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TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE KURAHUNA
MAHI A ATUA

TĒNEI TE PŌ NAU MAI TE AO- TRANSFORMATION IN ACTION

Mahi a Atua:

Committed to developing indigenous systems for positive community outcomes.

Operationalising Mahi A Atua – Te Hiringa Matua, Camberley School, & Ngātahi Takitahi.

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Be brave, be bold, be curious, and embrace the potential of Mahi a Atua and Te KuraHuna!

The pūrākau of Mataora, tells the story of an ariki (high chief) who had believed he was not accountable to anybody. However, guided by the love he had for his wife, Niwareka, Mataora became a kaitiaki for changing attitudes, beliefs and behaviour; firstly his own and then actively influencing changes in those around him. Guided by the knowledge embedded in the pūrākau of Mataora, Te Whare Wānanga o Te KuraHuna understands genuinely addressing equity for Māori requires an uniquely transformative Indigenous approach. Te KuraHuna is the kaitiaki of Mahi a Atua: a ‘way of being’ which privileges Indigenous knowledge and practice as the basis for addressing institutional racism, strengthening best practice, and realising equitable outcomes for Māori.¹

Directly responding to evidence presented across multiple reports, inquiries and reviews that institutional racism must be addressed in order to realise equitable outcomes for Māori², alongside overtly operationalising the necessary paradigm shift to whānau ora and whānau-centred practice, Te KuraHuna and Mahi a Atua are centrally positioned to realise the systemic innovation and transformation across sectors which has long been called for. This paper, part of the *Tēnei te Po Nau Mai Te Ao - Transformation in Action Series*³, examines three settings in which Mahi a Atua has been operationalised.

Introduction

Te Whare Wānanga o Te KuraHuna plays a central role in meeting the growing demand across sectors for a workforce able to effectively practice from a mātauranga Māori, whānau ora and whānau-centred practice base. Broadly growing a critical mass of

Mataora, change agents skilled in the application of Mahi a Atua, is essential to realising the critical consciousness required to address institutional racism and generate systemic transformation. This paper overviews three different settings where Mahi a Atua has

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been operationalised: Te Hiringa Matua, Camberley School, and Ngātahi Takitahi.

Te Hiringa Matua

In 2016, the Ministry of Health funded three District Health Boards (DHBs) to deliver Pregnancy and Parenting Services (PPS); intensive, assertive outreach case-coordination services for pregnant women, and parents of children under three years, who were experiencing problems with alcohol and other drugs, and were poorly connected to health and social services.⁴ The Hauora Tairāwhiti PPS, Te Hiringa Matua, is led by Ngāti Porou Hauora, and delivered by three community providers.

Recognising that a mainstream clinically-led and delivered service model would not effectively reach whānau in Tairāwhiti, and would continue to perpetuate inequity for Māori, Te Hiringa Matua prioritised the reinstatement of mātauranga Māori, whānau-centred practice, and the elimination of institutional racism. Te Kurahuna was involved in both the design and operationalising of Te Hiringa Matua, including training Mataora to implement and deliver Mahi a Atua wānanga for whānau engaging with Te Hiringa Matua. Centrally located in the city, with the capacity for whānau to self-refer, although Te Hiringa Matua are focused on whānau Māori, all ethnicities are welcome.

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An evaluation of Te Hiringa Matua shows the majority of referrals were self or whānau

referrals. Of importance is that although service entry was tightly controlled in the original PPS service design, Te Hiringa Matua have been able to, through utilising Mahi a Atua wānanga, support all whānau, including those who did not fit the strict PPS access criteria. This included finding other services and supports which were more appropriate for whānau.⁵

Te Hiringa Matua goes beyond a narrow bio-medically focused clinical model which views whānau complexity solely from the perspective of whānau dysfunction.

Reflecting the influence of Te Kurahuna and Mahi a Atua, Te Hiringa Matua goes beyond a narrow bio-medically focused clinical model which views whānau complexity solely from the perspective of whānau dysfunction. This is as opposed to such complexities being a consequence of ongoing systemic institutional racism. Whānau who present to Te Hiringa Matua often experience interrelated, complex issues and involvement with multiple agencies. The training provided by Te Kurahuna enhances understanding that these issues and the associated development of long term sustainable pathways forward for whānau must be understood within the broader historical and sociocultural context of institutional racism. Integral to this is an emphasis on the importance of systemic change across sectors such as justice and child welfare.

Reflecting the centrality of relationships to equitable outcomes, the evaluation of Te Hiringa Matua recognised initial engagement with whānau was often difficult, with the development of a trusting relationship the critical first step.⁶ Addressing the institutional racism which impacts on the development of

such relationships, and subsequently the achievement of equitable outcomes for Māori, is a key focus for Te Kurahuna and Mahi a Atua.

... the first time whānau felt heard and their needs understood.

The Te Hiringa Matua evaluation also reported whānau felt respected by the Te Hiringa Matua team, with this being the first time whānau felt heard and their needs understood. This included understanding that issues such as housing and income support often needed to be addressed before addiction related issues could be specifically focused on. Whānau were also supported in their interactions with the Ministry for Children and/or the justice system. For example, described as making a significant difference for whānau, Te Hiringa Matua provided a warm, tamariki friendly environment for supervised access visits.⁷

Overall, Te Hiringa Matua demonstrated positive outcomes of PPS for whānau, as well as the effectiveness of Kaupapa Māori services which reinstate mātauranga Māori and in the process reduce the impacts of colonisation on whānau Māori.⁸ The evaluation concluded disparities for Māori could be addressed via the expansion of the Te Hiringa Matua Mahi a Atua based service model.⁹

Camberley School

Camberley School in Hastings caters for students from Years 1 to 6. The relationship between Te Kurahuna and Camberley began when several staff from the school attended Mahi a Atua wānanga as individuals. Staff reported gaining a sense of validation from the wānanga, specifically in relation to the inner turmoil felt by Māori educators which occurred as a result of the direct and indirect institutional racism and bias which operates across mainstream education settings. These experiences laid the foundation for seeing opportunities to introduce Mahi a Atua more widely across the Camberley school environment.¹⁰

... activating a conscious decision and commitment to begin a journey of Indigenising the kura space and actively removing systemic blockages in order to unapologetically be and thrive as Māori.¹¹

Of importance to Camberley School was the need to heal the impacts of institutional racism already being experienced in education, both as individual practitioners, and as a school embedded in a high needs, largely Māori community, alongside identifying how institutional racism was still present within the kura. All kura staff attended Mahi a Atua wānanga, in the process activating a conscious decision and commitment to begin a journey of Indigenising the kura space and actively removing systemic blockages in order to unapologetically be and thrive as Māori.¹²

What was learnt in Mahi a Atua wānanga was innovated upon as pūrākau were shared with tamariki early in their life and educational journey.

This commitment is seen in the Camberley School Strategic Aims 2020-2023 where the vision of Kia Ū (to embody and develop students conceptual understanding); Kia Ora (to grow understanding and applied practice); and Kia Rere (to take knowledge and practice and innovate), is explicitly premised upon the three Mahi a Atua principles of Tēnei te Pō, Nau mai te Ao; Ka mā te ariki, ka mā te tauria; and Hongihongi te wheiwheiā.¹³ Strategic aims and actions for Camberley School include: learners will be immersed in cultural narratives embracing a world view and unlocking creative and cultural potential; curriculum design and behaviour management plans align with Atua; teacher and student inquiry, and learning environments are set up and based on Atua; pūrākau are visible and taught in all spaces; and staff partake in school-wide Mahi a Atua professional development.¹⁴

Camberley School focused on intentionally integrating pūrākau into the curriculum they

had created in response to their community. What was learnt in Mahi a Atua wānanga was innovated upon as pūrākau were shared with tamariki early in their life and educational journey. At the same time, Mahi a Atua was woven into the approach used by kaimahi in Rongo Mauri, a whānau-serving-whanau model based at Camberley School.

“Parents, tamariki, grandparents, caregivers and siblings can be both leaders and learners; givers and receivers within their own whare. They can heal and be healed, with and for each other”.¹⁵

All Rongo Mauri kaimahi have attended Mahi a Atua wānanga and the Rangi Parauri training to become Mataora, with the same pūrākau tamariki learn also being used in the healing and support work with whānau. This intentional sharing of pūrākau across both spaces enables pūrākau to become living tools and narratives within homes and the wider community. “Parents, tamariki, grandparents, caregivers and siblings can be both leaders and learners; givers and receivers within their own whare. They can heal and be healed, with and for each other”.¹⁶

Mahi a Atua resulted in the creation of many new tools for their kete, including narratives which assisted tamariki to navigate their own lives.¹⁷

The benefits of Mahi a Atua were reported as being immediately evident across the kura, with tamariki being excited and focused, as they contributed, created, and explored ideas and storylines within the pūrākau. Discussions regarding similarities and the relevance of the pūrākau to their own families and situations became commonplace, as did the ability of tamariki to observe themselves objectively and to consider the perspectives of others.¹⁸ Mahi a Atua resulted in the creation of many new tools for their kete, including narratives which assisted tamariki to navigate their own lives.¹⁹

Ngātahi Takitahi

... there was a sense of liberation for staff who had undertaken Mahi a Atua training in being supported to work in ways which felt ‘normal’

Te Paepae Arahi (TPA) is an organisation based in Te Awakairangi/Hutt Valley, who deliver strength-based supports to rangatahi via a school-based programme *Ngātahi Takitahi (In Schools Programme)*. Set within a marae context, this programme utilises a whānau ora, mātauranga Māori, and tikanga Māori to assist rangatahi find a place they can stand strong.²⁰ TPA also explicitly understands youth wellbeing, rangatahi ora and resilience as a priority equity issue for Māori. Ngātahi Takitahi programme staff undertook Mahi a Atua training which emphasised the deliberate engagement of mātauranga Māori and culturally informed practices as a basis for understanding and resolving issues with whānau.²¹

Findings from the evaluation of Ngātahi Takitahi found there was a sense of liberation for staff who had undertaken Mahi a Atua training in being supported to work in ways which felt ‘normal’, and being able to build on the wealth of their existing skills. Gaining more confidence in the application of pūrākau which built relationships and fostered identity helped staff to better connect with, support and affirm their taura.

Not only was Mahi a Atua seen as an ideal way to engage students, importantly it also engaged their whānau. From a taura perspective, the pūrākau content and being affirmed as Maori were identified as key benefits of Ngātahi Takitahi.²²

Conclusion

Truly transformative Indigenous theories are those which are 'owned' and 'make sense' to those communities.²³

With the potential of Mahi a Atua yet to be fully realised, Te Whare Wānanga o Te Kurahuna occupies a central role in meeting the growing demand across sectors for a workforce able to effectively practice from a

mātauranga Māori, whānau ora and whānau-centred practice base. Growing this broad mass of Mataora is essential to realising the critical consciousness required to address institutional racism and generate systemic transformation. Truly transformative Indigenous theories are those which are 'owned' and 'make sense' to those communities.²⁴ That Te Kurahuna training is seen as inclusive and valued by the community itself²⁵ lends weight to central role being played by Te Kurahuna in operationalising systemic transformation across sectors.

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