

# WĀNANGA

Māori students enjoying and achieving success as Māori

## The origin and purpose of wānanga

Rangiātea is considered to be the first whare wānanga, a building in the 12th heaven where the baskets of knowledge were suspended. Tane received these baskets of knowledge as a gift from Io (the supreme being).

Within English language construction the word wānanga can be a noun, a verb, an adjective and a metaphor.

As a noun, wānanga is still considered to be a place of higher learning. As a verb, wānanga is about engaging in the process of sharing and reflecting upon current understandings that leads to decision-making for future success and the creation of new knowledge. As an adjective, for example in whare wānanga, it describes the house as a house of learning.

As a metaphor, wānanga helps me to describe the feeling that learning in such a way evokes - one of equity, shared visions and ako, where knowledge is co-created. Wānanga is a safe space, one where decisions and pathways are determined through participation and engagement of all, with heart and head.

Charles Royal talks about the purpose of the wānanga process as enabling the creative mind or 'mahara' (conscious awareness) to emerge.

## Marae-based wānanga

Marae are places where theory meets practice, where spiritual meets secular, where tikanga meet Pākehā conventions. It is where the wānanga process privileges school leaders and the Kia Eke Panuku team to meet at the behest of local people, many of whom are both local knowledge holders and cultural leaders.

The marae as a place of learning can tip 'normal' paradigms on their head so that: learned leaders can become willing novices; literate knowledge holders can feel like illiterate knowledge seekers; power holders can become acquiescent learners willing to yield their power.

Wānanga allow Māori to lead the debate.

## Modelling culturally responsive and relational pedagogy

Through the different exercises that take place, the Kia Eke Panuku team is able to role model for schools the kinds of pedagogies, decision-making processes and effective relationships that it hopes to see develop in the schools.

Wānanga creates a space where culturally responsive and relational pedagogy is evident and happening. It creates the space for schools to connect with each other and for critical learning conversations to happen.

85% NCEA Level 2 & qualifications for tertiary education



**Kia Eke Panuku**  
building on success

## **Modelling culturally responsive and relational pedagogy cont'd**

The core values of the programme are reflected in the way schools are challenged to learn about and from each other (whanaungatanga at the start of the wānanga drives that process); to share knowledge by working in diverse teams (mahi tahi); and to see and understand how important culture is in helping Māori students enjoy education and to succeed as Māori.

## **Focusing on the kaupapa**

Wānanga provide a place for Strategic Change Leadership Teams to step away from the day-to-day distractions of schools, providing a place where they can focus on achieving the aims of Ka Hikitia. They come prepared to talk about 'why' they are personally, morally and professionally invested in Māori student outcomes, while working together as communities of practice. They are also connecting the 'why' to the 'what' and the 'how' of their actions located within their own critical cycle of learning.

## **Non-judgmental**

Kia Eke Panuku wānanga have been non-judgmental places for learning and theorising. There is no distinction between the expert and the learner.

## **Responsive to the current work**

As with all aspects of Kia Eke Panuku, out of school wānanga are specifically planned to model culturally responsive and relational pedagogy. This means that the content of each wānanga is connected to the current work in schools and the new learnings that are emerging. It also means that the activities within each wānanga all use, and so try to model, teaching and learning strategies that can be utilised in staff professional learning and development and in classroom practice.

## **Activating agency**

Wānanga enacts and embeds the culturally responsive and relational pedagogy at multiple levels. As kaitoro, we model these principles and take the opportunities throughout the wānanga to make explicit links to these principles so others are able to understand and participate fully.

By using wānanga as the way of working and organising ourselves we support the practices associated with wānanga such as karakia, whakawhanaungatanga and all voices contributing.

As a result of unlearning and relearning, wānanga provide a boost of energy and enthusiasm for schools generated by interrogating their own evidence and renewed conscientisation. Wānanga provide us all with an effective launching pad and the actions that result from wānanga have a direct and indirect benefit for Māori students.

It is a powerful process.

*This document is part of the Voices from Kia Eke Panuku series, written by members of the team to support schools on their Kia Eke Panuku journey.*