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**The Indigenous Factor: Exploring Kapa Haka as a
Culturally Responsive Learning Environment in
Mainstream Secondary Schools**

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

Recent research focusing on improving educational outcomes for Māori students in mainstream secondary schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand have asserted that building positive student-teacher relationships in the classroom are fundamental (c. f. Bishop, Berryman, & Richardson, 2003; Bishop & Tiakiwai, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2002, 2006). In contrast, attempts to investigate the educational benefits associated with Māori students participating in cultural learning activities, such as kapa haka, and the implications for improving levels of Māori student achievement, remains relatively unexplored. To embark on such an investigation, Māori kapa haka students and teachers from four mainstream secondary schools were invited to take part in an interview process informed by using a Kaupapa Māori theoretical approach. As a result, the study revealed quite emphatically that not only does kapa haka provide Māori students with an appropriate ‘*culturally responsive*’ learning experience, but that they also feel more confident and optimistic about school and their education. Moreover, kapa haka provides the opportunity for students to celebrate who they are as Māori and as ‘*culturally connected*’ learners in mainstream schooling contexts. In addition, Māori students through the kapa haka experience learn to ‘protect’, ‘problem-solve’, ‘provide’, and ‘heal’ their inner self-worth, essence and wellbeing as Māori. Similarly, most teachers agreed that kapa haka provides Māori students with a creative, dynamic and powerful way to access their learning potential as cultural human beings. An overwhelming response by both students and teachers is that kapa haka should be timetabled as an academic subject to provide greater access to indigenous and cultural performing art that affirms their identity as Māori, and our uniqueness as New Zealanders. Finally, the research proposes a ‘*culturally responsive*’ learning strategy to assist what mainstream secondary schools and teachers provide as valid and purposeful learning opportunities for ‘*culturally connected*’ learners who are Māori.

Mihi

Whakarongo ake ai au
Ki te tangi ā te manu nei
A te Mā-tui, tui, tui, tui-tuia
Tui i runga, tuia i raro
Tuia i waho, tuia i roto
Tuia te here tangata

Ka rongō te ao, ka rongō te pō
Tuia i te muka tangata
I takea mai i Hawaiki-nui,
Hawaiki-roa, Hawaiki-pamamao

Te hōno ki wairua,
Ki te whai-ao, ki te ao marama
Tihei Mauriora!

E ngā waka, e ngā mana, e ngā reo
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou,
Tēnā koutou i te ahuatanga ki o tātou aitua kua ngaro nei ki te pō
Kua mihia, kua tangihia, kua huri rātou ki tua o te pae
Oti ra, kua oti atu ki te pō
Kati ra, tēnā ano tātou kātoa

Ko Pohue, ko Emiemi, ko Tangitu ngā maunga
Ko Pūhi te tangata
Ko Taitimu te whare tūpuna
Ko Maatātua te waka
Ko Kaeo, ko Pupuke ngā awa
Ko Whangaroa te moana
Ko Tahawai, ko Te Huia ngā Marae

Ko Ngā Pūhi ki Whangaroa me Te Aupouri ngā iwi
Ko Ngatiuru ko te whānau pani te hapū
No Whakatane ahau engari kei Kirikiriroa e nōho ana

Ko Toe Toe Kainamu Whitinui rāwa ko Wai Pene ōku tūpuna
E te taha o tōku mātua
Ko Alex Roach rāwa ko Mildred Phillips ōku tūpuna
E te taha o tōku whaea
Ko Waenga Whitinui tōku pāpā
Ko Ruth Roach tōku whaea
Ko Paora Whitinui ahau

No reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, kia ora koutou kātoa.

Dedication

In the memory of John Braidwood
(Head of Mathematics Department, Huntly College)
who unexpectedly passed away in May 2006

and

To my wife and son who bring me much joy, happiness and aroha
every day

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