

# **The Māori Prison Educator**

by

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# Abstract

Māori are severely over-represented in the prison population of Aotearoa New Zealand, making up over half of all prisoners, despite being only about 15 percent of the national population. These Māori statistics are well known to the general population, and tend to add to racist perceptions of Māori in general. There is substantial literature on Māori imprisonment to be found within criminology and related fields, but it mostly focuses on ‘fixing’ the prisoner. There is very little existing research on the experiences of those who work in prisons, and little if any research on the experiences of Māori educators working in prisons.

The question of working as a Māori educator in prison is explored in this dissertation using Kaupapa Māori as a framework that aligns with Māori cultural practices and perspectives. The two sources of data used to investigate the question are, first, collecting information from the literature, and second, writing fictionalised autoethnographic stories based on my experiences as a Māori prison educator.

Prison education focuses on changing behaviours that lead to offending and helping prisoners to gain work and life skills. But security concerns and managing the prison population take precedence and restrict the availability and priority given to education. The recent introduction of the Hōkai Rangi strategy has generated optimism, but has yet to be translated into positive results. Efforts are being made to improve the integration of Māori culture in the prisons, but it is unclear how committed the Department of Corrections is to education for Māori prisoners.

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# Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the Acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

*Signed:*

*Date: 26 February 2021*

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Mereana Te Pere

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# Chapter One: Introduction

“If you can’t speak on behalf of your people why are you here?”

- Te Arikinui Dame Te Ātairangaikaahu

The aim of this research is to document and analyse my own experiences leading Māori prisoner education in a men’s prison in the Waikato region. The principles of Kaupapa Māori research are used to guide all decisions involved in carrying out this research, which uses autoethnographic methods to write narratives that record details of my experiences, both positive and negative, working in this role within the prison system. These narratives are analysed together with critical synopses of relevant research and policy literature, to generate novel insights that have potential to inform future policy and planning processes for prison education. The question of education for Māori prisoners sits at the intersection of three challenging topics: Māori education; prison education; and Māori in prison. Some aspects of this complex topic are outlined below.

## **Background and context**

There is severe over-representation of Māori prisoners in Aotearoa New Zealand: about 55% of the prison population is Māori, and the rate of incarceration of Māori males aged between 19 and 28 is up to 10 times that of non-Māori (McIntosh & Workman, 2017). In 2009, 3% of all 25-year-old Māori men were in prison. These shocking statistics mean that New Zealand prisons are “largely holders of Māori flesh and blood” (McIntosh & Workman, 2017, p. 726). McIntosh and Workman make the wry observation that the high Māori proportion of prisoners is “probably the most widely known social statistic in New Zealand” (p. 726). McIntosh and Workman point out that the Māori prisoner population does not reflect the overall Māori population in other ways as well, saying:

The Māori prison population overwhelmingly comes from communities that live under conditions of scarcity and deprivation. Moreover, it is difficult to not recognise the significance of gang membership in terms of the prison population. (McIntosh & Workman, 2017, p. 726)

Kaupapa Māori can be a useful theory for educational leadership research (Smith, 2012). Kaupapa Māori offers a paradigm for Māori leadership within the prison that is aligned with the views of a Māori person on the topic of Māori in prison. “Educational leadership has been identified as a key factor in raising achievement, particularly among Indigenous and other minoritized students” (Hohepa, 2013, p. 628), but Māori educational leadership and generic educational leadership are two distinctly different forms of leadership. “Indigeneity enables the realization of Māori aspirations and the meeting of Māori needs” (Hohepa, 2013, p. 629), but there are tensions that can impact on the Māori leader. Problems arise when trying to fit Māori leadership into generic conceptions of educational leadership that are not grounded in a Māori world view.

## **Research question and rationale**

This research is guided by the question:

**What are the nature and causes of the challenges faced by a Māori prison educator?**

A competent leader of education for Māori prisoners needs a sound understanding of the background and existing research relevant to this question (Hohepa & Robinson, 2008). Although there is substantial literature on Māori imprisonment to be found within criminology and related fields, most of this research focuses on ‘fixing’ the prisoner. There is very little existing research on the experiences of those who work in prisons (Bygnes, 2014), and little if any research on the experiences of Māori educators working in prisons. The views of someone like me as an ‘insider-outsider’ offer a unique perspective that is not represented in the existing literature. The following section is an autobiographical narrative that traces a selective story of my upbringing, education, life and work experience. It introduces me to the reader, and explains my connection to the research question explored in this dissertation.

## **My story, and how I came to be doing this research**

Growing up in the small rural town of Te Puke in the Bay of Plenty, all the ‘naughty’ kids at the back of the class were my whānau. I spent years watching them get growled at, sent to detention, and given ‘zero’ one-on-one teaching time. They regularly got kicked out of class, placed on detention, and told they were useless. I got the same looks of “you’re never going to amount to anything” as well, but I never made a scene, I was clever and did my work, so most of the insults I received were mumbled.



But at home on the pā, things were different. There wasn't an area where the naughty kids sat. To our elders we were all naughty, but we were all loved, and we belonged to everyone. The dynamics were different on the marae. Everyone, including the children, had a job and a purpose, and that effort contributed to everyone's overall success. The people washing dishes and peeling potatoes were considered just as valuable and important as the elders giving speeches. We all worked as a unit, and everyone pitched in. We were all important. It's for this reason I could never separate myself from the ones that the teachers called 'the naughty ones'. To me we were connected and part of the same whole. Our families always reminded us we come from the same whenua and bloodlines. So it was our duty as a Māori family to take care of one another. That is what I was always taught when I was young. And this has stayed with me ever since. The rest of the world couldn't separate us either, and we were only ever "those bad kids".

As we grew, some of those naughty kids turned into naughty adults. I spent more years watching them drop out of school. By Year 13, there were only three of us still catching the bus to school from the marae. I watched my 'wayward' whānau become parents at 14 or 15 years old—before they even knew what an ovary was. I watched them struggle to live independently as we became adults. Couch surfing and stealing was how they ate and survived. I watched them sit around each day, not knowing what to do with themselves. Lost, without any direction for what to do with their lives. Everything out in the wider world seemed so difficult and foreign to them, so they never tried, most likely for fear of embarrassing themselves. I watched as society, including me, left them behind. We all grew into adulthood and went on to live our lives, while they retreated into their own smaller groups.

The local gangs were always recruiting and would usually pick up 'the lost ones' if they hadn't already. How could these lost souls say 'no' to a family who accepts the worst parts of them? But for most of these whānau, the gang patches and red bandanas they donned were inherited. In our small town there aren't many opportunities for work. Locals don't usually get hired because migrant workers are cheaper and complain less. What did pay well was selling drugs. The partners, who were usually young mothers, were supportive, as they needed an income stream, and women are more approachable to buyers, which is good for sales. Job suitability was an obvious attraction - no experience necessary, no reference checks, they can make money quickly, and there's the added bonus of no tax. There is, of course, a high risk of being caught

and convicted due to it being illegal, but for those living below the poverty line, the risk is worth the reward. So eventually I would go on to watch some of my whānau get arrested.

As an adult, my career morphed into a series of roles that always centred around supporting Māori rangatahi and families through some form of hardship – drug and alcohol addiction mentoring, youth work, teacher aide, learning support, sport development, hauora, and others. Initially, when I first left home, these jobs were only ever a means to an end so I could survive and pay bills, but over time, this line of work slowly progressed into a professional career, a full-on passion and commitment, and a niche that I was pretty darn good at. My youth, knowledge in sport and health, and sister-like relatability made me a suitable and attractive candidate for health-related positions with Māori organisations and roles, and I jumped at every opportunity.

When my first years of university were complete, I decided to relocate to Manurewa with my toddler daughter in tow. I knew nothing about the big smoke or South Auckland except that it was a place where I could run away from my personal skeletons and start afresh. Fast forward to 12 years later, and I was an established Community Youth Worker and Teacher. I was working with the most poverty-stricken families and ‘hard to reach’ teenagers from across South Auckland.

When I decided to accept the position as an Education Tutor in a Waikato men’s prison, I knew it would be a demanding role. Probably my toughest gig yet. And I wasn’t wrong—but it wouldn’t be for the reasons I originally thought. This research explores what made it so hard to be a Māori prison educator.

## **Overview of dissertation chapters**

This chapter has introduced the topic, the researcher and the question explored in this dissertation. Chapter Two explains how the research was undertaken. Chapter Three explores the research question using research and policy literature. Chapter Four presents autoethnographic narratives of typical challenges for a Māori prison educator. Chapter Five draws together the themes of the previous chapters to provide some insights about the research question. Chapter Six summarises the outcomes of the research.

# Chapter Two: Methodology

The purpose of research is to discover new knowledge by exploring issues and answering questions. By furthering understanding about the world, research can help us learn how to improve and enhance our world (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998). Educational research is a form of social science research, which claims to provide objective knowledge about the social world. But research inevitably reflects the underlying, implicit beliefs and perspectives of the researcher. How a researcher views the world will influence the tools they use, the issues they reflect on, and how their findings are reported to others. The range of research methodologies available help to accommodate differing stances and approaches. Although traditional social science research methodologies are still influenced by science and quantitative approaches, new forms of research have emerged in recent decades within education. Two influences that are reflected in the methodology of this dissertation research are the auto-turn, which means beginning from the researcher as a source of data (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), and the cultural turn, which involves recognition of the extent to which so-called ‘objective’ methods of research are never completely free from cultural bias (Denzin et al., 2008).

The methodology chosen for this dissertation is appropriate for the investigation of a distinctively Māori educational scenario. Kaupapa Māori provides a foundation for theory and research that aligns with and therefore maintains cultural integrity when investigating Māori issues. The autoethnographic approach taken in this investigation aims to expose as honest an account of the researcher’s voice as is possible (Mihaere, 2015). These two influences are explored in more detail in the following sections.

## **Kaupapa Māori research framework**

Kaupapa Māori is especially useful for Māori researchers undertaking research with Māori, with the outcomes intended to benefit Māori (Walker et al., 2006). It is the practice and philosophy of living a Māori culturally informed life (Pihama et al., 2002). Kaupapa Māori theory developed in the 1980s from Māori struggles over the legitimacy of Māori identity and the ways in which Māori know and do things (Smith, 2003). As a colonized people, Māori have experienced the erosion and subjugation of their knowledge, language and culture. Kaupapa Māori theory is a response to Eurocentric, deficit-based theories and

research practices applied to Māori. Kaupapa Māori research has been developed as a more adequate approach for researching questions that are important to Māori. Kaupapa Māori challenges prevailing ideologies and social practices that disadvantage Māori (Smith, 2012).

Kaupapa Māori theory has specific procedures and techniques that help to identify, select, process and analyse information in a manner that upholds and validates the cultural perspectives of the Māori researcher and the Māori being studied. Historically, research methods assumed the researcher was an objective outsider to the community being researched, devoid of culture and studying without influencing what they were studying (Pihama et al., 2015). Kaupapa Māori research allows the researcher to embrace their own indigenous methodologies, within their own Māori societies, thereby supporting and growing the Māori leader (Hiha, 2016). Used in this way, Kaupapa Māori is an effective framework which ensures guidance and support within a Māori context.

This research is intended to amplify the voice and highlight the experiences of Māori within the prison community. Kaupapa Māori research enables me to analyse and understand the power structures of prison hierarchy from my Māori viewpoint. Highlighting the voices of Māori provides a means for identifying solutions. To research Māori prison education using Kaupapa Māori principles means that research proceeds from the perspective of Māori as people, irrespective of whether they may be employees or prisoners.

The principles of Kaupapa Māori have evolved and been added to by Māori scholars over time. The following principles of Kaupapa Māori theory guide how research into the Māori community within the prison proceeds.

### ***Tino Rangatiratanga - Self-determination***

Tino Rangatiratanga relates to sovereignty, autonomy, control, self-determination and independence. Tino Rangatiratanga asserts and reinforces the goal of seeking more meaningful control over one's life and cultural well-being. Within the context of Māori prison education, Tino Rangatiratanga provides space and support for the inclusion of Mātauranga and Tikanga Māori.

### ***Taonga Tuku Iho - Cultural Aspirations***

Taonga tuku iho asserts the centrality and legitimacy of Te Reo Māori, Tikanga and Mātauranga Māori. Within a Kaupapa Māori paradigm, these Māori ways of knowing, doing and understanding the world are considered valid in their own right, which also allows spiritual and cultural awareness to be taken into account. A Māori prison educator will be expected to have relevant skills and knowledge of taonga tuku iho, and to be able to incorporate them in the education programmes they create and deliver.

### ***Kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kāinga - Socio-Economic Mediation***

This principle asserts the need to mediate and assist in the alleviation of negative pressures and disadvantages experienced by Māori communities. This principle asserts a need for Kaupapa Māori research to be of positive benefit to Māori communities. Māori prison educators are mindful of the need to support Māori prisoners to prepare for life in the outside world upon their release, and the importance of work-related skills as well as life skills in general.

### ***Whānau - Extended Family Structure***

The principle of Whānau acknowledges the relationships that Māori have to one another and to the world around them. Whānau, and the process of whakawhanaungatanga are key elements of Māori society and culture. This principle acknowledges the responsibility and obligations of the researcher to nurture and care for these relationships. Māori prison staff are likely to encounter whānau among the prisoners or other staff. Relationships with other staff and prisoners are important in the work of Māori prison staff, and are not distinct from whānau relationships.

### ***Kaupapa - Collective Philosophy***

The 'kaupapa' refers to collective Māori visions and aspirations. Larger than simply the topic of the research, the kaupapa refers to the political aspirations of the Māori community. Prison is a political issue for Māori given the over-representation of Māori in prison; therefore research on Māori prison education has political significance.

### ***Te Tiriti o Waitangi***

Te Tiriti o Waitangi is a crucial document which defines the relationship between Māori and the Crown in New Zealand. It affirms the tangata whenua status of Māori in New Zealand and their rights as citizens. Te Tiriti o Waitangi therefore provides a basis through which Māori may critically analyse relationships, challenge the status quo, and affirm Māori rights. Te Tiriti

o Waitangi is also central in the relationships between Māori prisoners and staff and the non-Māori people and structures of the prison environment.

### **Autoethnographic research approach**

There are two non-empirical sources of data that are drawn on in this research project, neither of which involves directly collecting information from other people. First, I have undertaken critical readings of literature, to investigate my question through the research literature in relevant fields, supplemented by other documents such as policy texts. Second, I have written autoethnographic narratives that record and analyse my own experiences as a Māori educator working in the prison. Combining and synthesising the results of these two strands generates insights into, and recommendations for, the neglected but important area of educational leadership concerned with the education of Māori prisoners.

### **Ethical considerations**

Formal ethics approval from AUTEK is not required for this research project since no information will be collected from any other person, but ethical concerns are still of significance. Since this study is set inside the secure milieu of the prison system, I have ethical obligations to ensure the safety of all the information within my dissertation. To work as a Māori prison educator presents ethical dilemmas, which are explored in detail in this research. Ethical considerations in this dissertation project can be considered in terms of the autoethnographic study design, and the reflexive nature of the topic.

#### ***Ethics in autoethnography***

As an autoethnographic study, it is important to pay attention to ‘relational ethics’ (Ellis, 2007), which refers to the need to ensure the researcher protects the privacy of others with whom they engage, and who appear in their narratives. In the research narratives presented in this dissertation, I have fictionalised my experiences, changing names and details to the extent that it would not be possible for readers to identify the places and people included (Chang, 2008).

#### ***Being Māori, researching Māori prison education***

This research is reflexive in the sense that I am turning the research lens on myself, my work in prisons, and my own people, as represented among the prisoner population. Therefore,

although formal ethics is not required, it is imperative to remain aware of the ethical sensitivity and implications of all aspects of this research. To adopt Kaupapa Māori research principles helps align the research methodology with the research context, to avoid ‘othering’ the Māori prisoners who are at the heart of this research. as a Māori researcher writing about Māori prison education, I have ethical obligations to my iwi and to Māori in general to ensure that my research is politically sound, and explicitly excludes damaging ideas about Māori typical of Eurocentric research, as guided by the principles of Kaupapa Māori approaches in education.

# Chapter Three: Literature Review

Education within prison walls is a complex idea, reflecting the overlapping layers of history, culture, belief systems and politics that are erected from the minds and hearts of the people that fill such a space. The purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of information garnered from the research literature that builds up a background picture explaining the dynamics and challenges inherent in the everyday work of a Māori prison educator. The chapter is organised under the following five main section headings:

- Definitions of prison education
- Agnosis and normalisation of Māori imprisonment
- Education for prisoners in Aotearoa New Zealand
- Māori culture in prison education
- Expectations of a Māori prison educator.

## **Definitions of prison education**

This research investigates aspects of prison education in Aotearoa New Zealand, so it is important to consider exactly what is defined by this term (Devine, 2010). Education is a contested idea. Aristotle said that “educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all” – stressing that true education develops good morals and human character alongside the intellectual mind. Nelson Mandela stated that “education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world” – reinforcing that education is a tool and a weapon that should be wielded to remove inequality and foster peace. There is also a Māori whakataukī that proclaims “Mai i te kopae ki te urupa, tātou ako tonu ai” which translates as “from the cradle to the grave, we are forever learning” – reasserting that learning occurs in every situation and at every stage of life. However, the concept of education inside the prison world differs from how the rest of society understands education. Prison culture has its own norms and etiquette. The prison *learning* culture also has its own subset of nuances. It is a space of intersecting and competing principles, such as ‘education is a privilege’ versus ‘education is a right’; or ‘culture is a solution to offending’ versus ‘culture is the reason for offending’. Opposing positions of inmates, staff, and prison authorities make prison education a contentious space. Education within prison walls is an intercultural phenomenon, mixing teaching culture, prison culture and the political rhetoric of the day (Wright, 2005).



In this dissertation, two levels of meaning of the term ‘prison education’ are distinguished; and it is worth remembering that both levels are in operation throughout the specific life-story and trajectory of experience and emotional impact for the individual prisoner. Firstly, once a person arrives in the prison environment, a form of ‘prison education’ comes into play, which is commonly known as ‘prison life’—a reference to the need for the prisoner to rapidly develop skills and strategies to help them survive their incarceration, within the micro-level norms and power dynamics at play in their particular prison milieu. The (re-)acculturation process begins (Andrae et al., 2017). There are hierarchical dynamics between the staff and the prisoners, and amongst the prisoners themselves. The tenuous relationships compel behaviours to be disingenuous in order for inmates to manage power struggles as much as possible. Prisoners quickly learn that surviving prison requires foresight, tact and discipline.

The second level of meaning of the term ‘prison education’ refers to the formal systems and programmes of education provided for prisoners, with which this dissertation is centrally concerned. The New Zealand Department of Corrections bases its definition of education in prisons on what is outlined as the minimum entitlements to education for prisoners in the Corrections Act 2004. In the Act, it states that “a prisoner is entitled to access to further education that, in the opinion of the prison manager, will assist in (i) his or her rehabilitation, or (ii) a reduction in his or her reoffending, or (iii) his or her reintegration in to the community” (New Zealand Legislation, 2004). The Crown however is not required to provide a prisoner with any of the education mentioned “unless (a) there is an entitlement to receive that education free of charge” or “(b) the education is (i) provided to a prisoner with poor literacy skills; and (ii) designed to improve those skills” (New Zealand Legislation, 2004). The Department of Corrections keeps its approach to education aligned with the legal minimum entitlements, offering a very narrow window of information and accessibility to knowledge and learning for inmates.

As the prison population is so heavily weighted towards Māori men and women, prison education is also in a sense a form of Māori education. For this reason, the fourth section below considers how Māori cultural knowledge has been incorporated into formal programmes of prisoner education. The Department of Corrections takes the stance that applying Māori cultural frameworks to all programmes ensures the Māori perspective is considered, thereby being more responsive to Māori learners. The intended outcome is for the prisoner to attain a

strengthened sense of cultural identity, which promotes positive behaviour change and therefore reduces the likelihood of reoffending (Campbell, 2016). The authenticity and appropriateness of the design, implementation and delivery process of Māori cultural knowledge will be examined further below.

First, however, it is important to provide a background context about how New Zealand prisons became filled with Māori people, and how different factors contributed to mass Māori incarceration, forming the prison climate that exists today. That is, a space where Māori inmates and Māori people wrestle with the government to authentically practice Māori culture. Additionally, in society, the image of the prison population as being predominantly Māori has created a belief that Māori are born criminals. This belief holds that they are deficient *because* of their culture, and that it is the government that can fix them correctly.

### **Agnosis and normalisation of Māori imprisonment**

Agnosis is succinctly defined as “managed ignorance” (Stanley & Mihaere, 2018, p. 114), an ideological process involving social amnesia and propaganda originating in colonialism, which plays an important role in ‘normalising’ Māori crime and imprisonment in social discourses in Aotearoa New Zealand. Agnosis is therefore an important concept for understanding Māori imprisonment and Māori prison education. Agnosis is intimately involved in power relations in society; in this case, the power relations between Māori and Pākehā in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Agnosis in relation to Māori crime and incarceration has “deep roots that cut across multiple sites of power” (Stanley & Mihaere, 2018, p. 114)

Colonisation has always depended on the construction of ignorance - about the culture, language, beliefs and being of the ‘Other’ - and the situation within New Zealand has been no different. The colonial history of violence, suppression and incarceration of Māori by Pākehā settlers remains largely ignored, and the impact of neo-colonial harms is, in partial consequence, neutralised. The ‘success’ of colonial power is such that the over-representation of Māori as prisoners is now regarded as a normalised, inevitable feature of life. (Stanley & Mihaere, 2018, p. 114)

Since at least the 1920s, Māori incarceration rates have been significantly higher than non-Māori (Department of Corrections, 2020b). Māori make up around 53% of the incarcerated population at any one time, but are only approximately 15% of the New Zealand population (Tauri & Morris, 1997). During early phases of colonisation, the increase in Māori arrests was part of a subjugation process (Rumbles, 2011). Emerging colonial political structures were unstable and needed to assert their dominance, so legislation was used to facilitate over-policing of Māori to create an orderly society that reflected colonial aspirations. Stanley and Mihaere (2018) state that prisons originally operated to quell resistance among iwi, and worked to develop an inclusionary culture among Pākehā. The policing and punishment of Māori helped the Crown build confidence among Pākehā settlers, as it affirmed state control, and built on the policies that were founded for “social control and containment of ‘problem’ populations” (Andrae, McIntosh & Coster, 2016, p. 2).

The effects of this ignorance continue to be harmful for Māori today (Stanley & Mihaere, 2018). The 1960 Hunn Report, produced by the Department of Māori Affairs, which is one of the earliest studies of criminal justice statistics for Māori (Webb, 2013), asserted that Māori people would be better off conforming to a Pākehā or ‘modern’ way of life, wherein modernity equalled progress (Bishop, 2005). It emphasised Pākehā norms and values as superior, and advocated that Māori would need to shed their culture and adjust to Pākehā modern life in order to achieve advancement. While Hunn acknowledged that colonialism ravaged Māori society, it omitted any reference to, or concern about, its devastating impact on Māori people (Stanley & Mihaere, 2018). In accordance with Western views of offending, the report individualized Māori offending, disregarding any social contexts or constructs as explanations for committing crimes (Stanley & Mihaere, 2018).

Mass media in the modern age has been another institutional force that reinforces negative stereotypes about Māori and reproduces divisive rhetoric (McCreanor, 1993). The constant and continual portrayal of Māori as violent, criminals, protestors and child abusers reiterates long-held stereotypes, which are used to justify and naturalize overt racial discrimination towards Māori (Gregory et al., 2011). Most of the knowledge that Pākehā have of Māori culture comes from indirect channels such as media (McCreanor, 1993), making it a powerful form of communication. Jackson (1987) goes further, stating that media reiterates the ‘shortcomings’ of Māori, progressively contributing to a negative self-image among many young Māori. When

systems go unchallenged, deficit views are able to endure (Henderson, 2013). It was not until 2020, after 160 years and an internal review, that the largest New Zealand media outlet ‘Stuff’ made its first public acknowledgement and apology for their biased, unfair betrayal of Māori people, monocultural journalism approach, and ignoring the voices of Māori (Shimmin, 2020).

Agnosis as ignorance is an insidious ‘process of forgetting’ that misleads public perceptions and perpetuates neo-colonialism (Stanley & Mihaere, 2018). Moreover, agnosis diverts attention away from the responsibilities of political, economic, social and cultural inequality (Stanley & Mihaere, 2018), ignoring or forgetting the part they play in Māori incarceration.

### ***Pathologizing of Māori***

New Zealand state agencies have periodically implemented processes and mechanisms that defended imprisonment of Māori as the inevitable result of their pathological and socio-cultural deficits (Stanley & Mihaere, 2018). The Hunn Report portrayed Māori offending and inability to adapt to Pākehā law and society as resulting from inherent flaws in Māori culture (McCreanor, 1993, cited in Stanley & Mihaere, 2018). The narrative of Māori deficit has found broader appeal with other ‘monocultural’ research that has defined ‘the Māori offender [as] an urban misfit, a cultural maladept, an educational retard’ (Jackson, 1987, cited in Stanley & Mihaere, 2018). The commonly held belief that Māori are inheritors of the ‘warrior gene’ further contributes to the pathologizing of Māori. This myth of the so-called ‘warrior gene’ claims that the stresses of war and ocean exploration created a ‘warrior’ society. Consequently, so the myth holds, Māori inherited behavioural disorders including propensity towards crime, violence, risky behaviour and aggression, a claim disputed by Gary Raumatī Hook:

There is no evidence to indicate that the behavioural characteristics of Māori as a people are in any way unusual. Māori are not borderline psychotics, retarded, hyper-aggressive, depressive, antisocial, impulsive, suicidal risk takers, and to suggest otherwise is irresponsible and not supported by the facts. An explanation for the high conviction rates of Māori for violent crimes is to be found not in his nature but elsewhere perhaps such as in his victimhood arising out of 160 years of colonization, or in how the justice system deals with people whom most of its Eurocentric white administrators perceive as being excessively violent. (Hook, 2009, p. 7)

The consistent pathological representations of Māori people by the state reinforce the narrative that “Māori failure to conform to Pākehā law is due to their inability to cope in the modern world because of inherent flaws in their character or culture” (McCreanor, 1993, as cited in Stanley & Mihaere, 2018, p. 121). These narratives maintain the belief that Māori prisoners need to be ‘fixed’, which in turn affects how education is provided for prisoners (Devine, 2007b).

## **Education for prisoners in Aotearoa New Zealand**

As mentioned earlier, prison life has its own set of physical and mental lessons for inmates. Prison is an environment where the incarcerated learn to navigate dangerous power struggles, manage treacherous social dynamics, and survive within oppressive systems and rules (Novek, 2019). There is a normally unquestioned chain of command embedded in the policies, procedures and practices of prison staff. The prison system has a culture of white superiority, where Māori inmates are subjected to racism and abuse by staff. The ethos of ‘Māori bad, Pākehā good’ is so entrenched that even Māori staff become involved in discriminatory treatment in order to fit into the culture of the institution (Brittain & Tuffin, 2017). Prison organisational cultures are authoritarian in nature, so survival depends on the ability to be obedient and unquestioning of authority (Novek, 2019). Inmates learn to be manipulative and train themselves to answer with scripted mechanical responses that they believe the Judge, Psychologist, Case Manager, Teacher or prison staff want to hear. The ‘school of hard knocks’ imparts wisdom that can only come from experience and ‘doing time on the inside’.

### ***Formal education in prison***

Consistent learning in formal spaces within prison is difficult to achieve and sustain. Regimes, management of different security classes, and managing prisoner movements around the site make enrolment and attending classes and programmes very difficult at times. Approval into any education type programme is usually only for inmates who are: serving sentences longer than 12 months; housed in a medium security unit or lower; and in the final third of their sentence or nearing their parole eligibility date (Devine, 2007b). Even once they gain approval to join an education programme, the social dynamics can affect the ability for learning to happen, since inmates are normally engaged in power struggles amongst themselves and with the staff (Michals & Kessler, 2015). Prison norms and routines dominate and repress the inmates’ ability to learn or engage in meaningful education. Noise, dirty spaces, social tensions,

a ‘bad news’ phone call – all these can have a negative toll on the mental and emotional health of inmates to an extent that even the best teachers cannot overcome (Scott, 2013). Furthermore, submissiveness and compliance are habits that prison educators aim to dismantle, in favour of critical questioning, problem posing and engagement in debate and discussion. But inmates have learnt that submissive behaviours are more advantageous when dealing with prison authorities. Prisoner students, knowingly or unknowingly, are not free to practice the skills that teachers often seek to develop (Novek, 2019).

Prison teaches the incarcerated that formal prison education is a narrow, manipulated version of what education means on the ‘outside’. Formal learning in prison is slow, inconsistent, and for most ‘short stayers’ it will never be an option afforded to them. That is the lesson of prison.

### ***Education as rehabilitation***

The Corrections Act 2004 outlines the minimal educational entitlements for prisoners in Aotearoa New Zealand. Inmates are entitled to education that contributes positively to their rehabilitation, reintegration, and reduction of recidivism. The Department of Corrections has narrowed their definition of education in line with these minimal entitlements. In prison, rehabilitation is promoted as a primary form of education (Department of Corrections, 2020). The education programmes which prison authorities believe positively influence rehabilitation, reintegration and the reduction of recidivism are given priority (Devine, 2007b). Rehabilitation programmes include anger management and violence prevention programmes, drug and alcohol treatment programmes, sexual violence prevention programmes, cultural programmes, motivational programmes, and tikanga Māori based programmes (Department of Corrections, 2020). The shift to education as rehabilitation has accompanied the popular support for policies that focus on mass incarceration and punishment of criminals (Michals & Kessler, 2015). At first glance, the emphasis on education as rehabilitation seems in keeping with the 2017 Corrections mantra of ‘Change Lives, Shape Futures’, but closer inspection reveals serious limitations in its implementation.

Rehabilitation is the primary form of education in prison. Although Corrections state they are “committed to improving the educational outcomes of prisoners and offenders so they gain the skills needed for everyday life, and are ready for further education and training to develop the skills and experience that employers require” (Department of Corrections, 2020a), they contradict themselves. Rehabilitation is a priority behind keeping criminals contained.

Corrections takes the position that it is their responsibility to ensure the safety of the public, which is best achieved by ‘prisoner containment’. Rehabilitation is only pursued if it is convenient and manageable for prisons (Devine, 2007a). High musters mean inmates can be transported to other prisons to manage numbers, and thereby lose their position in rehabilitation programmes (Mihaere, 2015). In 2019, 17.9% of the total sentenced population, or around 1700 people, were classified as high or maximum security (Department of Corrections, 2020). Because of their classification, they are likely to have no access to rehabilitation programmes. This is due to the prison environmental restrictions and high staff manpower required to manage their movements. Operationally, the cost is too high, even though these are the groups that require the greatest intervention and support. Many prisoners, especially ‘lifers’ and ‘long ladders’, may spend years in prison with no eligibility for rehabilitation programmes, since acceptance into rehabilitation programmes for individuals is only approved once the parole eligibility date draws closer (Devine, 2007b).

### ***Prison education as a public service***

Recently, the selling point of formal prison education in Aotearoa New Zealand has shifted. The emphasis has changed from prison education as a support mechanism for rehabilitation, to prison education as a strategy to enhance public safety. The goal of education for prisoners is not to help the prisoner and their family, but rather it is re-purposed as a method to enhance public safety on the prisoner’s release. “Prison education is to be made available to the offender, not in their interests, but in the interests of the society with which they must still engage” (Devine, 2007b, p. 63). But there is a catch: formal education and learning opportunities will not be made available to prisoners unless they can be shown to result in public good (Devine, 2007a). In simple terms, ‘it is not for the good of the prisoner, it is for the good of everyone else’. Prison education is not provided to serve the needs of the incarcerated person, but as a process the prisoner undergoes for the benefit of the community.

Formal prison education is intended to create safer communities, but forgets the systemic biases and institutional, historical and political constructs that contribute to the pathway to imprisonment (Devine, 2007a). The Department of Corrections has a priority to keep ‘the community’ safe but forgets that the people in their care are also part of that community. Prisoners are instead treated as an underclass who present a safety risk to the rest of the good, moral law-abiding citizens (Workman, 2016).

## **Māori culture in prison education**

Formal education in prison has clearly defined parameters, set out in the Corrections Act 2004. When referring to Māori culture in prison education, it is important to distinguish that this discussion will examine Māori cultural based education programmes that inmates participate in, and not Māori cultural based tools used by staff to assess inmates.

Until 1995, the Department of Justice was the government entity tasked with managing prisons and the probation system. In 1988, the Department of Justice made reference to the over-representation of Māori in offending statistics, and noted the estrangement of Māori from their cultural roots. It acknowledged that Pākehā institutional dominance has led to the weakening and loss of Māori culture, and therefore it would be appropriate to provide opportunities for inmates to participate in culturally based initiatives within prison (Mihaere, 2015). Māori-led programmes include bone carving, waiata, and Te Reo Māori language programmes. These Māori cultural identity programmes are perceived as types of ‘Māori education’ and valuable opportunities for Māori inmates to connect to their culture.

### ***Māori based programmes in prison***

In 1995 the Department of Corrections took over from the Department of Justice and began to establish initiatives that they believe to be culturally responsive for Māori inmates. In 1997, the first of five Māori Focus Units opened, aimed at strengthening cultural values, kinship and knowledge. Māori Focus Units are kaupapa Māori units, in which inmates participate in group based rehabilitation until their completion of the programme (Mihaere, 2015). Other formal Māori based programmes include Māori therapeutic programmes that:

combine cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and tikanga Māori principles to address a range of offending behaviours by helping offenders to identify triggers for offending, and then give strategies to overcome or avoid these triggers.  
(Mihaere, 2015, p. 96)

Whare Oranga Ake are Kaupapa Māori Rehabilitation units – reintegration based housing units located outside the prison perimeter. Whare Oranga Ake are designed to support inmates to transition back into the community during the final part of their sentence (Webb, 2013). And tikanga based programmes are motivational programmes for offenders who identify as Māori,



delivered by local providers, and varying from site to site. They are designed to motivate offenders to engage more fully in rehabilitation programmes by helping them to understand their cultural identity, and by encouraging them to embody the kaupapa (principles) and tikanga (customs) of their tīpuna (ancestors) (Department of Corrections, 2020).

### ***Māori culture as rehabilitation***

Māori based programmes come under the umbrella of ‘rehabilitation’ since Corrections takes the stance that regenerating Māori identity and values encourages the motivation of offenders to address their offending needs (Department of Corrections, 2020). Māori also support the regeneration of cultural identity (Mihaere, 2015). According to Riki Mihaere:

- literature repeatedly illuminates the importance that Māori cultural identity continues to hold in contemporary Māori society;
- Māori cultural identity is a key determinant of Māori social and personal wellbeing;
- the resultant strengthened sense of Māori cultural identity will help fortify Māori people to withstand the onslaught of the ongoing effects of colonisation (from Mihaere, 2015, p. 103).

However, Mihaere (2015) points out that “Māori cultural identity should not be seen as a panacea that will miraculously reduce Māori reoffending” (p. 105). Despite the fact that Māori cultural identity might be acknowledged for its importance, it does not follow that Māori cultural identity can be positively linked with reduced reoffending (Mihaere, 2015).

### ***Treaty obligations***

Incorporating Māori cultural identity also served as a strategy to meet Treaty obligations and engage Māori prisoners in to Pākehā psycho-therapeutic programmes. The Department of Corrections has invested considerable effort into meeting its Treaty obligations by systematically ‘sprinkling’ Māori cultural identity initiatives throughout the New Zealand prison system. It is a co-option strategy, in which cultural ideas are used to make the Corrections system more culturally appropriate, and to make Pākehā developed programmes and services more likely to ‘work’ for Māori (Mihaere, 2015). When these programmes failed, the blame was placed on the individual offender and the limitations of Māori culture in improving lives, rather than the ineptitude of the program, the staff or participating agencies

(Mihaere, 2015). The commitment to a Crown-Māori partnership was shown as being only superficial.

### ***Cultural appropriation***

Mihaere (2015) states that “Māori education in prisons is generally directionless” (p. 86). Over the years, the Department of Corrections has implemented a series of newly-designed Māori cultural models and programmes, often boasting Māori names. Each programme has been designed ‘in-house’, with limited consultation or input from any partnership with a Māori community (Stanley & Mihaere, 2018). Through agnosis, Corrections sustains false and skewed versions of Māori cultural models, appropriating then repackaging Māori culture within their rehabilitation programmes.

Māori academics and professionals assert that Māori culture within the Department of Corrections is constantly being adapted and redefined to suit their political agenda, and often does not resemble Māori culture at all (Mihaere, 2015). The programmes are often stripped of tikanga (customs), then repackaged with Pākehā values without any input from Māori communities. Mihaere (2015) states the common reason for misappropriating Māori cultural identity is to pacify and control Māori, to engage Māori prisoners into default Pākehā programmes, and “as a subterfuge for meeting Treaty obligations” (Stanley & Mihaere, 2018, p. 124).

The Department argues that its Māori kaupapa based initiatives nestle comfortably within Western-based concepts, but this is refuted by Māori (Mihaere, 2015). Moana Jackson (1987) claimed the Department had inappropriate methods of working with Māori offenders, but “this body of knowledge was largely ignored by public servants, politicians and the press” (Workman, 2016, p. 97). “Ultimately, the Department of Corrections determines the meaning and level of Māori cultural identity in ways that Māori viewed as a case of distortion and misappropriation and override Māori people to determine what Māori kaupapa means” (Mihaere, 2015, p. 125).

### ***The Hōkai Rangi strategy***

A new strategic policy document called Hōkai Rangi was released by the Department of Corrections in 2019 (Department of Corrections, 2019). Originally it was the strategy to address Māori offending and recidivism, which meant it would apply only to staff and inmates

in Māori based programmes and spaces. But acting Chief Executive Officer Christine Stevenson made Hōkai Rangi the overarching strategy for the whole Department of Corrections, which was hailed as a bold move. Hōkai Rangi has been praised as a progressive strategy that incorporates te ao Māori across all sectors and staff within the Department of Corrections. It aims to achieve “effective and authentic partnerships, that build towards elimination of disproportionate reoffending by Māori” (Department of Corrections, 2019, p. 2). A core focus of the strategy is “to work in partnership with Māori communities to rehabilitate and transition whānau back in to their care” (Department of Corrections, 2019, p. 5), but these are not new goals for Corrections. There are questions about its ability to tackle key issues that previous cultural initiatives failed to achieve. Can the drivers of crime be addressed by a Māori cultural focus?

## **Expectations of a Māori prison educator**

### ***A public servant***

Prison educators are not prison officers or prison authorities, but as government employees they still have the responsibility of serving the government and delivering services to the public. Being a prison officer in New Zealand means being a part of the ‘blue machine – the ever-present authority figure within prisons. However, prison educators fall outside of that category. There seems to be very little research literature available that examines non-custodial staff roles and expectations, so this discussion looks at the expectations of a prison educator in relation to security issues and how they must manage safety and risk within the prison walls. This is something that all prison staff must prioritise regardless of job title, considering the nature of their work environment.

Security and safety in prisons are the most important factors for prison staff, both for themselves, other staff, inmates and the public (Drake, 2013). Order and control are the key focus areas that maintain a safe environment. The authoritarian, militaristic, and inflexible nature of prisons is not only for inmates, but extends to staff also (Novek, 2019). Authority of the prison officers is imposed upon everyone (Drake, 2013). Educators are subject to searches, are placed under suspicion for choosing to work in a prison (Michals & Kessler, 2015), have all communications heavily monitored, including personal social media use, and are instructed on what is acceptable dress and body placement, all in the name of security. These systems can

be disrespectful, demeaning and offensive (Michals & Kessler, 2015), but unquestioned compliance is expected without hesitation at all times (Wright, 2005).

### *A Māori educator*

Educators embark on the journey of teaching in prison because they want to help others (Wright, 2004). The call to teach in a prison is often fuelled by the drive to be an advocate for positive social change (Scott, 2013). For Māori educators, the expectation to fight for social justice goes beyond the prison perimeters, extending out to the Māori communities (Hohepa, 2013).

Māori education leadership requirements include leadership within the school, the classroom, and the community, and leadership that ripples out “into the wider corridors of Māori development” (Hohepa, 2013, p. 621). Thus, Māori educational leaders are expected to establish positive relationships with a variety of institutions, communities, sectors, and iwi (tribes) and to be familiar with systems of knowledge, from the past, present, and future. Māori educational leaders are expected to know how to lead and to carry out Māori culturally preferred practices in social situations and to operate appropriately in Māori cultural contexts. They are also expected to know how to conduct themselves in professional educational settings and activities that may have little link to Māori society in general. Effective Māori leadership is that which is “expert in navigating within te ao Māori” (Māori society) “and exploring te ao whānui” (wider society) (Hohepa, 2013, p. 621). In addition, Māori educational leadership has a significant responsibility in trying to ensure that Māori students acquire both universal knowledge and skills and Māori knowledge and skills, which will help realize aspirations held among Māori.

To develop strong Māori leadership is no easy feat in the epitome of colonial structures – the prison (Hohepa & Robinson, 2008). But considering the negative statistics for Māori, the need for leaders who will uplift Māori success is critical.

### *The impossible task of being both*

The work of meaningfully educating people inside prison is almost an oxymoron. There are strong ideological tensions between educators and the state. Teachers are trained specialists to be part of a helping profession, but are charged with educating people within a system designed to objectify and punish people (Wright, 2005). Tino Rangatiratanga (self-determination) is

what all Māori strive to achieve for their people, but when one chooses to teach inside a prison, self-determination is not always possible (Drabinski & Harkins, 2013). Working inside a prison means working within the logic of historical imprisonment. Prison is not a neutral environment: race, class, gender, sexual orientation and offender status are all explicit parts of the power dynamics of prison (Scott, 2013). Prison educators must recognize that they are not separate from the power structure they operate within; “they cannot escape it, they can only respond within it” (Scott, 2013, p. 26). This recognition raises the question for a Māori researcher: What is the true purpose of the prison system?

# Chapter Four: Narratives

The following research narratives are fictionalised autoethnographic stories, intended to bring the reader face-to-face with the realities of life inside prison. Most of the general population may never set foot inside a prison, so stories are one of the most powerful ways to provide a sense of what life on the inside is really like. The short story genre has been employed by famous Māori writers such as Patricia Grace to bring awareness to the realities of Māori life, still impacted by historical oppression. To write stories about what life is actually like in prison follows published examples such as *Broken Arse*, by Bruce Stewart (in the anthology *Tama and other stories*, Penguin, 1989).

The chapter presents three narratives:

## Narrative 1: Prison Life: Lessons 1, 2 and 3

This narrative documents my learning on first taking up a role as a prison educator. I was confronted and confused by the atmosphere and attitudes I encountered. The ‘lessons’ recorded in the three parts of this narrative provide details of the kinds of challenges I encountered.

## Narrative 2: Dancing Monkeys

The title of this narrative is taken from the ways some prison staff habitually spoke about Māori culture, in particular, kapa haka, which is at the heart of this story.

## Narrative 3: The Good House Nigga

This title, used with awareness of the sensitivity concerning the ‘n-word’, refers to the modern formulation by Malcolm X of what was previously referred to as the ‘house negro’ in the days of slavery. Slaves who worked inside the house were considered of higher status and treated better than the ‘field negro’ slaves, so the ‘house nigga’ was a coveted position. This term is used by Māori to refer to those Māori individuals who compromise their principles for the sake of career advancement.

## **Narrative 1: Prison Life: Lessons 1, 2 and 3**

The prison world is a very odd, peculiar place to work in. Even before you get inside, you are confronted with fortress-like walls lined with barbed wire that remind you of the might of colonisation. When you finally make it past the metal detector machines and eyes of suspicion (if you are really lucky you get the sniffer dogs), you step inside the wire and even the air smells different. Just a tad dirtier, but a whole lot sadder.

## **Lesson 1 – New World Order**

In prison, the regular set of morals and principles within New Zealand society don't exist. Each prison has subtle differences, but in general there are historical layers of 'norms' that persist. The first lesson I learnt about working in a prison was that I'm now part of a secret society with its own set of norms, hidden away from the view of the public. There are no connections to the outside world, except heavily monitored phone lines and email. The world I knew - the education world, the Māori world, the critical mind, the world where knowledge and learning is a right that everyone is entitled to, the world where diversity is celebrated, the world where social injustices are confronted, where progressive debates and ideas are invited, where fierce discussions and innovative solutions are encouraged. The world where success is achieved as a collective, the world that makes the most sense to me – that world doesn't exist in here. None of it exists here. In prison, control and power reign over every person inside, prisoners and staff members alike. For staff there is a food chain, and where you sit on that food chain determines how heavy the weight of the cloak of power and control will be. Absolute obedience is the gold standard of behaviour. When decisions are made, they are followed without question. Compliance propagates order, and in theory, an orderly environment is a safer environment. As a critical thinker coming in to the white-washed prison world I am urged to ask – who defines what 'safe' looks like? What does 'safer' mean? And safer for who? Stop asking questions Mereana! That gets you a target on your back in here. Stop thinking for myself. Stop forming my own opinions. Stop disagreeing. Stop using words that aren't English. Stop advocating for people who are scum and don't deserve any rights. When I do these things I disrupt the order that has been established and I become a threat to safety. What is happening here? Wait. . . . So now I'm a threat? Now I'm a risk? No more questions!

In the prison world, discriminatory and prejudiced opinions are shared openly. Negative stereotypical insults are like a right of passage here. A unifying pastime activity in the lunch room, office, meeting, or maybe just in passing by. A sign of authority and symbol of righteousness, superior to the unjust monsters that we lock up. If a uniformed officer said it, then it *must* be true, right? And if that officer has three stripes on their shoulder, then they are practically Jesus. So when someone cracks a racist joke, and Jesus laughs, or at the very least he says nothing – you know you have made it in to 'the club'. You've been accepted.

This is my new normal now. This first lesson was a painful one.

## **Lesson 2 – Blue World Order**

There is a distinct difference between ‘what is acceptable in the real world’ and ‘what is acceptable in the prison world’, but no one tells you that when you sign up for the job. The custodial staff are top of the food chain in prison. Known as the ‘Blue Machine’ – they are the enforcers of order. My induction to prison included 1) firstly figuring out that the vast difference of worlds even exists - Lesson One. And 2) that I would constantly be contending - with prison norms, prison authorities, the blue machine enforcers, and internally with myself. Almost everything about me is the antithesis of prison staff culture. My education perspectives, professional practices, culture, morals and values - they all contradict the acceptable norms of prison. I would learn that I will constantly be tested to stay true to my principles and values while trying to negotiate the prison space. The student-centered indigenous approaches to learning that I practiced would be openly rubbished and discouraged by other staff. I would be reprimanded for these approaches in front of my students and colleagues. Māori cultural perspectives and knowledge that I hold would be shunned, in favour of the watered-down Corrections interpretations of Māori ‘things’. And ideals of social justice, equality and fairness are only for the staff who are morally superior to inmates.

I learned that because of who I am, I would always have a contentious position in relation to the prison norms. I would be labelled a radical, trouble maker and rebel. I would continually be in a state of conflict, defense and justification. And as a result I would never be accepted by the prison staff and authorities.

This lesson would be the toughest one to swallow.

## **Lesson 3 – True World Order**

The hardest lesson I learnt came from my own people. I entered prison aiming to contribute to positive change for the ‘hardest to teach’ people in society, most of whom are Māori. They are the forgotten ones. The hated ones. The doomed ones. The worthless and undeserving. They are the students that everyone has given up on. But if I can serve this group of people to be able to succeed academically as Māori in the prison therefore enhancing their opportunities, and their success carries on beyond the prison walls to benefit their families, then I have served my people. I have contributed to the enhancement of Māori – the goal I have always worked towards as an educator.



I knew this task would be lofty, and the call to action from inmates would be very demanding. Inmates do not shy from asking for help. What I did not predict was the strong demand for action from other Māori – other Māori staff, the local tangata whenua, my own whānau, Māori families of the inmates, and the wider Māori community. I discovered that Māori from all different communities feel the oppression that prison has on Māori as a people. Because I worked in the deepest corners of the prison, and had access to the people that run the prison, I was expected by all these groups to be a change-maker for Māori. Sometimes I was asked nicely to help, but most of the time I was ordered to help - that it is my duty to advocate for Māori. To make a stand and be a voice against the monocultural thinking and systems. To support tangata whenua and their rights as guardians of their whenua and tikanga. To create pathways and opportunities for inmates to participate in te ao Māori. To build bridges for non-Māori staff to gain a more accurate understanding of Māori philosophies and culture.

Lesson three was the realisation that I carry the aspirations of Māori, and that as a Māori educator I am expected to work towards those aspirations. There were those that came before me, and those who stand with me. But I recognised that I couldn't and shouldn't be a spectator or bystander to the issues that Māori face.

This lesson would be the most powerful one.

## **Narrative 2: Dancing Monkeys**

*Cast of characters:*

Kataraina - a Prison Educator

Mikey - a Case Manager

Moana - a Case Manager

Whaea Sarah - a Senior Case Manager

Papa Johnny - a Principal Corrections Officer (PCO)

Whaea Gina - a Senior Case Manager

Doug - a Principal Corrections Officer (PCO)

### **Kai Time**

It's nearly midday and me and Kataraina are locked in our tiny office when we hear the clanging of some keys, the slow grind of heavy grill doors opening and closing and feet shuffling. Knock knock...the door opens - "C'mon girls. Kai time. That's us". It's Mikey and

Moana, “Heyyyy!! Ok then. Let’s go”. Me and Kataraina quickly shut down our computers, grab our bags, and we all make our way to ‘the Whare’ for lunch.

We walk along the ‘Programmes Unit’, casually chatting and having a laugh – as we do. It always draws unapproving suspicious looks, but then again – any remnant of happiness is suspicious in here. It’s a bright day, so we’re all wearing our sunglasses.

“You guys look like a gang, ha ha ha” yells one of the officers as we are walking. His friends chuckle along with him, quite amused with themselves. Are we supposed to laugh? It’s only a joke, right? Never mind the fact that one of us is a known devout Christian learning to become a Minister, two are young mothers, and another is a kuia. But it’s only a joke . . . right? . . . Right? Just a bit of harmless banter? . . . Actually, not really. It was funny the first hundred times, but now it’s just annoying. We carry on without offering an ‘I accept your joke’ chuckle, but instead respond with a ‘That wasn’t funny and I don’t approve’ glance, and carry on.

At ‘the Whare’ we have safety in numbers. This is our hang out place where we come to get away from the job and be together in the company of friends. This is our safe space. This is where we all found each other, our work tribe, our people. It’s not quite a whare nui or whare kai, but it’s the closest thing to it here, so we naturally gravitated to this place. Here the energy is peaceful and there aren’t any suspicious eyes and ears hovering over us. We come here to eat, to gossip, to share, to hui, to sing, to argue, to talk and to laugh together in peace. It’s rare to find a group of people that you can relax around in prison. And a space that isn’t parū, and doesn’t have loud people traipsing through. We are usually the only ones that come here to use this space. The bulk of staff tend to stay in their own tiny offices, do the work, and then go home. A miserable lot really. But we had each other, so we treasure this place and one another.

Everyone pulls out their kai on to the table, and we say karakia. “Amine!”

“So what are you going to run for Matariki girl?” asks Mikey. He is a Senior Case Manager. Great at his job, and well respected, but hasn’t yet been given the chance to hold any long term leadership positions.

“Huh? Me? What?” I mumble with my mouth full of food, while my brain tries to process what was just said.

“Yes YOU girl. Matariki is coming up and we need to do something. Let’s do something. Anything. Run an event or something. We haven’t celebrated anything Māori around here for a long time. So - ideas?”

Kataraina decides to jump in. She is a local.

“Yes e hoa. You’ve done all that before for years. And you know how to do it properly. We need your skills and ruthlessness”.

Then Moana decides to chime in. She is a local too. And another Senior Case Manager. She is awesome, but she is a bit more cynical than us. She has borne the brunt of Department backdoor deals and tokenism longer than we have. She is tired of the politics. I’m starting to feel like this is an ambush...

“My ruthlessness? But I’m a loveable person ha ha. Anyway, don’t fob your mahi off to me. I just got here, ha ha.”

“YES. But we need your fresh new ideas and enthusiasm. Some fresh new blood. Loving your energy and passion. That’s the kind of mauri that will bring everyone back together on the same kaupapa.”

More friends arrive. They are Senior Case Managers who have been in this game for over 10 years. They are sharp, experienced, unafraid to voice their concerns, and they know the systems. You can’t get anything past this bunch. But, like Moana, they have been unappreciated for too long and are worn down.

These women are the pioneers of the Māori Staff Support Team – a staff collective that works to ensure that Māori staff are treated fairly, and Māori culture is practiced appropriately amongst staff and inmates. There are no cultural advisors on our site, so the Māori Staff Support Team is the unofficial stewards of this role. Previously tangata whenua led the Māori cultural activities and advisory roles that guided the prison, but the relationship between prison authorities and tangata whenua is heavily strained. They have worked for years to support the local iwi, as well as advocate for Māori philosophies as a tool for better practice. They are our wise koeke, our nannies, and our aunties. They have the utmost respect from all the Māori here on site. But to the Department they are just a bunch of old know-it-all trouble makers.

“Kia ora whānau. How is everyone?”

“Kia ora!!” – everyone gives their greetings.

“Hey Whaea, we were just talking about Matariki!” says Moana.

“Oh yes! ... Mereana! So what’s the plan kare? You come from a teaching background. And you’ve worked with lots of Māori whānau. You’ve done all that mahi before. And you’re here now. He tohu! He rangatahi koe, me te rangatira, me te kaiako, engari kei a koe te mana. You need to run something” says Whaea Gina, with that stern ‘aunty’ tone. I just got my orders.

“Ummmm . . . “ I was stunned and still just trying to chew.

“Yes mete. I’ll help you” says Kataraina.

“There needs to be something for the tāne, AND something for the staff too. So you need to make sure there are events for everyone. The staff here should really learn about what Matariki is too. We will be here to support you. You work really well with the men. They respond to you really well” says Whaea Sarah. ... This IS an ambush!

“They sure need to learn!! No good the Department talking about Māori values when most of the staff don’t even know what Matariki is. They don’t even know what manaakitanga is. Not really. Got a cheek to tell me what whānau is.” That’s Papa Johnny. He is a Senior Custodial Officer, and the only one that ever comes to the Whare. He was a former teacher and is a fluent Te Reo speaker. He is from Ngāpuhi, so understands he is manuhiri on this whenua. He is also the go-to Māori that the Department lean on when they need an orator. He is our go-to guy too. His two stripes and good track record means he has some ‘push’.

“I reckon! They THINK they know. If they did then maybe they’d actually know how to work with these men properly” says Mikey.

“You lead it bub, and we will awahi. It’s good you’re here. We know you have a high standard of doing things. We might not always be around everyday, but you should know that when it comes to the time, we will always show up and support you. We need some fresh energy” says Papa Johnny.

“We need to be careful . . . there are different stories about Matariki. So make sure you make contact with the kaumātua and kuia. We will take their lead on the kaupapa they’d like us to follow” says Whaea Gina. She keeps us on the right track.

“Do we HAVE to go to tangata whenua for guidance around all Māori tikanga here at the prison?” I ask.

“ABSOLUTELY!! Anything to do with tikanga MUST go through tangata whenua. This is their house, so their rules. General kaupapa we can do ourselves, but we need to kōrero with them first” says Whaea Gina.

“Let’s run a talent quest! Or a Matariki kapa haka celebration! They’ve done them in the past, and they were always really good. The men love it. They love being able to haka. Even the island boys get right into it” says Mikey.

“Do they get to do tikanga, te reo Māori or kapa haka programmes?” I ask.

“Nope. There is one tikanga programme, but that’s it. And that programme is pretty strained. There are raru going on” – says Whaea Gina with her raised eyebrows. What’s going on there?

“Yeh, and that programme only just got back up and running too” says Papa Johnny.

“So there are no other programmes related to Mātauranga Māori for the men. And no professional development related to cultural competency around Māori culture available for staff?” I ask.

“Nope. The men have to be in a Māori Focus Unit to do kaupapa Māori. But there are only five prison sites in New Zealand that run them. And the men are only in the programme for 12 weeks, then they get shipped out to somewhere else afterwards” says Papa Johnny.

“There have kaupapa Māori elements in the rehabilitation programmes, but they are plastic as. It’s pretty much the men that teach each other. They know more than the staff most of the time anyway” says Mikey.

“Sometimes. These buggers get their mob stuff confused with their tikanga a lot of the time though. Bloody eggs”.

“Wow. Okay. I didn’t realise that’s how things work here. Umm...so what are WE doing exactly? Or what CAN we do?” I ask again.

“Running an event for the men and the staff to celebrate Matariki. If we don’t run SOMETHING, then no one runs anything related to kaupapa Māori. WE. ARE. IT” says Moana.

“Will Senior Leadership help us?”

“Doubt it!! We will have to hui with them though, so they know what is happening, and can approve it going ahead. But we do all the mahi”.

“They’re not shy too steal your credit and ideas though girl. Be ready for that” says Papa Johnny.

“I suppose the men will expect a hākari too, ha ha. They’ll be hanging out for a proper kai – with MEAT ha ha ha. Poor things” says Whaea Gina.

I’m sitting there thinking of course the men will get a kai. That’s a given – surely.

“Well they SHOULD get a kai. That’s what Koro Pete said should happen too. To whakanoa everything afterwards. Like at a pōwhiri or whakatau. But we don’t do that. Senior Management won’t let them have a kai” says Papa Johnny.

“Koro Pete wants a lot of things to happen that Senior Management won’t let happen” chimes in Kataraina.

“Like?”

“They wanted staff to go through a pōwhiri as part of being inducted when they start. He said staff should learn about the history of the whenua of the site, and other pā around here. This whenua is tapu, a lot of people don’t know that. He said that visitors should be greeted and looked after by Department staff, so they don’t feel like they’re being treated like criminals themselves. He wants all staff to learn basic reo Māori. He wants the iwi to be informed of when violent episodes happen so they can come in and do blessings and karakia. There’s a few things that used to happen, or should happen, but they don’t anymore.”

“So the local iwi are super hands on I take it? Do they like to be a part of what happens in the prison every day?” I ask again ... getting all the intel...

“They used to be, and they’ve always tried to be. Most of the men in here are locals, so this is their whenua too. Their history. And their whānau. That’s why the iwi are so invested - so they can look after their own while they are inside. But it’s all changed now. This prison doesn’t engage with them like they should.”

“But kapa haka is something we CAN do” . . . We all agree, knowing that doing nothing doesn’t sit right with any of us.

“Ok then. Let’s run a Matariki Kapa Haka Celebration Day for the men” says Mikey.

“The men always try to hustle a feed. But aside from that, they do actually love it. They do appreciate it. It makes them feel like they’re important again. Like they’re not just pieces of shit. This depressing place can make them feel like they are” says Papa Johnny.

“Well obviously they’re not angels.”

“No that’s right. . . but they’re our whānau. And eventually they return home to their families and kids. They’re our whānau and next door neighbours.”

“Yuuuuup” we all sigh, collectively.

“For most of them it’s the only time they really get to take part in Māori culture while they’re inside. They miss that type of connection with their family. It’s only a day to us, but to these fullaz it’s everything. Some of them don’t really know their Māori side so this is a way they get to start that journey.”

“It’s not a cure for committing crime, but at least they get to do something positive for themselves. It beats being told what to do all day, cos they get to have their own practices and write their own haka and waiata.”

“Oh they get time to practice?”

“Yes. Well, they’re supposed to. They’re supposed to have access to tikanga Māori activities. But it depends on who the Custodial Officer is in charge of their unit. Sometimes they’re not allowed to practice cos they’re short staffed, or the men have been playing up. It depends.”

“Who helps them? The different rōpū? Like with kupu, or history of waiata, or gat players?” I ask assuming ‘help’ is something they do in prison.

“Themselves! This is prison girl! No one gets help around here unless it’s to do with a prisoner being released, or their parole board hearing. There are maybe a couple of staff that’ll help, but the rest don’t care.”

“Ka pai kōtiro. I’ll help you with the operational stuff. You be our main person, eh. The pou. You’re able to move around freely and go see different people. We’ll organise a hui with Senior Management soon. I’ll make sure they know it’s you who is running the show” says Papa Johnny. I just got my second set of orders.

### **The day of the Matariki Kapa Haka Celebration**

“Morning my friend. Can you help me bring all this kai in from my car. There’s heaps.” I text Kataraina from the car park before she arrives. “Yip all good” she replies.

She pulls up in her car. “What’s all this kai for?”

“It’s for our dignitaries, the guest judges, manuhiri and the men for afterwards.”

“Did you pay for all this yourself?”

“Yeh”

“Why?”

“I had to. Senior Leadership only gave us enough for two sausage rolls per person. And like three packets of biscuits for each rōpū. Shameful! I don’t want Koro Pete, Nanny Doreen and all the rest of those kaumatua looking at me like I’m koretake. Embarrassing! And I will never live that down.”

“Not your fault. Why didn’t they give you more putea?”

“No not my fault, but you know it’ll be ME who is the one that’ll get the flack if we don’t manaaki them properly. Not happening on my watch bro! I’m surprised Management didn’t shut the whole thing down to be honest. Hurry up and help me. I still have to bring all the

dignitaries in through the gatehouse and host them, make sure they are looked after. Can you set up the kai in the Whare please?"

"Yup. Is Management going to reimburse you?"

We look at each other and laugh.

"C'mon, let's go."

### **At the Gatehouse**

Custodial Officer (CO) One: "Morning Miss. Are you here for visits?"

"No, I work here. I just came through here like 30 minutes ago" I reply.

"Are you a Case Manager?"

"No"

"Volunteer?"

"No. I just told you I work here. I've worked here for over a year. I say hello to you and talk to you literally EVERY morning."

"So what DO you do then?"

"I'm in the Education Team. I'm here to escort our visitors in for the Kapa Haka Celebration today. All the paper work is done. Here you go."

"Are you with the iwi?"

"No, I'm an Education Tutor"

"So you're a volunteer educator?"

"NO! I am employed and paid by the Department of Corrections just like you. My job title is Education Tutor. That is the reason I am here every day."

"Who is your Manager?"

I give him the name.

"Who is that?"

"He is the Manager of all the education programmes, rehabilitation programmes, and vocational training."

He goes into the office to call him and double checks. 15 minutes later he returns.

"Can I welcome our guests now? That's them walking down the path now" I ask.

"Stand back Miss. Stand over there. We need to check them first." says Custodial Officer One.

I'm ushered to the side, while three officers conduct searches on our manuhiri.

"Why are there so many visitors today?" says Custodial Officer Two.

"The crims have a mowry kapa haka thing on today" replies Custodial Officer One.

"Are the foulmasks with them too?" says Custodial Officer Two.



I am shocked. I look around at the officers, and no one seems to bat an eyelid over what was just said. He is referring to our manuhiri adorned with mataora and kauae. The male visitor is a haka specialist, and the wahine visitor is a master in the art of karanga. Immediately a wave of anger comes over me, but before I can say something, Nanny Doreen waves at me to come over and help her with her bags. She is sweet and old, so I concentrate on her. I let her lean on my shoulder as I walk her to the door, but glance back at the officers.

“I heard that! You won’t get away with what you just said.”

“He aha tērā, bub?”

“Nothing Nanny. You alright? Me haere tāua.”

### **Haka Time**

The stage is set, the tables are set, the manuhiri and guest judges are seated and ready. Everyone is settled. Kataraina rushes over to me 10 minutes before the celebration is due to start.

“Mereana! There’s a problem. The Principal Custodial Officer from Unit H doesn’t want to bring his group down anymore. He is pissed off. He wants to talk to YOU. He is asking for YOU.”

“Why? What about the men? How are they?”

“They are pissed off too cos the CO’s won’t let them come and perform. They want to talk to you too. They’re asking for you.”

“What the hell? What’s going on? It took so much work to get to this point. What’s the problem? Who is the PCO?”

“It’s Doug. Here he comes now.”

Doug comes storming in to the room . . . “ARE YOU RUNNING THE SHOW?” he bellows

“Aaaah... I’m part of a group running it, but yes I’m the one you want to speak to. Whats going . . .”

“What’s this I hear about there not being any trophies?”

I feel another wave of anger come over me. He is yelling at me in front of my colleagues, our visitors, and our elders. Stay calm, Mereana, I tell myself, and my Koro comes into my mind.

I’m well aware that Doug has three stripes on his shoulder.

“No there aren’t any trophies. Why?” I say sternly.

“This is Kapa Haka isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“And each Unit brings a group to perform isn’t it?”

“If they choose to participate, and are supported by the staff in their unit, then absolutely.”

“So why aren’t there any trophies? These boys have trained hard for a long time now. They’ve got a real good shot at winning. They’ve already performed for our Regional Commissioner, and even for the Volunteers.”

“Yes I know they’ve been practicing a lot. I’ve been there with them while they write their waiata and haka. I’m not the one stopping them from participating.”

“SO WHERE ARE THE TROPHIES?”

I pause and take a breathe . . . . stay calm.

“This particular day is about celebrating Matariki. It’s a CELEBRATION day. It’s about reflection, remembering those that have passed on, spending time together, and setting our sights on the year to come. Today is NOT about competing. There are no trophies today.”

“SO WHAT FUCK IS THE POINT THEN?”

Everyone’s eyes in the room go wide. Nanny Doreen is sitting right there. Our esteemed manuhiri have made the efforts to be here also. And all the Corrections Officers are watching too... This is a throwdown. Do I kiss his arse and say nothing, and do what he wants? And therefore let down my elders, my colleagues, and all my ancestors who I know are standing with me right now??? Or do I stand up to him and speak for my people? Otherwise why am I even there? But if I do... I know I’m going to get pulled into the Prison Director’s office tomorrow. Custodial staff don’t play nice when one of their own is disobeyed. Especially openly in front of others...

I take another quick breath.

“You listen to me – they aren’t here today to amuse or entertain you. You don’t even know what they are saying. DO YOU?? Today they haka for their families, their kids, and their dreams. But they definitely don’t haka for you! Just so you can win some trophies to show off in front of your mates! Just so you can parade them in front of your bosses like you taught them how to haka. Today is NOT about competing or being better than someone else. They are NOT your dancing monkeys, or your dial-a-Māori do you hear me!! You want bragging rights, you do the haka yourself!”

The room goes quiet.

“Everything ok?” asks Papa Johnny as he places a reassuring hand on my shoulder.

“Yes Papa. Everything is ok. Doug is figuring out if he is going to allow the rōpū from his unit to stand today... So?”

Long pause as he looks at me with contempt. “Yeah alright” . . . then trods off shaking his head in disgust.

Kataraina and Mikey come over next to me..

“Maaaaan . . . . I’m going to pay for that one” I say to them.

“Yuuuup” they both say - then give me a quick pat on the back.

“C’mon everyone. Let’s get this show on the road.”

### **Narrative 3: The Good House Nigga**

It’s the next day at work and I’m chilling in my office. It’s still early morning, and my phone goes off. “Kia ora, this is Mereana speaking.”

“Good morning Mereana. This is Michelle. Are you able to come and see me in my office soon? I need to have a discussion with you.”

Uh-oh! Michelle is the Assistant Prison Director. I’ve heard a lot about her, but we haven’t crossed paths much. She is Māori, from Ngāti Porou so I hear. She is the unofficial Māori voice for the Senior Leadership Team. I’m pretty sure I’m in trouble.

“Sure. I won’t be long.”

Knock, knock. “Morena Michelle.”

“Hey Mereana. Come in. Close the door behind you please.”

I go to sit down . . . it’s all niceties, but there is a mild whiff of machismo in the air.

“Alright. I understand you had a bit of an incident with a PCO yesterday. You had a disagreement with Doug... It’s not a good look to not follow the directives of senior staff. Look, this isn’t the first time your name has come up. There are a few staff here that you have upset, and frankly, they are tired of dealing with you. I know you don’t always agree with how we do things here. But you need to understand - we have a Department way of doing things. It might not be as true to tikanga as you think it should be, but it works for us. We have our own way of doing things here” says Michelle.

Long pause... was that a statement or a directive? Is she finished?

“Umm... I’m not okay with that. I’m not okay with that at all. That’s not right. Not for the men. Not for their families. Not for the Māori staff. Not for the tangata whenua. You shouldn’t treat us like rent-a-Māori’s when you need the ‘Māori jobs’ done. You are a leader for this place.

It's YOUR job to do that. And you shouldn't cherry pick bits and pieces of a culture that you like, disregard the rest, pass it off as authentic, then turn around and tell Māori – this is how we are doing it now... THEN expect them to be okay with it. We are not okay with THAT. It's not okay." Remember to breathe. She looks surprised.

"If we go around expecting staff to learn more about Māori culture, they will complain. There are a lot of people here who won't be happy, who will complain if they are forced to learn te reo, or a pepeha, or learn about the history of the land. People are tired of having Māori culture forced on them. Tired of YOU correcting them, going on about tikanga, asking questions all the time, and running all these Māori things. It's too much." She speaks a bit faster this time. We glance at each other with a confused look.

I respond. "I'm not going to lessen how Māori I am because it's not palatable for some people, or it makes them uncomfortable. This is Aotearoa. I don't have to stop being Māori when I come to work. We are told what to do in our jobs all the time. Learning more about Māori culture improves our ability to work with Māori. It's a skill set that improves our work performance outcomes, just like any other skill. How is this any different?" I say with frustrated agony.

She sighs, while nodding her head. "I know you want to do what is right by your culture, but I got into the position I am in now because I worked hard and made those tough decisions. I've chosen to trust in the leaders that we have here at the Department and it has helped me through the different leadership roles I have had."

I'm a little confused. This conversation has taken an odd turn. Hmmm...

"You have the potential to be a strong leader too, but then you shoot yourself in the foot by not following directions and upsetting your colleagues. A lot of whom have much senior roles than you. Even politics is something I see you doing. But if you want to make it as a leader in the long run, sometimes you just need to shut up and do as you are told. Even if you think the other person is wrong" she says with absolute conviction.

I say nothing more, and we end the meeting amicably. Afterwards, I walk out even more convinced that I am on the right path for me.

# Chapter Five: Discussion

Working inside a prison is a very unique and private experience. It is an exclusive community detached from society where the majority of its citizens are indoctrinated in the historical culture of colonisation (Mihaere, 2015). The seclusion from society, along with the maze of cells and cages that keep people separated, amplifies the isolation and loneliness.

The narratives and literature in previous chapters have exposed some of the challenges for Māori educators working in prison. The narratives highlight the social pressures of prison relationships, symbiotic power struggles and the internal turmoil they create. Trying to manage the clashing relationships and inevitable demand to compromise one's values and culture is stressful and harmful to wellbeing. The literature reveals historical tensions and competing paradigms. There are contradicting meanings, expectations and cultures that overlap.

For educators, there is a mismatch between the knowledge and values educators acquire, and the conflicting principles of prison and its staff. The professional training educators undertake and the progressive social justice philosophies they are instilled with do not match the tenets of prison. Educators are hired based on their qualifications, knowledge and experience, but are obstructed in practice from utilising those very expertises. For Māori educators, the tensions are compounded by the challenge of navigating te ao Māori and te ao Pākehā in the prison setting. Prison authorities and the Crown hold the positions of control and power, resulting in Māori having little or no cultural freedom.

## **Could the prison environment be made culturally safe for Māori?**

In 2017 the Waitangi Tribunal released the Wai 2540 Tū Mai Te Rangi Report (Waitangi Tribunal, 2017). This report responded to a claim made by a former Corrections employee that the Crown has breached its Treaty of Waitangi obligations by failing to address the high rates of Māori reoffending and reimprisonment. A number of recommendations were made by the Waitangi Tribunal.

This report catalysed the development of Hōkai Rangi, the Department of Corrections strategy, which was launched in 2019 (see discussion above on page 20). Initially it was earmarked as

the Māori Strategy for Corrections, but it was decided to make Hōkai Rangi the overarching strategy for the entire department, its staff, and every person under their management. During the consultation phase, it was identified that Māori in prison experience systemic racism and unconscious bias that is normalised through organisational culture and attitudes, policy, deficit based metrics, mainstream programmes appropriating Māori names, programme funding biases and decisions, lack of access to support systems, and lack of understanding of the value of cultural contexts.

The strategy has six high-level outcome domains, with corresponding new approaches that outline the future direction of Corrections:

- Partnership and leadership;
- Humanising and healing;
- Whānau;
- Incorporating a te ao Māori Worldview;
- Whakapapa; and
- Foundations for participation.

Under the domain ‘Incorporating a te ao Māori worldview’ new approaches include shifting from a system based on Western thinking in its operating approach to one that prioritises and elevates Mātauranga Māori, and shifting from an environment where direct and structural racism exists to one that is actively eliminating this behaviour. Some identified outcomes and actions for achieving this shift include: recognising and eliminating unconscious bias; implementing and reporting on an appropriate te ao Māori capability framework; and implementing culturally safe programmes for managers and leaders to understand how to best understand Māori staff, and eliminate discriminatory behaviour.

On reading the Hōkai Rangi document and these aspirational plans, it is easy to feel optimistic about the progressive direction in which Corrections seems to be heading. Corrections has made big steps towards transformational and generational change. They have acknowledged their structurally racist system; they have sought and documented the voices of Māori staff and inmates; and they have established new roles at the highest level. Immediately following the launch of Hōkai Rangi, Corrections appointed Mr Topia Rameka in the newly developed role of Deputy Chief Executive Māori. This new role is an important step that will ensure there is a dedicated Māori voice at the top table, which is in line with the action point outlined in Hōkai

Rangi to provide strong Māori leadership within the Department (Davis, 2019). The prospect of a culturally safe environment for Māori in prison seems possible, and exciting.

But setbacks quickly emerged, as demonstrated by the Waikeria Prison protest lasting six days between the end of December, 2020 and the beginning of January 2021, which resulted in extensive fire damage to prison buildings. Following the protest, prisoners who had stormed the prison were quick to criticise Hōkai Rangi:

We hear about this Hōkai Rangi Strategy but we don't see it. There is no programme. There is no rehabilitation. It's lock us up, put you in a yard full of gang members and then let you out. And they expect us to change. (Smith, 2021)

For staff, the changes are also slow. A year after its launch there are no measurable outcomes or indicators in place to track successful progress. Staff who were already implementing Kaupapa Māori values were under the belief they could operate in a culturally safe environment, but they are still facing uninformed opinions and obstructive decisions about issues relating to Māori culture. Corrections has been criticised for having no credibility in being able to deliver the Hōkai Rangi strategy (Johnsen, 2020). They have abandoned their Māori strategy in the past, which was the reason for the Waitangi claim made against Corrections (Waitangi Tribunal, 2017). However, Corrections defends the decelerated progress, arguing Covid has played a significant role in the slow pace. There is also 180 years of adjustment to be made, and embedding the philosophies of Hōkai Rangi into departmental structures still needs to occur (Johnsen, 2020).

The hopes for cultural freedom and safety are high amongst Māori prison staff, educators and contractors, but there is still a level of scepticism. A pathway has been carved out by the Hōkai Rangi strategy, but until behaviour and philosophy changes, nothing changes (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

### **The inherent tensions for a Māori prison educator**

As previously noted, there is very little literature on the experiences of Māori educators in New Zealand prisons. The ambiguous definition of 'education' and 'educator' used by Corrections causes confusion. The Department of Corrections considers an Education Tutor to be a separate role from a Programme Facilitator, which is separate again from a Vocational Programme

Manager. There are Māori clinical practitioners, Māori Corrections Officers, Māori Programme Facilitators, and tikanga Māori programme facilitators, who can also be described as kaiako or tikanga Māori educators. These roles have different titles and are located within different teams, yet all fall under the umbrella of ‘rehabilitation’ and all are to some degree involved with ‘teaching’ and ‘educating’.

There are high hopes that through Hōkai Rangi, Māori prison staff and educators will have a work environment where te ao Māori philosophies are embedded. Hōkai Rangi is probably the best hope Māori have had for realising a culturally equitable environment. The test for Corrections concerns the cultural authenticity of Māori prison spaces, and how much flexibility educators will have to implement Māori philosophies and pedagogies in designing programme content. Currently, Māori models tend to be viewed as inferior, ineffective, and undeserving by prison staff (Ward & Brown, 2004). Despite its challenges, Hōkai Rangi is the strongest tool that Māori prison educators and staff have to overcome prejudice, achieve the aspirations of their Māori communities and whānau, and still advance their career in te ao Pākehā.

Devine (2007a) follows the famous declaration by Paulo Freire that ‘education is freedom’ in proposing that education is fundamentally associated with freedom – freedom to think, freedom to choose what to learn, and so on. Prison education raises the ethical dilemma that if the person is not free, if the person is oppressed, and if the person is coerced, can it be called education? (Devine, 2007a). Inmates are often pressured or motivated to attend educative and rehabilitative classes not for the purpose of learning, but in order to be seen favourably at their next parole board hearing. All inmates have severely limited access to information and resources for learning. Approval to be accepted into programmes is often arbitrary, at the discretion of multiple layers of prison staff.

Educators are in the business of helping others and enlightening the minds of their students. In considering prison education as a function and a process, especially in regards to higher learning, vocational skill acquisition and rehabilitation, it is questionable whether prison education achieves this at all.



## **Māori ambitions for prison education**

If we were to predict the future of education for Māori prisoners, based on the historical actions of the Department of Corrections, the outlook is grim. Achieving radical change is very difficult. Many years of correctional experimentation and innovation in New Zealand prisons have failed to produce programmes that have consistently and significantly reduced recidivism (Newbold, 2007). Education as a form of rehabilitation still operates within a logistical and bureaucratic framework that makes it inaccessible for many prisoners. Inmates classified as high and maximum security have almost no access to programmes of any sort due to the perceived risk they pose to staff or other inmates.

The current government and Corrections Chief Executive have launched the beginnings of a new innovative strategic direction, but measures of progress of the strategy have yet to be devised. There are issues that need to be considered, and questions that need to be asked. There has been a lot of effort to address rehabilitation, but the specific subject of education in prison has not been mentioned in the strategy, showing the lack of significance that education has in the wider scope of prison management and direction. The strategy has been in place for over a year but Corrections defends the slow progress. With only four years left, can meaningful changes occur? Only time will tell. If powerful changes were to come about, they could easily be derailed by a change of government. And what will happen beyond 2024? There are no guarantees that future strategies will be as culturally forward thinking and progressive.

Many Māori scholars, politicians and prison staff have commended the brave move from the current government to forge such a strategy. But there have been just as many prison staff who are resistant to the changes, who refute or are blind to the value of the new approaches. Behind prison walls, out of sight of society, it will be these people who influence the success and efficacy of Hōkai Rangī. Māori must remain optimistic about what can be achieved in the near future. In the present day they must co-build the foundations of prison reform strategies that will later produce change that will outlast Hōkai Rangī.

## **What makes it so challenging to work as a Māori prison educator?**

I was once invited to visit another prison in the same region as the one I worked in. At this prison they had a Māori Focus Unit, and it was my first time visiting one. I was asked by their unit's Principal Case Officer to attend their kapa haka competition as a guest, in hopes that we

could formulate a plan to work together in future cultural collaborations. This place had a very different wairua to any other unit I had experienced working in prison. It was still a marae within a cage, but after I had passed the fenceline it felt very familiar – almost like home. Unlike the usual perpetual atmosphere of hyper-vigilance and caution, this place had its own rules and tikanga, separate from the rest of the prison. The mauhere acted differently too. They were at ease under the watchful eyes of their respected Matua, and moved around as if they were the ones being protected from harmful outsiders.

If prisons are a necessity as society's last resort to protect society and rehabilitate the broken, this kind of space is the environment most conducive for Māori to producing meaningful learning. Māori focus units are the most authentic Māori spaces in prisons, and are often held up as a Corrections Māori success story. However over time they have been criticized for compromising Māori values in favour of Correctional needs, and 'emphasizing a narrow version of cultural identity restricted to ceremonial and traditional rituals, disengaged from contemporary values' (Mihaere, 2015, p. 140), not applicable to everyday life. Kapa haka is seen by the majority of prison staff as the only proper or real 'Māori thing that Māori people do'. Consequently kapa haka is one of the few Māori activities that Corrections supports.

Hōkai Rangi is an opportunity to create Māori focus units or kaupapa Māori prisons that are part of the community and detached from the Corrections mothership. It is difficult for any type of tikanga to be followed in a prison (Mihaere, 2015). With genuine co-designing from local Māori communities there is a better possibility that the authenticity of a Kaupapa Māori prison would not be distorted. Even more aspirational for Māori would be the development of a separate Māori criminal justice system, as recommended by Moana Jackson in 1987, that could govern the Kaupapa Māori solutions to crime and prisons (Just Speak, 2012).

In reality, prison reform changes are slow. Very little has changed in the 30+ years since Jackson made his recommendations. The attempts to improve prison conditions are secondary to the huge task of housing and managing the incarcerated community. Above all, New Zealand prisons have 180 years of colonisation to unpack and unlearn, and are part of a penal system obsessed with punishment.

The prison system in Aotearoa New Zealand emerged from and as part of the larger system of colonisation of Māori. Society's attitudes to prisoners are based on ignorance and racism. The

direction in which prisons have been heading in the past few decades is away from the aim of educating prisoners for a meaningful life in society, and towards seeing prisoners as unworthy students. The prison system is a political football that is continually under pressure from lobby groups who believe in punishment of crime and harsher sentences for convicted criminals. It is intrinsically difficult to be a Māori educator in the best of circumstances; in prison, the aspiration to teach Māori as Māori, through Māori methods and with Māori content, is faced with almost insurmountable odds.

# Chapter Six: Conclusion

In taking up a position leading education in a men's prison filled with predominantly Māori men, I was motivated by the challenge of teaching those who are assumed to be the hardest to reach and teach. In reality, once the men understood that I could see through their 'masks' and see who they really were, I found they were generally very appreciative of the opportunity to learn, to engage their mind, and hungry to participate in education. The long-term prisoners and lifers in particular felt they were getting left behind and out of touch with outside, and were motivated by the need they felt to keep up their knowledge of the world. Facebook, attitudes towards gender identities, electric cars, smartphones and apps were some of the newer inventions and ideas that surprised and intrigued them.

The anxiety of being released back into the outside world is known in prison idiom as 'gate fever' and is the reason some prisoners take steps to ensure they remain behind bars, or are quickly returned to prison if they are released. Some prisoners become so institutionalised that the extreme structure and lack of freedom of the high-security unit is their only safety zone. Thus, prisoners and consequently prison staff also, have become indoctrinated into the historical traditions of prison. Moving away from the traditional methods of operating a prison and towards new approaches of addressing Māori incarceration and Māori educational needs is proving to be difficult for prisoners and staff alike.

## **Synopsis of findings**

1. Education is not a priority in the everyday operations of the Department of Corrections.

The goal of prison education is to challenge behaviours that lead to offending, address learning barriers, support inmates to achieve NCEA qualifications, and gain vocational employment experience. But managing prison population fluctuations, security requirements and movements, inmate regimes, staffing numbers and pandemics all take precedence. Operational requirements inhibit and restrict the accessibility, provision, and therefore the significance, of education.

2. The shift towards tackling the needs of Māori inmates and Māori staff is slow.

New Zealand prisons have a long history of discrimination against Māori, and changing the historical interlocking values, attitudes and assumptions within the world of the prison is challenging at every layer of the Department of Corrections.

3. There is a history of distorting Māori culture in the prison context.

Cherry-picking and warping Māori culture is harmful to cultural understanding. Given the high rates of Māori incarceration, it is clear that better understanding of Māori people, te ao Māori values and philosophies is important to embed throughout all areas of the work of the Department of Corrections.

4. Hōkai Rangi is viewed as the start of a radical new approach to tackling Māori incarceration. Despite the optimism generated by Hōkai Rangi, it is yet to be seen if positive results can come from its noble intentions. Education and training do not feature prominently in Hōkai Rangi. Whilst efforts are being made to improve cultural approaches to practices, it is not clear what commitment the Department of Corrections has to the future development and improvement of education for Māori prisoners.

### **Limitations of this research**

The small size of this research project limited its scope for findings. In reaching the conclusion of this project, I am left with the realisation that this is a huge topic which needs further attention and discussion. I have discovered that the topics of Māori educators and Māori prison education are heavily impacted by complex overlapping layers. Education has a limited definition and purpose in prison – but why must this be the case? The histories and relationships between tangata whenua and the prisons need further examination. Some prisons are built upon tapu land with its own historical significance. If prisons are to be the custodians of Māori flesh, they should also be the protectors of local Māori knowledge and customs - which starts with hau kāinga. Yet many of these relationships are strained and dysfunctional. Māori staff are praised in some situations for their cultural practices, but criticized in others.

Taking on the enormous, exclusive anti-Māori system has highlighted the lack of investigation around Māori prison educators. The aspirations of Māori and educators, and the skills and knowledge that Corrections demands of its education staff, are at odds with the reality of prison

life. Lack of existing literature and research also limited the reach of this project. The experiences that I and my colleagues faced are not yet found in the research literature.

The use of auto-methods that begin from my experiences as a source of data can be perceived as a limitation and lacking in objectivity. Given such a large void of information, however, storytelling is one of the only means of revealing the reality of life inside prisons. Through the process of this research I was able to figure things out and make meaning of my struggles.

## **Final thoughts**

It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.

- Nelson Mandela

This research was my opportunity to expose the hidden and isolating struggles that Māori staff experience working in prisons: to tell the truth about the pressures that the prison world places on Māori staff, in particular Māori educators. We are often in situations or debates that force us to turn our backs on our culture and professional training, and ignore the voices of tangata whenua, or face backlash from our colleagues and superiors. Sadly, these pressures result in many Māori staff and inmates accepting the ignorance as a natural feature of life. This study was also a chance to critique prison education, and the lack of guidance and precedent for processes and best practice. The culturally responsive practices that are encouraged in theory, are the same practices that educators are punished for implementing. There is no safe space for Māori educators to operate in, and this research acts as a tool to draw attention to this.

During the course of undertaking this dissertation research project, I reached the end of my tether with the environment within which prison education operates and chose to take up another employment opportunity in a different sector. Educating male prisoners was a role I found very fulfilling. As dangerous as these men were known to be, as students they were people asking for help, searching for the beginnings of a life beyond their crimes. Each week I taught convicted murderers, paedophiles, rapists, and drug dealers. We laughed, we argued and we learned together. The men received an education, and I got to see glimpses of how the minds and brains of these people worked. A highly exclusive position that I valued. But it was not the

threat of danger or being hurt that deterred me. I learnt from them as much as they learnt from me. It was the daily stress from being undermined, discredited, and chastised that led to my resignation.

It may seem odd to say that I valued helping people who had been proven to have taken and hurt the lives of others. I definitely get asked a lot – why teach these people? Why offer them any sort of mercy? It is easy to place oneself in a position of moral superiority, and look down on inmates as unworthy. This attitude is certainly the norm in prison. But if, as educators, we were able to truly help the most damaged and vulnerable people in society, imagine the endless possibilities for us all.

# Glossary of Māori words

*As used in this dissertation*

Aotearoa	New Zealand
Awhi	Help, support
Engari kei a koe te mana	But you should take the lead
Haka	Māori war dance
Hākari	Feast
Hau kāinga	Home people
Hauora	Health
He aha tērā?	What's that?
He tohu	It's a sign
Hōkai Rangī	Department of Corrections strategy document
Hui	Meeting
Iwi	Tribe
Ka pai	Good
Kai	Food
Kaiako	Teacher
Kāinga	Home
Kapa haka	Māori cultural performing arts
Karakia	Prayer
Karanga	Ceremonial call of welcome
Kare	Term of address
Kauae	Māori female chin tattoo
Kaumātua	Elder
Kaupapa	Topic, purpose, philosophy, cause
Kaupapa Māori	Māori approach, Māori customary practice
Kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kāinga	Overcoming problems at home
Kōrero	Discussion, talk, speak
Koretake	Be useless, incompetent
Kōtiro	Girl
Kuia	Female elder
Kupu	Word
Mahi	Work
Manaaki	Take care of
Manaakitanga	Hospitality, kindness, generosity
Manuhiri	Visitors
Māori	The indigenous people of New Zealand
Marae	Sacred Māori meeting house and communal space
Mataora	Māori male face tattoo
Matariki	Māori New Year
Mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge



Mauhere	Prisoner
Mauri	Energy
Me haere tāua	Let's go
Mete	Mate, friend
Ngāpuhi	Tribal group from Northland
Ngāti Porou	Tribal group from East Coast
Pā	Māori village or settlement
Pākehā	New Zealand people of European descent
Paru	Dirty
Pepeha	Customary introduction
Pou	Key person or leader for an activity
Pōwhiri	Welcoming ceremony
Putea	Money, funds
Rangatahi	Young people/person
Rangatira	Leader
Raru	Problem, issue
Rōpū	Group
Tāne	Male, man
Tangata whenua	Māori people of a particular locality / Māori as indigenous people of New Zealand
Taonga tuku iho	Cultural treasures passed down
Tapu	Sacred, under protection of spirits
Te ao Māori	The Māori world, Māori world view
Te ao Pākehā	The Western world / world view
Te ao whānui	The wider world
Te reo Māori	The Māori language
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	Māori version of the Treaty of Waitangi
Tikanga (Māori)	Māori customs, lore, procedures
Tino rangatiratanga	Self-determination, sovereignty, autonomy
Tīpuna	Ancestors
Tū mai te rangi	Report of the Waitangi Tribunal in 2017
Waiata	Song, sing
Wairua	Spirit, soul
Whaea	Mother, aunty, term used to address women
Whakanoa	To remove tapu
Whakatau	Less formal welcome
Whakataukī	Proverb
Whānau	Family
Whare kai	Dining hall
Whare nui	Meeting house
Whare Oranga Ake	House of healing - name of a rehabilitation unit
Whenua	Land

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