

## Indigenous autoethnographic reflections on the development of Indigenous practice in the Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in Māngere

**Byron Rangiwai<sup>1</sup>, Jennings George-Koteka<sup>2</sup>, Paul Hagai<sup>3</sup>, Janeca Hitchens<sup>4</sup>, Moeroa Marsters<sup>5</sup>, & Davina Vaughn<sup>6</sup>**

1. Ngāti Manawa, Ngāti Whare, Ngāti Porou, Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngā Wai a Te Tūi: Māori & Indigenous Research Centre, Unitec. [brangiwai@gmail.com](mailto:brangiwai@gmail.com)
2. Manihiki
3. Matavera, Tumutevarovaro, Pukapuka
4. Niue, Samoa, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa
5. Tongareva, Ngātangiia, Tumutevarovaro, Pamate, Aitutaki, Tokelau, Kiribati, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa
6. Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Māhanga

### Abstract

*This article presents the findings of a study exploring the transformative experiences of five students in the Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. Through an Indigenous autoethnographic approach, this paper illuminates the students' personal and professional growth, each from diverse backgrounds and professions. The research highlights the integration of Indigenous knowledge into various professional contexts, focusing on cultural identity, personal development, community engagement, and resilience. The programme, a blend of academic learning and Indigenous insights, demonstrates how education can empower individuals and communities to make significant contributions to society. The narratives of these students, reflecting their journey through cultural reclamation and personal/professional development, contribute to our understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems and their application in contemporary settings.*

### Key words

Indigenous autoethnography; Māori and Pacific cultures; cultural identity; personal growth; community engagement; Indigenous knowledge; educational transformation.

## Introduction

The Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa stands out as a specialised two-year course designed to nurture the expertise of Indigenous practitioners across diverse knowledge fields. It uniquely emphasises the development of advanced skills in specific Indigenous knowledge areas, the application of theoretical understandings, critical evaluation of literature, and reflective learning. The programme comprises five papers covering varied themes such as knowledge creation, well-being, transformation, and Indigenous wisdom, culminating in a substantial research-based project and a detailed exegesis.

Byron Rangiwai, Associate Professor of Māori Research at Ngā Wai a Te Tūi: Māori and Indigenous Research Centre, Unitec, played a pivotal role in the final year of the two-year programme as an external supervisor to five students. Before taking up the role at Unitec, Byron taught the Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme for five years. Even after his tenure at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa ended, his ongoing connection to the programme as an external supervisor underlines its enduring impact and importance in Indigenous education and practice.

This paper will explore five students' diverse and rich experiences, exploring the multifaceted nature of Indigenous knowledge and its application in various professional contexts. From Jennings George-Koteka's perspective as a Pacific youth practitioner to Paul Hagai's creative lens, Janeca Hitchens' financial expertise, and the respective social work and youth work insights of Moeroa Marsters and Davina Vaughn, this paper aims to illustrate the depth and breadth of Indigenous practice in contemporary settings. The narratives of these practitioners provide a window into the dynamic interplay of personal identity, cultural heritage, and professional and Indigenous practice, offering valuable insights into the role of Indigenous knowledge in shaping resilient, empowered, and culturally informed practitioners.

## Research approach

This work is grounded in an autoethnographic approach, which situates the research within self-reflection and narrative (Huber, 2024). This approach recognises the importance of connecting personal experiences to larger historical, cultural, social, and political realities (Tamarapa, 2024). It emphasises the role of the researcher as both a participant and a narrator, acknowledging the interplay between the personal and the collective in the construction of knowledge (Lamichhane & Luitel, 2023).

Autoethnography, as defined by Emerald and Carpenter (2017), is a method that connects personal experiences to broader societal and cultural contexts. It is seen to assert political significance through personal narratives (Boll, 2023). This approach is particularly relevant for Indigenous peoples, for whom storytelling is crucial for communication and knowledge transmission (Heaslip Kefi, 2023). As Whitinui (2014) discussed, Indigenous autoethnography is grounded in a resistance-based discourse to address social justice issues and promote social change.

Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge students write autoethnographically about their respective Indigenous practices, drawing on lived experience and critical reflections (Rangiwai, 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c;). Rangiwai's (2021) autoethnographic approach is

based on the concepts of *mōhiotanga* (experiential knowledge), *mātauranga* (acquired knowledge), and *māramatanga* (emerging knowledge), three Māori concepts which align seamlessly with the Master of Indigenous Knowledge programme. These concepts are central to Rangiwai's (2021) autoethnographic framework, enabling the integration of lived experiences with Indigenous and academic knowledge to generate new insights.



**Figure 1: *Mōhiotanga, Mātauranga, Māramatanga* (adapted from Rangiwai, 2021, p. 3).**

The guiding concepts of *mōhiotanga*, *mātauranga*, and *māramatanga* are central to this research approach. *Mōhiotanga*, focusing on personal experience, allows for deep engagement with individual narratives (Rangiwai, 2021). *Mātauranga*, representing acquired knowledge, ensures that these narratives are contextualised within the broader cultural, social, and historical contexts (Rangiwai, 2021). The concept of *māramatanga*, the enduring emergence and unfolding of new insights and understandings, signifies the transformative potential of critically reflecting on and integrating personal and collective knowledge (Rangiwai, 2021). This combination provides a comprehensive lens through which Indigenous texts and experiences can be understood.

The intersections between *mōhiotanga*, *mātauranga*, and *māramatanga*, particularly the central point where all three meet, highlight the synthesis of personal experience, acquired knowledge, and new insights. This central intersection represents the holistic understanding and integration that occurs when these three guiding concepts are harmonised. At this juncture, the transformative potential of critically reflecting on and integrating personal and collective knowledge is most potent. Focusing on the intersections, especially the central point, allows us to see how individual and collective experiences and understandings are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, leading to deeper and more meaningful insights.

An essential aspect of this methodology is its adaptability and recognition of the ongoing nature of learning and knowledge development; from this perspective, the research process is not linear but a continuous cycle of reflection, learning, and adaptation (Rangiwai, 2021). New insights and understandings that emerge during the research are continually integrated, allowing for a constantly evolving and deepening understanding of the research subject (Rangiwai, 2021).

Our research process started with collecting personal narratives, focusing on lived experiences (Adams & Herrmann, 2023). This process involved an in-depth examination of reflective narratives and related texts (Poulos, 2021). The emphasis here was on capturing the richness of lived experiences, allowing students to share their stories in their own words (Wężniewska et al., 2020) while integrating the perspective of their respective communities (Elers & Dutta, 2024). This step was crucial as it laid the foundation for understanding unique perspectives and insights (Fa'avae, 2018). For this research, we have analysed the texts of five Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge exegeses, researched and written by Jennings George-Koteka, Paul Hagai, Janeca Hitchens, Moeroa Marsters and Davina Vaughn in 2023, drawing on and discussing the emergent themes.

Each of the five master's exegeses, around 20,000 words in length, contains five chapters:

- Chapter One introduces each practitioner via a personal narrative about their upbringing and genealogy and presents a model of understanding that explains how they see the world from their unique Indigenous perspective.
- Chapter Two presents each practitioner's practice model based on values and concepts derived from their cultures, languages, elders, and lived experiences. Each practitioner's model explains how their unique values inform and shape their respective Indigenous practices.
- Informed by Indigenous methodologies, Chapter Three presents the research carried out by each practitioner with members of their respective communities. In this chapter, insights gleaned from in-depth interviews were analysed and used to shape an accompanying community project, explained in Chapter Four.
- Chapter Four explores the parameters and outcomes of a community project informed through research with community members. The project aims to provide a sustainable and transformative taonga tuku iho—a treasure handed down—to their community.
- The final part of the exegesis, Chapter Five, provides concluding reflections and understandings and posits potential areas for future research.

In addition to personal narratives—such as those that permeate Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge exegeses—the autoethnography requires a comprehensive exploration of relevant literature, cultural teachings, and social, political and historical contexts (Rangiwai, 2021; Tamarapa, 2024). As researchers, we engaged academic texts, traditional stories, oral histories, and other sources of cultural knowledge to enhance and contextualise the personal narratives gathered to inform this paper (Luitel & Dahal, 2021). This step was vital for grounding individual experiences within the milieu of cultural, social, political and historical knowledge,

providing a more nuanced understanding of the narratives (Ademowo, 2023). In this research, we enrich the students' narratives with other research findings and understandings from the literature.

The final step involved integrating personal narratives into broader knowledge systems (Rangiwai, 2021). This synthesis allowed for the discovery of new insights derived from the intersection of individual narratives with more extensive social, political, cultural, and historical contexts (Vienni-Baptista, 2024). The objective is to identify patterns, themes, and meanings that transcend individual stories, providing a deeper understanding of the collective experience (Damiano, 2024). In this research, we synthesise our findings—extrapolated from the five exegeses—within the broader cultural, social, political and historical setting within which the research took place and critically reflect on how our findings contribute to the transformation of Indigenous communities.

## **Limitations**

This study's findings are not generalisable but offer deep insights into individual experiences. The subjective nature of autoethnography also means that the narratives are personal interpretations of experiences shaped by unique memories and perceptions.

This Indigenous autoethnographic approach provides a meaningful and culturally sensitive method to explore the experiences of Indigenous students in a higher education context. It highlights the importance of personal narratives in understanding the multifaceted nature of Indigenous knowledge and its application in various professional fields.

## **Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge Programme Overview**

The Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in Māngere is an immersive two-year journey that profoundly develops and elevates Indigenous expertise (Rangiwai et al., 2019; Rangiwai, 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; Rangiwai & Simati-Kumar, 2020; Rangiwai et al., 2020a; Rangiwai et al., 2020b). Tailored for Indigenous practitioners, it encompasses a rich curriculum designed to deepen the understanding of Māori and Indigenous principles, critical literature evaluation, and reflective learning. The programme culminates in a significant research project, offering students a platform to apply and practically extend their learnings.

### **Programme Structure**

The course comprises five papers, each cultivating advanced skills in Indigenous knowledge. The structure guides students through a transformative process, from theoretical understanding to practical application in community-based projects. This approach enhances academic skills and reinforces a deep connection with Indigenous epistemologies and practices.

### **Learning Experience**

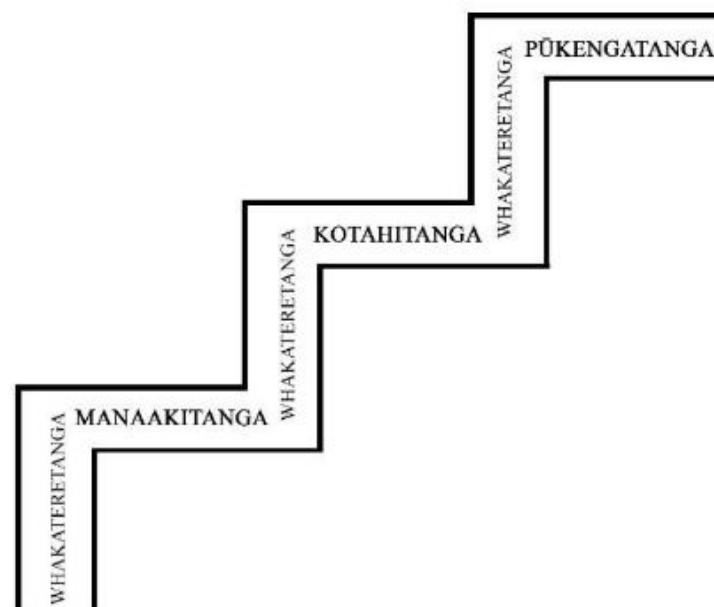
Students in the programme bring diverse professional backgrounds, enriching the learning environment with varied perspectives. The Indigenous autoethnographic approach adopted in the programme allows students to explore and reflect on their individual experiences, cultural identity, and professional practice in an integrated manner. This approach encourages a deep level of introspection and personal growth.

## Supervision and Support

The programme's reliance on external, PhD-qualified supervisors is a testament to its commitment to providing high-quality mentorship and guidance. These supervisors bring a wealth of experience and insight, enhancing the learning experience and ensuring students receive the support needed to navigate their academic journey successfully.

### Supervision approach: He Raranga Tangata

In 2019, Byron Rangiwai supervised ten students enrolled in the Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme. Reflecting on the combined supervision experiences involving Byron and his students, the following model was developed and implemented throughout the supervision and research experience.



*Figure 2: He Raranga Tangata model (Rangiwai et al., 2019, p. 9).*

The He Raranga Tangata approach was also applied in the supervision experience of Jennings, Paul, Janeca, Moeroa and Davina and included the following aspects:

**Whakateretanga** (Navigation) focuses on drive, direction, motivation, communication, productivity, and availability (Rangiwai et al., 2019). Whakateretanga provides clear direction, motivation, and open communication between supervisors and students. For example, the supervisor and students used this principle to set clear, agreed-upon objectives for each stage of their research projects while meeting regularly to ensure these objectives were met. This nurtured a sense of direction and purpose, helping students stay focused and motivated.

**Manaakitanga** (Hospitality) emphasises aroha (compassion), support, patience, honesty, and encouragement. Manaakitanga emphasised the importance of support, patience, honesty, and encouragement within the supervisory relationship (Rangiwai et al., 2019). For instance, the supervisor and students created a supportive learning environment by responding to one another's emotional and academic needs. The supervisor also offered timely and constructive feedback, encouraging a balanced work-life approach to reduce stress and enhance well-being.

**Kotahitanga** (Unity) highlights intellectual and social collectivity, group strength and support. Kotahitanga highlighted the benefits of intellectual and social collectivity (Rangiwai et al., 2019). The supervisor and students organised regular group meetings where updates around progress, challenges, and insights were shared, thereby creating a community of practice that enriched the learning experience. This helped students feel less isolated in their research efforts and benefit from their peers' collective strength and support.

**Pūkengatanga** (Expertise) pertains to teaching, modelling, imparting knowledge, providing critical feedback, and offering opportunities for growth and development (Rangiwai et al., 2019). Pūkengatanga was about cultivating expertise through teaching, modelling, critical feedback, and providing opportunities for further development. The supervisor and students connected with experts in their respective fields, thus enhancing their theoretical and practical knowledge. Additionally, encouraging students to publish articles and present at conferences could have helped them build their professional profile and expertise.

This model focuses on creating a supportive and empowering supervisory environment that enables the academic and personal growth of Māori and Indigenous master's students within an Indigenous knowledge programme (Rangiwai et al., 2019).

### **Impact and Outcomes**

Graduates of the programme demonstrate remarkable growth, both personally and professionally. The narratives of students like Jennings, Paul, Janeca, Moeroa and Davina illustrate the transformative nature of the programme, highlighting significant developments in their understanding of Indigenous knowledge and its application in various contexts. The programme successfully empowers its graduates to become leaders and change-makers within their communities, applying their newfound knowledge to promote growth and resilience in Indigenous settings (Rangiwai et al., 2019).

While many students who graduate with a Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge go on to transform their communities, the example of Tua'ipulotu William Cuthers (2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019) of Cook Islands Māori and Tainui descent stands out. William's research has been instrumental in acknowledging and celebrating the role of Pacific coastwatchers who served during the Second World War, leading to a documentary and increased public awareness of their service. His efforts culminated in formally recognising these individuals' contributions, bringing closure and pride to their many descendants. Furthermore, William's engagement in research has provided valuable insights into Māori and Pacific relational ontology (Bell, 2022; Campbell & Cuthers, 2021).

The bestowal of the matai title Tua'ipulotu, from his step-father's village in Samoa, recognising William's service to the Pacific and the coastwatchers, is a testament to his profound influence. His tireless efforts in academia and community service, alongside his professional career, have significantly contributed to Indigenous knowledge and transformation, making his achievement remarkable. Indeed, William's example has inspired many Master of Applied Indigenous Studies students and Māori and Pacific students at the University of Auckland and elsewhere, and his papers have been included as course readings in several courses.

## Summaries of Jennings, Paul, Janeca, Moeroa and Davina exegeses

### Indigenising Youth Practice: The Buff Squad by Jennings George-Koteka

Jennings narrates his transformative journey from his upbringing in Cook Islands culture to becoming a Pacific youth practitioner. He shares his impactful work in youth identity and belonging, culminating in forming the 'Buff Squad.' The narrative highlights his engagement in community projects, focusing on culturally sensitive practices in youth justice, and concludes with personal reflections on his growth as a Māori Manihikian researcher, blending academic insights with cultural introspection.

### 'Ei katu: Threading peu Māori through Aku Yanga by Paul Hagai

Paul's narrative as a Cultural Interdisciplinary Creative Practitioner is richly woven with his Aotearoa New Zealand upbringing and Cook Islands heritage. The story unfolds through metaphors of needlework, beginning with the influence of family and Cook Island traditions. It progresses through his integration of various skill sets, symbolised by the 'ei katu' floral crown, and his exploration of Peu Māori through fashion initiatives. Paul's engagement with the Cook Islands community in Aotearoa, New Zealand, nurtures inclusivity and family transformation, culminating in reflections on resilience and continuous learning.

### Indigenous Insights into Cultural Wealth: A Path to Financial Well-Being and Homeownership in South Auckland by Janeca Hitchens

Janeca presents a transformative exploration of identity, culture, and financial empowerment within Pacific/Māori communities. The narrative delves into the importance of authenticity, shaped by her cultural heritage and experiences. She introduces innovative financial literacy and homeownership strategies, engaging with community narratives to enhance collective resilience and prosperity. The work is a journey of growth and dedication to serving Pacific/Māori communities, focusing on empowerment and transformation.

### Kia mau te selenga: Navigating Space for Selenga and Utilising Song by Moeroa Marsters

Moeroa shares her journey as an Indigenous practitioner, focusing on her Tongareva heritage and the influence of her genealogy on her identity and professional approach. Her story explores Indigenous principle-based practice in social work, art, and motherhood, reconnecting Cook Islanders to their culture through song. The narrative also includes her role in cultural events like the Aku Yanga - Cook Islands Fashion Show, culminating in reflections on her identity struggles and her pathway to reconnecting with her roots.

### Te ahi kā: Where the Fires Burn, Returning Home to Heal by Davina Vaughn

Davina's biographical narrative details her journey of reconnecting with her Māori heritage. From her initial disconnection influenced by a Westernised upbringing to integrating Te Ao Māori principles into her work, Davina's story is one of resilience and rediscovery. It includes her focus on the healing journeys of single Māori mothers and a community project empowering them through cultural reconnection. The narrative concludes with her return to her marae, symbolising a spiritual homecoming and her commitment to exploring her Māori heritage.



## **Themes from the exegeses of Jennings, Paul, Janeca, Moeroa and Davina**

Jennings, Paul, Janeca, Moeroa and Davina contributed autoethnographic narratives reflecting their experiences, obstacles, and progress throughout the programme. These stories offer a rich, individualised perspective on their journeys. We also examined the community projects completed by the five master's students during the programme to enhance our understanding further. This dual approach offers a holistic view of their educational growth and development. The following themes are garnered from the students' exegeses and project work.

### **Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Identity**

The students' narratives highlight the importance of Indigenous knowledge systems, focusing on Māori and Pacific cultures (Clissold et al., 2023; Enari & Rangiwai, 2021; Rangiwai & Enari, 2023; Saunders et al., 2024). This accentuates how these knowledge systems shape cultural identity and preserve heritage (Enari & Haua, 2021; Parke & Hikuroa, 2023). Each student's narrative reflects their unique cultural background and the application of Indigenous principles in their respective fields.

Jennings discusses, "Aro'a can be expressed through various forms such as chants, dance, drumming, planting trees and vegetation and appreciating the lagoon and ocean. Aro'a is a part of our identity, and humanity reflects it, as when a man and woman fall in love, their love and connection produce new kin" (George-Koteka, 2023, p. 15).

Paul opines, "My role as a Cultural Interdisciplinary Creative practitioner involves the harmonious collaboration of my artistic skills, life experiences, and educational background. Through the carefully crafted creative platforms I have established, I am able to enhance and empower my community. These platforms serve as vehicles for instilling core values derived from the guiding principles of my practice. These values, in turn, are deeply rooted in indigenous knowledge" (Hagai, 2023, p. 18).

Janeca declares, "I have drawn strength from acknowledging the intricate connections between my cultural heritage, family bonds, and personal identity. This realisation has marked a pivotal turning point, empowering me to navigate the complex terrain of cultural identity with unwavering self-assurance and authenticity" (Hitchens, 2023, pp. 13-14).

Moeroa reflects, "This [master's research] has opened the opportunity to retrace the inner works of indigenous knowledge that I have applied through practice and the potential for new knowledge and unseen knowledge" (Marsters, 2023, p. 11). She continues, "The relationships that we have in life are further acknowledged in the underpinning values of who and where our identity comes from. Knowledge of one's ancestral place in this world can bring a sense of belonging" (Marsters, 2023, p. 26).

Davina states, "Disconnections from cultural identity can impact a sense of well-being, and influence parenting experiences" (Vaughn, 2023, p. viii) while the "transformative power of Indigenous knowledge" allows for "meaningful connections", "empowering the community" (Vaughn, 2023, p. 12).

The authors describe their journeys of integrating Indigenous knowledge into their practices, emphasising the transformative impact of Māori and Pacific cultural principles on their

professional and personal lives. They highlight the deep connections between their cultural heritage and identity, illustrating how these connections have shaped their work and community engagement approaches. The narratives reveal a profound respect and reverence for traditional knowledge systems, highlighting how these frameworks contribute to their understanding of self, family, and community roles. Several authors discuss the challenges and rewards of navigating multiple cultural identities, particularly the complexities of maintaining and celebrating Indigenous heritage within modern, multicultural environments. The authors also include deep reflections on the process of cultural transmission, particularly the importance of elders and community leaders in imparting crucial knowledge and values that guide their daily lives and professional endeavours.

### **Personal Growth and Self-Reflection**

The students' stories provide fertile accounts of personal development. Their reflections emphasised the programme's transformative impact on their personal and professional lives (Haurua & Rangiwai, 2020; Rangiwai et al., 2019; Yor, 2020). This theme underlines the power of education in developing critical self-awareness and personal growth (Assefa et al., 2024).

Jennings recalls, "I had to push myself to overcome my discomfort and ask myself why I do the things I do. Completing the required reflections every term helped me look back on my life and appreciate all my achievements. This served as a reminder of how far I have come in my life journey, with all the extensive knowledge and learnings I have accumulated as my background story" (George-Koteka, 2023, p. 75).

Paul maintains, "Mohiotanga – reflections, thinking behind the thinking in my words; this is where my journey began of discovering me" (Hagai, 2023, p. 54). Paul continues, "My growth is my family's growth, my success is my family's success, and my journey has always been their journey" (Hagai, 2023, p. 56).

Janeca asserts, "Looking inward, self-reflection reveals opportunities for improvement in addressing the multifaceted challenges our community faces" (Hitchens, 2023, p. 84).

Moeroa poetically opines:

As the sun sets and rises again  
My people continue to grow.  
Our leaders make decisions on our behalf.  
Sometimes good  
And sometimes not so good

The land, The sea  
The air we breathe.  
Is a reflection of us.

I cry for my ancestors.  
I cry for my songs, my dance.  
I cry for the vibrations of my beating heart.

The clothes we wear is a symbol of my hands.  
Many hands  
Hands that continue to fashion who we are today (Marsters, 2023, p. 66).

The educational journey facilitated a deeper understanding of the need for self-care, allowing the authors to support others effectively. This was accompanied by increased resilience, particularly through handling personal grief and challenges. The programme required authors to connect or reconnect with their cultural roots, enriching their professional practices. This included insights into Indigenous knowledge systems and their application in sectors like youth justice, highlighting the importance of culturally informed methodologies. The authors' educational experiences promoted a strong sense of community involvement, enabling them to engage in community-centric research. This contributed to their personal growth and enhanced their cultural understanding and professional development. Reflecting deeply on heritage and cultural values significantly shaped the authors' personal and professional identities. This knowledge was applied to enhance community engagements and professional practices, demonstrating the transformative power of education.

### **Challenges and Resilience**

The narratives consistently touch upon the challenges faced during the programme, including adapting to academic environments and dealing with personal trials. These issues are reflected in the burgeoning literature on the challenges faced by Indigenous students (Fa'aea & Fonua, 2021; Halabieh et al., 2022; Hollinsworth et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2021; Walton et al., 2020). The resilience displayed by the students in overcoming obstacles highlights the significance of perseverance and adaptability for Māori and Pacific students (Smith et al., 2021).

Jennings maintains, "The journey has not been easy, however. We began our master's classes during the COVID-19 lockdown and had to adapt to studying remotely. Later, we faced the Auckland floods and volunteered at a local evacuation centre to support our families and communities affected by the disaster. These challenges made concentrating difficult" (George-Koteka, 2023, p. 77).

Referring to the profound and enduring heartache of losing loved ones during his master's journey, Paul asserts, "It is important to acknowledge this because it supports the learning for me, the resilience that takes place, and the process. I have grown, I have learned, I have experienced" (Hagai, 2023, p. 55).

Janeca reflects, "This [master's] challenge beckons me to plumb the labyrinthine depths of my identity, a terrain in which I have long been entrenched in discomfort" (Hitchens, 2023, p. 10).

Moeroa contemplates, "the precious memories, 'the good and the not so good', being beneficial to our growth, the development through challenges, reconnects us to the resilience of a people" (Marsters, 2023, p. 77).

Davina avers, "My culture and reclaiming of traditional practices, language, and ceremonies which provide a source of strength, resilience, and empowerment" (Vaughn, 2023, p. 25).

The authors described significant personal challenges when returning to study after many years, including the discomfort of self-reflection and the frustration of writer's block. This experience required learning the value of constructive criticism and highlighted the necessity of pushing through discomfort and self-doubt, underscoring the resilience required in academic pursuit. One author shared a poignant account of dealing with the death of a close family member, which profoundly affected their emotional and spiritual well-being. This loss led to re-evaluating their cultural identity and the importance of transmitting cultural knowledge. It

reshaped their personal and professional life, emphasising the role of cultural preservation and resilience in overcoming personal trials.

### **Community Engagement and Leadership**

The programme's focus on empowering students to contribute to their communities is evident. The students' projects and research are geared towards addressing community issues and promoting positive change, demonstrating the role of education in advancing community transformation through the centring of Indigenous languages, knowledge and identities (Trinick et al., 2023).

Jennings reflects, "I began my youth-work career with support from my grandfather's church. This experience taught me crucial leadership skills, enabling me to excel in the community. However, I quickly realised the need to broaden my horizons beyond the church to pursue impactful youth development initiatives into the broader community (George-Koteka, 2023, p. 14).

Paul avows, "My role as a cultural interdisciplinary creative practitioner involves the harmonious collaboration of my artistic skills, life experiences, and educational background. Through the carefully crafted creative platforms I have established, I am able to enhance and empower my community" (Hagai, 2023, p. 12).

Referring to her practice as a financial advisor to Māori and Pacific families, Janeca avers, "This expansive vantage point enabled me to fine-tune my focus on comprehending our community's intricate needs and aspirations, all while acknowledging the stark challenges our communities face. My unwavering commitment, rooted in my deeply held values, is resolute, with the unchanging goal of making a profoundly positive impact, one family at a time, and continually seeking indigenous financial solutions for the well-being and homeownership of our communities" (Hitchens, 2023, p. 83).

Davina maintains, "By sharing my experiences, challenges, and reflections, [my research] aims to shed light on the importance of cultural identity and community engagement in promoting holistic well-being and empowering indigenous communities" (Vaughn, 2023, p. 12).

The authors share their own experiences, struggles, and the transformative impacts of their educational and community-focused projects, emphasising the role of Indigenous knowledge and identities in bringing about positive change. These personal accounts underline the programme's commitment to leveraging education to transform communities by integrating and centring Indigenous languages and identities. The detailed reflections exemplify their work's profound personal and communal impacts, demonstrating the transformative potential of culturally responsive education.

### **Integration of Indigenous and Academic Knowledge**

The programme integrates traditional Indigenous knowledge with academic research methodologies, highlighting a unique educational approach (Rangiwai et al., 2019; Rangiwai, 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; Rangiwai & Simati-Kumar, 2020; Rangiwai et al., 2020a; Rangiwai et al., 2020b). This integration demonstrates respect for and the value of Indigenous perspectives within academic discourse (Rangiwai, 2021).

Jennings states, “At first, adapting to the new academic environment with its American Psychological Association referencing and scholarly jargon was quite challenging and intimidating. However, with the support of my classmates and teacher, I managed to navigate this new journey” (George-Koteka, 2023, p. 75).

Paul affirms, “My practice is an integration of core elements seen through my lens as a New Zealand-born Cook Islander: My indigenous knowledge, my experiences, and my passion” (Hagai, 2023, p. 19).

Janeca avows, “This journey has not just equipped me with knowledge but a profound dedication to serve our community effectively and authentically” (Hitchens, 2023, p. 84).

Davina declares, “I have used my journey to weave my understanding of mana wāhine and how to (re)claim our knowledge and practices for Māori wāhine in my community, especially our single māmā. To (re)claim their voices and to challenge the dominant colonial hegemony” (Vaughn, 2023, p. 44).

The authors explore the profound impact of personal and community practices on personal and professional growth. They discuss the influence of their cultural backgrounds on their educational paths and career goals, emphasising the adaptation of traditional knowledge to modern educational settings. This highlights the enduring significance of Indigenous knowledge in shaping academic and professional environments.

### **Empowerment through Education**

A key theme is the empowerment gained through education, which mirrors Te Wānanga o Aotearoa’s vision of “whānau transformation through education” (Haurua & Rangiwai, 2020, p. 7; Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, n.d., n.p.). The programme equips students with advanced expertise in Indigenous knowledge, enhancing their ability to contribute meaningfully to their communities and fields (Cuthers, 2019).

Jennings states, “This project will benefit the community by addressing the cultural needs of young offenders at the earliest stages. This Kaupapa will meet the needs of the rangatahi and their family using a holistic approach that is uplifting and empowering without discrimination. By indigenising the system built on a Western construct, we will see whanau transformation” (George-Koteka, 2023, p. 73).

Paul avers, “I am a Cultural Interdisciplinary Creative, using many disciplines within the arts to enhance and empower through sharing knowledge to educate, influence, entertain, and present my people to connect, develop, and elevate” (Hagai, 2023, p. 12).

Janeca contends, “As I stand on the precipice of this transformative journey, I am resolute in my commitment to a brighter future for our Pacific/Māori communities in South Auckland” (Hitchens, 2023, p. 83). She continues, “This transformative journey has enriched my life, broadened my horizons, and allowed me to serve our community in ways I could have only dreamt of” (Hitchens, 2023, pp. 84-85).

Moeroa reveals, “What I have learnt from my life experiences and what I have learnt through applied education has shaped the concept of understanding, further highlighting the tacit knowledge (experienced and cultural learnings), both consciously and unconsciously. This

journey of understanding the principles and values embedded in my growth and development has guided my practice (Marsters, 2023, p. 9).

Davina opines, “I have developed a deeper understanding and appreciation of Te Ao Māori, which has enhanced my worldview because I have learned more about my Māori heritage. Before He Waka Hiringa, I had a more Western view that would often outweigh my thoughts and decision-making. He Waka Hiringa has given me the courage to be unapologetically Māori in my decision-making” (Vaughn, 2023, p. 61).

The authors discuss their journeys, highlighting how educational achievements have empowered them to contribute positively to their communities. They emphasise the importance of education in building self-confidence and providing the tools necessary to enact social change and support community development. The narratives often reflect the authors' challenges in pursuing higher education, including personal and family sacrifices. These stories highlight the resilience and determination required to overcome obstacles, underscoring the transformative power of education in altering life trajectories and enhancing community capacities. Education is portrayed as a catalyst for personal growth and community empowerment, with the authors advocating for its role in advancing Indigenous knowledge and practices.

## Conclusion

The Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in Māngere exemplifies the transformative power of integrating Indigenous wisdom with academic rigour. Through its innovative curriculum and supportive supervision model, the programme has developed the intellectual growth of its students and empowered them to become catalysts of change within their communities. The students' journeys, richly detailed in their autoethnographic exegesis, underscore the programme's profound impact on enhancing cultural identity, personal growth, and professional excellence.

Through the lens of Indigenous autoethnography, this study has shown how the programme encourages students to weave their cultural narratives and lived experiences with academic inquiry, resulting in a harmonious blend of experiential, acquired, and emerging knowledge. It highlights the indispensable role of Indigenous knowledge in shaping resilient, culturally grounded, and forward-thinking practitioners. The programme's emphasis on personal narratives, community engagement, and integrating Indigenous and academic knowledge has enriched the students' professional practices and contributed significantly to the ongoing discourse on Indigenous methodologies and education.

Moreover, the programme's success in creating an environment of critical reflection, mutual learning, and respect for the diversity of Indigenous cultures speaks volumes about its commitment to transformation. The graduates of this programme stand as testaments to the potential of Indigenous knowledge to inspire meaningful change and innovation across various professional landscapes.

As this study reflects, the Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme is more than an academic endeavour; it is a journey of cultural reclamation, intellectual empowerment, and community leadership. The narratives of its students resonate with the aspirations of Indigenous communities worldwide, aspiring for a future where Indigenous knowledge is not

only preserved but celebrated and integrated into the fabric of global education and professional practice. In this light, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa continues to illuminate the path forward, championing the indispensable role of Indigenous wisdom in shaping a more inclusive, resilient, and enlightened world.

## Acknowledgement

We acknowledge our respective Indigenous communities—past, present and future—for informing and shaping this study.

## References

- Adams, T. E. & Herrmann, A. F. (2023). Good autoethnography. *Journal of Autoethnography*, 4(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1525/joae.2023.4.1.1>
- Ademowo, A. J. (2023). Autoethnography: Unpacking a method and lived experience(s) as data. *ABUAD Journal of Social and Management Sciences*, 4(1), 162-171. <https://doi.org/10.53982/ajsms.2023.0401.10-j>
- Assefa, Y., Gebremeskel, M. M., Moges, B. T. & Tilwani, S. A. (2024). Transformation of higher education institutions from rhetoric commitment to a place of lifelong learning organizations: A meta synthesis study. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education* (ahead of print). <https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-07-2023-0293>
- Bell, A. (2022). Introduction: Studies of critical settler family history. *Genealogy*, 6(2), 49. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy6020049>
- Boll, T. (2023). Meet “Me” in the Field(-Notes): The Selves and Self-Relations of Autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004231196921>
- Campbell, H. & Cuthers, W. K. (2021). Heather’s homestead/Marotahei: The invasion of Waikato and ways of knowing our past in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Genealogy*, 5(4), 101. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy5040101>
- Clissold, R., McNamara, K. E., Westoby, R. & Wichman, V. (2023). Experiencing and responding to extreme weather: Lessons from the Cooks Islands. *Local Environment*, 28(5). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2023.2169912>
- Cuthers, W. K. (2018a). Chief, land, and family. *Te Kaharoa*, 11(1), 561-575. <https://doi.org/10.24135/tekaharoa.v11i1.236>
- Cuthers, W. K. (2018b). The mana model. *Te Kaharoa*, 11(1), 385-389. <https://doi.org/10.24135/tekaharoa.v11i1.220>
- Cuthers, W. K. (2018c). Reclaiming identity. *Te Kaharoa*, 11(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.24135/tekaharoa.v11i1.219>

Cuthers, W. (2019). The significance of stories. *Te Kaharoa*, 12(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.24135/tekaharoa.v12i1.266>

Damiano, N. (2024). Becoming through story: The relational processes of writing and creating the Stories project. In A. Kumar & A. Triandafyllidou (Eds.), *Migration and identity through creative writing: Stories: Strangers to ourselves* (pp. 297-333). Springer.

Elers, C. H. & Dutta, M. (2024). Local government engagement practices and Indigenous interventions: Learning to listen to Indigenous voices. *Human Communication Research*, 50(1), 39-52. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/hqad027>

Emerald, E. & Carpenter, L. (2017). Autoethnography: Is my own story narrative research? In R. Dwyer, I. Davis & E. Emerald (Eds.), *Narrative research in practice: Stories from the field* (pp. 27-46). Springer.

Enari, D. & Haua, I. (2021). A Māori and Pasifika label—An old history, new context. *Genealogy*, 5(3), 70. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy5030070>

Enari, D. & Rangiwai, B. (2021). Digital innovation and funeral practices: Māori and Samoan perspectives during the COVID-19 pandemic. *AlterNative*, 17(2), 145-354. <https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801211015568>

Fa'aea, A. M. & Fonua, S. (2021). Se'i lua'i lou le ulu taumamao: Privileging Pacific notions of success in higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 41(5), 1499-1513. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2021.1937954>

Fa'avae, D. (2018). Giving voice to the unheard in higher education: Critical autoethnography, Tongan males, and educational research. *MAI Journal*, 7(2), 126-138. <https://doi.org/10.20507/MAIJournal.2018.7.2.2>

George-Koteka, J. (2023). *Indigenising youth practice: The Buff Squad* [Unpublished master's exegesis]. Te Wānanga o Aotearoa.

Hagai, P. (2023). *'Ei katu: Threading peu Māori through Aku Yanga* [Unpublished master's exegesis]. Te Wānanga o Aotearoa.

Haurua, J., & Rangiwai, B. (2020). Digital marketing in Māori higher education: A case study of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. *Te Kaharoa*, 13(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.24135/tekaharoa.v15i1.302>

Heaslip Kefi, R. (2023). Ethical Relational Space: Autoethnographic Reflections on Learning from Indigenous Mothering. *Ethnographic Edge*, 6(2), 43-62. <https://doi.org/10.24135/ee.v6i2.264>

Hitchens, J. (2023). *Indigenous insights into cultural wealth: A path to financial well-being and homeownership in South Auckland* [Unpublished master's exegesis]. Te Wānanga o Aotearoa.

Halabieh, H., Hawkins, S., Bernstein, A. E., Lewkowict, S., Kamel, B. U., Fleming, L. & Levitin, D. (2022). The future of higher education: Identifying current educational problems and proposed solutions. *Education Sciences*, 12(12), 888. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12120888>



- Hollinsworth, D., Raciti, M. & Carter, J. (2020). Indigenous students' identities in Australian higher education: Found, denied, and reinforced. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 24(1), 112-131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2020.1753681>
- Huber, G. (2024). Exercising power in autoethnographic vignettes to constitute critical knowledge. *Organization*, 31(1), 49-65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505084221079006>
- Lamichhane, B. R., & Luitel, B. C. (2023). Postcolonial Autoethnography: Healing Wounded Humanities. *Cultural Studies - Critical Methodologies*, 23(5), 437-446. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15327086231188040>
- Luitel, B. C. & Dahal, N. (2021). Autoethnography: Writing lives and telling stories. *Journal of Transformative Praxis*, 2(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.51474/jrtp.v2i1.530>
- Marsters, M. (2023). *Kia mau te selenga: Navigating space for selenga and utilising song* [Unpublished master's exegesis]. Te Wānanga o Aotearoa.
- Parke, E. C. & Hikuroa, D. (2023). Against defending science: Asking better questions about indigenous knowledge and science. *Philosophy of Science*, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1017/psa.2023.146>
- Poulos, C. N. (2021). *Essentials of autoethnography*. American Psychological Association.
- Rangiwai, B. (2019). "Write (Right) the World": The benefits of publishing in Te Kaharoa: The eJournal on Indigenous Pacific Issues for Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge students, 2018-2019. *Te Kaharoa*, 12(1), 1-33. <https://doi.org/10.24135/tekaharora.v12i1.281>
- Rangiwai, B., Albert, M., Bell, T., Cuthers, W., Filisi, F., Hotereni, V., Lambert, C., Leuluai, R., Sasa-Tepania, L., Walker, D., & Yor, A. (2019). He Raranga Tangata: A Māori and Indigenous master's research supervision model derived from our experiences of the Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in Māngere in 2019. *Te Kaharoa*, 12(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.24135/tekaharora.v12i1.283>
- Rangiwai, B. (2020a). Facebook as a substitute for kanohi ki te kanohi in the Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in Māngere. *Te Kaharoa*, 13(1), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.24135/tekaharora.v15i1.309>
- Rangiwai, B. (2020b). The potential effects of COVID-19 on research interviews in Year 2 of the Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in Māngere. *Te Kaharoa*, 13(1), 1-13. <https://www.tekaharora.com/index.php/tekaharora/article/view/306>
- Rangiwai, B. (2020c). Supervision in the Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in Māngere. *Te Kaharoa*, 13(1), 1-11 <https://doi.org/10.24135/tekaharora.v15i1.30>
- Rangiwai, B., & Simati-Kumar, B. (2020). A plan for online teaching and learning for the Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge (MAIK) programme in Māngere: Responding to COVID-19. *Te Kaharoa*, 13(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.24135/tekaharora.v15i1.290>
- Rangiwai, B., Simati-Kumar, B. & Mataroa, R. (2020a). The He Waka Hiringa Map 2020-2021: Using He Raranga Tangata to support the implementation of the He Waka Hiringa Map

in the Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in Māngere. *Te Kaharoa*, 13(1), 1-12. <https://www.tekaharoa.com/index.php/tekaharoa/article/view/294>

Rangiwai, B., Simati-Kumar, B., & Mataroa, R. (2020b). The impacts of COVID-19 on the 2020 cohort of the Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in Māngere. *Te Kaharoa*, 13(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.24135/tekaharoa.v15i1.301>

Rangiwai, B. (2021). It's about me! My approach to autoethnography. *Te Kaharoa*, 14(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.24135/tekaharoa.v17i1.355>

Rangiwai, B. & Enari, D. (2023). Indigenous cultures and post-mortem photography. *Photography and Culture*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/17514517.2023.2228586>

Saunders, C., Dalziel, P., Reid, J. & McCallum, A. (2024). Knowledge, mātauranga and science: Reflective learning from the interface. *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand*, 54(2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/03036758.2023.2202408>

Smith, H., Wolfgramm, E. & Gillon, A. (2021). *He Vaka Moana: Navigating the success of Māori and Pasifika students in higher education*. AKO Aotearoa.

Tamarapa, A. (2024). *Whatua Mai te Aho: The Role of Museums in the Maintenance of Māori Weaving as a Living Cultural Practice* [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. Victoria University of Wellington. <https://doi.org/10.26686/wgtn.24938499>

Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. (n.d.). *Ngā uara: Our mission, vision, and values*. <https://www.twoa.ac.nz/te-whare/nga-uara>

Trinick, T., Allen, P. & Dale, H. (2023). Te huarahi Māori: Revaluing the role of indigenous language, knowledge, and identity in high-performing education systems. In W. O. Lee, P. Brown, A. L. Goodwin & A. Green (Eds.), *International handbook on education development in the Asia-Pacific* (pp. 1973-1993). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-6887-7\\_111](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-6887-7_111)

Vaughn, D. (2023). *Te ahi kā: Where the fires burn, returning home to heal* [Unpublished master's exegesis]. Te Wānanga o Aotearoa.

Vienni-Baptista, B. (2024). Investigating interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity: How meta-ethnography contributes to the study of collaborative research practices. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069241226528>

Walton, P., Hamilton, K., Clark, N., Pidgeon, M., & Arnouse, M. (2020). Indigenous university student persistence: Supports, obstacles, and recommendations. *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne de l'éducation*, 43(2), 430–464. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26954694>

Wężniejewska, P., Szwabowski, O., Szczepaniak, C., & Pławski, M. (2020). The Praise of Collective Autoethnography. *Cultural Studies - Critical Methodologies*, 20(4), 336-349. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708619863447>

Whitinui, P. (2014). Indigenous autoethnography: Exploring, engaging, and experiencing “self” as a native method of inquiry. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 43(4), 456-487. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241613508148>

Yor, A. (2020). *Native displacement in the twenty-first century: Applying leadership knowledge*. Xlibris.