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**'ĀKONO'ANGA MĀORI:
PRACTICES THAT ENABLE EDUCATION SUCCESS FOR
COOK ISLANDS MĀORI LEARNERS**

A thesis
submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education
at

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by
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MANAKO KITEA-KORE¹

Within the context of education research, our stories as Cook Islands Māori living in Aotearoa New Zealand are rarely told from our own lived experiences, even more so in Tokoroa. I see this lack of representation as significant, given our migration from the 1950s onwards in search of a better life, as well as our contribution to the economic development of this country. Our experiences are often absorbed into broader Pasifika-Pacific narratives, which overlook our distinct ways of being and knowing, as well as our histories and aspirations. Being positioned under this umbrella further generalises our experiences, specific needs, and understandings of education success as defined by our own communities. This has significantly impacted on how we have experienced education, and what it has been to experience success.

In this thesis, I investigate the practice traditions that have enabled education success for Cook Islands Māori students in Tokoroa. My aim was to understand how success is created by examining the conditions that shape students' experiences, relationships, and opportunities for learning. To do this, I draw on a theoretical framework grounded in 'Ākono'anga Māori (Cook Islands Māori way of life), bringing together Vā and the Theory of Practice Architectures to understand these conditions. I am guided by a Tivaivai methodology, which weaves together the stories, histories, and practices of Cook Islands Māori families in Tokoroa over time. Within this methodology, I use Patu Tuatua as the method to gather stories from participants, through culturally grounded ways of sharing knowledge.

My exploration of education policy, curriculum, pedagogical practices, assessment practices, and definitions of success across four time periods, the pre-missionary period in the Cook Islands, the missionary period, the colonial period, and the period of migration to Aotearoa New Zealand, demonstrates that education success for Cook Islands Māori learners is contingent on four significant conditions. I found that our learners experience success when their aspirations and needs are reflected in education policy, their identities are visible in the curriculum, their ways of learning are supported through culturally relational and sustaining practices, and their progress is recognised through forms of measurement that reflect their strengths. I also found that the resilience of our learners enables them to continue to experience education success by remaining grounded in their practice traditions, despite enduring constraints within education.

I argue that, in order to reverse the deficit positioning that continues to underserve Cook Islands Māori learners, schools need to recognise, support, and strengthen these practices if they are to

¹ Abstract

create conditions where our learners succeed. I maintain that it is imperative for strong connections between home, Church, community, and the school to be sustained, as education success is enabled when sites of learning values the practices that collectively enable our learners to experience education success.

'AKAEPAEPA²

To my grandmother Tereapii Turu Tiro who dreamed this, my mother Kura who encouraged this, my husband Corey and our children Lahaina and Nuhaka, Hawea and Teijana, Keawe and Dria, Hoana and Jahvaiah, who always believed it was possible, my enduring sources of wisdom and knowledge, Auntie Jean and Julius, and finally my 'ōire for their continuous support...we did it.

To Tewaimona-Jae Tereapii, Anela Huamokura, Manaianui Teaukura Tamarua, and all my moko angels still to come...the reason for finishing was and will always be you.

² Dedication

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I acknowledge my grandmother Tereapii Turu Tiro, who is no longer with us, but this thesis is just as much hers as it is mine. She dreamed it and inspired it. She believed that education would open opportunities for me in ways that she had been denied. If not for her, this journey would not have been possible. I also acknowledge my other grandparents who have also passed on, Bateseba Daniels, Reverend Timote Turu and Tuanu Ka who were constants in my life and supported me through this journey before their passing.

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TAPURA UPOKO-TUATUA⁶

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'AKAPOTO'ANGA O TE AU KUPU⁷

ERO	Education Review Office
LDS	Latter-day Saints
LMS	London Missionary Society
MOE	Ministry of Education
MPP	Ministry of Pacific Peoples
NCEA	National Certificate of Education Achievement
NZFP	New Zealand Forest Products
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
PICC	Pacific Islands Congregation Church
PIPC	Pacific Islands Presbyterian Church
THS	Tokoroa High School

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⁷ Abbreviations

TE KAPI KANAPA⁸

'akapapa'anga	to construct or prepare one's genealogy
akataka patoa	reciprocity
'akatomo'anga	introduction
'atui/'atuitui/'atui'anga	to connect
'akaue'anga	responsibilities, duties
'ākono'anga	practices, way of life
'Ākono'anga Māori	Cook Islands Māori culture or way of life
Ariki	high chief
aro'a	love/compassion
atua	god
'enua	land
iti tangata Māori	Cook Islands Māori
karakia	prayer
kite Māori	Cook Islands Māori knowledge
kōpu tangata	family, extended family
māmā	mother, grandmother, elderly women
mana	rights, dignity of a person
māpū	young people, youth
marae	sacred meeting place
mataiapo	sub-chief
matakeinanga	tribe
metua	parent, elders
moana	ocean

⁸ Glossary

mokopuna	grandchild, grandchildren
ngakau	heart
'ōire	village, town
Pāpā	grandfather, elderly men
papa'ā	European/Caucasian
papa'anga	genealogy
patu tuatua	conversation, storying
piri'anga	relationship
pure	prayer
reo	language
reo Māori	Māori language
Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani	Cook Islands Māori language
ta'aka'aka	humility
ta'oko'ta'i	unite, collaborate and work towards a common purpose
tapu	sacred
students	student
ta'unga	expert
tōpiri'anga	conclusion
tu'anga	chapter
tuoro	Cook Islands welcoming ceremony
turanga	position
tupuna	grandparent
vā	space, gap, relational space

Tu'anga Mua: E Tere 'Āpi'i

Chapter One: An Education Journey

'AKATOMO'ANGA⁹

Te karanga nei tēia pe'e:

Taravao Nukutua
Pararo koe
Tō aro pāia i te kākara
E 'iku tākiri
Ko Nukumanini Taupare ko Te-Maru-o-Toi e Iēkōkō!

Ko Tereapii tōku ingoa.
Ko Howard Rota tōku metua tāne.
Ko Kura Daniel tōku metua va'ine.
I te tua o tōku metua tāne, e mokopuna au nā Tereapii Turu Tiro rāua ko Taruia John Rota.
I te tua o tōku metua va'ine, e mokopuna au nā Maa Daniel rāua ko Bateseba Teuru.
Ko Corey Solomon tāku 'akaperepere.
E ā a māua tamariki.
Ko Lahaina te mata'iapo.
Ko Hawea raua ko Keawe te ngā tamāroa.
Ko Hoana-Rose te peniamina.
Nō Aitutaki mai au.
Ko Nikaupara e Amuri te ngā 'ōire.
Ānau ia au e tupu au nō roto mai i te 'ōire ko Tokoroa. Kia orana.

My name is Tereapii.
My father is Howard Rota.
My mother is Kura Daniel.
On my father's side, I am a grandchild of Tereapii Turu Tiro and Taruia John Rota.
On my mother's side, I am a grandchild of Maa Daniel and Bateseba Teuru.
Corey Solomon is my treasured husband.
We have four children.
Our eldest child is Lahaina.
Hawea and Keawe are our sons.
Hoana-Rose is our youngest child.
I am from Aitutaki.

⁹ Introduction

*Nikaupara and Amuri are my villages.
I was born and raised in Tokoroa.
Kia Orana.*

I preface this tu'anga (chapter) by introducing myself through the practice tradition of 'akapapa'anga (genealogy) which is customary in 'Ākono'anga Māori (Cook Islands Māori ways of being and knowing). Sharing my genealogy, is my way of grounding this narrative in the understanding that who I am, has been shaped by the lives of those who came before me. It positions me within a larger tapestry of the history of Cook Islands Māori peoples, emphasising that the knowledge and practices discussed in this thesis are not isolated but deeply rooted across generations. By beginning with 'akapapa'anga, I frame this thesis in a way that honours and sustains Cook Islands Māori practice traditions. The purpose of this tu'anga then is to introduce you to this study, how I came to carry out this research, and outline the context and questions that guide it.

SETTING THE SCENE

In this section of this tu'anga, I establish the context that led me to undertake this research. This includes my own educational journey, how my family came to be in Tokoroa, and my journey as a teacher at Tokoroa High School. It also includes a description of my Cook Islands community - 'Ōire Tokoroa, and its' unique story of settlement in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Towards a PhD

I grew up with stories. As a child of Cook Islands Māori migrants, born and raised in Aotearoa New Zealand, stories were my family's way of connecting myself and my siblings to our homeland of Aitutaki. So, it seems fitting that at the centre of this doctoral investigation are stories. Stories and storying are practices and ways of knowing that matter to Pasifika-Pacific communities, including Cook Islands Māori. Before I show how stories and storying are woven into this doctoral study, let me ground my why.

My name is Tere'āpi'i. In Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani (Cook Islands Māori), 'Tere' means 'to travel' or 'go to', while 'āpi'i' means 'school' or 'to learn'. My name literally means 'to travel to school', but I like to tell people it means 'education journey'. It sounds more sophisticated. Tere'āpi'i-o-Ngaro Turu Tiro, whose name I carry, is my paternal grandmother. Interestingly, her name literally means 'Ngaro travelled to school'. Ngaro, who was my great-grandfather's brother, travelled to Fiji in the early years of the 20th century, as a young man and trained to be a schoolteacher. To commemorate this proud moment my great-grandfather Turu Tiro, named his

daughter after his brother's journey. Naming children after important events was a common practice for Cook Islands Māori. Turu Tiro, who was also a schoolteacher, was famous for the physical consequences he liberally dished out to his students (there are many stories). But more importantly, Turu was famous for being a composer of Cook Islands music of all genres, kapa rima (action songs), 'imene tuki (traditional hymns), 'ura pa'u (drum dance) and 'ūtē (traditional song).

Fortunately, my grandmother and I were close. When she reminisced about her childhood, I was always willing to be her sounding ear. On one occasion, I listened intently as she recalled memories of her grandfather Tiro Ngaropu. Tiro was a chief in his time and was well known for his role in the growth of Christianity amongst the people of Aitutaki but more notably, in our 'ōire of Nikaupara. Tiro was proud of his son's 'prestigious' career, a teacher responsible for the education of the island's children. While Turu worked in the local school during the day, Tiro and his wife Ngariki-e-tini worked in the plantation and lagoon, gathering food for their son. With the unconditional love of devoted parents, Tiro and Ngariki-e-Tini provided for the temporal needs of Turu's family. Physical labour was not something they wanted their son to undertake, because they considered his profession as a teacher too important. My grandmother was raised by her grandparents, working alongside them, learning what she could from the both of them.

This story helped me understand my grandmother, her value of education, and why she treated my siblings and I the way she did. She migrated to Aotearoa New Zealand in 1967. As was the practice of families in Tokoroa during that time, her older sister Matariki along with her husband Piki paid for her to come and embrace this 'better life', in this modern papa'ā (Pākehā/European) world. Initially, she worked in a factory as a seamstress, then in an old establishment as a cook for the workers in the forestry and mill. My father joined her in Tokoroa in 1971 as a young teenager, where he met my mother and started a new life with her. As a child, raised in Tokoroa during the 1970s and 1980s, times were challenging for my family. Both of my parents worked in the forestry industry, like many other Cook Islands Māori in our town. Every morning my siblings and I were bundled into our family car and taken to our grandmother's home to be looked after by her, while our parents went to work.

We would climb into bed and rest, as she prepared everything that we needed for the day.

My grandmother was not a woman of many words, unless you made her angry. As a young child, I watched as she walked into the frosty back yard with her mūmū (island dress) and jandals to gather wood for our fire. Once she made the fire, she prepared breakfast for all of us.

While we ate breakfast, she made our beds and prepared our clothes for school. As we prepared for school, she took care of our breakfast dishes, and she always gave us lunch money. Nana never made us lunch. Sandwiches, in her mind, were for papa'ā children, and not something she considered real food. Before we left for school, we sat with her and read our tia - designated bible verses for the day. We took turns reading the English version, then we listened to her read the same verses in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani. Following this we prayed before we left for school. When school ended, we arrived home to a cooked meal. My grandmother did everything for us. We had one job - to go to school and learn. I was the eldest and so the expectation was higher. Her dream right throughout my childhood was for me to attend university and "be somebody". I didn't even know what university was back then, but I listened earnestly. Her dream became mine.

Mum and Dad worked hard to provide for our family. Dad was strict and enforced a regimented schedule that involved studying every night, scriptures and schoolwork, right through our childhood and adolescence. He made the decision not to immerse us in our cultural traditions and language as other Cook Islands Māori families had, deciding it was more beneficial for his children to be engaged in the world of the papa'ā. He was a fierce advocate for the need to have a "good papa'ā education". Mum took it upon herself to do the things that she had seen, in her words, "the papa'ā parents do". She read to us. She spoke "good English" to us. She helped us, as best as she could, with our homework. We didn't really have books, other than the scriptures and a handful of children's books with Bible stories. As the eldest child, I immersed myself in these books, until I knew every story well. Mum attended all our parent interviews and advocated for us when she thought our teachers weren't doing enough. She listened to the advice given to her, and she implemented what she could. While my grandmother was my inspiration, my mother was my quiet champion in the background, and my father, the strict hand ensuring that the goal of education was always a priority.

My grandmother, as with my parents, celebrated every educational achievement with me. I realised at a young age that every achievement was "our" achievement. Whether it was a high school certificate or a university degree, they were "ours". When I earned my bachelor's degree at the University of Waikato, my namesake was emotional. She stood beside me, and we walked together as the master of ceremony announced "our" name. When I received my honour's degree followed by a master's degree, my grandmother was there by my side each time. After my master's graduation she said to me, "did you know that there's one more degree? I saw those people in the maroon gowns. I asked someone why they were wearing that colour and he told me they are all doctors. That's the last degree. I want you to get it". In her eyes it was a simple

request. The words were few but the fire and determination in her eyes spoke volumes about her unwavering belief in me. Once again, her dream became mine.

I developed my desire to learn with my grandmother. This turned into a desire to want more, a desire to believe in her dream for me. "You don't let the papa'ā tell you what you will become", words grounded in my very being, words she constantly spoke throughout my childhood. It was with her that I developed a love for our culture. While our parents raised us with very western ideals, our grandmother immersed us in our culture, kept us connected to our 'ōire (village) in Tokoroa, and ensured we understood our Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani by refusing to speak English to us. I was proud to be Cook Islands Māori because she was proud. I loved our homeland of Aitutaki because she loved it. Our 'ōire Nikaupara in Aitutaki, was home to her and so it was home to me. My relationship with my grandmother motivated me to never stop learning and to pursue the "good education" she dreamed of. But life has a way of interrupting dreams and bringing you back into the lived reality of having families and gaining employment to make ends meet. So, the dream of a PhD was put on hold.

The journey towards this thesis began with a moment of clarity at the close of the 2021 academic year. My youngest child, Hoana-Rose, graduated from high school. With her siblings - Lahaina, Hawea and Keawe, they were nurtured by their devoted father, my mother - their grandmother, and a whole 'ōire of caring relatives and friends. With all four of our children now stepping into adulthood, I realised I could finally turn my attention to something for myself. I reflected on the moment when my nephew Julius was awarded Dux of Tokoroa High School in 2011. That achievement opened a world of possibilities for his younger cousins and brothers, who were in the audience watching. Fast forward 10 years to 2021, when Hoana-Rose received the same honour at her own graduation. Things seemed to have come full circle for my family. These parallel achievements were more than just individual successes. They symbolised the possibilities despite the odds, and speak to the potential, strength, and resilience not just within our family, but also the wider community. It made me wonder, what is it about our community, its practices and traditions, that fostered this collective educational success, even when the stories of Pasifika-Pacific children in Aotearoa New Zealand were less than positive. I decided to pursue my PhD.

Migration to Tokoroa

During the Great Depression in Aotearoa New Zealand, government work schemes employed thousands to plant forests across the country (Healy, 1982). In the decades following World War II, this investment paid off where the nation enjoyed rapid economic growth and industrial

expansion. Forestry became the primary driving force behind the post-war boom. New Zealand Forest Products (NZFP), formerly known as New Zealand Perpetual Forest Forestry Holdings, emerged a leader in the forestry industry after the war. The company's first major plantation was established on a 50,000-acre block near Tokoroa, known as the Maraetai Block (Healy, 1982; Hurd, 2014; NZFP, 1954).

The Kinleith Pulp and Paper Mill was built just outside of Tokoroa not far from the Maraetai Block, to convert the logs harvested in the forests and converted into different grades of paper (Healy, 1982). The mill drew in workers and their families from across the country, transforming the small agricultural settlement into a bustling town (Hurd 2014). Leading this expansion was Managing Director David Henry, a Scottish-born Presbyterian who had emigrated to Aotearoa New Zealand in 1907 (Finkelstein & Shep, 2010). Despite the number of people who moved to Tokoroa to work in the mill, there was a labour shortage across the country. Faced with a staffing shortage, NZFP began recruiting workers from overseas.

Chain migration was used to bring many Aitutaki families across to Tokoroa. Turia Turia, the first Cook Islands Māori employee at the Kinleith Mill (Morgan, 2001) was approached by David Henry and asked if there were many other strong workers like himself back in the homeland. When Turia's reply was yes, he was asked to encourage others to come to Tokoroa as there was work for them (Turia & Turia, n.d). Turia had a large family network, with extended families made up of numerous brothers. Both of my grandfathers were part of this network and took part in the chain migration process that brought them to Tokoroa. The stories of older brothers who worked hard to save up to pay for younger brothers to come and work in Tokoroa is embedded in our migration stories. These brothers worked, repaid their older brothers and then saved up to pay for their families to make the journey. This is the main reason why Tokoroa has a large Cook Islands Māori population from Aitutaki. Families from other islands came too, especially from Rarotonga and Mangaia (Chapple, 1976).

With large numbers of workers and their families arriving in Tokoroa for employment, NZFP took on the task of building the infrastructure needed to support a growing community (Chapple, 1976). The company made an initial request to the government to build state houses in Tokoroa as it had for other communities such as Tasman Pulp and Paper in Kawerau. After a negative response, NZFP built single men's camps and homes for its workforce (Finkelstein & Shep, 2010; McClintock & Taylor, 1983). Company mortgage loans enabled many Cook Islands Māori families to be homeowners. In contrast, other Cook Islands Māori communities,

such as those in South Auckland working in the factories, depended on government-provided housing (Hooper, 1961).

NZFP didn't just help families buy homes, they also donated land to the Pasifika-Pacific community, comprised of Samoan and Cook Islands Māori families, for the purpose of building a Church. To raise the necessary funds, the community organised a tere party¹⁰, a troupe of dancers, singers, and musicians who travelled throughout Cook Islands Māori communities across the country, performing traditional dances for an audience that paid admission and offered generous donations during each show. Once the community had raised the necessary funds, construction on the Church began. In 1958, during Queen's Birthday Weekend, the Pacific Islands Congregational Church (PICC) was opened in Tokoroa.

Figure 1: Pacific Islands Congregational Church, Tokoroa



(photo courtesy of St Lukes Pacific Islands Presbyterian Church, May 2025)

By donating land for a Church and building houses for Cook Islands Māori workers and their families (as well as some Samoan families), NZFP created conditions for them to establish a community in Tokoroa. Families purchased homes in a tight cluster close to the Church, mirroring the spatial layout of their villages back in the Cook Islands, where neighbours, who

¹⁰ Tere Parties is a common practice for Cook Islands Māori communities in Aotearoa, Australia, and the Cook Islands. Groups fundraising for a variety of reasons will travel and perform traditional dances to raise funds. This practice continues today.

were all related in some way, moved freely from one home to another, just as they did back home. My grandparents' home is situated across from the Church. To the left of our family home is my grandfather's sister, our Māmā Lucy's, family home. To the right is Uncle Charlie's (dad's cousin) home. His father's family home, the home of Turia Turia, is around the corner on John Street. Just down from his house, on the left is the home of Samoan family Oliver Cowley. On John Street alone are the family homes of two of my grandfather's brother's, Tamapeni and Maio, Turia's brother Joseph, and a cousin Rongo Manu. On Kelso Street, where the Church site is, and the surrounding streets sit the family homes of many other Cook Islands Māori families.

With the Church at the centre of the 'ōire Cook Islands Māori families positioned themselves to support each other in this new site they decided to call home. Although they had to adapt to a western lifestyle, they were committed to maintaining their identity, their practices, values, and language (P. Pakoti, personal communication, March 29, 2023). The Church played an important role in this. It flourished in the years that followed and experienced some significant changes. In 1969, all Pacific Islands Congregational Churches merged with the Presbyterian Church (Redding, 2012) and the Church in Tokoroa was renamed the Pacific Islands Presbyterian Church (PIPC). Three years later, in 1972, the original building was replaced by a larger, more modern Church to accommodate the growing community. By 1991, the Church complex was further expanded with the addition of a new hall and kitchen and just before its official opening, the Church was renamed the St Lukes Pacific Islands Presbyterian Church (J. Toma-Tuarae, personal communication, April 11, 2023). The original building was moved to the back of the Church and used as another space for Church activities. Today it serves as part of the St Lukes Punanga Reo on the Church site.

Figure 2: St Lukes Pacific Islands Presbyterian Church, Tokoroa



(photo courtesy of Leila Monga, July 2024)

The 16th Star

The Church became more than a place of worship; it served as a cultural hub, a space where Cook Islands Māori values, customs and Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani thrived. Through the Church, the families who migrated supported one another in adapting to their new home, maintaining their traditional practices while also sending financial contributions back to the islands, which helped to fund major development projects and build infrastructure in the homeland. These collective efforts have endured over the years and earned our community the label 'Ōire Tokoroa, the 16th star¹¹ of the Cook Islands, a distinction which we carry with pride (Kingston, 2003).

Most of the original migrants have passed away, leaving behind generations of Cook Islands Māori to carry on their legacy. For those who choose to live as part of the 'ōire (there are still many who don't), life is busy. regular annual and biannual events keep us connected Araura

¹¹ The Cook Islands flags have 15 stars which represent the 15 islands of the Cook Islands. Naming Tokoroa the 16th star is an honour bestowed because of its cultural strength.

Day¹², Uapou Fellowship¹³, Epetoma o te Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani¹⁴, Tatau¹⁵, Te Eiva Nui¹⁶, and Te Maeva Nui¹⁷. In between these events there are baptisms, birthdays, haircutting's, weddings, funerals, and the hosting of tere parties from the Cook Islands, all of which are underpinned by our own 'ākono'anga (cultural practices).

Another unique character of our 'ōire is its pastoral care system. Tokoroa is divided into three small districts called tapere or 'blocks', Tapere Ta'i (Block One), Tapere Rua (Block Two), and Tapere Toru (Block Three). It follows a system back in the Cook Islands where individual islands are divided into districts. In Aitutaki these are also called 'tapere', but in Mangaia they are called 'puna'. In Tokoroa, the families who live in the different blocks work together to support the work of the Church, but also to support each other. There are many Cook Islands Māori families who do not attend worship services at the Church but are members of other denominations. You do not have to be a member of the Church to be included in its pastoral care system or participate in community events. My family are actually members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and we are in Tapere Toru. We choose to remain connected to the 'ōire to carry on the legacy of my grandparents. We also have 'enua groups that represent the islands we are from. We have Araura 'Enua (Aitutaki), Tumutevarovaro (Rarotonga), Pa Enua Tokerau (Northern Islands), Ngāputoru (Atiu, Mauke, and Mitiaro), and Mangaia Society. When we have activities or there are groups visiting from these different islands, the 'enua groups will fundraise money and support. Over the years as people have moved from Tokoroa, or people have passed away, the 'enua groups have declined in numbers. Araura 'Enua remains the biggest group.

Araura is also divided into 'ōire groups for events such as Araura Day. In Aitutaki there are eight 'ōire, but in Tokoroa we have combined these 'ōire so that there are only four groups for Araura Day. These groupings follow the Koni Raoni¹⁸ combinations in Aitutaki. They are

¹² Araura Day is a day created for the community to connect the younger generations of Cook Islands Māori who are from Aitutaki to the cultural dances and stories of the older generation, especially those who migrated in those early years.

¹³ A cultural gathering where the focus is to learn and share traditional hymns and personal stories based on a chosen theme.

¹⁴ Cook Islands Language Week

¹⁵ White Sunday is when children and youth recite Bible verses in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani.

¹⁶ Our local dance competition.

¹⁷ The national dance competition where the Tokoroa community travel to Auckland to compete against other Cook Islands Māori communities in traditional dance and singing.

¹⁸ Every Boxing Day and the day after New Year's Day two villages take turns to dance around the island and fundraise for their villages. The same combination of villages is rotated through the years. These combinations

Tamariki Taupara, Tamariki AU, ARE, and Vaicool. Everyone participates in Araura Day, regardless of denomination or if you are from Araura or not, all are welcome. We have one other group that has existed since our grandparents migrated and that is Te-Maru-o-Toi Performing Arts and Sports Club. This group was created by families from the 'ōire of Nikaupara as a way of holding on to traditions that are village specific. This group is still very much a part of the wider Cook Islands community of 'Ōire Tokoroa.

Finally, although this thesis focuses on 'the Church', as in the St Lukes Pacific Islands Presbyterian Church (PIPC), our Cook Islands Māori families in 'Ōire Tokoroa belong to many Churches. Other than St Lukes PIPC, our people are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Seventh Day Adventist Church, Jehovah's Witness Church, Catholic Church, Activate Church, Free Church and Elim Church. Some don't go to Church. But when we need our people to come together as a community for whatever reason, and there are many, our people will come. This is the strength of the 'ōire, being Cook Islands Māori and being family is more important than denomination, and the Church serves as a marae¹⁹ that brings us all together.

'Āpi'i Teitei o Tokoroa (Tokoroa High School)

The St Lukes PIPC is located on the corner of Kelso Street and Maraetai Road. Tokoroa High School (THS) is situated across from the Church on the Maraetai Roadside. Tokoroa High School was opened in 1957 to "meet the education needs of the rapidly growing town" (THS, 2024, p 6). It is a co-educational school with 502 students on its roll. While Aotearoa Māori make up the largest ethnic group of the student population at 68%, approximately 37% identify as Pasifika-Pacific, the majority of which are Cook Islands Māori (ERO, 2026).

The location of the school is significant, in terms of its placement in the community. While on one side of the school sits the PIPC, on the opposite end of the school sits the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). Approximately 50 metres from the LDS Church is the Samoan Assembly of God Church. To the west of the school, two streets over, is the Seventh Day Adventist Church and the Activate Church. In the opposite direction of the St Lukes PIPC, about 100m is the Samoan Methodist Church. While there is research that states that young Pasifika-Pacific youth are "far less likely to go to Church regularly or identify as religious, and if they do go to Church, it is more likely to be a non-traditional Church or denomination"

are Tautua and Nikaupara (Taupara); Amuri and Ureia (AU), Arutanga and Reureu (ARE), and Vaipeka and Vaipae (Vaicool). In 2025-2026 Tautu will dance on Boxing Day, and my village Nikaupara will dance the day after New Year's Day. ¹⁹ A sacred place

(Salesa, 2017, pg 18), most of the Pasifika-Pacific youth of Tokoroa belong to one of the Churches mentioned. I am unsure of what the attendance rates of Pasifika-Pacific youth are every Saturday or Sunday but when our 'ōire is required to come together for a particular purpose, our mapu (young people), regardless of denomination come to support the cause.

A Teaching Journey

I am currently a teacher at Tokoroa High School and have taught at the school for 17 years. When I started teaching here, I was initially hired to teach a senior "Communication English"¹⁹ class, made up of primarily Pasifika-Pacific and Aotearoa Māori boys, the "league boys" that no one else wanted to, or could, teach. They were renowned for being difficult to manage, had little respect for teachers, and did not produce any evidence of their learning, if there was any learning at all. At the time of my employment, which was in May 2009, I was their fourth teacher that year. As it turned out, these boys were very intelligent and had realised that by making life difficult for their teachers, they would be left to their own devices. This class was one of the many "alternative lower ability" classes that I would teach in my career. These were the cliché "brown" classes, composed almost entirely of Pasifika-Pacific and Aotearoa Māori students, clustered together because they were "incapable", "troublesome", and "underachieving", typical labels of deficit theorising placed on them by educators with low expectations (Fasavalu, 2015).

When I started teaching at Tokoroa High School, our Pasifika-Pacific student achievement results were at the bottom, a pattern consistent from the time the school opened its doors for learning. There were notable outliers over the years such as the achievement of a younger cousin Jimmy Wilson, who was awarded the Dux medal in 1999, or some of us who were "bright enough" to have made it through. But as an ethnic population, they showed a pattern of underachievement, consistent with the rest of the country. At the same time, the Pasifika-Pacific Dean realised that more needed to be done for our Pasifika-Pacific students, not only during school hours but after school hours too. They needed more to ensure their academic success. They needed more time, more support, more confidence, they needed more of everything. Outside of their studies, they were young, talented leaders, dancers, singers, musicians, sportsmen and women, who were also proud of their heritage. They wanted to succeed in their studies too, but what they needed simply wasn't there.

¹⁹ Communication English was an alternative pathway class for lower ability students which were predominantly Aotearoa Māori and Cook Islands Māori.

Midway during 2009, led by our Pasifika-Pacific Dean, myself and a small group of teachers, embarked on an education journey, one that required us all to be make and lead change. We shifted our practices, developing initiatives that were centred on our own Pasifika-Pacific practices, values and knowledge. This would give our students the opportunity to experience their education through their Pasifika-Pacific lens, whether it was Cook Islands Māori, Samoan, Tongan, Niuean or Fijian. We realised that if we wanted our Pasifika-Pacific students' academic results to change, we had to make changes ourselves, us, the Pasifika-Pacific teachers. We could no longer rely on anyone else to grow our understanding of the curriculum and NCEA, we had to do that for ourselves, and we did. As a result, our students achieved incredible academic success, with many gaining NCEA endorsements, receiving university entrance, and becoming the first in their families to pursue higher education.

As we witnessed these positive outcomes unfold, it became clear that our narrative surrounding Pasifika-Pacific education needed to be told. The stories told about the education of Pasifika-Pacific students have been mostly deficit-based, where they are often depicted in reports by the Ministry of Education and academic institutions as being unable to achieve (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006; MoE, 2010). In contrast, the Tokoroa High School statistics told a different story, one of improved academic achievement outcomes for Pasifika-Pacific students which contradict the ongoing narrative of underachievement of these students across Aotearoa New Zealand. In these narratives Pasifika-Pacific students have often been characterised by sporadic engagement, low attendance, disproportionately high rates of suspensions and stand-downs, and low levels of achievement, predominantly framing them at the tail end of achievement expectations in Aotearoa New Zealand (Coxon et al, 2002; Fasavalu, 2015; Fergusson et al, 2008; Fraser & Gorinski, 2006; Matapo & Baice, 2020; MoE, 2019).

It is timely, therefore, to bring forward this story of success at Tokoroa High School as a counternarrative. Highlighting these positive outcomes challenges the deficit model, which sheds light on the factors contributing to Pasifika-Pacific students' achievements. By unpacking the practices that have fostered this success, we can better understand how to reproduce and sustain such progress, ultimately shifting the narrative from one of deficit to one of possibility and excellence for Pasifika-Pacific students. This success highlights the importance of tailored educational practices in addressing the unique needs of Pasifika-Pacific students.

THE STUDY

The foundational information presented for this research has been quite extensive but necessary to understand the context in which it is situated. This next section presents an overview of this

research and discusses its purpose, focus and structure of the thesis. It will also present the main research questions along with the sub-questions.

Terminology

Cook Islands Māori

Before delving into this study, it is necessary to clarify key terminology. Firstly, I use the term "Cook Islands Māori" and "iti tangata Māori"²⁰ (depending on the context of the text) to refer to Indigenous people who originate from the Cook Islands when the context of the discussion is not in the Cook Islands itself. It is important to note that this term is only used in the diaspora, but in the Cook Islands itself, the Indigenous peoples are called "Māori".

In the Cook Islands all things indigenous (both animate and inanimate) carry the name Māori. We call ourselves Māori, our language is Māori and our culture is Māori. In truth, one is only a Cook Islander outside of the Cook Islands.

(James et al., 2012, p 9)

When writing about key details, concepts, and practices that are situated within the Cook Islands itself, "Māori" is the term I will use to describe the Indigenous people of the land. Although the term "Māori" is associated with Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, drawing from

Powell's (2021) example, for the purpose of this thesis the term "Aotearoa Māori" will be used to describe tangata whenua²¹ to distinguish them from Cook Islands Māori.

Aotearoa New Zealand

This study adopts a strong historical lens, tracing themes across different periods of time. It is therefore necessary to clarify that the term "New Zealand" refers to the colonial nation established through British settlement, whereas "Aotearoa New Zealand" refers to the more contemporary nation-state that acknowledges both its Aotearoa Māori and colonial heritages. "Aotearoa" is used to refer to the Indigenous nation before colonisation. This distinction is essential to ensure historical accuracy and to acknowledge the socio-political contexts in which these narratives are located.

²⁰ This is Reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani equivalent of the word Cook Islands Māori and is more generally used in this thesis when describing key details, concepts or practices located in the Cook Islands itself.

²¹ Tangata Whenua is also an Aotearoa Māori term which means the original inhabitants of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Italicised Words

Additionally, like Wilson (2011), I have chosen not to italicise Cook Islands Māori kupu (words) other than the term *pure* (pray/prayer) to distinguish it from the English word pure. I too believe that "italicisation can make Native languages appear as foreign to the normal text...and it is more important that Indigenous languages appear standard, not as Other" (Wilson, 2011, p1). Although I am not fluent in Reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani, there are many kupu that I use in my everyday life that are a natural part of the way I speak. Choosing not to italicise these words is also reflective of my lived experience. Like Powell (2021), "I find it visually and intellectually distracting to read my ancestral languages in italics as I move fluidly and necessarily between those varieties and English" (p 4). English language translations will also be provided in parentheses.

Pasifika-Pacific

Finally, I use the terms Pasifika and Pacific together, Pasifika-Pacific. Pasifika and Pacific are similar but distinct terms (Fa'avae, 2022; Samu, 2013) both of which are valid in the context of educating students in Aotearoa New Zealand. Fa'avae (2022) argued when using these terms, it is necessary to anchor these in their genealogical roots and clearly explain their intended meaning by specifying the context of their use, the communities they refer to, and the purpose behind choosing those particular labels. Samu (2010) asserted that the New Zealand government has a history of using blanket terms that group peoples who migrated from the Pacific Islands, and their descendants born in Aotearoa New Zealand, together. From "Pacific Polynesian", "Pacific Islander", and "Pacific Nations Peoples" of the 20th century, to "Pasifika", and once again "Pacific" (Samu, 2006). The term "Pasifika" is from the Samoan and Tongan languages (Fa'avae, 2022) and simply translates to "Pacific". Tongati'o (2010) argues that the term has been in the education sector vocabulary since the 1970s but was not popularly used in education policy until the late 1990s. It was introduced to categorise migrants from the Pacific Islands, primarily from Polynesia, in particular Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands, Niue, Fiji, Tokelau, and Tuvalu (Samu, 2020). However, migrants from Micronesia and Melanesia often do not identify with the term "Pasifika" as it does not align with their vernacular or worldviews (Anae, 1998, 2001; Samu, 2006; Vaioleti, 2013).

In current education policy, "Pacific" is used as the umbrella term to categorise all Pacific peoples across Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia, and to align wording consistently across strategies and agencies (Samu, 2020). It is the language used in Tapasā (MoE, 2018), the cultural competencies framework for teachers of "Pacific learners", and in the Action Plan for

Pacific Education 2020 to 2030 (MoE, 2020). This shift in language is visible in all related government strategies, and according to Samu (2020), was something that was changed overnight and without explanation. It is not my wish to unpack the full debate around these terms, but rather to show that the labels reflect shifting attitudes and that they have often been changed not by those being named, but by government administrators. This top-down approach to naming reveals power dynamics in which identity decisions are made without meaningful consultation. I have experienced this shift across three generations in my own *kōpu tangata* (family). As a child growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, I was called a "Pacific Islander"; my children grew up during the use of "Pasifika", and today my mokopuna (grandchild) is described as "Pacific". These changes trace evolving ideas about identity and belonging and recognising their different histories and connotations help us honour each generation's experience. Although the labels have been debated because of their link to colonial histories, Samu (2010) argues that terms such as "Pasifika" or "Pacific" can also serve as unifying identities that help resist assimilation and marginalisation. It is with this lens that I use the terms together as "Pasifika-Pacific". I use "Pasifika" because it reflects my local context. At my school, this term is still used especially as part of the name of our Pasifika tutor group, "Te Manava Pasifika". It is a pastoral care system where students of any background and ethnicity who choose to, will receive support grounded in a Pasifika worldview. I pair it with "Pacific" to signal inclusivity across Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia to reflect the changing nature of students at our school and to ensure no one from the Pacific Islands is left out. Following Fa'avae (2022), I also use the hyphen as a relational marker, "Pasifika-Pacific", which names two linked yet connected terms held together in a shared yet distinct space, signalling relationship rather than reducing them to a single label.

Why This Study Matters

The most important principle I learned in my first year at university came from an article I reviewed, titled "Kaupapa Māori Messages for the Mainstream" (Bishop & Glynn, 2000). It was this reading that introduced me to the work of Russell Bishop and Ted Glynn, work that has gone on to influence the education landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly in culturally responsive and relational pedagogy. Their research offers frameworks for addressing the needs of Aotearoa Māori students, by emphasising the importance of partnerships, power sharing, and incorporating students' cultural identities into the fabric of teaching and learning (Bishop & Glynn, 2003). A simple phrase in the article resonated with me, "people lead storied lives" (Bishop & Glynn, 2000, p 4).

This notion of storying as learning was part of a discussion by the two authors on narrative pedagogies which posits that learning is a process of storying and re-storying. The implication of this idea for Aotearoa Māori students is the notion that for too long in education settings, their stories have been diminished or simply dismissed. As an educator, this fundamental principle has informed my teaching practice. I have seen from first-hand experience what can be achieved when students' stories are visible in education spaces. It creates a sense of belonging and validation, allowing students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and their learning environment. This visibility not only enhances engagement but also fosters a deeper connection between students, teachers, families and the community, creating a powerful foundation for academic success.

Stories and storytelling are also practice traditions valued by Cook Islands Māori families. Yet within the context of western research, rarely are stories told specifically from the lived experiences of Cook Islands Māori living in Aotearoa New Zealand, even more so in Tokoroa. My research, therefore, seeks to privilege their voices; stories shared by them of educational success as Cook Islands Māori, a desire in which Tapasā (MoE, 2018) advocates, with the hope of changing the narrative of how Pasifika-Pacific peoples are portrayed in academia. Little is known about what success in education means for Cook Islands Māori learners, or even what it looks like. When they are grouped under the Pasifika-Pacific umbrella, their stories are less visible and assumptions that success is the same for everyone endure.

To address this gap, this study centres stories of educational success told by Cook Islands Māori in Tokoroa. A site-based study such as this provides locally grounded evidence rather than generalisation's drawn from large urban centres. By privileging first person accounts, I move beyond deficit framings to show how success is defined and enacted by Cook Islands Māori learners themselves. These narratives reveal everyday practices that make success possible and the conditions that enable or constrain them. The aim of this study is to generate evidence that is useful to families, schools, and policy makers, and to ensure Cook Islands Māori understandings of success, including what works, for whom, and under what conditions, remain visible rather than absorbed into broad Pasifika-Pacific categories, a practice that endures today.

The Composition of this Study

My Research Questions

Finding the right questions to direct this research was something that I carefully contemplated. I wanted to ensure that they would capture the essence of the stories and experiences I was to explore. Throughout the study these questions have evolved and grown into what they are today. The central question of this research is: **What are the practice traditions that have enabled education success for Cook Islands Māori students in Tokoroa?**

To support this enquiry, the following sub-questions are posed:

- (a) How have the practice arrangements across time and place shaped how Cook Islands Māori experienced educational success?
- (b) How are these practices reflected in the learning spaces at Tokoroa High School?
- (c) How is success framed by Cook Islands Māori families in Tokoroa?

These questions seek to reveal how success is defined, experienced, and shared within Cook Islands Māori communities. They also aim to identify the learning foundations that underpin and sustain Cook Islands Māori students' educational journeys in Aotearoa New Zealand. Together, these insights highlight the importance of understanding success not only as an individual achievement but as a collective vision that is grounded in 'Ākono'anga Māori.

Initially, I intended to just explore the perspectives of students or ex-alumni who had attended Tokoroa High School. However, I realised that to truly capture the impact of 'Ākono'anga Māori in families and their practice traditions (intergenerational practices), I would need to involve multiple generations of family members as participants. As is our 'ākono'anga (practice) in Cook Islands Māori families, it is not uncommon for grandparents to assist in the raising of their grandchildren in the 'ōire. This key aspect narrowed down my sample of participants. The criteria adopted as a way of finding participants for this study, included being Cook Islands Māori, attended Tokoroa High School, with living grandparents who played a role in raising students in the sample. I based the timeframe for student participation on Julius' achievement in 2011 and Hoana-Rose's achievement in 2021, deciding that participants should have attended between the years 2011 and 2021. I believed this was the timeframe when Pasifika-Pacific educational success was at its peak. I then decided to include 2022, as it marked the beginning of my thesis.

Naturally, as Julius' achievement was the start of the shift towards Pasifika-Pacific success, he consented to be involved. I then have included in the sample, participants who graduated from

Tokoroa High School in 2011, 2014, two from 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022, a total of 10 alumni, along with their parents or a parent, their grandparents, and in one instance a great-grandmother. Additionally, because this thesis is closely connected to my own story, I included two of my children as part of the sample, integrating my personal narrative with the broader context of this research. In my writing however, I use pseudonyms for all the participants.

My Unique Position

A researcher's position in relation to their research requires ongoing negotiation, as it constantly shifts because it is shaped by their relationships (Fasavalu & Reynolds, 2019). Stories of positionality vary depending on researchers' affiliations linked to ethnicity, gender, social status, religion, race, cultural and research identities. Within my education site, I fill many roles and I am constantly navigating and negotiating my positionality within each of these. Although I am a teacher, I have also been a mother of students within that setting, a daughter, a granddaughter, grandniece, an aunty, a cousin, and a niece. My community roles also intersect with my teaching position. I am a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and serve as part of a committee responsible for the needs of the women in our Church; I am also a committee member of the Tokoroa Pacific Sharks Rugby League and Sports Club; a member of the St Lukes Pacific Islands Presbyterian Church Tapere Toru; treasurer for the Araura Enea Tokoroa Trust; board member for the South Waikato YMCA; and member of the Tokoroa Cook Islands Society, Tamariki Au 'Ōire, Tamariki Taupara 'Ōire, and Te-Maru-o-Toi Performing Arts Group. Historically teachers within a western framework have been viewed as being in positions of power (Bishop & Glynn, 2003), but my various roles and my upbringing have taught me that my position as a teacher is one of great responsibility and gives me the opportunity to serve the people in our 'ōire.

At the beginning of this doctoral study, I was introduced to the term "Indigenous researcher". This term is complex for me. I am not Indigenous to Aotearoa New Zealand, although my children are through their father, who connects to the tribe Ngāpuhi²². For this reason, I was initially reluctant to identify in this way. I did not want to diminish the place of tangata whenua or be disrespectful to their struggles and journey. I felt inadequate and inappropriate to apply the term to myself. I considered positioning myself as a "Pasifika researcher" or "Pacific researcher" but felt that these brought with them limitations in terms of the ethnic make-up of the community I serve. Several of the Pasifika-Pacific students in our community have dual

²² Ngāpuhi is a Aotearoa Māori tribe located in the Far North of Aotearoa.

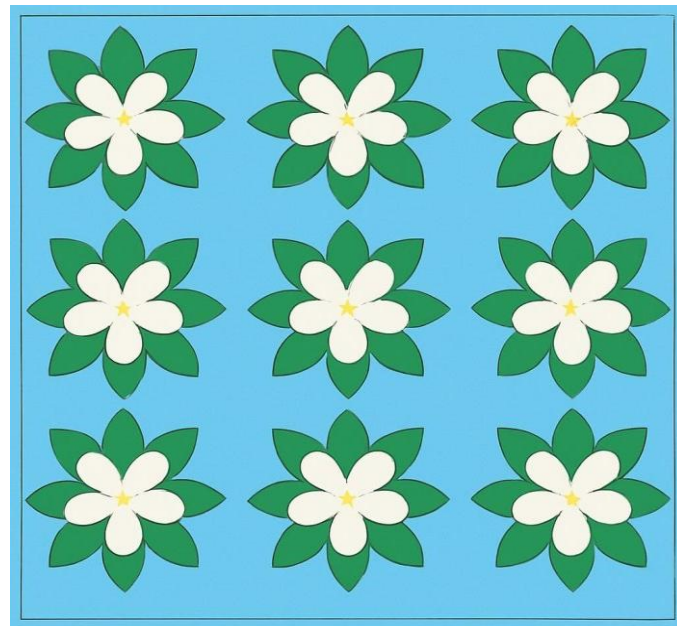
heritages, many are Cook Islands Māori and Aotearoa Māori, some are Cook Islands Māori and papa'ā, but most identify more closely as Cook Islands Māori (this includes my own children). Navigating these different identities within Aotearoa New Zealand is part of the journey of our students and brings with it different challenges.

Similar to Fa'avae (2016), an Aotearoa New Zealand educator and researcher of Tongan, Samoan, and Niuean heritage, I feel a responsibility to carry out research that brings attention to both the struggles and successes of Pasifika-Pacific learners, in particular Cook Islands Māori learners, within Aotearoa New Zealand's western schooling system. I am well aware of the lack of Cook Islands Māori Indigenous voices, theories, and concepts in academia, and have a strong desire to address this by making a meaningful contribution through this research project. Therefore, I have decided to position myself not only as an Indigenous researcher, but as a Cook Islands Māori researcher because of the people that I serve in my community. Positioning myself this way gives me the agency to negotiate and reposition myself within the different spaces in this study. This fluidity (Fasavalu, 2015) allows me to "walk" in different social categories, perspectives, relationships, and categories, reflexively and naturally, without the fear of compromising the research.

Finally, it is not possible for me to distance myself from the research process, as is often expected within a western paradigm, simply because of my active role within the teaching and learning communal experience. While western academia often assumes that Indigenous ways of knowing and practicing get in the way of good research (Boyask, 2023), I believe contrary. As an Indigenous researcher, I believe that Indigenous practices enrich research and reflect the learning experiences more authentically. Finally, I see my role as part of the wider diaspora that purposefully aligns my research outcomes with the survival of my people (Smith, 1999). This stance is especially important, given that Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani, is one of the most at-risk Pasifika-Pacific languages in the diaspora (MPP, 2022; Sio, 2018).

Reading this Thesis

Figure 3: A Metaphorical Tivaivai



Despite having two grandmothers who were ta'unga (experts) at sewing tivaivai (Cook Islands Māori quilts), and growing up around this artform, regrettably I myself am not skilled in this practice. This was not from a lack of desire to learn, but because my grandmothers believed it was more important for me to focus on studying and gaining a papa'ā education, I was not taught to sew. It is therefore with a sense of irony that I present this thesis as a metaphoric tivaivai. If both of my grandmothers were here with me (unfortunately both have passed), they would roll their eyes at me and shake their heads with disapproval. My namesake would follow this with a chuckle because of my stubbornness, acknowledging this as my opportunity to have the last say in a silent battle of wills between her and I.

In Tu'anga 'Ā (Chapter Four), I discuss the implementation of the tivaivai as the methodology for this thesis, as conceptualised by Teremoana Maua-Hodges (2018). However, by way of introduction, it is necessary to explain the perspective the reader should bring to this work. Reading this thesis is like unfolding a tivaivai. At first glance, it is an aesthetic artefact that captivates your attention. However, it is not until you look closely, inspect the stitching, and feel the layers of fabric, that you begin to understand how its meaning lies in the way the pieces are cut, arranged, and stitched together. To trace your hands over the pieces of fabric, from one tiare (flower) to the next, and across the stitching is to journey from one tu'anga to the next.

The bottom layer of this tivaivai, the foundation cloth (the blue piece in the picture), represents my worldview and the cultural grounding of this study through 'Ākono'anga Māori. It is strong, resilient and holds everything together. The second layer, the leaves, represent the theoretical framework, methodology, and methods that shape and support this work. The final layer, the tiare (flowers), represent the tu'anga of this thesis and the details held inside each one. Each tu'anga, like each flower, share a unique story. On its own, a tu'anga tells part of a story, but when placed alongside each other they form a larger pattern that bring meaning and purpose to this thesis. The stitching is my own analysis of the ideas, histories, stories and lived experiences of those involved in some way with this research. To read this thesis, then, is to trace these layers and see how they come together, and to recognise the ways in which 'Ākono'anga Māori gives shape to this work as a whole.

As a way of prioritising 'Ākono'anga Māori, where possible I have aimed to integrate Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani in my writing. Therefore, each tu'anga title begins with the Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani kupu "tu'anga" (chapter) followed by the tu'anga number, also in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani. This is then accompanied by the tu'anga heading written in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani, with its English translation provided in parentheses. Tu'anga Tai (Chapter One) through to Tu'anga 'Ā (Chapter 4) of this thesis are the introductory tu'anga, and include this tu'anga, the literature review, theoretical framework, and methodology-methods. The findings chapters are found in Tu'anga Rima (Chapter 5) through to Tu'anga Varu (Chapter 8). My discussion chapter can be found in Tu'anga Iva (Chapter 9), followed by my conclusion in Tu'anga Ta'i Nga'uru (Chapter 10). Each tu'anga also begins with 'akatomo'anga (introduction) and tōpiri'anga (conclusion).

TŌPIRI'ANGA²³

The purpose of this tu'anga has been to lay the foundation for this thesis by providing the context and the impetus that shapes it. It has established the research questions that sit at the heart of this work and invites a way of seeing through which this thesis unfolds. This thesis holds stories and therefore will reveal multiple layers and connections. As someone who is entrusted with this metaphorical tivaivai, the reader is invited to engage with its layers carefully and attend to it with an open mind.

²³ Conclusion

Tu'anga Rua: Te Au Tua Kua Tua Ia

Chapter Two - Stories Already Told

'AKATOMO'ANGA

This tu'anga presents the literature review. In the broader narrative woven into this metaphoric tivaivai, its role is to share the stories that have already been told by other storytellers in the realm of education. These stories are shared through the voices and experiences of researchers, educators, historians, policymakers, and communities who have contributed their perspectives, their findings, and reflections on the education of Cook Islands Māori students, all positioned under the umbrella of Pasifika-Pacific in Aotearoa New Zealand (Fa'avae, 2022; Matapo & Baice, 2020; Samu, 2013). Weaving their stories into the tivaivai, is to recognise their role in shaping education, while creating space to question and extend those narratives. In this way, the literature review locates this research within broader conversations, while revealing areas of improvement and potential new perspectives that can expand existing knowledge. It ensures that this symbolic tivaivai becomes part of the wider, ongoing fabric of shared knowledge and collective research projects.

Thaman (2021) explained that any discussion about education by Pacific peoples is autobiographic. It is with this lens that I wish to approach this literature review. It is part of the wider history of Cook Islands Māori, whose origins lie in the small islands of Te-MoanaNui-a-Kiva (the ancestral name for the Pacific Ocean), and many of whom later migrated and settled in Aotearoa New Zealand. As part of my unpacking of the literature, it is essential to consider the temporality of education for Cook Islands Māori learners, which has evolved through distinct time periods. The first of these starts with education in the Cook Islands, in particular Aitutaki, before the missionaries arrived (900 AD-1820). This is followed by education during the missionary period (1821-1894), education under colonial rule (1895- 1950), and finally, education as experienced by Cook Islands Māori after migrating to New Zealand (1951-2022). An examination of education for Cook Islands Māori through time is valuable because it provides insight into how historical and societal changes have shaped educational practices over time.

To explore this, it is essential to unpack the policies that shaped education over time, the pedagogical practices that were adopted, the content and curriculum taught, and how success was both measured and defined. Education policy matters because it establishes the foundations for how education was defined, how learning was to occur, what knowledge was valued, and

whose voices were prioritised. Curriculum sets out what knowledge, skills, and values are considered important for students to learn. It provides direction for teaching by outlining learning goals, content, and expected outcomes. Pedagogy focuses on how teaching and learning take place. It highlights the practices, relationships, and environments that shape learning experiences. Finally, it is also important to consider how success in education is defined and measured. Understanding these measures provides insight into what outcomes are prioritised and how different groups of learners are positioned within the education system. Together, these themes show how education was framed, delivered, and experienced, and show how these shifting practices continue to shape the educational experiences of Cook Islands Māori today.

I begin this tu'anga with a discussion of my own understanding of education. My perspective has been shaped by my own studies and my years of teaching experience in a secondary school here in Aotearoa New Zealand. While this provides one perspective, it is also important to consider how education has been understood and experienced by Cook Islands Māori across the time periods mentioned above. Additionally, in this tu'anga, when Cook Islands Māori are located in the Cook Islands itself, I refer to them as 'Māori' and the Cook Islands Māori language as Reo Māori, which is appropriate given the context. When they are located in New Zealand, I refer to them as Cook Islands Māori and use Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani for the Cook Islands Māori language.

WHAT IS EDUCATION?

At the core of this thesis is education, a fundamental human right connected to essential aspects of modern life such as employment, housing, health, and overall well-being (Hemi, 2016). Education is widely regarded as an integral part of any society, yet its purpose and meaning are often interpreted differently across cultures and communities (Scott, 2023). Today, in general, education is associated with schooling. The idea that "a good education" means doing well in school, gaining qualifications to secure a good job, is a familiar discourse. Thaman (2021) asserts that "today too many people speak of formal education as if that is the only important type of education existing in a place" (p 28). Her words remind us that while schooling is one form of education, it overlooks the learning that occurs in homes and communities. Believing that children in Aotearoa New Zealand can reach their potential only through school is unrealistic, as it overlooks the other important aspects of their lives that shape their growth and well-being. This raises key questions around the definition of education and its purpose.

In attempting to answer the question, "What is Education?", posed by John Dewey to a group of educators, author Phillip W Jackson gave this answer, "Education is a socially facilitated process of cultural transmission" (Jackson, 2011, p 5). As is the function of any rhetorical question, Jackson soon realised that Dewey was not expecting an answer right there and then, but for educators to go away and reflect. Eventually, Jackson would posit that "education as a human endeavour is deeply implicated in the pursuit for all kinds of truth" (Jackson, 2011, p 8). His definition highlights the role of education as the way through which we develop knowledge, understanding and meaning. It suggests that education is not just about acquiring facts or practical skills, but a search for truths that shape how individuals and societies understand themselves in relation to the world around them. Jackson's positioning of education as a "pursuit" suggests that education is an active and dynamic process, emphasising that it is something continually enacted through lived experiences. His comments led me to consider and ponder on the truths that shape Cook Islands Māori society.

The understanding of education as an active and dynamic process aligns closely with Pasifika-Pacific perspectives, where education is deeply embedded in communal practices, lived experiences, and the spaces that connect individuals, families, and communities (Heine, 2021). Heine views education as an ongoing and lived experience rather than the acquisition of knowledge, offering a stark contrast to the structured and individualistic approach of western education systems (Baba, 1985; Hau'ofa, 1998; Matapo & Baice, 2019; Thaman, 2021). Similarly, Baba (1985) defined education as the initiation into the ways of life of a community or society, while Thaman (2021) framed education as "worthwhile learning" (p 1). What is considered worthwhile learning is defined by the specific communities in the context where the learning takes place, one that is not always in a classroom. Teaiwa (2005) adds that Indigenous knowledge and identity are pushed aside in classrooms that privilege western knowledge systems, narrowing the extent of what is recognised as education. Baba's (1985) use of the term "initiation" implies that education is active, resonating with Kemmis et al.'s (2014) view that education is an initiation into practices. They posit education as:

...the process by which children, young people and adults are initiated into forms of understanding, modes of action, and ways of relating to one another and the world, that foster (respectively) individual and collective self-expression, individual and collective self-development and individual and collective self-determination, and that are, in these senses, oriented towards the good for each person and the good for humankind.

(Kemmis et al, 2014, p 26)

This definition highlights a dual purpose of education (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023; Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018; Kemmis et al., 2014). First, education equips individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to lead fulfilling lives while contributing to the greater good of humanity. Second, it seeks to foster a focus in education that encourages students to learn skills and knowledge, which will enable them to contribute to their communities in meaningful ways. This perspective emphasises not only how individuals should live but also the kind of world they should strive to build. To fulfil this dual purpose, that is enhancing individual lives and promoting collective well-being, education must be designed and delivered in ways that exemplify and nurture the principles of living well in a world worth living in (Kemmis et al., 2014; Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018).

This understanding of the purpose of education as shown in the above example, frames it as the growing of individuals who live well in a society worth living in for the good of human-kind. The two cannot exist without the other. This aligns closely with Thaman's (2021) understanding of the purpose of education in Pasifika-Pacific societies, which has always been centred on survival and continuity, prioritising collective well-being and the sustaining of cultural identity across generations. With the current focus of individualism in many education systems influenced by the modern world, it is often difficult to find communities who are focused on the well-being of the collective (Kemmis et al., 2014; Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018). However, in this thesis, the well-being of the collective, that is the families involved in this research and the community of 'Ōire Tokoroa is always a desired outcome. This emphasis on collective well-being forms the foundation for how I approach education in this research. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, I position education as bringing people into meaningful ways of learning, so they can live purposeful lives, contribute to the world around them to shape a world worth living in.

E AO TA'ITO - THE OLD WORLD (900AD-1820)

Unfortunately, there is very little published literature that explores Cook Islands Māori education, particularly in relation to pre-missionary education in the Cook Islands. This highlights the significance of addressing this gap. The collection 'Akono'anga Māori: Cook Islands Culture' (Crocombe & Crocombe, 2003), serves as the main source of information on Cook Islands Māori society through its diverse collection of essays. While this work provides invaluable insights, it is not a focused study of education for Cook Islands Māori. Therefore, understandings must be reconstructed from fragments of information scattered across several essays.

Education Policy of the Old World

To understand the journey of Cook Islands Māori in education, it is essential to look at the policies that guided it. To begin developing such understandings, it is important to first consider how education was embedded within the governance structures and everyday practices of Māori²⁴ life prior to missionary influence. Before the arrival of missionaries Māori were self-governing, self-determining, and for centuries used their agency to decide what constituted valuable knowledge (Henry, 2018; Makirere, 2003). Each island in the Cook Islands²⁵ was independent, with its own governance structures (Gilson, 1980; Henry, 2018). Some islands were led by Ariki (high chief/king/queen) supported by mataiapo or rangatira (subchiefs), while others were governed through the authority of heads of families, such as on the island of Palmerston (Buck, 1993; Mason, 2003). While political power sat with this layer of leadership, children were nurtured within kōpu tangata (families), matakeinanga (tribes) and 'ōire (Ama, 2003; Jonassen, 2003). The integration of leadership and family life shaped what knowledge was prioritised and how it was transmitted to the next generation.

What might today be described as "education policy" was not written down or formalised, but was instead governed by the aspirations, needs, and values of the kōpu tangata the matakeinanga and the 'ōire. "Education" as a term was not used in the vernacular, but learning was inseparable from daily life and community practices. This was shaped by shared aspirations, with Māori viewing it collectively, believing that what was good for the individual was good for the collective (Ama, 2003). As the Indigenous language of Māori, Reo Māori was the natural medium of instruction and therefore prioritised in all learning contexts (Goodwin, 2003). In this sense, education was guided by community-based policies of practice, evolving in response to the changing needs of the community.

A Māori Curriculum

Traditional Māori education functioned as a curriculum oriented toward nurturing children to become capable and responsible members of their families and communities (Jonassen, 2003; Vini, 2003). Although not named as "curriculum", there were definite expectations around what children should learn when they were young. Children were expected to grow in kite pakari (wisdom) and kite Māori (Māori knowledge), with a strong emphasis on developing values such as 'akangateitei (respect) and ta'aka'aka (humility) (Jonassen, 2003; Makirere, 2003). An

²⁴ We use the term Māori in this context, as these stories and explanations are located in the Cook Islands and not the diaspora.

²⁵ It wasn't until colonisation that the 15 islands of the Cook Islands were grouped together as one nation.

essential component of this was growing their understanding of papa'anga (genealogy), which shaped how children understood who they were and where they belonged (Ama, 2003). Children memorised their papa'anga, as well as the stories tied to significant ancestors and events (Powell, 2021). These stories were shared through storytelling, song, dance, and chants (Tai'a, 2003). This practice emphasised the continuity of family relationships where the lives of past generations shaped those in the present, while the actions of the current generation shaped the lives of those who are yet to come (Jonassen, 2003).

Each person living today is nothing more than a biological production of their ancestors. We are therefore a living expression of our heritage. Our ancestors or tupuna may be dead. But we are alive and so they are alive in each and every one of us as well. It is they who gives each of us our vaerua or inner spirit. And it is this inner spirit that is the ultimate in terms of personal expression as to who we are as individuals, where we stand within any given family and where we belong within the overall context of both Aituaki...and the Cook Islands.

(Henry, 2018, p 1)

Understanding their connections with others and with the world they lived in shaped not only their sense of identity, but their responsibilities within those relationships. In this way, they were also taught how to act appropriately within those relationships (Vai'imene, 2003). This included showing respect to elders and learning to care for and support members of the kōpu tangata. Grandparents in particular were recognised for their kite pakari and kite Māori and regarded as custodians responsible for passing this on to younger generations so they would be equipped to live in accordance with these values and practices (Makirere, 2003; Vini, 2003).

As well as learning to navigate relationships between people, Māori children were taught how to live responsibly within their natural world through practices grounded in an understanding of how the natural and spiritual worlds were interconnected (Crocombe, 2003). Children learned their obligations to atua (gods) through ceremonies, rites and karakia, and understood which atua to acknowledge in relation to different activities such as planting, fishing, or conflict (Gill, 1979; Makirere, 2003). Spiritual knowledge provided the framework that guided how they engaged with the natural world.

Alongside this, the curriculum taught practical knowledge and skills for interacting with the natural world through practices that maintained balance and sustainability (Gill, 1979; Kauraka, 1989; Tai'a, 2003). Children learned to observe environmental patterns, such as lunar cycles, seasons, winds, tides, and stars to guide decision-making (Vini, 2003). They were taught how

to use natural resources to meet daily needs, including making tools, producing clothing, building shelters, weaving, carving, food collection, herbal medicines, and navigating their environments (Tai'a, 2003; Tangaroa, 2003). Equally important, children were taught to take only what was needed and to protect resources through practices such as *rā'ui*, which restricted use to allow regeneration (Ama, 2003; Crocombe, 2003).

Together, this curriculum reflected a holistic approach to learning, where spiritual understandings and practical knowledge were inseparable. Children learnt how to use the resources of their natural environment to make a meaningful contribution to their families and communities, while also learning how to do this responsibly. They also learnt to value the relationships they were part of between people, the environment, and the wider world. Learning occurred everyday through everyday participation alongside the elders, where knowledge, values and responsibilities were developed through shared practices. Kite Māori was prioritised within these practices, as was the transmission of Reo Māori. In this way, the "curriculum" of the old world was focused on Thaman's (2021) understanding of engaging children in worthwhile learning appropriate for the world they lived in.

Māori Pedagogy

While curriculum reveals what knowledge is valued, pedagogy provides insights into the teaching practices, relationships, and sites that shaped Māori education. It exposes the processes through which knowledge was shared, who had the authority in teaching, and how learners engaged in the process (Coxon et al, 2002). Examining pedagogy makes it possible to understand how education was experienced in everyday life for Māori children.

Māori pedagogies were originally community-oriented, with parents, grandparents, and other elders²⁶ within the *kōpu tangata* and community serving as educators (Ama, 2003; Gill, 1979; Tangaroa, 2003). Learning was woven into the daily lives of Māori children through direct participation in daily tasks, ceremonies, and collective responsibilities (Vai'imene, 2003). This reflected an apprenticeship type model where children were guided through these activities

where they were expected to observe, listen, and participate when able to. Of particular importance is the notion that learning took place across several sites and not confined to one particular place. This depended on the activity or designated task. Sites of learning included,

²⁶ Māori lived in extended family units where it was common for the siblings of parents to also be living together. In Reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani there are no terms for 'aunt' and 'uncle' or even 'cousin', therefore they were all considered parents or siblings.

but not limited to the lagoon, plantations, the 'ōire, and marae (Ama, 2003; Edwards, 2016; UNESCO, 1972). Each site offered different learning opportunities.

Although most learning opportunities took place within families and communities, some children who displayed exceptional talent in a particular area were invited into the 'Are Vānanga (House of Learning) and taught by ta'unga, experts in a particular skill (Tangaroa, 2003; Tai'a, 2003; Vai'imene, 2003). The purpose of this learning was to entrust specialised knowledge to a select group, so that expertise in areas such as but not limited to navigation, the arts, and papa'anga would be preserved and sustained. Young men were also taught combat in the 'Are Toa (House of Combat) as it was expected that each 'ōire or tribe should be able to protect themselves (Tangaroa, 2003).

These pedagogical practices reveal how the holistic curriculum of Māori were woven into their everyday lives. Although learning was grounded in this way, it also allowed for differentiation, where learners learnt at their own pace but could also be extended as evidenced by the 'Are Vānanga (House of learning). Underlying these practices were the relationships between elders and children, which were built on the practice of reciprocity. Elders engaged children in learning activities, and children responded appropriately by participating and being respectful. Through this exchange not only did the learning of new skills and knowledge take place, but it also enabled the growth of certain dispositions.

Measurement and Success for Māori

Having considered what was taught through the curriculum and how it was taught, it is necessary to examine what counted as success for Māori in education and how this was measured. Considering measurement and success is important as it reveals the underlying purposes of education and the values of those who shape it (Biesta, 2013; Friere, 1970). What is regarded as worthwhile learning is always shaped by culture and context (Thaman, 1993). Thus, worthwhile learning, as defined by those in authority at the time, can be seen as setting the goals of education, while success represents the recognition of whether those goals have been achieved.

Before the arrival of missionaries, what was considered worthwhile learning was knowledge that benefitted families and communities (Crocombe & Crocombe, 2003). Terms such as "measurement" and "success" were not conceptualised in the ways they are understood today. Success was not tied to formal assessment or the achievement of certain standards and qualifications but demonstrated in everyday life through learning a new skill, developing

understandings around certain aspects of life in the 'ōire, and fulfilling responsibilities to family and community (Jonassen, 2003; Tai'a, 2003).

Achievement was shown through what children could do in practice. For example, reciting *papa'anga* in Reo Māori showed the learning of oral traditions, but also language competence (Ama, 2003; Jonassen, 2003). Mastering fishing techniques did not only show the learning of catching fish but also how to provide for a family (Tai'a, 2003). Knowing which incantation to use in ceremonies and rites, as well as which god to dedicate those to, showed spiritual growth (Makirere, 2003). Together, these examples illustrate that success in traditional Māori education was measured through the ability to apply knowledge and skills in meaningful ways that sustained the wellbeing of the family and community but was also "assessed" in context by the elders responsible for teaching that particular life skill.

Education before the arrival of the missionaries was a period where Māori communities held authority over what was taught, how it was taught, and who taught it. Power remained within families and communities, where they determined for themselves on a daily basis what was meaningful learning for the benefit of the collective. Kite Māori was prioritised, Māori voices and agency dominant, and education practices sustained the continuity of practice traditions, strengthened identity, and collective wellbeing. In this way, the function of education was to maintain and carry forward the everyday practices that defined Māori ways of life.

THE MISSIONARY PERIOD (1821-1894)

The self-governing education system of Māori was disrupted by the arrival of missionaries from the London Missionary Society (LMS) in Aitutaki (Gilson, 1980; Henry, 2003; Lange, 2005; Williams, 1998). The society, founded in London by evangelists of different denominations but primarily the protestant faith, were dedicated to supporting evangelism throughout the world (Lange, 2005). Tahitian missionaries Papeiha and Vahapata, were welcomed on to the island and protected by high chief Tamatoa Ariki (Henry, 2003; Williams, 1998). With his endorsement, they were able to continue with their ministry. After some time in Aitutaki, Papeiha and Vahapata were successful in converting many Māori to Christianity, which led to the establishment of the Cook Islands Christian Church (Lange, 2005; Williams, 1998).

Church Education Policy

Church policy maintained that the Christian message of the missionaries was essential for the progress and salvation of Māori souls and should guide all aspects of life and learning (Buzacott, 1866; Williams, 1998). This policy justified the introduction of formal schooling as an instrument to civilising Indigenous peoples, reflecting a belief in the superiority of European

ideals which aimed to replace Indigenous practices with those aligned with Christian doctrine (Ama, 2003; Buzacott, 1866; Gill, 1979; Gilson, 1980). This strategic reframing reshaped Māori perceptions of what counted as valuable knowledge and progress, subtly seducing Māori into believing that the missionary way was the right way (Makirere, 2003). As part of this reframing, the Tahitian language also became the language of learning, as the missionaries did not speak Reo Māori (Goodwin, 2003). Teaching Indigenous peoples in their own language was Church policy, but as it was not possible to do this, the language of the Tahitian missionaries was prioritised (Buzacott, 1866).

A Church Curriculum

The holistic curriculum of Māori was displaced by LMS missionaries. The focus of education shifted away from sustaining life in the *kōpu tangata* and the *matakeinanga* towards religious instruction, with literacy prioritised as essential for engaging with the Christian Bible (Buzacott, 1866; Gilson, 1980; Williams, 1998). The ability to read and interpret scripture became central to the moral and spiritual development of Māori, aligning with the missionaries' primary goal of converting souls to Christianity. Māori embraced this new technology, eager to learn how to read and write (Beaglehole, 1957).

As Christianity spread throughout the islands and the missionaries learnt how to speak Reo Māori, the Bible was translated into the vernacular and Māori became literate in reading and writing in their language (Buzacott, 1866; Williams, 1998). While this enabled their growth in their literacy and Christian practices, it simultaneously pushed *kite Māori* into the margins. The narrow focus of the curriculum on the doctrine of the gospel, encouraged individuals to be responsible for working out their own salvation and ensuring that their religious practices did not anger God (Henry, 2003; Williams, 1998). As such, this marked a profound shift where learning was no longer about strengthening communal relationships and responsibilities, but about guiding individuals towards personal redemption.

Pedagogical Practices of the Church

In contrast to the collective and relationship-based teaching practices of Māori before the missionaries, the practices of the missionaries themselves reshaped education to serve the purposes of evangelisation and conversion. Although, they were supported by the *Ariki* who maintained political power on the islands, in education power sat with the missionaries themselves because they were the holders of the knowledge Māori were so eager to learn (Buzacott, 1866; Gilson, 1980; Edwards, 2016). Sites of learning also changed from the everyday contexts of places like the lagoon and plantations where children were guided through

their learning by their elders, to small mission schools with the missionaries as their teachers (Beaglehole, 1957; Buzacott, 1866; Gilson, 1980).

This transformed the way learning occurred with lessons often delivered through sermons, readings, and recitations. The teaching practices of the missionaries consisted of strong discipline and control, with the expectations that Māori would be obedient, passive learners. While Buzacott (1866) described this method of teaching as essential to training children in the morals of the Christian faith, Beaglehole (1957) noted that the missionaries methods did little to foster critical thought. He concluded that the missionaries' intentions were always aimed at moulding Māori into obedient subjects of the Church, shaping not only what they learnt but how they were expected to think and behave within the rigid framework of the Church.

Although the first missionaries to the Cook Islands were Tahitian, English missionaries Williams (1998) and Buzacott (1866) spent much of their ministry in Rarotonga and spearheaded the establishment of the Church's headquarters on the island. Both Williams and Buzacott saw the need for a training centre to train Māori missionaries that could evangelise on the outer islands, especially in the north. As a result, Takamoa Theological College was established; Māori couples were trained in the ministry and sent to the outer islands (Buzacott, 1866; Lange, 2005). Not only were these couples commissioned to preach the Christian message, but they were also encouraged to build small schools and teach Māori to read and write. When the Bible was translated into Reo Māori, copies were sent out to the islands and used as a resource for learning. By the 1880's most of the Cook Islands population were literate in Reo Māori and converted to Christianity because of the work of the missionaries (Gilson, 1980; Vai'imene, 2003).

Measurement and Success in the Church

While success in traditional Māori education was measured through the ability to apply knowledge and skills in meaningful ways that sustained the wellbeing of the family and community, education success under the missionaries was linked to the mastering of religious practices and doctrine, as well as basic literacy and arithmetic skills (Beaglehole, 1957). In schools, this was measured through missionary administered examinations, a first for Māori children (Buzacott, 1866; Gill, 1894), but it was also measured in how they behaved towards each other, dressed, spoke, and worshipped (Buck, 1993; Buzacott, 1866; Gill, 1894; Williams, 1998). Giving up the practice traditions of their ui tupuna (ancestors) and adopting the practices of good Christians was also considered as a form of educational success.

A COLONIAL EDUCATION (1895-1949)

The strong foundation of missionary control in education was soon overshadowed by colonial intervention. The growing presence of European powers in the Pacific meant that the political landscape of the Cook Islands would change, and with it the control and focus of education (Beaglehole, 1957). In 1888, the Cook Islands became a British protectorate to prevent the potential threat of French colonisation (Gilson, 1980; Vai'imene, 2003). Up until this time, the 15 islands were self-governing, but as a British protectorate they were united and given a new collective identity under the name "Cook Islands" (Gilson, 1980). In 1889, it was agreed that the administration of governance for the Cook Islands would fall under the New Zealand government, and then in 1901 the nation was formally annexed by New Zealand (Goodwin, 2003; Mason, 2003; Vai'imene, 2003). These conditions shaped the education of Māori under a new colonial power.

Education Policy under the Colonial Administration

The first act of the New Zealand government was to appoint Frederick Moss as the British Resident to head the government of the Cook Islands (Edwards, 2016; Gilson, 1980; UNESCO, 1972). Under Moss, education policy shifted once again, this time away from a purely religious focus to a more secular curriculum. In 1895, the most influential education legislation was passed, imposing policy that would create a profound shift for Māori:

Whereas it is desirable that the English language should be taught to the Māori people in order that they may be able to at the least read in that language: And whereas it is desirable to secure such teaching in schools established or that they may be established by other than Māori teachers in the Cook Island's.

(Moss, 1896, p 11)

The new policy under colonial rule mandated English as the language of learning, sidelining Reo Māori. Missionaries strongly opposed this change, fearing that exposure to English would corrupt Māori morals and values (Buzacott, 1866). Despite these objections, Moss remained adamant, arguing that English was essential for Māori to succeed in the modern world (Goodwin, 2003; Moss, 1896). Support for Moss's position was reinforced by some Ariki and other Māori leaders who believed that English represented the best path forward for their children (Edwards, 2016; Vai'imene, 2003). Records of proceedings between Ariki and Moss, show that the Act was formally passed by the Ariki present. However, the records do not reveal

the extent of the discussion involved, if any, or whether the Ariki fully understood the long-term consequences of implementing such change. The record simply states:

Passed by the Arikis (the Government of Rarotonga) this 8th
day of November 1895.

1. The English language shall be used in teaching in schools.

(Moss, 1896, p 25)

The introduction of English as the medium of instruction marked a significant policy shift aimed at assimilating Māori into western education systems. However, according to reports from that time, the Ariki who were members of the government alongside colonial administrators agreed that this shift was essential. Their response to the proposition was recorded as:

We agree with Mr Moss that unless we have schools and teach English in them the Government will never be able to work without outside help and therefore can never be made safe or strong.

(Moss, 1896, p 2)

While English was positioned as the key to opportunity in the modern world, the Ariki believed that knowing this language would in fact strengthen their government structures. It became apparent that this view was reflected in the broader influence of the colonial administration and their belief systems as articulated by British Resident Moss (1896), who stated:

I need not repeat to you my strong belief that, without such training, and without being able to read English books, it will be impossible for Māori to govern themselves.

(Moss, 1896, p 2)

This statement made by Moss reflects how colonial influence shaped how Māori leaders came to view education and leadership. The growing importance of English did not just represent colonial control, but also how colonial ideas became normalised within Māori society. In regard to the use of English as the medium of instruction in schools, the Ariki agreed on behalf of all Māori that this would be best, however, evidence suggests that they were not fully aware of the broader and long-term implications of the policy. It appears that Māori believed that children could maintain their reo within the home and achieve bilingualism, however the literature indicates that the consequences of the implementation of this policy was not well understood

(Goodwin, 2003; Vai'imene, 2003). Moss, on the other hand, was completely convinced that 'Europeanising' Māori into the western world through the adoption of the English language was the only viable future for them (Coxon et al., 1994; Edwards, 2016; Gilson, 1980).

In 1915 the Cook Islands Act was passed which gave the New Zealand government power to establish public schools and appoint New Zealand teachers, but more importantly made English the official language of the Cook Islands (UNESCO, 1972). It also made schooling compulsory for children aged 7 to 14. It is important to note that this legislation was passed in Wellington, where the following general principles were adopted as a guide to creating education policy for the Cook Islands:

1. Instruction should be closely related to native environment and traditions.
2. Nothing should be taught that is not serviceable in the near future.
3. The system should aim to develop agriculture in its widest sense and also manual and domestic arts.
4. The possibility of broadening and intensifying interests in village life by means of manual training, nature study, drawing and design, music and games, should be recognised.
5. Prominence should be given to the teaching of hygiene.
6. As far as practical instruction should be given both in the English language and the vernacular.
7. Full and free scope should be allowed for the observance of religious exercises.
8. For a limited number selected by each administration, special provision should be made in the islands for advanced classes that will enable such students to proceed to New Zealand and undertake higher and professional courses.

(UNESCO, 1972, p 101)

Judging by the above principles, it is clear that the New Zealand government had no intention of providing an education for Māori where they would be empowered and equipped to lead themselves into the modern world. The narrow focus of the principles on manual labour, domestic duties, and agriculture, suggest that education in the Cook Islands was deliberately directed toward preparing Māori children for work of a physical nature, as was the general

practice of the New Zealand government with countries in the Pacific (Coxon et al., 1994). What is also concerning is the shift of decision making from Rarotonga with the British Resident and the Ariki, to the New Zealand government in Wellington, completely silencing Māori from any decision-making in education for their own children. After a time, this fell under the responsibility of the Ministry of Native Affairs, who would advocate for a curriculum and teaching practices that encouraged Māori to take 'pride in their race' (Gilson, 1980). Despite this, successive Ministers still prioritised English as the medium of instruction, making it difficult for any meaningful learning grounded in 'Ākono'anga Māori.

A Colonial Curriculum

The principles outlined in the previous section formed the basis of the curriculum for schooling under the colonial administration, with a strong emphasis on reading, writing, and arithmetic in English. With the compulsory school ages being 7-14 years, Māori aspired for their children to continue their education through secondary schooling. However, Moss's successor Walter Gudgeon refused to accommodate this, arguing instead that schooling should prepare Māori only for practical work suited for island life (UNESCO, 1972). The missionaries did establish one secondary school in 1895, in Rarotonga, Tereora College. According to Gilson (1980), the curriculum was predominantly academic, but it could not be sustained by the missionaries. Tereora was closed down in 1901 by the colonial administration, as Gudgeon refused to fund the school believing that it was unnecessary (Gilson, 1980; UNESCO, 1972). Gudgeon expresses his beliefs in the following statement:

For what purpose are we educating these boys? In their own islands and for island purposes they are invaluable, but there is little if any opening for educating these boys...the educated boy despises the work of the planter, his true work, and for this reason the sole result of education will be dissatisfaction among those who are unable to find the employment they deserve. To educate such people above the resources of the islands would be little short of criminal.

(UNESCO, 1972, p 100)

Gudgeon's bias reflected the attitudes of New Zealand administrators back in Wellington. Just as it was for Māori in New Zealand, the curriculum for Māori in the Cook Islands was designed to provide practical training and grow the English language (Barrington, 2008; Beaglehole, 1957; Māhina-Tuai, 2022; Whimp, 2008). Gudgeon defined island life as the natural limit of Māori potential and was responsible for further perpetuating the stereotype of Māori as inferior to the British colonialists. Even though Gudgeon's role as British Resident was to prepare them

for social advancement, he argued that education could not prepare Māori to lead a democratic society (Gilson, 1980). This positioning reveals how the curriculum was used to control what Māori could learn, limiting access to western forms of knowledge associated with leadership practices in a colonial society. Creating a curriculum that focused just on practical skills, not only restricted opportunities but also reinforced existing power hierarchies. This further narrowed what was recognised as valuable knowledge, marginalising Māori and overlooking the existing leadership knowledge and practices already present within Māori society.

Under the Ministry of Native Affairs, attempts were made to introduce cultural practices such as the sharing of Māori histories that were labelled 'legends', and skills such as weaving, but for the most part the curriculum remained the same. A key point that emerges from the literature is the creation of a class in one of the schools just for the children of Europeans in Rarotonga, who were given a more academic curriculum than what Māori were given (Gilson, 1980). This practice highlights the underlying purposes of the curriculum for the two peoples, where academic learning was for Europeans and practical learning for Māori. This example of unequal learning opportunities shows how the curriculum was used to shape different futures for Māori and Europeans but also highlights the belief in the inferiority of Māori in comparison to European children.

Colonial Pedagogical Practices

When the New Zealand government assumed administrative control of the Cook Islands and therefore education, the schools in the islands were still mission schools - built and run by the missionaries. Implementing the English-only language policy proved more difficult than Moss (1896) had anticipated. Even as the curriculum shifted from a religious to secular and labour-oriented focus, the missionaries remained as the teachers and their teaching practices reflected their missionary priorities, including Reo Māori as the language of instruction (Edwards, 2016; Gilson, 1980; UNESCO, 1972).

Additionally, on the outer islands, the teachers in schools were mainly Māori, with very little knowledge of how to teach in English, so still prioritised Reo Māori. Vai 'Imene (2003), argued that education under colonial control was a period of confusion for Māori, because teachers received no training at all in the curriculum they were expected to deliver, especially Gudgeon's labour-focused curriculum that he advocated for. Given, that policy decisions and curriculum design were determined in Wellington, not only were Māori voices silenced in the decision-making process, but they had no way to request support with the implementation of the

curriculum. Gudgeon did not care for the education of Māori therefore he offered very little support (UNESCO, 1972).

It was not until the 1915 Cook Islands Act where New Zealand teachers were recruited as head teachers in the Cook Islands, to come and assist in the schools. The mission schools became public, with control given over to the government by LMS missionaries, however each school was run separately (Gilson, 1980; UNESCO, 1972). Māori teachers worked under the supervision of the New Zealanders, and English as the language of learning was not only mandated but imposed. Children were punished for speaking Reo Māori in the playground, as teachers were strict and often harsh in their disciplinary practices (Vai'imene, 2003).

The schools functioned as separate entities until the 1920s when a superintendent was appointed to bring some uniformity to education in the Cook Islands, and arrangements were made to provide teacher training for Māori (Edwards, 2016). The aim of this was to reduce the number of New Zealand teachers and replace them solely with Māori (Gilson, 1980). Teaching practices remained largely the same and despite the influx of Māori teachers, English was still prioritised (Vai'imene, 2003). However, the literature states that realising this in practice continued to be difficult because at home and Church, Reo Māori was prioritised. For the most part, parents and grandparents did not speak English, making it difficult in some respects for children to truly master the English language (Gilson, 1980). At the most, for a period of time, Māori children remained largely bi-lingual (Edwards, 2016).

Colonial Measurement and Success

Unfortunately, there is a gap in the literature regarding how education was measured and reported in the Cook Islands when it was annexed by New Zealand. Vai'imene (2003) did report this time as a period of confusion in terms of implementing the curriculum, therefore this would have impacted measurement and achievement. What is recorded, however, is that following the imposition of the 1895 English language policy, school attendance rates declined (UNESCO, 1972; Edwards, 2016), hence the education mandates on compulsory attendance. Gudgeon's expectations of Māori children in terms of their schooling were very low, and monitoring education success did not appear to have been a priority. This suggests the reason for the absence of detailed records. However, what the literature does state is that by the 1930s, Māori were still receiving an education far below what was received by New Zealanders and literacy rates sat at 16% in 1936, and increased to 50% in 1945 (Edwards, 2016). Considering the majority of Cook Islanders were literate by the 1880s in Reo Māori, these results are disturbing, suggesting that ability was not the issue, the prioritisation of English was.

EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND (1950-2022)

Education policy in New Zealand

After World War II, economic policies motivated the New Zealand government to encourage migration from the Pacific nations to meet the demands of a labour shortage (Coxon et al., 1994; Salesa, 2017; Tiatia, 1998). Prior to this migration, shifts in education policy shaped the education landscape that Māori would engage in. In 1936, Minister of Education Peter Fraser at the time, abolished the Proficiency examination enabling free secondary education for all New Zealand children (Jones et al., 1990). Following this in 1939, he made an announcement that formed the core of the government's policy in education that would shape it for many years to come. He stated:

The Government's objective, broadly expressed, is that every person, whatever his level of academic ability, whether he be rich or poor, whether he live in town or country, has a right, as a citizen, to a free education of the kind for which he is best fitted, and to the platitude that the full acceptance of the principle will involve the reorientation of the education system.

(Beeby, 1992, p 124)

This new education policy was underpinned by the idea of 'equality of opportunity', which posited that equal opportunities did not infer that every child should have the same education, but "... implies special assistance to those who start the race from somewhere behind the scratch line" (Mason, 1945, p 53). Fraser believed that education could address the social inequalities of New Zealand society, especially in terms of those who Director of Education, Clarence Beeby (Renwick et al, 1986) labelled "disadvantaged" (p 55), or as Education Minister Henry Mason (1945) stated, "behind the scratch line" (p 53), a category both men placed Aotearoa Māori in. Considering the poor literacy rates of Cook Islands Māori as detailed in the previous section, they were even further behind Aotearoa Māori.

Across the decades, 'equality of opportunity' remained central to education policy, however, by the 1960s and after, reports such as the Currie Report and Picot Report highlighted persistent disparities for Aotearoa Māori which led to education reforms in the 1980s (Openshaw et al., 1993). Despite a commitment by successive governments to the idea of 'equality of opportunity', these reports suggested that education was not addressing the social inequalities of New Zealand society as hoped for. New education policy was announced in 1989 with an underlying ideal of 'equity':

The needs of children and their learning shall be paramount. Therefore, the Boards of Trustees will ensure all students are given an education which respects their dignity, rights and individuality. This education shall challenge them to achieve personal standards of excellence and to reach their full potential. All school activities will be designed to advance these purposes.

(Jones et al, 1990, p 48)

While aspirational, the new education policy left its implementation to individual schools under new governance structures of Boards of Trustees (Jones et al., 1990) but still did not address the needs of Cook Islands Māori specifically. It was not until the introduction of the Pacific Education Plan in 2001 (MoE, 2001) and Tapasā (MoE, 2018) was there evidence of education policy where Cook Islands Māori who fell under the umbrella of Pacific or Pasifika, was recognised (Samu, 2013). Cook Islands Māori voices were silenced in any decision-making process in the Cook Islands under colonial rule and this was further perpetuated in New Zealand itself.

A New Zealand Curriculum

In the Cook Islands, colonial administrators implemented a core curriculum, designed in New Zealand, that prepared learners for manual labour, alongside basic literacy and arithmetic in English (UNESCO, 1972; Gilson, 1980). As a result, when Cook Islands Māori migrated to New Zealand, they entered a system built on the same foundations. Prior to their arrival, in the early 1940s the focus of education administrators was to prepare students for a new qualification and the work force. In 1943, suggestions were made to redefine the purpose of secondary schooling as outlined in the following statement:

...the post-primary school has two functions of equal importance - the first, to prepare the few for higher education, and the second, to prepare the many for immediate participation in the life and work of the community. To perform this second function to the full it will probably be necessary to make considerable changes in the curriculum of some of the post-primary schools.

(AJHR, 1943, p 2)

These ideas informed the work of the Thomas Committee, which was commissioned to review and redesign secondary education in New Zealand in the 1940s with a strong academic focus (Jones et al., 1990; Openshaw et al., 1993).

Before Cook Islands Māori even arrived in New Zealand, these statements show education was set up for only a few to succeed academically. The idea of "the few" and "the many" meant that most students were directed to work, while only a small group were prepared for higher education. Limited access to secondary schooling in the Cook Islands, meant that many Cook Islands Māori entered New Zealand schools without the academic preparation expected for secondary education, effectively positioning them for the workforce right from the very beginning.

This positioning was reflected in the design of the common core curriculum which included subjects such as English Language and Literature, Social Studies, History and Civics, Geography, Science, Mathematics, Music, Craft, Fine Arts, Physical Education and Home Crafts for girls (Openshaw et al., 1993). While this was framed within Fraser's principle of 'equality of opportunity', access to these subjects and progression to higher learning was not equal in practice. Cook Islands Māori were placed at a disadvantage due to their lack of access to the academic subjects back home. In this way, the curriculum acted as a tool for channelling students into different pathways where Cook Islands Māori, as with other Pasifika-Pacific students were directed towards more practical training subjects, while European students were channelled towards the more academic subjects (Jones, 1991; Openshaw et al., 1993). As a result, many left school without any formal qualifications and entered the workforce (Jones, 1991).

Cook Islands Māori were already familiar with a curriculum that did not recognise their cultural practices, values or knowledge, and this continued in their schooling experiences in New Zealand. Within this system, they were frequently channelled into lower streams and more vocational pathways, a pattern that persisted until the reforms of the late 1980s and 1990s (Coxon et al., 1994; Openshaw et al., 1993). Significant changes to the curriculum as part of these reforms was the inclusion of Pacific Languages, with Cook Islands Māori recognised as one of them (MoE, 1991).

Pedagogy in New Zealand

Schooling in New Zealand was strongly shaped by British ideas, structures, and traditions (Beaglehole, 1957; Renwick et al., 1986). These were carried over through institutions, teacher training, textbooks, and examinations, all of which were based on British practices (Jones et al., 1990). These traditions were so ingrained in schooling in New Zealand, that when Cook Islands Māori arrived, they entered an education system that privileged British ways of teaching and learning. This influence shaped how teaching was enacted in classrooms, with teaching

practices being highly structured and teacher-directed (Whitehead, 1974), once again practices that Cook Islands Māori were all too familiar with.

It is only in recent years through the introduction of culturally responsive pedagogies where the identities, languages, and knowledge of Aotearoa Māori and Pasifika-Pacific learners have been prioritised in terms of teaching practice. This came about after the Ministry of Education (2007) called for a more inclusive pedagogy that addressed the culturally diverse needs of both Aotearoa Māori and Pasifika-Pacific learners. Teachers had been identified by Pasifika-Pacific families as being pivotal to the success of Pasifika-Pacific learners (MoE, 2020) and Pasifika-Pacific educators agreed (Fa'avae, 2016; Fasavalu, 2015; Si'ilata, 2014; Te Ava & Page, 2020).

Culturally responsive pedagogy challenges deficit views of Aotearoa Māori and Pasifika-Pacific learners by positioning their cultures as strengths rather than limitations, a view that has dominated education discourse for decades (Bishop & Glynn, 2000; Fasavalu, 2015; Fa'avae, 2016). However, research shows that when teachers recognise and build on students' cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Fasavalu, 2015), learners are better able to engage and succeed because learning aligns with how they make sense of the world. Additional research also highlights that effective teaching for Pasifika-Pacific students not only involves validating their cultural practices but also maintaining high expectations, and building strong relationships with learners, families and their communities (Fa'avae, 2016; Si'ilata, 2014; Te Ava, 2011; Te Ava & Page, 2020). This practice contrasts with traditional schooling, which privileged dominant cultural norms and left learners disconnected from their lived realities.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy for Cook Islands Māori

In terms of culturally responsive pedagogy for Cook Islands Māori learners, Te Ava (2011) expands on the importance of the inclusion of families and communities by asserting that effective teaching for this group does not operate in isolation from elders, values, culture, and language. Within a culturally responsive pedagogy, these aspects are important and contribute to a holistic understanding of education that is beneficial for Cook Islands Māori students both in the Cook Islands and New Zealand. This understanding is further developed in the work of Te Ava and Page (2020), who provide an example of how these practices can be enacted in teaching.

Te Ava (2011) adapted the Tivaevae Research Methodology created by Teremoana Maua-Hodges (2018) and used this as a framework to engage Cook Islands Māori learners in culturally responsive teaching in the subject of Physical Education. Within the Tivaevae framework Te Ava and Page (2020) outlined important practice traditions passed on to Cook

Islands Māori children from their pā metua (elders). Engaging in this practice tradition enabled learners to participate in more meaningful learning experiences and build more positive relationships with their teachers.

A key aspect of Te Ava's (2011) study is the link within their Tivaevae framework to sustainable education. This focuses on the way that the education system can prepare and sustain young people to become custodians of their future. For Cook Islands Māori the idea of a sustainable education is vital as Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani has been declared an endangered language (MPP, 2022). This aligns with culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) which emphasizes the ongoing maintenance and development of Indigenous languages and practices within education. For Cook Islands Māori, this could support the preservation of Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani, strengthen identity, and also enable learners to carry these practices into the future.

Measurement and Success in New Zealand Education

In Aotearoa New Zealand educational success is the goal of the Ministry of Education (2010) for all learners. The 1989 Education Act lists that one of the key objectives for the education system is to help every child and young person to attain education achievement to the best of their potential (MoE, 2019). This was reiterated in 2016 when the Ministry of Education published the statement, "Every student, no matter their background or needs, should be supported to meet their potential" (MoE, 2016, p 1). This principal echoes Fraser 's earlier notion of 'equality of opportunity', reflecting a continued commitment to ensuring all learners succeed.

However, when considering how success was measured, there have always been clear inconsistencies between the intent of education policy and its implementation, particularly in secondary schooling. The introduction of School Certificate in 1945, an outcome of the Thomas Commission, established a standardised national measure of academic achievement through end-of-year examinations (Whitehead, 1974). While it appeared to support the principle of 'equality of opportunity', in practice it reinforced a system designed only for a few to succeed, in terms of those who would pass. The structure of schooling meant that success was narrowly defined and accessible to a limited group, while the majority were positioned toward the workforce. Failure was built into the system (AJHR, 1943; Beeby, 1992).

This in itself reveals a key contradiction. Although education policy promoted the idea that all students could achieve to their potential, the system itself was designed to channel students into unequal outcomes, undermining the very principle it promoted. These outcomes are reflected in the results of Pasifika-Pacific learners which reveal that during the years School Certificate

was in place, they achieved well below their European peers and were more likely to leave school without a formal qualification (Coxon et al., 1994). Even when the new National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) was introduced with the hope of addressing education outcomes for Aotearoa Māori and Pasifika-Pacific learners, both populations still achieved well below their European and Asian peers (MoE, 2022).

While success is not explicitly defined by the Ministry of Education for learners, student academic achievement shows evidence of academic progress and is generally how success is measured in education (MoE, 2010). For secondary school students, NCEA Level 2 is the minimum qualification needed to progress on to higher education, further training, and employment (MoE, 2022). It is the minimum level considered suitable for readiness for life outside of school. The attainment of secondary school and tertiary education qualifications are linked to social and economic advantages such as greater career options and work opportunities, higher incomes, better living standards, and improved health outcomes (MoE, 2019).

The narrative of Pasifika-Pacific student underachievement, and therefore Cook Islands Māori student underachievement, persists placing them at 'the tail' end of academic achievement (Fasavalu, 2015; Fasavalu & Thornton, 2019). However, this focus on deficit outcomes highlights a gap in the literature, where little attention is given to how Cook Islands Māori define success for themselves or to the stories that reflect their experiences of success within and beyond the education system. Given the silencing of their voices throughout their history in education, it is time that these are addressed.

A SHARED HISTORY

The educational experiences of Cook Islands Māori did not occur in isolation. They reflect the familiar narrative of colonisation across Indigenous communities throughout the world, where Indigenous knowledge systems, practices, identities, and language were marginalised within education systems. However, in the South Pacific, similar experiences can be seen among Niuean, and Tokelau communities (MPP, 2022). In Niue and Tokelau, the Cook Islands experience is reflected in the repeated colonial pattern of missionary conversion, the introduction of formal schooling as a tool for conversion to Christianity, becoming a British Protectorate, and later, part of the Realm of New Zealand which led to the gradual control of their Indigenous education systems by the New Zealand government (Swain & Ulu, 2010; Tauevihi, 1977).

Both countries were subjected to the same education practices where the English language was prioritised above their own, and a curriculum focused on manual labour was implemented based on assumptions that this was best for children who lived on the island (Taeuevihi, 1977). The prioritisation of the English language above Vagahau Niue (Niuean language) and Gagana Tokelau (Tokelaun language), both in their home countries and also here in Aotearoa New Zealand, has also contributed to their languages, alongside Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani as being vulnerable and needing urgent revitalisation (MPP, 2022; MPP, 2026).

What is concerning about the position of the Indigenous languages of all three countries is the subtle yet powerful influence of colonisation, where western education and the English language were promoted as necessary for progress, development, and also participation within colonial systems. Within these conditions, these communities were encouraged to move towards systems and practices that reflected colonial priorities at the expense of their own languages and ways of being and knowing. This raises questions about agency, and if like Cook Islands Māori, the Niuean and Tokelaun communities understood the consequences of their decisions to accept the changes colonial administrators imposed and whether they truly understood what was being promised to them. Ironically, education is now also seen as part of the solution for reclaiming and revitalising their languages (MPP, 2022; MPP, 2026), and way of life that were marginalised through missionary and colonial schooling practices.

TŌPIRI'ANGA

This literature review has shown that from the arrival of missionaries to the Cook Islands and then colonial administrators from the New Zealand government, through to migration to New Zealand, education has done little to recognise the value of Cook Islands Māori people and culture. In so much that over time their voices were dismissed and then completely silenced from any decision-making in regard to their own education. This is reflected in the shift of the curriculum. Learning moved away from a focus on Cook Islands Māori understandings of living well in their world as a collective and moved toward individual achievement within a western framework. As a result, Cook Islands Māori children became increasingly disconnected from their own cultural practices, raising questions about the cost of assimilation on identity and belonging.

The literature review also showed that these experiences were not unique to Cook Islands Māori but reflected broader histories of colonisation experienced in the South Pacific. Similar patterns can be seen among Niuean and Tokelaun communities, who are also facing the impacts of colonisation on their languages and way of life. It is the normalising of these impacts and how

they have to come to shape the way Indigenous communities come to understand themselves and their place in the world that is of great concern, especially as they face the vulnerability of their languages.

There is also a gap in the literature that explains how these changes affected the way Cook Islands Māori understood learning, or how families engaged with a curriculum that did not reflect their lives. It also raises questions about what education could look like if it better supported the aspirations and understandings of Cook Islands Māori communities. Within this context, culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies aim to restore Cook Islands Māori practices, knowledge, language and values in education, helping to reconnect with their identity and sense of belonging. However, deficit narratives still dominate education discourse, focusing on underachievement and overlooking success. This highlights a significant gap in understanding how Cook Islands Māori communities define success for themselves and how their experiences in education are understood, particularly as long as they continue to be grouped under the broader Pasifika-Pacific umbrella, where their distinct identities and perspectives can be overlooked.

Tu'anga Toru: Te 'Akano'o'anga

Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework

'AKATOMO'ANGA

At this stage I begin stitching the second layer of this metaphorical tivaivai, represented by the leaves as depicted in tu'anga mua. They represent the theoretical framework, methodology and methods, and act as a connecting layer between the main backing cloth of 'Ākono'anga Māori, and the tiare (flowers) that hold the tu'anga of this thesis. In weaving this layer, I reflect on how this theoretical framework came to be and why it took the shape it did. Finding a theoretical framework that would prioritise my worldview and enable me to answer my research questions was significant. I needed an appropriate framework that would be culturally responsive to the needs of those involved in this study, as encouraged by education researcher Melani Anae (2010).

Research for Cook Islands Māori by Cook Islands Māori is still relatively new in the education research landscape, hence there was some tension around what would be appropriate for this study. As Smith (1999) notes, researchers may, when necessary, bring parts of existing theories to form a framework that allows them to approach an issue from a different perspective. In this tu'anga, I take up that approach, bringing together 'Ākono'anga Māori, Vā (Ka'ili, 2005; Mahina, 2017; Wendt, 1996) and the Theory of Practice Architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014), to establish the foundation of the theoretical framework underpinning this study. Although these frameworks emerge from different knowledge traditions, each is pivotal to the way in which I approach, interpret, and make meaning in this research. Together, they enable a dialogue between Pasifika-Pacific and western understandings of practice, which allows for a more holistic understanding of how certain conditions shape the way Cook Islands Māori live and learn. I turn first to 'Ākono'anga Māori, before discussing Vā and the Theory of Practice Architectures in turn.

'ĀKONO'ANGA MĀORI

We live our lives in practices, and it is through practicing together that we come to make sense of the world we live in (Kemmis et al., 2014). As migrants to Aotearoa New Zealand, our grandparents and parents carried their 'ākono'anga (practices) from the Cook Islands, sustaining their way of life through everyday actions and interactions. Living away from our homeland did not diminish their commitment to their traditional customs and practices. Instead, they were

embedded in our families and community, ensuring that the practice traditions they themselves were raised with, endured. It is through these practices that we come to learn what it means to be Cook Islands Māori, practices embodied in 'Ākono'anga Māori (James et al., 2012), which is grounded in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani (our language), peu Māori (our customs), and kite Māori (our knowledge).

The term 'Ākono'anga Māori is typically used to define Cook Islands culture (Crocombe & Crocombe, 2003; James et al., 2012). 'Ākono'anga on its own refers to practices, habits, and a way of life (Cook Islands Māori Dictionary, n.d). This aligns with Thaman's (1993) view of culture as "a way of life of a group of people, which includes their language and a body of accumulated knowledge, understandings, beliefs, skills and values" (p 119). Hence, 'Ākono'anga Māori is our way of life as Cook Islands Māori. How we live it, shapes how we experience and understand the world. This way of life is not abstract but enacted through the practices we engage in each day. In this sense, 'Ākono'anga Māori can be understood as lived through practice, where our way of life is continuously embedded and sustained through everyday actions.

It is from this worldview that I engage with and make sense of theory. As a Cook Islands Māori researcher, with Cook Islands Māori participants, I position myself within this research where theory serves as a way to make sense of our realities and situate them within our lived experiences and practices as advocated for by Aotearoa Māori researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999). This positioning requires a theoretical framework that can hold and reflect these ways of being and knowing, enabling me to centre my worldview alongside those of the participants in this study.

The theoretical framework for this research is interconnected, with each component playing a distinct yet connected and complimentary role. Given that 'Ākono'anga Māori is not yet established as a formal theory, I draw on Vā²⁷ and the Theory of Practice Architectures to make sense of the practices through which 'Ākono'anga Māori is lived and sustained. I begin with an explanation of Vā to centre how Cook Islands Māori make sense of the world, emphasising that understanding emerges through relationships with others and with the wider world. Following

²⁷ When vā is positioned on its own in my writing, it refers to the concept more broadly. When vā is preceded by the definite article 'the' as in 'the vā', it refers to the relational space within a particular context. When Vā with a capital letter is positioned alongside 'Ākono'anga Māori and the Theory of Practice Architectures, it is to position it as part of the theoretical framework.

this, I will explain the Theory of Practice Architectures, before bringing these layers together to show how they inform and shape this research.

VĀ - A RELATIONAL SPACE

Before discussing how I intend to use vā as part of the theoretical framework it is necessary to frame the importance of relationships for Cook Islands Māori. This begins with my own experiences and how I make sense of connections and relationships in my everyday life. I have come to learn that research is not just an academic exercise, but one that is deeply personal, shaped by who we are, where we come from, and the relationships that define us (Smith, 1999).

A Relational World

Our whole lives are made up of stories. Some stories define us in ways
we can never come back from.

(Seed-Pihama, 2022, p 113)

Growing up in Aotearoa New Zealand, my family and I, like many other Cook Islands Māori families living in Tokoroa, were separated from our homeland by the metaphorical highway that is Te Moana Nui a Kiva, the Pacific Ocean. Despite this physical distance, we remained deeply rooted in our identity through the stories of our parents and grandparents. We (my siblings and I) knew our 'ōire, the names of our ui tupuna (ancestors), our marae (sacred meeting place), our tapere (district), and the significant events that shaped our family's history. The language of our grandparents echoed in our lives as we moved between their homes and our own. We lived dual lives, navigating the complexities of being Cook Islands Māori and being 'Kiwi'²⁸, often grappling with an internal struggle to reconcile these identities. Yet, there was always a deep sense of connection and pride in who we were as Cook Islands Māori. Our paternal grandmother ensured we grew up strong in our identity, while our parents equipped us with the skills to thrive in the papa'ā world, even if it required sacrificing parts of ourselves, most profoundly, our language.

Despite these sacrifices, we never felt isolated. We understood that our world was far greater than ourselves. Our roots stretched across Te Moana Nui a Kiva to a small island we had never lived on or seen but knew intimately through stories. These roots connected us to family members we had never met and even to those who had passed away. At the same time, we were part of a vibrant 'ōire in Tokoroa, surrounded by an extended family network. People were

²⁸ The term 'Kiwi' is a colloquial term for a person who identifies as someone who lives in New Zealand.

constantly moving in and out of our homes. We grew up alongside our grandparents' siblings and their families, always conscious of our interconnectedness and the responsibilities that came with it. This was reinforced at family events and reunions where 'akapapa'anga (genealogy) sessions were pivotal in teaching family history. Friendships were unnecessary because we had many cousins, and our lives were grounded in relational living, always connected, always responsible for one another, and always with God at the centre. This sense of unity and faith shaped who we were and provided a framework of belonging that sustained us through the challenges of living between two worlds, the world of the papa'ā and the world of Cook Islands Māori. This communal and relational nature of my upbringing formed a foundation of practices that shaped how I understood myself in relation to others, which aligns closely with the concept of vā – a relational space (Wendt, 1999).

A Relational Concept

As a concept, vā is deeply embedded in Samoan and Tongan worldviews, but is also evident in Aotearoa Māori and Kanaka Māoli (Hawaiian) contexts through the concept of wā (Ka'ili, 2017). One of the most recognised definitions of vā in academia comes from Samoan theorist Albert Wendt explained:

Vā is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates, but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships and contexts change.

(Wendt, 1996, p 403)

Wendt describes vā as a context that gives meaning to relationships between people, and between people and all that they are connected with such as the environment and the cosmos (Ka'ili, 2017; Māhina, 2017). This is subject to change as relationships and contexts change over time (Faleolo, 2021; Ualesi, 2021). But a key understanding of vā is the notion that it is an active space that is always being reshaped by people and the practices they enact with one another (Ka'ili, 2005). It is in the vā that people work together to make sense of the world they live in (Fa'avae, 2016).

This collective meaning making carries with it an ongoing responsibility to actively care for relationships so that the vā remains balanced and harmonious. This is expressed through 'tauhi vā' for Tongan communities (Fa'avae, 2018) or 'teu le vā' for Samoan communities (Anae, 2010). Nurturing vā through tauhi vā or teu le vā is about intentionally caring for relationships

through everyday acts such as respect, open dialogue, reciprocity, and the upholding of Pasifika-Pacific values that strengthen and protect the relational spaces (Anae, 2010; Fa'avae, 2018; Ualesi, 2021). These relational spaces are not just situated in the present but connected across generations of time and space, ensuring the *vā* is ever present (Ka'ili, 2017).

While *vā* as relational space is clearly defined in other Pasifika-Pacific contexts, for Cook Islands Māori it is not explicitly named as such. In an everyday sense, *vā* is indeed part of our vernacular, where *vā* refers to 'space, a gap, a void' (Dictionary of Cook Islands Languages, n.d). "Teia tō'ou *vā*, teia tōku *vā*", which translates as "this is your space, this is my space", are examples of the common uses of the term in our daily lives as Cook Islands Māori. However, "i rotopū i te *vā*" or "the space between" is not something we say. *Vā* is also one way of expressing time. For example, in the saying, "Ka *vā* koe āpopo?", as in "are you available tomorrow?", *vā* refers to availability. In the saying, "teia *vā*", as in "this space right now", refers to time and space together.

In fact, my introduction to *vā* as a concept came through a discussion with my supervisor, Associate Professor David Fa'avae, who asked whether Cook Islands Māori conceptualised *vā* as relational space. My immediate response was no, not as far as I was aware. However, this question prompted me to reflect on how we, as Cook Islands Māori, navigate relational space, especially given that we are undeniably a relational people. This reflection led to multiple conversations with family members and mentors, which in turn led to my own process of what Powell (2021) terms as recalibrating the mind to look beyond what *vā* is not for Cook Islands Māori and instead consider what it can offer. It is with this understanding that I approach this part of my discussion, as I conceptualise *vā* with a Cook Islands Māori worldview for the purposes of this study.

E VĀ MĀORI (A COOK ISLANDS MĀORI RELATIONAL SPACE)

In this next section, I discuss how I have come to understand the *vā* through a Cook Islands Māori worldview, introducing how I intend to engage with it as part of the theoretical framework for this study. As Cook Islands Māori we prioritise relationships, not just with people, but with ancestors, spiritual beings, and the natural world, and it is with this relational priority that led me to engage with *vā*.

Vā Tapu - A Sacred Space

Vā as a way of understanding relational space invites us as Cook Islands Māori to consider what it means to share space with one another (Ligaliga, n.d). As a starting point for this

discussion is the notion that all relationships are sacred (Makirere, 2003) and therefore the vā is sacred - vā tapu. To understand this initial idea is to turn back to the past, to the islands of our origin, to get a sense of the world our ui tupuna (ancestors) lived in before the arrival of missionaries from the London Missionary Society (Williams, 1998). The story of the creation of the world that our ui tupuna lived in, their atua (gods), their ao tini²⁹, and iti tangata Māori (Māori people) is written in our papa'anga (genealogies). Pre-missionary times, each island had their own version, shared and passed down through oral traditions, in their own dialects. In terms of published works, Bobby Turua (2003) gives a detailed account of the creation according to Rarotongan traditions.

Ka no'o e Tumu
 Ki te Papa 'Enea
 Mama mai ko te rito
 Te uira, te a'a
 Ko te kinakina
 Mama mai ia Ko te kau atua
 Ko Rongo! Tane!
 Ko Ruanuku
 Tu e Tangaroa
 Rongo the atua o te akamoe'au
 Tane to atua o te rakau, te manu
 Ruanuku te atua o te matangi
 Tu te atua o te tamaki
 Tangaroa te atua o te moana
 Te ika, e te au mea totonu e 'a'aere...

'Io te metua
 'Io te tupa mata'ita...

*Tumu the father
 Will copulate with the earth mother
 Then came forth the essence
 Light, feeling
 And the outpouring of waters. Revealing themselves As the many Gods*

*Rongo! Tane!
 Ruanuku!
 Tu and Tangaroa!
 Rongo, god of peace
 Tane, god of trees and birds*

²⁹ Te ao tini literally translated means "many worlds" but is a holistic concept to describe the interconnected world of Cook Islands Māori, encompassing the social, physical, spiritual, and intellectual (J. Toma-Tuarae, personal communication, 11 April 2025)

Ruanuku, god of winds
Tu god of war
Tangaroa god of the ocean
Fish and all that walks and crawls...

'Io the parent 'Io the beginning....

(Turua, 2003, p 70)

Turua's account continues with the children of Tumu and Papa separating them. With this separation came the creation of the natural elements such as the sun, moon and the stars, the forests and all living creatures, the winds and water masses on the earth, and eventually the creation of mankind. This account is similar to the creation story of Aotearoa Māori (Walker, 1990). In Aitutaki we also have in our genealogy, an account of the creation, but it is written in what our māmā's and pāpā's call "e reo ta'ito" (old language) which follows a structure similar to the way genealogies are written in the Bible (Tunui, n.d). While there are clear similarities across these accounts, the Aitutaki version is not written in a narrative form or speaks to the separation of Tumu (Rangi) and Papa. That does not suggest that such accounts do not exist, but a reflection of the limits of my reach and the available evidence. Some names differ across accounts, which is to be expected, given the different dialects across the islands. Despite these differences, there are common atua including Tangaroa, Tane, Rongo, Rangi (Tumu), Papa, and Io (Low, 1934; Makirere, 2003; Tai'a, 2003; Turua, 2003). These shared elements reflect a common genealogy, based on the understanding that all Cook Islands Māori come from Avaiki (Numa, 2003; Tai'a, 2003).

Te 'Atamira Makirere (2003) explained that for our ui tupuna, their spiritual and physical natures were inseparable. They considered their spiritual natures as more important than their physical because it existed before their physical bodies. With this understanding, spiritual practices were woven into their everyday lives to pay homage to the atua (gods), especially when entering their domains. As spaces presided over by atua, they were considered tapu (sacred). To interact with te ao tini, was to also engage with te ao vaerua³⁰ (spiritual world) through the practice's reciprocity and respect. For example, of the atua, Tangaroa is the most well-known to us in Aitutaki (Low, 1934; Tiro, n.d). As the atua of the ocean, he provided sustenance by the way of seafood, that sustained the lives of our ui tupuna. The ocean was considered tapu because it was Tangaroa's domain, so our ui tupuna enacted practices such as

³⁰ Te ao vaerua is the spirit world which includes the ui tupuna and the realms of the atua.

karakia (prayer) and rau'i (restrictions to protect a natural resource) to show respect and also reciprocity through caring for that space.

The significance of this information is the connection between atua and iti tangata Māori, between atua and te ao tini, and between iti tangata Māori and te ao tini. It is this connection, as described in our papa'anga, that makes all relationships sacred. Ligaliga (2022) articulated that we do not occupy vā physically, we occupy it through relationships. In this way, vā becomes less about space and more about presence. When those relationships are understood as sacred, this shapes how we act in ways that uphold that sacredness. As Anae (2010) explains, we tend to them more closely. Sacredness, therefore, requires respect (Ligaliga, n.d). In the relationships between our ui tupuna and atua, rites were performed to show respect. In their relationships with te ao tini and each other, caring for those spaces was evidence of that respect. When the missionaries arrived in the Cook Islands (Williams, 1998), they replaced the traditional gods and introduced our ui tupuna to Iehova (Jehovah). This changed the world they lived in and therefore changed the nature of their spiritual practices. What did not change is the understanding that relationships were sacred and they therefore continued to show respect and reciprocity towards each other, with te ao tini, and with Iehova. This continuity highlights that what matters is not the physical proximity, but the depth and quality of these relationships (Ligaliga, n.d).

Vā 'Ātui'anga - Space that Connects

The sacredness of relationships is held within the vā. It is not about how close we are physically, but about how deeply we are connected (Ligaliga, 2022). For iti tangata Māori when we are born, we come into the world already connected to important people and places (James et al., 2012). Through our papa'anga, we 'atui (connect) to our family members who are living, to those who have passed on, and those who are yet to come. Papa'anga situates us within a kōpū tangata and matakeinanga. It locates us within a tapere (district), 'ōire, 'enua (island) and moana (ocean). It connects us to a marae (a sacred place for religious purposes), a vaka (canoe), a mataiapo (sub-chief) or Ariki³¹. All of these piri'anga (relationships) shape our identity and affirm who we are as iti tangata Māori. Knowing this then shapes how we understand ourselves in relation to others and our place within the collective, which in turn shapes how we navigate the vā.

³¹ In some areas Ariki are high chiefs, but in others they are considered kings or queens.

Oro koe e tākarere, uri mai koe te tu ua atu nei au.

Wherever your journey carries you, when you turn back, you will find me standing, waiting.

(P. Daniels, personal communication, October 1, 2025)

The proverb above, represents the idea that the connections that shape who we are as iti tangata Māori endure, grounding us across time and space. Regardless of where one is located, whether in Aotearoa New Zealand or the Cook Islands or anywhere else in the world, lived in 1926, living in 2026, or still yet to live in 3026, our 'atui'anga through our piri'anga as defined in our papa'anga endures. Like other Pasifika-Pacific peoples, the past, present, and future exist in an ongoing continuum (Ka'ili, 2017). This fluid and cyclical nature of time and space infers that to look back is to also look forward. We are raised with the histories of our ui tupuna and an understanding that their practices in the past shape the world we presently live in, just as our practices today shape the world our descendants will inherit in the future. Within this ongoing continuum, the vā is where these piri'anga exist, therefore it is essential that we must know how to be present in the vā.

Being present in the vā, however, is not passive but requires understanding one's turanga (position), akaue'anga (responsibilities/duties), and ngakau aro'a (loving heart), as these are essential to how we as iti tangata Māori navigate relational space (James et al., 2012). Everyone has a turanga (position or standing) in a relationship. Within the kōpū tangata this position shapes your responsibilities or duty of care. The extent of how you fulfil your responsibilities is reliant on your ngakau aro'a³² - a loving heart. Your position as an eldest child means you have greater responsibility than if you were a youngest child. If you are an educated child, then your responsibilities to the family or community can look different than if you are uneducated. Your standing in the community shapes your responsibility in that space, but it also shapes how you represent the family so that you bring honour to them at all times. If you are skilled as an orator, then your position as va'a autara (speaker) for the family carries with it certain responsibilities. In this way, how we take up our turanga and fulfil our akaue'anga is not simply about obligation, but about deepening our piri'anga with those we are connected to. Therefore, turanga and akaue'anga shape how we engage with vā respectfully.

³² The Cook Islands Māori concepts of 'akapapa'anga, piri'anga, turanga, akaue'anga, and ngakau aro'a have been conceptualised as part of the Turanga Māori Framework (James et al., 2012) for transforming family violence for the Ministry of Social Development.

Vā Ora - A Living Space

Navigating the vā with turanga, akaue'anga, and ngakau aro'a is therefore not a one-off act, but an ongoing practice, one that speaks to the vā itself as a living space. Vā understood as a living space, moves beyond the idea of space as a gap or void that needs to be filled (Ligaliga, 2022). Instead, this speaks to an active relational presence that we tend to (Ka'ili, 2005). The notion of the vā being active and needing to be tended to, opens up a conversation with existing concepts vā-kā and tauhi vā or teu le vā. 'Igniting the vā' through the term 'vā-kā', as conceptualised by Smith & Wolfgramm (2022) is one that resonates with me. Like Aotearoa Māori, in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani 'kā' means 'to ignite' or 'to burn' (Cook Islands Māori Dictionary, n.d). It also indicates the beginning of an action or change of condition. Vā-kā, therefore suggests more than just action. It proposes that we act in ways that give life to vā.

To give life to vā is not found in grand or dramatic acts, but in the everyday practices that we engage in as we share space together. It is in the moments that we pray and sing together in devotions, the conversations we share, the affectionate ways we address each other, and in the ways we laugh together. It is in the shared meals, the trips to get groceries, the collection of monies for family events, then attending the family events together. All of this and more are examples of how we give life to the vā. They are not single moments of action, but enduring ways of being together.

This is where nurturing and caring for the vā becomes important. Tauhi vā for Tongan communities or teu le vā for Samoan communities involves tending to the vā in ways that sustain harmony and balance (Anae, 2010; Ka'ili, 2005). In Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani to nurture is to 'ākono, but this term also means to follow and obey. 'Ākonokono means to attend to something in every way, as well as to obey fully or observe strictly. When we consider that for Cook Islands Māori the vā is always tapu, the notion of 'ākonokono i te vā is the more appropriate Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani equivalent to tauhi vā and teu le vā, indicating a two-way commitment to not only nurture the vā, but to do so through practice traditions that also honour the vā.

What this looks like in practice is best illustrated through every day, embodied acts of care. When I reflect on how my grandmother raised me, I remember quite vividly the sacrifices made, the aspirations dreamed, and the wisdom that was shared. In return, my responsibility was to trust, to believe, and then adopt her teachings as sacred learnings. When I became an adult, I returned the same care and also shared my education success with her. Practising care in this sense is to 'akangateitei (show respect) and 'akataka patoa (show reciprocity), but also about

ta'aka'aka (acting in humility). Nurturing and caring for the vā in this sense, is therefore lived through practice and is how we preserve relationships, strengthen and sustain the vā. To examine how these practices are shaped within specific contexts, I now turn to the Theory of Practice Architectures.

THEORY OF PRACTICE ARCHITECTURES

A key aspect of this thesis is to examine practices that enable education success for Cook Islands Māori learners. Deploying vā is to understand that for Cook Islands Māori meaning is created in the relational space as people encounter each other in their everyday practices as embodied in 'Ākono'anga Māori. However, despite the depth of Pasifika-Pacific and Indigenous scholarship, I found no existing Pasifika-Pacific or Indigenous models of practice that provided the analytical language necessary to examine how practices are enacted, sustained, and transformed within the vā. This absence revealed a gap between Indigenous understandings of relational space, and the tools to analyse how practices happen in that space. As a result, an analytical approach was required to make these practices visible in the context of this research, while remaining grounded in 'Ākono'anga Māori. The Theory of Practice Architectures offered a framework to do this.

A Definition of Practice

The term 'practice', in education, is often linked to constructs like 'best practice' and 'professional practice', which are typically framed as the work of educators. In education, teachers are expected to engage in continuous reflection, however, this often occurs in isolation, with teachers primarily assessing what they did well and what they could do better (Mahon et al., 2016). The term 'better' is problematic in itself, as it implies high expectations but offers little guidance or support (Kemmis et al., 2014). Practice theorists argue that these statements are not always helpful, and instead, what teachers require are tools that allow them to unpack their practices, identify the conditions that shape them, and then consider their impact on student learning (Grootenboer et al., 2017; Kemmis, 2019). In response to these gaps, a different way of understanding practice has developed within education research.

Theory of Practice Architectures has emerged from a broader tradition of practice theory, which seeks to explain how society, culture, and social life are shaped by practices (Schatzki, 2002). Practice theories view practices not as isolated actions, but as the everyday ways people create meaning in their lives in real time and space (Bourdieu, 1977; Nicolini, 2012; Schatzki, 2002). Schatzki (2002) extends this understanding by explaining that practices are not only about what people do (doings), as commonly perceived, but also about what they say and how they

communicate (sayings). Sayings involve language, communication, and expressions that convey rules, instructions and shared understandings, while doings encompass the physical actions and behaviours people engage in. Schatzki's (2002) positioning of practices as a nexus of sayings and doings that are co-dependent, highlights their interconnected nature. These practices are also situated within a site³³ shaped by material arrangements found in or brought to that site (Schatzki, 2002; 2010).

This understanding of practices as a nexus of sayings and doings was extended by education theorists, who further conceptualised practices as comprising sayings, doings, and relatings (Kemmis et al., 2014). Relatings are included because of the notion that social practices involve more than just the actions of an individual but also the relationships between people within those practices. By including relatings, the Theory of Practice Architectures offers a comprehensive understanding of practices, recognising that they are shaped by:

...particular sayings (evident in what is being said at the time),
particular doings (evident in what is actually being done at the time),
and particular relatings (evident in how people present are actually
relating to one another at the time)...

(Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023, p 5)

Theory of Practice Architectures was developed as a way to help educators understand the conditions that enable and constrain the success of students, teachers, leaders, and researchers within education contexts (Kemmis et al., 2014). To consider education as practice rather than the transmission of knowledge from teacher to students, is to understand learning as socially situated, occurring through participation in practices in real time-space (Grootenboer et al., 2017). Practices, however, do not just happen (Grootenboer & Edwards, 2023). The sayings, doings, and relatings are enmeshed within the places in which they happen, interconnected, occurring at the same time and bundled together amid existing site-based conditions and arrangements (Kemmis et al., 2014). These arrangements - culturally-discursive arrangements, material-economic arrangements, and social-political arrangements, supply the resources for sayings, doings, and relatings. This combination of arrangements makes practices possible and are called practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014; Mahon et al., 2017).

³³ A site refers to the specific place or local setting where a practice is happening (Edwards-Groves, 2023).

The practices that we observe in real life are not abstractions with an ideal form of their own; they are composed in the site where they happen, and they are composed of resources found in or brought to the site: cultural-discursive resources, material-economic resources, and social-political resources.

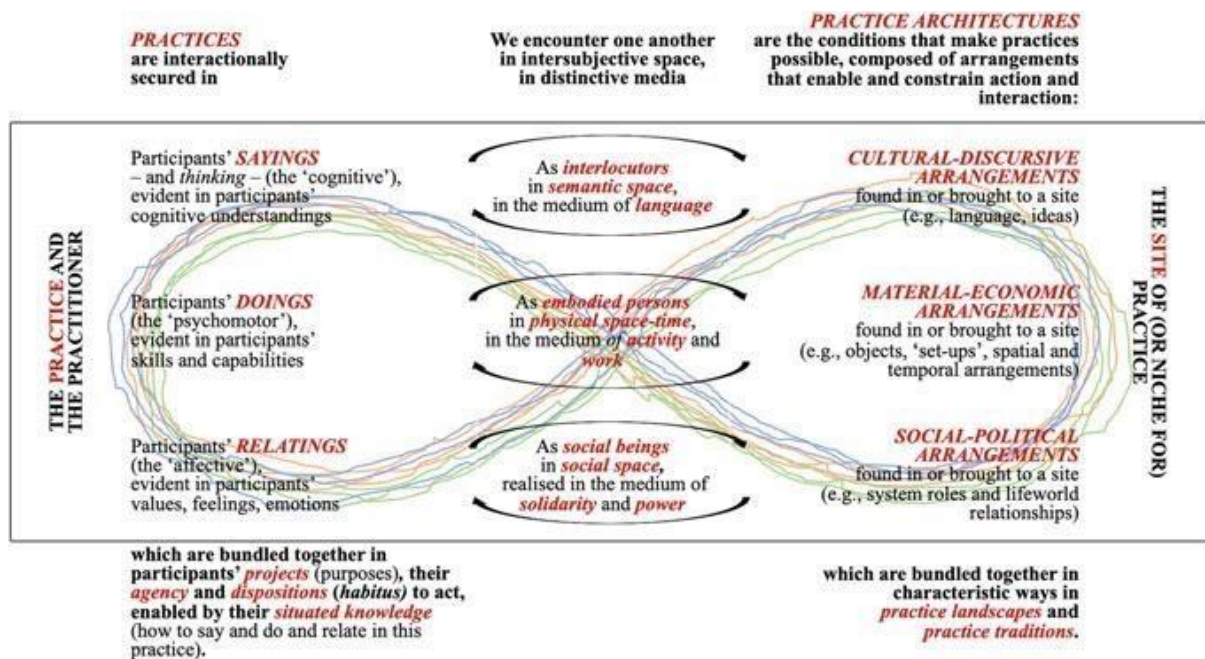
(Kemmis et al., 2014, p 33)

Practice architectures shape how practices get done (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023). The cultural-discursive arrangements and conditions found in, or brought into (by people) a site enable and constrain the sayings of a practice, just as the material-economic conditions or arrangements found in, or brought to a site enable or constrain the doings of a practice, and finally, the social-political arrangements found in, or brought to a site enable and constrain the doings of a practice (Kemmis et al., 2014; Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023). While these arrangements shape what is possible within practice, meaning is not produced by the arrangements alone, but through the interactions between people as they participate in these practices. It is within the space between people that meaning is created as they encounter each other in practice (Kemmis, 2023).

The Intersubjective Space

Practices are not simply carried out by individuals acting alone, but are always social and collective, enacted in the intersubjective space (Kemmis et al., 2014; Kemmis, 2023). The intersubjective space refers to the shared social world in which people relate to one another through language, action and interaction (Kemmis et al., 2014). The prefix 'inter' highlights that this space is not formed in isolation, but between people, in connections, negotiations, and mutual understandings that unfold through relational practices (C. Edwards-Groves, personal communication, 2024). The practice architectures that enable and constrain practices exist in three dimensions of intersubjective space, as shown in the following diagram.

Figure 4: The Theory of Practice Architectures (Kemmis, 2023, p 20)



The left side of the diagram shows the sayings, doings, and relatings of the project, while on the right side sit the practice architectures as in the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements. The lemniscate woven through the background of the diagram represents the interconnected relationship between practices and practice architectures. In the middle of the diagram sits the three dimensions of intersubjective space, semantic space, physical space-time, and social space which is the shared space in which people encounter one another and the world (Kemmis et al., 2023).

In communication, we encounter one another in semantic space, in the medium of language and specialist discourses among cultural-discursive arrangements (what do you hear? what are they thinking? what are they saying?). In activity and work, we encounter one another in physical (material) spacetime, in the medium of materiality and temporality, among material-economic arrangements (what do you see? what are they doing? In social interaction, we encounter one another in social space, in the medium of solidarity and power, among social-political arrangements (what do you feel? how are they relating to one another?)

(Kemmis, 2023, 3:36)

As with the *vā*, the intersubjective space is where meaning making exists and this is shaped through the practices people engage in and by the conditions or arrangements that make those

practices possible. Therefore, the sayings in a practice are made possible by the cultural-discursive arrangements (such as language, discourses, traditions) in the site which we encounter in semantic space, the doings in the practice are made possible by the material-economic arrangements (such as wealth, economic resources, other material resources, physical spaces) in the site which we encounter in material or physical space, and the relatings in the practice are made possible by social-political arrangements (such as roles, relationships, agency, solidarity and power) which we encounter in social space (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023; Kemmis et al., 2014). Together, these arrangements provide a way to understand how practices are shaped and situated in time and space, showing how what is possible depends on the conditions within a particular site (Kemmis et al., 2025).

Practice Traditions

While practices are shaped by practice architectures, some of the arrangements in practice architectures are also shaped by practices, many of which existed in the past (Kemmis et al., 2014; Kemmis et al., 2025). These past practices are carried forward as practice traditions, which "encapsulate the history of the happenings of the practice, allow it to be reproduced, and act as a kind of collective memory of the practice" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p 31). Hardy and Edwards-Groves (2016) explain that recognising the impact of history on current practices is helpful in understanding how they are carried out today but also how particular practice traditions endure. This is not to say that history predetermines current practice, but rather history prefigures, and therefore shapes how practices adapt to changing times (Kemmis et al., 2014).

Practices are not confined to a single site but can travel across sites and time and continue to exist within different contexts (Hardy et al., 2012). As people move from one site to another, they carry with them practices they have learned and reproduce them in new sites of practice (Wilkinson et al., 2013). In the context of migration, this highlights how practice traditions endure across sites, because they travel with people as they move. Using the term 'reproduce' is to acknowledge that while practices are carried across sites, the site itself remains crucial in shaping how those practices are enacted (Kemmis et al., 2014). While there may be resemblances, and the practices may appear identical, the practice architectures of each site will influence how practices are enacted (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023).

THEORETICAL FRAMINGS

This understanding of practice as something carried, reproduced and shaped by the conditions within a site resonates with how 'Ākono'anga Māori and Vā are also lived and sustained across contexts. Having outlined the Theory of Practice Architectures, I now bring it into a conversation with 'Ākono'anga Māori and Vā, to show how together these frameworks provide an understanding of how Cook Islands Māori practices travel, endure, and are shaped within the sites in which they are lived.

Connecting 'Ākono'anga Māori, Vā and the Theory of Practice Architectures

For Cook Islands Māori, the notion of practice is embodied in the term 'ākono'anga, where we have our own sayings and ways of saying - "tō tātou au tuatua", expressed through Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani; our own doings and ways of doing - "tō tatou e ravenga"; and our own relatings and ways of relating - "tō tatou au piri'anga". I add the terms 'own ways of saying' to acknowledge that each island in the Cook Islands has its own distinct discourses, stories, histories, and dialects which shape how meaning is expressed, understood and shared. Similarly, 'own ways of doing' is to recognise that each island also holds its own practices, customs, and ways of acting. The phrase 'own ways of relating' is to acknowledge that each island holds its own genealogies, hierarchies, and societal structures that shape the ways people relate. There are similarities and differences across the Cook Islands, which reflects the diversity within Cook Islands Māori communities but also highlights how the distinct conditions of each island shape how practices are lived.

In Theory of Practice Architectures, meaning making happens in the intersubjective space, but for 'Ākono'anga Māori, in the context of this study, that meaning making happens in the vā. This is not to say that the intersubjective space is the vā because it is not. They are related in the way that both recognise meaning making is made in the spaces between people, rather than with individuals. However, they are not the same because they emerge from different knowledge traditions. The most significant difference is the understanding that the vā is sacred. A potential limit of the Theory of Practice Architectures is that it is oriented towards the material, that which is seen heard, moved, touched and so on (Kemmis et al., 2014). The sacred necessarily sits outside of this. In terms of a relationship with the atua or gods, our ways of interacting with them or him still happen through practices such as worship, prayer, and serving others. In this way, while the sacred itself may sit beyond the Theory of Practice of Architectures, the practices through which we relate to the sacred are still enacted in visible, material ways, and it is this that allows the theory to be a valuable tool for this study.

Having established that the intersubjective space and the *vā* are related yet distinct, this connection becomes more visible when considering how meaning is actually produced and shared in practice. According to Kemmis and Edwards-Groves (2018), knowledge is not confined to the mind and travels from one person to another through speech and conversation. In the Theory of Practice Architectures, sense-making occurs in semantic space as people encounter one another as interlocutors in their 'sayings' through the medium of language (Kemmis et al., 2014). Similarly, in the *vā* shared knowledge and understandings are conveyed through language (Faleolo, 2021). Language and communication play a vital role in nurturing, preserving, and maintaining the *vā*, as language is the key vehicle for carrying and expressing our ways of life (Māhina, 2017). In 'Ākono'anga Māori, these shared understandings have traditionally been communicated through Reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani, which has been vital for preserving *peu* Māori and *kite* Māori across the generations.

Language not only carries meaning but actively shapes how people act in relation to one another. The ways people speak, the words they use, and the meanings they create shape their actions and interactions, which in the Theory of Practice Architectures are the 'doings' in a practice (Kemmis et al., 2014; Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018). These 'doings' occur within physical space-time, where individuals engage as embodied beings (Kemmis et al., 2014). The concept of space and time together highlights that practices happen in real time and specific sites (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023).

Similarly, in the *vā*, physical space refers to the tangible environments where these interactions occur, such as homes, Churches, community halls, *marae*, and the natural environments of island life (Ka'ili, et al., 2017; Māhina, 2017). In 'Ākono'anga Māori, our 'doings' are deeply connected to our customs which traditionally occurred in the villages on our islands. But because of migration, those physical spaces here in Aotearoa New Zealand mainly include our homes, Churches, Church or community halls, and schools. Yet the *vā* is not only about physical space; it also encompasses time-space, captured in the phrase '*teia vā*' as in 'what is happening in this space at this time', aligning with the Theory of Practice Architectures concept of the 'happeningness of practices' (Kemmis et al., 2014).

Beyond physical space, the *vā* also encompasses social space. While 'doings' happen in physical space, people encounter one another as social beings in social space, where 'relatings', the ways people interact and connect, are shaped by solidarity and power (Kemmis et al., 2014). Māhina (2017) explained that in the *vā*, sociality is space. Ka'ili (2005) adds that human relationships and their interactions shape and define the spaces we occupy. In the *vā*, relationships are built

through reciprocity, respect, and fulfilling one's responsibilities, but they are also influenced by hierarchies and authority (Māhina, 2017). In 'Ākono'anga Māori, the 'relatings' or piri'anga between elders and younger generations demonstrate both solidarity and power, which are pivotal to the passing down of practice traditions essential to sustaining our way of life. The relationships between grandparents and grandchildren are particularly significant to Cook Islands Māori and highlights the importance of intergenerational practices.

A Relational Practice-Based Framework

'Ākono'anga Māori, Vā, and the Theory of Practice Architectures create the theoretical framework that underpins this study. 'Ākono'anga Māori grounds this research in a Cook Islands Māori worldview and our way of life, which is essential as this study aims to make visible the education histories and experiences of Cook Islands Māori learners. It also shapes how I engage with the vā, in terms of the practices that are enacted to maintain and sustain the relationships with those involved in this research. This includes prioritising the use of Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani, where possible, as a way of explaining and expressing our practices.

Melani Anae (2010) explained that when relationships are viewed as sacred or tapu, then they are valued and nurtured more. They also carry an ethical commitment to act with care, responsibility, and accountability. Within 'Ākono'anga Māori all relationships are tapu, and therefore the practices of 'akangateitei (respect), 'akataka patoa (reciprocity), and ta'aka'aka (humility), enable me as a researcher not only to 'ākonokono i te vā but to engage with those involved in this study appropriately. To do this is to follow Cook Islands Māori practice traditions such as engaging in meaningful discussions as advocated by Faleolo (2021) through 'mata-ki-te-mata' (face-to-face) as is our 'ākono'anga.

There are also other cultural practices that need to be followed to maintain and protect the sacredness of the vā. Protocols such as karakia, sharing a ĭrava (bible verse), sharing papa'anga and sharing kaikai (a meal) before any conversation or interaction occurs is essential. These practices set the tone for how I engage with the vā as a researcher. This is also guided by papa'anga, piri'anga, turanga, 'akaue'anga and my ngakau aro'a. I must consider how I 'ātui (connect) to those involved in this study through my papa'anga, my piri'anga with every individual, my turanga in that relationship, my 'akaue'anga, and the understanding that my interaction with everyone involved in this study is motivated by good intentions from a ngakau aro'a. These conditions shape my practice as a researcher.

As discussed earlier in this tu'anga, Theory of Practice Architectures provides a way of examining practices as they happen, not by focusing on individual teachers, but by attending to

what unfolds between people. In this study, these practices are understood as happening in the *vā*, where meanings are made and experienced in the spaces between people. Teaching and learning are understood as practices shaped by interconnected cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements (Kemmis et al., 2014), all of which shape how Cook Islands Māori experience education. As such, it is necessary to outline what these specific arrangements could look like.

The cultural-discursive arrangements shape what has been said and what is able to be said, and how Cook Islands Māori are positioned within educational discourses. This includes the wider narratives in the Cook Islands itself, and in Aotearoa New Zealand about Cook Islands Māori learners, the expectations of them, and the ways administrators and teachers speak about and to them. These narratives matter, as they can affirm identity and learners' potential, or they can reproduce deficit thinking that limits how Cook Islands Māori learners see themselves. These 'sayings', shape how knowledge is valued, how success is defined, and how Cook Islands Māori learners are positioned in the classroom.

The material-economic arrangements draw attention to the conditions in which learning takes place. This includes the distribution of resources, access to those resources by Cook Islands Māori students and their families, the structuring of timetables, and the decisions about grouping or streaming. It also includes the spaces in which learning happens and whether those spaces enable or constrain the engagement of Cook Islands Māori learners. Access to culturally relevant resources, including Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani Māori is considered part of this. These conditions shape what is possible in practice and who is able to participate fully.

The social-political arrangements are not just about the relationships between teachers Cook Islands Māori learners, their families, and communities. This includes policy, leadership, decision-making, as well as who's knowledge and perspectives are recognised and valued. It also involves how schools engage with Cook Islands Māori communities and the extent to which 'Ākono'anga Māori is reflected in the curriculum and pedagogical practices. These arrangements shape how power and responsibility are carried out, influencing who is heard, included, and valued.

Using Theory of Practice Architectures allows me to look more closely at how these arrangements come together in particular sites to shape practice. It makes visible how practices are enabled or constrained, and how Cook Islands Māori learners, families, and community are positioned within them. This study therefore analyses not only the conditions that shape practice for Cook Islands Māori, but how those conditions are experienced within the *vā*.

TŌPIRI'ANGA

Together, 'Ākono'anga Māori, Vā and the Theory of Practice Architectures form the theoretical framework for this study. 'Ākono'anga Māori situates this research within a Cook Islands Māori worldview and way of life. Centring Vā foregrounds relationships and the understanding that making sense of the world occurs between people. The Theory of Practice Architectures then provides a way to examine the practices and conditions that shape these experiences. In this way, the framework allows this study to analyse Cook Islands Māori education experiences as culturally grounded, relationally enacted, and shaped by specific conditions in the sites in which they occur.

Tu'anga Ā: Rave'anga Kimikimi'anga

Chapter Four: Methodology/Methods

'AKATOMO'ANGA

In this tu'anga, I continue to stitch my tivaivai by building on the foundation of the theoretical framework, turning now to the methodology and methods drawn upon in this study. Having grounded this thesis in 'Ākono'anga Māori, I draw from peu Māori as a way to meaningfully engage with this research. I adopt the Tivaevae methodology developed by Teremoana Maua-Hodges (2018) to guide this research. Its emphasis on people working together to weave kite Māori and peu Māori together to create shared meaning, is appropriate for this study. Within this, I introduce Patu Tuatua as a method for gathering stories, where participants' experiences are expressed through narrative forms that reflect how kite Māori is shared in Cook Islands Māori contexts. I then explain my use of Tara, short vignette-like accounts, to capture collective moments, relationships, and meanings. The tara make visible the practices and practice arrangements for the purpose of analysis.

TIVAEVAE - A METAPHOR FOR RESEARCH

Tivaevae are hand-sewn bedspreads and are considered important cultural treasures in Cook Islands Māori communities (Rongokea, 2004). Traditionally crafted by the va'inetini³⁴, these beautiful artefacts are an essential part of many important events such as weddings, birthdays, traditional hair cuttings, unveilings and funerals. This practice is believed to have been introduced through Christianity (Hutton et al., 2010), but over time, Cook Islands Māori have made it their own. In the Rarotongan dialect 'tivaevae' means 'patches', which refers to the pieces of fabric sewn together to create one whole (Rongokea, 2004). In Aitutaki, however, we use the spelling 'tivaivai'. Tivai means to mend, patch up, or restore, and tivaivai is to do this with more than one piece of fabric (J Toma-Tuarae, personal communication, May 8, 2024).

Tivaivai Research Design

Within education research, there are very few research methodologies and methods that are grounded in 'Ākono'anga Māori. The Tivaevae methodology (Maua-Hodges, 2018) appears to be at the forefront of approaches that centre our ways of being and knowing. The process of

³⁴ The va'inetini are groups of Cook Islands women, typically affiliated with a Church or village who meet together to sew (Morgan, 2001)

creating a tivaivai has been adapted by academic Teremoana Maua-Hodges and conceptualised as an Indigenous methodology for research. Maua-Hodges (2018) described this as a metaphor with the intent to give voice to Cook Islands Māori peoples in the area of academic research. Because it centres Cook Islands Māori ways of being and knowing, the practice makes it a suitable metaphor to guide the research process. The common use of metaphors in Pasifika-Pacific research frameworks, has been described by Sanga and Reynolds (2020) as a way of bridging between world views, while also encouraging communication and relationships between knowledge systems. Baice and Samu (2023) add to this discussion with the following statement:

The use of metaphor grounds understandings in existing knowledge, imparting critical information to make sense of what are often foreign concepts in education and in research centring Pacific voices and challenging a wide range of theoretical, methodological, and political issues in academic research.

(Baice & Samu, 2023, p 142)

Maua-Hodges conceptualisation of the tivaivai metaphor has been used and adapted by several researchers over the years, a practice she advocates for (Maua-Hodges et al., 2025). Every tivaivai is unique, in terms of the stories they tell, the relationships they hold, the colours and symbols used, and the vision of the ta'unga (expert) who conceptualises the tivaivai in the first place. The same can be said for research. Research is also shaped by relationships, shared understandings and experiences of those who are involved. The collaborative nature of this practice therefore makes it suitable for this study.

My conceptualisation of the tivaivai metaphor as a methodology is a weaving together of how it has been interpreted and applied across three studies by Aue Te Ava (2011), Teremoana MauaHodges (2018), and Debbie Futter-Puati in consultation with Teremoana Maua-Hodges (2019). It is also informed by the lived experiences and practices of my grandmothers and the cherished women they collaborated with over the years on tivaivai projects. As a child growing up, it was common to walk into both of their homes and see a large canvas spread out on the living room floor with māmā's sitting around bent over the canvas sewing, while talking, laughing, and even crying together.

My tivaivai methodology begins with the three foundational phases: ko'iko'i (to gather), tuitui (to sew), and 'akairi'anga (to put in place) as conceptualised by Te Ava (2011). Within my own

interpretations of the methodology, each phase is then comprised of two interconnected stages as outlined by Maua-Hodges (2018), and Futter-Puati and Maua-Hodges (2019). In the **Ko'iko'i** phase, these stages are 'akateateamamao (to prepare) and 'akaruru (to bring together). In the **Tuitui** phase, the stages are tāmoumou (fasten) and tuitui (to stitch). In the **'Akairi'anga** phase, the stages are 'o'ora (to gift) and rima oranga (to use the gift). Finally, the practice of pākoti (to cut) refers to the ongoing cutting of fabric and thread throughout the process of making a tivaivai. The unpacking of phases and stages is linked to my own understanding and sense-making process which also allows me to be more precise in my explanations. The use of these terms comes with the following definitions:

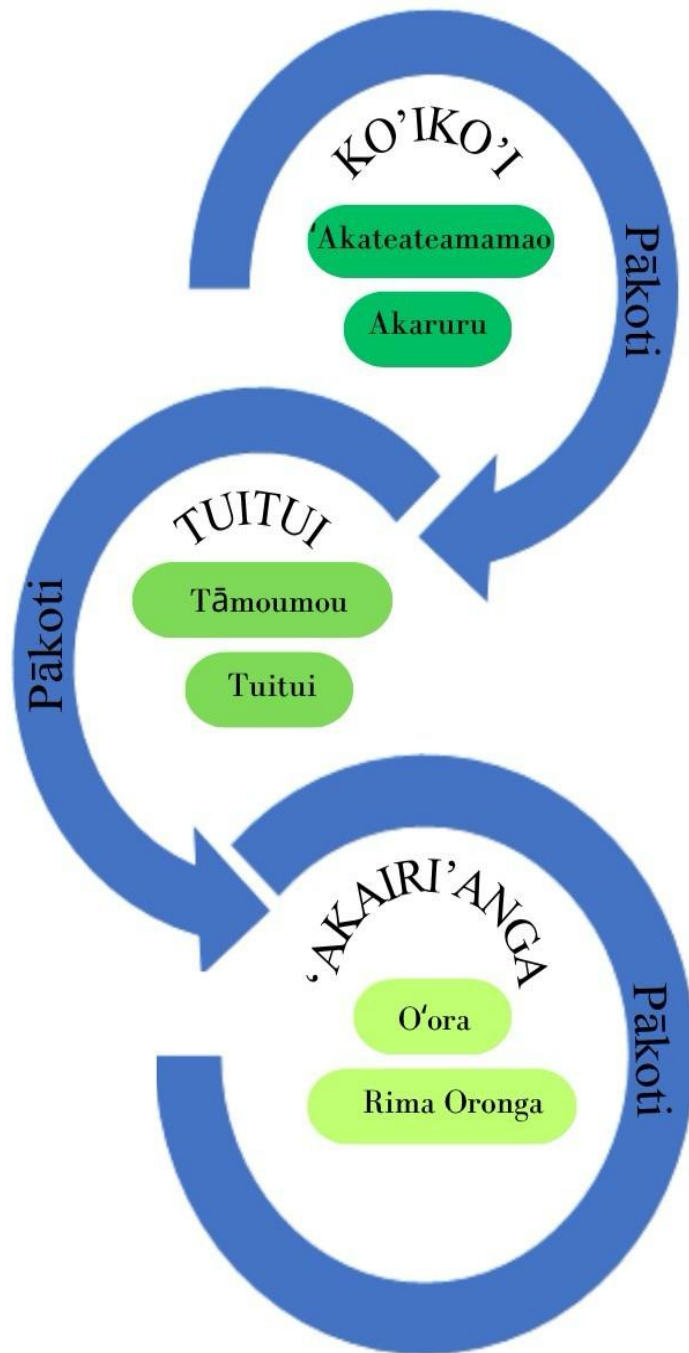
A phase is a distinct and measurable period in a process or project. It represents a specific step that needs to be completed before moving on to the next one. A stage is a point or period in a process or development. It is often used interchangeably with the term 'phrase' but there are some subtle differences. While a phrase represents a distinct and measurable step in a project or process, a stage is a more general term that can refer to any point in a process. Stages can be sequential, but they can also overlap or occur simultaneously.

(Manaher, 2023, p1)

My conceptualisation of the methodology is based on the tivaivai manu³⁵ and depicted in the following diagram and explained in the subsequent section:

³⁵ There are three types of tivaivai – tivaivai manu (applique), tivaivai ta'orei (patchwork) and tivaivai tataura (embroidered applique).

Figure 5: Tivaivai Methodology Model



Ko'iko'i (to gather)

Ko'iko'i represents the foundational phase of gathering and preparing the necessary conditions for the tivaivai and the research journey to begin. This phase involves careful thought, preparation, and the bringing together of the people, materials, knowledge, and stories that will shape the work.

'Akateateamamao (to prepare)

Stage one of 'akateateamamao (to prepare) begins with the ta'unga (expert) herself, her vision, the story she wants to sew into the tivaivai, the design she wishes to create, the colours and patterns that will convey her story, the team she wishes to work with and finally, considering how each element will contribute to the overall meaning of the tivaivai as a whole. She considers her own expertise, her relationships with those that will participate, and her responsibilities in terms of leading the project while maintaining the strength and balance of the vā. She may seek advice from trusted confidants to help clarify her ideas and her vision, but before anything is done, she prepares herself first.

In terms of my own preparation for this research, it began with a wider interest in the student achievement of Pasifika-Pacific students at Tokoroa High School. My initial comments for my application to begin my doctorate journey were focused more on a life-history analysis of this wider achievement. It was not until I was accepted into the PhD programme and assigned supervisors that my focus narrowed toward my own Cook Islands community; after also being encouraged by these professionals to centre the experiences of my own people within this research. From these initial conversations, I created my vision and planned accordingly, in terms of the story I needed to tell, the criteria for participants, what support systems I needed to put in place to assist me, the tools and materials I needed, and also considered my own ability to carry out this research.

Part of this preparation was deciding on my main research question and sub-questions that would guide this study. Initially I had a list of several questions that were at the forefront for me: What contributed to the academic success of Cook Islands Māori students at Tokoroa High School in the years 2011-2022? Where did our Cook Islands Māori practices fit into this success? What did Cook Islands Māori families do that contributed to that academic success? What were the dreams and aspirations of Cook Islands Māori families in Tokoroa in terms of education success? What was education success? Was it different from academic success? How did Cook Islands Māori families define success?

Eventually, I settled on the following questions: What are the intergenerational stories of success for Cook Islands Māori students in Tokoroa? What do intergenerational stories and storying practices look, sound, and feel like for Cook Islands Māori students? What intergenerational cultural knowledge and cultural practices are believed to be worthwhile by Cook Islands Māori people in Tokoroa? How is this cultural knowledge and these cultural practices reflected in the learning spaces or contexts at Tokoroa High School? How is success framed through the intergenerational knowledge and practices of Cook Islands Māori families in Tokoroa? These questions became the foundation of my research proposal, which was completed and approved in 2022, along with my ethics proposal.

However, over the years, as my knowledge of practice theory grew, so too did my desire to centre 'Ākono'anga Māori in this research. My questions therefore evolved into "What are the practice traditions that have enabled education success for Cook Islands Māori students in Tokoroa?" This main question is supported by the sub-questions: (a) How have the practice arrangements across time and place shaped how Cook Islands Māori experienced educational success? (b) How are these practices reflected in the learning spaces at Tokoroa High School? and (c) How is success framed by Cook Islands Māori families in Tokoroa? Although these questions evolved over time, once my initial questions were decided, my vision and plan settled, I set out to gather what I needed.

'Akaruru (to bring together)

Stage two of the ko'iko'i phase is 'akaruru (to bring together). In this case, to bring together what was needed to give life to the tivaivai. Sewing tivaivai is typically a collaborative practice, not that a tivaivai can't be sewn by one person, because they can. Sometimes a ta'unga will sew a tivaivai on her own to refine her skills, or for a special occasion, like my maternal grandmother did for my father's unveiling³⁶. Although a tivaivai can be sewn by one person, it is known for its collaborative efforts. The people that the ta'unga includes are people she trusts will not only nurture the vā but assist in bringing her vision to life. Their life experience as with their sewing skills will contribute significantly to the project, but they also must have a desire to participate and a ngakau aro'a (a loving and compassionate heart) for the work that is to be undertaken. Many people will be included and serve on the project in different ways. There are materials and tools to be purchased, food to be bought and prepared, patterns to be created, and fabric to cut (Maua-Hodges, 2018). Her team of trusted helpers will also assist the ta'unga in

³⁶ The unveiling of the headstone of a loved one who has passed on is a common practice for Cook Islands Māori families.

gathering everything she needs to begin the tivaivai. Once all the necessary materials have been gathered, and the fabric prepared and cut, the ta'unga is ready to move into the next phase.

Figure 6: Ta'unga Sewing Tivaivai



(photo courtesy of Leila Monga, September 2024)

Having decided on the focus of my research, I set about surrounding myself with a support team. My initial advisors in terms of this research were of course my supervisors - Assistant Vice-Chancellor Academic Excellence - Associate Professor Kirsten Petrie, and Assistant Vice-Chancellor Pacific - Dr Keakaokawai Varner Hemi from the University of Waikato and also Associate Professor David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae from the University of Auckland. Each of them are renowned academics in their fields, widely published and highly sort after. I have been extremely blessed to have them guide me through this research journey. As well as strong academic support, I created a team of cultural advisors, to ensure that my use of Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani, as with my explanations of the 'ākono'anga implemented and explained were accurate, according to how we live as iti tangata Māori here in Tokoroa. They are Māmā Jean Toma-Tuarae, Julius Daniels, Poaru Daniels, Dr Reverend Tokerau Joseph, Maine Teokotai Tarai, Teariki-Terae Tearoa-Natua and of course my mother Kura-Teauti Rota. Each of them holds their own expertise in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani and Ākono'anga Māori, but also have strengths in areas such as papa'anga, peu Māori and kite Māori. Māmā Jean and Julius were my main advisors from the beginning of this journey until the very end. Unfortunately, mum passed away just before the completion of my research.

With a strong support network in place, I set about recruiting participants to participate in the research. This selection was based on specific criteria. First, participants had to be ex-students

of Tokoroa High School and of Cook Islands Māori descent. They needed to have attended the school during the years 2011-2022, a period of 11 years where the achievement results of Pasifika-Pacific increased to record levels at the school. All ex-students had either completed a tertiary qualification or were working towards the completion of a tertiary qualification, and finally, be one of three generations to show intergenerational connections. The inclusion of three generations in a family narrowed the selection participants down to a few families, and it was these families that I approached to participate in the research.

However, communicating my intention for their involvement presented a tension due to the requirements set by the ethics committee. In my ethics application, I outlined that my approach would be to first contact participants in person before sending any paperwork. This approach aligned with 'Ākono'anga Māori, particularly when involving our metua³⁷. Given the significance of the project, 'mata-ki-te-mata' (face-to-face) communication, was essential as it demonstrates respect, a value that holds great importance in our lived realities. The ethics committee declined my initial application, and they advised that I needed to send the paperwork out first before meeting in person. In their view, this was the most appropriate process to follow. After a discussion with my chief supervisor at the time, it was decided that for the sake of ethics approval that I need to comply. This was difficult for me, especially as I was committed to prioritising 'Ākono'anga Māori in this study.

The ethics process raised significant issues for me. It became clear that there was a disconnect between the worldview and practices of those on the ethics committee and my own. Their approach seemed rooted in a rigid, western framework that didn't align with the way in which we show respect to our elders within 'Ākono'anga Māori. It was evident that they had never navigated the cultural nuances involved in working with our māmās and pāpās, who are the main knowledge holders of our culture. This disconnect highlighted the challenges of applying a standardised ethical framework to research that privileges Indigenous knowledge systems. It was a reminder of the importance of advocating for ethical processes that honour and respect the practices and lived realities of the communities being studied. However, I humbled myself and made the necessary changes, which gained me ethical approval.

Upon receiving ethical approval, I sought out the participants that could participate. Out of the 10 families that I approached, seven committed to participating in the study. Once I had confirmed my participants, I set about unpacking the tools that I needed to move the work forward according to the plan I had created. This included unpacking the theoretical

³⁷ Metua is a term that means parent but is also used as a term for 'elders'. In this instance it refers to elders.

components that would shape the research while also learning alongside my cultural advisors and deepening my understanding of 'Ākono'anga Māori and Reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani, so that these could be woven into the study appropriately. Finding the right terms and phrases to reflect my Aitutaki heritage was important to my advisors but also challenged us in terms of having to articulate our way of life in a that could be understood in western frameworks. In terms of the theoretical underpinnings, I attended conferences, meetings, and had meaningful conversations to deepen my understandings of different research methodologies, methods, and theories. Finally, I collected the materials I needed to ground the study in the stories of the past, especially for the literature review. I collected books, journal articles, theses, genealogies, policy documents, dictionaries, photographs, histories, both oral and written, and achievement data. All these elements were essential to the emergence of the patterns required to create this metaphoric tivaivai.

Tuitui (to sew)

The next phase of the tivaivai methodology 'tuitui' consists of two interconnected stages, *tāmoumou*, which means 'to fasten', and *tuitui*, which in this case also means 'to stitch'. While sewing refers to the overall process of creating the tivaivai, stitching represents the deliberate joining together of individual fabrics and patterns, with the blank canvas.

Tāmoumou (to fasten)

During the *tāmoumou* stage, the patterns are laid out carefully, so they can be fastened to the foundational canvas. The second layer, the leaves, are laid out first, and the final layer, the flowers are placed on top. When the patterns are accurately placed, the women³⁸ take a section of the tivaivai and fasten the layers together. This is not a permanent stitch but a measure of securing the pieces together to hold them in place for the final stitching. This is the collaborative part of the process, the time when women sit together and share stories as they sew. It is a deeply personal time, where women share their losses, their memories, their joys, or ask questions and offer advice. It is during this time where those who participate strengthen the *vā* and create meaning together around the tivaivai.

³⁸ I have used the term women in my explanation with the *va'ine tini* in mind but tivaivai is sewn by all genders.

Figure 7: Laying the Patterns



(photo taken by me, March 2025)

In terms of the research methodology, this was the stage where I sat with participants and they shared their stories with me through the practice of *patu tuatua* (to be discussed later in this *tu'anga*). There were indeed lots of tears shed across the generations, along with joy, aspirations, and reflections. Each story shared was unique in terms of family stories but there were definitely similarities in the way of the decisions made and resilience shown to adapt to circumstances and focus on the goal of a better life. Through the process of *tāmoumou*, metaphorically families fastened themselves into the fabric, embedding their stories into the layers of the *tivaivai*.

Figure 8: Fastening the Patterns



(photo taken by me, March 2025)

Figure 9: Tacking the Tivaivai



(photo taken by me, March 2025)

Figure 10: The Fastened Pattern



(photo taken by me, March 2025)

Tuitui (to stitch)

Although the team of sewers can work on stitching the layers together after the *tāmoumou* process (Maua-Hodges, 2018), it is common practice in Tokoroa for the *ta'unga* to take the *tivaivai* home and complete the stitching herself. This is to ensure the consistency of the stitch. Too many hands can distort the appearance of the final stitch and therefore the final appearance of the *tivaivai* itself. It is also an opportunity for the *ta'unga* to stitch herself into the *tivaivai* revealing her expertise and knowledge. In terms of research, it is where researchers interpret the data, make connections and construct a meaningful narrative from the layers of work. Researchers stitch their own expertise into the research before concluding with new meanings and insights that benefit the collective.

Figure 11: Examining the Tivaivaui



(photo taken by me, March 2025)

It was during this stage that I unpacked the findings of the data collected during the *tāmoumou* stage. Initially, once the transcripts were completed, I read through them and identified themes that came through strongly. Then I read through them again to highlight where I believed participants had answered my research questions. Although this seemed like a natural step in the analytical process, I was not achieving the depth of analysis I had hoped for. The Theory of Practice Architectures provided the means to be able to do this. In the theory, observational data is regarded as a more precise way of examining practices as they unfold in real time-space (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023). However, my late introduction to the theory, as well as the historical nature of this study, made this impossible. Despite this limitation, I relied heavily on the accounts shared by the participants, as well as artefacts of practice gathered during the *'akaruru* stage which included personal journals, genealogies, policy documents, historical records, and other research texts.

A focus on practice meant identifying the conditions that enabled or constrained education success for Cook Islands Māori learners. With this new understanding, I read through my transcripts again and became more attuned to the accounts of practice in terms of the sayings, doings, and relatings as described by the participants. I used a colour code to identify these elements of practice and highlighted these accordingly. Then I used a table of invention to bring the data into a more coherent structure. This is an analytical tool used in the Theory of Practice

Architectures that organises the data from the transcripts where the sayings, doings, and relatings of a practice are recorded as individual components. Although the table of invention enables this practice, in reality they are interconnected and must be brought back together in the presentation of the findings.

Using the table of invention had a significant impact on the analysis and the direction this research would take. In particular, it revealed how the broader conditions of society shaped practices that impacted how Cook Islands Māori learners experienced education both in the Cook Islands and in Aotearoa New Zealand. An example of how I used the table of invention is given below. This example does not include the full scope of my use of this tool.

Table 1: Table of Invention for Analysing Practices

Practice Architectures	Broader Pre-figuring Practice Architectures	Practices found in or brought to the site of NZ schools	Empirical Examples
Cultural-discursive Arrangements	Economic policies designed to meet growing demands for manual labour encouraged migration from Pacific nations to NZ. Education policy with English as medium of instruction.	English only language spoken in schools. English became dominant language at home.	"My dad was always made fun of for talking broken English so it was important to him that we could speak good English".
Material-Economic Arrangements	English-dominant schools Lack of language resources to support Cook Islands Māori learners in schools	Streaming practices in schools for Cook Islands Māori learners straight from the islands.	"Culture wasn't a priority for our pāpā. It was more important to learn English. We couldn't afford books, so we read our Bible instead".
Social-Political Arrangements	English dominant society with pressures on Cook Islands Māori migrants to assimilate to NZ culture.	Privileging of English. Teachers punishing students for speaking Cook Islands Māori	"We were punished in the Cook Islands for speaking Māori at school and our children were also punished when they came to NZ because their English wasn't good enough"

By bringing together the sayings, doings, and relatings, and the conditions that shape them, the table of invention revealed patterns across the stories and experiences of the participants, such as how particular practices were enabled and constrained by certain conditions, how past practices continue to shape present practices, the interconnected nature of the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements, as well as the dominance of the British culture in Aotearoa New Zealand society and its impact on Cook Islands Māori families both in the Cook Islands and Aotearoa New Zealand.

Upon completion of the table of invention, I attended to the practices more carefully and ascertained that these were unfolding chronologically. Considering the inclusion of three generations of participants, this was a likely but unexpected outcome. A deeper examination of the data also revealed the emerging themes were significantly different from my original analysis. Hence a focus on policy, curriculum, pedagogy, measurement and success across the timeframes of the pre-missionary period in the Cook Islands (900 AD-1820), the missionary period (1821-1887), the colonial period (1888-1949), and migration to Aotearoa New Zealand (1950- 2022). My literature review and findings tu'anga also follow these timeframes.

Communicating my understandings in a coherent manner throughout my tu'anga was quite complex because of the historical nature of the data. As a novice researcher writing with a practice lens for the first time, one of the tensions I encountered was writing analytically about practices, rather than merely recounting historical events - a trap I fell into often. An approach that enabled me to focus my writing was the use of creative non-fiction practices, where a single story is used to communicate the perspectives of many people, are fiction in terms of its structure but its content is factual (Quarmby et al., 2020; Vickers, 2010). I will discuss this more later in this tu'anga.

Ultimately, the practices I enacted during this stage of the research enabled me to analyse my data with a critical lens and focus my writing beyond historical descriptions. As a result, the tu'anga that follow are layered, where stories, practices, relationships, and histories are woven together to reveal how Cook Islands Māori have defined and experienced education across the Cook Islands and essentially here in Tokoroa, Aotearoa New Zealand.

Pākoti (to cut)

In Futter-Puati and Maua-Hodges (2019) tivaivai metaphor, they conceptualised pākoti as its own stage. However, I propose that the practice of 'cutting' is one that occurs right throughout the process of making tivaivai and happens in every phase whether it is cutting the patterns and fabrics in the ko'iko'i phase, the cotton threads in the tuitui phase, or even any last-minute

threads that were missed right before the 'o'ora in the 'akairi'anga phase. Pākoti is ongoing and requires the skill to critically analyse what is needed and what is not. A critical lens is required right throughout the research process and cutting out unnecessary information to make the analysis and explanations succinct and relevant is ongoing. Hence, in the methodology for this study, pākoti represents the ongoing critical lens that is required to unpack the layers that shape this research.

'Akairi'anga (to put in place)

O'ora (to gift)

The final phase of the methodology is 'akairi'anga, meaning 'to put in place'. This represents the completion of the tivaivai and its use by those for whom it was created. This phase consists of the two interconnected stages of o'ora (to gift) and rima oronga (to use the gift). When the tivaivai is completed, it is ironed then gifted to the person it was intended for (Maua-Hodges, 2018). It is an expression of love, service, relationships, and also responsibility. The act of gifting is just as important as the making of the tivaivai. This is usually presented through the o'ora, a practice tradition performed at a wedding, where the Cook Islands drums are played and the tivaivai carried by family members and placed over the recipient. More recently this practice has been extended into other celebrations such as 21st birthdays and hair cuttings.

Figure 12: O'ora the Tivaivai



(photo courtesy of Timote Turu, July 2020)

Figure 13: Displaying the Tivaivai



(photo courtesy of Elle Hawea, February 2022)

For the research, this thesis is the metaphoric tivaivai, bound, submitted, examined, and ready to be used. Like a completed tivaivai placed into the hands of others, the research moves beyond the researcher herself and into the lives and spaces for those who will benefit from the understandings held within it. It is intended that this thesis will move beyond just another academic product and be carried into communities.

Rima Oronga (to use the gift)

This final stage of the methodology, 'to use the gift', is to share it. For many recipients of tivaivai, including myself, it is common to hide them in a glory box to preserve them for important moments. Others will use their tivaivai and display them on furniture or use them for what they were intended for - bedspreads. It is hoped that this research does not remain an unused document, but will contribute to conditions that not only enable more meaningful conversations focused on Cook Islands Māori learners and communities by educators and policymakers but also create conditions that enable education success for them throughout the country.

Figure 14: The Unironed Tivaivai



(photo taken by me, May 2026)

TIVAIVAI AND THE VĀ

Vā is a mutual space of respect and reciprocity that recognises the contexts within which each person (group) exists and in this space builds and sustains authentic connections.

(Baice & Samu, 2023, p 144)

When working alongside others so closely, it is essential that we 'akonokono i te vā or care for the vā to ensure that there is balance and harmony (Ka'ili, 2005). Within tivaivai we do this through the practices of ta'okota'i'anga (collaboration), 'akangateitei (respect), 'akataka patoa (reciprocity) and ta 'akaaka (humility). Enacting these practices not only strengthens the vā but also upholds the mana ³⁹ of those who engage in the creation of the tivaivai. These interconnected practices, shape and sustain the vā, while ensuring the tivaivai is created through relationships grounded in care. To engage with vā this way comes from a place of ngakau aro'a for the ta'unga and her vision but also for the tivaivai.

While ta'okota'i'anga is defined as collaboration, in practice it means to work together to achieve a shared vision. Everyone involved in the project must believe in the vision so that they can contribute meaningfully to the work. When people ta'okota'i (collaborate), the other practices

³⁹ Mana is a person's dignity, value and importance that should be respected and protected.

happen naturally. The other sewers 'akangateitei the ta'unga and her vision, others who are involved in the project, and the work of the tivaivai. The ta'unga shows 'akataka patoa by reciprocating this mutual respect but also understanding that there will be a time where she will also have to collaborate on future tivaivai projects for the other participants. Ta 'akaaka is to understand that despite being the ta'unga, there will be times where she may have to humble herself to take advice from another member of her team which will benefit the project in ways she had not seen. With a ngakau aro'a, everyone involved moves forward as one.

A key aspect of the ta'okota'i'anga is the understanding that the vā is tapu (sacred) and therefore certain practices that acknowledge this tapu are essential and appropriate. This means engaging in *pure* ngutuare (devotion) at the beginning and end of each session, as well as sharing a meal. Devotion includes the singing of a hymn, a prayer, and sometimes a bible verse. This is offered by any member of the team. The ta'unga will usually lead this practice, or she may ask another participant who has a position in the Church or community to lead it. A meal may be shared at the beginning, during, or at the end of the session. This is all according to the needs of the participants.

In research with Pasifika-Pacific peoples, engaging with the vā this way is what Anae (2010) calls vā ethics. This understanding enables ethical responsibilities enacted from a Pasifika-Pacific worldview which prioritises relationships above processes. As the researcher, and in a sense, the ta'unga of this project, engaging with those involved in the study, in whatever capacity, being respectful and humble was always a priority. In every conversation, I wanted them to feel the passion and love I had for my research so they could "catch the vision", in order to ta'oko'ta'i with me in meaningful ways. Working alongside our māmā's and pāpā's was humbling in itself because of the knowledge that they hold of our histories. I also understood that there would be moments where I would have to step back and be led because of their turanga (position) in my papa'anga and community. This was never an issue, just a privilege. Grounding this research in 'Ākono'anga Māori enabled my participants to be their authentic selves and express themselves in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani if desired but also follow our own practices when required. Doing this aligns with how Faleolo (2021) advocated researchers engaging with vā to follow participants protocols to maintain the harmony of the vā. This was essential in this research.

PATU TUATUA - A STORYING PRACTICE

While tivaivai framed the overall methodological approach for this study, it was equally important that the method used to gather knowledge was also grounded within 'Ākono'anga Māori. This led to the storying practice patu tuatua. Smith (1999) positions story telling as a pre-requisite for Indigenous research, as woven within these stories are lessons and understandings that relate directly to Indigenous peoples and their lived experiences. Stories exist in many forms, each guided by particular rules and protocols regarding the contexts in which they are shared, how they are shared, and the purposes for sharing them, but the ability to interpret and make meaning from them are a central part of Indigenous teaching and learning practices (Archibald, 2018).

Patu Tuatua in the 'Ōire

Before discussing how Patu Tuatua will be used in this research, it is necessary to explain how it is practiced in the 'ōire. Storytelling is a legitimate way of sharing knowledge for Indigenous peoples in academic research (Archibald, 2018; Bishop & Berryman, 2006). Within Cook Islands Māori communities, patu tuatua is a conversation, one that encourages the natural use of storying and storytelling. In Reo Māori Kuki Airani, 'patu' has several meanings. In the Rarotongan dialect patu as a noun is 'a stone or concrete wall' (Cook Islands Māori Dictionary, n.d), while in the Mangaian dialect, one of its uses as a verb is 'to strike' and in the Penrhyn dialect it is a verb which means 'to beat or kill'. However, the most common use of 'patu' is as a verb which in Aitutaki, Mangaia, Manihiki, and Rarotonga 'means to build'. The terms 'tua' or 'tuatua' as nouns mean 'speech' or 'story' in the Rarotongan and Penrhyn dialects (Cook Islands Māori Dictionary, n.d)). As verbs they mean 'to talk' or 'speak'. In Aitutaki and Mangaia, the term 'tara' is used. This is similar to the term 'tala' (to tell, to story) within 'talanoa' (Vaiotei, 2006), a socio-cultural practice and tradition common in most parts of Polynesia. Therefore, 'patu tuatua' are conversations that give people the opportunity 'to speak to' a particular theme or question with the intent to 'build on' and help others to learn from what is being shared. While people share their thoughts on a theme or question, they naturally share stories of their own lived experiences that help others to grow in their shared understandings.

The practice of patu tuatua comes from the Cook Islands Māori religious service or gathering known as 'uapou' (which literally means a collective effort). Uapou is a common event that occurs regularly in Cook Islands Māori communities (Ratu, 2016). It is a way of bringing our people together to understand religious and spiritual matters (Dr Reverend T. Joseph, personal communication, September 3, 2022). In this context, 'spiritual matters' refers to the sacred

dimensions of Cook Islands Māori culture, often tied to matters of the heart (Solomon & Tarai, 2022). Central to this are the connections established through papa'anga, where the lives of our ancestors lead us to important locations and the stories of events that transpired there (Dr Reverend T. Joseph, personal communication, September 3, 2022).

Va'inetini Patu Tuatua

In our Cook Islands community in Tokoroa, the most common use of patu tuatua as a cultural practice of shared stories, conversations, and learning, can be found amongst the va'inetini or the Cook Islands Women Fellowship. These women are often involved in traditional practices such as tivaivai, 'ura (dance), and 'ime (song). They are also responsible for organising community events and supporting families in various capacities. The va'inetini are highly respected within our communities for their contributions to preserving and passing on our kite Māori through sharing stories in different forms (Rongokea, 2004).

In Tokoroa, the va'inetini are associated with the St Lukes Pacific Islands Presbyterian Church. According to Māmā Pokoina Pākoti (personal communication, March 29, 2023), our eldest māmā in 'Oire Tokoroa, the va'inetini were formed by a group of women from Aitutaki, who migrated to Aotearoa New Zealand in the early 1950's. These women decided that they needed a space to fellowship and support each other. The va'inetini concept was a practice they had grown up with in the Cook Islands, and they adapted this practice in Tokoroa based on their lived experiences. At first these women met in their own homes, and when the Church was built, they were given a space of their own to continue with their sewing. While their husbands worked various jobs in the forestry industry, the women helped each other to settle into their new lives in Tokoroa, by enacting practices they brought with them from the Cook Islands.

As a young mother the Va'inetini Patu Tuatua not only helped me and other women to build our understanding of the Bible, but it helped grow our confidence in reading and speaking English.

(J. Toma-Tuarae, personal communication, 29 March 2023)

The va'inetini, have been vigilant in sustaining two important cultural practices through the decades. These are tuitui and patu tuatua. From these practices, two women's groups have been formed - Va'inetini Patu Tuatua and Va'inetini Tuitui. Women can belong to one or the other group, but most times they will belong to both. The Va'inetini Tuitui gather every week and spend most of their time sewing tivaivai. The Va'inetini Patu Tuatua, however, gather once a month in Tokoroa, to seek guidance and clarification around Bible readings. Before they meet, they are given a reading accompanied by a question or two. They study these at home and then

come prepared with their stories to the patu tuatua session. While at the patu tuatua, those who wish to share their understandings of the reading will do so individually, and address the question posed. Women share their stories confidently, as the space is safe and empowering, allowing speakers to share freely. Traditionally Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani was the language of sharing but today given the lack of fluent speakers of the language, Reo papa'ā (English) is allowed with the encouragement to grow women's confidence to speak our reo.

In our community today, men also participate in the Va'inetini Patu Tuatua sessions, including our Pāpā 'Orometua (minister), while our mapu (young people) are actively encouraged to also participate and share their stories. Whether in formal Church settings like Uapou, Va'inetini Patu Tuatua or during family and community meetings, this practice is vital for our young people. It ensures that they remain connected to our community and 'ākono'anga but also ensures that their voices are heard within our 'ōire (Solomon and Tarai, 2022). Furthermore, it ensures the continuation of patu tuatua across generations, giving our young people the chance to deepen their own understandings through the lessons and stories shared.

Embracing Patu Tuatua

Drawing on patu tuatua as a research method aligned with my desire to ground this thesis in 'Ākono'anga Māori. It is a lived practice in my community both in the gatherings of the Uapou and Va'inetini Patu Tuatua. Without context patu tuatua looks like any semi-structured interview but the cultural nuances of our 'ākono'anga such as the use of Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani, the practices of *pure* ngutuare, sharing papa'anga, and the sharing of a meal ground this in a Cook Islands Māori worldview. Before engaging in patu tuatua with my participants, I created a simple questionnaire that would encourage conversation. As is customary in patu tuatua, these were given out beforehand so families could prepare what they wanted to share. Each patu tuatua looked differently for every family. Some families preferred to have their patu tuatua separately, as in grandparents on their own, parents on their own, and children on their own. Others preferred to have them together with all generations sharing their stories together. Although I had allocated a timeframe (60-120 minutes), I allowed the patu tuatua to go for as long as needed.

There was one particular patu tuatua that stood out, that would remind me of my place as a "child of the 'ōire", and also of my turanga in my papa'anga, regardless of my position as researcher. Of the grandparents involved in this study, two are tupuna tane (grandfathers). In a patu tuatua with one of them, he entered the space, and after greeting me, proceeded to welcome me to the patu tuatua then began the devotion. After sharing a prayer, a Bible verse, and his

papa'anga, he spoke to the questions I sent out previously. He moved between English and Reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani seamlessly and stopped at times to make sure that I understood him. There were moments when he asked me if I had any other questions for him, which opened up opportunities for conversation.

I was not offended in any way in fact I was in awe of the moment. It was a simple reminder of the mana of our elders and the importance of ethical responsibilities that allow our elders to be themselves even in the realm of academic research. But more importantly, it authenticated the implementation of patu tuatua as a relevant method of research grounded in 'Ākono'anga Māori. When our elders can engage in research where the conditions enable a genuine conversation, it opens up space for critical dialogue regarding the aspirations of Pasifika-Pacific communities and provides opportunities for them to articulate how they believe these aspirations were shaped, sustained, and achieved (Tualaulelei & McFall-McCaffrey, 2019).

Patu Tuatua and Vā

Educator Michael Ligaliga (2022) described vā as a space where Indigenous stories, perspectives and experiences find grounding and relevance. Since the arrival of our grandparents and parents to Tokoroa, our community have shared their stories through chant, songs, dance, creative drama, and storytelling. Wider society often mistake these practice traditions as entertainment but for our people these are ways of sharing our stories, including our those of migration and our lived experiences as migrants living away from our homeland. Patu tuatuta provides an opportunity to share personal stories with each other with the intent that others may learn from them. For this practice to unfold, it is essential that the vā between the participants is safe. Once gain the practices enacted in the vā as described in the tivaivai are prioritised during patu tuatua - ta'oko'ta'i'anga, 'akangateitei, 'akataka patoa, and ta 'akaaka, which are all motivated by a ngakau aro'a.

In the ta'oko'ta'i'anga of the patu tuatua, it was interesting to note everyone's commitment to their part of the research. Each person involved not only wanted to contribute to this research but also understood the opportunity to tell a story of our 'ōire and how we have navigated education, but also migration and settlement. This emerged through the patu tuatua and it was then that I truly realised the significance of the conversations I was having with families. The 'akangateitei enacted was not just for the people involved but also the people who had passed and built a foundation for those of us still living in Tokoroa. There was a respect for their efforts and their work, and participating in this study seemed to also be an act of reciprocity - a giving back so to speak, as a way of honouring their memories. This sharing truly humbled each of us

and motivated me even more to push forward with my ngakau aro'a and complete this work. In this way, engaging with patu tuatua and vā was more than sustaining the relationships of those involved in the research at the time. What eventuated, was not only the sharing of stories of those living in the present, but also those who had passed, a practice enabled through patu tuatua and vā.

Patu Tuatua and Tara

Throughout the patu tuatua, while I realised that each family's stories were unique, there were also interconnected experiences and understandings that emerged, especially in how families navigated migration, aspirations, education, and the end goal of a better life. While I understood that it was not possible to write about each family's experiences in the way they were delivered in patu tuatua, I turned to the use of tara (narrative stories) to articulate these collectively in my writing. While patu tuatua was a storying practice I deployed as a method to collect stories from participants, tara is a practice I utilised to re-tell their stories in this thesis.

Otherwise known as 'vignettes' or 'creative non-fiction', short stories that are fictional in structure but based on lived experiences and events, are used to weave together the collective voices and experiences of participants (Mutch, 2013; Schuster, 2023). In Aitutaki, tara is a storytelling practice, often used to articulate lived experiences. Hence, rather than using the terms 'vignettes' or 'creative non-fiction', I use 'tara' to represent a Cook Islands Māori worldview, grounded in 'Ākono'anga Māori and utilising Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani.

The tara are shared across Tu'anga Rima to Tu'anga Varu (Chapters 5-8). They represent the stories of the generations of participants involved in this study. These included one great-grandparent, grandparents, parents, and recent graduate students. In Tu'anga Rima, the tara represents the collective family histories of participants, including my own, handed down through oral traditions and family journals. They also represent the stories of the great-grandparents. In Tu'anga Ono, the tara represent the stories of the grandparents who initially migrated to New Zealand as children, and their upbringing as youth, then young adults. In Tu'anga Itu, the tara represents the grandparents as adults with children. These children are the parents of recent graduates who also attended Tokoroa High School. In Tu'anga Varu, the tara represents the collective stories of the recent graduate students and their experiences.

TŌPIRI'ANGA

This tu'anga has outlined the methodology and methods underpinning this study. It introduced tivaivai as the overarching methodology guiding this research, with patu tuatua as a method of gathering stories and experiences. It also introduced tara as a narrative practice used to weave together and represent the collective voices of participants in this study. Together, these approaches further grounded this study in 'Ākono'anga Māori, ensuring that the research remains connected to the lives of the participants in authentic ways.

Tu'anga Rima: Tauī'anga o te 'Ākono'anga Māori

Chapter Five: Shifting Māori Practices

'AKATOMO'ANGA

At this point, I begin to weave the findings of this research into the metaphorical *tivavai* that is this thesis. As Marx (1852, as cited in Kemmis et al., 2025) reminds us, "People make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already given and transmitted from the past" (p 31). The threads of *tivavai* constructed in the past carry practices that are pulled through to the present. Furthermore, before examining the education experiences of Cook Islands Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand and what it means in the context of this research, it is necessary to look to the past and discuss what practices took place in our homeland, that prefigure how Cook Islands Māori encounter education today.

A key component of Theory of Practice Architectures is to articulate the "happeningness" of practices through direct observation (Kemmis et al., 2014). It was not possible for me to 'see' the practices of the past as they were lived in the Cook Islands because I was not there and not physically present to witness these practices unfolding in real time-space. Yet what has become apparent through the insights gained from *patu tuatua* with participants, the oral histories, written records, and my family's experiences, is a rich tapestry that encapsulates the essence of practices and practice architectures of the past. In weaving together their stories, it provides the opportunity to trace the enduring threads of education practices that are stitched across different periods of time.

One of the questions this research seeks to answer is what practice traditions are considered valuable by Cook Islands Māori families in Tokoroa? As the stories are shared through this and the following *tu'anga*, these practices will be revealed and discussed. The focus of this *tu'anga* is to pull through the threads of education, namely education policy, curriculum, pedagogy, measurement and success, across the time periods of pre-missionary Aitutaki (900AD-1820), the missionary period (1821-1887), and the colonial administration period (1888-1950). I have chosen these periods as 900 AD marks the arrival of the first Indigenous peoples to Aitutaki, 1821 marks the arrival of London Missionary Society missionaries to Aitutaki, and 1888 is when the Cook Islands became a British Protectorate.

Focusing on the identified themes will reveal the practices that were lived, shifted and disrupted across the time periods. It is important to note that the experiences in this tu'anga are located within in the Cook Islands, in particular Aitutaki, where Indigenous peoples call themselves Māori. It is only in the diaspora where the term 'Cook Islands Māori' is used. Hence for the purposes of this tu'anga, Māori is the term that will be used. It is also in this tu'anga that I begin the use of tara (creative non-fiction stories) to capture the collective histories and voices of the participants in this research. In each tara the kupu 'Moko' is used to represent the main character in each tara. Moko is not a name but rather a shortened form for 'Mokopuna' as in grandchild. Pā is used to represent 'father' and Pāpā used to represent 'grandfather'.

MĀORI EDUCATION PRACTICES (900AD-1820)

Tae atu au ki ta'atai, kua tae ake ana a Pāpā ru'au. Kua reti au teia pōpongi, kua kite au kāre aia e akaruke mai iāku. Kua 'ōpara māua te vaka ki roto i te vai, kāre e mamao mai te ta'atai. Ka mou a Pāpā ru'au i te vaka, ka kake au ki roto ka aru mai aia. I mua ake māua ka 'oe ka karakia 'a Pāpā ru'au ki Tangaroa (te atu o te moana), kia pati ka 'aere meitaki ua māua e kia rauka mai tetai ika kia āngai i te kōpū tangata. E rare ta mātou katoatoa. Kua 'aere 'a Tuanu rāua ko Rima te āru 'a Māmā ru'au ki te maunga te akatau mei kua pakari rae te mānga tanu. To mātou metua tane tei te marae aia no te 'uipā'anga a te Ariki e te au mataiapo. Koia tō mātou mataiapo ka tu ai no mātou tona iti tangata, koia tō mātou va'a autara. Ko teia tona tauanga. I te taime mua ko Pāpā ru'au te mataiapo, autara mai aia ki iāku e pakari aia. Ta Pāpā ru'au 'anga'anga e rapu kai e te tuatua papa'anga. 'Akapē'ea tāua e ma'ara nei tāua ingoa ere?

Tere atu māua ki te tai roto te ngā'i mātira ana te 'ōire. 'Akakite mai a Pāpā ru'au kare roa ake a ra'ui ia teia ngā'i kia 'akangaro i te tai roto kia ki 'aka'oa teia ngā'i i te ika. Tae māua ki te tai roto, ka maka au te kupenga ta Pāpā ru'au i api'i mai, ka no'o ka tiaki ko au ko Pāpā ru'au e te moana. Kāre i roa ake kua autara mai a Pāpā ru'au, "ko terai te ngā'i i tere mai te tupuna a Ru i te ngā'i kitea'anga'ia to tātou ipukarea. To rātou terea'nga mai, ka u rātou ki tetai uri'ia ka karakia a Ru ki Tangaroa kia marino te tai e te matangi. Ka pe'e ai "Tangaroa i te titi! Tangaroa i te tata!" Ka pe'e, ka autara, ka 'imene, a Pāpā ru'au. Uri mai aia ki iaku, "Kia api'i koe teia e taku mokopuna". Te rongo 'anga au kore ake kua tapeka ia tōku kopu. A tetai ra ka ui maia aia ki iāku kia 'aka'oki au te autara ki iaia. Ae, ka 'akaronga meitaki au.

Kua teima'a te kupenga ka u'utu mai māua ki te vaka, ka 'akatau a Pāpā ru'au kia 'apai ua tei ka rava na te kōpū tangata kare e nuinui. Ka karakia 'aka'ou a Pāpā ru'au kia 'akameitaki ta māua i rauka mai na mātou i te kōpū tangata e to mātou 'aere'anga meitaki. Ka rekareka a Māmā ru'au me oki māua ki te kainga ra⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ Translation by Kura Rota.

Pāpā (grandpa) was waiting for me at the seashore. I was a little late this morning, but I knew he wouldn't leave without me. Together, we pushed our small vaka (canoe) out into the shallows - not too far from the shore. Pāpā steadied the vaka as I jumped in, and then he followed. Before we paddled out Pāpā prayed to Tangaroa (God of the sea), asking for our safety and a good catch to feed our family. Even though I was a child, it was my duty to go with Pāpā and collect food from the sea. We all had a task to do. Tuanu and Rima had gone with Māmā Kereni (grandma) to check on our fruit and vegetables in the gardens. Hopefully, some were ready to bring home to eat. Pā (Dad) was up at the marae meeting with the other mataiapo (chief). As the mataiapo for our tribe he was expected to go and represent us. His voice was important in the discussion about what is important for the welfare of our people. That's his role now. It used to be Pāpā's, but he said he was too old. Now Pāpā gathers food and gives us lectures on our papa 'anga. How does he expect us to remember all those names???

We glided out to a special part of the lagoon - one set aside for the to fish. Pāpā said that soon a rā'ui (prohibition) would be placed there, allowing the lagoon to rest and regenerate so that kai would remain plentiful for future fishing. Once there, we cast our net the way he had taught me and waited. I loved these moments with Pāpā, just him, me, and the moana (sea). It wasn't long before Pāpā began to speak. He pointed toward the channel in the distance and said, "That is the entrance where our ancestor Ru sailed through when he discovered our homeland. There was a great storm, and he prayed to Tangaroa to calm the sea". Then he chanted, "Tangaroa i te titi! Tangaroa i te tata!" He continued chanting, then talking, then singing. "You must learn all of this, moko (grandchild). You are the future of this family", he said firmly. I felt a knot in my stomach. One day, he'll ask me to repeat this all to him. I must listen more carefully next time.

The net soon grew heavy. We hauled in the catch and Pāpā checked to make sure we only took enough for our family – nothing more. Grateful for what Tangaroa had provided, we began our journey home. As we reached the shore, Pāpā offered a final prayer as we sat in the vaka, giving thanks to Tangaroa for keeping us safe and for providing food for our family once again. Māmā will be happy with our safe return and our great catch.

When I consider the education of Māori in Aitutaki before the arrival of missionaries, this tara represents that for me. It was a world where Reo Māori was the exclusive language of communication, hence the positioning of the Māori version of the tara first, followed by the English translation. This prioritisation of Reo Māori was not a planned aspect of the everyday life of Māori, but a practice that occurred naturally because it was their Indigenous language. Jonassen (2003) explained that language is the vehicle through which children create their views of the world, their values, their practices, their belief systems and understandings. The

importance of language for Māori is expressed in the proverb, "Ko tōku reo te i'o o taku Peu tupuna; My language is the essence of my culture" (Jonassen, 2003, p 128). With Reo Māori as the only language, it was therefore the language of learning, one that was spoken as the written word had not yet arrived.

Thaman (2021) defined education as 'worthwhile learning'. In formal education within western frameworks, what is considered worthwhile learning has always been defined through education policy. As a form of discourse, education policy shapes what knowledge is valued, how learning occurs and measured, and what constitutes achievement and success (Levinson et al., 2009). It also reveals whose voices are valued in the decision-making process and who holds power when determining the purpose of education (Thaman, 2021). Education policy also shapes the conditions that make education practices possible (Kemmis et al., 2014).

Prior to colonisation, there was no formal education policy in the western sense. The purpose of Indigenous education, as explained by Nabobo (2021), was to prepare children to live in their communities. This was achieved through participation in community life, with the elders as guides (Nabobo, 2021; Vai'imene, 2003). In Aitutaki, everyday life was grounded in 'Ākono'anga Māori, where Māori ways of being and knowing shaped how people lived, learned and related to one another. It was through these everyday practices that their lives were given meaning. Vai'imene (2003) stated that "culture was not a subject to be taught so much as a way of life to be lived" (p 169). In this sense 'Ākono'anga Māori itself became the curriculum and the context for learning, pedagogy, measurement and success. Furthermore, what was learnt was also determined by the needs of the community.

In the tara, Moko learnt the responsibilities of providing for the family, caring for the environment, family history, storytelling, and karakia (prayer). These interconnected practices were not separated into individual subjects requiring the refining of separate skills. Instead, learning was woven into Moko's everyday life, allowing him to engage holistically and more meaningfully with the world around him. This way of learning enabled him to make connections to his own worldview, while also strengthening the vā between himself and his grandfather, his family, his 'ōire, the ancestors, the atua, and the moana.

A life embedded in 'Ākono'anga Māori lead to meaningful ways of learning that deepened Moko's understanding of kite Māori, but this could not have happened without Pāpā there to guide him. There were no extra lessons or tutoring; no classrooms or textbooks. There was just Pāpā, Moko, the ocean, and a fishing experience that led to the enactment of practice traditions through which Māori ways of being and knowing were shared intergenerationally. Building on

the understanding that the purpose of learning was to prepare children to live in their communities, it was important to Pāpā that Moko understood where he was situated within the world in order to strengthen his sense of identity, belonging, responsibility and his potential within the collective.

At the same time, this learning did not come without any expectations. A moment spent learning about Ru, the progenitor of Aitutaki (Tiro, n.d), accompanied by the remark, "you must learn all of this" was enough to remind Moko that his learning came with certain responsibilities; namely, the expectation that he would eventually be required to enact the practices without Pāpā's guidance. This form of measurement placed assessment within the context of everyday life, where success was reflected in Moko's ability to enact and uphold the practice traditions his grandfather had taught him. But Pāpā's encouragement spoke to his trust in Moko to achieve the given task in his own time. It also speaks to the understanding that teaching in that sense was not only about the present moment, but about preparing the future generation who would sustain the practice traditions of the collective.

A focus on the collective highlights who held power before colonisation. In the tara, power largely sat with Pāpā as the holder of knowledge, but Moko is being prepared for future responsibility and leadership, so he too holds power, although this is limited. Pā holds political power as the mataiapo of the tribe, while Tangaroa holds spiritual power as the atua of the ocean. The community also holds power through the shared expectations and practice traditions, as depicted in the implementation of rā'ui. What is significant is the collective aspirations of the community on the island, the power held within the layers of the collective, the agency to achieve their aspirations on their own terms, according to their own timeline and within the sites of learning that are present in the physical world that they lived in. Therefore, in terms of education before the arrival of missionaries, Māori voices were always valued and decision making rested with them.

The purpose of this tara was to reimagine what education in the Cook Islands prior to colonisation looked like. By unpacking Pāpā and Moko's experience there were significant key conditions that emerged in relation to practices that enabled success. These include the prioritisation of Reo Māori as the language of learning, the embedding of Ākono'anga Māori and kite Māori in everyday life, and the ways Māori exercised their agency in determining the purpose of education, and the significance of their voices across all aspects of learning and community life. In the sections and tu'anga that follow, it will be important to trace how these

practices and conditions are positioned across the time periods to understand whether they change and how they shape the education experiences of Māori learners.

MISSIONARY EDUCATION PRACTICES (1821-1887)

Ua ahoaho vau. Ua tae mai to'u taime no te faaite i te haamori i teie mahana. Ua titauhia ia'u ia tai'o i te mau irava Bibilia i horo'ahia mai ia'u e ia faahiti ia'u iho i te pure a te Fatu. E faaite te reira e e Kerisetiano haapao maitai vau e ua maitai mai to 'u aravihi i te taio. Ua uiui au eaha te tupu mai te Peu e e haamoe vau i te mau mea atoa. E mauruuru ore anei te mau misionare? E riri anei te Atua? Ua hi'o vau i te tahi atu mau tamarii; Te ti'aturi nei ratou e, eita ratou e anihia ia rave i te haamoriraa ananahi, maori râ o MatAriki. O oia te matahiapo roa a'e o matou e ua ite oia i te mau mea atoa. Ua hinaaro vau e haamana'o i te mau mea mai ta'na i rave. Ua taio mārû noa oia i ta 'na mau irava, ua haamana'o oia i te mau tuhaa taa maitai atoa o te mau aamu Bible, e ua nehenehe oia e faahiti i te mau i'oa o te mau buka atoa mai te Genese e tae atu i te Apokalupo. E mea ohie roa ia haere ê atu. Peneia'e no te mea ua rave oia i te taime rahi a'e e o Pāpā no te haapii i to matou papa'anga, o tei haamâmâ a'e ia'na ia haamana'o i te mau mea. E mea ti'a ia na reira. Aita â vau e haamana'o ra i te mau mea atoa noa'tu ehia rahiraa haapiiraa ta'u i farii e te mau misionare i te mau mahana atoa.

Ua parau o Pāpā e mea faufaa roa ia haapii i te mau e'a o te mau misionare e ia pee i te mau haapiiraa a to tatou Atua apî, o Iehova. Ua faahaamana'o mai oia ia matou e ua faarue o Tamatoa Ariki i to matou mau atua tahito i muri a'e i to ratou oreraa e faaora i ta 'na tamahine. I taua taime ra, ua tau i te mau mea atoa. Ua vavahi - roa - hia o Marae. Ua moe te mau atua ta tatou i pure i te hoê taime. Ua vavahihia ta tatou mau Peu, ta tatou mau oro'a, e to tatou mau e'a. Ua feruri au i to matou fare i Taravao. Ua maoro to matou taeraa mai i reira. I teie nei, ua î roa paha te reira i te tumu raau. Te parau ra o Pā e, aita e titauhia ia putuputu faahou i reira, no te mea paha e fare pureraa nehenehe ta matou. Te mana'o nei au e mea tamārû a'e no te Ariki e te mataiapo ia parahi i nia i te mau parahiraa papa'a i nia i te mau ofai.

Te parau ra o Tepaki tahito ia tatou e e mea ti'a ia tatou ia mauruuru. Te parau ra oia e, “Aita tatou i riro faahou ei taata ino. “Ua faaorahia tatou.” E ere o Tepaki i te mea ti'a ia faaru'ehia. E papa'ihia to'na i'oa e a muri noa'tu i roto i to tatou mau aamu ei nunaa Aitutaki no to'na ti'araa ei matahiapo o tei paraparau no Tamatoa Ariki i te taeraa mai te mau misionare. Ua faaroo maitai au ia Tepaki ia paraparau, eiaha râ i ta'na mau parau, i to'na râ reo. Ua ite oioi mai ia'u e, te paraparau nei matou na roto i te Reo Māori, tera râ, te tai'o nei e te papa'i nei matou na roto i te reo Reo Ta'iti. Tera râ, te paraparau ra o Papeiha e o Vahapata i te Reo Māori, Reo Ta'iti, e Reo Papa'ā, te reo o te mau misionare uouo. Aita ratou e hinaaro ia tatou ia haapii i te reo papa'ā no te mea o te reira te reo o te hara. E ere

ta ratou mau parau i to'u. Te uiui nei au e, e nehenehe anei ta tatou e tai'o e e papa'i na roto i te Reo Māori?⁴¹

I was nervous. It was my turn to share the devotion today. I was expected to read the assigned Bible verses and recite the Lord's prayer on my own. This would show that I am a faithful Christian and that my reading ability had improved. I wondered what would happen if I forgot everything. Would the missionaries be disappointed? Would God be angry? I looked around at the other children; their faces hopeful that they wouldn't get asked to do tomorrow's devotion - all except for Matariki. She was the eldest of us and knew everything. I wished I could remember things like she did. She recited her verses with ease, remembered every detail of the Bible stories, and could name every book from Genesis to Revelations. She would pass easily. Maybe it's because she spent more time with Pāpā learning our papa'anga, which made it easier for her to remember things. That had to be it. It didn't matter how many daily lessons I had with the missionaries, I still couldn't remember everything.

Pāpā said it was important to learn the ways of the missionaries and follow the teachings of our new God, Jehovah. He reminded us that Tamatoa Ariki turned away from our old gods after they failed to save his daughter. That was when everything changed. Marae were torn down. The gods we once prayed to were gone. Our rituals, our ceremonies, our ways, have been swept aside. I thought about our marae up at Taravao. It's been some time since we were there. It's probably overgrown with bush by now. Pā says it is not necessary to meet there anymore, because we have a beautiful Chapel. I suppose it is more comfortable for the Ariki and mataiapo to sit on chairs than on the rocks.

Old Tepaki, tells us we should be grateful. "We are no longer savages", he says. "We are saved". Tepaki is not one to be ignored. His role as the spokesperson who spoke on Tamatoa Ariki's behalf when the missionaries arrived means that his name will be forever carved into our histories. I listened carefully to Tepaki speak, not so much to his words but his language. It suddenly dawned on me: we speak in Reo Māori but read and write in Reo Ta'iti. That is because Papeiha and Vahapata are from Ta'iti. They don't want us to learn Reo papa'ā (English) because it is the language of sin. Their words not mine. I wonder if we will ever be able to read and write in Māori?

The arrival of missionaries to Aitutaki from the London Mission Society completely disrupted the ways education was practiced (Williams, 1998). Although Church policy prescribed the teaching of Indigenous peoples in their own language (Buzacott, 1866), it was not possible to do this as it was the missionaries first interaction with Māori. The missionaries were Tahitian

⁴¹ Translation by Jean Toma-Tuarae.

and the closeness of Reo Ta'iti (Tahitian language) to Reo Māori enabled the two groups to communicate. Hence, the reason for the Reo Ta'iti version of the tara written before the English translation. Initially, Reo Ta'iti was the language of learning, but as the missionaries learnt Reo Māori and translated the Bible into the vernacular, it became once again the medium of instruction.

Terms like education policy, curriculum, pedagogy, as well as measurement and success associated with education, were not in the vernacular of Māori. With the arrival of the missionaries, these terms were not incorporated into the language as such but realised through practice. As discussed in the literature review of this thesis, missionary education policy was aimed at converting Indigenous peoples to the Christian faith, founded on the discourses of Bible teachings (Buzacott, 1866). To achieve this, missionaries utilised schooling and literacy practices as tools for spreading their message, shifting the curriculum away from Ākono'anga Māori and kite Māori towards religious instruction. These shifts in education policy and the curriculum moved learning away from preparing children to live in their communities, instead preparing them to be good Christians (Williams, 1998). This also reshaped how learning was delivered and by whom, as well as how it was measured and success defined.

The tara introduces us to the new conditions of learning for Moko, as prescribed by the missionaries. Prior to this, the site of learning was the ocean, with Pāpā as the guide. Māmā was also guiding her two other mokopuna through a different learning experience in the plantation. Both sites of learning illustrate the understanding that learning was lived through the everyday activities of the collective. However, when the missionaries came, they not only reshaped what was to be learnt, but they also changed how learning would be experienced through the introduction of new material-economic arrangements such as a Chapel, tables, chairs, slates and chalk (Buzacott, 1866). The lessons in the natural world of Māori shifted into the chapel and small mission schools of the missionaries, with elders replaced by the missionaries. Not only were the missionaries positioned as teachers who held all knowledge, but they also held power and authority in the decision-making process.

What becomes concerning in the tara is the response of Moko to the conditions of learning and assessment. The anxiety of having to read the Bible out aloud, the doubts around the inability to recite the Lord's prayer as expected, and the fear that the missionaries and God would be disappointed or angry if she made a mistake. With success now defined through the mastering of literacy skills and the appearance of being a faithful Christian, it is not surprising that Moko experienced feelings of anxiety and nervousness. This example draws attention to the purpose

of the education provided by the missionaries in terms of promoting the individual merit of the child as opposed to the contribution of the child's learning to the wellbeing of the collective, a key feature of Pasifika-Pacific societies (Vai'imene, 2003; Thaman, 2021).

In this shifting landscape, Māori children were also required to navigate the *vā* differently. The *vā* between grandparents and *mokopuna*, once central to education, was disrupted. Where once the most important relationships were between children, their elders, families, the natural world, the *atua*, and the collective; the relationships with the missionaries, the Church, and Jehovah were prioritised. The practice traditions of Māori that once enabled them to find meaning and harmony in the *vā* were pushed into the margins, while the new practices introduced by the missionaries were elevated. This reordering of relationships meant that Māori were compelled to follow the missionaries because the Ariki had declared it. By endorsing the missionaries, the Ariki effectively gave them greater power over Māori, signalling that the practices of the missionaries were of greater value. What emerged then, was that 'Ākono'anga Māori was not simply displaced by the arrival of Christianity but reshaped by the practices of the missionaries. In this sense, 'Ākono'anga Māori was transformed, with Māori practices increasingly aligned to the practices of Christianity.

The impact of the education practices of the missionaries was significant for Māori society. Learning shifted away from 'Ākono'anga Māori and *kite* Māori, and away from the everyday focus of contributing to community life. It was instead oriented towards religious instruction. While Māori continued to exercise agency through the ways they accepted, adapted to, and negotiated the changing practices introduced by the missionaries, authority over determining the purpose of education also sat with the missionaries. Additionally, the value of their own voices in education, increasingly diminished.

COLONIAL EDUCATION PRACTICES (1888-1914)

"Ka kite māmi!" (Bye mum!), I yelled as I dashed outside. Our devotion was long this morning. Pāpā decided to pray for the whole island. Now I'm running to school so that I'm not late. I don't want to have to stay behind to pick up rubbish for being late again. I arrived at the school gate, just in time. I caught my breath and walked to my class calmly.

"Good morning Ngapo", said the teacher.

"Good morning, Miss Royle", I replied.

"How are you today?"

"I am well, thank you".

Satisfied with my response, Miss Royle began the morning lesson. I smiled, pleased with my perfect English. My teacher is the daughter of the

orometua (minister). She and her sister are our teachers. We are learning to read and write in English. We are already so good at it in Māori but now we are expected to learn in English. Not everything is taught in English. Our teachers still teach some lessons in Māori, like sewing and planting. But I do enjoy practicing my English.

Pāpā is the reason I love speaking English. Even though Māori is our main language we speak at home and at Church, Pāpā always speaks to me in English. He wants me to be fluent in speaking, reading and writing in English. Pāpā believes that learning English will open the world of the papa'ā to us, because it is the way of the future. That's why Pāpā was happy to support the sisters when they wanted to open a new school. As the chief of our village, he wanted our children to receive an education to prepare for the future. But what kind of future can we really have when our schooling ends with primary school?

The commissioner says that we don't need more schooling, so unlike New Zealand or other Pacific countries, we have no high schools. Here on the island, we are destined to work with our hands, in the plantations and the ocean. That's why some families don't even send their children to school. They are kept at home to go and work in the plantations or work in their orange plots. Still, Pāpā insists I am different. He says I am too clever for a life of labour. Now he is thinking of sending me away, to New Zealand or Fiji, so that I can continue my schooling. The thought frightens me. How can I leave my family? I am only a child. Until Pāpā and Pā make a decision, I am left wondering what will become of me.

While the practices of the missionaries had a profound impact on how Māori learners experienced education in the Cook Islands, the practices of colonial administrators from New Zealand would intensify this disruption even more. The most significant change was the introduction of education policy imposing English as the language of instruction in all schools (Moss, 1896). Earlier in this tu'anga, the importance of language was linked to how children created their own world views. Fasi (2021) expands on this notion by asking us to consider if it is possible for children to create their worldviews through the lens of someone else's language. If language shapes the ways children come to understand themselves and the world around them, then the shift from Reo Māori to English also shifted the worldview through which Māori were encouraged to see and interpret their realities.

Although English was positioned as the language of learning, in practice this was not easily realised. Schools remained under the influence of the missionaries, who were largely against teaching Māori the English language mainly because it conflicted with Church policy (UNESCO, 1972). While students were expected to learn English, Reo Māori continued to be spoken in schools. This tension between the two languages shows the inconsistency between

colonial education policy and classroom practice, a result of the lack of trained teachers and weak monitoring of schools on the outer islands (Gilson, 1980). It also highlights the shifting political arrangements within the classroom, where education policy pushed Māori children more toward English and the western world, but missionary influence meant that Reo Māori still persisted (Edwards, 2016).

In the tara, Ngapo and Pāpā's desires to learn English reflected a belief that English proficiency was associated with intelligence, opportunity, and progress. Both Edwards (2016) and UNESCO (1972) wrote of the aspirations of Ariki and Māori families for English to be taught to their children based on these very beliefs. With the growing emphasis on English and its acceptance amongst Māori the positioning of western forms of knowledge and communication became increasingly valued in education (Vai'imene, 2003). This also reflects the seduction of Māori into western education frameworks, where missionary and later colonial schooling practices were positioned above their own. Māori were not simply forced into these systems but drawn toward them through promises attached to the notion of a 'better life' (Gilson, 1980). Even as missionary and colonial practices disrupted and reshaped Māori ways of learning, knowing and being, Māori continued to aspire for these forms of education because of the opportunities they believed it would provide for their future generations (Vai'imene, 2003).

What is alarming is the positioning of Māori children within the curriculum. Prior to the arrival of missionaries, education was holistic, aimed at developing the whole child through practices that strengthened the vā. It was in the vā, in the relationships of Māori children that they came to understand the world they lived in. With the arrival of the missionaries, however, the curriculum shifted towards practices that prioritised children's relationships with Jehovah. This encouraged Māori to understand themselves and interpret the world through Christian beliefs and values, essentially as children of God. Under the colonial administration, this focus narrowed even further, shifting away from the vā altogether, towards learning English and preparation for manual labour.

To be successful in this sense, was to demonstrate English proficiency and the ability to perform domestic and agricultural duties (Beaglehole, 1957; Moss, 1895; UNESCO, 1972). However, this definition confined Māori children to labourers within society, which narrowed how they came to understand their potential, value, and contribution to society. Rather than believing they were capable of determining their own futures or positioning them as future leaders and entrepreneurs, colonial education practices limited their opportunities and constrained the futures Māori children were encouraged to imagine for themselves. This raises questions about

how success was defined within colonial education systems, and whether these narrow expectations by colonial administrators could truly be considered success from a Māori perspective.

What emerges from this discussion, is the progressive marginalisation of Reo Māori within education, while 'Ākono'anga Māori and kite Māori were completely displaced from the curriculum. Māori voices became increasingly silenced within education decision-making as power shifted largely toward colonial administrators, rather than with Māori communities themselves.

CONSOLIDATING COLONIAL PRACTICES (1915 -1950)

I dumped the rubbish in the bin and glared at Tipuia as he approached me. He looked at me apologetically.

"It's all my fault. I'm sorry Turu", he said.

I sighed.

"It's too late now. Come on, we'll have to run home so that we can do our chores, before Pā gets home".

We quickly grabbed our things and ran out of the school gates. We had been punished for speaking Māori. I was guilty by association. Being younger than me, Tipuia had forgotten that we could not speak Māori at school. As we walked to our classes this morning, he spoke in Māori to me and my teacher overheard. We were given a punishment straight away without even being able to explain.

"You will both pick up rubbish after school", the teacher said. What is even more ridiculous is that my teacher is also my uncle. He knew that if we were home late to help Mā that our father would be angry with us. Our teachers were all Māori, and many of them our own relatives. They were strict, especially when it came to speaking Māori. Māori was for home and Church, not for school. The only time we could speak it at school was when we were performing our legends and singing songs.

I didn't see the whole point of school really. Tereora⁴² had closed a long time ago and we still had no secondary school. One lucky person may get a scholarship to go to school in New Zealand, but the rest of us were destined to follow our parents into the plantations.

"Maybe I'll go to Takamoa⁴³ and be an orometua", I thought to myself. I laughed at the idea. That would mean more Church and school. At least at Church we could speak Māori and not be punished. "No thank you", I mumbled to myself.

⁴² Tereora was the only secondary school in the Cook Islands in the late 1800's that was opened by LMS missionaries. It was eventually closed because of lack of funding.

⁴³ Takamoa Theological College in Rarotonga is where people go to train to be ministers.

I thought about my Uncle Po. He didn't go to Church or school. He just worked hard in the orange tree plots all day long. I liked the idea of being free and having no responsibility, but do I really want to work in the plantation for the rest of my life? Pāpā would never let that happen. We have to go to school and learn all that we can. Pāpā is hoping that I'll be the lucky one to get a scholarship to New Zealand, so that I can finish my schooling there, then come back and help our family. I only have one more year left before I finish primary school, so I need to work hard. I don't want to let my family down.

Colonial control over education became increasingly evident through the stronger enforcement of English within schools. While the 1895 Public Schools Act declared English as the language of learning in schools, the 1915 Cook Islands Act went further by making English the official language of the Cook Islands (Goodwin, 2003). This policy reshaped education practice by creating conditions that would ensure its actual implementation. Firstly, mission schools were reclassified as state schools, with education as a free service. Up until this time there was a small fee (Gilson, 1980). Secondly, teachers were recruited from New Zealand to be head teachers in schools right throughout the Cook Islands, and a teacher training college was opened in Rarotonga so Māori adults could be trained in the profession, then assigned to teach in schools on their home islands (Edwards, 2016).

The prioritisation of English in the curriculum was significant because it involved more than just learning to speak English. As the medium of instruction, all lessons in the schools were now taught in the English language. With the introduction of New Zealand teachers, came the inherited teaching practices that originated from British culture especially in the way of punishment for speaking Māori (Jones et al., 1990). These conditions reinforced the dominance of the English language and silenced Reo Māori from education altogether. Even though Māori teachers were trained to work in schools, they were trained to teach in English, further privileging the language in education spaces.

These practices not only reshaped the language and knowledge valued within schools but also influenced the kinds of educational opportunities made available to Māori learners. Access to an education beyond primary schooling remained restricted, with colonial administrators unable to justify the need for such an opportunity (Gilson, 1980). Moko's reflections in the tara represent the limits of education and career opportunities available to them because of the belief by colonial administrators that a secondary education was not necessary in the Cook Islands (UNESCO, 1972). The offers of a small number of scholarships to New Zealand, to carry on with further education, introduced Māori to the notion of competition, another colonial practice designed to award the few instead of the many (Beeby, 1992).

For Māori families, who viewed education as an opportunity that would lead their children to a better life, these disruptions carried major consequences. Education had once been a way of sustaining Reo Māori and 'Ākono'anga Māori, but in the colonial system it became a site of disconnection. The fracturing of the vā meant that families' aspirations to flourish in both Māori and the western world, were consistently undermined by policies and practices that privileged English and western knowledge. Rather than validating 'Ākono'anga Māori as the foundation for a better life, the colonial system positioned it as an obstacle to progress. This not only constrained the educational success of Māori children but also challenged the very practices that gave meaning to life in the Cook Islands. In this sense, the very purpose of education, to enable people to live well together in a world worth living in, was compromised as Māori families were forced to navigate an education system that silenced their voices while undermining the practice traditions and relationships that shaped their world.

What also emerged over time, was the role of the Church in sustaining Reo Māori. Despite the contribution of the missionaries towards colonisation, they did not purposefully seek to displace the language like colonial administrations did. In fact, in the community the Church was the one institution that held on to the language, elevating its status above English. Whether it intended to or not, the Church became a safe space for Reo Māori and essentially other Māori practice traditions, while colonial policy sought to suppress all things Māori.

AMERICAN PRACTICES (1942-1945)

It's the third Saturday night of the month and everyone is excited. Since the American soldiers came, the whole island comes out for movie night. It's the best night - American movies playing on a big white sheet, and we get real American chocolate and popcorn. Everyone laughs more these days. Even Pā and Mā seem happier. Before the war, Pā used to worry a lot. He, Pāpā, and Tuanu worked so hard on our orange plantation. They were out there every day, working in the hot sun. But no matter how hard they worked, the money they received never matched their efforts. I remember hearing Pā and Mā whispering at night when they thought we were asleep. Pā would say the government didn't care about people like us, only about themselves. He said he wanted to give us the things the land couldn't, like new clothes and shoes, things we needed in the papa'ā world. Food we always had, the land and the ocean looked after us, but money was a different thing.

Then the Americans came, and everything changed. Pā got a job working on the new airstrip in Amuri with all the other men. Mā got work too, doing the soldiers' washing. They were both paid good money, real money, not like before. With the money they earned, Mā bought us new school uniforms. It was perfect timing because our old ones were too small and

full of patches. I loved my new uniform. The Americans were generous. They smiled a lot and gave more than we were used to. Pā said it felt good to work hard and actually be paid well for his efforts.

Some of the soldiers even started coming to our Church. One of them, everyone calls him Sergeant, teaches our Sunday School class. One Sunday, Sergeant asked us what we wanted to be when we grew up. I thought it was a silly question. On our island, we grow up to be like our parents - work hard, then look after our families. That's just how it is. But Sergeant said if we worked really hard at school, we could leave the island, go get an education and become teachers, or even doctors. Then we can come back to the island and help our people. I went home and thought really carefully about this. Maybe I could be a doctor when I grow up. I will have to work hard.

The arrival of American soldiers in 1942 in Aitutaki, although temporary, reshaped everyday practices and opened Māori imaginations to a better life. During World War II, Aitutaki and Penrhyn were selected by the American military as bases for the US Naval Air Transport System. By the end of 1942, hundreds of American soldiers were stationed across the two islands. In Aitutaki, men were employed to build an airstrip in Amuri and unload supplies, while women worked as housekeepers or did laundry. For their labour, they were paid generously. This direct exchange of labour for high wages gave Māori a vision of what a 'better life' could look like in a cash driven economy. The Americans not only brought money and employment but also new foods, films, and experiences that exposed Māori to a new way of life (Anderson, 2014).

With the Americans, Māori shifted their worldview from simply living well to understanding what it was to have 'a better life'. New economic sayings of 'wages', 'prosperity' and 'modern living' became part of everyday conversations, as Māori experienced for the first time direct and larger payments for their labour. This enabled adults to provide more for their families than ever before. They also experienced more respectful treatment from the Americans, who recognised the worth of their labour, a stark contrast to the condescending attitudes of colonial officials. The Americans were not only soldiers, but they were educated, and their presence signalled that education, alongside labour, could open doors to opportunity (Anderson, 2014).

These practices together created a new imagination of what life could be like for Māori. If paid work could transform their living standards, then education could also equip their children for a more prosperous future. Unlike colonial administrators who positioned Māori as workers in their own plantations and lagoons that would not produce an income, encounters with the American soldiers reshaped how families in Aitutaki understood a 'better life'. This inspired

new hopes for prosperity and financial independence, something they had not found under the New Zealand colonial administration.

TŌPIRI'ANGA

The purpose of this tu'anga has been to examine how Māori have historically experienced education before and during colonisation in the Cook Islands. Before the missionaries arrived, learning happened naturally in the daily practices of Māori. Their voices were prioritised as with their way of life, their language, ways of knowing and being. Children were nurtured amongst the collective. The introduction of formal schooling, reading and writing shifted Māori away from the wellbeing of the collective to focus on growing individuals. Over time education success came to mean something new and Māori were confronted with changes to their way of life.

What emerged was a pattern of disruption where the practices of both the missionaries and the New Zealand colonial administration pushed Reo Māori and 'Ākono'anga Māori into the margins, silencing Māori aspirations and voices in education. Assimilation policies and practices made it increasingly difficult for Māori to succeed as Māori within a system that prioritised western knowledge systems. If Māori struggled to be themselves within a colonial education system in their own homeland, then the challenge of succeeding within the very place where that system was created and normalised in New Zealand, would be even greater.

Tu'anga Ono: Tuteretere o te 'Ākono'anga Māori

Chapter Six: Māori Practices that Travel

'AKATOMO'ANGA

Cook Islands Māori have long journeyed across the oceans in search of opportunities that would give them a better life. These were not merely physical movements of individuals with no knowledge or understandings of themselves, but movements of practices as Cook Islands Māori carried their ways of being with them. Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves (2023) remind us that "the practices of yesteryear, even yesterday, influence the practices of now" (p 13). When Cook Islands Māori travelled, they did not leave their ways of being and knowing behind. Their practices, their language, histories, stories, and intergenerational family structures travelled with them. The first wave of migration to Tokoroa occurred in the early 1950s (Chapple, 1976). As families relocated to New Zealand, these practices were again reshaped by the conditions of their new home, a new practice landscape that would enable or constrain their hopes towards a better life.

This tu'anga will discuss the education experiences of Cook Islands Māori in the time period of the 1950s-1960s. One of the questions this research seeks to answer is how have the practice arrangements across time and place shaped how Cook Islands Māori experience educational success? As this tu'anga unfolds, followed by the next few chapters, the arrangements will start to reveal themselves. Once again, I was not present to observe Cook Islands Māori as they established themselves in Tokoroa. As the researcher, this means it was not always possible to see, hear, or be part of the practices as they unfolded in real time-space and therefore rely on the insights gained from patu tuatua with participants, the oral histories, written records, and my family's experiences. The practice architectures that shaped these practices, on the other hand, are still evident in the community today, and these form the focus of this tu'anga.

In tracing these practice architectures and practices, I continue to pull through the threads of education from the previous tu'anga, education policy, curriculum, pedagogy, measurement and success, from the Cook Islands into New Zealand. During this period, Cook Islands Māori were confronted by the reality of colonialism and assimilation in the very land of those who sought to impose these conditions back home in the islands. While migration exposed families to new pressures, 'Ākono'anga Māori anchored them in the unfamiliar environment.

MIGRATION TO NEW ZEALAND (1950s)

Leaving home was not easy, especially when we had to leave our little ones behind. Our sacrifice will be worth it. The Americans have already shown us what is possible when we have a good employer who is prepared to pay for our hard work. They inspired us to want a better life for ourselves, one where our living conditions on the island could be improved. My wife and I are tired of sleeping on a dirt floor in a nikau⁴⁴ hut. We no longer want our children to have to do this. So, when my brother called, and boasted about how New Zealand Forest Products look after their workers and pay them well, I was convinced I needed to come. Now I am here in New Zealand with my wife building our dream of a better life together. My father-in-law cares for our young ones while we work here in New Zealand. Initially, we intended to work and save to build a house back in Aitutaki, but now that we are here, we have decided to stay. We will send for them when we can.

Stacking heavy timber in the freezing cold is very different from working under the warm sun in the plantations, but we must do what is necessary to survive here. We are the workforce, brought here specifically to fill the jobs in the mill. Formal education doesn't seem to be for us. There is plenty of learning taking place in our work and the world of the papa'ā. We must learn to do things the way they do, otherwise we will not fit in.

Our employers are papa'ā. I have tried my best to learn to speak the papa'ā language, but it is not easy. I was not lucky enough to go to school when I was young, which makes it harder. But we are not alone. My brothers are here with their families. We live by each other, attend our Church meetings together, and spend time together outside of work. We speak Māori when we are together, sing our songs, and dance our dances. Outside of our circle though, Māori has no place. But here in this country, we are no longer Māori. Now we are Cook Islands Māori.

In this section of this tu'anga, it is necessary to consider the learnings of Cook Islands Māori as they migrated and settled in Tokoroa, to understand the conditions that laid the foundations for future generations and the wider community. The migration to Tokoroa, as explained earlier in this thesis, was shaped by economic policies that were aimed at addressing the labour shortages created by a boom in the agriculture and manufacturing industries (Chapple, 1976; Hurd, 2014). Although it was not initially intended to be permanent, the industrial practices of New Zealand Forest Products (NZFP) encouraged long-term settlement to maintain a stable workforce for the mill (Hurd, 2014).

⁴⁴ Nikau or kikau are leaves from the coconut tree used to make shelter or huts before colonisation.

Large numbers of adults migrated from Aitutaki, but many had limited access to formal education and vocational training in the islands (Chapple, 1976; Turia & Turia, n.d; Vai'imene, 2003). Even when migrants did have some form of training, these qualifications were not often recognised in New Zealand. Despite this, the first migrants were willing to take whatever work was available so they could provide for their families. This came in the way of physically demanding labour. Teupoko share's her father's experience:

My dad was teaching in Aitutaki before he came to New Zealand. He taught at Araura Primary School. When he came to Tokoroa, he worked in the bush; that was the only job available to him at the time. He then applied to buy a house, but there weren't any houses available, so he searched for another job on the grading table, at the Sawmill. He was responsible for grading the timber... he wanted to earn money for his family, then return to Aitutaki, but the plan changed, and he decided to stay and work in Tokoroa while earning good money. He wanted his family to come to New Zealand.

The desire to settle permanently in Tokoroa brought with it significant challenges that required learning new practices. Initially, the focus was on adapting to and fitting into an English dominated society, as well as learning how to function within industrial workplaces. Tokoroa was significantly colder, working at the Kinleith mill required working under supervision, strict shift schedules and also working with people of diverse backgrounds. Outside of work, families also had to learn how to navigate housing, banking, transport, and other public services shaped by English social norms and expectations. Although some of these practices were introduced in the Cook Islands, life in New Zealand confronted migrants with a different reality. In Tokoroa, learning was therefore largely understood as the ability to fit in and function effectively as a worker, reinforcing the positioning of Cook Islands Māori migrants as labourers rather than as learners with wider aspirations.

Although there were very few education opportunities available for Cook Islands Māori migrants, the dominance of English in the wider society was clear. English was the language of authority and power and was used in all formal settings. Reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani, on the other hand, was largely absent from these spaces. Those who had attended school in the islands and developed some English language skills were often better able to navigate the workplace, while those who had left school early often struggled. At the same time when we consider that many of these migrants had received a basic primary education, adjusting to these expectations would have seemed overwhelming. Teauti share's her father's experience:

My dad told me it was hard getting used to a new country and a new way of living, mostly because the weather was different, the work was harder, and having to learn English was difficult. Things were hard for dad after he migrated because he couldn't speak English and couldn't read or write. My dad didn't have much of an education due to being a sick child and struggling. One of my uncles had to write my dad's letters for him and helped my dad send money back to Aitutaki for us.

Back in the islands, although Cook Islands Māori lived with the impacts of colonisation on their way of life, being on their own 'enua provided a sense of security, familiarity, and belonging that they did not have in Tokoroa. Some found themselves without familiar relationships, environment, and practices that had previously given meaning and direction to their lives. They were separated from their 'ōire, their tribe, and their Church, sites that had guided how they understood themselves and their place in the world of Māori. Younger adults had left their parents behind, while older adults had left their spouses and children behind. Given these conditions, their success in Tokoroa could have been constrained, and it would have been understandable had they chosen not to continue. However, many of them had come in clusters of brothers and worked together to navigate the difficulties they encountered. Over time, they established a community and began holding Church and social gatherings in individual homes, where they could enact the practice traditions they had brought with them from the islands. Some of these traditions were simple in terms of *pure* ngutuare (devotion), sharing a meal, singing traditional hymns, and speaking Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani. Despite the ongoing pressure to speak English, the early migrants held on to their reo.

This act of creating space to come together was significant especially in terms of learning. It is the position of this thesis that learning happens in the *vā* - in the spaces between people. It is through enacting practices together in the *vā* that meaning occurs. Teauti's dad could not have sent his letters or money home without his brother's help, because he was constrained by his lack of English. As the older brother Teauti's uncle had a responsibility to care for his younger brother, especially since they were both in a new country. Coming together like this and enacting shared practices helped Cook Islands Māori to make sense of their place within a new society while remaining connected to their own ways of being and knowing.

In the previous *tu'anga* in the *tara* of Pāpā and Moko, we were shown how important it was for Moko to understand how he was situated in the world through the connections and relationships he had. For Cook Islands Māori migrants in Tokoroa, this practice was essential for them too. Fellowshiping together often enabled them to reproduce certain practices within their new sites of learning to maintain a sense of identity and belonging, as well as a collective

understanding, so as not to isolate themselves in an unfamiliar environment. Although success in terms of learning and migration was associated with English proficiency and conforming to the values of the western world, what might also be considered success in this sense is the establishment of a Cook Islands community which activated a support system for themselves. In coming together, they were able to adapt their own practice traditions that helped them to be resilient in the face of their challenges without having to compromise their identities.

ASSIMILATION NOT EDUCATION (MID 1950s TO EARLY 1960s)

My feet dragged along the footpath. I didn't want to go home. My head hung low, and I sighed. I got into trouble at school today for fighting. The teacher was angry because of what I did, and I got the strap. It didn't even hurt. We were hit by our teachers in Aitutaki too. This was nothing. I wasn't trying to be bad, and I didn't want to fight. But that papa'ā boy - he laughed at the way I talked. He said I sounded dumb, and I should "learn proper English" if I want to live in New Zealand. I tried to walk away. But his voice followed me back to my seat, and I just couldn't help but get angry. Before I knew it, I had turned around and punched him. Just once. Now I'm the one in trouble.

Walking home now, with my eyes to the ground, I make a promise. When I grow up and have children, they won't speak Māori, only English. That way, they won't get laughed at and feel what I feel today, frustrated, angry, and ashamed. They will speak English well and be good at school. They won't have to hide who they are just to fit in, because they will already belong. Pā will be angry when he hears about the fight. I know it. He will say that I am not being respectful and that I have embarrassed the family. What about respect for me? What about my shame? I don't know how to explain to him that I'm tired of feeling like being myself isn't good enough.

When Cook Islands Māori arrived in New Zealand, they were part of a migration of thousands of migrants from across the Pacific Islands (Salesa, 2023). Upon their entry into the country, they were categorised as one homogenous group (Samu, 2006). Initially, they were labelled Polynesian (Chapple, 1976; Samu, 2006). By the end of the 1950s, Polynesian communities were still relatively new to New Zealand society and yet they were framed in education discourse and historical records with a deficit lens. Despite the education policy of the time being underpinned by the myth of 'equality of opportunity' (Beeby, 1992), in practice education did more to create conditions of inequality than anything else. The belief in the islands that the purpose of education for Cook Islands Māori children was to "fit people to their environment" (UNESCO, 1972, p 100), reinforced the idea that education for them was primarily intended to prepare them for manual labour. This same discourse not only prevailed in New Zealand but

originated from here, reflecting wider colonial assumptions about the kinds of work and futures that were considered appropriate for Polynesian peoples.

At the time of migration, many Cook Islands Māori families saw their employment in Tokoroa as a great opportunity but considered education as a pathway for their children to gain greater opportunities beyond the physical demands of manual labour. However, society positioned them as unmotivated and lacking, portrayed as being complacent with the limited opportunities made available to them. The following comments were made in regard to some of the first Polynesians to settle in Tokoroa, many of whom were Cook Islands Māori:

They are more likely to have community prestige in the field of sport and entertainment...but the rewards for this are less tangible than those based upon occupation. They are not so easily convertible into forms of material security such as a loan to purchase a more spacious and comfortable home or the means to obtain a 'superior' education for one's children.

Such inequality is linked to the cultural differences we started with; the relative unfamiliarity of Polynesian peoples with European commercial enterprise and techniques for 'getting on' in the world. And they are perhaps less motivated to do so, especially if this means failing to meet the expectations of kinsmen. Their level of formal educational attainment is usually lower, and raising it generally regarded by the people themselves as the beginning of the way out for their status dilemma for their children rather than for themselves.

(Chapple, 1976, p 52)

The claim that Polynesian peoples, in this case, Cook Islands Māori did not possess the motivation to 'get on' in the world reveals a narrow understanding of their journeys. The statements also overlook the sacrifices and aspirations that shaped their migration and settlement. They came to work (Hurd, 2014). Their aspirations for their children were different because they now lived in a country where their children could access a higher education, unlike when they were in the Cook Islands. Access to a regular cash income and stable employment made this possible. As families became more settled, new responsibilities and possibilities emerged, including the education of their children. As they arrived from the islands, they were enrolled in local schools and became the first generation of Cook Islands Māori migrants to receive formal schooling in New Zealand. Their placement in these schools, however, presented new challenges. Teauti explains:

My sister Ine was really shy, so most times I would have to defend her and protect her against other kids. My oldest sister would help us with our schoolwork, which made me and Ine more determined to learn to speak English. It was tough because at school we had to speak English, but then at home my parents would speak Cook Islands Māori to us. My sister Ine told me that because she was made fun of for talking Cook Island, she didn't want to speak our language at home and never out in public. Over time, she spoke our language less and less, and now she doesn't know how to speak Cook Island Māori at all.

In the Cook Islands, children who spoke Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani in schools, were generally punished for doing so (M. Maea, personal communication, August 25, 2023). This practice continued here in New Zealand, but what children did not expect was the confrontations they would experience from their peers. Feelings of shame, hurt, and fear were not synonymous with an education purpose aimed at achieving equality. This led to resentment and a desire by many children to silence their Indigenous voices because it was simply easier to. The 'better life' that many migrated for, came at a great cost.

Teauti's example draws attention to the tensions Cook Islands Māori children faced in terms of having to navigate two different worlds. At school they were required to speak English and adapt to the norms and expectations of English society as taught to them by their teachers, but at home they were expected to uphold their values and practices as defined by Ākono'anga Māori and continue speaking Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani. Children were constantly having to negotiate the vā between home and school, to make sense of who they were within those relational spaces. Many learned how to shift between the two worlds and languages, while others sacrificed their 'ākono'anga and reo to make their lives less complex. Despite these tensions, Cook Islands Māori families continued to create spaces where their reo, identity, and 'ākono'anga could be sustained. Church, social gatherings, family gatherings and community life remained important spaces where 'Ākono'anga Māori and Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani could thrive.

RECLASSIFIED AND RENAMED (1960s)

I looked at the enrolment forms the office lady had given me. My children had finally arrived from Aitutaki, and they needed to go to school. My eldest son was old enough to attend high school. Back home attending high school was not possible for everyone. Only those who were clever and passed the exam could go to Tereora in Rarotonga to carry on with their schooling. But here in New Zealand they can attend. The form asked for ethnicity. I didn't understand this word, so I asked the office lady to explain. She said, "it's your culture". I wrote Māori. That is what we are. I

filled the form in and gave it to the office lady. She read it then looked at me from behind her desk.

"You've written Māori in ethnicity", she said, "but your son said he's just arrived from the Cook Islands so you're not Māori, you're Pacific Island". She drew a line through what I had written. I was confused. I didn't understand what she had done but knew that it wasn't right. Rather than argue with her, I decided it was easier to accept what she had said.

"It's just for the paper", I said to myself, "this doesn't change who we are as Māori".

A few days later, my son came home from school and was quiet. I asked him what was wrong. "In Social Studies", he said, "the teacher was talking about Māori history. He asked me what iwi I belonged to. I told him I'm from Aitutaki. He said to me that I am not really Māori that I am Pacific Island. The class laughed when he said that. Mum I'm confused. At home I am Māori, at school they tell me I am Pacific Island, but then they want me to behave like a papa'ā. Who should I be?"

Migration to New Zealand did not only reposition Cook Islands Māori economically but also reshaped how identity was understood and recognised. Earlier discussions demonstrated how Cook Islands Māori adults were positioned primarily as workers, and how schooling operated under assumptions shaped by the principle of "equality of opportunity" (Beeby, 1992; Currie, 1962; Jones et al, 1990). Yet beyond labour and schooling expectations, another shift was unfolding, less visible but equally significant. Identity itself was no longer simply lived and affirmed within the community but was being reinterpreted through institutional processes. In the Cook Islands, Māori was not a term that required explanation. It just simply was, and there was no need for validation. In New Zealand, however, identity became something that had to be formally classified and then recorded. Within government structures, the terms "Polynesian" and "Pacific Islander" were used to refer collectively to peoples from various Pacific nations who had migrated to New Zealand (Macpherson, 2004; Salesa, 2023; Samu, 2006). After a time, the term "Polynesian" was removed and "Pacific Islander" the preferred term. Cook Islands Māori were grouped within this broader label, a category shaped by migration patterns and labour needs rather than by ancestral ties.

While this classification may have appeared practical within administrative systems, it carried deeper implications. It promoted the false idea of one unified migrant community (Samu, 2006). In grouping them together, it positioned Pacific peoples as the same, when they were not. When groups are combined under one label, their distinct histories, identities, and realities are harder to see (Coxon et al., 1994). For Cook Islands Māori, the term "Pacific Islander"

concealed the wider colonial relationship between New Zealand and the Cook Islands (Crocombe, 1976). As a realm nation of New Zealand, migrants from the Cook Islands had the legal right to migrate to New Zealand, but this relationship was not acknowledged in education policy (Salesa, 2023). Instead, they were positioned in education as part of the general Pacific Island population, and with this positioning came the deficit assumptions associated with that label.

At the same time, within New Zealand schooling and policy, the term Māori was generally understood to refer to tangata whenua⁴⁵, where identity was linked to iwi (tribe), whakapapa (genealogy) and whenua (land) in Aotearoa (Smith & Smith, 2001). Māori from the Cook Islands did not fit neatly within this framework. They were Māori by heritage yet were not recognised as such within the systems already in place in New Zealand, amongst both papa'ā and Aotearoa Māori. In this sense, Māori from the Cook Islands occupied an unsettled space. They were Indigenous to the Cook Islands yet positioned as migrants in New Zealand. They were Māori, yet not Māori in the way national systems defined the term. As a result, Māori from the Cook Islands could not simply be Māori in New Zealand. They were renamed Cook Islands Māori but known more commonly as Cook Islanders (Chapple, 1976).

Another tension Cook Islands Māori encountered was being mistaken for Māori of Aotearoa. The shared use of the term "Māori", as well as the similarities in visual appearance, often led to teachers and peers presuming they were the same. In this sense, the mistaking of Cook Islands Māori for Aotearoa Māori also exposed the unsettled position of Aotearoa Māori within schooling at the time. Aotearoa Māori were struggling for recognition of their Indigenous position, language, and knowledge within the schooling system (Jones et al., 1990; Openshaw et al., 1993; Walker, 1987). Cook Islands Māori entered the same system and experienced similar limits. Both groups were navigating arrangements in the education system that did not cater for their diverse needs.

Within education frameworks during this period of time, and for many years to come, the reclassification of Māori children from the Cook Islands as Pacific Islanders, as well as their renaming as Cook Islands Māori or Cook Islanders was rarely unpacked. For the children, this positioning shaped their sense of belonging in subtle but powerful ways. At home and at Church, they were Māori. However, when they were at school they encountered different expectations. To be Māori in New Zealand carried specific meanings tied to connection to the

⁴⁵ Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand.

land in New Zealand. To be Pacific Island often implied migrant difference. Cook Islands Māori children were asked, indirectly, to locate themselves within categories that did not fully hold them. This produced a quiet tension. Children learnt that identity shifted depending on context. In some settings they were Pacific Island, in others they were Māori, but in some contexts such as in school, not quite the right kind of Māori. Their belonging was conditional and depended on how others interpreted them. Over time, for some, this generated uncertainty, where they were left to navigate the tension if Māori meant one thing in New Zealand and another in the Cook Islands, where did they actually belong?

A CHURCH FOR THE PEOPLE (1960s)

There are many Māori here from home. With so much work available, our people have come in droves. I was just 16 when I came to live with my father. He was working out at the mill, and I had a job as a cook at the roadside dining hall for the men. Now I am working in the factory, sewing clothes for the workers. We have built a Church. What started as small gatherings in Turia's living room has now become a real building, a place where we can all come together as one. We raised money by travelling through the country and performing in different cities. New Zealand Forest Products gifted us some land on the corner of Kelso Street and Maraetai Road and with the help of many people, our Church has been built.

Our Church is more than a place of worship. Yes, it is a symbol of our faith, but it is also a reminder of who we are as Māori. We gather together to worship in our language, to sing our 'imene sabati (sabbath songs), 'imene tuki and reo metua⁴⁶. We have somewhere to come and meet as va'inetini, to sew our tivaivai, patu tuatua, and nurture our children in our reo. We try to do the things that we learnt back home, to gather after services and share a kaikai, hold our item (dance) practices, and tell our stories. This Church is where we can celebrate our identities, our histories, and our language.

While schools were not places where Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani and 'Ākono'anga Māori were valued, the Church became a site where this knowledge thrived. The community worked together to build the St Lukes Pacific Islands Church (later became St Lukes Pacific Islands Presbyterian Church). It did not operate under the same conditions as schools, where Cook Islands Māori children were expected to fit into an English-speaking, western system and leave parts of themselves behind when they entered the classroom. In contrast, Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani was spoken freely and 'Ākono'anga Māori practised without fear of being corrected or

⁴⁶ Māori are well known for their traditional singing of hymns with guttural sounds and high-pitched harmonies. Imene tuki and Reo metua are the names of these traditional hymns.

punished. The Church offered something schools did not, a place where Cook Islands Māori identity was normal and respected.

Learning in schools was usually strict and teacher-led with clear rules about behaviour and authority. Similar practices were also present in the Church, particularly in Sunday School where learning was structured and adults were the teachers. However, the Church also offered other learning contexts that were more shared and grounded in relationships. When learning cultural dances, songs or other cultural practices, knowledge was passed on through doing things together, watching, and supporting one another. Because most people were related, learning was shaped by existing relationships. Respect and care for one another were naturally prioritised. Expectations about how to behave, listen, and contribute were guided by these relationships rather than by formal rules or expectations. Cook Islands Māori children learnt alongside their elders and learning was not separated from life, it was experienced through participation in the life of the community.

Although the Church followed its own religious curriculum, it also created a space where 'Ākono'anga Māori could be learned and practised. Alongside Bible teachings and worship, Cook Islands Māori learned how to sing reo metua and 'imene tuki (traditional hymns), speak Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani, sew tivaivai, perform ura (dances), and share stories passed down through generations. These practices were woven into Church life and were not confined to Sundays. They were already lived in Cook Islands Māori homes. Many families prayed together and read the Bible together in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani every day. They also sang hymns in kitchens and living rooms in the vernacular too. Respect for elders was taught at home and carried naturally into Church gatherings. 'Ākono'anga Māori was lived in homes and Church every day, in meaningful ways. In this way, the Church did not introduce new practices but strengthened those that were already present within the home. At a time when society and, more importantly, schools did not recognise Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani or 'Ākono'anga Māori, these were sustained at home and at Church.

In the Church success was understood in ways that reflected collective values rather than individual achievement. Participation, responsibility, and care for others were central, while success was also formally recognised in the context of Sunday School, where children sat exams and were assessed on their learning. These assessments focused on understanding religious knowledge and reflected the western structure of Church systems, which closely resembled assessment practices used in schools. However, success in the Church extended beyond these exams. Children and adults were recognised for contributing to Church life,

speaking Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani, learning 'Ākono'anga Māori, supporting others, and taking on responsibilities within the community. Success was also revealed through a strong sense of belonging and a strengthened Cook Islands Māori identity.

This understanding of success did not emerge by chance but was shaped by the historical role of the Church in sustaining Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani and 'Ākono'anga Māori. Just as the Church in the Cook Islands became a place of safety for iti tangata Māori and their 'ākono'anga following the New Zealand administration's takeover of governance (Buzacott, 1866), the Church in Tokoroa served a similar role for migrant families. This history shaped how iti tangata Māori understood the role of the Church. When families migrated to Tokoroa, the Church once again became a trusted space where identity, relationships, language and 'Ākono'anga Māori could be protected and sustained in a new and unfamiliar environment. For families navigating new jobs, new schools, and new social expectations, the Church helped ease the dislocation of migration by strengthening identity and belonging. This grounding was vital, as it helped ensure that Cook Islands Māori language and cultural practices did not disappear with migration, but continued to be lived, shared, and passed on to children growing up in Tokoroa.

TŌPIRI'ANGA

This tu'anga has demonstrated how migration changed the way Cook Islands Māori lived. Families were confronted with the reality of living in a western society. Living conditions were not easy and new practices were necessary to be able to adapt to a new way of life. English was prioritised and worldviews challenged as government policy re-identified Māori and then categorised our people under broader labels. These practice arrangements disrupted the close 'ōire life they were used to in the Cook Islands.

In Tokoroa, Cook Islands Māori held on to remnants of their practices from the islands but needed a collective space to bring people together. The Church became that space. It allowed their families to come together, to worship, speak Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani and engage in 'Ākono'anga Māori without being corrected. It recreated something of the 'ōire life they had left behind. Within the Church, relationships and identity were strengthened. It was more than a Church. It was the place where 'ōire life was reconstructed, where language and identity were protected, and where Cook Islands Māori could find stability amongst the challenges of schooling, labour demands, and the pressure to adapt to the world of papa'ā.

Tu'anga Itu: 'Akaneke ki roto i te 'Ākono'anga Māori

Chapter Seven: Moving Towards Māori Practices

'AKATOMO'ANGA

Cook Islands Māori entered schooling in Tokoroa at a time when education policies and practices were not designed with them in mind. Although these conditions constrained their success in education, they did not diminish their aspirations for a better life. As they became more settled, they worked together as a community to navigate the complexities of western society, including the challenges they faced in schools. In this tu'anga, I examine how Cook Islands Māori overcame the constraints they experienced in schools which allowed them to establish foundations that would enable educational success over time. Unlike the previous two tu'anga, I was present as these practices unfolded in real time-space. I experienced the expectations, tensions, and decisions made by Cook Islands Māori families to move their children forward. I also witnessed the resolve of the Church to keep Cook Islands Māori grounded in 'Ākono'anga Māori and Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani, despite the decision by some families, including my own, to move away from it.

Once again, in this metaphorical tivaivai, I draw together the threads of education policy, pedagogy, curriculum, measurement and success. In the previous tu'anga, Māori from the Cook Islands were renamed Cook Islands Māori but more commonly referred to as Cook Islanders or Cook Islands. In this tu'anga I will continue with these identification markers, keeping in sync with the language of the participants from the time period of the 1970s-1990s.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PRACTICES (1970s)

We have been here in Tokoroa for many years now. The work is still plentiful, but it is hard. Many of our families continue to arrive from our homeland. Their goal is always the same, to earn money and take it back to the islands to build a house. But they always stay, they never return. Our children are now parents, and the first generation of New Zealand born Cook Islands children - our grandchildren, have arrived.

We are not called Māori here like back home. We are Cook Islands Māori. We have a good life here, but our aspirations for our grandchildren are different. I myself don't want my grandchildren to work out in the cold like many of our people. I want for them, what papa'ā want for their children and grandchildren - a good education.

At home, I was a teacher. Last year a play school was opened in our Church hall by some of our mothers. They wanted a place to gather with their children. I have been asked to help. At first, I was reluctant. But now that my eldest grandson is here, my dreams for him have encouraged me to help where I can. Our little ones learn in both English and Reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani. Keeping our language is important to us so we teach them little songs and chants in our reo; how to pray and say grace in our reo; and how to dance ura (hula). But we also teach the papa'ā alphabet, how to count in English and Māori, as well as the English nursery rhymes.

I love to read, so I read to them. We only have books with Bible stories, so that is what I read. We gather them together and they sit quietly on the floor. When they are quiet, I read and they listen. Reading the Bible together is something that we do in our homes, and our children already know the stories well. We want our Tamariki (children) to do well when they go to school but we want them to still know our traditions. This will help them stay strong in their identity but also help them succeed here in New Zealand.

The prevailing discourse in education policy in the 1970s in New Zealand continued to be the belief that if all children had equal access to the same system, they would have equal opportunities to succeed (Jones et al, 1990). Equality was understood as participation in one common system, rather than changing or adapting that system to reflect the diverse communities of New Zealand. While the government recognised Pacific Islands students as needing extra support in education, the focus was to help them succeed in the existing system, rather than transforming it to enable their success (DoE, 1972).

For Cook Islands Māori families in Tokoroa, school still represented hope. Many that had migrated to work were now grandparents. These migrants hoped that education would provide their grandchildren with a future beyond the physically demanding labour they had experienced. School was seen as the pathway to something better, particularly success at secondary school, where qualifications could open doors to different career opportunities. Yet while Cook Islands Māori families invested their hopes in schooling, they were still absent from the language of education policy. This silence shaped the everyday experiences of their children within classrooms.

The reality of Cook Islands Māori children in classrooms was complex. The education system still reflected dominant papa'ā norms and was not culturally inclusive. This often meant that the practices and dispositions nurtured at home were not always recognised at school. Their identity, language, values and practices did not always align with classroom expectations. At the same time, they continued to be categorised under the label "Pacific Islander" and

"Polynesians", which did not recognise their distinct identities as Cook Islands Māori (DoE, 1972). This label carried deficit assumptions about Pacific Islands learners, which positioned them as less likely to achieve academically (Anae, 2010; Samu, 2006; Samu, 2010). Over time, Cook Islands Māori families began to see the disconnect between what they valued as learning and what schools defined as success.

However, a shared understanding grew amongst our families, that doing well at secondary school did not begin in third form⁴⁷. If children were to navigate English speaking classrooms and have academic success, their foundations needed to be strengthened in the early years. Children not only needed to grow their academic ability, but they also had to learn how to participate in the practices of schooling. It was within this context that early childhood became a crucial focus. Strengthening the early years was seen as strengthening the pathway to academic success. Early childhood settings also created opportunities for mothers and grandmothers to contribute their knowledge in valued ways. While schools were not spaces where they felt they could contribute meaningfully to their children's education, early childhood learning environments allowed them to take an active role.

In 1974, a small group of Cook Islands Māori mothers and grandmothers established a play school in the Church hall. While the play school was influenced by the wider Playcentre movement, which promoted child-led learning and parent involvement (May, 2001), this play school was shaped by Cook Islands Māori values and ways of raising children. Learning in this space was intergenerational, based on a shared understanding within the Cook Islands Māori community about what it meant to raise a child well, to nurture respect, confidence, faith, and responsibility, and a strong sense of identity grounded in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani and 'Ākono'anga Māori.

Teupoko reflects on the women who created the play school:

Those women who created the punanga (play school), Puroku, Moeroa, Mrs. T., and Cathy Mcmeeken all wanted a place for their children and wanted a meeting place for the māmās to come and talk to each other and hang out. I think the punanga started in 1973, and my mum came in 1974, and they elected her for the president role. She seemed to like what she was doing. She made sure everything was right, light the fire during the winter, got biscuits and cups of tea for the kids, and she loved teaching. My mum taught the kids English basics like the alphabet and taught them Cook Islands basics.

⁴⁷ In the 1970s, third form was the equivalent of today's Year 9, which is the first year of secondary school in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Cook Islands Māori children have always learned by watching, listening, and participating alongside adults (Vai'imene, 2003). At play school it was the same. Children gathered alongside the mothers and grandmothers, who resumed the role of teachers. They prayed, sang, spoke Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani and English, read books, played, shared food and learned together daily. Through these routines, they developed confidence, co-operation, attentiveness, and a strong sense of belonging, while also being introduced to basic literacy and numeracy in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani and English. This was intentional. If children were to succeed at secondary school later on, the mothers and grandmothers believed they needed both a secure identity and the foundational academic skills and behaviours valued in mainstream education.

Through the routines at play school, children were not simply being immersed in play or acquiring new skills. They were being immersed in established Cook Islands Māori practice traditions such as prayer, reading collectively, singing and dancing in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani. These practices created conditions where children could also be initiated into new practices such as reading in English and having conversations in English, while also developing the dispositions such as not speaking unless spoken to, that would prepare them to participate more confidently in school classrooms.

However, as children neared the school entry age of five, there was uncertainty amongst some parents who wondered if the play school curriculum would ensure that their children were ready for school. These parents worried that too much emphasis on Cook Islands Māori language and culture would leave their children unprepared for the expectations of classrooms in schools. They wanted their children to be confident and competent with the English language in those spaces. Some decided to move their children away from play school to kindergarten, which were seen as being more aligned with primary education. They were seen as places where children would become familiar with English as the dominant language of learning, but where the teachers were also papa'ā and Cook Islands Māori children could interact with papa'ā children.

The decision to move children into kindergartens was not straightforward. It sat within a tension that many Cook Islands Māori families navigated. On one hand, play school strengthened Cook Islands identity, privileged Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani, and sustained 'Ākono'anga Māori. It strengthened children's confidence in who they were. On the other hand, kindergartens would strengthen proficiency in English and expose Cook Islands Māori children to behavioural norms shaped by papa'ā expectations. This tension was not simply about preference, but about balance. Cook Islands Māori children were expected to be strong in both worlds despite the two

not being equally valued within the schooling system. Families who left their children at play school believed their children could move between the two cultural spaces without any detriment to their education. Those who moved their children to kindergarten, however, believed their children would be better prepared for school, if they prioritised English language and knowledge.

Parents acted based on their understanding of what was best for their children. They wanted them to be confident, capable, and fluent in the language that carried power in the classrooms. Yet the steady privileging of English and papa'ā norms within schooling influenced how success was understood. Just as earlier generations of Cook Islands Māori in the Cook Islands had been seduced into believing that English was the language of progress and advancement, families in Tokoroa encountered similar experiences. Despite this tension, some Cook Islands Māori families held firmly to their commitment to the play school, believing their children could still thrive in New Zealand classrooms while holding on to their reo and 'ākono'anga. They refused to believe that their children's future depended on loosening their hold on who they were as Cook Islands Māori.

EARLY LITERACY PRACTICES (LATE 1970s-EARLY 1980s)

The warmth of the morning fire drifted through our home. That could only mean one thing. Māmā was up. She always rose before us, moving quietly through the house preparing for the day. Mum, Dad, and Pāpā had already left for work. It was still dark outside, but inside the house, the fire glowed, and breakfast waited. Before long, Māmā called out for us to get ready for school. After we ate, we went and sat with Māmā for our morning devotion. This was how every school day began.

Māmā came out from her bedroom carrying her Church bag. Inside were her Bibles and her hymn book, worn from years of use. She handed her English Bible to me and kept the Cook Islands Māori one for herself. My brother had just started school and was still learning to read. Because I'm a few years older, the job of reading the English Bible was mine. After checking with Māmā which verses to focus on, I read them out aloud while she and my brother listened. When I finished, Māmā read the same verses in Cook Islands Māori, while brother and I listened. After she read the verses, she asked us some questions to make sure we understood.

Once the reading was completed, we had one more task before saying our daily prayers. Every morning, we had to practice memorising the Bible verses we were given in Sunday School. This week's verse was Matthew 5:14-16. Māmā took it upon herself to make sure we learnt our verses. She didn't want us to be those children who showed up to Church and didn't know them. Once she was happy that we had remembered the verses, she

had us sit quietly, with our heads bowed, and she prayed for us in Cook Islands Māori.

I loved these morning devotions. Since finishing play school and starting primary school, this was the only time my brother and I heard stories read aloud in our Cook Islands language. Sometimes before our prayers we sang our islands hymns with Māmā too, which I loved. We used to do this at play school too, but there are no schools with any classes that teach in Cook Islands Māori, only English. Cook Islands Māori is just for home, Church, and play school.

Despite the efforts of Cook Islands families to sustain the play school and all that it represented, a harsh reality remained. When their children turned five, there were no primary schools offering a curriculum that honoured or taught through both Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani and English. There were no bilingual pathways waiting for them and they had no choice but to move their children into mainstream English-medium schools. The dual-language practice traditions that had been cultivated at play school, home, and Church, could not continue in the same form within primary schooling. Families who had worked carefully to strengthen both identity and English proficiency were confronted with a system that only recognised English as the legitimate language of learning.

These conditions reflected the broader conditions of education policy of the late 1970s and early 1980s, where schooling continued to be shaped by the rhetoric of equality of opportunity (Beeby, 1992; Openshaw et al., 1993). Inside classrooms, this hierarchy was reinforced through everyday teaching practices. Teachers taught in English. Reading and writing lessons were in English. Children's progress was measured in English. There were also no Cook Islands Māori teachers within these primary schools. The absence of teachers who shared students' language and cultural background meant that Cook Islands Māori identity was not reflected in positions of authority in the classroom. Within these conditions, teachers often interpreted the use of Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani through a deficit lens. Students' own language practices were seen as interference with English rather than as evidence of bilingual competence. Unlike their parents, who migrated from the Cook Islands with limited English, many of these children were bilingual. Yet bilingualism was not viewed as a strength, but as a barrier that needed to be overcome.

At the same time, literacy for many Cook Islands Māori children did not begin at school. Literacy practices were embedded in their everyday lives at home and at Church. While parents worked, many children were raised by their grandparents, where daily scripture reading formed part of their routine. This was reinforced at Church. In this sense, Cook Islands Māori children

were entering primary school with strong bilingual literacy foundations shaped through intergenerational practice traditions. However, these foundations were often overlooked within the practice conditions of schools.

Curriculum and assessment influenced teachers to focus on accelerating English proficiency above Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani. Teachers were given the power to categorise students based on their competence in different curriculum areas. As these were usually measured in English-medium, students who were stronger in their reo, were often labelled as "behind" and needing intervention. This did not necessarily reflect a lack of literacy knowledge, but more the failure of teachers to recognise the prior knowledge that students brought from their homes. In this way difference was framed as deficiency and intervention was "required", which came in the way of programmes such as reading recovery.

For some families, this dominance of the English language at school led to a gradual shift in their everyday language use. English became the language of homework, of reports, of conversations around learning, and of academic success. This increased focus of English in the homes, because of the expectations of schooling, shifted the balance of language use. In this way Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani was also confined at home to informal conversations, cultural practices, and devotions. This shift did not occur in isolation. It was interpreted differently across generations within the same household.

Within intergenerational families, children moved between two different perspectives. Many parents, shaped by their own early schooling experiences in New Zealand, had encountered embarrassment and marginalisation because of their poor English skills. Determined that their children would not face similar barriers, they prioritised English as the pathway to success. Grandparents, however, held a different perspective. They believed their grandchildren could succeed academically without relinquishing their language or identity. For them, Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani and 'Ākono'anga Māori were not obstacles to success but foundations of strength. This intergenerational tension further added to the complexities of how Cook Islands Māori children navigated their educational experiences.

This tension raises deeper concerns around the value placed on Cook Islands Māori ways of knowing and being within schooling contexts where English teaching and learning practices are consistently prioritised. When academic success becomes tied primarily to English proficiency, children whose first language is not English may begin to question the value and legitimacy of their own language, identity, and ways of being. Over time, the privileging of English does more than shape literacy development. In this instance, it shaped which language

families associated with intelligence, progress and opportunity. For some it shaped identity. Cook Islands Māori children were not simply learning English. They were learning to position themselves within a system that did not equally value all parts of who they were.

CHANGING PRACTICE CONDITIONS (MID TO LATE 1980s)

My son started high school today. When he arrived home, he surprised us by asking if he could take the Cook Islands Māori option class and join Puna Vai Ora. His dad didn't take it well. He's always been firm about not encouraging our children to join the cultural activities at the Church or to speak our language at home. It's not that we don't value it, both of us speak Cook Island fluently, but we only ever use it with each other or with other adults in our families, never with the kids.

My husband still carries the sting of being mocked for his broken English when he was a teenager. He doesn't want our children to go through that same shame or struggle. For him, the best way forward has always been through English - strong reading, strong writing, strong speaking. That, in his mind, is the path to opportunity. When we asked our son why he wanted to join Puna, his reply was, "School makes me feel like I'm an outsider. The teachers act like we don't know anything, and half the time, I feel like I don't even belong there". My heart hurt when I heard those words.

At school, we expect our children to do well and be respectful. At home, we make sure they study and stay focused. I've always tried my best to support them, helping with homework, attending parent-teacher interviews, and showing up at every school event. I watched how the papa'ā parents did things, and I followed their lead. But now, with our son wanting to take the Cook Islands option and join Puna Vai Ora, a quiet tension began to grow between us. I don't see the harm. It's just an option class, and Puna is only held during lunchtime. My husband, however, was strongly against it. He sees no value in either. To him, they are distractions, cultural detours that won't help our son get ahead in life. After much discussion, he eventually agreed, but with one condition: when our son reaches fifth form and begins preparing for School C, he would have to stop. It was a compromise and although it wasn't ideal, it was a small step forward. It's hard. I want our children to succeed. But I also want them to know who they are. What is the harm in that?

By the mid to late 1980s, the practice conditions of schooling in New Zealand began to change. This shift was influenced by the election of a new Labour government in 1984 and by ongoing pressure from Māori communities advocating for greater recognition of Māori language, culture, and rights as indigenous peoples. During this time, education discourse began to focus more on equity, and on reducing the inequalities that continued to exist in participation and achievement for Māori students (Ritchie, 1992; Walker, 1990). At the same time, there was

growing momentum to revitalise Te Reo Māori. Developments such as the Kōhanga Reo movement, the establishment of Kura Kaupapa Māori, and the Māori Language Act of 1987, signalled a stronger commitment to Māori language and culture (Bishop & Glynn, 2000; Smith & Smith, 1990; Walker, 1990). These developments challenged the assimilation practices within New Zealand schools. The Picot Report of 1988 led to a major review of the schooling system and resulted in Tomorrow's Schools reforms in 1989, which shifted the management and governance of schools to local Boards of Trustees (McKenzie, 1999).

While these changes created space for schools to respond more directly to their communities, they did not introduce specific national policies supporting Pacific languages or education. Pacific learners were highlighted in discussions and reporting of participation and achievement, but structural reforms centred largely on Māori as tangata whenua. There were, however, some small shifts within the curriculum. During the mid-1980s, Cook Islands Māori was introduced as a School Certificate⁴⁸ subject. This provided a formal pathway for the language within the national assessment system. Although this represented an important acknowledgement of the Cook Islands Māori language, it remained situated within the existing structure of English-dominant schooling.

Within these shifting practice conditions, some schools began to consider how language and culture were positioned within their learning environments. At Tokoroa High School, school leadership responded to the growing national emphasis on bicultural partnership by working closely with Māori staff and the local community to strengthen the Te Reo Māori curriculum. As part of their commitment, they worked together to build a marae⁴⁹ on school grounds (THS, 1985). The establishment of Te Whānau-a-Noa created a physical space where Te Reo Māori, tikanga, and identity could be learnt, practiced, and affirmed within the school environment. Naming the marae Te Whānau-a-Noa also reflected an intentional gesture by the school and community to create space that welcomed all cultures. It signalled that while the marae was grounded in Māori tikanga, it was also a space where the diverse cultures within the school community could gather and be acknowledged.

These arrangements further enabled the school to respond more directly to other needs of its student population. As Tokoroa High School had a large number of Cook Islands Māori

⁴⁸ School Certificate was a national secondary school qualification in New Zealand that operation from 1945 to 2002.

⁴⁹ Marae are sacred Māori (in Aotearoa) communal places that serve as central focal points of Māori community life.

students, the growing commitment to recognising and supporting the diverse needs of students created opportunities to employ two Cook Islands Māori teachers, who were appointed to teach Home Economics and Science. Recognising the absence of Cook Islands Māori language within the curriculum, they advocated for the introduction of a Cook Islands Māori language class. Their efforts were supported by the schools Te Reo Māori teachers, whose own programmes were already thriving within the school. Together, these teachers not only created spaces where Te Reo Māori and Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani could thrive, but they also created Puna Wai Ora (Māori Kapa Haka), Puna Vai Ora (Cook Islands Culture Group), and Puna Wai Ola (Samoan Culture Group), which strengthened the visibility of Aotearoa Māori, Cook Islands Māori, and Samoan identity within the school (M. Maea, personal communication, August 25, 2023).

Puna Vai Ora and the Cook Islands Māori language class emerged within changing practice conditions at the school. The school's commitment to biculturalism, the establishment of Te Whānau-a-Noa, and the presence of Cook Islands Māori teachers, enabled Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani and 'Ākono'anga Māori to enter spaces of schooling that had previously been dominated by English-medium practices. Cook Islands Māori students could now engage with schooling in ways that connected more closely to their lives beyond the classroom. For students already grounded in their culture through Church and home, these sites affirmed and celebrated their identity. For others whose connections to their culture were less secure, they provided opportunities to reconnect with Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani and 'Ākono'anga Māori. In this way, these programmes enabled students to either sustain or strengthen their sense of what it meant to be Cook Islands Māori.

These changing arrangements also enabled Cook Islands Māori culture to be more visible within the everyday life of school. Puna Vai Ora was integrated into the school timetable as an elective, and along with the other school cultural groups, performed on many occasions. Parents regularly came into the school to assist Puna Vai Ora, and respected community members provided tutoring and guidance to support the group. Through these practices, relationships between the school and the Cook Islands Māori community were strengthened. For Cook Islands Māori students, this visibility changed how they could position themselves within the school environment. Rather than leaving their identities and cultural practices at the school gate, students were able to see aspects of their language, dispositions, and practices recognised within formal spaces of schooling. In this way, changing practice conditions within the school created possibilities for Cook Islands Māori students to participate in schooling without separating their identity from their schooling experience.

However, while these arrangements presented positive progress for many Cook Islands Māori students, not all parents viewed them in the same way. For some families, the dominance of English within the wider education system continued to shape how they understood success at school. Many believed that strong English proficiency remained the most important pathway to academic success. Natua shares his families experience in relation to this:

Because my Dad was mocked about how he talked, he cared more about learning English more than anything else. He didn't want his kids to come across as being dumb. Dad would say that our Cook Islands people aren't dumb and that we just couldn't understand English words. So, he would make sure that my siblings and I talked properly.

As a result, Puna Vai Ora and the Cook Islands Māori language class were sometimes seen as valuable for maintaining culture, but not necessarily as contributing to academic success. In some cases, this belief led parents to keep their children away from these programmes, choosing instead to prioritise their full participation in schooling, through English-medium. While these decisions were often made with the intention of supporting their children's academic success, they also contributed to some youth becoming increasingly disconnected from their language and cultural practices, at home and at school. This reflected the continuing tension between the growing visibility of Cook Islands Māori culture within the school and the enduring belief that educational success was still closely tied to English.

CONTINUED TEACHING PRACTICES (1990s)

I'm really not enjoying school this year. Since I passed my School C exams last year, they moved me into a new tutor group, and now I'm literally the only brown kid in all of my classes. Most of my cousins and friends, didn't pass School C, so they've had to repeat the year. While I'm sitting in Sixth Form Certificate classes doing English, Maths, Physics, Accounting, and Economics, they're in Home Economics, Woodwork, PE, Cook Islands, and Work Experience. Apparently, they're not bright enough for these so called papa'ā subjects. My dad said that I was lucky that I dropped out of Puna and the Cook Islands Māori class. I don't think I'm lucky at all.

I hate tutor time. I even asked Mum to come in today and try to get me moved. My tutor teacher is rude! When he does the roll, he refuses to use my first name. He just calls me by my last name. I just don't answer when he calls my name. He thinks I'm being defiant, but I think he's racist. My name is important to me, because it's my grandmother's name too. To disrespect my name is to disrespect her. These teachers, they think they know everything, when really, they don't know anything. In primary school, my name was already shortened by teachers who couldn't say my full name. Now I have a teacher who doesn't want to use it at all.

*I hate maths too. I have a papa'ā friend I work with, and we're usually the first two to finish our work. She always gets extra extension tasks, something to keep her mind going, but when I ask for the same, I just get told to take a break. One time I even asked why she was given more work, and I wasn't, but the teacher just ignored me. Like I wasn't even worth answering. He makes me feel like I don't belong there, like I'm lucky to even be in that classroom. While I'm at it, I hate English as well. We're studying *The Crucible*, and I don't get it. Where even is Salem? Why are we reading about witches? If my dad knew I was reading a play about witchcraft, he'd be angry, not with the school, but with me, because I should know better. Witches are not from God. I don't even feel comfortable reading it. While I'm reading this stuff, my cousins are in Cook Islands Māori class dancing, learning, laughing, together. As for me? I'm here, on my own, feeling like I'm drifting further away from the people who know me best. Passing School C was supposed to open doors. But it doesn't feel like that at all.*

By the 1990's, the practice landscape of education was changing. While policy discussions of the 1980's focused on Aotearoa Māori, the growing Pacific population and emerging research on Pacific education prioritised Pacific learners in policy discussions. The discourse challenged deficit views of Pacific students, emphasising the importance of identity, culture, and language, in learning contexts for these students. Additionally, small developments such as Pacific advisory roles and curriculum resources also began to emerge. Although these changes did not transform schooling conditions straight away for Pacific learners, they signalled a growing recognition of their educational needs (Tongati'o, 2010).

The New Zealand Curriculum Framework (MoE, 1993) introduced a national structure for curriculum planning and learning objectives. While it influenced how schools organised their teaching programmes, it did not change existing teaching practices. One such practice was streaming, which shaped how students were grouped in many secondary schools. This practice had long been a part of New Zealand schooling and was used to group students based on their perceived academic ability. The School Certificate examination remained the main way students were sorted into different pathways. Students who passed could move into more academic subjects and higher qualifications, while those who did not pass were often placed in classes where they would repeat their fifth form year, placed in vocational courses or left school earlier. These arrangements often constrained education success for Aotearoa Māori and Pasifika-Pacific students, who made up a large percentage of those who failed the examination (Coxon et al., 1994). In effect, these practices not only limited access to higher academic pathways but also contributed to reproducing patterns in which certain ethnic groups, such as Cook Islands Māori, were confined to labouring and lower skilled forms of work.

Even for those who managed to pass this academic hurdle, just as the child in the tara, teaching practices often undermined their success. Some teachers refused to use students' proper names sending a clear message that Cook Islands Māori identities were not valued in some classrooms. Teaching was centred on a narrow form of standard English and cultural differences were often treated as problems rather than strengths. Students were expected to conform to these norms, while their own experiences and perspectives were rarely invited into the learning process. The curriculum reflected similar priorities. Most texts, examples, and assessment tasks drew exclusively on European traditions and middle-class contexts, privileging papa'ā ways of being, thinking, speaking, and interpreting the world. Cook Islands Māori knowledge and perspectives were largely absent from formal learning. Mirinoa addresses this in her patu tuatua. She shares:

In School C, I took six subjects and gained my university entrance. I did really well academically because of the teachers and the opportunities given by Tokoroa High School. I was often the teacher's pet, but not because I was greasing up to them; I was just a good student who did well. I had to learn very quickly how to assimilate myself into European spaces. I was supported very well at Tokoroa High School to be able to do that, but I had to lose part of myself being in that space.

In contrast, Cook Islands Māori language classes and Puna Vai Ora created different learning experiences in the school. In these spaces, language and culture were treated as strengths rather than barriers. Students could draw on their own stories, traditions, and experiences to make sense of new concepts, connect learning to their communities, and exploring topics through their own world views. These spaces encouraged participation, grew confidence, and allowed students to see that their cultural knowledge had value within the school environment. In this way, learning was connected more closely to who the students were and where they came from.

Taua reflects on his own experience as a student during this period. He explains:

Our culture was always kept alive both at home and in high school...I was lucky at Tokoroa High School, culture was always strong in the school. I didn't feel like I had to give up anything.

These contrasting experiences raise an important question about how success was defined in education. In schools, success was largely measured through assessment results, particularly the end of year School Certificate examinations. This reflected a western understanding of achievement based on academic performance. However, if Cook Islands Māori students were required to set aside their language and culture in order to succeed within this system, the meaning of that success becomes more complicated. From an assimilation perspective, passing

these examinations might be seen as a positive outcome. Yet it also raises the question of whether success that requires students to distance themselves from their cultural identity can truly be considered success at all.

CULTURALLY GROUNDED PRACTICES (1980s-1990s)

Youth club nights are every Tuesday and Thursday at the Church, and all our mapu are there. It's the highlight of our week. Tuesdays are sports nights, we play everything from touch and table tennis to basketball, but our favourite by far is volleyball. We can spend hours at the back of the Church playing, laughing, diving for the ball, not even noticing the time. Pāpā Orometua⁵⁰ sometimes watches us and cheers us on. He knows all of us and in return we all know him.

Thursdays are different, that's when we have item practice. I'm not much of a dancer, but I love playing the drums. Lucky for us, our youth leaders take the time to teach us how to dance, sing, and play our instruments properly. Right now, we're learning the legend of Ru. Our main tutor taught us the song about Ru's vaka, - Ngapuariki. He said it's sung by all the school children in Aitutaki, and now we can sing it too. When I came home and told Nana that we were learning about Ru, she brought out her dad's journal and showed me his record of the story as well as the genealogy that shows how we link back to him. I love being at Church with our mapu on youth nights. It's where we belong. We're all family anyway. It's not just about worship, it's where we learn our culture, our language, and who we are. We are so blessed with a Church, two halls, and a playcentre all in one space where we can be ourselves.

Speaking of worship though, Tatau⁵¹ is coming up. This means that our youth nights will be replaced with tatau practices for a short time. My nana has been making me practice at home every chance she gets. Even though I'm 15 she still makes me stand in front of her in the lounge, like I did when I was 5. When she says 'Go!', I have to say my verse to her, LOUD! If I'm not loud enough for her, she points to the sky and yells at me to be louder! The louder the prouder. She also teaches me to say each word correctly. "How you say the words is very important because if you pronounce them wrong, you could be saying something different!" So, we say the words until I can pronounce each one properly. I'm excited though and I practice hard. I want to do my best, because it not only makes nana proud, but it means I get treats. You're never too old to have treats.

⁵⁰ Pāpā Orometua is the term for the Minister of the Church.

⁵¹ Tatau is a Cook Islands Event that is also known as 'White Sunday'. Leading up to this day, Cook Islands children and youth will learn Bible verses in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani. On White Sunday, they will recite their verses in front of the whole community, in Church. This is a huge celebration and a way of engaging our young people in the language.

The Church in Tokoroa remained an important site of practice in the lives of Cook Islands peoples, in the 1980s and 1990s. It functioned not just as a place of worship, but also as a space where being Cook Islands Māori was celebrated. This reflected what was happening, not only in the Cook Islands, but in the rest of the Pacific Islands. MacPherson (2011) explained that Churches in New Zealand had been central to sustaining the cultural practices and languages of Pacific peoples, and in strengthening Pacific identity. For Cook Islands Māori in Tokoroa, this was especially true for the younger generation, many of whom were born in the 1970s. Participation in Church life enabled them to learn how to move within the relational and cultural practices of their community while also living within a New Zealand context.

While education policies in New Zealand during the 1980s were assimilation focused (Jones, 1991), the Presbyterian Church enacted different practice arrangements. As Pacific congregations grew rapidly during the 1970s and 1980s, the Church recognised the importance of being culturally inclusive (MacPherson, 2011). In response, it sought to deepen its engagement with both Pacific Islands and Aotearoa Māori congregations by strengthening its pastoral care system and creating spaces where cultural identity could be affirmed alongside spiritual growth (Redding, 2012). These arrangements supported the use of Pacific languages, strengthened Pacific identities, and encouraged Pacific leadership. In Tokoroa, this was evident in the appointment of Cook Islands ministers and the continued support of Pacific congregations. These decisions shaped the local practice landscape by creating conditions that recognised and supported the realities and needs of the community.

These cultural-discursive arrangements did more than create an inclusive Church structure. The play school had grown and required its own separate space, so the Church purchased the house next to it and moved the group there. The two halls were used for youth nights, Sunday School sleepovers, dance practices, uapou and other functions. A volleyball net was put up at the back of the hall for young people to enjoy. Within this context, the Church operated as a significant learning site where the material arrangements created learning spaces where intergenerational learning and the sharing of Cook Islands Māori cultural practices could be enacted.

Youth leaders, Sunday School teachers, elders, ministers, parents, and grandparents all participated in the practices of teaching and learning, maintaining the strong connections between home and Church. Through these intergenerational practices, young people were initiated into the cultural practices that shaped how they related to others and participated in community life. They learnt to listen and show respect for their elders, yet there were also times when they actively engaged and were encouraged to be creative. Through culturally embedded

practices such as storytelling, collective worship, song and dance, youth were empowered to engage in their language, heritage and faith in ways that were affirming.

This intergenerational approach shaped the practices through which learning was enacted within the Church and community. Learning was inseparable from everyday life and community activities. This occurred through participation in activities such as but not limited to, Sunday School, Church cultural activities, and family practices at home. In these spaces, faith and culture were enacted together. Grandparents, parents, and youth participated together in practices grounded in love, care, and shared responsibility. This created conditions where knowledge could be passed down naturally from one generation to the next. Through these practices, the discourses of our community, drawn from the past and present, continued to live on as elders shared their stories, teachings, and values with Cook Islands Māori youth.

Religious teaching in the Church was also carried out through both Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani and English. This created conditions where Cook Islands youth moved between the two languages in prayer, song, scripture reading, and everyday conversation. Through participation in these practices, youth developed bilingual fluency and strengthened their literacy in both languages. These language practices reinforced the value of each language within the community and ensured that Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani remained an active part of Church and family life. As the youth participated in these practices, they not only learned the language of worship, but also the importance of speaking Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani. However, with the conflicting prioritisation of English in schools and in the wider community, Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani fluency was difficult to sustain.

Within this practice landscape, success in Church and home was not measured through grades but participation. Cook Islands Māori youth demonstrated their learning through their ability to read scripture both in English and Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani, respond confidently during conversations, participate in Cook Islands Māori dance and song, or answer questions about Bible teachings confidently. Although Sunday School examinations remained a requirement of the Presbyterian Church, competence was often recognised through active participation. Showing up, contributing, and embodying the values of both the Church and the culture were key indicators that the youth were learning how to participate meaningfully in the life of the community.

These practices were particularly significant during the 1980s given the tension many young people experienced in navigating what it meant to be both Cook Islands Māori and New

Zealanders. In the wider society, where conditions often constrained the recognition and expression of Pacific identities, the Church created conditions that enabled Cook Islands youth to be grounded in a strong sense of who they were. Through its cultural practices, the Church helped sustain Cook Islands identity and ways of being. In this way, Church life offered an alternative practice landscape to schooling, where Cook Islands Māori language, culture, and values were consistently recognised, prioritised, and celebrated.

CHANGING VOCATION PRACTICES (1990s)

The last few years have been tough for our family. Dad was lucky to have survived the redundancies out at the mill before Forest Products folded a few years ago but wasn't so lucky when the new owners Carter Holt Harvey took over and restructured the workforce out there. This led to further redundancies and unfortunately Dad lost his job. He was worried because he had no other skills and no formal education to fall back on. Then one day, he came home and told us that he was going back to school. I literally panicked because I thought he meant high school - as in going to the same school as me. We already have a few adult students at our school attending classes. But no, he explained that he was going to university to do a teaching degree.

Dad travelled up to Hamilton every day for four years, while Mum continued to work. Nana and Grandad looked after us while mum was at work, but we all had to do our part and help with the younger children and also make sure we did our homework. Mum and Dad would both get home late, but Nana and Grandad cooked our meals, which was a blessing. That's all about to change soon, because Dad is graduating soon. We are so proud and the sacrifices have been worth it. But now education has become even more of a priority in our home, because there is no work like when our parents and grandparents came from the islands. If we want to survive, we have to get an education. That's what all the adults keep telling us anyway.

By the late 1980's redundancies at the Kinleith Mill significantly impacted the Tokoroa community. Aotearoa Māori and Pacific Island communities were among the most affected because many had been concentrated within labouring roles in the mill or the forestry. For decades these industries had provided employment and stability for Cook Islands Māori families. However, when restructuring occurred and workers laid off, many found themselves without the qualifications needed to easily move into other occupations. The very industries that had recruited Cook Islands Māori migrants to fill the labour shortages of the 1950s now exposed how vulnerable our community had become within an economy that had largely positioned them within manual labour.

At the same time, these changes became a turning point for many Cook Islands Māori families. For some adults, redundancy created an opportunity to rethink what education could mean for them. Many returned to studying as adult students in high school, entered training programmes, or attended university to gain new qualifications and skills (K. Rota, personal communication, 15 June, 2022). This marked an important shift in how education was experienced within Cook Islands Māori communities. Education was no longer seen as something only connected to children or preparation for work. Instead, it became understood as something that could create wider opportunities, support change, and open pathways beyond the forestry industry.

This also challenged earlier assumptions about what education was for. Previous generations had viewed formal education as inaccessible or unnecessary for themselves because their lives had been shaped around labour and survival. Returning to education as adults disrupted these ideas. It demonstrated that Cook Islands Māori were capable of succeeding within spaces they had historically been excluded from. It also showed the agency of our community in responding to changing economic conditions. These experiences had a significant impact on younger generations. Children witnessed their parents returning to classrooms, studying, and working towards qualifications despite the challenges they faced. In many ways, this reshaped how education was understood within our community. It became connected not only to employment, but resilience, aspiration, and the possibility of creating different futures. It showed younger generations what it truly meant to be a lifelong learner and that learning did not stop after school. It also showed that education could become a pathway toward opportunities previous generations had been denied.

Throughout this period, the support of the 'ōire remained important. Families, Churches, and the wider community supported each other through challenging times, especially through change and unexpected decisions such as studying. These relationships helped Cook Islands Māori adapt to new realities while continuing to reshape who could experience education success, what that could look like for adult students, and what opportunities could look like for future generations.

TŌPIRI'ANGA

This tu'anga has shown that Cook Islands Māori experiences of education in Tokoroa were shaped by ongoing tensions between western schooling and the desire of families and communities to remain grounded in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani and 'Ākono'anga Māori. Despite the constraints of English dominance, deficit assumptions and assimilation practices within

schools, our families remained resilient. They were not passive within these conditions and adapted to create new possibilities within the changing times.

The changes in the economic conditions in Aotearoa New Zealand also created conditions where Cook Islands Māori families had to reimagine their futures and change their everyday lives. These changes reshaped the education landscape, and educational success became even more important for parents and students. At Tokoroa High School, shifting conditions created opportunities for new practices to emerge where 'Ākono'anga Māori and Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani were beginning to be visible in the site of the school. Although traditional western education practices persisted, change for Cook Islands Māori became even more possible.

Tu'anga Varu: Tākave'anga o te 'Ākono'anga Māori

Chapter Eight: Embracing Māori Practices

'AKATOMO'ANGA

Philosopher Gert Biesta (2013) questioned what price we are willing to pay for education to "work" for our children. For Cook Islands Māori in Tokoroa, this raises important questions about the conditions needed to enable our children's success. Educator Aue Te Ava (2011) argued that Cook Islands Māori should return to past practices to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. In many ways, the findings in this tu'anga demonstrate how we turned to our own cultural practices to connect Cook Islands Māori students to meet the challenges they faced in education, as suggested by Te Ava, and to engage them in learning in more meaningful ways. In this sense, we were willing to disrupt the practices of the status quo to truly cater for the needs of our children.

This tu'anga draws on the patu tuatua with participants, as well as my own experience. I was there, as an educator and mother, to observe the practices as they unfolded. Unlike the previous tu'anga, which divided each section into time periods, this tu'anga focuses on the years 2000-2022. The themes that have been stitched through this thesis, are discussed in individual sections beginning with education policy, curriculum, pedagogy, measurement and success.

EDUCATION POLICY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

My friends and I stood at the gate of the marae, Te-Whanau-Noa. It was our first day at Tokoroa High School. We were nervous and excited about the new adventure ahead. Finally, high school. My dad didn't want me to attend this school, worried that it would not be able to cater to my academic needs. He wanted me to attend a boarding school in Hamilton, an idea that I was dead against.

"Can I be Cook Islands Māori at this school you want me to attend?" I queried.

I had just attended an Intermediate School where my culture was treated as something we turned on for entertainment purposes. I remember one day being reprimanded by my teacher for not having completed my homework. I tried to explain to her that I had dance practice for Te Eiva Nui⁵² the night before and was up late, so didn't complete my homework.

⁵² Te Eiva Nui is a Cook Islands Māori dance competition that occurs bi-annually in Tokoroa. Dances of all ages from as young as 4 through to adults are encouraged to participate.

She wasn't impressed with my answer and asked me the question: "Isn't your education more important than your culture?" I was disappointed with this question, and rather than explaining that my culture is who I am, not this separate thing that she was suggesting. I just said to her calmly, "Can you ask my mum that question?"...

My thoughts were interrupted by the sound of the karanga⁵³. I looked forward to the occasion before me. At Tokoroa High School, it was customary to be welcomed into the school through the powhiri⁵⁴. Being Cook Islands Māori myself, I appreciated cultural practices, and I loved that we were experiencing something so beautiful. The karanga brought us on to the marae, and we followed the adults ahead of us to our seats. I looked to the other side and saw so many familiar faces. Pāpā Willie was the principal, Pāpā Timote, our minister, Aunty Chooks was our Pasifika dean, Uncle Ta, the Head of PE, Aunty Apii in English, Aunty Darny our deputy principal, and so many other familiar faces. Realising there were so many people I knew from my family and the community calmed my nerves. I had nothing to worry about; I was in good hands.

Pāpā Timote stood to speak. He spoke in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani and then Aunty Tai started the tuoro⁵⁵. Students from school, my cousins and my older siblings stood beside Aunty and chanted with her. I was emotional. To hear my language and see my culture alive on this marae in this school, showed me that being Cook Islands Māori was celebrated here and not invisible like in the school I had just come from. Even though I was young, I had experienced the judgements of teachers of us because we were islanders. From my very first day of school at the age of five, I experienced the shock of teachers because of my strong literacy skills, and this continued throughout my schooling. They expected me to be dumb, to be behind, or to be poorly behaved. My parents held many meetings with my teachers in the past because I wasn't being extended or because teachers thought I was cheating on my schoolwork.

Hopefully, things will be different here and I'm ready to embrace it all.

Throughout the 1990s, successive governments recognised the need for major reforms across the wider Aotearoa New Zealand society, including education. As the new millennium approached, political discourse increasingly focused on what kind of education would best prepare students for the 21st century (Lee & Lee, 2000). Central to these discussions was the belief that "traditional approaches to education and training were no longer viable in a modern

⁵³ A formal call of welcome in Aotearoa Māori culture, specifically used in the pōwhiri (welcoming ceremony) on the marae (meeting ground).

⁵⁴ An official Aotearoa Māori welcoming ceremony.

⁵⁵ Tuoro is an official Cook Islands Māori welcoming chant

global economy" (Lee & Lee, 2000, p 6). Conversations were also being held amongst secondary school educators, with a particular emphasis on the relationship between curriculum and assessment. It was within this climate that a Labour-led government introduced the 'Closing the Gaps' strategy aimed at reducing inequalities experienced by Pasifika-Pacific peoples and Aotearoa Māori, in comparison to the rest of Aotearoa New Zealand (Clark, 2004). The strategy created conditions for greater recognition of the needs of Pasifika-Pacific. As concerns grew, policy outlined in the Pasifika Education Plans emerged as a way to introduce more equitable practices in education (Tongatio, 2010).

The Pasifika Education Plans (MoE, 2001; 2006; 2008; 2009; 2013; 2020) reflected the changing understandings of Pasifika-Pacific students' experiences in education. The first plan was introduced in 2001, and largely focused on raising participation, retention, and academic achievement (MoE, 2001; Tongatio, 2010). While the objectives of the plan were aspirational, Pasifika-Pacific children were positioned through deficit language where the emphasis centred on 'raising achievement' and addressing underperformance within western schooling systems. Although these plans acknowledged the importance of community partnerships and improving teacher understanding, the dominant focus remained tied to measurable academic outcomes.

Between 2006 and 2017, the Pasifika Education Plan increasingly recognised the importance of Pasifika identities, languages, cultures, relationships, and community engagement with educational success (MoE, 2006). During this period, education policy moved beyond participation and achievement, acknowledging that Pasifika-Pacific learners needed to experience success as Pasifika-Pacific. This represented a significant shift, as education policy recognised that culture, identity, and belonging, and wellbeing were important aspects of engaging Pasifika-Pacific learners in meaningful learning. Additionally, greater emphasis on culturally responsive pedagogy, leadership, family and community partnerships, and creating learning environments where Pasifika-Pacific learners could see themselves reflected within their schools (Tongatio, 2010).

More recent policy developments, particularly the Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030 (MoE, 2020) and the 2023 Refresh (MoE, 2023), marked a greater shift in terminology, timeframe, and focus. The most visible change is the use of the term 'Pacific' instead of 'Pasifika', which referred mainly to Polynesian countries and did not include Melanesian and Micronesian communities. The term 'Pacific' ensures that these peoples are equally represented and acknowledged (MPP, 2022). The move to 'Pacific' also reflected a stronger focus on recognising diversity, particularly the naming of specific communities such as Cook Islands Māori, Niuean, and Tokelaun peoples, which is visible in the 2023 Refresh (MoE, 2023).

The Action Plan for Pacific Education Refresh (MoE, 2023) also reflects a focus on systems change, equity, wellbeing and cultural sustainability. Rather than positioning Pasifika-Pacific learners as the problem needing to be fixed, these policies acknowledge that education systems themselves require transformation. In the document itself, greater attention was given to challenging systemic racism, bias, and inequitable structures; at the same time, ways of being and knowing were positioned as strengths and not barriers to achievement. Across these shifts, the plans reflect how changing political and social conditions enabled greater opportunities for Pasifika-Pacific learners. For Cook Islands Māori, who had largely been silenced from education policy, our naming as a people within the Action Plan Refresh in 2023 (MoE, 2023), signalled a long-awaited acknowledgement of our identities, language, knowledge, and aspirations within education. Finally, visibility in education policy and, therefore, education spaces.

A CURRICULUM FOR COOK ISLANDS MĀORI

I looked at my friend, frustrated. As the Dean of Pasifika I felt disheartened, because no one wanted to teach my children. The Pasifika students accounted for about a fifth of the school's population and if we didn't find any solutions for their disengagement soon, I was afraid that we'll lose them.

Despite the changes in education policy and the mandate to do more for our Pasifika students, I was finding it hard to enact change within the school systems we had in place. My children were still overrepresented in the communication classes for maths and English. Their overall achievement rates were poor. I refuse to accept that this is it for my children. Their parents and grandparents are counting on us to do better. My Year 13's are the priority right now. If I can just get them through the academic year, then we can look at making a change next year. I think for a moment and then I turn to my friend and say to her, "I want to have homework classes. Will you help me?"

She didn't hesitate. She promptly answered, "of course".

"Great", I said. "We'll start on Wednesday night at 6pm. I'll tell the kids and get us some milo and biscuits in case we get hungry. I'll see if I can get some more teachers to come and help us".

Shifts in education policy encouraged us to think differently about our own teaching practices. The shifts signalled wider changes within the education landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand, which contributed to national reforms in the curriculum, alongside the introduction of the National Certificate of Education Achievement (NCEA). These changes opened up possibilities

for us and our students in ways that we had not imagined would be possible. Following the 2003 curriculum stocktake (Clark, 2004), concerns around equity, relevance, and student engagement contributed to the development of the revised New Zealand Curriculum in 2007, which created greater flexibility for schools to design learning programmes and assessment opportunities that reflected the identities, strengths, interests, and aspirations of their learners (MoE, 2007). This enabled us to create a curriculum for Cook Islands Māori that would engage them in more meaningful ways.

A Community of Learners

For our children, change began with the introduction of homework class. There were already initiatives in the school that had been in place since the early 1980s, such as the Cook Islands Māori language classes and Puna Vai Ora, but these alone were not enough to sustain the growth in our students' educational achievement. Homework class became a targeted intervention aimed at giving our Pasifika-Pacific learners, who were mainly Cook Islands Māori, more time for completing assessments, greater access to teachers for one-on-one tuition, and the resources and space to just sit and work on their units of work. The learning space was the library. The library consisted of a small upstairs level with a few computers and tables, and was a designated space for our Year 13's. At floor level there were tables and chairs set up for group work, with small sofas in some spaces and beanbags in tight areas, allowing students to have quiet time. When they came to homework class, the happenings in the space were led by them. If they needed help from teachers, they would approach them; if they just needed to use a computer and work on their own, they would do so. If they had arranged to work with their peers, they would have done so too. The space enabled flexibility and agency. Students facilitated their own learning. The material-economic arrangements in the library enabled us to practice in ways that were different from how we taught in class and how students engaged in their learning.

Initially, this programme was designed in 2009 to support our Year 13 Pasifika learners who were having difficulty with their learning and meeting the requirements of their internal assessments. Over a short period, this extended to the rest of the school. Milo and biscuits sustained us through those hours, but a Ministry of Education initiative named 'Power Up' (Parata, 2014) enabled our local Pasifika community health provider to provide hot meals for our families. 'Power Up' aimed to bring the community, schools, and families together in education spaces through homework initiatives. Our school homework class grew to be a space where parents could bring their whole families, students who attended our school and their younger siblings.

Conversations were held with parents about NCEA expectations and how to support students at home. Homework class was held only once a week, so helping parents understand how they could support their children at home was a key focus for us. As attendance in homework classes grew over the years, especially with the South Waikato Pacific Islands Community Services (SWPICS) sponsoring a meal for those in attendance and transport from school to students' homes, more teachers were supported. In regard to the impact of homework class or clubs, author Stacey Shortall (2025) wrote:

Homework clubs have shown me that what learners really need is not just answers on a page - it's encouragement, patience, and the belief that they can succeed. Many of the learners who come to Homework Clubs carry heavy loads. Some live in families stretched by poverty, housing insecurity, or parents working multiple jobs. Others speak English as a second language, or despite the best efforts of their families, have experienced stress and inability at home.

(Shortall, 2025, p 1)

Homework class became more than a space for study. It became a collective effort to overcome barriers to learning in the classroom and provide a safe space for our children to receive support in a number of ways. Cindy shares:

Homework class was very important for me. I attended with my grandmother when I was in Intermediate school as part of the 'Power Up' programme. I'm glad I started early because it was at homework class where I gained confidence in my reading. Aunty Apz and Aunty Chookz helped me with some strategies to grow my reading skills. I attended homework class for seven years, from Year 7 through to Year 13. Homework class definitely helped me pass my NCEA.

For many of our students, homework class became a regular part of their weekly routine, and they attended it right throughout high school. A small number, like Cindy, attended since they were in Intermediate School. Homework class has always been on a Wednesday afternoon, straight after school. Initially, it was from 6-8 pm, but this was changed to suit staff and students. Staff members volunteered their own time to attend. Many of our students were also very athletic and heavily involved in our school sports teams. For many years, there was an unspoken expectation that no other activities would be scheduled on Wednesday afternoons so students could attend homework class, but this was not always possible. In this instance, students would attend their sports practices, then come to homework class at the end of those sessions. At times, homework class attendance could reach 60-70 students, with up to 14 staff members. This

number has since dropped due to changing conditions, with three of us staff members who were there from the very beginning still supporting the initiative.

Reconnecting with our World

One of the pivotal changes to the curriculum was the introduction of Year 9 and 10 Social Studies with Cook Islands Māori class. NCEA Cook Islands Māori Language classes were already part of the school curriculum, but the junior Social Studies classes gave our Pasifika Dean, who was also the Cook Islands Māori language teacher, the opportunity to effect change right from Year 9. This class involved studying Social Studies with a Cook Islands Māori world view, which also incorporated learning basic Reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani. The majority of students who joined this class were, in fact, Cook Islands Māori. The introduction of two cultural practices as units of learning enabled more language use while also creating space for meaningful learning connected to students' lives.

The introduction of the 'Akapapa'anga unit created meaningful dialogue between junior students and families. Students were required to go home and ask their parents or grandparents for information about their migration stories, the names of their 'ōire, their great-grandparents, or a specific chant from their 'ōire or island to identify who they were. Not only were they engaging in their own histories but strengthening their use of Reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani. The practice of sharing papa'anga⁵⁶ became an integral part of the Cook Islands Māori curriculum, but also in encouraging our Cook Islands Māori students to embrace their identities within the school. In the community, they were already strong; however, through bringing our own 'ākono'anga into the school, they soon learnt that they could be proud to be Cook Islands Māori everywhere.

Rosey shares:

We were always reminded of the sacrifices our grandparents and great-grandparents made so we could be in school, and because of this, we continued to keep our heads held high. The pe'e 'Noku ei tōku purotu no roto i te kutikuti o te rangi e'⁵⁷ is something I hold on to quite dearly because it's a reminder to be strong in who you are and in your identity. It's something that I always share when I do my papa'anga. It really stuck with me throughout high school because there were many times when I questioned my purpose in school. I would ask myself, how are you going to make a change for the betterment of your people? If I hadn't held on to

⁵⁶ 'Akapapa'anga is to construct one's papa'anga, whereas papa'anga is the genealogy itself. It is common practice to share three generations in your papa'anga, this includes the person sharing.

⁵⁷ This is a proverb from Aitutaki which translates to 'your beauty is your own given to you from the heavens above'.

this verse as closely as I did, I don't think I would've accomplished or achieved the things that I did.

Pure Ngutuare or devotion was also introduced to the junior classes. In our community, there are certain protocols and sayings that involve everyone in the devotion, which usually consists of a song, a prayer, and a bible verse - all spoken in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani. Students are given the opportunity to take turns at leading this practice in the class. The prayers - a prayer for the start of class and the end of class, were learned and then recited when it was time. This practice, and the sharing of students' papa'anga, were practices they will enact right throughout their schooling years if they are part of Puna Vai Ora and the Cook Islands Māori classes. The beauty of these practices is that when students are in the community and expected to speak at events, they have already been taught how to introduce themselves appropriately in our reo.

Engaging with Pacific Studies

The flexibility of NCEA standards enabled Ta'i to create a learning programme for her senior students that catered for their specific needs. The language class already included a unit of work connected to the subject, but she also introduced three Pacific Studies units that enabled students to conduct research into aspects of Cook Islands Māori culture, including the histories of students' families connected to the different islands they are from. These units of work often required students to go home and have conversations with parents and grandparents to gather information. As there is not a lot of published works on Cook Islands Māori culture, family members were often the first point of contact where students could learn from their lived experiences. Once students had gathered the information they needed, they could present their findings in a number of ways, either as an oral presentation, a written essay, or a PowerPoint presentation.

Performance as Learning and Achievement

The school Polynesian group, Puna Vai Ora (Puna), was always a way for our students to share their stories through song and dance. For many years it was an opportunity for our Pasifika-Pacific students to be together with people who were the same. Tupou adds:

I went into Puna Vai Ora, and I knew most of the people who were a part of the group from Church or who were my cousins. I felt that I had a place where I belonged, as I was amongst other Cook Islanders, Pacific Islanders, and other people who looked like me, which made it easier to fit in.

One change we made to participate in the group was to tie it to academic achievement, attendance, and class participation. Amongst our small team of teachers, we had decided that

every initiative or programme we were part of in the school would be linked to student achievement. This included Puna Vai Ora. Cindy adds:

Puna gave students the opportunity to engage in their Pacific cultures. To be a part of Puna, there were certain requirements, one of which was that we needed to pass our classes and do our work. If you wanted to go on a Puna trip, which everyone did, then you needed to have 90% attendance across all classes. To others, that may not sound like anything or may not be important, but to us, it was everything. We were all very proud of who we were and where we came from. We all wanted to perform our different cultures and always wanted to be the best. Doing our work helped us get all the treats. If you weren't in class to pass, then there were no treats for you. It wasn't just us Cook Islanders by ourselves either. If you identified as a Pacific Islander, then you were our people; you were a part of our group.

A significant shift in Puna that changed how students participated was the attachment of the NCEA Dance subject standards to their learning. In Term Two of the academic year, the regional Pasifika by Nature Dance Competition⁵⁸ was held in Hamilton for secondary schools in the region. In Term One, our tutors and students worked hard to choreograph, teach and learn different Pasifika-Pacific ethnic dances to perform at the festival. After weeks of learning and fine-tuning of their bracket, students performed their bracket and were assessed for their performance. Students worked hard to earn their performance credits at the excellence level, and many were rewarded with this grade for their precise execution of the choreography.

Going Home

Another key shift that connected classroom learning to students' lives was a planned school trip back to the Cook Islands. The trip involves spending time on three islands - Rarotonga, Mangaia, and Aitutaki. Most of our Cook Islands Māori students have connections to one or more of these islands. Leading up to the trip, students learn stories, histories, songs, and chants associated to their 'ōire and their islands. When we visit these islands, we visit the places that the students learn about, bringing their stories and histories to life. Additionally, students are expected to speak Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani as much as possible. Unfortunately, their efforts, especially in Rarotonga, were often met with English responses from local residents, which frustrated our students. On the outer islands, however, their experiences were different.

⁵⁸ This event no longer runs. It was last held in 2021.

We are always hosted by the 'ōire we visit, and our students are expected to introduce themselves through sharing their papa'anga. One of my fondest memories was in 2018, when three of my four children travelled with the school group to Aitutaki and were required to share their papa'anga as a group of siblings in our 'ōire. The 'ōire hall sits on our family land, and our family home is located at the back of the hall. When they shared their great-grandparents names, connections by those listening were immediately made. This example of engaging students in more meaningful learning reaches beyond the classroom and into the lives of our students in ways that could never be experienced at school.

Connecting the Curriculum to 'Ākono'anga Māori

More opportunities to speak Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani, engage with units of learning connected to the Cook Islands, as well as linking more initiatives to student achievement were key shifts made to increase the visibility of 'Ākono'anga Māori in the school as well as to engage our students in more meaningful learning experiences. Although a lot of these changes happened within the Cook Islands Māori language programme, other Cook Islands Māori teachers like me supported where we could and made changes in our own spaces. In English, this involved incorporating more purposeful and contextual texts, using basic Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani in my teaching, and supporting the Pacific Studies units through research studies.

Being more intentional about curriculum choices shifted how our students came to see themselves in the school. It enabled them to feel more visible and valued, which contributed to a growth in their own pride and confidence. Authors Tuafuti and McCaffery (2005) asserted that in order to raise Pasifika-Pacific learner's self-esteem and positive self-identity, Pasifika-Pacific cultural values, beliefs, and languages need to be present in all facets of their education. At Tokoroa High School, the increasing visibility of Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani and 'Ākono'anga Māori within the curriculum contributed to creating learning spaces where students could see themselves reflected and affirmed. As a result, students were able to move into other learning spaces across the school with a stronger sense of capability and self-belief.

RELATIONSHIP-BASED PEDAGOGIES

I stood at the doorway of the school hall. A big smile on my face. The hall looked beautiful, with the students's tivaivai hanging all around it. We were waiting for the students to tuoro us. The drums were beating and we could see the students dancing, which made me smile. We were dancing too. It has been three months already. The time went so fast. Our small group of māmā's and the students have worked hard sewing their tivaivai. They have done so well learning not only the sewing, but also our reo. We

are old now. If we do not teach them, who will? It has been very different doing our tuitui (sewing) in the classroom, but I have enjoyed my time, especially with my inarere (great-grandchild) ...

Oh, I can see the two boys getting themselves ready to pe'e (chant). The tears come when I hear my great-grandsons voice and my heart swells with pride. I move slowly as he calls us; as he calls me in my reo: "Turou te vaka taparanga..."

One unit that grew out of the Cook Islands Māori language class, which was a favourite for both students and parents, was the tivaivai unit. Although this was one of the most effective additions to the curriculum, I discuss it in this section of the tu'anga because of its link to pedagogical practices. Before entering a discussion of pedagogy, it is necessary to discuss the unit itself. The unit involved inviting māmā's from the 'ōire, grandmothers, grandaunts or great-grandmothers of some of the students, to come and teach the NCEA Cook Islands Māori students to sew tivaivai. While the māmā's taught the students to make the tivaivai, they also spoke Reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani with them. At the end of the unit, the students held an exhibition displaying their work and were required to share the stories of their tivaivai through oral presentations. The first to see their exhibitions were the māmā's, the students' families, and Pāpā Orometua, the Minister of the Church.

The learning intentions in this unit reflect the importance of integrated cross-curricular learning. Sewing tivaivai was linked to describing a cultural aspect in Pacific Studies. The conversations with the māmā's were to engage in spoken interactions for the Cook Islands Māori language class. The sharing of the tivaivai stories was linked to the subject English, where students crafted and delivered an oral presentation with fluency. This one unit of work, demonstrated how students could participate in a meaningful learning experience, where teaching and assessment practices reflected the strengths of students, but also engaged them in culturally relational and sustaining practices. This unit of work received a positive response from parents, staff, and families. One mother Ramarihi shared:

I really liked the programmes put in place by the Pasifika Dean. The practical units like the tivaivai really benefited my son because they incorporated key cultural values. I enjoyed how the kids had to do all the work. They had to sew, cut, and tack the tivaevae. Then the Dean would bring in the māmā's to sew everything together, which I thought was very cool because it was a way of connecting the older generations with the younger generations. Our kids were able to learn a lot from the māmā's. They were able to learn things that they wouldn't necessarily learn in a classroom or in a book. I really value the knowledge the māmā's passed on to the kids. My son has been able to

learn many things from his māmā's and pāpā's, and I believe those things are more valuable than being the dux of the school. I think because my son was too confined, he didn't really fit into a classroom, and so the Dean offering these opportunities to kids like him was awesome.

A key understanding that emerged from this unit of work was the notion of whose voices matter. In education, teachers are considered the authority in the classroom; the ones who hold the knowledge. However, in a culturally responsive and relational classroom, power is shared (Bishop & Glynn, 2003). In the tivaivai unit, the māmā's were the knowledge holders and experts who could share their practices with the students. As a teacher of the class, Ta'i also allowed herself to be guided by the māmā's because in this sense, they were the "teachers", not only of tivaivai, but also of our reo. Their presence within the classroom shifted the western traditional roles of teaching to Cook Islands Māori traditional teaching roles, which reflected the practices of our community as demonstrated on the lagoon with Pāpā and Moko in Tu'anga Rima.

The collaborative nature of sewing tivaivai requires ta'oko'ta'i'anga, meaning working together to achieve a common purpose. This practice is also dialogic, where communication and the sharing of stories are a natural part of the process. Using the reo in a context like this is not only more meaningful but also safer. Students asking māmā's how to say a certain phrase, how to sew a particular section, or how to use a certain stitch received positive responses and were encouraged to try their best. Students speaking the 'bits' of reo they knew and then feeling good about themselves after receiving praise for 'giving it a go' reflects a learning environment that valued encouragement and participation rather than perfection. These practices built confidence in our students, which empowered them to keep trying.

Creating this kind of culturally safe learning space enabled students such as Ramarihi's son to participate in ways that he had not experienced before. Her comment about him being a student who seemed confined or constrained because "he didn't really fit into a classroom" speaks to the limitations of traditional schooling structures and how some students are positioned as unsuccessful when learning contexts fail to reflect their strengths, identities, and ways of being. In this sense, the material-economic arrangements shifted where the classroom became a sewing room, and the school hall was turned into a space for an exhibition and oral presentations, and in doing so, changed the practice of teaching and learning. This enabled a different kind of learning environment, one that did not limit how students learnt or how they could express that learning.

Mutual Respect and Trust

The inclusion of the *māmā*'s in the learning experiences of our students as 'experts' draws attention to the relationships present in the school. Most of the Pasifika-Pacific student population in our community and therefore in our school are Cook Islands Māori. Many of us are related, originating from the same island and same 'ōire. Therefore, it was very common for many of the Cook Islands Māori teachers to be related to the students. The notion of 'relational' was taken quite literally, as the "aunty" and "uncle" relationships that existed outside the school became essential to motivating students within the school. The use of terms such as "Mr", "Miss" or "Sir" constrained Cook Islands Māori students because these practices brought with them a set of values associated with authority. The western practice tradition that Aotearoa Māori and Pasifika-Pacific students were expected to leave their cultures at the school gates (Bishop & Glynn, 2003), seemed to apply to relationships too. There appeared to be an unspoken expectation that familial relationships could only exist outside of school, and between school hours, the relationship of teacher and student was prioritised. However, when Cook Islands Māori students were faced with their own elders as teachers in their classrooms, the familial relationship was prioritised over the teacher-student relationship, because the 'ākono'anga of respect for their elders they had been taught in their homes, Church, and community was more important.

Cook Islands Māori teachers shifted from being addressed as "Miss", "Mrs", and "Mr", to being "aunty", "uncle" or, in the case of our principal, "pāpā". Although they were simple changes, they brought the community's practices and values associated with those 'sayings' into the classroom and the school, including mutual respect, trust, listening to elders, and responsibility. This extension of ways of relating from the community into the school fostered the implementation of culturally grounded practices, our own 'ākono'anga, that students could connect with. It created conditions that enabled new ways of relating for Cook Islands Māori in classrooms but also created the architectures for other practices to emerge, such as more meaningful connections among teachers and students, home and school, and the school and community. Having a principal and teachers who were Cook Islands Māori made the school more accessible to the community. At the same time, this change in 'sayings' enabled teachers to see students' potential more clearly and, in return, students trusted that teachers could guide them toward achieving their goals. Daniel explains the impact of these relationships on his learning:

The good thing about Tokoroa High School is that the teachers aren't just your teachers; they are your aunties and uncles, who become like parents to you and are people who know your parents. If you're not doing well in school, these teachers were able to talk to your parents about it. I know that things work best when the teachers, parents, and students are all on the same page. That's one thing that's good about our Cook Islands community, because there's no shame in having conversations with each other. This was kind of the type of community life I had at Tokoroa High School. It was really hard to get away with anything in high school when my aunties worked there, and so I had no choice but to go to classes to learn and do well.

Viewing teachers through familial relational roles such as "aunty" and "uncle" did more than strengthen trust. It also enabled students to see themselves reflected in those teaching them. In this way, Cook Islands Māori teachers became important role models whose presence affirmed that success within education was possible without having to leave their identity and culture behind. The importance of role models was highlighted by Sinead Overbye (2022):

Role models inspire us and allow us to imagine what is possible, by showing us what we could be like in the future.

(p 34)

Role Models

While teacher-student relationships were important, there were other relationships in the school and in the 'ōire that were just as meaningful for our students. These were the relationships of older siblings and cousins. For Pasifika-Pacific students, role models are vital in expanding what students believe is possible for their futures. They demonstrate that academic success can be achieved while staying true to who they are, helping to close the gap between aspiration and reality (Chu & Reynolds, 2024). When Daniel was presented with the Dux award at the end of his final year in high school, it ignited hope and pride, inspiring not only his peers but an entire generation to believe they too could excel academically. Daniel adds:

Role models are very important because a lot of the time our kids have the mentality that they can't do things and only the papa 'ā can. We quite commonly stereotype ourselves into thinking we can't do as well as others. I think when our kids see someone like me who has achieved a lot, they believe for themselves that they can do the same. When our students see other Cook Islanders who do well and who were brought up in the same way they were, there is more hope for them. Our students believe in themselves when they can see others who are exactly like them excelling or doing well in whatever area it is. It's important for

our parents to keep pushing our kids and to keep inspiring them. I didn't know that when I finished high school with all my awards and academic achievements, I was starting something for the next generation of Cook Islands students. I became a role model to them and someone my younger cousins and siblings could look up to.

Daniel's experience had an impact on Cook Islands Māori students because he came from a prominent family who were present the night of the prizegiving. With many younger students in the audience watching on, he could not have known that this visibility of his accomplishments would inspire so many of them to do the same. One of those students Marama, followed Daniel's example and shares of her own experience as a role model for her younger siblings:

I paved the way for my siblings, not in the way where they had to follow exactly what I did but where they could look at me as a role model to know for themselves that if I can do it, if I can achieve it, then so can they. It was like I'm the first one to lead, and so my siblings are able to follow if they would like to. I never pushed that pressure on my siblings because I am very different from them. We're all very clever and intelligent in our own ways.

Both Daniel and Marama's reflections highlight the important role older siblings played as role models. Through their experiences, older siblings created pathways that helped younger siblings navigate schooling with greater confidence and belief in their own abilities. Rosey, shares her thoughts as a younger sibling:

My older sister started a legacy for my brothers and me, which started with primary school. This legacy created a strong foundation for us, which followed right throughout our 13 years of schooling. My sister had created this path for my brothers and me to follow; a pathway she created for us to succeed in all that we did.

Through Daniel's experience, we recognised the impact his achievements had on the aspirations of the younger generations. To build on his success, we emphasised the notion that "if Daniel can do it, so can you" and used it in the context of the 'ōire. As teachers, we intentionally created conditions for positive role modelling by strengthening connections between younger students and older siblings who had navigated schooling with success. At the same time, older siblings were encouraged to recognise the influence and responsibility they carried as visible examples for those coming behind them. In Puna, we encouraged students to see themselves as brothers and sisters, responsible for supporting, encouraging and guiding one another through their educational journeys. This collective approach led to stronger relationships and accountability

to one another but also reflected a shared commitment to supporting the success and well-being of the group.

Dialogic Practices

A key practice that enabled teachers to guide students to achieve their goals was through dialogue. Engaging with students in dialogue was a significant shift in our practice. Enabling their voices was extremely important. We no longer wanted them to be told what to do, but to have agency in their learning and be empowered to enter into conversations with their teachers themselves. Initially, this began with planning. Through planning, we empowered our students with knowledge, especially regarding NCEA expectations. They needed to understand NCEA, how many credits were required, where those credits came from, how many credits were required for an endorsement, and how to start conversations with teachers by asking how they could gain merit and excellence credits rather than achieved. We looked at their subjects' strengths and where those merit and excellence credits could come from, and then we set goals. Regular check-ins throughout the year to confirm they were on track to achieve their goals ensured that they knew their learning and achievement were always prioritised. Ariki adds:

My teachers encouraged me to think better for myself, to want better, to want more, and to never limit myself. I was always encouraged to seek further and to look beyond just achieving in my subjects...At the end of Year 10, my tutor teacher sat with me, Are, and Reg to discuss a three-year plan. He talked to us about NCEA and explained it so we understood what was expected. He told us he wanted us to do well in our five subjects: history, science, math, English, and Cook Islands Māori. We had these conversations with him right until we finished high school.

Over time, these conversations were initiated by students themselves, especially in their senior years. Dialogue grew beyond planning and tracking achievement, into conversations about learning, about wonderings, or about the struggles they were having in different subjects. As they built their confidence, they were able to engage in meaningful conversations with teachers they felt comfortable talking with and believed would help them address their needs. In this way, students not only exercised agency but were also self-determining in their learning. The importance of dialogue in teacher-student relationships was discussed by philosopher Paulo Freire (1970). For Freire, dialogue was more than just talking. It was a process of co-constructing knowledge through relationships, reflection, listening, and action. In this way, teachers guide students, but also recognise that they are knowledgeable participants, not just empty vessels. Educators Bishop and Berryman (2006) support this understanding and add that

dialogue is a practice that shows students that teachers care, thereby enabling more positive relationships.

This practice is not new to us as Cook Islands Māori, considering oral traditions are embedded in our very society. However, the voices of our people were silenced in education by colonial practices and agency taken away. Therefore, at Tokoroa High School, not only was dialogue encouraged with teachers and students, but also with parents, with the māmā's and pāpā's who came into help where they could, but also with other students, especially in Puna. This practice was also enacted in Homework class and demonstrated in the tivaivai unit, a reflection of the intergenerational practice traditions within our school.

Enabling students' voices through conversations on so many levels created a learning environment of collective ongoing communication. As students became more comfortable sharing their thoughts, opinions, and experiences, their confidence grew, along with their ability to participate more actively in their learning and contributing to discussions within the classroom. These practices reflected Freire's understanding that "without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (Freire, 1970, p 93). This highlights the importance of dialogue in creating meaningful learning environments.

Engaging with Parents

Engaging with the parents of our students in meaningful conversations was also a priority for us. Just as we made every effort to give students the information, they needed to navigate their learning, we did the same with their parents. Initially, getting parents into the school for report evenings was difficult, which was not surprising considering their own experiences in educations as reflected in previous tu'anga, so we attached incentives for students. Every student that brought a parent or grandparent to report evenings would receive a free lunch. We held information evenings for parents and attached the same incentives.

We took advantage of community and family events to "catch up" with parents about their students' learning and invited them into the school if they wanted to sit down and learn more. We believed that for students to improve in their learning and achievement, their parents had to be part of the journey right from the start of the academic year. After a time, parents became more proactive in engaging us in conversations about their students and we were never too busy. Our principal had an 'open door policy' which allowed parents and grandparents to come into the school at any time to meet with teachers.

We also called on parents to assist us when their students were being disruptive and disengaged. In some circumstances where teachers were needing more support, parents or grandparents were invited to attend classes with their students. This proved to be a successful strategy and the greatest deterrent to disruptive behaviour. Eventually, students began managing their own behaviour because they understood that their learning and actions were not only the concern of the school, but also of their families and the wider community.

Using a range of strategies to engage with parents helped them to understand that the school was a space that they could be in. It was a space that they could access, participate in, and also contribute to, rather than a place separated from their lives at home and in the wider community. Engaging with our parents in this way reflected an aspiration of the Ministry of Education and consistently highlighted in each of the Pasifika Education Plans (MoE, 2001; 2006; 2009; 2013; 2020). They positioned this as pivotal to success outcomes in education for Pasifika-Pacific students.

Voices of the 'Ōire

The notion of "whose voices mattered" within teaching and learning became an important consideration in the changes of our own pedagogical practices. To accomplish our goals of improving student achievement of Cook Islands Māori, we recognised that this needed to be a collective effort. Rather than positioning ourselves, the teachers, as the only holders of knowledge, we created conditions and spaces where there were opportunities for the voices of students, their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, as well as the wider 'ōire to be heard, valued, and included in teaching and learning. In this way, dialogue became more than just talking. It was instead thought of as a practice of care and empowerment that nurtured the balance and harmony of the vā while strengthening the relationships that connected students, teachers, families and the 'ōire.

More importantly, where once our collective voices were silent and invisible within the curriculum, our changes in our teaching and leading practices meant that Cook Islands Māori voices were now being heard, seen, and valued within our own teaching and learning spaces. With our reo as a priority in these changes, our pedagogical practices moved beyond culturally responsive and relational approaches towards culturally relational and sustaining practices that supported the ongoing visibility and continuity of our reo and 'ākono'anga.

MEASUREMENT AND SUCCESS

The introduction of NCEA created greater flexibility in how achievement could be measured within schools (Hipkins, 2010). Rather than relying solely on traditional forms of written assessment and end of year examinations, students were able to demonstrate their learning in different ways. This was seen in the tivaivai exhibition shared in the previous section. The exhibition provided a different way of assessing what students had learnt. The actual tivaivai as evidence of a cultural aspect, accompanied by sharing the story of the tivaivai through an oral presentation. The tuoro and the sharing of papa'anga showcased the use of Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani in context. This one unit created conditions for assessment across three curriculum areas - English, Cook Islands Māori and Pacific Studies. These interconnected practices were lived in the community, but woven into the school curriculum, and the learning and assessment practices were examples of an education where "Pacific success is a priority and realised in ways that are 'touchable' and 'viewable' by Pacific and non-Pacific" (Tongati'o, 2010, p 64).

As a team of dedicated teachers, we were driven to help raise the achievement of our Cook Islands Māori students. Success was therefore tied to gaining their NCEA "credits". With end of term targets set by our Pasifika Dean, each student worked towards achieving these targets. The first target at the end of Term One was 20-40 credits; Term Two was the literacy and numeracy credits, plus 40-60 credits; Term Three was 60-80 credits; and Term Four was a focus on exams especially for subject endorsements, but also for those who had yet to achieve their 80 credits. Students who were working at merit or excellence level were also encouraged to gain their set targets at merit or excellence⁵⁹.

This is not to suggest that our students could not do written assessments or pass their end of year examinations. Homework classes were pivotal to teaching students essay structure, learning subject specific vocabulary, and providing teaching around examination preparation through unpacking past examination papers. However, the tension of having to sit individual examinations to show individual performance conflicted with the collective learning practices students experienced in their classes. In examinations success is measured through what an individual can produce alone within a restricted time and space, a practice evident of western traditions that prioritise individuality. For Cook Islands Māori, the notion of individuality was a concept that some struggled with and constrained their passing of examinations.

⁵⁹ With NCEA, grades are distributed as achieved, merit, and excellence.

Over time, what became evident for us, was that each credit accumulated by our students had to mean something. Initially, our focus on summative assessments drew our attention away from the learning. As our students progressed through the years and our knowledge of our curriculum areas grew, so too did our knowledge of formative assessment. Data became essential to gaining information on individual students and providing feedback in our conversations to grow their understandings, as well as their learnings. This data was collected in a variety of ways including classroom observations, teacher conferences, drafts, pop quizzes and peer reviews. Even with our assessment practices, there was a deliberate shift toward creating meaningful experiences that could show us what our students learnt. Rather than assessment simply measuring achievement, it became a way of recognising student's strengths, their progress and needs, while also empowering them to take ownership of their learning, an aspiration encouraged by the Ministry of Education (2023). Marama shares how recognising her strengths enabled her to better prepare for the future. She shares:

In my last year of high school, I did seven subjects: geography, history, English, biology, statistics, dance, and Cook Islands Māori. Because of this, I was able to get the most excellent credits of the entire year, and that was because Auntie Ta'i knew my strengths and what would look really good on my scholarship applications, CV, and academic record, so she really pushed me. If she hadn't given me that opportunity, I don't know if I would've been as successful as I had been.

In this way, educational success was tied to academic achievement, with a focus to prepare students to attend university. Although, our own assessment practices had shifted, for the most part in the rest of the school, they were still very much the same. As a collective we worked together to support students to meet the requirements of NCEA and they experienced success along the way. An example of this achievement is reflected in their NCEA Level Two results from 2018-2020. In the 2019 Pacific Evidence Brief 'Best Practice for teaching Pacific Learners' (MOE, 2019), the Ministry of Education expressed concerns around Pasifika-Pacific students' achievement, despite incredible improvement over the previous decade.

Statistics showed a small percentage of Pasifika-Pacific students leaving Aotearoa New Zealand schools with minimum qualifications that showed they were ready for the outside world. "In 2018, 28 percent of Pacific 18-year-olds had not yet achieved NCEA Level 2, the minimum level considered suitable for readiness for life outside school" (Ministry of Education, 2019, p 2). At Tokoroa High School, in 2018, 97 % of Pacific learners in Year 13 left school with NCEA Level Two or more (THS, 2019). In 2019, this moved to 100 %; in 2020 this decreased to 90 % (attributed to the effects of the pandemic on Pasifika-Pacific families,

as many of our senior students left school to go into employment and help their families); but jumped back up again to 100 % in 2021 (THS, 2022). These results were evidence of our changing practices that enabled educational success for our students.

TŌPIRI'ANGA

This tu'anga has shown the changing arrangements that impacted the overall learning and achievement of our Cook Islands Māori students. The shifts that were made in wider education policy enabled us to make changes to our school curriculum and teaching practices which created opportunities to engage our students in ways that reflected their strengths. At the same time, enacting culturally relational and sustaining practices enabled us to make visible Cook Islands Māori ways of being and knowing in the school, while simultaneously creating conditions where the voices of our 'ōire were heard and valued. As a result, academic achievement of our students grew, rising from the tail end of achievement in our school to the top.

Tu'anga Iva: 'Ākono'anga Māori

Chapter Nine: Cook Islands Māori Practices

'AKATOMO'ANGA

*She stitches herself into the final seams her stories
her aro'a
her memories
her hopes
for future generations.*

She is ta'unga.

Just as the ta'unga completes the final stitches of the tivaivai, binding together the stories, aro'a, and relationships, this discussion tu'anga brings together the key findings of this metaphoric tivaivai through a practice-oriented lens. It creates a deeper understanding of how the practices and practice architectures both constrained and enabled Cook Islands Māori educational experiences and feelings of success, across time and place. At the same time, it draws attention to the practice traditions that sustained the 'ōire while also supporting future generations to ensure they remained connected to who they are as Cook Islands Māori.

The previous tu'anga traced Cook Islands Māori experiences of education across different historical periods and sites of learning. Through these stories and experiences, the recurring themes of education policy, curriculum, pedagogy, measurement and success, revealed how Cook Islands Māori navigated tensions between western schooling and 'Ākono'anga Māori. Central to these experiences was the vā, where the relationships of Cook Islands Māori students shaped how learning was understood and experienced across homes, Churches, schools, and the wider 'ōire.

This discussion tu'anga begins by revisiting these themes and pulling these threads together across time and space as a way of acknowledging how the different sites shaped education for Cook Islands Māori. Following this, the tu'anga will discuss the changing arrangements and therefore changing practices that shaped a different education experience for our students, and the implications these shifts had for educational success. In weaving these findings together, this tu'anga critically considers what these experiences reveal about meaningful education for Cook Islands Māori students. It also considers what 'Ākono'anga Māori could look like within contemporary education spaces through teaching and leading practices, that strengthen identity, belonging, and wellbeing for Cook Islands Māori students.

EDUCATION ACROSS TIME AND PLACE

To begin this tu'anga it is essential to look back at the themes that have been discussed throughout this thesis and how they shaped the educational experiences of our students. Revisiting these themes, education policy, curriculum, pedagogy, measurement and success, allows me to critically reflect on how they constrained or enabled education success, while also revealing how our students and their families responded to the changing conditions within education across different sites of learning.

Education Policy

Discussing education policy in the context of this thesis is essential as it helps us to understand how the educational inequalities were produced across time and place for Cook Islands Māori, especially as it reveals the agendas of those who held political power. Initially, in the Cook Islands, this power rested with Māori themselves, in their kōpu tangata within their matakeinanga and 'ōire, and with their ariki and mataiapo (Makirere, 2003; Vai'imene, 2003). However, with the arrival of missionaries and the introduction of formal schooling, power gradually shifted to the missionaries (Gilson, 1980; Williams, 1998). When the Cook Islands became a British Protectorate, colonial administrators from New Zealand gained control over education (UNESCO, 1972), and following migration to New Zealand, power rested with the New Zealand government (Beeby, 1992).

This shifting of power highlights the misguided belief of missionaries and later colonial administrators who made assumptions that Cook Islands Māori could not govern themselves or succeed in the "modern" world without their direction (UNESCO, 1972). These beliefs ignored the fact that Māori in the Cook Islands already had their own governance systems that had been in place for centuries, before either of them arrived. Instead of recognising these systems as valid and therefore considering working alongside Cook Islands Māori, they positioned their own ways of being and knowing as superior, then treated Cook Islands Māori practices as inadequate instead of just simply different. These actions are reminiscent of wider colonising practices seen in countries such as Aotearoa New Zealand, Canada, Hawaii, Niue, and Tokelau where western governance structures were also imposed upon Indigenous peoples and their existing systems (Hemi, 2016; Joseph, 2005; Swain & Ulu, 2010; Tauevihi, 1977; Walker, 1990).

Under missionary leadership, Christian values, religious doctrine and literacy in the way of reading and writing were prioritised. However, Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani was essential to teaching and learning (Beaglehole, 1957). This prioritising of the reo was not so much about

its preservation but about their positioning of the English language as a language of sin (Gilson, 1980). Furthermore, under the colonial administration of New Zealand western values and knowledge dominated education, alongside a focus on manual labour (Edwards, 2016; UNESCO, 1972). This positioning of manual labour in the curriculum once again speaks to deficit assumptions that Cook Islands Māori did not have the intelligence to be anything more than labourers. However, the most significant shift was the elevation of the English language above Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani (Moss, 1896). This privileging of English within education was more than a tool to accessing the modern world and opportunity, as viewed by Cook Islands Māori. Instead, it was a deliberate exercise of power that disrupted existing systems of learning that were grounded in 'Ākono'anga Māori. When Cook Islands Māori migrated to New Zealand, these same priorities were reproduced and normalised within schooling systems, further silencing anything Cook Islands Māori.

It was through education, however, that many of these colonial assumptions became normalised. The historical approach to education policy of the New Zealand government was that it should work equally well for all ethnic groups, reflecting an enduring one-size-fits-all practice tradition (Tongatio, 2010). The idea that all children should be treated the same ignored the obvious reality that children were definitely not the same. Western ideas determined which worldviews, languages, and experiences were valued, while Indigenous ways of knowing and being were silenced, and western dominance was sustained across all aspects of society (Smith, 1999). Equality therefore did not mean equity, as Cook Islands Māori students were expected to succeed within a system that clearly was not designed for their specific needs-

When we consider that formal schooling was introduced to the Cook Islands by missionaries in 1821 (Williams, 1998), that New Zealand assumed responsibility for the education of Cook Islands Māori children under colonial administration in 1889 (Goodwin, 2003), and that successive generations of Cook Islands Māori have since migrated to and been educated in Aotearoa New Zealand, it becomes clear that the aspirations of our people have been largely absent from the education policies that shaped them. Across each of these periods, Cook Islands Māori were educated in systems designed by others. The first policy to address the aspirations of Cook Islands Māori students did not appear until the Pasifika Education Plan in 2001 (MoE, 2001), 180 years after formal schooling began for them back in the Cook Islands, and even then, they were absorbed within the broader Pasifika category. It was not until the refreshed Action Plan for Pacific Education (MoE, 2023), a further 22 years later, that Cook Islands Māori were named as a distinct group. For much of their history of formal schooling, Cook Islands Māori participated in education systems that quite simply, did not want them to be Cook Islands

Māori. Schooling therefore became a site of assimilation, where our people were expected to adopt western practice traditions to participate within the wider Aotearoa New Zealand society.

At the same time, within the 'ōire, education policy constrained the kinds of learning opportunities that were made available to our children. The one-size-fits-all approach to education failed to recognise our unique ways of being, knowing, and learning. However, as a 'ōire, our people were not willing to give up the very practices that connected them to who they were. In response to this tension, the home, Church and community spaces became important sites where the identities, reo and 'ākono'anga of Cook Islands Māori could be nurtured and sustained. Māmā's and mothers who were not in employment, came together to create initiatives to support learning, such as the creation of the play school, patu tuatua, and literacy practices at home. The solutions for sustaining our way of life came from within our own 'ōire. This resilience showed that education for our people was never left solely to schools but remained a collective responsibility of families and the 'ōire.

A Changing Curriculum

Prior to the arrival of missionaries and formal schooling, the "curriculum" within traditional Cook Islands Māori society was grounded in 'Ākono'anga Māori. The purpose of learning was not simply the acquisition of knowledge but preparing children to live well and contribute meaningfully within their communities (Vai'imene, 2003). However, with the arrival of missionaries and later colonial administrators from Aotearoa New Zealand, this focus changed and education policy shaped the curriculum in terms of what students learned within formal schooling spaces.

Historically, the curriculum privileged western knowledge systems while marginalising 'Ākono'anga Māori and Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani. The prioritisation of English and Eurocentric knowledge both in the Cook Islands and in New Zealand, reinforced colonial ideas about what counted as legitimate learning. The addition of manual labour to the curriculum perpetuated colonial beliefs that Cook Islands Māori were suited primarily for physical labour rather than pathways that involved leadership or entrepreneurial roles (UNESCO, 1972). In this way, the curriculum restricted opportunities that were available to Cook Islands Māori right from the time colonial administrators became involved in formal schooling for our students.

However, more recently, the curriculum was transformed when Tokoroa High School became an extension of the 'ōire, and teachers intentionally created opportunities for Cook Islands Māori to see themselves reflected in education. The inclusion of Pacific Studies, the elevation of the Cook Islands Māori language class, dance, as well as opportunities to research Cook

Islands Māori histories and contemporary issues, strengthened identity, belonging, and pride amongst our students. 'Ākono'anga such as tuoro, *pure* ngutuare, and 'akapapa'anga also became visible practices within school life, showing that the curriculum extended beyond the classroom, into the wider values, relationships and practices of the 'ōire. This shift reflected wider aspirations of Pasifika-Pacific communities for education systems where Indigenous identities, languages, histories, and ways of knowing were made visible and valued within schools (Tongatio, 2010).

The flexibility offered in NCEA and the Aotearoa New Zealand Curriculum (MoE, 2007), allowed teachers and leaders to design programmes that reflected the identities and lived realities of our students. For them, a curriculum that connected to who they were not only strengthened their identity but enabled them to participate in education without feeling that they needed to give up parts of themselves to succeed. The curriculum needed to be one that validated their ways of knowing and being, while also strengthening the *vā* between school, home, Church and the 'ōire. In contrast, when curriculum privileged western knowledge and experiences, our students felt invisible and disconnected, uncertain about where they belonged within the school. These changing conditions enabled us to challenge dominant western assumptions that western knowledge and practices should remain at the centre of schooling and enabled education success for our students, in ways that they had never achieved before. It also helped us to reconsider the definition of education success for ourselves.

Reclaiming Māori Pedagogies

The curriculum shaped how teaching and learning were experienced across sites of learning for Cook Islands Māori. Once again, before the arrival of the missionaries, teaching practices were grounded in 'Ākono'anga Māori and embedded within everyday life (Vai'imene, 2003). Teaching was not confined to formal classrooms but experienced through the relationships and practices of the wider community. When the missionaries arrived and then colonial administrators, teaching practices within formal schooling were structured around western traditions of discipline, literacy, Christianity, and preparation for manual labour (Beaglehole, 1957; Gilson, 1980; Williams, 1998). When Cook Islands Māori migrated to New Zealand, with the exception of Christianity, these practices were largely unchanged.

Across time and place, pedagogical practices revealed whose voices were valued within sites of learning. Prior to the missionaries, children were guided through their learning by the elders in their families and 'ōire (Makirere, 2003; Vai'imene, 2003). 'Ākono'anga Māori and Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani shaped what children learned and how it was learned. However, with the arrival

of the missionaries and later colonial schooling practices, authority over teaching shifted towards the missionaries and then colonial teachers from New Zealand. Eventually, Cook Islands Māori teachers were assigned to teach in schools, but with very little training (Gilson, 1980; UNESCO, 1972). However, western knowledge, language, and values became more dominant within formal education, while Cook Islands Māori voices and ways of learning were increasingly silenced. Upon migration, their voices and ways of being and knowing were completely silenced, as pedagogical practices such as the teacher as expert, and the focus on individual success, within the schools of New Zealand, shaped by state educators, continued to privilege western forms of knowledge, language, behaviour, and success (Openshaw et al., 1993).

Despite these changes, our grandparents and parents in our 'ōire, for the most part, sustained our ways of teaching and learning across our homes, Church, and wider community spaces. These spaces became important sites where our identity, 'ākono'anga, and reo continued to be nurtured alongside western schooling expectations. It was not until pedagogical practices at Tokoroa High School also began to shift, in ways that created conditions for greater visibility of 'Ākono'anga Māori and Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani, that Cook Islands Māori students were able to experience an education that prioritised their needs as Cook Islands Māori. The enactment of culturally relational and sustaining practices such as dialogue, storytelling in different forms, engaging elders from the 'ōire as experts of cultural knowledge in learning and using Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani more in our teaching practices, all represent shifts that enabled education success for our students.

Measurement that Matters

The pedagogical practices and the cultural-discursive arrangements of education policy across time and place influenced how achievement was measured and how success came to be understood. Prior to missionary influence, success was also grounded in 'Ākono'anga Māori and understood through one's ability to contribute meaningfully to the collective (Vai'imene, 2003). However, with the arrival of the missionary's, success was measured by the values and teachings of Christianity, as well as the mastering of literacy practices in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani (Beaglehole, 1957; Gilson, 1980). Under colonial administrators, measurement and success moved away from Christian and religious teachings, and success was largely tied to English language proficiency and literacy, at the expense of Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani (Edwards, 2016; UNESCO, 1972).

The practices of the missionaries and colonial administrators also represented the introduction of individualised assessment, a significant shift away from the responsibility of contributing to the collective. More focus was given to what the individual child was capable of achieving as a direct result of their intelligence and academic ability (UNESCO, 1972). This reflected a western understanding of achievement that positioned education as a personal accomplishment, rather than something connected to the wellbeing of the collective.

Following migration to New Zealand, educational success continued to be closely tied to English language and literacy, where standardised testing and examinations became dominant ways of measuring success as academic achievement (Jones, 1990; Openshaw et al., 1993). As children progressed into secondary schooling, students were increasingly expected to demonstrate their knowledge individually through formal assessment practices, particularly as secondary school qualifications became linked to employment opportunities and future pathways. These assessment practices reflected narrow ideas about what counted as achievement and success in schools. More importantly, within these systems Cook Islands Māori were given no opportunities to define success for themselves, nor were there assessment practices that recognised and reflected the strengths of our children.

Over time, shifts within the education landscape created space for schools to respond differently to how students could demonstrate their learning. The introduction of NCEA and an updated curriculum created greater flexibility in how achievement could be measured (MoE, 2007). Internal assessments created conditions for students to showcase their learning through other forms of measurement other than standardised examinations, which were more meaningful in terms of reflecting their ways of being and knowing. However, success was still tied to academic achievement. At Tokoroa High School, we were able to create assessment opportunities that connected more closely to the lived experiences, identities and strengths of our students, allowing many of them to demonstrate their learning in ways that were more meaningful and accessible to them. By creating more meaningful ways for our students to demonstrate their learning, led to more students being able to experience success in ways that related to who they were and what they could actually do.

REFRAMING EDUCATION SUCCESS

I held back the tears when I heard my name. The hard work had finally paid off. I walked slowly across the stage as Pāpā stood waiting at the end with the trophy in his hands, emotional that he had been asked, as a Board member, to present the award. I could see the tears falling from his eyes. The teachers who had guided me stood proudly, while my parents remained quietly to the side of the hall, trying to hold back their emotions. My

brothers were there honouring me with a pe'e and haka, while my sisters were already making their way to the stage to embrace me. I had followed in their footsteps, crossing the same stage each of them had walked, also recipients of numerous scholarships and awards. Then my big brother yelled "Yeah my Baby!", which is so typical of him. It was his way of reminding me to enjoy the moment. I smiled then finally embraced Pāpā. "You did it", he whispered. I was the last of us to finish at Tokoroa High School. Together, my siblings and I had left behind a legacy of Cook Islands Māori excellence in leadership and academic success. The sacrifices of our pa metua paved the way for moments such as this.

Considering what has emerged across the findings tu'anga has led me to a new perspective of how I understand education success. Over the decades, the practice architectures within the school shaped the education experiences of Cook Islands Māori students. But it was during the years 2011-2022, that the academic results of these students were reported to be at the higher end of student achievement and not the tail, as they had been in previous years. The question, "what is education success?" remained with me throughout this research. Even as I asked participants in this study, and listened to their responses, I searched deeply for my own answer.

In Tu'anga Rua (Chapter Two), I framed education as bringing people into meaningful ways of learning, so they can live purposeful lives and contribute to the world around them. However, it was not always possible for Cook Islands Māori to be engaged in ways of learning that were meaningful to us and our families. Even the definition of living purposeful lives and contributing to the world around us, depended on the conditions that shaped our education experiences. Before the arrival of missionaries to the Cook Islands, education was simpler and aligned with my definition. But as the social-political arrangements changed both in the Cook Islands and Aotearoa New Zealand, the introduction of formal education through schools and education policy, complicated what education meant for us.

Reflecting on this, my thoughts turn to my grandparents and how quickly they had to learn the western practices of a society shaped by British culture and wondered if they would consider those learnings as meaningful. For me, their ability to adapt is an example of coming to practice differently, and in my opinion, a form of education success. Yet, they never considered themselves educated because of their limited schooling. They finished school at the end of their primary years as secondary education was not available to them in Aitutaki. The tension for me lies in the words 'school' and 'education', and the notion that education success in our society is synonymous with academic success achieved at school. As a child growing up in the 1980's, my grandmother would always say, "go to school and get a good education", as if school was the only place I could get educated. But this idea was also prevalent amongst some of the

participants in this study. I grew to understand that much like my grandmother, the grandparents and parents in this study did not want their children to be forced to work as labourers. Their belief was that a formal education at school would prevent this from happening.

Educator Alison Jones (1991) addresses this idea in the following statement:

Like other migrants brought in to work the 'bottom' of the labour hierarchy in western capitalist cities elsewhere, Pacific Islands migrants had no intention that their children were to remain in this position. And the prevailing 'truth' of the school's provision of economic opportunity meant that they saw the Aotearoa New Zealand school as offering their children the chance of better things.

(p 55)

As Ma, a parent in this study, shared the aspirations she and her husband held for their children, she noted:

I've always told my kids since they were young that their only job was to learn and my husband and I would take care of all things monetary. Their job was to make sure they do well in their schooling... We always pushed our kids to have a better education. We would also tell our kids we didn't want them to end up like my husband and I. They have seen the stress we've endured and the long hours their dad has had to work for us to get by. So, we've made sure our kids know that their academic success is what's going to make their lives easier and what's going to help them be successful in their careers.

Ma expressed what many others in the study shared, and their fears for their children are very real. Usually, our children in Tokoroa, who leave school without any formal qualification, find themselves unemployed or working jobs in retail, fast food restaurants, or jobs connected to the forestry industry. Some remain there for years, with very few opportunities for progression. This not only limits their futures but contributes to a wider pattern where our young people are forced into lower paid work. Listening to the concerns of the participants and across the previous four tu'anga, a key understanding emerged for me. In this thesis, I too aligned education success with academic success, even though I somewhat disagreed with this idea. Even my practice as a secondary school teacher reflects this notion. But the thinking of the participants who attended Tokoroa High School during the 2000's, was different, which led me to reflect on their understandings. It became clear that they viewed education success differently, as depicted in the following responses. Ariki noted:

For me, they're two different things. Academic success is something that is based on credits, qualifications and degrees, something that is more of a western concept. Education success is not only success in educational institutions but also your own personal development. Education success is about knowledge and about your own learning in all different areas, then bringing that knowledge back into our 'ōire.

Nga's response was similar. He shared:

No. I think education success is when you start off with no knowledge of something and then learn to be able to have knowledge of that something. It doesn't have to be a qualification or a degree, but it can be an extra skill or something you can learn. Education success isn't defined by what you learn in school.

While many of the responses of the participants were similar to Ariki and Nga, it was Ana's response that positioned education success as transformative for Cook Islands Māori.

Education success for my family is about proving to ourselves as Cook Islands people that we can be lawyers, doctors, principals...it is about going into the world and making use of every opportunity especially today.

For these young people, their understanding of education success differed from their parents, grandparents, and even me. Instead of education success focusing on qualifications or academic achievement, they described it as developing knowledge and skills, and personal growth across different sites. For Ariki and Nga, education success was not about formal recognition, but about learning and being able to use that learning in meaningful ways, which involved sharing that knowledge back in the 'ōire. Ana's response on the other hand highlighted an important tension. While she valued learning beyond school, she also saw academic success as important for accessing opportunities in the wider society as Cook Islands Māori. This positions academic success as a way to navigate systems shaped by western ideas of achievement. Ana's emphasis on professional roles such as doctors and lawyers also raises the issue of how academic success functions as a gateway into these professional spaces. In this way, it is positioned as a strategic step towards broader goals, but it is not the final measure of success itself. Of particular importance is the notion that education success includes the ability to move into high profile professions while still standing strong as Cook Islands Māori with the sense of responsibility to family and the 'ōire.

Through time, Cook Islands Māori have aspired for a better life, which in Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani translates to ora'anga meitaki. At one time, employment, in the form of low skilled

labour jobs was a way of achieving that. When jobs were no longer available in Tokoroa, formal education became the vehicle to enabling that. Our grandparents and parents did not intend for us to lose ourselves, our way of life, our identity, and our language as a compromise to gaining a formal education. But ora'anga meitaki remains the ultimate goal, not educational success as defined by western society, but education success as in the ability to access every opportunity, and every pathway made available to us as Cook Islands Māori; not just for ourselves, but for our families and our 'ōire. Educator Teokotai Tarai and the Pasifika-Pacific Dean at our school adds:

I believe in showing our children the essence of who they are and who they can be, and that there is no limit to what they can achieve. It's about being able to give our children confidence and developing that confidence, as well as their identity, by knowing who they are. There's a quote that talks about two lasting things we can give our children. One is roots, and the other is wings. I always believe that. We must always know who we are, and I believe if we know who we are, there is no limit to where we can go. We must give our children wings. We must allow them to aspire, to seek their pathways, to dream their dreams, and our job is to be there to support them. When they get wings, we should let them soar and let them fly.

(T. Tarai, personal communication, May 7, 2022)

Education success was never just about qualifications, credits, or careers for our 'ōire. It was about the ability to pursue the better life our grandparents and parents dreamed of by taking advantage of every opportunity, while remaining grounded in who we are as Cook Islands Māori, and still be able to contribute meaningfully to our 'ōire. It was and still is about ensuring that future generations can move confidently through the world without sacrificing their reo, their 'ākono'anga, and their identity.

COMING TO PRACTICE DIFFERENTLY

Given this understanding of education success and the changing arrangements as described in the first section of this tu'anga, as educators we need to consider how we must come to practice differently if we want to sustain meaningful educational experiences for Cook Islands Māori students. To achieve this, we must understand that education is broader than what happens in schools for our students (Kemmis et al., 2025). Throughout the tu'anga in this thesis, it is evident that policy administrators and educators have made assumptions about learning that is "best" for our Cook Islands Māori students and positioned their own aspirations outside of their everyday lives. However, we have learnt that learning in the site of our school becomes more meaningful when it is connected to the lives of our students at home, Church, and the 'ōire.

As such, there were three key shifts that enabled our students to engage in education in ways that were more meaningful to them. These are firstly, learning was not confined to the classroom; secondly, culture really did count; and finally, meaningful learning took place when the 'ōire was part of the experience. Making these vital connections, enabled us to practice teaching and learning differently in our school, but also bring life to education policy.

Connecting Spaces for Learning

The initial shift that changed the trajectory of student achievement for our students was Homework class, in the library. The material-economic arrangements of the library created conditions that changed the way both teachers and students practised teaching and learning, in terms of what was said, what was done, and how we related. A larger space allowed multiple teachers to be present at the same time, supporting each other and the students without the restrictions imposed by labels associated with physical classrooms and departments. It also enabled agency for students, allowing them to choose how they engaged with the learning. If they needed a space to just work independently, with some headphones on and listen to music while they worked, they could do so without the reprimands that may usually be attached with that kind of practice in the classroom. If they needed the support from multiple teachers across different subjects or to work in small groups, they could engage in those practices as well, because the space and resources allowed for it. At Homework class, learning was directed by the students themselves and teachers engaged as needed.

As a result of this practice, other school spaces designated for a specific purpose, also became learning spaces where anything was possible. For example, the hall typically used for school assemblies and prize giving, became an art gallery for tivaivai exhibitions and a conference space for Year 13 business class presentations. The field typically a space for sports and physical education became a site for at risk students to engage in mathematics differently. The wharekai (dining room) and outside area where our visitors to our school share a meal after a powhiri were turned into a space for the junior Cook Islands Māori Social Studies class to hold their 'Boom and Bust' stalls, where they enacted small business practices. The school marae, a site to enact Aotearoa Māori practice traditions, became a learning centre in which our children could hold vānanga. Even the staffroom became a space for engaging with parents and their children through conversations and presentations. In essence, the school site became our

'lagoon', where the learning experiences of our students looked different but were more meaningful.⁶⁰

This way of learning may have looked different in the school, but it looked similar to how learning took place in the 'ōire. Our students were familiar with spaces being transformed and used for multiple purposes of learning. For example, the living room in their grandparents' homes, typically used for families to gather in but at times transformed into a space for the māmā's to sew their tivaivai, or a place for singing practice, dance practice, or making costumes for children who were participating in a cultural event. The Church hall was typically a space used for large gatherings and events but could also be transformed into a space for singing practice, dance practice, Sunday School retreats, or genealogy sessions. Therefore, our changing arrangements were simply about making better connections between our practices in the school and the practices of the 'ōire.

These teaching and learning practices challenge assumptions about how learning should unfold within schools. In these experiences, when the practices changed, learning was not confined to textbooks and classrooms, with the teacher standing at the front enacting instructional practices. Instead, learning was fluid, active, and engaging where teachers and students moved in and out of spaces based on their purposes for learning. In doing this, students came to see that every space within the school was accessible to them as learners, but also that learning could happen across many different sites rather than just in the classroom. More importantly, students came to see themselves as having agency because they were given greater choice, flexibility, and responsibility within how they engaged with their own learning practices. These changing arrangements allowed students to practice learning in ways that reflected their own strengths and needs, but also their identities. As a result, learning became something they actively shaped and participated in, rather than something simply done to them by us their teachers. Although raising academic achievement was the end goal for all of us, something better happened along the way - more meaningful learning.

Culture Does Count

To engage students in more meaningful experiences of learning, another important shift was the prioritisation of their identities as Cook Islands Māori. This reflected the notion that culture really does count, not simply as an addition to their lives, but as being central to how they came to understand the world they lived in. Cook Islands Māori author Gill Vai'imene wrote "Culture

⁶⁰ Vānanga is another term used for speech, talk, or conversation. It is also used as a reference of coming together as a group to share, meet, or have formal conversations.

was not a subject to be taught so much as a way of life to be lived" (2003, p 169). Within the context of this thesis, Cook Islands Māori culture is understood through 'Ākono'anga Māori, that is, the ways Cook Islands Māori come to know and be in the world.

The changes to the curriculum and to our teaching practices, were aimed at immersing students in practices that strengthened their identities and sense of belonging. 'Ākapapa'anga was to connect them to their family history and the practices of their individual islands. Pacific Studies was aimed at studying their own histories and key aspects of Cook Islands culture. Ethnic dance was to immerse students in storytelling practices also related to the specific islands they claimed heritage too. This enabled them to see themselves in their learning, validating their identities while also adding to their foundation of knowledge that they already possessed, so they could then engage with the rest of the world. Too often our students are engaged in studies about other countries and other cultures but have not studied their own in the curriculum. Essentially, we enabled them to study the nature of themselves.

It is important to acknowledge, that although our grandparents and parents worked very hard to sustain our 'ākono'anga and reo, they could not completely shelter the 'ōire from the impacts of colonisation within Aotearoa New Zealand, and our culture suffered as a result. The pressures of assimilation, the privileging of the English language, and the dominance of western knowledge systems gradually shaped how many of our people came to see themselves and their futures. Over time, some families began speaking Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani less, some not at all, believing that English would provide for their children greater opportunities. Certain cultural practices also became less visible in everyday life because of the demands of employment, school expectations and the pressures of fitting into mainstream society took priority.

Hence changing the practice arrangements within the school was our attempt to decolonise educational spaces and respond to the colonial practices that had impacted our people across generations of time. It was a deliberate effort to reposition our reo and 'ākono'anga, and the identities of our students as strengths rather than barriers to success. Doing this, created conditions where our students no longer had to distance themselves from who they were in order to achieve, but to succeed as Cook Islands Māori because their culture counts too.

Engaging with the 'Ōire

The term 'culture counts' is associated with educators Russell Bishop and Ted Glynn (2003), whose research focused on how to engage with Aotearoa Māori students more effectively. As part of their research, they explained that relationships were central to effective teaching and learning. Bishop extended this further by asserting that the "notion of the extended family...

invokes contexts for learning in ways that promote learning and improve educational outcomes" (2019, p x). While these statements were made in reference to Aotearoa Māori, they are also applicable to Cook Islands Māori. However, the extended family in this instance is represented by the 'ōire because of the many familial connections in our town. It is important to note that the Church sits at the center of the 'ōire as the stronghold of our 'ākono'anga and reo. Therefore, when I use the kupu 'ōire, the Church is an important part of that.

Instead of just inviting individual families to participate in our learning context, we extended the notion of the 'ōire into the school. Inviting our māmā's and pāpā's into the school to engage with our students and teach them our 'ākono'anga was to essentially bring the 'ōire into the school. This connection made it easier for our students to be themselves because how they lived their lives as Cook Islands Māori, did not have to change in the school because the practice arrangements in the site of the school created conditions where they could be their authentic selves. This becomes more than just introducing new units of work. It is lived practice.

Additionally, we understood the impact of the 'ōire in the lives of our students because we too lived within the same 'ōire. Our stories were all connected by the historical experiences of our grandparents and parents, and in many cases the relationships as outlined in our papa'anga. Bridging the gap between the lives of our students in the 'ōire and the school was our way of connecting the important sites of learning that were prevalent in their lives but also making connections to all the important relationships in their lives too. In this sense, engaging the 'ōire was to strengthen and sustain the harmony of the vā. This harmony was essential to how students engaged with their learning, as harmony equated with connection.

Engaging with the 'ōire also meant that we did not have to be the knowledge holders or hold authority over the learning. By bringing the 'ōire into the school in the way of māmā's and pāpā's, parents, uncles and aunties, older siblings and cousins, meant that students were well supported with their learning. In this sense, the support systems for students outside of the school could also be their support systems within the school. This collective nature of the 'ōire was reflective of enduring practice traditions that were carried from the Cook Islands into life here in Aotearoa New Zealand. Extending this into school also extended our 'lagoon' into the ocean, where the possibilities are endless.

ENDURING PRACTICE TRADITIONS

Across the four time periods represented in the tu'anga (rima - varu), it was evident that there were enduring practice traditions that constrained education success for Cook Islands Māori. There were also particular practices that our people held on to that not only showed resilience,

but also enabled success for our students in education, without having to give up parts of themselves. As a people, we took advantage of opportunities where we could exercise our agency and reshape the conditions around us. In doing so, we were able to create practice arrangements that allowed us to carry our own practice traditions in sites of learning that created more meaningful ways for our children to engage in education. This next section of this tu'anga will draw attention to these practices and practice arrangements to ensure continued educational success in all its forms, despite the tension of how we sustain them in an environment that constantly seeks to erode them or constrain success in ways defined by western frameworks.

Tupuna-Mokopuna Relationship

A thread that runs across each of the tu'anga is how family relationships shaped the ways our children have experienced learning across time and place. Just as educators Bishop and Glynn (2003) explained that relationships are central to effective teaching and learning for Aotearoa Māori students, "strong relationships are key to Pasifika-Pacific learner achievement and wellbeing" (Rimoni et al, 2022, p 98). For us as Cook Islands Māori, there is no stronger relationship in our culture, other than with God, than that between tupuna and mokopuna. That is not to disregard the importance of the relationship between parent and child, but simply to highlight this enduring practice tradition where tupuna in many Cook Islands Māori families, have been and still are responsible for caring and nurturing their mokopuna.

The tupuna-mokopuna relationship grounds students in the present but also connects them to the past while also looking forward to the future. It is significant because it has helped students to experience educational success in the past and in the present. We saw evidence of this in Tu'anga Rima, in the lagoon with Pāpā, then with Ngapo's conversations in English with his Pāpā; then again in Tu'anga Itu when Māmā read with her mokopuna; and again, in this chapter when Pāpā presented the Dux medal to his mokopuna. In each example, the relationship between tupuna and mokopuna is not one-sided but reciprocal. "Reciprocal relationships is about everybody having worth and everybody having a place...what each person has to say and what each has to bring to that relationship is important..." (Rimoni et al., 2022, p 99).

Across all the examples, the expectations of the tupuna are evident, but each of the mokopuna plays an active part in the relationship by adhering to those expectations. There is a shared understanding of roles, a genuine care, mutual trust and respect. One key factor in my relationship with my grandmother, which I also saw in my mother with her mokopuna, and the tupuna involved in this research, was that they always saw the potential of their mokopuna.

Because they saw this potential and had this future perspective of what they imagined for their mokopuna, this led to higher expectations which were always given with love and support.

Imagine a classroom, where a teacher every day, like our tupuna, practised seeing the whole child and the potential they have, rather than viewing them through deficit beliefs about what they can't do. In a space like this, expectations are high but grounded in care. There are mutual trust and respect, because time has been taken to build a strong relationship. With these expectations, is a belief in the learner that they will have success, because their prior knowledge, their stories and everyday practices, are seen as strengths and not limitations. This kind of teacher creates conditions where students are supported to succeed as themselves. What has just been described here is not a new way of teaching, but they can be understood as a set of interrelated practices, evident in the relationship between tupuna and mokopuna.

There are five key interrelated practices that emerge from this relationship. These are Te Nakunaku'anga (belief and aspiration), Te 'Irinaki'anga (expectation and trust), Te Tu Rangatira (care and respect), Te 'Akatano'anga (guidance and correction), and Te Mana Tangata (identity and belonging). While these are often understood as values, within this thesis I position them as practices because they are learned, developed and sustained through relationships. For example, care is learned through being cared for and caring for others, while trust is built through trusting relationships. Identity and belonging emerge through speaking the language, practicing traditions, and contributing to the life of the 'ōire.

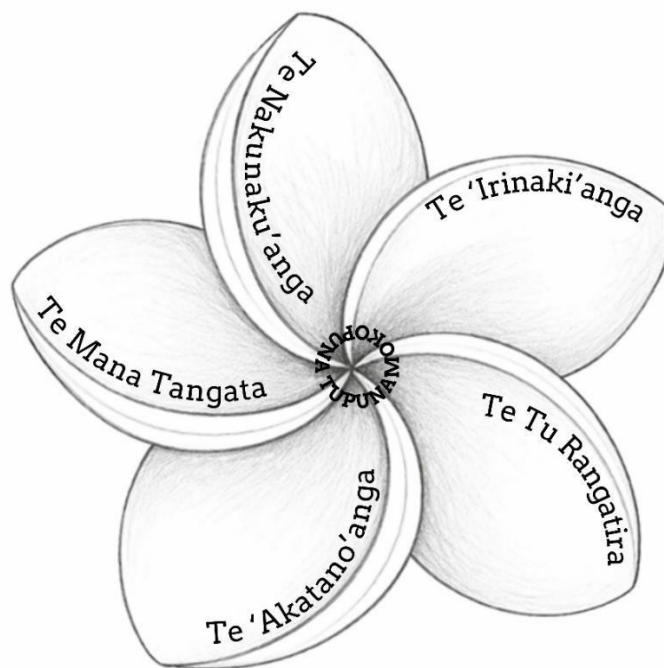
Understanding these as practices shifts attention away from seeing them as just ideas or values, but as lived and sustained through everyday life and relationships over time. If schools want to do better for their Cook Islands Māori students, then engaging with these practices is part of what is necessary, alongside the establishment of practice arrangements where learning spaces are viewed differently, our reo can be spoken, our 'ākono'anga enacted, and our elders allowed to bring their expertise into the schools to support learning for our children, and the voices of our people are heard.

TUPUNA-MOKOPUNA FRAMEWORK

Having made the final stitches of this tivaivai, and considering it as a whole, it is now possible to visualise a framework for teachers and school leaders to better understand what matters for Cook Islands Māori students and their families within education. It draws on understandings from the Theory of Practice Architectures and the Vā but is grounded in 'Ākono'anga Māori. The framework consists of the five interconnected practices listed in the previous section, Te Nakunaku'anga (belief and aspiration), Te 'Irinaki'anga (expectation and trust), Te Tu Rangatira

(care and respect), Te 'Akatano'anga (guidance and correction), and Te Mana Tangata (identity and belonging). To conceptualise the interconnected nature of these practices, I represent them through the tipani (frangipani flower). I acknowledge that the frangipani has already been used in other Pacific models and diagrams (Ako Aotearoa, 2012; Scheyvens et al., 2023), but I use it in this thesis as a way of grounding my understandings in 'Ākono'anga Māori. The proverb below the flower reflects the nature of the tupuna and mokopuna relationship, where both walk alongside each other and learn through shared experiences and practices. This is why the tupuna and mokopuna are positioned at the centre of the flower.

Figure 15: Tupuna-Mokopuna Framework



"Kia tu aiteite uarai, e auraka ki mua e ki muri"

(Never in front or behind, always side by side)

The tipani is a familiar flower across the Cook Islands, commonly found growing throughout the islands and frequently worn as an adornment, in the hair or behind the ear. A number of tipani can be threaded together to create ei, a garland presented at special occasions. The petals of the tipani are symmetrical and emit a sweet floral fragrance, with each petal connected to the centre to form a single, whole flower. Within this thesis, the tipani symbolises how each of the five interrelated practices remain distinct, yet interconnected and dependent upon one

another. Together, these practices work collectively to shape or create conditions through which meaningful learning is experienced across the generations.

While the stem and roots of the flower are not pictured in the model, they too hold relevance. The tilling of the ground represents the arrangements that create the conditions for these practices to grow. Just as the fertile soil provides the sustenance for the flower to flourish, certain practice arrangements enable the practices that nurture meaningful learning experiences for our students. The stem emerges from the roots that are grounded in 'Ākono'anga Māori and symbolises the vā, the space where meaning making happens. Without the stem, the flower cannot receive the nourishment it needs to survive. In the same way, without the vā, the practices become disconnected from the relationships that sustain meaningful learning for students. Eventually, as conditions change, the petals on the flower wilt and the flower dies, but it does not disappear completely. Instead, it returns to the soil, becoming part of the ground that nourishes future growth. In many ways, this reflects the cyclical nature of time and relationships, where tupuna who pass away may not be physically present, yet their influence continues to be felt by mokopuna through their teachings, keeping the tupuna-mokopuna relationship at the centre.

Within the changing conditions, a new flower emerges from the soil, just as new practice arrangements and practices emerge across generations in response to those changing conditions. Despite these changes, the roots of 'Ākono'anga Māori continue to nourish the flower through the stem, the vā that carries meaning making, but also holds the practices together, ensuring that the practice traditions of Cook Islands Māori endure within the present and into the future. Being grounded in 'Ākono'anga Māori is essential to holding on to our way of life, because the practices that subtly disrupted our lives are also sustained in the same way, and it is imperative that we are aware of these conditions so as not to conform once again.

Implementing the Tupuna-Mokopuna Framework

The following statements are an explanation of what each practice in the framework could look like within the classroom and school sites. It provides a way for schools and educators to consider how they can create conditions in their spaces to enable education success for their Cook Islands Māori students, understanding that this is not a formula as each site, and each community will be different. When considering the practices and practice arrangements that make educational success possible in your site, it is necessary to reflect on the following questions: who has power? whose voices are heard? how do spaces enable meaningful learning? what language is being used and how is it being used? are 'Ākono'anga Māori and Reo Māori

Kūkī 'Āirani visible in the curriculum and throughout the learning site? is the 'ōire visible in the learning site? do teaching practices engage students in meaningful learning experiences? and do assessment practices enable students to reveal what they actually know?

Te Nakunaku'anga (belief and aspiration)

Belief and aspiration are not just ideas that people hold but are realised through practice. As educators enact these practices themselves, they then create practice arrangements that encourage and motivate students into believing and aspiring for success as well.

- In the wider school these practice arrangements can look like leaders: linking the vision of the school to reflect the aspirations of students, their families and the 'ōire; ensuring timetabling reflects the aspirations of students; creating a curriculum that prioritises students' needs; ensuring there are clear pathways for success and leadership opportunities; create discourses that reflect a potential oriented focus; advocating for and implementing assessment practices that reflect the strengths of students; and ensure teachers are supported through professional development opportunities where they themselves engage with Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani and 'Ākono'anga Māori.
- In the classroom, this can look like teachers: seeing the potential students have; inspiring students through learning their own histories and sharing their own stories using their own cultural practices; create meaningful opportunities to success; arrange learning spaces to cater for diverse needs; planning trips that engage students in experiences that inspire belief; use collaborative practices; and use language that uplifts and inspires.

Te 'Irinaki'anga (expectation and trust)

Expectation and trust are developed through relationships and everyday interactions within sites of learning. As educators enact these practices themselves, they then create practice arrangements that encourage students into expecting success and trusting in their own ability.

- In the wider school this can look like leaders: communicating high expectations and trust in students to achieve; knowing their students; ensuring academic pathways and mentoring systems are consistently available to all; the 'ōire are encouraged to be part of the school community.
- In the classroom, this can look like teachers: having high expectations that encourage students to work hard and contribute positively to the learning environment; giving students responsibility; planning for success; empowering students to use their agency; and knowing students beyond academic achievement.

Te Tu Rangatira (care and respect)

Care and respect are realised through the ways people relate to and treat one another. As educators enact these practices themselves, they then create practice arrangements that help create environments where students feel safe, valued, and supported.

- In the wider school this can look like leaders: creating an environment that is safe, where students can be themselves and feel valued; creating pastoral care systems that strengthen students' identities; and encourage respect and reciprocity amongst all individuals in the school.
- In the classroom, this can look like teachers: responding to student's needs; teachers know their students, their names and the meanings behind those names, and pronounce these properly; a genuine concern for students that stems from a ngakau aro'a (loving and compassionate heart); understanding that students are part of a collective which means that they will have responsibility to that collective.

Te 'Akatano'anga (guidance and correction)

Guidance and correction are realised through practices that support growth and responsibility. Rather than focusing only on discipline, these practices help learners grow through encouragement, support, and accountability. As educators enact these practices themselves, they then create practice arrangements where students can manage their own learning and take accountability for their decisions and actions.

- In the wider school this can look like leaders: providing learning support and homework programmes; engaging with families to ensure they are empowered with knowledge; creating mentoring and role modelling programmes; and restorative behaviour management practices and support for students.
- In the classroom, this can look like teachers: encouraging mentoring and role modelling; giving constructive feedback; restorative conversations that help students to learn from their mistakes while holding on to their mana.

Te Mana Tangata (identity and belonging)

Identity and belonging are realised through practices that allow students to see themselves, their 'ākono'anga and their 'ōire reflected and valued within sites of learning.

- In the wider school and classroom, this can look like leaders and teachers encouraging the use of Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani; 'Ākono'anga Māori is visible in the curriculum, teaching and assessment practices; students storying practices such as 'akapapa'anga are

visible; the learning space is one where students feel like they belong; elders from the 'ōire are invited to be part of the learning experience; and success is defined by families and the 'ōire.

Embracing the Framework

The purpose of this framework is to provide educators with a way to engage Cook Islands Māori students in meaningful learning experiences that reflect their identities and ways of being and knowing. It is a way to consider the practice arrangements that enable a site of learning where students are more likely to feel a sense of belonging, grow their confidence, and experience education success on their own terms. It is also a way for educators to consider how their current practices and practice arrangements enable or constrain opportunities for our students to engage in learning that is meaningful.

TŌPIRI'ANGA

This chapter has demonstrated what is possible when the practice arrangements in a site of learning are changed in ways that enable teachers and students to practice education differently. Learning becomes more meaningful and responsive to the diverse needs of students, while reducing barriers that previously limited their participation and achievement. In this kind of learning environment, teachers guide students in ways that enables them to use their agency, because their voices are not only heard but their way of life prioritised. When students do not have to worry about being confronted with deficit assumptions connected to their identity, they can be themselves and move forward with their learning.

Understanding learning as practice has enabled the Tupuna-Mokopuna Framework to emerge as a way for school leaders and teachers to respond to Cook Islands Māori in ways that value their unique ways of being, knowing, and learning, while also engaging in experiences that are more meaningful. It is not a prescriptive framework that tells educators what they must do but provides a way for school leaders and teachers to consider the conditions and practices that support Cook Islands Māori students. It also offers an insight into what these practices may look like in sites of learning, but more importantly it enables educators to consider what arrangements are necessary in their sites of learning that will enable Cook Islands Māori students to succeed as Cook Islands Māori.

Tu'anga Ta'i Nga'uru: Te Manako 'Openga

Chapter Ten: A Final Reflection

'AKATOMO'ANGA

My heart sinks as Kirsten stares at me across the table looking shocked by what she had just read. She waits patiently, trying to register my response. I had for so long believed that our colonisation story as Cook Islands Māori was far better than that of Aotearoa Māori. What does "better" even mean in the context of colonisation and how naïve of me to even think this way? I knew what she was suggesting but couldn't bring myself to say it. The text that we had just read had all but spelt out that our ancestors had been led to believe that everything that the missionaries and colonial administrators had brought to the Cook Islands, was better for us.

But it wasn't just any text. It was a document outlining education policy for Cook Islands students in 1895, in particular, the positioning of English as the only medium of instruction in Cook Islands schools. She had just read aloud the words that Māori could not govern themselves without being proficient in the English language. It was one thing to suggest that English would improve our way of life, give us access to the modern world and the opportunities that came with it, but to suggest that my ancestors could not govern themselves without English was just absurd...and condescending. They had governed themselves for centuries before the arrival of the missionaries and colonial administrators.

It was a seduction. A subtle promise that would impact on our way of life more than our ancestors could have imagined. Did we really just give up our right to speak our language freely whenever we wanted? Aotearoa Māori recognised the Goliath they were fighting as soon as they arrived in Aotearoa by the droves; laid down their lives to protect their way of life. We, on the other hand, didn't even know that we were involved in a battle. A battle for our agency, our right to determine our lives for ourselves, a battle for our traditions and our language. Now I sit here, in the 21st century, studying one policy that impacted our whole trajectory as a people. Our language is at risk, and therefore our way of life is at risk. Who are we without our reo and our 'ākono'anga?

It is within this context that I write this tu'anga. Like the ta'unga examining the final un-ironed tivaivai laid out on the bed, reflecting on her journey, I too take a step back to examine what I have gained personally from this research. This moment, therefore, is a time to consider my own place as a learner and what I have come to understand, with a hope of carrying these learnings forward into future research. I have listened to stories, examined histories, and traced

the practices and practice architectures that have shaped the schooling experiences of those in my 'ōire, and in essence, I found myself on an inner journey of my own. Therefore, in this tu'anga I share key learnings that have emerged from this research that have shifted my worldview.

In the previous tu'anga I positioned 'Ākono'anga Māori as a way of enabling education success by connecting key practices across my finding's chapters. My findings chapters began with Tu'anga Rima, where I unpacked the conditions that shaped education practices for Cook Islands Māori before the arrival of the missionaries, during the missionary influence, and during the governing time of colonial administrators from New Zealand. Tu'anga Ono described the conditions that shaped education practices for Cook Islands Māori migrants as they settled in Tokoroa, New Zealand, in the 1950-1960s. In Tu'anga Itu, I discussed the changing conditions that shaped education practices for the first generation of New Zealand-born Cook Islands Māori children in the 1970s-1990s, tracing their journeys from early childhood through to secondary schooling. In Tu'anga Varu, I focused on the changing conditions that shaped education practices for Cook Islands Māori in the 21st century, from 2000-2022. In Tu'anga Iva, I brought everything together through a focused discussion of the changing arrangements and changing practices that enabled educational success for our students. I also discussed the resilience of our 'ōire to hold on to 'Ākono'anga Māori and Reo Māori Kūkī 'Āirani, despite the changing conditions that constrained their visibility in education spaces. This tu'anga is my final reflection.

WHY FOCUS ON PRACTICE?

The belief that learning is about acquiring knowledge continues to prevail in current Aotearoa New Zealand education policy, where learning is defined through the accumulation of knowledge, skills, and measurable outcomes (MoE, 2026). However, my research aligned with a growing community of education researchers who challenge this view, arguing instead that learning is situated in people's common, everyday practices (Kemmis et al., 2025). Learning and educational success are terms that are often connected to the formal education one receives in school. However, this perspective changes when both are viewed through a practice lens, where learning is shaped through what people do together in their everyday lives, and education success is defined by learners and their communities.

When I began this research, I aimed to unpack the teaching and learning practices that were worthwhile to Cook Islands Māori families in education. While aspirational, I had no idea how to do this. Engaging with the Theory of Practice Architectures provided a way to not only

examine how practice unfolds in our everyday lives, but also the language to describe and make sense of them. Originally, I, like many others, viewed practices as something people do. Within Theory of Practice Architectures, as this thesis has shown, practices are more than action. Practices are comprised of sayings (what is said), doings (what is done), and relatings (how people relate to one another and the world) which hang together in the project or purpose of the practice (Kemmis et al., 2014). This nexus of sayings, doings and relatings are bundled together amongst existing site-based conditions and arrangements described as practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014; Kemmis et al., 2025; Schatzki, 2002). These practice architectures are the conditions that shape how practices get done (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023).

Theory of Practice Architectures provided a way for me to look at education differently, in particular, the idea that practice architectures pre-figure practices in education (Kemmis et al., 2014; Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023). To identify the practice architectures that enabled or constrained the success of education for Cook Islands Māori, I relied heavily on accounts of practice as recounted to me by my participants. I also collected artefacts of practice in the form of personal journals, policy documents and other research texts. In Theory of Practice Architectures, observational data is a more precise way of studying practices as they happen in real time-space (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023), however, my late introduction to the theory, as well as the historical periods I researched, prevented this. Regardless, a focus on practice through Theory of Practice Architectures, enabled me to see how different practice architectures such as dominant discourses, curriculum decisions, and the distribution of material and economic resources, shaped the way education was practiced.

As part of the language of Theory of Practice Architectures, I was introduced to the term practice traditions. The main research question for this thesis grew into, "What are the practice traditions that have enabled 'education success' for Cook Islands Māori learners at Tokoroa High School?" Focusing on practice traditions allowed me to look at how learning unfolded in the histories of Cook Islands Māori. As Grootenboer and Edwards-Groves (2023) attested, "...learning happens in response to historically changing circumstances, needs, desires, opportunities, and challenges whose origins lie in practices, in the lives of people and communities, and in particular sites and in practicescapes" (pg 12-13). While this thesis could have provided an extensive and valuable life-history of the journey of Cook Islands Māori in education, a focus on practice through Theory of Practice Architectures, meant that the emphasis shifted from a simple recount of what has happened, to understanding what or how enduring practices have the potential to transform education outcomes, not only for Cook Islands Māori, but all Pasifika-Pacific learners.

Finally, a focus on practice through Theory of Practice Architectures created space to understand learning and education success through 'Ākono'anga Māori. There have been many times when I have been in a conversation with other Cook Islands Māori and heard the phrase, "that isn't our 'ākono'anga" or "we must do it this way because that is our 'ākono'anga". These phrases speak to the everyday focus in our community to ensure that our cultural practices are sustained and carried out correctly, but it also speaks to our worldview as Cook Islands Māori, where learning has always been embedded in the lived experiences and relationships of our everyday lives. Our culture and its practices are not separate from who we are, from who our children are, and yet the belief that culture is something additional to learning continues to shape how education is understood and delivered. I was intentional in centring 'Ākono'anga Māori. For my Cook Islands community, it is not this added layer that enhances who we are as people, but the foundation of how we engage with the world. Aligning with Theory of Practice Architectures enabled me to make visible the value of our practice traditions, our own 'ākono'anga, that have sustained how we as Cook Islands Māori in 'Ōire Tokoroa learn, where that learning happens, and how we view success.

THE 'SITE' MATTERS

A key learning for me was understanding that the 'site' matters. In Theory of Practice Architectures, a site is a specific place or setting where a practice happens (Kemmis et al., 2014). Practices do not just appear in the places where they happen but are enmeshed within those places where they occur (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023). In this research, sites of learning have been places such as the lagoon, the islands, the Church, homes, and the different spaces at Tokoroa High School. In each of these sites, the practice arrangements constrained or enabled education success for Cook Islands Māori. This understanding is significant, given the popular discourse that associates low education achievement to the ethnicity of students.

When we understand the importance of the site in education practice, we come to know that students are constrained or enabled by the practices made possible in those sites. Often in education we blame people instead of practice when our students do not perform as well as we expect. Considering the site as the place in which practices happen, enables us to look beyond the people and at the conditions that make practice, or in this case education success, possible. This includes the timetable, power structures, access to resources, school policies or lack of it, assessment and moderation systems, and so many more conditions that can be found in a school.

By examining these conditions, we begin to understand how sites of learning shape what is possible for our students.

The term 'what is possible' stands out for me. This research has demonstrated that when we consider the possibilities for our students in a site of learning, great things can happen. Too often in education we limit what can be done for them because we are constrained by our own fear, by dominant assumptions about what they can't do, or the existing arrangements in front of us. However, when we put our students first and reimagine what is possible for them in that particular site of learning, we can reshape the existing conditions that change our practices and how we engage with our students.

If we consider the St Lukes Pacific Islands Presbyterian Church as a site of learning, the Church policy of supporting the diverse needs of their congregations enabled our people to speak their reo and enact their 'ākono'anga therefore sustaining it within our 'ōire. The conditions at Tokoroa High School from its official opening in 1957 until the early 2000's constrained education success for Cook Islands Māori until we changed conditions that then enabled it. The changing arrangements in the school library as a site of learning enabled education success in ways that had not been possible before homework class. In each site, it is possible to change the arrangements that shape the way we practice that then enables success.

To understand practice in this way, in terms of what is possible in a site of learning, is to also recognise that what is possible for Cook Islands Māori students in our school may not necessarily be what is needed in another school because of the existing arrangements in that site. In the education landscape we are inundated with discourses of 'best practice', which assumes that one approach can be universally applied across all contexts and students will benefit from that same practice. However, what is best for students in Tokoroa may not necessarily be best for students in Porirua. While there may be similarities in cultures, values, and practices; understanding education as practice requires us to respond to the specific relationships, histories, and actual needs of those within specific sites of learning and their communities. In this way, meaningful change occurs in education spaces through recognising and responding to the unique conditions that shape learning within each community, rather than imposing 'same' practices across all sites of learning, that we have become accustomed to.

A 'BETTER LIFE'

Understanding the importance of the 'site' in education, encouraged me to consider our educational experiences from the Cook Islands to Tokoroa. In doing this, I was confronted with the unsettling realisation of how we, as Cook Islands Māori in 'Ōire Tokoroa have come to

understand success and progress. This reflection led me to question how these ideas have been shaped over time for our people and experienced across these different sites of learning.

Before London Missionary Society missionaries arrived in our islands, education was simple in that learning occurred naturally in everyday life and learning outcomes were measured by an individual's ability to contribute meaningfully to family and community life. Yet from the arrival of the missionaries and colonialists to the islands, and then later here in Aotearoa New Zealand, education has been presented as the pathway to a "better life". That better life was measured by western standards such as learning English, succeeding in school, and embracing western ways of living, which were framed as the keys that would open doors to opportunity. Our ancestors, our grandparents and parents believed this deeply and advocated strongly for us to follow that path without fully understanding the impacts this would have on our way of life.

Education promised the possibility of overcoming the hardships many of our families had experienced, both in the Cook Islands and here in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, as I reflect on this promise, I am disturbed by the unsettling revelation that for many years, as a people, we have been subtly seduced into believing that the papa'ā way was the right way. Missionaries brought the Gospel to the Cook Islands, which positioned Christianity as the pathway to a better life. Years later, colonial administrators from New Zealand prioritised the English language and presented it as the key to accessing opportunity to an even better life. Later, representatives from New Zealand convinced our people to migrate with promises of employment and prosperity through wages in an expanding cash economy, a new definition of a better life. Each time, these promises were offered as pathways to a "better life", and each time our people were drawn to the futures others had defined for us. However, with each new promise, the meaning of a "better life" shifted, redefined according to the values and expectations of those who held power.

Over time, these promises did more than simply introduce our people to new opportunities, they also reshaped the conditions through which our people came to understand themselves, success, and the world around them. The education of the missionaries transformed our lives, and in many ways erased our traditional ways of being. The education of colonial administrators not only limited what could be learned but also put our language at risk. At the same time, the education here in Aotearoa New Zealand redefined our identity and silenced our voices. Yet, despite these changing conditions, our people demonstrated immense resilience, as this thesis has shown. Our people continued to do what they could to support the wellbeing of the 'ōire, always with the hope of creating a better life for future generations. Whether through education,

migration, Church or community initiatives, our families carried the shared aspiration that our children would have greater opportunities than those who came before them. This aspiration is so important to us that it is encapsulated in the vision statement for our 'ōire - "Nō te uki ki mua", which translates to "For future generations".

We now live in the 21st century, and as a 'ōire, a better life is still our goal. Once again education is the promise to attaining that. However, an unsettling tension now emerges for our children, who must walk their own journey through the education system of this country. The conditions in education are always changing and as they change, so too do education practices. The tension around how our children will fare when many of the very conditions that constrained generations of our people in education, continue to confront us. Although the context may look different today, inequities within schooling, deficit thinking, and unequal access to opportunity remain.

If this research has revealed anything, it is that for Cook Islands Māori, the challenge for our children is not just simply to succeed within the education system as it currently exists, but to remain grounded in who they are while moving through it. Being in the world, is not simply about participating in systems that were designed for us, but about re-centring our own ways of being through the practices that we value in our everyday lives. This means that it is even more important for us to teach our children to speak our reo, to be immersed in 'Ākono'anga Māori, and to nurture them in the vā between home, Church, and school, and within the 'ōire. In doing this, we strengthen their sense of agency and self-determination, while enabling them to move through education and the wider world on their own terms.

RECOLOURING THE BROWN SPACES

If we look at a child's colouring book, before it has any colour added to it, we think of the page as blank. It's actually not blank, it's white. That white background is just "there" and we don't think much about it. Not only is the background uniformly white, the lines are already in place and they dictate where the colour is allowed to go. When children are young, they don't care where they put the colours, but as they get older they colour in more and more cautiously. They learn about the place of colour and the importance of staying within the pre-determined boundaries and expectations.

(Milne, 2013, p v)

Education systems are structured in ways that position our children within those predetermined boundaries. In schools, those boundaries are not always visible, yet we know they exist, or they are so blatantly obvious, but we lack the power to step outside of them. The call to do what

Milne (2013) describes as stepping outside of "education's white spaces to create new space" (p v) is not a patoi (challenge) laid down for the children themselves, but for educators who have a responsibility to do more.

While the white spaces in Milne's metaphor are unmistakable, another tension has emerged from this research regarding what I will describe as the 'recolouring of brown spaces'. The tension lies in the broader collective identity of Pasifika-Pacific that often obscures the distinct identity of Cook Islands Māori. While I agree that a collective identity is beneficial for all Pasifika-Pacific peoples as advocated for by Pasifika-Pacific researchers (Crocombe, 1976; Hau'ofa, 1998; Samu, 2006), in education, these broader identities are often prioritised over our own as Cook Islands Māori. This raises important questions about whose language, histories, practices and ways of understanding the world are being made visible in education.

In our 'ōire where Pasifika-Pacific peoples are predominantly Cook Islands Māori, our schools are continually asked to 'talanoa' with our families, instead of 'patu tuatua' or 'komakoma' (talk). In the cultural competencies document *Tapasā* (MoE, 2018), our "Cook Islands way" was positioned as "akano'anga Kūkī 'Āirani" (p 3) instead of 'Ākono'anga Māori. I have also attended symposiums and community meetings held by Pasifika-Pacific researchers, where we were referred to as Oceania peoples. In schools, our children are continuously referred to as Pasifika or Pacific, as if that is the only identity that they must know. Our people have already experienced generations of schooling where the English language and Eurocentric ways of being and knowing were prioritised over our own. While this is not the same experience, nor do I believe it is intentional, there is still the tension of whose language and worldview is prioritised in education when ours is obscured by the labels of Pasifika or Pacific, and now Oceania.

Protecting and strengthening our distinct identity as Cook Islands Māori, remains imperative so that our reo, our histories, and 'ākono'anga do not once again become overlooked within educational spaces. Before our children can be Pasifika-Pacific within these spaces, they must be allowed to be Cook Islands Māori first. The challenge then is to resist the recolouring of brown spaces and for educators to move beyond generic Pasifika-Pacific practices that treat all Pasifika-Pacific peoples as though they are the same. It begins with the recognition that for us as Cook Islands Māori, our culture and way of life as encapsulated in the phrase 'Ākono'anga Māori must be allowed to stand on its own in education. Rather than recolouring brown spaces into something more common or recognisable to others, a view that presents us as the same, it is essential that we let our differences that make us unique, be allowed to thrive.

CHAMPIONING 'ĀKONO'ANGA MĀORI

Ruta, one of the participants shared in her patu tuatua, "I am proud to be Cook Islands Māori. It's who I am". Reflecting on Ruta's comments made me realise that this is what I dream for every Cook Islands Māori child, whether here in Aotearoa New Zealand or across the moana in the Cook Islands, and other countries they reside in. The challenge that comes for those of us who are living in the diaspora and away from our homeland, is that we are distanced from our traditional sacred places, and the natural environment in which our reo and 'ākono'anga are practiced. Being distanced from our homeland and raised in a western society as is the case in Aotearoa New Zealand, also means that our children are having to navigate what it means to be Cook Islands Māori in a society that does not necessarily celebrate it.

I was taught the importance of identity by my pāpā, Reverend Timote Turu, who was also the guardian of our 'ākapapa'anga in my father's family until he passed away. He did this through sharing the following proverb:

Ko te tangata kāre i kite e nō 'ea mai 'aia, kua āite ia ki te manu rere,
kāre ona e kō'anga.

A person who doesn't know where they are from, is like a bird with no nest to call home.

(Reverend T. Turu, personal communication, July 2, 2021)

Pāpā's simple phrase carries important teachings about identity and connection. Just as a bird without a nest has nowhere to return to, to rest and feel safe, a person without a strong sense of their identity may feel disconnected or without a sense of belonging. We have seen the disruption to our way of life as Cook Islands Māori because of colonial education practices right throughout this thesis. Since the collapse of the forestry industry in our town, education has and continues to be seen as the vaka of hope that will create a path forward to support our 'ōire to reclaim what was disrupted. This places a huge responsibility upon educators and change is not only necessary, it is overdue.

In education research, real progress begins when we use our own reo and 'ākono'anga to explain our existence in the world. Currently, we are limited in terms of the known theories and methods that prioritise our worldview. However, we have a responsibility to reach into our communities, to our elders who hold knowledge that can support us through this. In schools and in our classrooms, we cannot be afraid to position our reo and 'ākono'anga as legitimate ways of engaging our students, especially if they are Cook Islands Māori. In our communities, families

also carry a responsibility to advocate for the visibility of our reo and 'ākono'anga in education spaces.

For too long in education, we have accepted the papa'ā way as the right way, when in fact, what is right for our children is available to us and them, within our own 'ākono'anga. Aotearoa Māori have already demonstrated what is possible when an entire people prioritise their language and ways of being and knowing across sites of learning (Walker, 1987). Imagine what could happen for us, if we were to ta'oko'ta'i, that is to come together, as iti tangata Māori to prioritise our reo and 'ākono'anga across education spaces too. Imagine the difference we can make together if we come to practice education differently and create conditions that not only allow for our students to be themselves but genuinely help them to achieve a better life, and live well in a world worth living in (Petrie et al, 2020). Change is only possible if we lead it, if we practice it, and if we live it. The outcome of these efforts will be generations of Cook Islands Māori children who will not only succeed as Cook Islands Māori but sustain our way of life into the future.

TŌPIRI'ANGA

In April of this year, Ruta graduated with a Bachelor of Teaching in Early Childhood Education. In August, Daniel will graduate with a Master's in Business Administration Degree, and in October, Rosey will graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree. Cook Islands Māori māpu experiencing educational success as Cook Islands Māori, strong in their identity, know their language, and supported by their 'ōire. This is the education experience I hope for, for every Cook Islands Māori child.

I conclude this thesis with the words of my eldest son Hawea, in a speech he wrote as a Year 12 student to address the inequities he and his peers were facing at school.

He writes:

I am Cook Island.

I am gang related, often hated and definitely uneducated.

I can't spell or read, and I will not succeed because I am Cook Island.

A giant on the field, but never in class.

Low expectations from teachers because I could never pass...NCEA.

Come to school to eat corned beef and play court touch.

Never do any schoolwork because it's "too hard".

No literacy or numeracy, what even is university? And dux? Well, that couldn't possibly be me.

Lower grades, lower pay. Hit the piss, hit my woman...then hit my children???
That is what I'm destined for... after all.

The mill, bush and go bus are my future career choices,
My self-esteem depleted by all these negative voices.
Too poor to be healthy, too hungry to read,
Can't afford to pay school fees, too many mouths to feed.
My DNA makes me primitive, my brown skin means I'm limited, And I'm a savage
that inhales stupid substances prohibited.

I'm just a F.O.B,
A person who will get F.A.T,
A teenager who's gonna be a D.A.D?
But when will the universe STOP and see the real M.E,
Instead of the stereotypical perception of society???

You see when I first started school, my story was already written.
A repeated narrative attached to generations smitten.
Lost visions, misconceptions and negative perceptions, Judgements already made
because of my complexion.
So, what would a brother like me possibly know?
When my life has been determined by the status quo?

I am Cook Island. No. I am Cook Island.
My ancestors navigated the seas using only the stars,
They conquered the oceans, settled lands from afar.
They were agriculturists, marine biologists, nutritionists...scientists.

My great-grandparents, they came here so that we could have better, Their belief
that education could give us a brighter future.
They paved the way, made the sacrifices, built a legacy,
They believed it was possible, so why shouldn't we?
I don't understand this negative picture of my culture,
But I do know this - what we do with that legacy is completely up to us.

I am gang related my uncle lives in a cell.
Instead of choosing to live, he chose a life in hell.
I can spell and read,
I choose to succeed,
Not just to achieve - but excel...
Excellence is the path I choose for me.

I don't give a damn about what society would have you perceive,
In my heart I know that I am capable of achieving my dreams.
Black, white or yellow, greatness is for all,
But I want to be remembered for using my brain, instead of a ball.

You don't have to play league or always pull sieg.

*You don't have to beat a brother or smoke a bag full of weed.
I don't want to be the brown guy that stands idly by,
Watching others live life because I didn't believe.*

*So, I'm gonna navigate my life, put my faith in God's hands.
Be proud of who I am, no matter where I stand.
The good Lord said, all things work together for good to those who love Him.
So, I'm gonna love Him, knowing that I can do all things because he strengthens
me.*

I am Cook Island.

*My blood.
My bones.
My heart.*

I am Cook Island.

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TE PANGE TŌPIRI'ANGA⁶²

APPENDIX A: EMAIL TO COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS



Kia Orana Julius and Ake,

As you already know, I have started my doctoral studies with the University of Waikato. The title of my research project is: **“E TEREAPII: Ta Rātou Moemoeā, Ta Mātou Kaveinga, Ta Rātou Oe’anga; An Education Journey - Their Dream, Our Navigation, Their Paddling. Successful stories and storying as Cook Islanders; Transforming education systems and practices.”** I am studying under the supervision of Dr David Faa’vae, Associate Professor Kirsten Petrie, and Dr Keaka Hemi.

The aims of my research are two-fold. Firstly, to story the academic success of past Cook Islands Māori students at Tokoroa High School, including the aspirations of their parents, grandparents and/or great-grandparents and their reasons for migrating to Tokoroa. Secondly, to identify the inter-generational cultural practices valued by these Cook Islands Māori families, and how these practices were realised and operationalised in their education experiences and settings. Over the last few years, the Pasifika/Pacific students at Tokoroa High School have achieved incredible academic success. This is considerably notable when compared to other Pasifika/Pacific students, especially in the statistics of school leavers who leave with a NCEA Level Two qualification or more.

To gather relevant data, I intend to hold conversations with ex-students of Tokoroa High School, their parents, grandparents, and if possible, great-grandparents. These Patu Tuatua sessions can range between 60–120-minute conversations, and depending on the participants, possibly three conversations over a set timeframe. I would like to give participants two options, depending on location, familiarity, and anonymity. The South Waikato YMCA Media

⁶² Appendices

Room and the SWPICS Conference Room both fit these criteria. My purpose in writing is to ask for permission to use the named room from your organization, to hold these conversations with my participants. Of course, if you agree, times will be negotiated with your office, and we will abide by your rules and regulations. If there is a cost, please advise and I will be happy to pay for this.

I have chosen sex-seven families to participate in this project. What this will potentially look like for you, is the use of your premises for an hour to two hours per family, (depending on the family) over a period of five months. Additionally, a follow up conversation may be needed. But these times will always be negotiated with the both of you. The number of sessions that will be held at your workplace will be dependent on the families, but I will negotiate a timetable with you, as soon as I am told. The timeframe for this data collection will be approximately June 2023 – August 2023. If these dates change, I will inform you as soon as possible.

I am aware of how busy your organizations are and understand that these rooms may not always be available. However, any support that you can offer, will be greatly appreciated.

Please advise your response, through a reply to this email.

Te Atua, te aroa.

APPENDIX B: LETTER TO TOKOROA HIGH SCHOOL



Date

Mr William Ford and Board of Trustees
Tokoroa High School
Billah Street
Tokoroa 3420

Kia Orana

As you are already aware, I have started my doctoral studies with the University of Waikato. The title of my research project is: **“E TEREAPII: Ta Rātou Moemoeā, Ta Mātou Kaveinga, Ta Rātou Oe’anga; An Education Journey - Their Dream, Our Navigation, Their Paddling.** Successful stories and storying as Cook Islanders; Transforming education systems and practices.” I am studying under the supervision of Dr David Faa’vae, Dr Kirsten Petrie, and Dr Keaka Hemi.

The aims of my research are two-fold. Firstly, to highlight the strengths in the knowledge and practices, and story the academic success of past Cook Islands Māori students at Tokoroa High School, which includes the aspirations of their parents, grandparents and/or greatgrandparents and their reasons for migrating to Tokoroa. Secondly, to identify the intergenerational cultural practices valued by these Cook Islands Māori families, and how these practices were realised and operationalised in their education experiences and settings.

Over the last few years, the Pasifika/Pacific students at Tokoroa High School have achieved incredible academic success. This is considerably notable when compared to other Pasifika/Pacific students, especially in the statistics of school leavers who leave with a NCEA Level Two qualification or more. My purpose in writing this letter is to ask the school for permission to have access to, and utilise in my research, any learning or achievement data analysis of Pasifika/Pacific students, but more specifically Cook Islands Māori students for the last 10 years. Your assistance with this would be greatly appreciated.

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

Tereapii Rota-Solomon tereapiis@tokoroahigh.school.nz
0275342982

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET



Date

Dear (name)

RE: DOCTORAL RESEARCH

I am currently a doctoral student in Te Kura Toi Tangata – School of Education, at the University of Waikato. For the last 13 years, I have taught at Tokoroa High School as an English teacher. I was born and raised in Tokoroa, and I am of Cook Islands Māori descent.

This year I have embarked on a new journey, by beginning my doctoral studies. The title of my research project is: **“E TEREAPII: Ta Rātou Moemoeā, Ta Mātou Kaveinga, Ta Rātou Oe’anga; An Education Journey - Their Dream, Our Navigation, Their Paddling.** Successful stories and storying as Cook Islanders; Transforming education systems and practices.” I am writing to invite you to participate in this research project, as part of the requirements for a PhD degree for the University of Waikato, under the supervision of Dr David Faa’vae, Dr Kirsten Petrie, and Dr Keaka Hemi.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Within this research project, my aim is to story the success of Cook Islands Māori students, and this is linked to the aspirations and dreams of their parents and grandparents. Additionally, I want to understand the intergenerational cultural practices, Cook Islands Māori families deem as necessary for success in education settings in Aotearoa-NZ, and how knowledge and practices were realised and operationalised in their child’s schooling. I will be having Patu Tuatua - conversations with six-seven families. These families are made up of past students who attended Tokoroa High School, their parents, grandparents, and if possible, greatgrandparents.

My main objective for this study, is to inform others involved in education in Aotearoa-NZ, how Cook Islands Māori families and teachers have come together in Tokoroa to help their children have success in secondary schooling. Sharing your family stories – dreams and aspirations, challenges and the overcoming of those challenges, and any other factors – helped your child along the way.

As a family, my desire for you is to advise me of how to honour the stories you share with me in this research. This is a discussion that we can continue to have. I would like to have an individual conversation with the past students first and record this using a Dictaphone. Then I would like to have another conversation with the past student, their parents, and grandparents together as a family. I would like to video record this conversation. As there are limited resources available for secondary school students to refer to regarding aspects of Cook Islands Māori culture, I would like to ask for permission for the video recordings, to be made available for our Cook Islands Māori students to study, but just the section of the recordings that refer to the migration of people to Tokoroa. You do not have to give permission to do this, and if you do consent, you can change your mind at any time.

The conversations will be in the form of 'patu tuatua', where I will have two or three questions to prompt you, but then allow the conversation to flow freely. You can choose not to be recorded; in which case I will take written notes. If you want to stop the recording, this can be done at any time.

If you agree to be involved, I would like to talk with you for about 60-120 min'utes. It may be that we will need to have a follow up conversation, just to clarify any relevant information. I will also transcribe our patu tuatua and send it back to you to check. You can change anything you want in the transcript, and once you are satisfied with the transcription, I will use the information or parts of the information in my thesis. If you want to change anything or withdraw from the study altogether, you can do this until the end of February 2024.

All recordings, transcripts and consent forms will be stored securely with my supervisor at the University of Waikato. If you wish to keep your recordings and transcripts, you may do this. On completion of this research project, your family will receive a copy of my thesis. A hardcopy will be kept at the library at the University of Waikato and will also be available electronically.

I assure you that your participation in this research is voluntary. So please indicate at any time if you do not want to take part. If you have any further questions, please contact myself or my supervisors.

Meitaki Atupaka.

Yours sincerely,

Tereapii Rota-Solomon tereapiis@tokoroahigh.school.nz
0275342982

PhD Supervisors

CHIEF SUPERVISOR	CO-SUPERVISOR	CO-SUPERVISOR
Dr David Fa’avae Pacific Senior Lecturer Te Kura Toi Tangata – School of Education University of Waikato dave.faavae@waikato.ac.nz	Dr Keaka Hemi Assistant Vice Chancellor Pacific University of Waikato keaka.hemi@waikato .ac.nz	Associate Professor Kirsten Petrie Associate Dean Academic Te Wānanga Toi Tangata – Division of Education University of Waikato kpetrie@waikato.ac.nz

For ethical concerns please contact Tereapii or Dr Fa’avae.

This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Division of Education Ethics Committee on 26 October 2022. Approval number: FEDU066/22.

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANTS CONSENT FORM



Title of Research Project: “E TEREAPII: Ta Rātou Moemoeā, Ta Mātou Kaveinga, Ta Rātou Oe’anga; An Education Journey - Their Dream, Our Navigation, Their Paddling. Successful stories and storying as Cook Islanders; Transforming education systems and practices.”

Researcher: Tereapii Rota-Solomon

We have been given information about this project and have had an opportunity to make enquiries and have conversations regarding these. We consent to participating in the study with the understanding that our participation is completely voluntary. We also understand that we can withdraw from this project at any time and any information that we have contributed can be withdrawn. We also understand that the following will take place:

- 1-3 patu tuatua - conversations with Tereapii
- The conversations will be recorded with a dictaphone and/or a video recorder
- We can have the recording stopped at any time
- We can ask that certain information that has been shared be excluded
- We will have the opportunity to read transcripts, check its accuracy, and make changes to those transcripts
- Recordings of conversations will be transcribed by Tereapii and/or a third-party person who will sign a confidentiality agreement
- Recordings from conversations (other than the migration stories) will be kept for five years and then destroyed, or given to families should they want to keep it
- Our consent forms will be securely stored separately from the research data until the completion of the research project, and then be destroyed
- Our names or any information about us will not be used in this written thesis unless we give permission, and a pseudonym will be used instead. (While I will do my best to protect your anonymity, I cannot fully guarantee this)
- In the event that Covid-19 rules require individuals to do contract tracing, a register will be provided, and personal details kept.

- In the event there is a dispute that needs resolving regarding this research, I will contact Tereapii or Dr Fa’avae.

Tereapii Rota-Solomon tereapiis@tokoroahigh.school.nz 0275342982	Dr David Fa’avae Dr David Fa’avae Pacific Senior Lecturer Te Kura Toi Tangata – School of Education University of Waikato dave.faavae@waikato.ac.nz
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We agree to participate in this research:

Name	Signature	Date
Student:		
Parent One:		
Parent Two:		
Grandparent One:		
Grandparent Two:		
Great-Grandparent One:		
Great-Grandparent Two:		

This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Division of Education Ethics Committee on 26 October 2022. Approval number: FEDU066/22.

APPENDIX E: PATU TUATUA – GUIDING QUESTIONS

Guiding Questions for Parents/Grandparents/Great-Grandparents

Introduction

- Papa’anga – Who are you? Where are you from? (Genealogy)

Migration and Aspirations

- What brought you to Tokoroa?
- What dreams and aspirations did you have for your family?
- Where does education fit into aspirations for your children or mokopuna?
- What does education success look like for you as a family?

Culture and Identity

- How important is your culture and identity?
- What Cook Islands Māori values, customs, and traditions have you taught your children?
- How are these reflected in the community you live in?
- Explain the significance of Cook Islands Māori culture in your child’s education?

Guiding Questions for Past Students

Introduction

- Papa’anga – Who are you? Where are you from? (Genealogy)

Migration and Aspirations

- What brought your family to Tokoroa?
- What dreams and aspirations did your family have for you?
- Where does education fit in your family?
- What does education success look like for you as a family?

Culture and Identity

- How important is your culture and identity?

- What Cook Islands Māori values, customs, and traditions have you learnt and believe are important?
- Explain the significance of Cook Islands Māori culture in your education?