





Original Research / He Rangahau Motuhake

# The Māori Student Nurse Experience of Cohorting: Enhancing Retention and Professional Identity as a Māori Nurse

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Despite decades of work by tertiary providers to increase the Māori nursing workforce, there has been little change in the numbers of Māori nurses graduating from schools of nursing. The call for more culturally responsive teaching and learning strategies saw one tertiary provider implement Māori student cohorts for labs and tutorials in year one and two of the Bachelor of Health Science Nursing programme. This research explored the student experience of the cohorts using a hermeneutic methodology within a Māori-centred approach. Students in year two and three of the programme who had participated in the cohorts were invited to join focus groups to share their experiences. Data from the focus groups was analysed using van Manen's approach with a Māori lens. The themes of whanaungatanga (connection), tikanga (correct practice), wānanga (learning conversation) and manaakitanga (ethic of care) emerged from the data. Cohorting was identified as a culturally responsive teaching and learning strategy. It provided a safe space for learning in what is a predominantly western monocultural system. It was not sufficient on its own however. Cohorting of Māori students needs to be supported by teaching practices which include tikanga Māori, wānanga as a formal teaching strategy and the overt demonstration of manaakitanga to ensure it meets the needs of Māori nursing students. When integrated into programmes of study, Māori student cohorts have the potential to not only support retention, but also the development of the student's professional identity as a 'Māori' nurse.

### TE REO MĀORI TRANSLATION

#### Ngā wheako o ngā tapuhi Māori mō te urutomo ā-rōpū: Te whakapiki i te purutanga kaimahi me te tuakiri ngaio hei tapuhi Māori

##### Ngā Ariā Matua

Ahako te huhua o ngā mahi i roto i ngā ngahuru tau a ngā kaihora mātauranga matua, he iti noa ngā panonitanga o te tokomaha o ngā tapuhi Māori e tohia ana ki ō rātou tohu i roto i ngā kura tapuhi. Nā ngā karanga mō ētahi rautaki whakaako urupare ki te ahurea, rautaki ako pērā hoki, i tahuri tētahi kaihora mātauranga matua ki te whakatinana rōpū ākonga Māori mō ngā mahi pūtaiao, akoako hoki i ngā tau tuatahi, tuarua o tā rātou hōtaka Tohu Paetahi Pūtaiao Hauora mō te Mahi Tapuhi. I āta tūhura ēnei rangahau i ngā wheako o aua rōpū, mā te whakamahi tikanga whakamārama, i roto i tētahi ara whakaaro ao ki te Māori. I pōwhiritia ngā ākonga i te tau tuarua, tuatoru hoki o ngā rōpū kia piri mai ki ētahi rōpū arotahi, ki te whakaatu i ō rātou wheako. I tātāritia ngā raraunga mai i ngā rōpū arotahi mā te whakamahi i te ara a van Manen me te whakamahi i tētahi aronga Māori. I puta ngā tāhuhu o te whanaungatanga, o ngā tikanga, o te wānanga, me te manaakitanga, i ngā raraunga. I tautohutia te whakarōpū hei rautaki whakaako, ako hoki ka urupare ki te ahurea. Nā tēnei rautaki ka hua he mokowā haumarū mō te ako, i roto i tētahi pūnaha nō te hauāuru o te ao, te nuīnga o ōna tikanga. Ko te karanga kia kaua e mutu noa i reira. Me mātua tautoko ngā mahi whakarōpū i ngā ākonga Māori mā ngā tikanga whakaako kei roto nei ngā tikanga Māori, ko te wānanga hei rautaki whakaako ōkawa, me te putanga nui o te manaakitanga, kia tutuki pai ngā hiahia o ngā ākonga

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Māori. Ina tuia mai ki roto i ngā hōtaka akoranga, he whai pito mata ngā rōpū ākongā Māori hei tautoko i te purutanga ākongā, me te whanaketanga o te tuakiri ngaio o te ākongā hei tapuhi Māori.

*Ngā kupu matua:*

te whakarōpū; ngā tikanga whakaako urupare ki te ahurea; taketake; tapuhi tohu paetahi; tuakiri ngaio; purutanga ākongā

## INTRODUCTION

A Māori health workforce which reflects the Māori population, Māori values and Māori models of practice is considered imperative to improving Māori health outcomes (Ministry of Health, 2020). Despite decades of work by tertiary providers in Aotearoa New Zealand to increase the Māori nursing workforce, Māori still comprise just 8% of the workforce, falling far short of the 16% of Māori within the population (Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2020). Significant change is needed to rectify this lack of progress within schools of nursing, particularly within mainstream and university settings, where retention and limited success of Māori students remains an issue. While deficit theory has prevailed in the past, it is no longer accepted as a legitimate rationale. Deficit theorising is where students are blamed for their lack of success (Mayeda et al., 2014). It creates negative and problematic learning experiences for students and sets them up for failure. It also ignores the institutional racism and disempowering stereotypes educators hold, which privilege some and disadvantage others.

Māori achievement in education reflects the socio-political and historical context of Aotearoa New Zealand and highlights the inability of the current monocultural education system to meet the unique needs of Māori learners (G. H. Smith & Smith, 2019). While Bachelor of Nursing (BN) Māori specific programmes have been successful (Longmore, 2022), there are not enough of them. There is an urgent need for more mainstream providers to radically reform their curricula so that Māori nursing students are better supported and Māori communities can be cared for by Māori nurses (Rook et al., 2022). Mainstream institutions are not neutral and require Māori conformity to the dominant culture; they retain biased institutional structures, which put Māori at a disadvantage; and lastly, Māori resistance is required to create space for Kaupapa Māori within the mainstream (Hoskins & Jones, 2022).

To improve Māori success in nursing education programmes and increase the number of Māori registered nurses, a multifaceted approach is required which includes reconsidering the pedagogy of the nursing curriculum, learning and teaching strategies, and institutional and programme support factors (Zambas et al., 2020). Culturally appropriate educational pedagogy and learning environments are recommended to support Māori tertiary students (Waiari et al., 2021).

In response to the call for culturally appropriate teaching and learning strategies to support Māori nursing student retention and success, a separate Māori cohort was initiated at a New Zealand mainstream university in 2019. Māori students attended tutorials and simulation labs together in their first two nursing courses. Where staffing allowed, Māori lecturers were assigned to facilitate the tuto-

rials and labs. This research project sought to explore the student experience of the cohorts as both a formal evaluation of the approach and to guide the ongoing implementation of cohorting as a teaching and learning strategy for preparation of Māori nurses. It follows the Māori whakatauki or proverb, *hoki whakamuri, kia anga whakamua*, look to the past, in order to forge the future. A hermeneutic exploration of experience within a Māori-centred approach was undertaken to listen to the voice of students. In this predominantly white space (Bonini & Matias, 2021), the student voice allows us to see what we do not see.

## BACKGROUND

A culturally appropriate and relevant learning environment is fundamental to Māori doing well in tertiary settings. It is protective of Māori student identities and mana (dignity, prestige, pride), provides a place to be free to be Māori, and brings a Māori perspective to education (Waiari et al., 2021). The provision of a culturally safe learning environment demonstrates visible respect for Māori culture (Rātima et al., 2022). Creating a safe learning space for Māori students involves creating a space that supports the opportunity for whanaungatanga (relationships) with other Māori students, including within student cohorts (Waiari et al., 2021). The development of a whānau-like atmosphere through whanaungatanga enables students to experience emotional and cultural support and a sense of belonging in predominantly western institutions of learning.

A learning environment that is culturally safe and welcoming for Māori is one which matches the requirement of learners, rather than expecting them to fit in (Waiari et al., 2021). It includes trusting relationships between academic staff and students, visibility of and access to Māori lecturers, and teaching styles that reflect Māori beliefs and values (Waiari et al., 2021). The appointment of Māori academic staff within faculties increases a faculty's ability to support Māori students. Māori academic staff are more likely to relate to the student's experience as Māori in the university environment and serve as a motivator for realising students potential to succeed. They are also more likely to bring tikanga into their teaching and enact Māori values, both elements necessary for student success.

Durie (2005) identified communities of learning established through cohort practices led to greater academic success for Māori in higher education. When sustained through a programme they foster a sense of whānau and maximise the positive effects of peer support (Stevens, 2020). Communities of learning also prepare students to be ready to work with Māori communities. If this is not achieved, they must negotiate this deficit once graduated.

The review of literature and discussion with the university Nursing Kawa Whakaruruhau Komiti and senior Māori nurse leaders supported the development of a Māori cohort for lab and tutorial learning sessions. However, a gap existed in the literature on the implementation and effectiveness of Māori cohorts in nursing. Māori student experiences can be helpful in addressing this gap by identifying successes and pitfalls (Amundsen, 2019). By exploring the experience of Māori nursing students who participated in the Māori tutorial and lab groups, we hope to identify how best to implement such groups and facilitate teaching and learning to support Māori nursing student success within mainstream nursing registration programmes.

## METHODOLOGY

This research project utilised a hermeneutic methodology within a Māori-centred approach to explore the experiences of Māori nursing students cohorted together at one tertiary education provider in Aotearoa New Zealand. Hermeneutic research listens to the voice of the participant. It has the potential to impact teaching and learning approaches through its exploration and interpretation of the lived experience within their relevant cultural, socio-political, and historical contexts (Dangal & Joshi, 2020). Hermeneutic methodology fits well with Māori who have an oral storytelling tradition; it is through story that meaning emerges.

The research was conducted using a Māori-centred approach (Hudson et al., 2010) which privileges Kaupapa Māori. Smith (2015) defines Kaupapa Māori Research as research “by Māori, for Māori and with Māori” (p. 48). A Māori-centred approach involves Māori as significant participants in various roles within the research project (Hudson et al., 2010). The researchers position themselves as follows. The first author (SZ) identifies as tangata Tiriti, with a long history in nurse education in Aotearoa New Zealand guided by senior Māori academics in her work with Māori students. She sits on the School’s Kawa Whakaruruhau Komiti and has researched and published previously in the area of Māori workforce development. She was instrumental in establishing the Māori cohorts following consultation with Māori Nurse kaumatua, and responded to the request to evaluate the project. SZ has taken on what Smith (2021) describes as the pragmatic function in Māori-centred research of assisting with shaping, carrying out, analysis and dissemination of the research findings alongside her Māori colleagues. In leading this research project, the first author wanted to correctly use Kaupapa Māori research methods, honour her Māori colleagues’ interpretation and analysis of findings, and foster their development as early career researchers. The second author (JD) has Ngāi Tahu whakapapa and a strong focus on Māori workforce development and the improvement of health care outcomes for Māori. The third author (JTM) identifies as Ngāti Raukawa whakapapa. She has a strong commitment to Kawa Whakaruruhau and the development of Māori nurses, and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree. Both Māori members of the research team participated fully in designing and conducting the research, including data collection, analy-

sis, reporting and dissemination. Data analysis was conducted through a Te Ao Māori lens, led by JD and JTM, the second and third authors.

## Methods

### Aim

The aim of this research project was to explore the experiences of Māori undergraduate nursing students who were placed in Māori cohorts for tutorial and lab sessions. The research question was, “What was your experience of the Māori tutorial and lab group?”

### Participant recruitment

Undergraduate nursing students who self-identify as Māori and were enrolled in the Bachelor of Health Science (Nursing) degree programme in years two or three of the programme were invited to participate in the research project. The total sample size of Māori students was 45, seven percent of a total cohort size of 636 nursing students in years two and three. Five participants were recruited into two focus groups by advertising on relevant social media and through the university Māori networks. Recruitment was hampered by the impact of a COVID-19 lockdown and uncertainty around delayed clinical experiences and assessment due dates.

### Ethics

Ethics approval for this research was granted by Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (Reference 21/331). The Health Research Council of New Zealand’s *Te Ara Tika Guidelines for Māori Research Ethics* (Hudson et al., 2010) were followed in the design of this project.

### Data collection

Data was collected via focus groups to enable individual participant stories to be heard within the collective story of the Māori tutorial and lab cohorts. Focus groups provide a unique opportunity for in depth exploration of a phenomenon, including the opportunity for deep individual reflection on the topic within a collective social group and clarification for deeper understanding for both participants and researchers (Montague et al., 2020). The focus group interviews followed the principles of *whakawhanaungatanga* (relationship building), *aroa ki te tangata* (respect for people) and *mana tangata* (upholding the mana of the person/people). Tikanga was incorporated into the format of the focus groups, including opening and closing karakia (prayer), mihimihi (introductions and pepeha) and adequate time for each participant to tell their story.

Each focus group interview was led by two of the research investigators, with JTM participating across both focus groups for consistency. Focus group interviews coincided with a COVID-19 lockdown, and thus had to be completed via video conferencing. Participants were asked to reflect on the following three open-ended questions about their experience of the tutorial and lab groups.

1. What was your experience of being in the group?
2. Tell us a story of when the group worked well for you.
3. Tell us a story of when the group didn't work so well for you.

Video recordings were transcribed verbatim by the research officer and the completed transcripts were sent to the participants for confirmation of accuracy.

### Data analysis

The finalised transcripts were analysed using van Manen's (2016) approach for hermeneutic analysis. Analysis involved a process of insightful discovery to identify the things that matter. All authors contributed to the identification of themes following the recommendations of Montague et al (2020) for managing multiple researchers and multiple participants (focus groups). Themes were then developed through reading, writing and dialogue between authors.

## RESULTS

In the process of analysing the data, the Māori authors were drawn to an alignment between student responses and matauranga Māori (Māori knowledge systems). As a result, Māori concepts have been used to describe the experience of Māori students. In many cases, the students used Māori terminology. One of the strengths of matauranga Māori is the fluidity of many of the concepts (Taani, 2022). We have provided loose translations of the concepts to clarify for the reader our interpretation of the data.

### Whanaungatanga – relationship/connection

Whanaungatanga was a consistent theme emerging from the data. Whanaungatanga is both a value and a social process in Te Ao Māori (the Māori world). Whanaungatanga is described as a relationship, kinship and sense of family connection (Rātima et al., 2022). It is developed through "shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging" (Rātima et al., 2022, p. 257). Within the context of this research, whānau refers to the metaphoric use of whānau - groupings of people who are connected by a common interest and shared goals (Dell et al., 2021). Participants spoke directly about the role of the cohort in enabling whakawhanaungatanga, that is, the cohort enabled the use of Māori social and cultural process to establish a metaphorical whānau.

I think that it's so good for whakawhanaungatanga... building that good support system has been one of the key things that has kept me going through the degree... [P1]

I refer to it as a safe space. It's like when you're at home with your whānau... [P2]

What I appreciated the most was the community that the lab created for us and our year group... It is just like a whānau environment. [P4]

Cohorting Māori students into discrete lab groups provided an opportunity to build relationships and develop

whānau-like bonds. These relationships then became a safe space, and a support system that sustained some participants through the degree. While it would be reasonable to expect that relationships and support networks can be developed with non-Māori students within the degree, it was relationships with other Māori students that participants valued most.

I find that I can really connect with other Māori students... I really got mokimoki, homesick for being back home in [rural town] so I didn't feel so isolated... whānau is everything to us. To have that connection, that really helped. [P5]

The best thing about having a Māori cohort is Māori working together... Getting to know, getting to work with other Māori students; it's a different type of connection than working with non-Māori students. [P2]

Participants described the connections they made with other Māori students as enabling them to feel supported, comfortable, and less isolated. They described a sense of belonging that was created through connection with *their own people*. Sciascia (2017) recommend tertiary providers facilitate a sense of belonging in a culturally safe, supportive and familiar environment. The theme of whanaungatanga as developed in the Māori cohorts reflects this safe supportive environment. There was a sense that whānau was being created with people who were *on the same page* as themselves and who could be relied on to help overcome the challenges of university study such as homesickness.

### Tikanga Māori - the right thing to uphold the mana of the people

The second theme reflected the incorporation of tikanga Māori into the learning environment. Tikanga is commonly described as cultural customs and practices. It is the ways of doing things framed by Māori knowledge and wisdom (matauranga Māori). Tikanga Māori provides a guide for how to establish and conduct interpersonal relationships. It is a core value guiding culturally appropriate and acceptable ways of interacting within a Māori-centred nursing practice (Wilson et al., 2021).

I think the karakia [the Māori clinical educator] introduced into the labs... She had that knowledge of how that's to be so she could bring that into our labs... I think practicing it in the labs was really helpful. [P1]  
Tikanga is huge for us as Māori. We go into a room, and we'll have a [Māori] clinical educator start the labs with karakia and himene (hymn), a waiata (song). And there was just that sense of belonging, like I'm rooted here. [P5]

The inclusion of tikanga into the classroom helped participants feel that they belonged. Karakia and waiata provide for a more culturally appropriate teaching and learning environment (Chittick et al., 2019). Practices such as these acknowledge the real world of the learner and their culture.

The view that tikanga had a place in the labs was taken a step further with the recommendation that teaching within the labs embodies a full Māori environment.

When I first started it was two non-Māori clinical educators which was fine, but they couldn't really uphold any tikanga... it didn't elevate it to fit our needs as Māori students. [P4]

It would have been nice if you push it further, not just a lab with Māori students, but you make the full environment Māori. You teach in a way that's Māori and incorporate our tikanga. [P5]

While it was clear that whanaungatanga was an important outcome of the Māori cohorts, on its own it was insufficient and did not meet the learning needs of Māori students. There was a desire for tikanga to be included in the labs, to make the lab experience a Māori learning environment.

In exploring this notion further, participants referred to how this might enhance their development as a Māori nurse.

I think it's giving us confidence to be a Māori nurse... if we put Māori culture back... into everyday life then we can take away the differences... being in the cohort allows us to make [Māori culture] normal. [P3]

It may be if they were run in a Māori way, more tikanga orientated and focusing on things like cultural safety and the Treaty [Te Tiriti o Waitangi]... it may be better in terms of developing Māori nurses. [P4]

The inclusion of tikanga in the labs provided a sense of normality for participants, enabling them to gain the confidence needed to be a Māori nurse. While not all students with Māori whakapapa want to be identified as a Māori nurse, for these participants it was clear that to be a Māori nurse who uses Māori models of care within a Māori world view, tikanga should be a part of their nursing education.

### **Wānanga – discussion/learning conversation**

Wānanga has more than one meaning for Māori. It is used here to describe a learning forum that involves a rich and dynamic sharing of knowledge (Rātima et al., 2022). Wānanga involves an exchange of ideas through dialogue, debate, and careful consideration to accommodate new knowledge. This type of learning has been identified as effective for Māori learners. In describing learning experiences within the labs, participants revealed the familiar and appropriate nature of this type of learning.

Culturally we're brought up with a lot of storytelling... It's our culture and that was ok in the labs. We were able to bring up stories or just say little comments and we weren't told off for talking when "its quiet time" and the lecturer talks or the [educator] talks and then you do your thing. And for us it was natural, it's the best way to learn. [P3]

I really like how the lessons were always run in a discussion-based manner. They'd make it real comfortable for us to discuss things... So, the way that they ran the lesson... [P4]

A few of us will be like, "I'll go find out, I'll go find out, I'll go find out" and then we all kind of go "No that's not right, it's this one. Nah, it's this one". We all put the mahi [work] in to figure out what we need to do. [P5]

Participants described the learning in the labs as discussion based. They were able to share stories to support their and other's learning. This style of learning is focused on collaborative knowledge creation rather than transmission from teacher to student. Storytelling and discussion reflect student-centred and collective learning, which are traditional teaching and learning methods for Māori (Abraham, 2021). Utilising interactive teaching strategies such as wānanga, actively engages Māori students in the learning process and promoting learning (Rātima et al., 2022).

### **Manaakitanga – loosely translated as generosity, care, respect**

The final theme which emerged from the data reflected manaakitanga. Manaakitanga derives from two words, "mana" and "aki". Mana is a condition that essentially holds every phenomenon in the highest regard. Aki means to uphold or support. By extending manaakitanga, an individual is essentially holding up another in high regard, ensuring that mana is upheld. To do this requires actions and attitudes that demonstrate qualities such as respect, humility, kindness and honesty. K.I.N. Author Collective (2021) describe manaakitanga as a deep level of interaction, one in which kindness, generosity, care, respect and spiritual connections are demonstrated. Manaakitanga was most noticed in data describing Māori clinical educator (CE) teaching practices within the labs.

Having wrong answers is ok. I don't know if it's because we've had really good CEs... They're not like, "no, you're wrong". You don't need to feel ashamed of having a wrong answer because that's how you learn. [P3]

It's having that whole discussion in lab rather than "[Name], what do you think?" and feeling like you're picked on... we're corrected in a way that doesn't feel like we've been demeaned or is harmful to us and our learning. [P5]

This data demonstrates that manaakitanga is reflected in how discussions are framed, questions are asked, and answers responded to. Questioning which allowed for wrong answers as a part of learning, or which encouraged open discussion maintains student mana within the learning environment.

The word manaakitanga stems from mana. Mana is a spiritual concept and describes the prestige, authority, power and influence that exists in a person (Rātima et al., 2022). In Te Ao Māori, mana is a value which is retained for both the participant and the person demonstrating it (K.I.N. Author Collective, 2021). In the above excerpts, both teaching staff and participants' mana is upheld. When the learning environment is created in such a way as to uphold mana, participants felt safe to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes. This experience was in sharp contrast with other experiences in which participants were left feeling bad because of wrong answers or worse, felt picked on and demeaned.

The manaakitanga demonstrated in the classroom extended beyond the teacher-student relationship. It was also

evident in the support received from other taura (Māori students).

We would always help each other out whether it be asking questions, knowing that you've got more people there to help you out and to support you throughout your studies. [P4]

They [taura] were so supportive of me... We would also help other students. I think that is really important for Māori nurses especially. [P5]

Participants identified the generosity, care and support of each other as being particularly important for Māori nurses. The data reflected genuine care for the other. Wright and Heaton (2021) describe *manaakitanga* as a “cultural, social reciprocal and relational practice” (p. 76), which nurtures and supports *mana* to enhance feelings of belonging and relationship. It is intentional practice.

## DISCUSSION

This research project set out to explore the use of Māori student cohorts as a teaching and learning strategy. The theme of *whanaungatanga*, relationship and connection, as an outcome of the Māori cohorts was not an unexpected finding. *Whakawhanaungatanga* has been recommended by previous researchers as a strategy to enhance Māori student wellbeing and success at university (Rātima et al., 2022) and thus was a key reason for initiating the Māori cohort as a teaching and learning strategy. Many students feel overwhelmed and isolated when they begin university, thus strategies to enable students to connect to form communities and support groups are welcomed by many students. However, Chittick et al. (2019) argue that *cultural* connection is an important goal because it increases students' self-confidence. The need for cultural connection was evident, with participants valuing the opportunity to form close connections with other Māori students. While cultural connection is possible to facilitate outside the learning environment, this has challenges. Cohorting Māori students together for labs and tutorials provides a structure within the curriculum for *whanaungatanga* to occur. This practice reflects a culturally responsive learning environment which reinforces the identity of the learner. Further, it signals to students and stakeholders that the education provider values cultural connection as important for student success.

Cohorting for the purpose of *whanaungatanga*, however, is not enough. The initial cohorts supported *whanaungatanga*, however it was not until the teaching environment for the Māori cohort integrated other aspects of Māori culture, specifically *tikanga* Māori, *wānanga* and *manaakitanga*, that students felt their learning needs were being met. Bringing *tikanga* into the classroom provides the opportunity for participants to not only live as Māori, but study as Māori. Māori cultural identity and connectedness instils a sense of belonging which supports student wellbeing and enables a more effective transition to student life (Amundsen, 2019). Smooth transition into tertiary study, in turn, facilitates improved retention and success.

In addition to increasing the retention and success of Māori students, *tikanga* Māori supports nursing students

gaining competence as a 'Māori' nurse. The development of a professional identity strengthened by *mātauranga* Māori and *Te Ao Māori* has been shown to retain Māori nurses in the workforce despite the challenges they experience working within a predominantly western world view (Hunter & Cook, 2020). Māori nurses who are confident in who they are as Māori bring this cultural capital into their nursing practice to more effectively deliver health services for Māori *whānau* and communities (Wilson et al., 2022) and role model culturally safe practice to the wider health workforce (Hunter, 2019). Thus, incorporating *tikanga* into the curriculum for Māori students has the potential to provide the dual cultural and clinical skill set they need (Sciascia, 2017).

The use of *wānanga* as a teaching and learning strategy reflects an attempt to treat students as autonomous and self-determining (*rangatiratanga*) within the learning relationship. It enables classroom relationships to be based on interdependence, and Māori can engage with learning, while maintaining who they are as people. They could be themselves, make mistakes, and ask 'silly' questions. *Wānanga* allows students to explore ideas, unpack rationale for practice, and articulate reasoning. When *wānanga* is achieved, all learners are able to share thoughts and ideas and correct misunderstandings (Rātima et al., 2022). Culturally relevant teaching practices are affirming of cultural (and self) identity and consequently, are associated with academic success for Māori (Wilson et al., 2022).

*Manaakitanga* is a core value within Māori educational practice. The overarching principle of *manaakitanga* is to nurture and protect others (K.I.N. Author Collective, 2021; Wilson et al., 2022) and helps to ensure meaningful and long-lasting relationships between individuals. These relationships are key to Māori student success (Rātima et al., 2022). In enacting *manaakitanga*, *mana* is upheld through both giving and accepting kindness and generosity (Wright & Heaton, 2021). Both student and teacher retain *mana* through *manaakitanga*.

A strong sense of *mana* enables Māori students to achieve their goals and to thrive (Webber & Macfarlane, 2020). It was the ongoing practices of teaching staff, observed through the care taken when working with students, and the demonstration of *manaakitanga* that created a safe learning environment for students and further supported their sense of connectedness and belonging. If *mana* is not upheld throughout the learning process, students are likely to become disillusioned with the 'caring profession' of nursing. Absence of *manaakitanga* in the classroom could account for Māori withdrawals from programmes.

The visible demonstration of *manaakitanga* serves an additional purpose. Dewar (2021) identified *manaakitanga* as an important value in providing 'good care' within hospitals. The potential role-modelling of this deeply held value in the classroom, both teacher to student and student to student, has significant relevance to the provision of good care when applied in nursing practice settings. Building an emphasis on *manaakitanga* in the curriculum and teaching as a *mana*-enhancing way to practice, provides a solid foundation for the practice of future 'good care' as a registered nurse. It upholds and enhances the *mana* of the student,

and this has the potential to carry over into practice with patients and whānau.

This study gave voice to Māori nursing students who have a clear understanding of the educational practices that support their learning. Their experience and views reflect previous research which demonstrated that more inclusive practices are needed to support Māori learners in higher education, particularly at the university level (Amundsen, 2019). Cohorting, particularly alongside Māori educators as facilitators to incorporate tikanga, wānanga and manaakitanga, is a valid strategy to support success for Māori nursing students. However, the onus cannot lie with Māori teaching staff alone. Non-Māori teaching staff need to implement teaching practices which support success such as the wānanga (discussion style teaching) that students identified. Further, non-Māori staff must demonstrate an understanding of tikanga Māori practices and embody manaakitanga when working with Māori students to support student retention and success and grow the Māori nursing workforce.

### Limitations

This study was limited by the low number of participants, and was confined to one tertiary education provider, thus findings may not be transferable to other providers. It was also limited by the absence of participants who had a less than favourable experience within the cohorts, or who had withdrawn from the nursing programme, despite participation in the Māori cohorts. Further, this research explored one teaching and learning strategy implemented to support Māori student learning. It is acknowledged that the whole curriculum needs to better prepare all nurses to meet the needs of Māori whānau and communities (Hoskins & Jones, 2022).

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The cohorting of Māori students is recommended for programmes preparing nurses for registration. Such cohorting would be one strategy towards He Awa Whiria, a braided river approach to programme design advocated by Macfarlane et al. (2015). In it, there is a Te Ao Māori stream which co-exists alongside the western stream.

Māori students should be supported to develop their understanding of tikanga Māori and Te Ao Māori within programmes of study. Deeper understanding of tikanga and Te Ao Māori will support students to become Māori nurses, who are prepared to advocate for and lead the change needed to achieve health equity in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Tertiary providers must make an effort to employ staff who have special skills and enthusiasm for forming strong, positive relationships with Māori students, and that bring

with them some fundamental understanding of tikanga Māori. This requires a conscious and ongoing effort to recruit, employ and retain Māori teaching staff (McAllister et al., 2019).

### CONCLUSION

A fundamental aspect of decolonising work is listening to Māori and trusting what they tell us about their experience (Thomas, 2020). This research has sought to listen to and describe the student experience of Māori cohorts within a School of Nursing in Aotearoa New Zealand. The findings indicate that cohorting is a culturally responsive teaching practice for Māori and will go some way to retaining students within programmes. It provides a safe space for learning in what is predominantly a western monocultural education system. An atmosphere can be created where students make connections and support each other. However, cohorting alone is not sufficient. It needs to be supported by teaching practices that meet the needs of Māori learners. These teaching practices include the inclusion of tikanga Māori, wānanga as a formal teaching strategy and the overt demonstration of manaakitanga. When integrated into programmes of study, Māori student cohorts have the potential to not only support retention, but also the development of the student's professional identity as a 'Māori' nurse.

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### Conflicts of Interest

None

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