning environment with an interesting curriculum that is culturally relevant and future focused. As a whole, the data collected for this project supports the use of culturally responsive relational pedagogies, as related practices continue to be relevant and valued by Māori whānau.

Relationships are a key component of culturally responsive pedagogies. When asked "what does your child enjoy most about school?" 31.39% of parents responded "social aspects and friendships", indicating that schools offer students important opportunities for social learning and fulfilment. The relationship between student and teacher is particularly important. Many parents wanted teachers to listen to their children (16.91%), encourage and celebrate them (15.61%), and show genuine care and interest in students as unique individuals (14.74%). Evidently, the parents in this study value teachers developing positive, caring and reciprocal learning relationships with their tamariki wherein the individual strengths and interests of their tamariki are seen and fostered. Relationships foster success for all students, and research indicates that positive relationships between Māori students and teachers can combat the low teacher expectations and racism that Māori students can experience at school (Bishop et al., 2009). Many parents commented that they wanted their child's teacher to simply know, understand and love them.

A central component to CRRP is learning that is relevant and builds on the prior knowledge and experiences of students (Berryman et al., 2018). When culture is central to learning activities, students are more likely to find learning relatable, and are able to build on new information and ideas by utilising their prior cultural experiences and understandings (Bishop et al., 2009). This culturally responsive approach is supported by parents in this study, illustrated in the comments from whānau regarding localised curriculum content, supporting the idea that knowing who you are and where you are from is an important facet of being Māori (Hutchings et al., 2012). Embedded in that notion of whakapapa and genealogy is the importance of familiarity and comfort around your own indigenous language. All parents who participated in this research (Māori and non-Māori) supported the increased use of te reo Māori in the classroom and school context. Increased use of te reo Māori remains a critical issue for Māori (Hutchings et al., 2012), and therefore “normalising” the learning of the reo in mainstream schools and in wider society is regarded as an opportunity to right the wrongs of the past and ultimately treat the language as a *taonga* (treasure) that must be protected and encouraged (Bright et al., 2015). Having culturally specific and relevant curriculum including role models is also vital for Māori student success (Webber et al., 2021; Webber & Macfarlane, 2019). However, this study showed that te reo Māori is valued by both Māori and non-Māori whānau, emphasising the importance of Māori knowledge and language as critical for developing a sense of belonging for all students and whānau.

Whānau in this study indicated that success in education should not simply encompass academic outcomes and should value social, personal and cultural development alongside academic achievement. These participant comments align with existing research connecting a strong cultural identity with academic resilience and success (Macfarlane et al., 2014; Webber, 2012). Notions of a strong cultural identity are explained by Hutchings et al. (2012) as related to self-esteem and a sense of “belonging” in young people. The Mana Model is an existing model that contends that Māori student success is deeply tied to their ethnic and cultural identity (Webber & Macfarlane, 2020). The model depicts five “optimal cultural conditions” that, together, foster *mana tangata* (cultural status and pride) for Māori students, and suggests these components are key to educational, social and personal success. The five conditions are “*Mana Whānau* (familial pride), *Mana Motuhake* (personal pride and a sense of embedded achievement), *Mana Tū* (tenacity and self-esteem), *Mana Ūkaipō* (belonging and connectedness) and *Mana Tangatarua* (broad knowledge and skills)” (Webber & Macfarlane, 2020, p. 26). While a full exploration of this model is beyond the scope of this paper, the Mana Model illustrates how Māori achievement and wellbeing involves multifaceted school, social, personal, spiritual and cultural elements, and that cultural identity is central to Māori success and should therefore be supported within education contexts.

Māori whānau and communities play a crucial role in developing the cultural identity of tamariki Māori and are rich resources of cultural knowledge (Webber & Macfarlane, 2019). As Berryman et al. (2018) outline, developing relationships with parents, whānau and communities is a way to access and appropriately incorporate cultural knowledge and experiences that will support the cultural identity of students. Establishing a synergy between home and school environments in which cultural knowledge and identity is valued and supported is one way that schools can support the holistic wellbeing of students. As Durie (2006) puts it, this has a “profound effect on Māori potential” (p. 20). Interestingly, only 2.31% of whānau communicated that involving whānau would help their children learn best. This is lower than expected, given the research outlining the significance of whānau for Māori students (Rubie-Davies et al., 2018) and the benefits that whānau involvement can have for cultural identity, engagement and success (Alton-Lee et al., 2009; Bull et al., 2008; Webber et al., 2016). Although it was not a strong theme expressed by whānau themselves, whānau involvement remains an influential way for schools to be aware of whānau aspirations and needs, as well as to enact the forms of culturally responsive teaching pedagogies that are valued by whānau and expressed in this study. For instance,

whānau are often the most influential source of Māori student cultural identity, efficacy and assets (Duckworth et al., 2021; Macfarlane et al., 2014; Webber et al., 2021); therefore, whānau are best placed to support educators to get to know their individual students (including cultural identities) and develop a relevant curriculum.

The results of this study underpin previous research that demonstrates culturally responsive approaches and relational pedagogies support the achievement of all students. The whānau results demonstrate that there were no statistically significant differences between the responses of Māori and non-Māori parents in terms of how they encourage their tamariki with their learning at school and their views and values about teachers' pedagogy and interactions with students. This is a significant finding that challenges the existing stereotypes and biases currently operating in schools. The New Zealand ERO school reviews and national evaluations, and the research that underpins their latest *School Evaluation Indicators*, show that, when schools accelerate student achievement for Māori, all students accelerate (Education Review Office, 2016). The findings in this paper further demonstrate that meeting the needs of Māori students and whānau concurrently supports non-Māori students and their whānau, increasing achievement opportunities for all.

Despite historical educational injustices, Māori whānau continue to be supportive and hopeful about the education system providing their tamariki with the educational outcomes they need to be successful. While the New Zealand educational context outlined in this paper highlights a consistent gap between Māori and non-Māori achievement, the current study shows that for these participants this gap is not due to a lack of parental aspiration or lack of faith in the education system. Māori whānau who participated in this study indicated the same aspirations for their tamariki pursuing further tertiary study as non-Māori whānau. Some whānau were able to link their child's interests/talents to a vocation and other whānau comments about their child's future were more focused on expressing a desire for them to have a healthy and happy life. This research supports the assertion by Webber et al. (2016) that teachers need to work closely with students and their whānau to promote achievement and academic success toward clearly achievable goals so that students feel the strength of collective efficacy to support them in their achievements. School initiatives that promote academic counselling conferences with whānau as partners can begin at an early age to provide ideas and strategies for goal setting, pathway planning, reviewing academic progress and celebrating success (Webber et al., 2016). These partnership strategies help produce informed whānau who can participate and contribute fully in the education of their tamariki (Hutchings et al., 2012).

### **Influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on this research**

The context for this research project meant that whānau were participating and commenting on the surveys in a very uncertain and anxious time during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic. While Māori whānau value cultural and social outcomes such as happiness and wellbeing (Whitinui, 2017), their comments regarding aspirations for their tamariki to have a "happy life" could have been heightened by the experiences of life during lockdown (Choi et al., 2021) in an environment of economic uncertainty caused by job losses.

The types of job aspirations parents recorded in their survey responses could also have been impacted by the pandemic context. It was obvious there were going to be future requirements for a labour force in the health and social services sector to deal with the ongoing impacts of the pandemic. Parents who responded to the survey noted careers in the sciences (27%) as being desirable and also considered teaching favourably (11%). While similar numbers of Māori and non-Māori parents favoured teaching,

21% of Māori and 33% of non-Māori parents favoured professional science careers. Within this category, Māori parents were also less likely (5%) than non-Māori parents (14%) to believe that a career in health (as a doctor or nurse) would suit their tamariki. Severinsen et al. (2021) discuss the value of indigenous knowledge and leadership within public health and the shortcomings of the top-down government approach to COVID-19 for Māori. The lack of consultation with Māori communities and a government health response that prioritised a Western worldview (Jones, 2020; Severinsen et al., 2021) may have been isolating for Māori, and may have influenced Māori parent perspectives on the suitability of science and health careers for their tamariki. Interestingly, more Māori parents (4%) than non-Māori parents (1%) noted that a career in hospitality/tourism would suit their tamariki.

## Conclusion

The research reported on in this paper builds on and consolidates research by Webber and Macfarlane (2019) which was the first of its kind to examine Māori student success from the perspective of Māori students, whānau, community members and teachers from one tribal region. Their important iwi-initiated research project emphasised that success as Māori is unique to specific contexts, *hapū* (subtribe) /iwi and school communities (Webber & Macfarlane, 2019). Their research concluded that collaborations between academics and practitioners that draw upon iwi perspectives with an inquiry-focused methodology has much to contribute to international research.

This study was strengths-based in that it focused on Māori whānau views of the culturally responsive and relational pedagogies and te ao Māori approaches that supported increased engagement and outcomes for their tamariki. The findings of this study align with existing research that shows that Māori whānau have high aspirations and hopes for their tamariki. This paper has outlined how many Māori and non-Māori parents hold similar views of their tamariki and their abilities, and are equally committed to the educational and vocational futures of their children. Furthermore, both Māori and non-Māori parents discussed the importance of culturally responsive teaching pedagogies and hoped that their children will be appreciated as individuals and holistically nurtured at school.

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