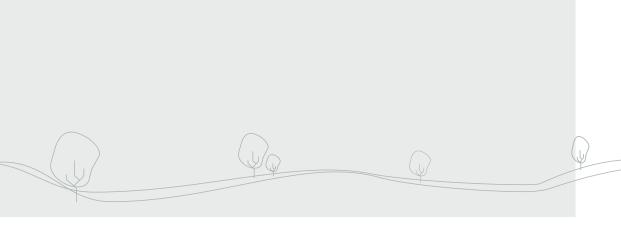# Marae-ā-kura: Teaching, learning and living as Māori

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Introduction

Marae-ā-kura (school-based marae) have been part of the secondary school landscape since 1978. Today there are approximately 99 marae in state secondary schools in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2008).[1] Although marae-ā-kura are officially endorsed by the Ministry of Education (2000) to better engage with Māori parents, whānau and communities, there is little research on the way marae-ā-kura operate, their pedagogical practices and their effect on Māori student outcomes.

This two-year research project investigated the role of marae-ā-kura as culturally determined spaces in mainstream secondary schools. It involved the participation of students, teachers, principals, whānau and community representatives of three urban marae-ā-kura within the Auckland region. The study examined the pedagogy of marae-ā-kura and their effect on the educational achievement, including the cultural well-being, of Māori learners and their whānau.

Key findings

- Marae-ā-kura are a kaupapa Māori intervention which provide for Māori aspirations within mainstream schooling.
- Marae-ā-kura provide opportunities for Māori staff, students and whānau to "live as Māori" within a mainstream schooling context.
- Te reo, tīkanga and kawa provide the pedagogical and cultural basis for understanding educational achievement, including cultural well-being in marae-ā-kura.
- Marae-ā-kura have a significant potential to provide opportunities to enhance educational achievement for Māori students within mainstream secondary schools.
- Critical success elements for the operation of marae-ā-kura include kaupapa Māori values and practices, appropriate staffing and resourcing, strong school relationships and structural support.

Major implications

- The role of marae-ā-kura as a kaupapa Māori intervention needs to be recognised, acknowledged, and better understood as a way to address Māori educational aspirations.
- Further research related to marae-ā-kura needs to be undertaken to support existing and future marae-ā-kura.
- Resources need to be provided that enable the establishment, development and successful operation of marae-ā-kura.

The research project

The establishment of marae-ā-kura has been a significant development in Māori education, described by Ranginui Walker (1992) as symbolic of the urgent need for the "maintenance of culture, assertion of identity, and resistance to assimilation" (p. 25). Yet there are very few papers written about the establishment of marae-ā-kura as a pedagogical approach. In a paper entitled "Marae as a learning environment in secondary schools", Pat Heremaia (1984) argued the "marae has brought about some radical innovations inside the school itself and in the local community" (p. 74). Linda Smith (1993) concurs, stating that "the establishment of a whare represents

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1　The Ministry of Education is cautious in providing this statistic as the codes used to distinguish types of buildings does not necessarily mean that a whare or marae is not in operation in another building in the school. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education is not able to provide this information for state integrated schools, private schools and schools on marae; e.g., TKKM o Hoani Waititi Marae. (Personal communication with research analyst, Demographic and Statistical Analysis Unit, Ministry of Education, 26 May, 2008.)

an innovative approach to the problems faced by ethnic minority children in schools. It is potentially much more than that … The whare has a wider potential to transform the structures by developing alternative pedagogical practices and validating Māori forms of knowledge" (p. 72). Smith (ibid.) points out the positive effect of the whare on the Māori girls at school, including the strengthening of Māori reo rūmaki (Māori immersion unit), an increased number of Māori teachers, and the achievement of high academic examination results.

The "radical innovation" of marae-ā-kura and "alternative pedagogical practices" created by the establishment of such an institution, as referred to by Heremaia and Smith, clearly warranted investigation. The fact that nearly 100 marae-ā-kura already exist in secondary schools (and more are being planned) without a clear knowledge of how they contribute to teaching, learning and outcomes, points to a serious gap in New Zealand's educational research literature.

Recent educational literature on raising Māori student achievement in mainstream secondary schools recognises the salient role of culture in the process of teaching and learning, including the effect on Māori student achievement of a cultural mismatch between learners and teachers, the absence or low prevalence of Māori content in the curriculum, and weak links between school and home (Alton Lee, 2003). Furthermore, the cultural learning context affects the quality and effectiveness of teaching (ibid.; Bishop et al., 2003; MacFarlane, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2000). While the centrality of culture in teaching and learning is now widely accepted, the complex ways culture is contributes to teaching, learning and achievement is still not well understood.

This research project builds on research about the role of the culture in raising Māori achievement, illuminating what Bishop et al. (2003) refer to as the visible and invisible cultural elements, to deepen our understanding of the nexus of culture, pedagogy and outcomes. This research project does not assume that the establishment of a marae or whare in a secondary school is the single answer to improving Māori educational outcomes; rather, it foregrounds how marae-ā-kura address Māori educational aspirations that include "to live as Māori" (Durie, 2001).

Methodology

Kaupapa Māori provided the methodological approach to address the key research question and achieve the research objectives. Kaupapa Māori research locates Māori understandings as central to the research design, process, analysis and intended outcomes. A key element in the discussion of kaupapa Māori is the centrality of te reo Māori me ona tīkanga. Graham Smith (1997) writes that kaupapa Māori paradigm in education is founded on three key themes:

- The validity and legitimacy of Māori are taken for granted.
- The survival and revival of Māori language and culture is imperative.
- The struggle for autonomy over our own cultural well-being and over our own lives is vital to Māori struggle.

In addition, kaupapa Māori adherents reject a pathological approach to research. In the Māori educational context, where Māori failure has been relentlessly documented (Bishop, 1996) and victim blaming is often the norm, Māori are viewed as culturally, intellectually, and financially deficient. Encouraged by Māori educationalists, this research uses a non-pathological approach that shifts the focus from Māori underachievement to the things that are accomplished by Māori teachers, whānau and students and often go unnoticed—the pedagogy of Māori-ā-Kura is a case in point.

As a part of a wider kaupapa Māori methodology, a pūrākau approach was also employed in this study. Pūrākau was developed in Jenny Lee's (2008) doctoral thesis as a culturally defined narrative to enable the diversity and nature of Māori teachers' work to be articulated and understood within a specific context. In short, pūrākau may take various forms depending on the "story"; in this project, they will be similar to a case study; however it is the pedagogical dimension of pūrākau that means such an approach is both relevant and useful. Representing these stories as pūrākau is highly appropriate in the context of the marae-ā-kura, because this is precisely the way in which much of the learning and teaching occurred on marae—through the crafting and telling of pūrākau.

Research question

This project examines the cultural pedagogy of marae-ā-kura in mainstream secondary schools. The overarching research question was framed as follows:

> How does the culturally responsive pedagogy of marae-ā-kura operate, and what impact does this pedagogy make on the educational achievement of Māori learners and their whānau?

The key objectives of this project were threefold:

1. to provide pūrākau of each of the participating marae-ā-kura about the establishment, operation and effect of marae-ā-kura on Māori students, other students, teachers, whānau and community
2. to identify key success elements that contribute to the maintenance and practice of a culturally responsive pedagogical approach for Māori learners and their whānau
3. to investigate ways marae in schools contribute to the enhancement of educational achievement and cultural well-being of Māori learners and their whānau.

Research methods

The research team wanted to work with marae-ā-kura that are effectively used by the school and community. Based on the research team's knowledge of Māori teachers in Auckland secondary schools and Māori teacher networks, we approached three marae-ā-kura that have reo rūmaki and/or whānau units attached to them. These marae-ā-kura were therefore used daily as teaching and learning spaces and are considered by whānau as "the heart" of the school for Māori.

Thus, three marae-ā-kura in mainstream secondary schools in the Auckland region participated in this study. A total of 102 students, teachers, principals, whānau and community representatives were interviewed, and 265 students completed questionnaires.

The research methods used enabled documentation of the way in which these marae-ā-kura operated, and "measured" the effect of their pedagogy on Māori achievement by widening the lens from a focus that was primarily on academic achievement to one that included cultural well-being. These methods included:

- pūrākau
- interviews
- observations
- small-scale survey (questionnaire)
- analysis of Māori students' school achievement data and other documentation
- literature review.

Key findings

Marae-ā-kura are a kaupapa Māori intervention which provide for Māori aspirations within mainstream schooling

Marae-ā-kura were originally initiated by Māori teachers in the late 1970s as part of a wider "Māori renaissance" movement within Aotearoa. The intention of marae-ā-kura was to transform the negative experiences and outcomes of Māori learners and their families in secondary schools through the revitalisation of te reo and tīkanga Māori. Like te kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa Māori, marae-ā-kura is an intervention sourced in mātauranga Māori that includes cultural institutions, such as marae. Māori whānau and community were critical to the establishment and operation of these kaupapa Māori initiatives. Marae-ā-kura were founded on the dual aims of the regeneration of te reo and tīkanga Māori, and improving conventional secondary school educational achievement of Māori students.

The pedagogy of marae-ā-kura are clearly grounded in the kaupapa Māori concepts such as ako, and precede notions of cultural responsiveness. Whereas a culturally responsive approach in New Zealand tends to foreground the teachers' cultural and pedagogical response to Māori students, the pedagogy of marae-ā-kura is grounded in an traditional institution that brings together the "spiritual, social and personal life, linking past and present, tangata whenua and manuhiri" (Penetito, 2010, p. 211). As such, the pedagogy of marae-ā-kura is generated by cultural values and practices that guide teaching, learning and living within marae-ā-kura. For example, the practice of karakia, hui and participation in kapa haka is key part of ako in marae-ā-kura.

While marae-ā-kura share a kaupapa Māori agenda with kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa Māori, they are distinct because of their location within mainstream secondary schools. In each of the pūrākau of the three marae-ā-kura in this project, Māori teachers, students and whānau led the establishment and development of the marae in their schools. The pūrākau of each marae-ā-kura is characterised by several years (at a minimum) of struggle to establish the space, and collective commitment to making it work.

It is also apparent that in each case, the marae-ā-kura would not have been build within the environs of the mainstream school without the support of non-Māori; in particular, the support of the principals, members of the board of trustees, staff and wider community. There was a clear need for Māori to have Pākehā allies within the school community to support the establishment of the marae. Support from the wider school community is reflective of a number of things, including a discourse of multiculturalism and biculturalism that was prevalent in education at the time. The involvement and aspirations of the multicultural community in setting up marae-ā-kura are most evident in the tukutuku (woven panels), kowhaiwhai (painted panels), whakaairo (carvings) and taonga (treasures) displayed in each of the whare.

> With a marae in the school, we're not afraid to be Māori. (Year 11 student)
>
> Ko te kaupapa matua mōku ake kia noho Māori tātou ia rā, ia rā i roto i tō tātou kura, mā te marae tērā. Mā te marae, mā te whare e whakapai i tērā i waenga i a tātou ia rā (Kaiako). For me, the main purpose is to remain as Māori everyday in our school, through the marae. It is the marae and the whare that enables us to do that everyday. (Teacher)

Marae-ā-kura provide opportunities for Māori staff, students and whānau to "live as Māori" within a mainstream schooling context

Each of the marae-ā-kura provided opportunities for Māori teachers, students and whānau to engage in a range of activities in a way that would not be available to them if the secondary school did not have a marae. From the teachers' point of view, one of the primary roles of the marae-ā-kura is to provide a safe learning environment for te reo and tīkanga Māori. For example, students were encouraged to participate in all parts of the pōwhiri process, including karanga and whaikōrero, as a way of learning and teaching cultural skills (roles that young people were less likely to participate in at their tribal marae). Marae-ā-kura enabled teachers and pakeke to nurture the learners in te ao Māori. The extra opportunities marae-ā-kura provide are primarily centred on the teaching, learning and living as Māori in authentic and meaningful settings.

Marae-ā-kura activities usually always involved the whānau as active and valuable part of teaching and learning experience. Students appreciated the role parents and whānau played in providing support, guidance and knowledge on the marae, this included acting as coaches and of sports teams, fundraisers for trips, cooks for wānanga, leaders, speakers, and so on. Marae-ā-kura became a "hub" for Māori whānau for information, wānanga, kapa haka, hui, NCEA information, sports events, and celebrations. The marae-ā-kura has provided a space that is enabling of the notion of "living as Māori" both for school and wider community activities.

Teachers, students and whānau often referred to their marae-ā-kura as a place to calm and re-energise the wairua. Students relate to the marae-ā-kura as a "home away from home" which provides a space that is safe and inclusive of them, their friends, their whānau. Marae-ā-kura enable students, teachers and whānau to feel Māori within a wider non-Māori environment.

> *This [marae-ā-kura] is like another home, a second home for us. This is the place where we can come back to … for spiritual reasons. (Year 9 student)*
>
> *Having a marae at kura is quite significant, and that's because I believe I have been brought up in my college years at school around tīkanga Māori. So, if I was to go to another high school, I know I wouldn't be embraced in tīkanga Māori, like coming to a kura marae taking your hat off, taking your shoes off, speaking to reo, taking karakia in the mornings, having carvings and tukutuku—all remind you that, you know, you are Māori—and yeah, of my nanny. (Year 13 student)*
>
> *You know, for me sometimes, the marae is rejuvenation. Rejuvenation is to go back to the marae and sit there, and look at my maunga. So for me, education wise, it's really important to have that centre point, I guess it is what it is for my children. For me as a parent, it's easy for me to come here. I feel very welcome to come here. I don't have to see a teacher or talk to anyone, I just come here, sit here, and wait for my children. So the marae is like their home base, you know, it is an easy way to put it. (Mother)*
>
> *For myself, I never considered working in a kura without a marae. It just wasn't a consideration, it wasn't happening. It just wouldn't be right, because that's what I need. To be the teacher that I want to be, to be the person that want to be. That's what I need. I grew up on my marae, there everyday learning from my nannies and my koro. So why would I choose a different life, when I know how good it can be. (Teacher)*
>
> *I think it [marae-ā-kura] determines our operation every day … kua tau te wairua o ngā mātua tīpuna i waenga i a tātou, you know? That there is that wairua Māori i tua atu i te reo me ōna tīkanga, kua tau tērā wairua Māori ki roto i a tātou nei, akonga, tauira—which is something I suppose we do because of the environment that we're in, where we live, and where we are placed, and where we teach. (Teacher)*

Te reo, tīkanga and kawa provide the pedagogical and cultural basis for understanding educational achievement and cultural well-being in marae-ā-kura

For the participants in this research project, marae-ā-kura created a clearly demarcated kaupapa Māori space that was defined by te reo, tīkanga, and kawa. The cultural environment determined much of how people were expected to operate in marae-ā-kura, including pedagogical practices; whanaungatanga relationships between teachers and students, teachers and whānau, students and students, students and whānau, and whānau and whānau; and measures of educational achievement.

For many of the participants, the strength of each marae-ā-kura depended on the ability of the staff, students and whānau to understand and adhere to te reo, tīkanga and kawa of their marae. In turn, the strength of the teaching and learning occurring within marae-ā-kura was reflected and measured by the participants in the ability of Māori learners to uphold te reo, tīkanga and kawa both in and outside the school, sometimes unassisted by teachers or whānau.

> *But to me, my success is in te reo Māori. For me is, hey I know how to speak Māori and I'm quite fluent in it, and I'm proud of that … I know I can stand in both worlds, the Māori and the Pākehā worlds—and that's me, my success … those are the goals that I work towards. (Year 13 student)*
>
> *To me that marae is the heart of this kura because it's the focal point. It's the very heart of what we do here. And everything we do is based around that whare, because what comes with a whare come tīkanga, comes kawa and all those things that have been passed down from the old people to us. So we have an opportunity to pass those things on to the your people that come through here. (Teacher)*

Marae-ā-kura have significant potential to provide opportunities to enhance educational achievement for Māori students within mainstream schools

For all the participants in this project, educational achievement was not limited to academic achievement. Rather, participants' aspirations included achieving a level of competence in te reo Māori, increasing their understanding of tīkanga Māori, gaining a knowledge of mātauranga Māori, participating as Māori in wider school activities, and approaching their future with confidence. Students highlighted that in their view the marae-ā-kura played a key role in their achievement of their goals, both academic and cultural, within the schooling context. A clear point made by all was that the marae-ā-kura provided a space that students wanted to be in; teachers noted that often the students did not want to go home, and teachers, whānau and students were constantly there during and afterschool hours, including weekends and holidays.

> *Oh well it [marae-ā-kura] makes me want to come to school, cause I don't want to miss anything. (Year 13 student)*
>
> *It [marae-ā-kura] does have an impact, it has a huge impact. It inspires each and every one of us in a different way. It motivates us, it gives us goals ⋯ because we came from a [primary school] Māori unit, we were surrounded my Māori and to go to mainstream [secondary school] and to lose it, would be such a waste. (Year 13 student)*
>
> *I think, there is the pride you can see that [marae-ā-kura] kids have in being Māori. You can actually see that in quite a number of ways, there's an additional something about [marae-ā-kura] Māori that you don't see in a lot of the other mainstream Māori youngsters. It's to do with, "I can speak my own language and I understand my own culture, and I participate in all the various nuances of it whatever that might be and I've got to be an example of what's good about being a young Māori all the time". To me, that's an important success factor. (Principal)*

Critical success elements for the operation of marae-ā-kura include kaupapa Māori values and practices, appropriate staffing and resourcing, strong school relationships and structural support

When participants were asked to identify the success elements critical to their marae-ā-kura, they commonly talked about the importance of cultural values and practices (below) in the following ways:

Rangatiratanga

Participants identified the following elements as critical to success:

- strong leadership of the marae-ā-kura tumuaki based on an understanding of the kaupapa and tīkanga
- an ability to determine what marae-ā-kura do and how they operate

- a clearly demarcated kaupapa Māori space
- an understanding between school principal and marae-ā-kura tumuaki of the leadership qualities and responsibilities of each role.

Whanaungatanga

Participants identified the following elements as critical to success:

- strong, multiple relationships developed between all groups of the marae-ā-kura—whereas educational research emphasises the teacher–student relationship, the participants identified student–students relationships (such as tuakana–teina), and to a lesser extent whānau–student relationships (such as whaea/matua–tamaiti) as critical
- a good relationship with mainstream, including the board of trustees, was also necessary in the successful operation of the marae-ā-kura.

Kotahitanga

Participants identified the following elements as critical to success:

- a clear shared understanding of kaupapa of marae-ā-kura
- a collective commitment to marae-ā-kura that ensures the best educational opportunities for all the students
- the ability to work together with a team of Māori teachers, other teachers, the whānau collective and students, towards the same goals.

Tautoko

Participants identified the following elements as critical to success:

- a willingness to work, assist and support each other as Māori beyond the conventional role of teacher, student or parent
- a collective ability to support the kaupapa in whatever capacity is required.

Manaakitanga

Participants identified the following elements as critical to success:

- being able to be to provide a level of care for the whole person, including the whānau
- understanding the importance of respecting and caring for others.

Whakapapa

Participants identified the following elements as critical to success:

- a knowledge of the history and whakapapa of the marae-ā-kura
- an appreciation of the connection between the marae-ā-kura to other groups in the school and wider community
- a relationship with local hapū, iwi, or mana whenua.

Ako

Participants identified the following element as critical to success:

- a focus on teaching, learning and achievement in and outside of the classroom.
- te reo, tīkanga Māori and the marae at the centre of teaching and learning

Wairua

Participants identified the following elements as critical to success:

- the importance of spiritual sustenance
- feeling good and engendering a good feeling.

It is important to note that each of these marae-ā-kura are well established (they opened from the late 1980s to mid-1990s) and are attached to reo rumaki and/or whānau units that range from approximately 100 to 300 students. While the marae-ā-kura in this study are located in different parts of Auckland and a range of school deciles (1, 5 and 7), each has established, or is actively working towards, appropriate staffing; there are 5–8 Māori teachers and/or staff in each unit. These marae-ā-kura have also developed strong school relationships, and structural support including management and curriculum systems.

> It's [marae-ā-kura] important to me cause you learn you've got whānau here, brothers and sisters, mums and dads … its like a second marae. (Year 10 student)
>
> For me it's that whole thing of tīkanga, you know. Ko te tīkanga. Kei te tika te wairua, kei te tika te tamaiti, kei te tika tatou—that's such a powerful base to be coming from. (Teacher)

Major implications

The role of marae-ā-kura as a kaupapa Māori intervention needs to be recognised, acknowledged, and better understood as a way to address Māori educational aspirations

This study highlights that marae-ā-kura provide culturally defined spaces that have significant potential to address Māori aspirations to teach, learn and live as Māori within mainstream secondary schools. Marae-ā-kura provide an intervention that is able to enhance Māori achievement in mainstream secondary schooling.

This study calls for an inclusion of marae-ā-kura within research and policy agendas across the education sector, as a valid intervention for Māori in mainstream schooling. Furthermore, the pedagogy of marae-ā-kura draws attention to the constraints of the current dominant research and policy focus on cultural responsiveness and teacher effectives that will only go some of the way to addressing Māori educational aspirations in mainstream secondary schools.

Further research related to marae-ā-kura needs to be undertaken to support existing and future marae-ā-kura

Given the scoping nature of this study, further research needs to be conducted to better understand the state of marae-ā-kura around the country. Such research would provide the Ministry of Education and other agencies in the sector with a greater appreciation of the achievement outcomes as well as the needs of staff, students, whānau and communities involved in marae-ā-kura. There is a need for further exploration of kaupapa Māori pedagogical approaches that move beyond cultural responsiveness pedagogies and teacher effectiveness approaches.

Resources need to be provided that enable the establishment, development and successful operation of marae-ā-kura

Kaupapa Māori values and practices, appropriate staffing and resourcing, strong school relationships and structural support are all critical to the success of all involved with marae-ā-kura. Resourcing marae-ā-kura appropriately includes the development of the Māori teacher workforce, and support to increase Māori staffing of marae-ā-kura and, in particular, provide senior Māori leadership in education.

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