

RANGIĀTEA

HAMILTON GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL

EXEMPLAR

The Rangiātea project consists of case studies and exemplars from five secondary schools, each of them on a journey towards realising Māori student potential. The case studies look at the strategies used by the school leadership team and report on the key factors that contributed to lifting Māori student achievement. The exemplars step through how a particular programme has been used successfully in each school.

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ENGAGING MĀORI: SCHOOL ROUTINES CREATE AN “AS MĀORI” SPACE

Introduction

1. There is a common refrain that “what’s good for Māori is good for all New Zealanders”. This is an example in practice.
2. Imagine an initiative so powerful for Māori students that the school offered it to all students. This exemplar illustrates how Hamilton Girls’ High School (HGHS), working collaboratively with whānau and Māori students, built powerful educational relationships using whānau tutor classes, vertical tutor classes and mentoring.
3. Over time, the school developed and refined these initiatives for use with Māori students. Then, the senior leadership/management (SLM) team, believing in the potentiality of what works for Māori students is valuable for all students, implemented the approach school-wide.

The challenge

4. With a large and expanding roll of more than 1,500 students of approximately 50 ethnicities and more than 100 teaching staff, HGHS was challenged to create an empowering learning environment for Māori students. The school wanted to engage the minds and spirits of Māori students and to inculcate a love of learning. The school recognised the need to value and facilitate opportunities for whānau to contribute to the life of the school in ways that resonated and were meaningful for them.
5. The current HGHS principal brings an understanding of the importance of small communities within a large-school context—where a sense of belonging is critical to student development and education. She believes that positive participation, feeling a sense of ownership and acknowledging and valuing the contribution each student makes to the school environment accumulates and translates into pride in self and school, high self-esteem and awareness of others.
6. The Māori student roll has grown steadily, and in 2010 the Years 9–11 Māori student roll comprised 30 percent of the student population. A large number of Māori students come from kura kaupapa and/or bilingual settings. Whānau chose to send their daughters to HGHS because of its growing reputation as a school where Māori students achieve excellent academic results. Whānau also appreciate the school’s emphasis on raising global citizens:

The cultural diversity of the school positively impacts on Māori, the chance to gain an appreciation of other cultures and even more examples of positive role models. [Whānau]

7. Back in 2001, under the school leadership of the time, the school started to respond to whānau aspirations to reflect the values and customs of Māori within the school environment. When the new principal arrived in 2004, Māori student achievement at HGHS was higher than national Māori achievement levels. However, a key challenge remained of raising Māori student achievement to at least the same level as non-Māori achievement. Within the SLM team, there was a genuine desire to eliminate that gap. Attendance and retention rates amongst Māori students were an issue.
8. The new principal’s challenge was threefold. First, it was crucial to continue the creation of space and time where Māori students were able to participate in daily routines on Māori terms. Second, it was vital to continue to advance Māori achievement. Third, it was important to acknowledge value and build on the work already undertaken in the school.
9. The principal considered a number of responses to engage Māori, building on past developments. She asked the staff to discover why Māori girls did not attend school or attend certain subjects. She also asked for suggestions as to what the school could do to engage these students more effectively. She realised it was important to include whānau input in developing responses specifically for Māori students. Further, she investigated more general school-wide approaches that all community members of the school participate in, to check their resonance for Māori students and their whānau. The key principles that emerged are outlined in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1 Summary of key assumptions that support Māori student engagement

Underlying assumptions
• The curriculum resonates for Māori students.
• Māori students and their whānau have a sense of belonging.
• There is a need to bring the family environment of kura into the school, and build on natural connections.
• It is important that school staff and students involve whānau in their learning.
• Students can speak for themselves and provide direction on ways forward.
• School staff have an awareness of students' context/environment.

10. This exemplar shows how three initiatives have helped support and raise Māori student achievement in an “as Māori” environment:

- whānau tutor groups
- vertical whānau tutor groups
- mentoring.

The beginnings of a journey with Māori whānau

11. The new principal had a passion for learning and a commitment to build HGHS to be an outstanding educational institute for all students. Based on the strong foundation laid by the previous school leadership, and with the support of an experienced SLM team, the principal started to build on existing positive developments as well as injecting new life into the school.

12. The principal and SLM team acknowledged that there was no one solution to improving Māori achievement and that it was a journey, which required working together with whānau to develop and fine-tune strategies over time.

13. There was dedicated commitment to provide opportunities for Māori to articulate their aspirations and participate and contribute to the school life. There was also a commitment as well as a determination and courage from the principal and board of trustees (BOT) to take direction from kaumātua and whānau:

We expect our Māori students to achieve just as well. If [they are] not, then we need to be doing more, to work harder. If we investigate our own responsibility, we can and will make a difference. [Principal]

14. The principal and SLM team put Māori consultation into action, involving whānau in decision-making processes including employment of staff. A partnership approach with Māori is at the forefront of school management:

The fact that [the principal] seeks our advice and asks us to be a part of the employment process shows us that it is not just lip service [Whānau]

15. At times, the nature of partnership between school and whānau varied based on whānau availability and level of participation. As with any process, there were ebbs and flows, but the school mandate was always clear—the school is responsible for supporting and securing whānau engagement and involvement.

16. The principal indicated that all activities in the school have curricular value. She maintains that as long as students see personal relevance, activities have the potential to provide opportunities for learning and success:

There is no co- or extra-curricular; it's all a part of education and learning ... Everything is related to achievement. [Principal]

17. HGHS supports and acknowledges the involvement of Māori students in the wider Māori community and provides opportunities for them to participate in Kingitanga, marae and other cultural pursuits:
- [The senior management and principal] think outside of the square. They trust and respect things Māori, encouraging the students to participate because they see the greater value in that.* [Kaumātua]
18. Buy-in from students is more likely when students feel valued and acknowledged for positive contributions in all areas of school activity, not just in academic achievement. The principal, SLM team, teaching staff, BOT, kaumātua and whānau working party all agree on this:
- It is about showing [students] we care and focusing on their strengths. Then they start to trust you and will work to the very best of their ability.* [Teacher]
19. There is a strong emphasis on getting to know whānau and students—learning about their whānau/family circumstances, what they enjoy, what they feel they are good at (for example, sports), and providing tangible support and recognition. Staff changes (which are ongoing in any school) have less impact when the culture of whānau participation is embedded strongly in the school. Newly appointed staff are inducted into this culture of valuing whānau participation and enhancing Māori achievement.
20. Māori and whānau involvement is formalised in school systems and structures, with whānau classes, whānau rōpū and Ka Awatea, the Māori Student Council. There are also networks in the school such as the Pacifika and Indian student clubs.
21. Over time, it became clear to the principal and SLM team that a systematic, holistic response was required in order to engage more effectively with Māori students. This was facilitated through Māori student surveys and other opportunities to korero (discuss) and share, as illustrated in Table 2.

TABLE 2 Example of student questions

Student survey questionnaires—what was asked

- What helped you settle into HGHS?
- What else could have helped you?
- Think of your favourite subjects. What helps you to learn in them?
- Think of teachers with whom you find it easy to learn and state what makes them a good teacher.
- What are some of the things that hold you back from doing as well as you would like at school?
- If you need help with schoolwork or have other issues, where do you go for help?
- What is your cultural background?
- Does the school culture/attitude make a difference to how comfortable you feel at school?

22. The principal and SLM team believe that to advance Māori achievement, students need to be scaffolded into a broad range of initiatives they find engaging. Examples of initiatives developed to be relevant for Māori include a Māori mentoring programme and Ka Awatea. Further, events offered specifically for young Māori women, such as Te Ao Hou/Māori careers day and Mana wahine, help broaden their horizons. In addition, there is extra support in English language for students coming from Māori language settings.
23. As well as a focus on delivery of specialised curriculum, there is a broader school-wide focus on tikanga. The Treaty of Waitangi is acknowledged, and the school works towards developing a culturally inclusive environment for Māori students. Professional development for teachers in relation to Māori students draws on whānau knowledge and Māori teacher expertise. The principal is motivated to connect the curriculum with the cultural and community experiences of Māori, including whānau knowledge and skills.

The initiatives

24. The future direction for Māori students within the school aimed to advance Māori achievement using a culturally appropriate framework. Over a period of years, whānau recommended that the school offer Māori students and whānau “something they could call their own—a safe environment to undertake cultural traditions”. As a result, the first whānau class was developed in 2002 to create a space where Māori students could share problems relevant to them, encourage the use of te reo and help senior students feel comfortable within the school.
25. The following illustration provides a high-level overview of the developmental stages in implementing whānau form classes and mentoring.

FIGURE 1 Stages of development of the whānau tutor class and mentoring approach



Early beginnings

26. From 2001, kaumātua and whānau helped develop and implement a whānau working party that focused on advancing Māori achievement. Whānau became actively involved—leading consultation with the Māori community and students of the school.
27. Kaumātua and whānau provided cultural knowledge and expertise about the wairua (spirit) of the school—what they wanted to be able to feel and see when they entered the school. Key components they believed help to build Māori student success were values such as whakawhanaungatanga (building relationships), awhina (providing help), tautoko (providing support/advocacy) and manaaki (expressing love and hospitality). In addition, whānau indicated they value visual representations that showcase Māoritanga:

It is important that the school builds on what is familiar to our kids: it stops them feeling isolated and there is no us and them, it's about being a collective. [Whānau]

28. The SLM team at the time collaborated closely with whānau and the kaumātua and placed a strong emphasis on formalising systems and structures in the school that advanced Māori achievement. Whānau hui were held regularly throughout the year, and meeting times were advertised in school newsletters and whānau tutor classes. Teachers participated in hui and other Māori-focused events, at times during lunch breaks and outside of working hours. Whānau acknowledged the high level of commitment from senior management and teachers who they say were always willing to learn and support Māori achievement.
29. The SLM team believed it was critical that responses to and for Māori were flexible and based on collaboration with whānau and students. Change was grounded in a transparent approach, integrity and a genuine care for the progress of Māori students within the school.

Structure of the first whānau tutor classes

30. In 2002, the first whānau tutor class was established. It had strong support and direction from the deputy principal and the whānau working party. All Māori students were invited to join the first whānau class, irrespective of their course of study. They were free to choose whether they opted into the whānau class or not. The first whānau tutor class contained only a small number of senior Māori students in Years 11–13 who came together in a daily vertical tutor group. At that stage, Years 9 and 10 were not offered this option but stayed in their common tutor groups, as senior management believed that support from friends (as a cohort) helped the younger students transition into the school and was less disruptive for them.
31. Following the establishment of the first whānau tutor class, whānau and students provided feedback on the benefits experienced. These included increased tautoko (support) amongst students, more regular use of te reo, an improved sense of belonging, better whānau involvement and increased regard for tikanga. The demand from whānau and students for whānau classes grew.

Expanding whānau tutor classes into vertical tutor groups

32. In 2006, two more whānau tutor classes were established due to student and whānau feedback and the school's ongoing commitment to raising Māori achievement. This aligned well with the newly appointed principal's motivation to create small communities within the larger school environment.
33. Whānau tutor classes underwent a number of changes at this time. Whānau tutor groups were extended to contain a mix of Years 9–13 students. In addition, whānau tutor groups came together each day. The rest of the school's tutor groups remained horizontal (in single year groups):
- We really wanted a space which would support [Māori students] to be who they were; a safe environment where te reo would be used outside of te reo classes. [Whānau]*
- Whānau provides a sense of community and is all about building on natural connections, about building on strengths. [Principal]*
34. At the time additional whānau tutor groups were established, the whānau tutor group concept was also extended to support Year 9 and Year 10 students for several reasons:
- Whānau tutor groups helped and supported a growing number of Māori students from kura/immersion schools to adapt to a mainstream school and establish routines while retaining familiar concepts and ways of being for them.
 - Whānau tutor groups were seen as a more effective way to engage a wide range of junior Māori students in the school to learn and become familiar with new school systems.
 - The Year 9 and Year 10 whānau students were also placed with others from their whānau tutor group in subject classes to further assist the Year 9 students' transition.

Rolling vertical form classes out to the whole school

35. In 2008, all HGHS tutor groups changed to vertical tutor groups. Whānau tutor groups appeared to be making a difference in facilitating a culture of caring about the whole person, building a sense of belonging among Māori students, tuakana–teina support and improving attendance and retention. These were key factors in deliberations about possible school-wide implementation:

We felt that Māori were leading the way, the school was integrating the positive components of what our Māori students were doing and experiencing. [BOT member]

The girls were building excellent relationships; there was a nice atmosphere with lots of good humour. [Whānau]

36. The principal and SLM team undertook wider consultation with teaching staff, whānau and students about the rollout of vertical tutor groups. Consultation with teaching staff drew on their personal experiences of the advantages and disadvantages of vertical tutor groups. The advantages from the teachers' perspective were that vertical tutor groups provided better pastoral care for students, students learned to communicate and work together and older students got a chance to become role models. When compared to a single-tutor class the perceived disadvantages included the potential for a lack of consistency of teachers, and a lack of bonding between students and tutor teachers. There appeared to be more advantages overall. Feedback on the strengths and limitations of vertical forms was also sought, and students and parents voted on this issue. The principal and SLM team also visited schools operating vertical form classes to learn of their strengths and weaknesses.
37. Change can be a time of excitement for some but may appear threatening to others. Staff reactions to change in the school ranged from complete buy-in to pessimistic criticism. Initially, there wasn't uniform acceptance or consensus of the value of vertical form classes. The principal understood that people need time to come to terms with change and she was willing to negotiate with teaching staff over the changes. A review planned for 2009 was a condition of gaining staff approval for shifts in school direction and structures.

The emergence of mentoring

38. In 2009, during her sabbatical, the principal undertook the review of the school-wide vertical form classes with staff. Some of the feedback was disappointing, particularly the number of negative responses from some teachers about the changes that had occurred. At the time it felt like a setback to the principal; however, it stimulated thought and reflection by the SLM team on the school's strategic plan and direction.
39. There were still concerns with general student (including Māori) attendance and engagement in school. The school also identified a need to improve the number of students who got their options in on time for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA).
40. During that time, analysis of the NZCER Years 9–10 Engagement Survey suggested that there would be benefit from a smaller number of students working closely with a staff member to improve attendance and engagement:

This [mentoring programme] sets out to meet the needs of 21st century learners. We identify the need to be nurturing and assisting our students through to independence and interdependence. We seek to see each one of them with the confidence and capability to become a resilient self-sufficient graduate.

[Excerpt from principal's sabbatical report]

41. The principal was determined to make a positive change and a mentoring programme was implemented in both whānau and school-wide tutor groups. The programme became a way to monitor student progress. It established a formal system to engage teachers in getting to know their students and to make connections outside of classroom teaching. Expectations of students were also established from the outset—such as that it is a student's responsibility to adhere to school routines such as coming to school and being in class on time.

42. The principal believes that mentoring is valuable in building relationships between whānau, students and the school, as well as an effective way to communicate the importance of wider school procedures and policies such as attendance and behaviour management policies:

Mentors are effective; they can be advocates where teacher–student relationships are not the best ... Mentors can access students regularly and provide guidance. [Principal]

43. The principal strongly believes that mentoring ties together the mission of the school—a wise woman shapes her own destiny—and the strategic goal to improve engagement of all students. It also supports the kaupapa of the whānau tutor classes who already create strong relationships with their students and go the extra mile to support them in their progress, as outlined in Table 3.

TABLE 3 Summary of HGHS’s approach to mentoring students

Key points for the whānau and tutor class mentoring programme
<p>HGHS believes it is important to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • get to know the girls—use correct names, have shared lunches together, know of and acknowledge birthdays • look up each girl’s file to establish any issues/sensitivities but be wary about initiating any conversations about these issues; always leave it to the student to initiate • allow the girls to get to know staff as people • communicate—get to know the girl’s whānau, and provide opportunities for whānau to get to know us as their daughter’s mentor • use the whānau tutor group as the first point of contact for everything—especially where there are concerns • set up routines that support student success—fill in reflections, feedback and feedforward to student, monitor attendance, expect them to wear the uniform well and look after their environment (looking after school).

Underpinning theory and philosophies

44. Relationships matter at HGHS. The school’s overall approach to supporting Māori student achievement is underpinned by consultation and collaboration with whānau and students. Meeting the needs of Māori students and their whānau has emerged largely from this interaction.

45. A key component is the successful ongoing relationship between HGHS and the Māori community. Kaumātua and whānau involvement is constant, with regular hui and opportunities for participation (for example, involvement in staff selection, providing advice on tikanga and contributing to the school policy for Māori students):

Relationships are the heart of the matter and there are parallels with Te Kotahitanga. We are building resilience with our students, realise the critical part that school climate plays, and recognise difference and celebrate it. [Ex-deputy principal who led the consultation and changes from 2001]

46. The SLM team regularly seeks and accepts guidance from kaumātua in areas that require proficiency in tikanga. This helps to establish and maintain credibility amongst whānau and Māori students:

The principal and senior management have always looked outside the square, which has produced huge success amongst our tamariki [children]. [Kaumātua]

47. Whānau class development was substantively based on whānau and kaumātua advice and guidance on the cultural knowledge and values that needed to be evident in daily school life. This included the use of karakia, waiata and te reo Māori as well as modelling whanaungatanga (having respectful relationships), awhina and tautoko (providing support and advocacy) and manaaki (caring for others). Whānau class development was also based on an understanding that when teachers place an emphasis on caring about students as people and when schools put in place processes that support Māori to be and feel Māori, learning and achievement are a natural consequence.

48. The principal strongly believes that it is important to gather data to inform decision making within the school. Formative and summative data are used to set goals, establish relevant and appropriate teaching strategies and monitor progress. The principal recognises there are differences between students in the school and that some groups need to be treated separately in terms of gathering and analysing data:

The principal is not afraid to recognise difference but does this by being inclusive where all students are treated equally. [Teacher]

49. A critical factor that supports the implementation of these initiatives is teacher professional development. The principal strongly advocates lifelong learning for staff and leads the way by staying up to date with the latest education philosophies and research, sharing this information with staff and challenging them to reflect on their own learning. Teachers and the SLM team are expected to walk the talk and be self-directed lifelong learners themselves:

At HGHS, teachers need to be passionate about learning and become researchers in their own practice ... I tell my staff to let the girls know you are a learner as well; lead by example. [Principal]

50. The principal has also championed the development of a professional learning community. There is also a strong focus on reflective practice, informed by analysis of student achievement data to enhance student achievement:

It is a good place to grow our girls. The principal is passionate about the girls being strong enough to make wise, good choices ... [By] doing the whānau classes and encouraging things Māori I can see that the girls are working towards that goal. [Whānau teacher]

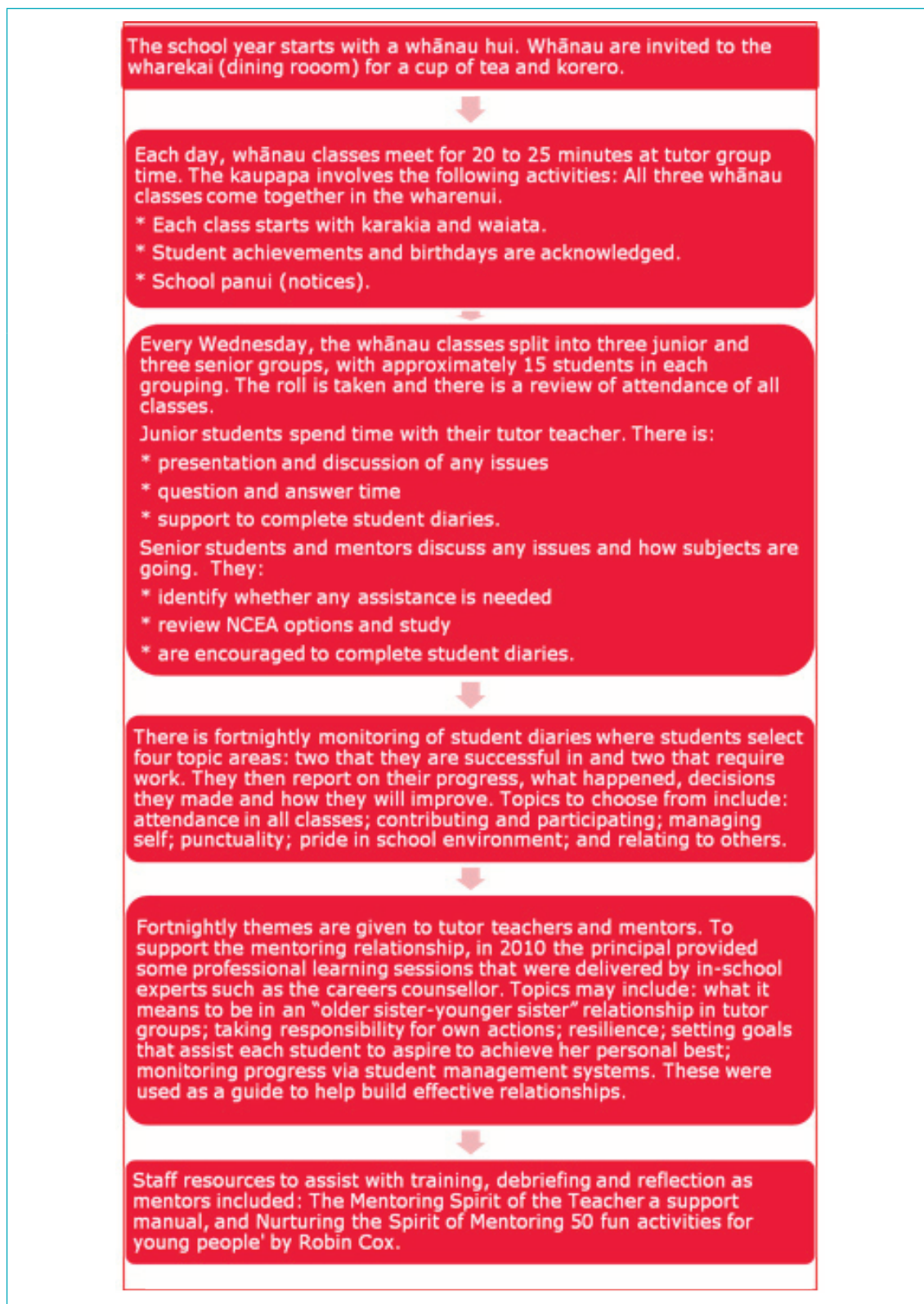
51. There are a number of sources of information that the principal found provided critical insight when leading whānau and tutor group change and in implementing school-wide approaches such as mentoring. These include Robyn Cox's mentoring model and training, Maggie Dent's professional development in adolescent development and David Hargreave's personalised learning approach. Other research and readings that also have had a significant impact on leading development include:

- Bolstad, R., & Gilbert, J. (2008). *Disciplining and drafting, or 21st century learning? Rethinking the New Zealand senior school curriculum for the future.* Wellington: NZCER Press.
- Claxton, G. (2002). *Building learning power: Helping young people become better learners.* Bristol: TLO.
- Claxton, G. (2005). *Building 101 ways to learning power.* Bristol: TLO.
- Crowther, F. (2002). *Developing teacher leaders.* CA: Corwin Press.
- Fullan, M., Hill, P., & Crevola, C. (2006). *Breakthrough.* CA: Corwin Press.
- Gilbert, J. (2005). *Catching the knowledge wave: The knowledge society and the future of education.* Wellington: NZCER Press.
- McCain, T. (2005). *Teaching for tomorrow: Teaching content and problem solving skills.* CA: Corwin Press.
- Sergiovanni, T. (2007). *Rethinking leadership: A collection of articles.* CA: Corwin Press.
- Stoll, L., Fink, D., & Earl, L. (2003). *It's about learning (and it's about time).* New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Treadwell, M. (n.d). *Whatever next—a global conceptual curriculum.* Available at: www.schoolv2.net

What do whānau form classes and mentoring look like?

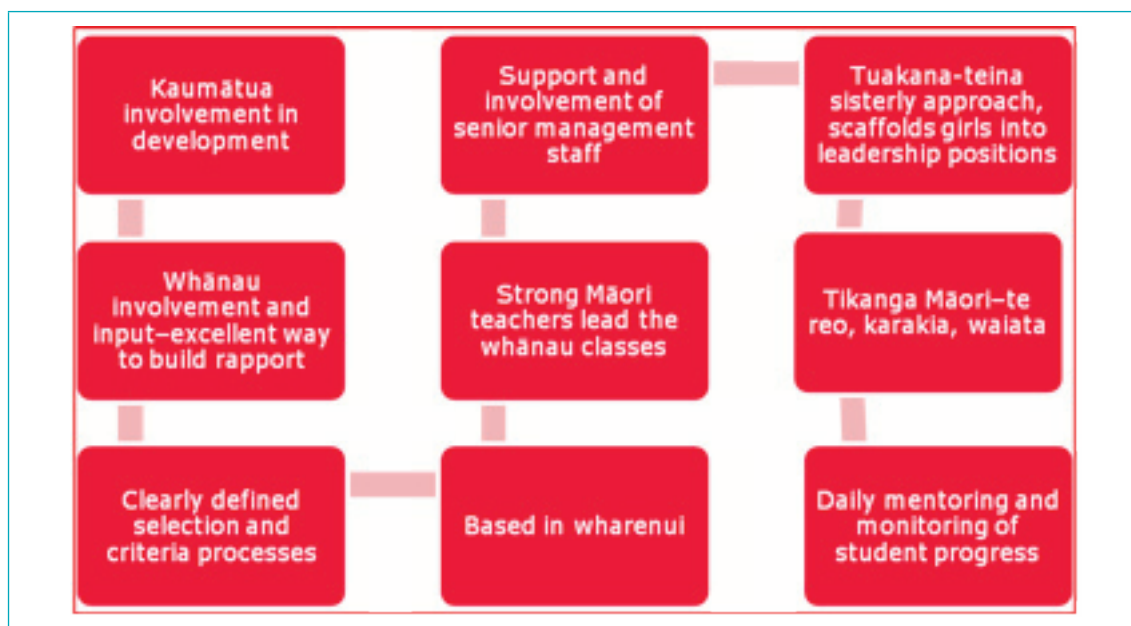
52. Figure 2 outlines the key steps in whānau form classes and the mentoring process.

FIGURE 2 Key aspects of the whānau form class and mentoring



53. The school has found that students like it when the whānau class is held in the wharenuī. Within whānau classes a tuakana–teina sisterly approach scaffolds girls into leadership positions, sets up positive role models and provides peer support positions where girls can enjoy tikanga Māori—te reo, karakia and waiata (language, prayers and song).
54. Importantly, daily mentoring and monitoring of student progress becomes possible with whānau classes. Further, strong Māori teachers lead the whānau classes:
Girls feel more comfortable when they see a brown face. [Whānau teacher]
55. Figure 3 outlines the core components of the HGHS whānau classes and mentoring approach.

FIGURE 3 Core components of whānau classes



Learnings along the way

56. Following the introduction of whānau form classes, the school noticed Māori students started to have a stronger sense of being Māori and felt that cultural differences were accepted and celebrated:
I found myself in whānau. It is our own community and with the support we can do everything, anything we put our minds to. [Senior student]
57. Whānau involvement increased as they saw the benefits of their early involvement. Teachers noted whānau class students began to take on more leadership positions in the school, became more involved in school activities and exhibited a sense of pride in the school. More students wanted to be a part of whānau classes than there were places available.
58. The high demand for places in the whānau classes resulted in the SLM team reviewing the policies and procedures in relation to the whānau class. The revised policies clearly state school expectations regarding whānau classes, and whānau worked on describing what whānau classes were, so prospective whānau could make an informed choice about their daughter’s involvement.
59. As whānau tutor classes grew in popularity, whānau teachers raised their expectations based on whānau feedback and made it clear that being in whānau class was a privilege that came with responsibilities. Students came to understand that good and bad behaviour is not just about individuals but also reflects on whānau:
Being in the whānau class is a privilege, girls want to be in it, but they understand that expectations are high. They have to work hard in all areas of the school. [Whānau teacher]
We try to do well for whānau. Even if sometimes results aren’t good, we still are here and trying ... We don’t like to do anything bad because it comes back on whānau, not just you as an individual. [Student]

60. Whānau tutor classes became a conduit for building relationships and trust between whānau, students and school staff. They provided a safe and comfortable space for whānau to contact the school and connect with teachers with whom they can relate.
61. Whānau continue to play a large role in determining the direction and role for whānau tutor classes. Lines of communication and decision making start with whānau to management and then management to staff. At times, compromise and negotiation are required, and the kaumātua plays a key role as mediator, teacher and mentor for the principal, SLM team, teaching staff and the whānau rōpū. Tutor teachers monitor student and whānau feedback and check how the whānau tutor class system is working for students.
62. To gain a full understanding of whānau satisfaction with their daughter's progress and the school's efforts towards providing educational opportunities that support Māori as Māori, the principal, SLM team and teaching staff attend whānau rōpū hui.
63. Whānau and kaumātua appreciate the efforts of the principal, SLM team and teachers and their commitment to honouring the contributions of whānau. The principal presents Māori student achievement data and talks honestly and openly about Māori student attendance and engagement in the school:

It empowers the girls because they can work in both the mainstream Pākehā world and still experience te ao Māori [the Māori world] and hold those values ... They see how the two worlds work together as they move between them and how they can be mutually beneficial. [Whānau]

64. Progress isn't always smooth sailing, and both whānau and the principal have had to be patient with each other, building rapport and trust. The principal has experienced some discomfort in working in a Māori space, specifically around her own limitations in pronunciation of te reo. This deterred her from attending whānau hui, which was interpreted by whānau as being unsupportive. The situation was resolved after the principal discussed her feelings with the kaumātua. On his advice she approached the whānau hui with a new attitude, opening up on her feelings of inadequacy. Whānau warmly embraced her and their relationship moved forward in a positive way.
65. Non-Māori SLM team and teaching staff also reiterate the importance of being upfront about limitations, particularly in pronunciation of names and te reo and realising that students can be teachers in those situations:

I have learnt to be humble to ask for help when I need it. If we can open up to the girls and teach through showing how we ourselves struggle with certain things like pronouncing names then they get good examples of how to ask for help, how it's okay not to have all the answers and how they can be the teachers—the knowledgeable ones with something to offer. [Teacher]

Benefits of whānau classes and mentoring

66. The school-wide changes have been significant—what started with one whānau tutor class evolved into three vertical tutor classes and then to a school-wide system of vertical tutor groups and a tutor group mentoring programme for all students:
- A Māori model is leading the way. [Teacher]*
67. The support offered through school routines and a specific Māori space provides effective intervention before issues escalate for Māori students. The whānau tutor classes monitor attendance daily, and a quick phone call home resolves any problems in a timely way.
68. Relationships with whānau continue to grow and improve. Whānau feel a part of the school and that their opinions matter. More importantly, they feel valued, as the school makes a place for them to participate in decisions that impact on Māori:

The whānau classes help kids in all areas; support is offered wherever it is needed. [Whānau]

It is a net in place; I feel I know exactly where my daughter is, how she is going ... [The] whānau [group] is nonjudgemental and they make me feel part of my daughter's education. [Whānau]

69. The close bond that is formed between whānau, teachers and students, along with the mentoring programme, provides a comprehensive monitoring system and attends to the needs of Māori students and their whānau. For junior students, the whānau tutor class mentoring provides an environment that they are familiar with. At times when they may experience challenges in other areas of the school (such as with other subjects or teachers) the whānau tutor class is a daily routine they look forward to where they can receive support to work through any issues.

Case example

In Years 9 and 10 Mereana* was not happy at school. She always felt uncomfortable—like there was no place for her to fit in. Being Māori was important to her, but there was no way for her to express herself; what it meant for her.

In Year 11 she became a whānau member based on the guidance from a teacher. Mereana has never been happier. Her years as a senior student have been so beneficial, and she puts this down to the whānau classes. Having unconditional acceptance from other students, a place to participate in things Māori and where being Māori drives the kaupapa of participation has helped her to grow incredibly. Mereana now has a strong sense of her own identity, her te reo has improved and she has developed longlasting friendships.

*Not her real name

70. Whānau teachers and mentors comment that close contact with the senior students is nice. Whānau classes give the opportunity to focus on academic achievement, enhance school participation, reinforce the high expectations of the school and support leadership amongst the girls. Whānau students do well in school: they know how to socialise, they communicate and they learn how to work together, according to teachers—who notice the positive difference whānau students make in class:

By the time many of the students become seniors they have excellent leadership skills with compassion, inclusion and acceptance as part of their makeup. They can communicate well, putting their opinions forward. [Teacher]

71. A closeness amongst the whānau students is easy to see from the honest, open discussions they have, and from the care and support seniors give to younger students:

They share really in-depth, personal knowledge with each other and are so accepting. There are some girls going through tough times and the whānau students can be a real constant for them. [SLM team member]


72. Whānau classes support the pastoral care systems in the school, and any issues are dealt with by whānau teachers who have strong relationships with the girls, bypassing the dean in many circumstances:

Many of the girls' issues or difficulties at school can be solved when you have a good relationship with them; one that is based on mutual respect and trust ... Generally I like to help my students directly, supporting them in their relationships with other staff. I will take responsibility to talk with other teachers if something has occurred or just to let them know where the student is at. [Whānau teacher]

73. The identity of being Māori is strong; students feel positive about who they are and what they have to offer. Listening to the students talk, you get a sense that life at the school is excellent, and although they feel the wairua (spirit) of whānau, they struggle putting words to how and why it works. It is “just whānau” and “that’s how whānau work”, they say, but it is clear that the wairua of whānau speaks to them in a way that touches the core of what is important to them as Māori.

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