

Ngā Tau Tuangahuru

**MPEI Longitudinal Study -
Overview and Learning Debrief**

March 2025

Ngā Tau Tuangahuru

As Foundation North's five-year Māori and Pacific Education Initiative¹ (MPEI) came to an end in 2014, in 2015 Foundation North decided to use remaining funds to support:

- [Urutapu](#), a leadership programme for young Māori women.
- [Ngā Tau Tuangahuru](#) – a ten-year longitudinal study exploring what 'success' looks like as Māori and as Pacific students and families. Like MPEI, Ngā Tau Tuangahuru was a first for philanthropy in New Zealand.

This report shares the kaupapa, journey, 'outputs', key messages and learning from this almost decade long research initiative. Foundation North's Kaumatua Kevin Prime named this initiative 'Ngā Tau Tuangahuru' – looking beyond for ten more years.

Former Foundation North staff member Moi Becroft and CSI Associate Dr Fiona Cram shaped the initial research proposal. CSI Associate Rachael Trotman was the Study Coordinator. The study was fortunate to have a prestigious and highly experienced leadership team: Dr Fiona Cram as Māori Research Lead, Dr Tanya Wendt-Samu from the University of Auckland as the Pacific Research Lead and Professor Moana Theodore from the National Centre for Lifecourse Research as an advisor and peer reviewer. Dr Moana Theodore is now the Director of the [Dunedin Study](#), taking over from the late Professor Ritchie Poulton.

Kaupapa

It took over a year to land the focus of the study. In line with the vision of MPEI, *Mā tātou anō tātou e kōrero - We speak for ourselves*, it was important that study participants decided on the study focus and that participation would be valuable for them and their communities.

Of the 10 visionary education providers involved in MPEI, six initially agreed to participate: He Puna Marama Trust - Leadership Academy of A Company in Whangārei, Sylvia Park School in Mt Wellington, Rise Up Academy in Māngere, Oceania Careers Academy in Māngere (formerly C-Me Mentoring), the Manaiaakalani cluster of schools and especially Pt England Primary via Principal Russell Burt, and the High Tech Youth Network in Ōtauhu. The High Tech Youth Network withdrew before fieldwork began due to health and funding challenges.

Early kōrero on the potential focus of the study involved two group hui and two rounds of individual hui with each of the participant organisations. It was Russell Burt, Pt England Primary Principal who suggested focusing on what 'success' looks like for Māori and Pacific learners and their whānau. The intent was to run a strengths-based inquiry into the things that support Māori and Pacific success, as Māori and as Pacific peoples.

The core research questions were:

- What does 'success' look like as Māori and as Pacific students and whānau, now and in the future?
- What supports and hinders that success?
- What are whānau already doing and what can they do to support the educational success of their children? What would they recommend to other whānau?

¹ See [here](#) for the back story of MPEI. See [here](#) for the evaluation findings for MPEI. Education providers involved in MPEI were C-Me Mentoring Trust; Ideal Success Trust; Unitec Graduate Diploma in Not-for-Profit Management; The Leadership Academy of A Company; Sylvia Park School/Mutukaroa; Rise UP Trust; Manaiaakalani Education Trust; The Starpath Project; High Tech Youth Academy; and the Māori into Tertiary Education (MITE) student pipeline project.

- What are whānau perspectives of effective school approaches to raising Māori and Pacific educational achievement?
- What are the ripple effects of student educational success on themselves, peers, whānau, schools and communities?

Inclusion criteria were:

- Māori and/or Pacific students aged 5 to 16 years (at start) and their whānau
- High levels of school attendance
- Range of whānau and learner types
- Whānau keen and willing to commit to a long-term study
- Whānau open to the school/provider sharing information on their children.

An early intention was to take a longitudinal approach – essentially to follow the same lines of inquiry with the same people over time. This was to track changes in what success looks like and to follow a cohort of children, young people and their whānau over pivotal developmental years. This approach shifted as a result of Covid-19 disruption to looking at how schools can support student and whānau wellbeing in times of crisis and adversity.

Journey and ‘outputs’

Here are the key phases of the study and findings produced. See [here](#) for links to all published study findings. Links to individual reports and videos are also given below.

Phase	Key activities
2015-2016 – Set up Landing kaupapa, research questions and participation Exploring method and process Engaging key advisors	Hui in July 2015 with three MPEI education providers (Rise Up, He Puna Marama and Oceania Careers Academy) on potential purpose and scope Two rounds of meetings with each potential participant to discuss their interests and possible methods Features of effective longitudinal studies explored Joint hui November 2016 to agree on focus, research questions and broad method Dr Moana Theodore contracted as study advisor and Dr Tanya Samu as Pacific Research Lead
2017-2019 – Fieldwork and Round One findings Ethics approval Engaging a team of community researchers Whānau and student interviews Round One findings shared	Ethics approval gained from the New Zealand Ethics Committee in August 2017 A team of seven Māori and Pacific researchers drawn from the communities of the education providers was established Summary of findings from Round One whānau interviews, involving 69 different whānau and 126 participants English version and Te Reo version of a one-page poster ‘tips from families’ on how to support children and young people Two minute video of the community researchers talking about what they noticed from Round One interviews A paper on the collaborative process behind Ngā Tau Tuangahuru was published in Evaluation Matters, the journal of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research

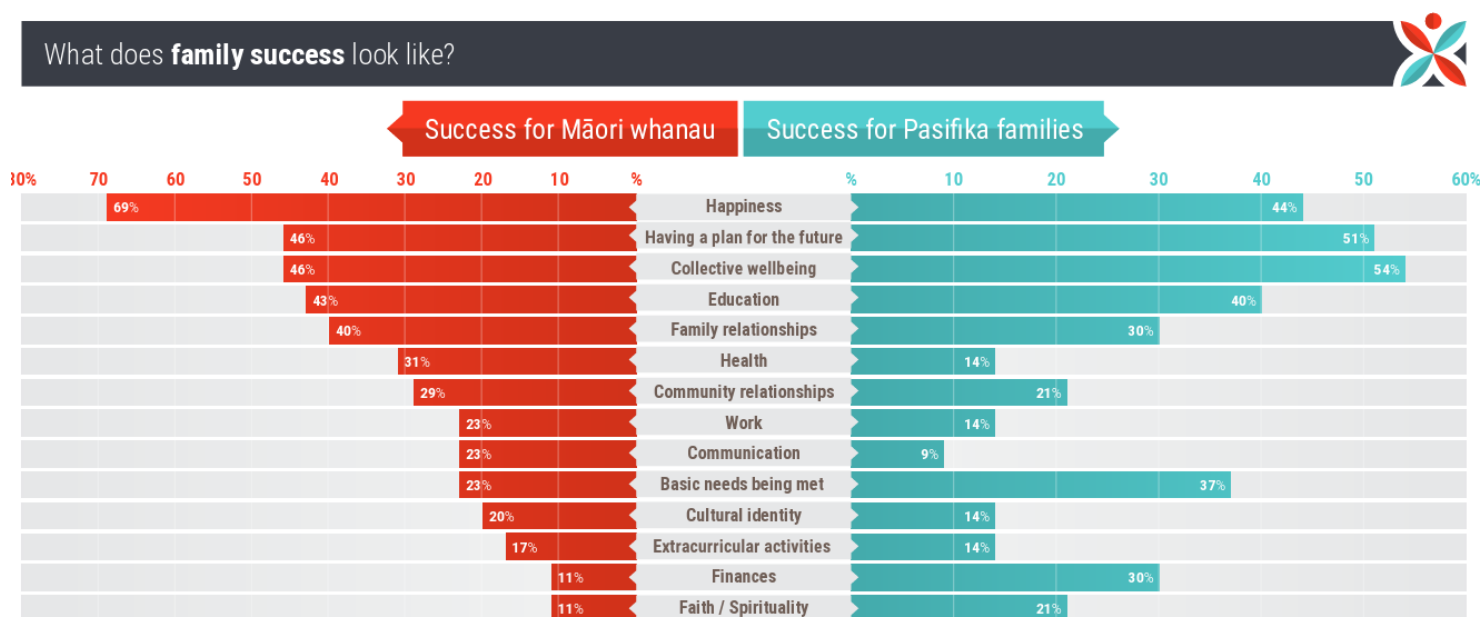
	Schools receive a summary report of their findings by school 2018 Round One findings presented by former Foundation North Chief Executive Jenny Gill to the Ministry of Education and Philanthropy Summit 2018 (Wellington) Second round of interviews in 2018/19, with whānau interviews plus 78 separate interviews with mainly Pacific children and young people
2020-2023 – Sharing Round Two and a shift in focus Analysis and sharing Covid disruption	Summary of findings from Round Two Investing in Pacific success - Guidance for Funders in Aotearoa New Zealand Pacific families talk about Pacific success Pacific youth talk about culture Sita Selupe (Rise Up) and Tanya Samu present to PNZ Pacific Voices Summit on how to fund Pacific success (May 2021) Second journal article published in the Pacific-Asian Education Journal: Sharp, T., Samu, T.W., Trotman, R., Cram, F., Theodore, R. (2021). Pacific educational success in Aotearoa New Zealand: Comparing Ngā Tau Tuangahuru findings with policy directions and research. <i>Pacific-Asian Education</i>, 32, 59-74. http://www.pacificcircleconsortium.org/uploads/1/1/9/5/119542233/pae_32_1_final_21.pdf Hui with schools to present and workshop implications of the findings Presentation of study findings and implications for Foundation North to Trustees and to staff July 2021 Strategy Brief – Ngā Tau Tuangahuru – Investing in Māori Success (2021), summarising findings from Round One interviews with whānau Māori A third journal article presents Rise Up Academy as one of four transformational educational models for Pasifika peoples: Wendt Samu, T. (2023). New frontiers in Pacific education, leadership and decolonized practice within Oceania: An initial exploration. In <i>International Encyclopaedia of Education</i> (4th ed., pp. 159–170). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.06054-1 In 2023, a 3-minute video featuring Rise Up children shared themes from interviews with 77 Pacific children and young people aged 5-19 years, on what 'doing well' looks like for them. The study team, Niuean artist Maka Makatoa and Rise Up Academy worked together to create this animated film Here is a video made by CocoNet, based on the launch of the video at the Māngere Arts Centre in August 2023
2024-2025 - Learning Covid learning with Rise Up Synthesis and learning debrief	Debrief with Rise Up Academy on their approach and learning during Covid and weather events Meetings with Professor Carol Mutch on what supports community resilience Building resilient communities - learning from Rise Up Academy during Covid-19 lockdowns and weather events Overview and learning synthesis (this report)

Key messages

Families want to be successful, though how this looks and how they get there might differ. Māori and Pacific ideas of success tend to focus on the group or collective, on the family and family values and for some, on faith and spirituality.

Some families felt that Pākehā or mainstream ideas of success tend to be more about the individual person, money and financial status.

In Round One, key themes about what success look like were as follows.



Being successful as whānau Māori revolved around these key things²:

Tūrangawaewae – cultural identity and having a place to stand (ancestral home base)

Whanaungatanga – strong relationships

Whānau ora – holistic health and wellness

Taonga tuku iho – nurturing the treasures handed down from ancestors

Succeeding as whānau Māori meant being happy, prioritising collective wellbeing, having a plan for the future, strong relationships, good health and education.

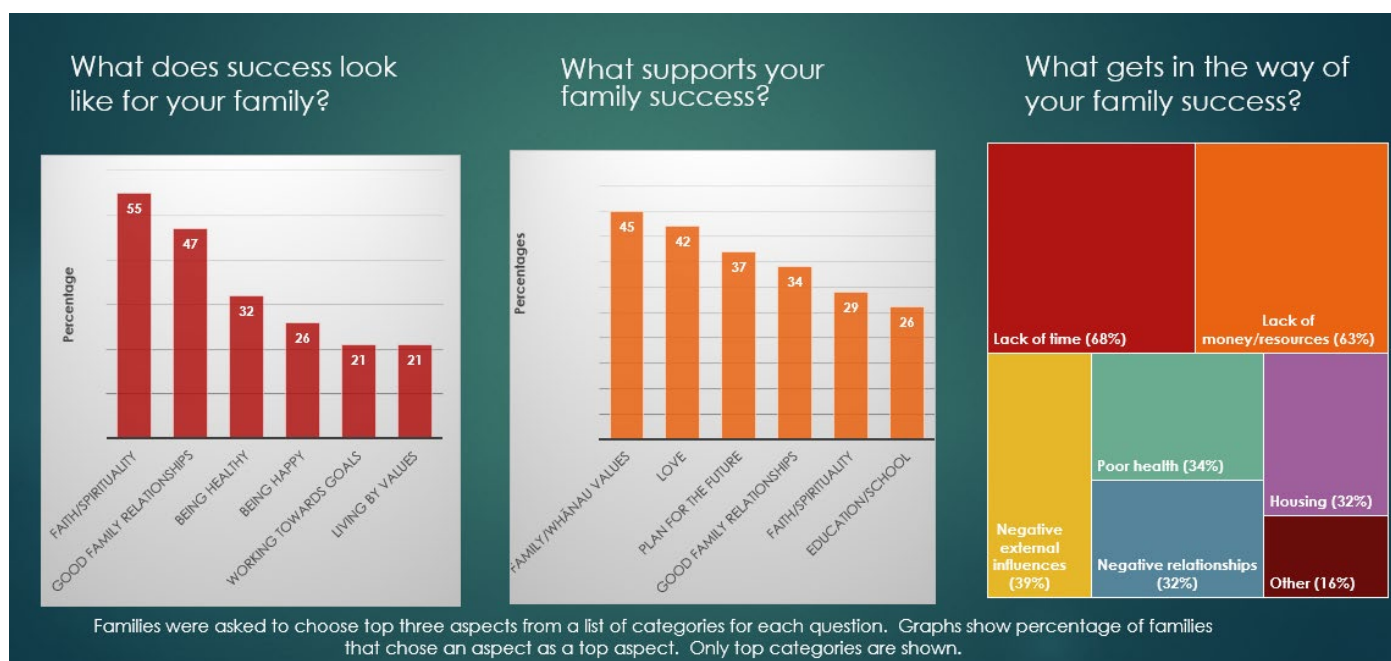
Educational success as Māori related to being proud of being Māori, walking well in both worlds (Māori and tauīwi), feeling happy, safe, connected and achieving educationally.

Funder implications include supporting whānau-determined success as Māori and helping to address structural inequity and drivers of disadvantage.

In Round Two interviews, participants were asked to identify their top three elements of success.

Here is what Pacific 'aiga chose in Round Two:

² See also *Strategy Brief – Ngā Tau Tuangahuru – Investing in Māori Success*. This shares findings from Round One interviews with whānau Māori.



Maintaining a strong connection to cultural identity is important for Māori and Pacific across the board. Pacific youth feel culturally connected through having strong family bonds, speaking their home language, connections to church and community and knowing cultural traditions, values and practices.

Educational success for Pacific youth involved having high aspirations, strong values (including faith), doing well in broad terms (beyond institutional or academic such as through sports, arts, leadership and socially), having family support/involvement, cultural legitimacy and positive cultural identity and a safe learning environment (emotionally, physically, socially).

Funder implications include supporting Pacific values, leadership and aspirations and initiatives designed to raise Pacific economic wellbeing. Funders can do more to engage well with their Pacific communities:

“It’s about the vā” (Rise Up Academy Principal Sita Selupe speaking to PNZ Pacific Voices Summit 2021).

Key messages to funders about how to support Pacific to succeed were:

Engage	Connect, have a dialogue, share power, work to be equal partners. Weather the storms of community organisations. Ask what people need.
Establish	Build high trust relationships, still with accountability. Ask “What can we help with?” <u>Socialise</u> other relationships, connect people for influence and support.
Equip	Set organisations up to succeed.
Empower	Support leadership, self-determination and Pacific-led approaches. Learn from these communities.

System implications

The 2018 presentation to the Ministry of Education and Philanthropy Summit 2018 noted that all of the MPEI supported initiatives are creating new stories for Māori and Pacific children and young people. They are changing lives and paths on a daily basis. Yet all these initiatives have struggled and the leaders of these initiatives often pay high personal costs for their successes. The question was posed as to why we don't collectively invest more in Māori and Pacific success in Aotearoa?

Key messages from the study to this Summit were:

- Philanthropy is a natural partner with government – come connect with us, let's see what we can do together.
- Communities hold the solutions to their issues - we just need to get behind them.
- Let's back child and family success as Māori and as Pacific and build an ecology of success together.

Further system implications include:

1. Support a societal shift in dominant mindset from self-interested individualism and materialism to collective good, service to others and interconnectedness.
2. Address the underlying drivers of disadvantage experienced by Māori and Pacific – including inequitable policies and laws that are the legacy of our colonial past, and structural and institutional racism, including in the education system.
3. The need to support Māori-led and Pacific-led models of education and wellbeing (as Foundation North did via MPEI).
4. Invest in connected ecologies of wellbeing and support (at individual, family and community levels), with a priority focus on strengthening whānau/aiga/family wellbeing (and especially of mothers who tend to be primary caregivers).
5. The importance of taking a holistic approach to wellbeing and achievement in schools and investing more in schools as sites of child and family support. This includes funding roles in every school that focus on strengthening the home school relationship and addressing things getting in the way of children's learning and development (see for example Rise Up and Te Kapehu Whetu's models for doing this). It also means bolstering schools as one key part of connected networks of community support that can be mobilised in tough times.
6. The vital importance of nurturing cultural identity, belonging, self-confidence and pride via the education system.

Learning

Funding and implementing a research inquiry for ten years is rare for philanthropy. An early intent was to undertake a longitudinal 'evaluation' of MPEI by following the journeys of students via MPEI supported providers, to see what the ongoing value of the MPEI investment was and to track the outcomes over time of at least a few of the students.

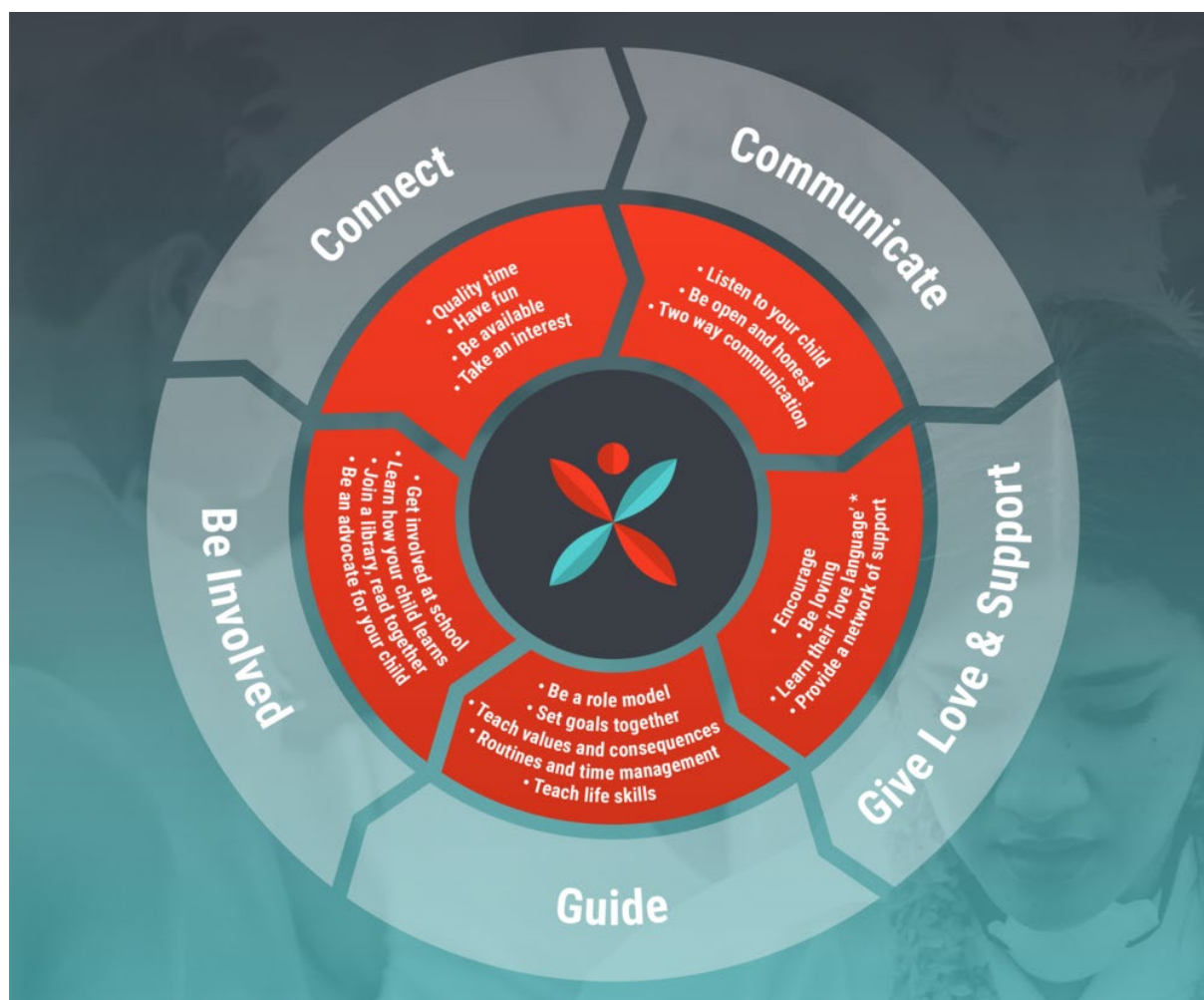
While a good idea on the surface, it became apparent that this would not be feasible for the funding available, given privacy issues in following up past students, the desirability of having a control or comparison group of students from non-MPEI education providers to compare outcomes, and the difficulty of attributing outcomes over time to past experience of an MPEI supported school approach.

In line with MPEI values of self-determination, the decision was made to develop the study focus with the MPEI education providers involved, to ensure it was of maximum value to them and their changing contexts.

Strengths and value

The core value of Ngā Tau Tuangahuru was in providing a platform for the voices of Māori and Pacific families, children and young people, on what success looks like for them, and what supports and gets in the way of that. The clearest example of this is the 2023 [video](#) sharing Pacific child and youth voices on what 'doing well' looks like for them and what helps them to do well. The study provides local indigenous perspectives and voices that are of global interest.

Another useful resource from the study is this one-page poster in English and Te Reo Māori of tips from families involved in the study on how to support your child/ren:



The study was only possible given the long-term relationships and trust built by Foundation North with study partners through MPEI, via a shared commitment to the kaupapa of supporting Māori and Pacific success as Māori and as Pacific peoples.

Hiring Māori and Pacific researchers to connect with whānau and children significantly improved access to families and supported authentic engagement. It was easier to engage families of children in years 1-8 (as families tend to be more engaged in their child's schooling at those ages); it was harder to engage families of young people aged over 13 years. Engagement with the former MPEI supported providers was easiest where relationships with the research team were strongest.

There was appreciation from families for the opportunity to talk and be heard, and for the researchers' relational approach. Koha and taking food to interviews was really appreciated by families. Families were affirmed through participating in the study and valued the opportunity to reflect on what success means to them as a whānau/aiga, or as a young person.

The focus on success was useful and strengths-based and Ngā Tau Tuangahuru study findings affirmed MPEI evaluation findings. Core issues are increasing structural investment in Māori and Pacific success as Māori and as Pacific peoples and affirming Māori and Pacific cultural identities in the education system.

The study provided a means for Foundation North to connect productively with government via the Ministry of Education. It opens the door to partnering with government to support the wellbeing and achievement of children and young people, from a base of knowledge and experience.

The disruption of covid and weather events saw the study shift its focus to working with Rise Up on how schools can act as community hubs and sites of social support, especially during times of community stress. It also led to creatively sharing Pacific youth voices via the video.

Increasing whānau support and building community resilience through schools emerged as an area of interest through covid and the weather events. Rise Up for example could rally families during covid as they had strong whānau relationships in place. Responding more effectively to neurodiversity also emerged as an issue, which is new for Pacific contexts. The importance of children and parents hearing from and listening to each other has been highlighted through this study, along with the value for young people and families of reflecting on hopes and dreams and goal setting.

Limitations and challenges

Covid-19 and weather events between 2020 and 2022 prevented further rounds of interviews taking place after the first two. Engagement waned as other priorities emerged and as shifts in personnel occurred within the schools involved.

Key issues were sustaining interest and commitment over time, accessing families and having a long set of questions. The busyness of schools and families and engaging both in research was sometimes difficult and took a lot of persistence. Changes in schools and whānau meant that some school contacts and whānau moved on or away. Finding the right person in the school to connect interviewers with families was the key. The communication and briefing process with families could have been clearer and stronger.

A longitudinal approach (asking the same questions of the same people over time) was not the right approach for this research. Flexibility was needed both in student and family participation and in the questions asked, to ensure maximum usefulness for all involved. It was challenging finding a study focus that would sufficiently engage five diverse organisations over ten years. Over time, a further education provider disengaged and others became more interested in tailored research that more directly met their needs.

Implications for Foundation North and other funders

Ultimately, the study reinforced existing research on what works for Māori and Pacific children in terms of educational achievement. It has contributed to what we know about what supports child and family success. It has also provided authentic examples of effective education practice, which include a whole whānau approach, high expectations, reflective practice, being inquiry led and visionary leadership. What it adds is the perspective of Māori and Pacific children, young people and whānau about what success looks like and what supports them to do well, in their own words.

The study has these implications for Foundation North:

- Supporting Māori-led and Pacific-led approaches and self-determination is strongly affirmed, as are Foundation North's current theories of change. Hold fast to current strategy and keep centring Māori and Pacific voices, along with other non-majority voices.
- Fund compelling alternatives and keeping the lights on for visionary organisations when times are tough. Intergenerational change requires intergenerational relationships and support, utilising funding and non-funding mechanisms.

- Fund kaupapa and individuals and their expertise and include funding to support the wellbeing of those amazing people (however that looks for them). The fragility of educational initiatives has been highlighted through this period and how visionary educational leaders can get burned out and/or pulled into other roles.
- Tracking change and learning over a longer term is appropriate where a long-term funding commitment is made (for example via lean-in spaces or Mana Whenua partnerships). A strong shared commitment to the kaupapa and to learning together is critical. Visionary organisations are there for the long story of transformation and are committed to learning.
- Pay more attention to the forces that support kotahitanga and social cohesion among diverse communities. These threads can be intentionally explored via lean-in spaces, for example.
- Values underpin successful educational and community initiatives and for many Pacific peoples – faith-based values. Promoting the use of [love languages](#) in education and in families is one example.
- Schools are undervalued and underutilised as family support hubs and as part of local connected networks of social support. Finding ways to connect parents/carers into schools and foster the home-school relationship continues to be important, with the educational providers in this study showcasing how to do this well. These relationships can then be broadened out to form connected networks of community spaces, organisations and people in our communities, who can support each other in good times and bad. This is a key opportunity highlighted by this study – to build community resilience through creating connected community networks of social support that can be mobilised as needed.
- Partner with other funders to support intergenerational kaupapa long-term, for collective impact. For example, to develop schools as sites of holistic whānau support (connected for example to WINZ, health care, employment and housing providers) and as key parts of local community support networks.
- Study engagement was strongest where there was consistent school leadership and strong pre study relationships between the organisation and the researchers. Evaluation and research are most useful when they occur in a relational context and are in service to community aspirations. They need to be responsive when things shift and adapt to what will best serve the shared kaupapa, as negotiated between the parties involved. Evaluation and research need to work in a web of trust and connection and respond to what matters to communities.