



Wānanga from te ao Māori

Rangiātea is considered by many to be the first whare wānanga, a building in the twelfth heaven where the baskets of knowledge were suspended. According to some, it was Tane who received these baskets of knowledge as a gift from Io, the supreme being.

As a metaphor within te reo Māori, wānanga can help us to describe the feeling that learning in such a way evokes - one of equity, shared visions and ako, where knowledge is co-created. Charles Royal talks about the purpose of wānanga as enabling the creative mind or 'mahara' (conscious awareness) to emerge. Therefore, wānanga must be safe spaces where decisions and pathways can be determined through the participation and engagement of all.

I always feel privileged to be accepted onto a marae, whatever the kaupapa, whanaungatanga always trumps it all. I was reminded again of the power of this tikanga and I was impressed by my fellow ākonga and how they opened up, and I found connections with the stories of the lives of others.

Wānanga participant

Wānanga from te ao Pākehā

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

I heard fellow ākonga talk of how the system was built for them to succeed, as white middle class participants. I hated school. I feel like I was forever arguing with the teachers and longing for better connections and relationships to be made. We didn't all fit, and I knew something was not right. It breaks my heart that this is still apparent in our education system and our wider society. I need now to shift my thinking and build my muscle for challenging this reality in the right way. I need to become a driver of change and connect to those who commit to this same battle.

Wānanga participant

Marae-based wānanga

Marae are places where theory meets practice, where spiritual meets secular, and where tikanga supersedes Pākehā conventions. Maraе-based wānanga invite educators and school communities to meet at the invitation of mana whenua. As a place of learning, marae can tip colonial paradigms on their head so that learned leaders can become willing novices; literate knowledge holders can feel like illiterate knowledge-seekers; and power holders can become acquiescent learners willing to yield their power.

The conversation and learning in this wānanga has hit hard. I went through a lot of emotions, the first being shock and anger, then tears. The new learnings left me feeling ashamed. As a Pākehā, I feel obligated to drive change within our society. I feel that I have a part in righting the wrongs of my ancestors.

Wānanga participant

Modelling cultural relationships for responsive pedagogy

Marae-based wānanga are specifically planned to model cultural relationships for responsive pedagogy. This means that the focus of each wānanga is connected to the current work within a community and the new learnings that are emerging. It also means that the activities undertaken model the kinds of pedagogies, decision-making processes and mana ōrite focused relationships that can be utilised across community contexts.

Our whanaungatanga reminded me of why this process is so important with our students; discovering ways we connected with one another and, through surprisingly honest introductions, creating a safe space in which to build on those relationships and work alongside one another in our learning.

Wānanga participant

Focusing on the kaupapa

Wānanga provide different cultural spaces for community members to step away from the demands of their day-to-day realities. Working to an agreed kaupapa they allow different groups to connect with each other, to share experiences and challenges, and collectively consider, plan and review past or future actions.

This wānanga has also made me much more aware of my own practice and the need for me to always keep this kaupapa at the front of my thinking. I am very grateful for this experience and honoured to be part of it. It is time for change. Not one more generation! Not one more child to be subjected to this system that oppresses their right and ability to succeed.

Wānanga participant

Links to Te Hurihanganui Pou and Principles

As a Māori way of being and learning, wānanga draw from the Te Hurihanganui pou *Kaupapa Maori*. The *Critical Consciousness* pou is also activated by challenging the western practices of importing programmes, theories and responses developed by experts in favour of the community based, collaborative focus of wānanga.

The Te Hurihanganui principles: *Te Ao Māori, Tino Rangatiratanga, Whanaungatanga, Te Ira Tangata, Mana Ōrite* and *Te Hāngaitanga* are used to examine, deconstruct and shift the traditional systems and structures that are still present in schools or centres and create space to explore, understand and become critically conscious of new cultural norms and structures.