Whanaungatanga and Identity: Strengthening Wellbeing for Taiohi Māori

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Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini.

My strength or success should not be credited to me alone, for it is not individual strength or success but that of the collective.

Introduction

Whanaungatanga is a foundational concept in te ao Māori, emphasising relationships, kinship, and a deep sense of collective connection. Rangimarie Rose Pere describes whanaungatanga as a powerful bond influencing "the way one lives and reacts to his/her kinship groups, people generally, the world, the universe," based in "ancestral, historical, traditional and spiritual ties."[1] These ties often extend beyond shared whakapapa (genealogy) to include mentors, teachers, and caring community members who provide emotional, spiritual, and cultural support.[2] This underscores its enduring significance for taiohi (adolescent) Māori.

Identity for taiohi Māori can involve a wide range of intersecting components—spiritual beliefs, te reo Māori fluency, historical consciousness, genealogical knowledge, and personal expressions of being Māori.[3] Cultural efficacy—the ability and confidence to engage in Māori cultural contexts and practices—often lies at the core of this identity. Studies show that reinforcing these varied dimensions of identity through supportive relationships can help to foster wellbeing.[4] Yet, the long-lasting impacts of colonisation—including structural inequities, discrimination, marginalisation, and under-resourced healthcare and education systems—continue to shape the realities in which taiohi Māori live. These realities influence outcomes for taiohi Māori, such as increased poverty, involvement in state care, stress, and poorer outcomes in health, youth justice and education.[5] Strengthening whanaungatanga and identity emerges as one approach to provide vital support for taiohi Māori amid these challenges, helping them to navigate ngā piki me ngā heke—the ups and downs of life—and thrive as proud and connected Māori.

This article examines the ways whanaungatanga underpins taiohi Māori wellbeing, highlighting how mātauranga Māori–based practices—including everyday whānau experiences and more formal cultural activities—offer protective benefits. We also explore educational, community, and technological strategies that can bolster identity and whanaungatanga in contemporary environments.

Understanding whanaungatanga

Whanaungatanga is often described as the "glue" that binds people together through kinship, extended family relationships, and communal responsibilities.[6] Grounded in reciprocity and collective responsibility, whanaungatanga ensures every individual has a

role within a broader social unit.[7] Whether learning whakapapa, attending marae gatherings, or simply talking in the car, taiohi gain a sense of belonging that can help fortify them to manage and cope with life's challenges.[8]

Scholars have explored whanaungatanga as both a cultural value and a structural force shaping relationships in te ao Māori. Some have examined its linguistic components, suggesting it reflects an active process of relational connection.[9] Others argue that whanaungatanga is so fundamental to Māori culture that it does not require explicit definition, as it is embedded in daily life.[10] The concept has been described as a web of interconnections that exist across kinship, community, and kaupapa-based groups.[11] It is closely tied to care, mutual support, and shared obligations, which are essential to maintaining social cohesion.[12]

While traditionally linked to whānau, hapū and iwi relationships, whanaungatanga has evolved over time. Colonisation and urbanisation have reshaped Māori realities, leading to an expansion of whanaungatanga to include non-kin relationships, kaupapa-driven networks, and digital interactions.[13] These changes reflect how Māori continue to uphold relational values in diverse ways, adapting to contemporary contexts while maintaining intergenerational ties.[14]

For taiohi, whanaungatanga is reinforced in many ways beyond traditional spaces. It can be found in friendships, sports teams, creative collaborations, and professional mentorships. Online platforms also

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provide a space for maintaining and strengthening relationships, demonstrating how whanaungatanga remains central to Māori identity in both physical and digital realms.[15] Regardless of the form it takes, whanaungatanga continues to play a vital role in fostering belonging, supporting wellbeing, and ensuring the transmission of mātauranga Māori across generations.

Strengthening links between whanaungatanga and identity

Cultural identity as a protective factor

Identity for taiohi Māori can include many connected aspects—such as spirituality, history, te reo Māori, whakapapa, and personal interests—and can develop differently over time.[16] Having a strong Māori cultural identity, regardless of whether one knows their hapū and iwi or not,[17] can support positive health and social wellbeing outcomes.[18] When identity is strengthened by whanaungatanga, taiohi Māori are helped to understand their place within a network of connections.[19] This combined effect of identity and whanaungatanga can provide resilience, helping taiohi cope better with experiences of racism, discrimination, or cultural isolation,[20] though it may not fully eliminate their impacts.

Individual expressions of being Māori

Although Māori identity is strongly linked to connections with others, taiohi may express this identity in variety of ways.[21]

Some relate most to reo Māori environments, kapa haka or marae-based activities, while others may prefer sports, arts, or multiple cultural backgrounds. Others may have limited involvement with te ao Māori or their Māoritanga, due to a range of factors such as fewer family connections, whakamā (embarrassment, shame) of not knowing much about their

culture leading to further avoidance, adoption into non-Māori families, or interests not focused on Māori practices.[22] Often, these experiences are shaped by colonisation, which has disrupted connections to whakapapa, language, and cultural knowledge. Urban migration, displacement from ancestral lands, and assimilation policies have impacted intergenerational transmission of traditions, resulting in diverse and sometimes limited ways of engaging with Māori identity today.

Colonisation, therefore, has not only disrupted collective traditions in general, but also resulted in highly varied experiences among taiohi Māori. These disruptions have created diverse pathways through which taiohi connect—or struggle to connect—with their cultural identity.

Recognising the range of factors shaping diverse experiences of Māori identity—including individual differences in spirituality, relationships with other Māori, disability, gender identity or personal appearance[23]—helps ensure whanaungatanga remains welcoming and inclusive for all taiohi. Marae, hapū, community and wider networks can support taiohi effectively when they acknowledge and affirm each person's unique way of being Māori.[24]

The whānau chocolate box

The whānau chocolate box metaphor[25] represents the collective traits, strengths, and capabilities within a whānau (family), likening each whānau member's gifts or qualities to individual chocolates. This concept reframes whānau as an expansive network of support, reinforcing collective identity and wellbeing.

The metaphor provides a strengths-based perspective on support networks, with each chocolate representing a different source of guidance, love, support and knowledge. Just as a chocolate box holds a variety of flavours and textures, a whānau consists of a diverse range of relationships—parents, siblings, aunties, uncles, kaumātua, mentors—each offering a unique form of encouragement, wisdom, or source of resilience for taiohi.

By identifying "chocolates"—such as practical skills, leadership potential, humour, empathy, or deep cultural wisdom—taiohi and whānau gain clarity about the diverse attributes present in their family. This metaphor is underpinned by four concepts: te haerenga whakamua (drawing from ancestral stories), kotahitanga (unity and shared purpose), he toa takitini (recognising collective support and gratitude), and tātai hono (learning from intergenerational relationships). The approach offers flexibility for whānau to personalise the metaphor, using culturally meaningful alternatives, thereby nurturing reciprocal support and holistic wellbeing within whānau contexts.

The metaphor aligns with the cultural practices outlined below—much like an assortment of chocolates themselves—all of which can contribute to taiohi identity, resilience, and a sense of whanaungatanga.

Cultural practices that support identity through whanaungatanga

Tikanga

Tikanga Māori-based frameworks for whānau to support taiohi such as Tikanga Ririki[26] and Matua Rautia[27] emphasise nurturing and protecting the mana and tapu of taiohi through practices deeply connected to te ao Māori. Central to these frameworks is tikanga—the culturally grounded principles and practices that uphold the identity of taiohi; an identity made up of many parts, but focusing in this article on their mana, the spiritual power and inherited authority from atua and tīpuna, and tapu, the sacredness that surrounds each individual.[28] Mana for taiohi can take the form of developing independent agency (mana motuhake) or positively influencing their relationships and environments (mana tangata), while tapu might be evidenced in self-respect for and protection of their intrinsic dignity.

Engaging with whakapapa places taiohi in a continuum that connects past, present, and future, helping them to contextualise their place within the multiple layers of relationships that exist within the world.

Tikanga Māori-based frameworks can provide practical guidance for whānau to honour mana and tapu in ways particularly supportive of taiohi, such as:

- Helping taiohi to work through big feelings and expressing their needs—showing empathy and acknowledging rangatiratanga—through such tikanga as sharing aroha and kindness, hearing taiohi voice, and considering the needs of taiohi, i.e., taiohi-centred tikanga;[29]

- Helping to bring balance and awareness to mauri, the energy state that is expressed through indicators of wellbeing; physical, mental/emotional, spiritual and whānau/social;[30]

- Collective healing engagement, drawing on extended whānau networks, including professional support as needed.[31]

As well as having an intentional tikanga for raising taiohi, tikanga Māori practices can be used to support taiohi to deepen their connections within Māori contexts, be they whānau, hapū, iwi, or in general Māori settings, anchoring them within cultural identity and supportive relational networks, such as:

- Regular use of karakia to foster spiritual wellbeing and resilience;

- Involving taiohi in kaitiakitanga (guardianship) activities, such as tree planting or river clean-ups, can help taiohi to develop a sense of responsibility towards the environment, aligning with Māori values of interconnectedness with nature;

- Actively engaging taiohi in marae-based activities such as pōwhiri, mihi whakatau, and manaakitanga practices around kai, which reinforce intergenerational bonds and relational responsibilities.[32]

Pūrākau (storytelling)

Pūrākau about our atua or tūpuna can help taiohi to see personal challenges as components of an intergenerational narrative celebrating resilience, creativity, and potential.[33] Programmes like Te Mahi a Atua involve whānau in exploring creation narratives, reframing adversity through Māori cultural insights.[34] By associating themselves with atua who have been through a range of experiences and emotions—ngā piki me ngā heke—taiohi derive a broader sense of understanding, awareness, self-compassion and purpose, reinforcing whanaungatanga among whānau and situating everyday challenges in a lineage that emphasises hope and aroha.

Sharing whakapapa and cultural narratives

Engaging with whakapapa places taiohi in a continuum that connects past, present, and future, helping them to contextualise their place within the multiple layers of relationships that exist within the world.[35] Taiohi who engage with genealogical records, iwi narratives, or the achievements of tūpuna (ancestors) often experience enhanced self-esteem and a collective sense of self.[36] Centring whanaungatanga

ensures that learning whakapapa is not an isolated exercise but rather a communal one, enriched by kaumātua (elders), whānau and wider community, who share stories and cultural values. These inter-generational relationships are critical for passing on key tikanga and knowledge that strengthen the place of taiohi in a living cultural legacy.

Kapa haka

More than performance, kapa haka creates strong group unity, shared responsibility, and pride in te ao Māori.[37] By learning haka, poi, and waiata, taiohi refine te reo Māori skills and forge peer relationships in the process.[38] This environment promotes confidence and belonging, and cultivates the synergy that is essential to whanaungatanga.[39] Research highlights kapa haka as a significant protective factor for many taiohi, providing opportunities to strengthen te reo Māori, deepen whakapapa connections, and reinforce resilience.[40]

The Whānau Chocolate Box framework aligns with these findings, illustrating how kapa haka nurtures the diverse strengths within a whānau, ensuring that taiohi have access to role models, cultural narratives, and collective wisdom.[41] The collective energy created through kapa haka exemplifies the essence of whanaungatanga, grounding taiohi in their whakapapa and providing a foundation for lifelong cultural engagement.[42] This aligns with broader research on whānau-centred approaches to wellbeing, such as the Tū Kahikatea framework, which highlights whanaungatanga as a catalyst for collective health and resilience.[43]

Waka

Waka (canoes) have long held cultural, historical, and spiritual significance for Māori, connecting people to their ancestors, to te taiao (the environment), and to each other. Traditionally used for travel, trade, warfare, and ceremony, waka also reflect whakapapa and iwi identity. In contemporary times, different types of waka—including waka ama and waka tangata—continue to offer opportunities for strengthening identity and fostering whanaungatanga.[44]

Waka ama (outrigger canoeing) unites physical challenge with an intimate link to te taiao, providing opportunities for collective whānau activity across generations.[45] Families or community teams often train and compete together, forging strong intergenerational ties while honouring Māori maritime heritage and technological knowledge.[46] Collaborative

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paddling emphasises manaakitanga and whanaungatanga, in a modern expression of ancestral navigational traditions.

Additionally, engagement with te taiao—through the rhythms of the water and the discipline of paddling—promotes a holistic approach to health and identity.[47] These themes align with findings on the social and health benefits of whānau-based initiatives, demonstrating how participation in cultural activities enhances collective wellbeing.[48] Whether used for racing, learning, or connection to ancestral practices, waka can offer a powerful vehicle for building identity and nurturing whanaungatanga today.

Waka tangata—the construction of waka for educational purposes in community settings—provide inclusive spaces free from tapu restrictions, allowing all to engage with waka traditions in accessible and culturally affirming ways.[49]

Rites of passage

Historically, Māori rites of passage marked significant life transitions, embedding taiohi deeply within their whānau and iwi. These rituals, including tā moko (traditional skin markings), whare wānanga (specialised places of higher learning), and ceremonial rites such as tohi (dedication under tapu) and pure (rituals of purification), provided structured support and mentoring from kaumātua, transmitted ancestral knowledge, and prepared young people for adult roles within their community.[50]

While colonisation disrupted many traditional practices, contemporary Māori communities are revitalising these rites of passage in culturally meaningful ways. Modern adaptations include wānanga that utilise pūrākau (ancestral stories), mau rākau (traditional martial arts), kapa haka, waka, and identity-centred programmes to support taiohi in navigating critical life stages.[51] These initiatives maintain core elements of intergenerational mentoring and reinforce whanaungatanga, providing taiohi with a strengthened sense of identity, cultural grounding and belonging.[52]

Balancing kanohi ki te kanohi with digital engagement

Traditionally, kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) interactions have been central to nurturing whanaungatanga, fostering deep connections through marae-based and hapū engagements.[53] However, with many whānau now geographically dispersed, sustaining these relationships increasingly involves digital platforms. Data from the Youth19 Rangatahi Smart survey—a representative survey of over 7,500 taiohi from Taitokerau, Tamaki Makaurau and Waikato, with 1,528 (20%) of those who did the survey being rangatahi Maori—shows that 96% of taiohi Māori have personal devices, with 63% using them to seek health and wellbeing information.[54] Despite this widespread digital access, taiohi report that many online resources lack cultural relevance or user-friendly navigation, highlighting the need for culturally

aligned digital spaces that emphasise whanaunga-tanga through mana-enhancing content.[55]

Community-led digital projects, such as iwi or hapū-managed social media groups, offer taiohi real-time genealogical resources, event updates, and local support networks, demonstrating how virtual whanaungatanga can complement traditional practices.[56] Elders and experts, however, caution against exclusively digital interactions, noting potential risks to maintaining robust marae-based or hapū connections, "virtualising tikanga", and concerns of people not returning to their marae.[57] Integrating digital engagement with ongoing kanohi ki te kanohi interaction—such as visiting one's marae if known, taking part in local cultural events, or attending nationwide events such as Matariki/Pūanga celebrations or Waitangi Day gatherings—can help to provide a balance between the immediacy of digital technology and the immersive depth and cultural integrity of face-to-face practices.

Identity, learning and wellbeing

Historically, taiohi learned practical and cultural skills within communal and intergenerational settings, embedding them in values, cultural responsibilities, and collective identity.[58] Central to these settings was whanaungatanga, fostering kinship ties and intergenerational knowledge sharing that strengthened a collective sense of belonging.[59]

Today, educational environments significantly impact how these traditional connections and identities evolve. Kaupapa Māori approaches, notably kura kaupapa Māori, actively promote Māori language, tribal histories, and whānau engagement, positively reinforcing taiohi cultural identity and wellbeing.[60] Conversely, mainstream schooling, when disconnected from Māori perspectives, risks isolating taiohi and weakening their sense of cultural identity and belonging—factors linked to poorer mental health outcomes.[61]

Kaupapa Māori approaches to education actively promote Māori language, tribal histories and whānau engagement, positively reinforcing taiohi cultural identity and wellbeing.

Recognising this dynamic, Māori communities frequently supplement formal education with culturally grounded initiatives such as knowledge and skill-building wānanga, Māori performing arts and sports, kaitiakitanga/environmental protection, and other community-led activities.[62] These initiatives provide opportunities for taiohi to explore and strengthen their Māori identity, build resilience, and experience genuine whanaungatanga within safe cultural spaces.[63]

Culturally affirming contexts support taiohi identity development, offering spaces for restorative and positive interactions that have the power to strengthen wellbeing, especially important for those taiohi facing marginalisation or disconnection.[64]

Thus, nurturing cultural identity and meaningful whanaungatanga in both traditional and contemporary settings remains fundamental to supporting taiohi development, resilience, and educational engagement.

Takatāpui insights: belonging and affirmation

Recent studies highlight that for takatāpui communities—Māori with diverse genders, sexualities, and sex characteristics—a strong sense of belonging is closely linked to greater life satisfaction, pride in their identity, and enhanced overall wellbeing.[65] However, the protective impacts of whanaungatanga have been eroded for many who identify as takatāpui through colonising forces and attempts at active exclusion and alienation by some groups within the community.

When young people are excluded by their whānau, it is particularly damaging and associated with high levels of mental health distress. Conversely, when whānau and friends are loving and supportive, whanaungatanga is protective for takatāpui taiohi. Supportive whānau environments affirm cultural identity, mana, and tapu within inclusive settings, counteracting discrimination and oppression related to transphobia or homophobia. Some find online takatāpui groups especially valuable for forging non-kin "found whānau," where cultural and sexual/gender diversity intersect safely.[66] Meanwhile, marae or kura-based programmes that welcome takatāpui broaden the scope of whanaungatanga by meeting the diverse needs of taiohi and ensuring they remain anchored to iwi and hapū relationships, both physically and digitally.

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Addressing systemic inequities demands intentional strategies targeting the root causes of racism and inequality, including meaningful shifts in institutional policy and practice.

Recognising that there are a range of factors and diverse experiences—including individual differences in spirituality, relationships with other Māori, disability, gender identity, or personal appearance[67]—helps ensure whanaungatanga remains welcoming and inclusive for all taiohi. Marae and hapū spaces can support taiohi effectively when they acknowledge and affirm each person's unique way of being Māori.[68]

Addressing systemic inequities and structural disadvantage

Although whanaungatanga and identity can powerfully protect taiohi, colonial legacies such as racism, institutional bias and material hardship remain embedded.[69] These systemic barriers significantly limit—or prevent—the ability of many taiohi Māori to access culturally supportive environments, thus diminishing the full protective potential of whanaungatanga.[70] Structural inequities, including inadequate housing, economic disadvantage, and geographic isolation from marae, compound these challenges, restricting whānau from engaging fully in cultural practices that are vital for resilience and collective wellbeing.[71]

Addressing these systemic inequities demands intentional strategies targeting the root causes of racism and inequality, including meaningful shifts in institutional policy and practice. Educational policies that authentically incorporate te reo Māori, mātauranga Māori, and sustained relationships with marae, hapū, and iwi can help dismantle cultural barriers and reduce experiences of marginalisation within mainstream schooling contexts.[72] In healthcare, a genuine commitment to culturally responsive frameworks—such as Te Whare Tapa Whā[73], Mauri Ora Tai Pari[74], Te Tapa Toru[75], and the Meihana Model[76]—is required. This involves not only embedding these models structurally but also ensuring Māori leadership and expertise guide their implementation to better address the specific needs of taiohi Māori.[77]

In addition, equitable resource distribution and targeted investment in marae- and iwi-based initiatives are critical. Initiatives such as marae-based mental health services, culturally grounded parenting programmes, and digital platforms guided by tikanga Māori principles support taiohi Māori to overcome barriers created by ongoing structural disadvantage.[78] Furthermore, addressing material hardships—such as housing instability, poverty, and limited access to healthcare—through policies co-designed with Māori communities can enhance the practical ability of whānau to engage consistently in whanaungatanga-enriched activities, fostering resilience and wellbeing.[79]

Ultimately, meaningful systemic change relies on sustained, collaborative efforts involving Māori leadership, policymakers, and communities, ensuring taiohi Māori are genuinely supported to flourish within culturally rich and affirming environments.

Conclusion

Whanaungatanga and identity remain central to the wellbeing of rangatahi Māori. Traditionally, culturally grounded learning settings provided young people

with practical skills, cultural values, and collective responsibilities, embedding them deeply within inter-generational networks. These settings reinforced mana and upheld the tapu, inherent in every individual.[80] Today, integrating kaupapa Māori principles and culturally responsive frameworks into schools, social services and health services continues to significantly strengthen taiohi Māori identity, resilience, and wellbeing.[81]

However, systemic inequities resulting from colonisation, including ongoing experiences of racism and economic disadvantage, persistently disrupt the full potential of whanaungatanga to protect and nurture taiohi Māori.[82] Addressing these structural barriers requires targeted anti-racist policies, equitable resource allocation, and community-driven solutions designed collaboratively with Māori communities. Such measures will enhance equitable access to cultural practices and networks essential for taiohi wellbeing.

Expanding culturally affirming community activities such as waka, kapa haka, wānanga and rites of passage ceremonies can further integrate whanaungatanga and identity formation, offering taiohi secure, culturally relevant spaces for growth.[83] At the same time, recognising the shift to digital spaces for maintaining relationships, it is critical that online platforms are available that actively incorporate tikanga Māori, guided by experts, to authentically extend mana-enhancing support for taiohi.[84]

Above all, genuine whanaungatanga—fostered through meaningful relationships, cultural engagement, and community-driven initiatives—holds the potential to anchor taiohi Māori firmly in their whakapapa and identity, enabling them to thrive with confidence and resilience.

> *Culturally affirming activities and rites of passage ceremonies can offer taiohi secure, culturally relevant spaces for growth.*

Endnotes

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3   Houkamau & Sibley, 2015
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Cover image: Te Rawhitiroa Bosch

Glossary of Māori words and phrases:

Aroha – *Love, compassion, empathy, charity, sympathy.*

Atua – *Ancestors of continuing influence; spiritual beings connected to particular domains.*

Hapū – *Kinship group descending from a common ancestor; sub-section of an iwi.*

He toa takitini – *Recognising collective support and gratitude; acknowledging success as the result of collective effort rather than individual achievement.*

Iwi – *Tribe; extended kinship group sharing a common ancestor.*

Kai – *Food.*

Kaumātua – *Elders; respected leaders within whānau, hapū, iwi, and communities.*

Kanohi ki te kanohi – *Face-to-face interaction.*

Kaitiakitanga – *Guardianship and stewardship of the natural environment.*

Kapa haka – *Māori performing arts, involving haka, poi, waiata, and other forms of expression.*

Karakia – *Ritual chant, incantation, or prayer used to invoke spiritual guidance and protection.*

Kaupapa – *A topic, purpose, initiative, or underlying philosophy.*

Kotahitanga – *Unity, togetherness, collective action and purpose.*

Kura – *School or educational facility.*

Kura Kaupapa Māori – *Māori-language immersion schools (kura) whose philosophy and practice reflect Māori values, dedicated to revitalising Māori language, knowledge, and culture.*

Mana – *Spiritual authority, influence, status, dignity inherited from atua and tīpuna.*

Mana motuhake – *Self-determination, autonomy, independence, self-governance.*

Mana tangata – *Power, prestige, and influence derived from actions and relationships.*

Manaakitanga – *Kindness, care, hospitality.*

Marae – *Communal meeting place central to Māori life.*

Matariki / Pūanga – *Māori New Year celebrations; marked by the rising of the star cluster Matariki or the star Pūanga.*

Mātauranga Māori – *Māori knowledge systems, originating from Māori ancestors, including the Māori world view and perspectives, Māori creativity, and cultural practices.*

Mauri – *Life force or vital essence sustaining all living things.*

Mihi whakatau – *Informal welcoming ceremony.*

Ngākau aroha – *Empathy, compassion, kindness, love.*

Ngā piki me ngā heke – *The ups and downs of life; fluctuations and changes experienced.*

Poi – *a light ball on a string, swung or twirled rhythmically to sung accompaniment; traditionally used to strengthen the wrists.*

Pōwhiri – *Welcoming ceremony involving speeches, waiata, and hongi; typically held on a marae.*

Pure – *Ritual purification ceremony marking transitions in life.*

Pūrākau – *Creation stories and narratives containing historical, moral, or cultural understandings, wisdom, and insights.*

Rangatiratanga – *Leadership, authority, self-determination; exercising autonomy and leadership over one's affairs.*

Tā moko – *Traditional Māori skin markings/tattooing; signifying milestones and identity.*

Taiohi – *Youth or adolescent/s.*

Takatāpui – *People with diverse genders, sexualities, and sex characteristics.*

Tapu – *Sacredness and spiritual restriction; something set apart due to its sacred nature.*

Tātai hono – *Learning from intergenerational relationships; recognising the importance of connections across generations.*

Te ao Māori – *The Māori world; encompassing Māori worldviews, values, beliefs, customs, and traditions.*

Te haerenga whakamua – *Drawing from ancestral stories; connecting past experiences to guide future actions.*

Te reo Māori – *Māori language.*

Te taiao – *The environment; the natural world and surroundings.*

Tikanga – *Correct procedure, custom, rule, code, practice, convention, protocol – the customary system of values and practices developed over time and deeply embedded in the social context.*

Tīpuna / Tūpuna – *Ancestors.*

Tohi – *Ritual dedication ceremony under tapu marking significant life stages.*

Wānanga – *to meet and discuss, deliberate, consider; tribal knowledge, lore, learning - important traditional cultural, religious, historical, genealogical and philosophical knowledge.*

Waiata – *Songs; sung poetry expressing cultural knowledge, emotions, histories, and identity.*

Wairua – *Spiritual essence; the unseen force connecting all things to the spiritual realm.*

Waka – *Canoe or vessel; holds historical, spiritual, and cultural significance for Māori.*

Waka ama – *Outrigger canoe paddling.*

Waka tangata – *Canoes constructed for educational and community use.*

Whakamā – *Embarrassment, shame, shyness; feeling inadequate or awkward.*

Whakapapa – *Genealogy; the layers of ancestral lineage connecting people to their ancestral heritage, including connections beyond people to the natural world and atua.*

Whānau – *Family, inclusive of extended, fluid, and kin-like bonds.*

Whanaungatanga – *Kinship, relationships, profound sense of collective belonging.*

Whare wānanga – *Traditional Māori houses of higher learning; educational institution or forum.*

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