



Ina te mahi rangatahi: Ina te mahi rangatira

The work of young people: is the work of chiefs

Volume 8 | Issue 1

Article 1, February 2026

Maia Ratana

Pūrangakura Kaupapa Māori Research Centre

Hinekura Smith

ARC Centre of Excellence for Indigenous Futures, University of Queensland

Dallas Cherrington

4th Gen

Rāhiri Mākuini Edwards-Hammond

Project Rangatahi

Rosa Hibbert-Schooner

Pūrangakura Kaupapa Māori Research Centre

Lani Rotzler Purewa

Cuzzies i te Māra

Jenny Lee-Morgan

Pūrangakura Kaupapa Māori Research Centre

Abstract

The title of this article - Ina te mahi rangatahi, ina te mahi rangatira, is a play on the whakataukī (proverb), - ina te mahi rangatira; – by actions a chief is recognised. However, by incorporating ina te mahi rangatahi, it evokes the idea that rangatahi (Māori young people's) actions can mirror those of a chief, sharpening their skill sets, navigating the different spaces they occupy, and leading alongside peers, whānau (family), hapū (extended family), and iwi (kin group or tribe). This rangatahi-centred co-authored paper aims

to gain a deeper understanding of rangatahi leadership through the voices and experiences of four rangatahi Māori, connected by a Kaupapa Māori research project called Generation Kāinga (Gen K). Gen K aims to advance understandings of rangatahi realities and aspirations in relation to kāinga (home and homelands) and, importantly, transform the housing context for rangatahi and their whānau. Gen K supports rangatahi Māori to become change agents in promoting and developing intergenerational kāinga solutions that go beyond bricks and mortar. These can include the reclamation of cultural narratives and practices, the mobilisation of political campaigns and social movements and the restoration and protection of the taiao (environment), all of which influence the health and well-being of kāinga.

Keywords: rangatahi, leadership, housing, kāinga, research

He Mihi – Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge all of those involved in the Generation Kāinga project, including the members of each

partner organisation for their tireless dedication to this kaupapa (project). While this article reflects the experiences of the co-authors, the writing stems from the many kōrero (discussions) and learnings shared amongst the wider team. In particular, the authors would like to recognise Irene Farnham (Ngāti Awa, Ngāi Tahu) and Matangireia Yates-Francis (Te Arawa whānui, Te Aitanga-ā-Māhaki, Rongowhakaata, Ngāti Maniapoto) and Catherine Mitchell (Taranaki, Ngāti Tara, Ngāti Haupoto) for the wealth of knowledge they shared to realise this piece of writing.¹

Introduction

In this paper, we foreground the concept of rangatahi leadership by engaging with four outstanding rangatahi Māori who offer insights based on their diverse leadership roles. The word 'rangatahi' has been widely adopted within both Māori and non-Māori scholarship, across organisations, in government policy, and in the media to describe young people or youth. While this normalisation of te reo Māori (Māori language) can be an exciting prospect, like other now common te reo Māori terms in

¹ While this article is primarily written in English, it also includes full sentences in te reo Māori (the Māori language Indigenous to Aotearoa). Our inclusion of te reo Māori is deliberate: it affirms the integrity of contributing author identities, languages and culture. Some in text

translation and a glossary of words is included. In cases where there is no English translation we include a footnote "*", which infers a simple description of the te reo Māori used as opposed to a literal translation.

New Zealand English, the nuances and contextual subtleties associated with the word rangatahi are at risk of becoming problematically simplified, pulling and stretching the meaning out of shape. Te reo Māori, as we know, is a vibrant and richly metaphorical language that draws on our environment, our practices, and our holistic view of the world. Furthermore, te reo can have multiple meanings that vary depending on the location, iwi (kin group or tribe), and context. These intersecting complexities are explored in this rangatahi-centric co-authored paper, which sets out to better understand rangatahi leadership through the voices and experiences of rangatahi Māori connected by a Kaupapa Māori research project called Generation Kāinga.

Generation Kāinga (Gen K) is co-led by Prof Jenny Lee-Morgan (Science Lead) and Maia Ratana, an early career researcher of Pūrangakura, an independent Kaupapa Māori Research Centre based in Tāmaki Makaurau. This four-year, Endeavour research project is funded by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. Gen K aims to advance understandings of rangatahi realities and aspirations in relation to kāinga (home and homelands) and, importantly, create transformative change for rangatahi in the housing context. Gen K supports rangatahi Māori to become change agents in promoting and

developing intergenerational kāinga solutions that go beyond bricks and mortar. These can include the reclamation of cultural narratives and practices, the mobilisation of political campaigns and social movements and the restoration and protection of the taiao (environment), all of which influence the health and well-being of kāinga. A key aim for Gen K is to amplify innovative rangatahi leadership across Aotearoa (New Zealand), arguing that rangatahi are not a problem to be fixed but are instead taonga (invaluable treasures) and require strategic investment.

Six rangatahi-led organisations were asked to partner with Gen K to highlight the exciting and creative work rangatahi are doing to improve kāinga opportunities for their whānau (family), hapū (extended family) and iwi. These rangatahi brought with them an in-built momentum to this research project, sharing their diverse skills and passion for community transformation. Each partner organisation nominated a representative to join the research team, building research capability and capacity among rangatahi whilst also drawing on their expertise and experiences as rangatahi leaders. In addition to participating in research activities, such as interviews, wānanga (collective ideations, gatherings), and analysis, the rangatahi representatives have contributed to one of two co-authored articles that explore their active, community-centred experiences of

rangatahi leadership. Four of the six have co-authored this piece of writing, while the other's have developed a complementary article in te reo Māori.

Methodology

Kaupapa Māori (Smith, 1997; Smith, 2022; Pihama et al., 2015) is a methodological foundation on which the Gen K research rests. This project also draws upon Community Based Participatory Indigenous Research (Castleden & Garvin, 2008; Ferreira & Gendron, 2011; Wallerstein & Duran, 2008), and Pūrākau (Lee-Morgan, 2019). One of the scholarly developments emerging from this research is Kaupapa Rangatahi, a methodology that theorises the role of rangatahi Māori in rangatahi research. Maia Ratana is investigating this innovative methodology in her forthcoming PhD. Kaupapa Rangatahi centres rangatahi as key leaders and decision-makers in the research process, whilst being supported and guided by experienced senior researchers. In adopting this methodology, we recognise the knowledge, experience and expertise that rangatahi researchers bring to Gen K. Rangatahi researchers are often able to relate better to rangatahi participants and create research spaces and outputs that rangatahi and their whānau are more likely to engage with (Paul et al., 2022).

As a research project Gen K considers rangatahi to be those with whakapapa Māori and who are aged 16-35; however, as a research team, we acknowledge that rangatahi can be defined in many ways depending on factors such as region and kaupapa. According to the Te Aka Māori dictionary, rangatahi is defined as 'to be young' (verb) and as 'younger generation or youth' (noun). Alternatively, the Williams (1957) Māori Language Dictionary references rangatahi as a verb, meaning 'to move or traverse quickly.' Literature and policy documents commonly refer to rangatahi as either an age cohort, often those in their late teens and early twenties or in some cases, to describe all and any young people generally (Clark et al., 2022). Keelan (2014), on the other hand, describes rangatahi as "a stage of development that can be associated with age but is not bound by it (p.18)", while Doherty (2009) sees rangatahi as not an age group at all but instead a stage that one moves in and out of as they learn new ideas and knowledge. As such, the term rangatahi can describe a person's transition through various life stages, changes in circumstances, and shifts in positions within a family unit. It can also be seen as an expression of growth and identity when preparing to take on future roles and responsibilities (Berryman et al., 2017).

The four rangatahi co-authors represent different organisations, communities and

kāinga from across Aotearoa. Rosa Hibbert-Schooner (Te Arawa) has spent many years in student advocacy, notably as the Tumuaki of Te Mana Ākonga (The National Māori Students' Association). Rāhiri Makuini Edwards-Hammond (Taranaki whānui, Ngāti Kahungunu o Te Wairoa, Ngāti Ruapani, Rongowhakaata, Moriori, Te Arawa) started Project Rangatahi - a rangatahi-led organisation at the age of 17 that utilises kaupapa Māori to create positive opportunities for young people in her hometown of Te Wairoa. Lani Rotzler-Purewa (Te Mahurehure, Te Urewera, Ngāti Pūkeko, Schwarzwald) is passionate about māra kai (gardening) teaching tamariki (children) and rangatahi about the benefits of growing your own food. Finally, Dallas Cherrington (Ngati Kuri, Te Rarawa, Ngati Hine, Ngati Kahu, Tainui) is a kaiwhakairo (carver) and a member of 4th Gen, a rangatahi group based in the far north that focuses on environmental conservation.

Through a series of wānanga (Smith et al., 2019) led by senior researchers of the Gen K team, the rangatahi partners were encouraged to extend their research thinking, reading and writing skills to contribute to this co-authorship in a way that broadens our knowledge of rangatahi and leadership. Bound by whanaungatanga (interactional relationships), this kaupapa Māori process of co-authorship encouraged

each rangatahi partner to think deeply about their position as rangatahi, what being rangatahi means to them in their leadership work and how they use this position to create positive change. Rangatahi authors were taught to search literature and actively read to extend their emerging thinking whilst engaging in scaffolded writing tasks and constructive peer review. Each of the rangatahi authors was then asked to refine their writing and provide feedback to one another to develop their understanding of this topic further. What follows are four interdependent pieces of writing by the Gen K rangatahi partners. These authors were encouraged to bring their whole selves and authentic voices to this academic writing task. As such, each offers a differing style of writing that responds to how they understand themselves as rangatahi leaders across multiple contexts.

Rosa Hibbert-Schooner
Te Arawa

Te pū, te more, te weu, te aka, te rea, te waonui, te kune, te whē

(I want to grow far beyond the pot I was told fits me)

Vines invading the neighbour's fence to remind them that plants aren't as wild as the systems we just let 'be'

Let them know we all come from the same sort of whakapapa (genealogy) as them,

*The plants, I mean
The same plants that incarcerate my
people
Well... We cannot blame the plants for this,
nor our people
We blame the whakapapa of the systems
that start too late in colonial histories to be
this, history
I tell you our hītori (history) can be found
in our seeds, in our rākau (plants, trees)
who have lived longer than me, my pāpā
(father), my koro (grandfather)
Rongoā (medicinal plants) in its various
forms, holding our intimate connection to
whenua (land) in a new way.
To know plants like a friend, an old soul
that just clicks. A wairua (spiritually) where
their whare (house) is always open, always
with an abundance of kai (food) and friends
Kāinga is where the plants are*

I remember learning how to garden from my māmā (mother). Small fingers in the soil, making mud pies and not knowing the importance of what she was doing at the time. As I grew into the rangatahi I am today; I saw the need for her mātauranga (knowledge) shared in our communities. So, we grew a māra kai at our student whare at Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha (The University of Canterbury) to feed those around us.

A lesson I have learnt from mahinga kai (gardening) practices that our tīpuna

(ancestors) have passed on to us is that the most integral part of rangatahi-centred mahi (work) is the ability to sow seeds that will create a garden you may never eat from. In the critically acclaimed Broadway musical Hamilton, written by Lin-ManuelWallerstein, the main character, Alexander, meets his final moments and reflects on the idea of legacy. He says, "Legacy! What is a legacy? It is planting seeds in a garden you never get to see. I wrote some notes at the beginning of a song someone will sing for me" (Miranda, 2015). In other words, the work you do is for those who will come after you, and we must settle with the knowledge that we may not directly receive ngā hua o te mahi (fruits of our labour). I believe legacy is something that needs to be front of mind when in spaces of community building, leadership and service. That what we must do and what we should do will be reflected in what is enjoyed by those in the future. Our tīpuna did this, our koro mā (grandfathers) and kui mā (grandmothers) have done this, and our pakeke (adults) continue to do this, but how do we continue this and add more sustenance to the māra (garden)? How do we use the opportunities we have to lead, to dream, to imagine and to create a better tomorrow?

When I was asked to be a part of this kaupapa (project), Generation Kāinga, I knew that the time in my then role

(Tumuaki o Te Mana Ākonga) was close to an end – students are often in these roles for short stints, a year to three at most. One of the things constantly on the top of my mind that year was, if we come from a great legacy, how do we contribute to this legacy in our own unique way? I knew that healthy kāinga and having support systems at home were an essential part of a holistically nurtured taura (student), much like a seed and its soil. When supported, nourished and protected, one thrives. Those who did not live with that privilege were often the ones who got left behind, alone and struggling.

In joining this kaupapa, I realised that my immediate housing needs, my friends, my fellow taura, my hāpori (community) would not be changed then and there. I knew that nurturing this idea of legacy in this rangahau (research) would create benefits for future taura over time. Generation Kāinga has challenged me to look far beyond even my local community's māra kai and instead consider how we live as rangatahi Māori in Aotearoa into the future. By this, I mean the rangatahi of tomorrow, who will be looking at us, asking how they can do more with the resources we grew for them.

Generation Kāinga has enabled rangatahi to not only grow but flourish in our leadership. We have had opportunities to

host wānanga, to learn new skills, to challenge existing practices and ideas, to carve the tables we want to be sitting at rather than being a seat at the colonial table. For me, this rangahau has created a space for resistance in that it draws from the intergenerational transmission of knowledge by building on 'the wisdom of the elders and the young people's energy' (Common & Legend, 2014). I now work in the housing sector, on the ground with our people and communities, serving and listening so that the future I want to dream and the legacy I leave is one that I am proud to pass on through my whakapapa, taonga tuku iho (values handed down through generations).

Ruia ngā purapura, Ka tipu, ka ora

Sow the seeds, let them grow

We know what we see for our future. It is beautiful, it is the wildest dreams of our tīpuna, it is authentically us, Indigenous.

We are walking down te ara a ngā tīpuna (pathway of our ancestors), paths paved for us by generations we never got to see Ara connecting me to this world, culture, experience and legacy

You never got to walk this way after having built the path, oh tipuna, do you feel my feet roam

Do you feel @Peace when "We thank you all for/ The right to let us stand on this war-torn land that we all call/HOME" (Scott & El Truento, 2011).

Take my hands and bless them in the holy waters that is my tīpuna, that is my whānau in my urupā (cemetery)

Watch my worries disappear in the wharenuī (meeting house) generations before me walked in

This is spirituality, the way someone's koro knows when the oceans will rise and fall based on nothing but the skies

We are circles living in a square, focused on everything but ourselves and our innate connection to each other, land and cultures.

Te Reanga Hou (the new generation), I see hope in them, they are the light

Aang said, "The past can be a great teacher" (DiMartino & Konietzko, 2005) they understand the fight

Te Ao Mārama (the world of light) can be found in their hearts, in their laughter, in their eyes

A generation who will start a new, looking toward their Hawaiki (ancestral homeland), it might feel far

I know, but dear one, one day we will grow old knowing this

Generations to come will live the way we've always dreamed of because we planted those seeds before we left

Connecting us right back to creation itself, timeless whakapapa held in

te pū, te more, te weu, te aka, te rea, te waonui, te kune, te whē

Rāhiri Mākuini Edwards-Hammond
Taranaki whānui, Ngāti Kahungunu o Te Wairoa, Ngāti Ruapani,
Rongowhakaata, Moriori, Te Arawa

*Tū ake au ki Te Tihi o Rereaitu, ko tōku ruruhau, ko Te Whakapūnake o Te Matau a Māui Tikitiki a Taranga. Ka heke te tirohanga ki ngā wai e rere nei, ko Ruakituri, ko Hangaroa, ko Kaitarahaē, ko Waiau, ko Te Wairoa Hōpūpū Hōngenengene Matangirau. Nei rā ōku kāwai koromiomio.**

*Nei rā te reo mihi o Te Hinonga Rangatahi ki ngā tūtohu whenua, tūtohu moana o tēnā takiwā, o tēnā takiwā, o tēnā takiwā o koutou. Kei te tihi o whakaaro ngā tini mate o te wā. Kei ngā rauōpiopio, moe mai rā, moe mai rā, moe mai rā. Rātau kua whetūrangitia ki a rātau. Tātau te hunga ora e takatu nei te mata o te whenua me ngā tai o te moana, tātau ki a tātau. Mauri ora.***

Born out of Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Ngāti Kahungunu o Te Wairoa, our pakihi

* A pepeha or tribal motto or proverb often a saying of the ancestors encapsulating Māori values and human characteristics ([Te Aka Māori Dictionary](#).)

** A mihi or speech of greeting, acknowledgement, tribute ([Te Aka Māori Dictionary](#)).

(business) Project Rangatahi, grew from the awareness that opportunities are not made or distributed equally. We noticed that the young people who were offered opportunities were usually the same ones who were connected to more opportunities later in life. Meanwhile, those without such connections and access to resources would continue to miss out.

These are undoubtedly intergenerational and societal issues that require layered responses. However, as products of kaupapa like Te Ataarangi (Māori language revitalisation programme), Kōhanga Reo (total immersion pre-school), Kura Kaupapa Māori (total immersion school) and Whare Wānanga (Kaupapa Māori tertiary education), we already had some blueprints for challenging prominent issues at hand through taonga tuku iho. With this in mind, we set a lofty mission for our pakihi: 'Poipoia ngā rangatira ō āpōpō' - Nurture tomorrow's leaders.

Since leaving kura (school) in 2018 and attending various wānanga over the years, our priorities shifted from providing grants and developing a database of educational resources for young people to facilitating learning and connection opportunities for whānau of all ages in a range of settings, from marae (Māori meeting place) to digital domains. In this time of growth, our mission changed to 'poipoia ngā rangatira

mō āpōpō,' nurture today's leaders for tomorrow.

With this whakaaro (idea, thought) of preparing our leaders for tomorrow, I reflect on 'ina te mahi rangatahi, ina te mahi rangatira,' the title of this paper. While our mahi has changed since 2018, one constant over the years is the evident reality that rangatira exist in every generation and leadership comes from all ages and backgrounds.

I recall a wānanga reo (gathering to learn the Māori language) that our team once hosted at Iwitea marae, north of Te Wairoa. Our youngest attendee was a pēpi (baby) on the hip of their māmā, and our eldest was a koroua (elder) who travelled from afar to join us. As we do at most of our wānanga, we set up tables of rauemi (resources), taonga, and koha (gifts). In the middle of the wharekai (dining hall) was our taonga pūoro (musical instruments) table where we laid out pūkāea (long wooden wind instrument), poi (a light ball on a string that is swung rhythmically to a song), and ponga ihu (nose flute). As we set up, I hesitantly pulled out a Rotorua-grown hue (gourd) that, following a fall while drying, had a large gash on one side, exposing remnants of seeds still embedded in the dry flesh. The wānanga kicked off with a pōhiri (formal welcoming ceremony) on our

marae ātea (courtyard) under the warm Tai Rāwhiti (Eastern) sun. After kai and further whakawhanaungatanga (getting to know each other), our tira wānanga (participants) got straight into composing pao (short songs). Conscious of our ringawera (cooks), I popped out of the wharenuī to check in with our kaimanaaki (support team, facilitators). I remember walking into the wharekai to an unexpected chorus of taonga puoro from the tamariki. As I soaked up the sound echoing across the wharekai, I watched the tamariki in awe. One in particular stood out to me in that moment. They were using craft sticks and my broken hue to drum beats between the sound of the pūkāea and the rhythm of the poi. It reminded me of the potential in tamariki to see creativity and expression in everything. Where I had hesitated and seen something as broken, this tamaiti (child) saw an opportunity to make music.

In some of the challenging spaces we exist in, we are told that there is no better option than that which has been given to us. In those moments, I return to this beautiful memory and recall that whether we are creating sound or infrastructure, there are always other approaches that can be unlocked through different perspectives. I am so grateful for those who paved the way for us to challenge the colonial status quo by doing what comes naturally to us - being Māori. However, I also admire this

tamaiti for challenging my perception and for the ongoing learnings I gain from seeing the next generation push boundaries to create new and exciting opportunities we did not see before.

Lani Rotzler Purewa

Te Mahurehure, Te Urewera, Ngāti Pūkeko, Schwarzwald

I have often been asked questions along the lines of, 'so, how long have you been into nature?' I feel genuinely confused and concerned about people's imagined separation from earth and sky. My love for soil and seed extends far beyond a hobby or interest. They are the very origins of who I am and all that I am made up of: the rivers, the mountains, the waters, the sun, moon and stars. Ranginui raua ko Papatūānuku (Sky father and Earth mother), Hineahuone (the first woman), Hinepukohurangi (deity of the Tūhoe tribe representing the mist maiden), Te Auahitūroa (deity of comets and the origin of fire). I know we are of Te Hapū Oneone (confederation of Tūhoe tribes). Science, too, will tell you that we are carbon, hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen - stardust. I was introduced to this mahi in 2015 through a school project, but my more focused learning journey in the māra began in 2020 at a community hub in Eponi, Lower Hutt. I was mentored there by Perma Cultural experts and community

members, absorbing the many learnings gathered there. I ran the cafe and delivered environmental education to kura, youth groups, and volunteers. I saw this as the most tangible remedy to the most significant problem of our time - disconnection from Papatūānuku and the oncoming climate and ecosystem collapse. Being able to create space for tamariki, rangatahi and pakeke to touch soil and to remember skills needed to grow a kamokamo (squash) is the revolutionary work that our climate's unstable future requires us to reinstate.

With the support of my Uncle Haimona Hirini and whanaunga (relative) Tina Walker Fergusson, we decided to begin planting kai at the high school where Matua Haimona teaches Pūtaiao - Māori Science. We worked with taurua to remove blackberries, plant rākau Māori (native plants), transplant watercress, clean the awa (river), sow carrots, plant fruit trees, herbs, sunflowers, taewa (type of potato) and kumara (sweet potato). This project has come to be referred to as 'Cuzzies i te Māra'. However, as a third-generation urban Māori, I always wished that growing food was a skill that might eventually take me home. In 2024, I was lucky enough to move to Te Urewera herself, to a rural kura where I help tend to the māra, teaching both tamariki and their whanaunga about Rongomātāne (deity of cultivated foods)

and Haumietiketike (deity of uncultivated foods). While I no longer live in the Hutt Valley and in proximity to the māra there, I continue to visit, send seedlings and aroha (love) their way and support the development of mahi from afar.

It is because of this work in māra kai that our kaupapa, Cuzzies i te Māra, was asked to be a partner in Generation Kāinga. Being passionate about living in balance with our taiao and being allowed to reimagine how we live with one another, build our homes and feed ourselves sustainably alongside a group of inspirational rangatahi Māori is a dream come true. Our weekly Zoom hui is my dose of hope during a time when divisiveness feels so amplified. Being encouraged to reimagine together as Gen K is important and exciting because how can we possibly come up with better solutions for the future without envisioning all that could be while taking inspiration from all that once was? When we allow ourselves to dream about what might be possible, we can look at a bleak section of lawn and see what we might be harvesting there in the future. We then get to work while letting that vision be the motivation to dig holes for fruit trees. Adrienne Marie Brown, a well-known American activist and writer, discusses the importance of imagination in a world determined to have us visionless. She says;

We have to imagine beyond those fears. We have to ideate, imagine, and conceive together. What we pay attention to grows, so I am thinking about how we grow what we are all imagining and create something large enough and solid enough that it becomes a tipping point (Brown, 2017).

Spending time in wānanga with the other rangatahi partners gives me the feeling that we are closer than ever to that tipping point. Momentum and transformative energy are bursting out of the spaces rangatahi occupy. Creative and real-life solutions are being brought to life by my peers, dispelling stereotypes about our capabilities as rangatahi Māori.

What makes our work rangatahi-led, and what does that mean to us? I was recently discussing my approaching 27th birthday with whānau, and one of my nani's responded, "Girl, I was a rangatahi until I was 50." She is the youngest of all my nan's sisters, so to restrict kupu (words) and whakaaro Māori (Māori ideas and ideologies) to an age range or dictionary definition is not conducive to allowing the kupu to teach us its full breadth of philosophies and wisdoms - we need to allow kupu to be recomplexified. We do not suddenly become a rangatira at the age of 30, nor are we sheltered from the responsibilities of adult life until we are 'old

enough.' Chaz Doherty, a mentor and dear friend said;

A key thing of rangatira is manaaki (support, hospitality). Rangatahi is a time of growing, making new mates, looking around at one another, that unification, manaaki, looking after each other. Rangatahi is an action. You have to be out there, strengthening, growing and doing it with others. It is a step towards rangatira as you get older and wiser. Part of your rangatahi-led stuff is preparation for that, to make sure you're going to be a good pakeke (Personal communication, 2024).

I began doing what I do, not because I am a rangatahi who needs to be a rangatira or because I am an expert gardener, but because I saw a problem and I knew I had something to contribute. I began giving my time to growing māra because it brings me joy, accepting that I will make mistakes along the way. Not just mistakes like over or under-watering seedlings, but being able to build the skills required to strengthen, maintain and navigate relationships with people. As Adrienne Marie Brown (2017) notes, "we need to understand that the strength of our movements lies in the strength of our relationships, which can only be measured by their depth (p.10)". I have learnt that the stronger and deeper

my relationships are with people and place, the more abundance the work will provide for everyone.

A gardening friend once told me that you are not a seasoned gardener until you have completed forty growing seasons, so you can imagine how much more there is for me to learn. I hope to always embody the āhua (characteristics) of a rangatahi and retain the ability to learn and grow even when I am a kuia. The ability to be vulnerable, to make mistakes, and to try again will always be important in our 'success,' no matter how many times we rotate around the sun.

Dallas Cherrington

***Ngati Kuri, Te Rarawa, Ngati Hine,
Ngati Kahu, Tainui***

"I am proud of you", said my auntie as she wept while handing me over at my whakatau (welcoming ceremony) for carving school. I walked across the room in silence as her words struck my heart, sending my brain into an overthinking frenzy. 'I haven't even started yet' - 'I don't even know if I'll like it or finish it', I thought as I sat down on the opposite side of the room to face my whānau. I saw the look of hope and trust in my stepfather's eyes, and at that moment, I realised it was no longer about me; in an instant, my destiny was chosen, and I was sent to serve more than

just myself; I was entrusted with serving my people.

In the anime 'One Piece' (Oda, 1997) the concept of 'will' is used, stating that 'inherited will' is the idea that the living will carry the ideals of past generations. Those who believe in the concept of inherited will tend to accept their own mortality and entrust their dreams to the people of the next generation. Though a fictional concept, it is one that I often reflect on. Is this my dream? Did I even want to do this? If it isn't my dream, then whose is it? Is it the will of my mother or the will of someone before her? Perhaps it is the will entrusted to me from someone in times past or someone in the present. All I know is that it was an opportunity handed to me, and ever since, I have given it my all, and it has given just as much in return.

The idea of inherited will reminds me of a story I was once told of the totara tree. Totara are a tight-knit whānau unit and grow to their best potential whilst amongst one another. While it is safe and comfortable in this embrace, there is not always enough room, and the need to expand is always present. When the totara seeks to grow the collective, it throws a seed out past the edge of the collective in order to survey new lands and pave the way forward. Under the watchful eye and support of its whānau, the seed does its best to grow and prove it can lead them

forward. Once the young totara has shown its true strength and potential, the whānau then follow, embracing and empowering the young totara.

What does rangatahi-led or centred mean to me? And how is it enacted in my mahi? This isn't a question I have stopped to ask myself, nor do I think I can answer it completely. I can only draw on my experiences to understand some pieces to this puzzle. Even though I embody in some ways the answer to this, it is almost inconceivable for me to be leading. To be the centre. Me, us? To be amongst so many great rangatahi in Gen K and see the potential around me, I almost get stuck wondering about my own worth. To be given the power to make change. To be tutored by one of the best kaiwhakairo (carver) who saw potential in me. How can I reach or even exceed these expectations? This question creates more questions the more I think about it.

What does rangatahi-led or centred mean to me? It means supporting our rangatahi, inspiring them to inspire others, trusting their potential and enabling them. We achieve this by supporting them to explore the unknown, growing the world around them and creating a safe place for them to develop their mātauranga and strive for greatness, just like the totara. Letting them connect with other rangatahi to become the succession plan. Reminding them that

being a rangatahi is a gift and that, in this era, we have opportunities and tools that previous generations did not have; to waste them would be a dishonour to our tūpuna (ancestors) and mokopuna (grandchildren).

Moana Jackson famously said, 'We are not alone in our struggles. We stand in the light of our ancestors.' (Jackson, n.d). If great Māori leaders such as Moana Jackson and Eva Rickard, as well as many others like them, had the opportunities and resources we have today, what would they have done? I guess we will never know, but what we do know is that they achieved greatness with far less, paving the way and entrusting us to carry out their will. Each new generation must learn from the last, using past and present knowledge to further grow as a people, finishing the work of our ancestors and giving our future ancestors more to innovate from.

Ka Pu te Ruha - ka Hao te rangatahi

When the old net is cast aside, the new net goes fishing.

Conclusion

The central aim of this paper is to showcase the complex and poetic rangatahi perceptions of what it means to be a rangatahi and the ways in which rangatahi contribute positively to and offer leadership

within their diverse communities. Rather than homogenising and limiting our understandings of rangatahi and leadership, the intention here is to deepen our understanding of rangatahi narratives in order to disrupt mainstream discourses that define rangatahi as simply 'youth.' While age is, of course, a factor, there are more interwoven and subtle insights about rangatahi that exist in our kōrero, our pūrākau (stories) and our experiences.

The second and more implicit aim of developing this paper has been to enhance the kaupapa Māori research capacity and capability of rangatahi. While some of the rangatahi authors are engaged in different forms of formal learning and teaching, this is the first academic publication for all four rangatahi authors, demonstrating once again that as Māori, we are thinkers, writers, and doers, active and activists in the various community spaces we inhabit.

What we learnt from this process is that rangatahi are deeply connected to people and place and that their ability to lead, organise, mobilise and dream weighs heavily on their relationship with the whenua and the people who support and guide them. While rangatahi face complex challenges that impact their ability to feel secure in a rapidly changing and sometimes hostile world, they understand that there is power in the collective. By

bringing together this group of rangatahi through Gen K, these rangatahi authors have drawn inspiration and support from one another to grow in their respective work while recognising their shared dreams and aspirations to be tīpuna who have contributed to building a better world for future generations. Ina te mahi rangatahi, ina te mahi rangatira.

References

Berryman, M., Eley, E., & Copeland, D. (2017). Listening and Learning from Rangatahi Māori: the Voices of Māori Youth. *Critical Questions in Education*, 8(4), 476–494.

Brown, A. M. (2017). *Emergent strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*. AK Press

Castleden, H., & Garvin, T. (2008). Modifying photovoice for community-based participatory Indigenous research. *Social Science & Medicine*, 66(6), 1393–1405. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.11.030>

Clark, T., Ball, J., Fenaughty, J., Drayton, B., Fleming, T., Rivera-Rodriguez, C., Le Grice, J., Roshini, P.J., Bavin, L.M., Schwencke, A., Sutcliffe, K., Lewycka, S., Lucassen, M., Waa, A., Greaves, L., & Crengle, S. (2022). Indigenous adolescent

health in Aotearoa New Zealand: Trends, policy and advancing equity for rangatahi Maori, 2001–2019. *The Lancet Regional Health - Western Pacific*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanwpc.2022.100554>

Common and Legend, J. (2014). *Glory, Selma Soundtrack*. Sony Music Entertainment.

DiMartino, M.D., & Konietzko, B. (2005). *Avatar the last airbender* (Season 3, episode 13) [Review of *Avatar the last airbender*]. Nickelodeon. *DiMartino, M.D & Konietzko, B. (2005). Avatar the Last Airbender*. Nickelodeon Animation Studios

Doherty, W. (2009). *Mātauranga Tūhoe: The Centrality of mātauranga-a-iwi to Māori Education*. [Doctoral Thesis, University of Auckland].

Ferreira, M. P., & Gendron, F. (2011). Community-based participatory research with traditional and Indigenous communities of the Americas: Historical context and future directions. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 3(3), 153–168. <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/nfsfrp/2>

Jackson, M. (n.d.). *We are not alone in our struggles*. ActionStation Aotearoa. Retrieved May 14, 2025, from

<https://medium.com/actionstation/a-tribute-to-moana-jackson-2224b0417a7d>

Keelan, Teorongonui Josie. (2014). *Te Reanga Youth Development: Māori Styles*. ePress, Unitec. <https://www.unitec.ac.nz/epress/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Nga-Reanga-Youth-Development-Maori-styles-by-Teorongonui-Josie-Keelan.pdf>

Lee-Morgan, J. B. J. (2019). Pūrākau from the inside-out: Regenerating stories for cultural sustainability. In J. Archibald, J. B. J. Lee-Morgan, & J. D. Santolo (Eds.), *Decolonising research: Indigenous storywork as methodology* (pp. 151–166). Zed.

Miranda, LM. (2015). *The world was wide enough, Hamilton; the soundtrack*. Broadway Productions.

Oda, E. (1997). *One Piece*. Weekly Shōnen Jump Magazine. Shueisha.

Moorfield, J. C. (n.d.). *Te Aka Māori Dictionary*. <https://www.maoridictionary.co.nz/>

Paul, J., Berghan, J & Ratana, M. (2022). Ka pū te ruha, ka hao te rangatahi: Rangatahi perceptions of housing including papakāinga. In F. Cram, J. Smith, & J. Hutchings (Eds.), *Kāinga Tahī, Kāinga Rua:*

Māori Housing Realities and Aspirations. Bridget Williams Books.

Pihama, L., Tiakiwai, S.-J., & Southey, K. (Eds.). (2015). *Kaupapa Rangahau: A reader* (2nd ed.). Te Kotahi Research Institute.

<https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/c6c30d8a-c0cb-4edf-b16d-dafa1908f011/content>

Scott, T., Tuiasau, L., & El Truento, C. (2011). Home, @Peace. YouTube, In everplay.

Smith, G.H. (1997). *The Development of Kaupapa Māori: Theory and Praxis*. [PhD Thesis, University of Auckland].

Smith, L.T. 2022. *Decolonising Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 3rd ed. London: Zed Books.

Smith, L.T., Pihama, L., Cameron, N., Matakī, T., Morgan, H., & Te Nana, R. (2019). Thought space wananga. a Kaupapa Māori decolonising approach to research translation. *Genealogy* 3(4), 74

Wallerstein, N., & Duran, B. (2008). The theoretical, historical, and practice roots of CBPR. In M. Minkler & N. Wallerstein (Eds.), *Community-based participatory research for health* (2nd ed., pp. 25–46). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13398-014-0173-7.2>

Williams, H. W. (1957). *A dictionary of the Maori language* (6th ed.). Government Printer.

Glossary

Āhua	Characteristics
Aroha	Love and compassion
Aotearoa	New Zealand
Awa	River
Hapori	Community
Hapū	Extended family
Haumietiketike	deity of uncultivated foods
Hawaiki	Ancestral homeland
Hinepukohurangi	deity of the Tūhoe tribe representing the mist maiden
Hineahuone	The first woman
Hītori	History
Hue	Gourd
Hui	Meeting
Iwi	Kin group or tribe
Kai	Food
Kaimanaaki	Support team, facilitators

Kāinga	<i>Homes, tribal homelands, community</i>
Kaitiaki	<i>Guardian, caregiver</i>
Kaiwhakairo	<i>Carver</i>
Kamokamo	<i>Squash</i>
Kapu tī	<i>Cup of tea</i>
Kaupapa	<i>Initiative, project</i>
Koha	<i>Gift</i>
Kōhanga reo	<i>Total immersion pre-school</i>
Kōrero	<i>Talk/discuss</i>
Koro	<i>Male elder</i>
Koro mā	<i>Male elders</i>
Koroua	<i>Male elder</i>
Kui mā	<i>Female elders</i>
Kūmara	<i>Sweet potato</i>
Kupu	<i>Word</i>
Kura	<i>School</i>
Kura Kaupapa Māori	<i>Total immersion Māori language school</i>
Mahi	<i>Work</i>
Mahinga kai	<i>Food garden</i>
Manaaki	<i>Support, hospitality</i>
Māra	<i>Garden</i>
Māra kai	<i>Food garden</i>
Marae	<i>Māori meeting place</i>

Marae ātea	<i>Courtyard, public forum</i>
Mātauranga	<i>Knowledge</i>
Nani	<i>Female elder</i>
Ngā hua o te mahi	<i>Fruits of our labour</i>
Pakeke	<i>Adult</i>
Pakihi	<i>Business</i>
Pao	<i>Short songs</i>
Papatūānuku	<i>Earth mother</i>
Pepi	<i>Baby</i>
Pōhiri	<i>Formal welcoming ceremony</i>
Poi	<i>a light ball on a string that is swung rhythmically to a song</i>
Ponga ihu	<i>Nose flute</i>
Pūkāea	<i>Long wooden wind instrument</i>
Mokopuna	<i>Grandchildren</i>
Pūrākau	<i>Stories and traditional narratives</i>
Rākau	<i>Plants, trees</i>
Rākau Māori	<i>Native plants and trees</i>
Rangahau	<i>Research</i>
Rangatahi	<i>Young person, youth</i>
Rangatira	<i>Chief, leader</i>

Ranginui	<i>Sky father</i>
Rauemi	<i>Resources</i>
Ringawera	<i>Cooks, kitchen hand</i>
Rongoā	<i>Medicinal plants</i>
Rongomātāne	<i>Deity of cultivated foods</i>
Taewa	<i>Type of potato</i>
Tai Rāwhiti	<i>Eastern region of Aotearoa</i>
Taiao	<i>Environment</i>
Tamaiti	<i>Child</i>
Tamariki	<i>Children</i>
Taonga	<i>Invaluable treasures</i>
Taonga puoro	<i>Musical instrument</i>
Taonga tuku iho	<i>Values/treasures handed down through generations</i>
Tauira	<i>Student, example</i>
Te Ao Mārama	<i>The world of light</i>
Te ara o ngā tīpuna	<i>Pathway of our ancestors</i>
Te Ataarangi	<i>Māori language revitalisation programme</i>
Te Auahituroa	<i>Deity of comets and the origin of fire</i>

Te hapū Oneone	<i>Confederation of Tūhoe tribes</i>
Te Reanga Hou	<i>The new generation</i>
Te Reo Māori	<i>The Māori language</i>
Te Urewera	<i>Tribal homelands of the Tūhoe people</i>
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha	<i>The University of Canterbury</i>
Tīpuna	<i>Ancestors</i>
Tira wānanga	<i>Participants</i>
Tumuaki	<i>Leader, principal</i>
Tūpuna	<i>Ancestors</i>
Urupā	<i>Cemetery</i>
Wairua	<i>Spirituality</i>
Wānanga	<i>Collective ideations, gatherings</i>
Wānanga reo	<i>Gathering to learn the Māori language</i>
Whakaaro	<i>Idea, thought</i>
Whakaaro Māori	<i>Māori ideas and ideologies</i>
Whakapapa	<i>Genealogy</i>
Whakatau	<i>Welcoming ceremony</i>
Whakataukī	<i>Proverb</i>
Whakawhanaungatanga	<i>Getting to know each other,</i>

	<i>relationship building</i>
Whānau	<i>Family</i>
Whanaunga	<i>Relation</i>
Whanaungatanga	<i>Interactional relationships</i>
Whare	<i>Building, house</i>
Whare wānanga	<i>Kaupapa Māori tertiary education institution</i>
Wharekai	<i>Dining hall</i>

About the Authors

Maia Ratana (Ngāti Rangiwewehi, Ngāti Whakae, Ngāti Te Roro o te Rangi, Ngā Rauru, Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga) is a researcher at Pūrangakura, a lecturer at Unitec School of Architecture, and a PhD candidate at Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiāraangi. Her research interests include Māori housing, homelessness, rangatahi leadership and equity in tertiary education. Maia's PhD explores 'Kaupapa Rangatahi,' a theory of change that challenges colonial norms and empowers rangatahi as leaders and change-makers. Maia is passionate about building relationships, centering rangatahi voices and fostering equitable, sustainable futures.

Associate Professor Hinekura Smith (Te Rarawa, Ngā Puhi) is a teacher,

weaver and Kaupapa Māori researcher. With 27 years' experience as a Māori educator, she began her career as a Māori language teacher, before moving into tertiary education, teacher education, research and academic leadership. Hinekura's research interests weave together growing Indigenous research, decolonising education, Indigenous arts-based methodologies and Māori and Indigenous doctoral supervision and support. She is a principal research fellow at the ARC Centre of Excellence for Indigenous Futures at the University of Queensland.

Dallas Cherrington (Ngāti Kuri, Te Rarawa, Ngāti Hine, Ngāti Kahu, Tainui) is a founding member of 4th Gen - a group of rangatahi from Ngāti Kuri who work on collaborative projects which help us to better understand what we need to protect, restore and revitalise our land, sky and oceans. While he travels home to Ngāti Kuri regularly to aid in conservation efforts, Dallas is predominantly based in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland where he studies whakairo at Te Wānanga Whakairo o Ruawhetū.

Rāhiri Mākuini Edwards-Hammond (Taranaki whānui, Te Arawa, Ngāti Kahungunu o Te Wairoa, Ngāti Ruapani, Rongowhakaata, Moriori) holds a Master of Indigenous Studies

from Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington, a Postgraduate Diploma in Art, majoring in Māori studies from the University of Auckland and a Bachelor of Health Promotion, Sport and Exercise Science from Te Wānanga o Raukawa. In 2018, Rāhiri founded Project Rangatahi, a rangatahi driven and community centred kaupapa that aims to create more opportunities for rangatahi based in Te Wairoa. As a raukura of kura kaupapa and whare wānanga, Rāhiri is driven by her passion for tikanga, taiao, and our potential as a people.

Rosa Hibbert-Schooner (Te Arawa) is passionate about advocacy and bridging connections between decision-makers and those who work within our communities. As a past Tumuaki of Te Mana Akonga – the National Māori Student Association, Rosa worked tirelessly to ensure Māori voices were heard across the tertiary sector and beyond. She now works as the Manahautū Start Up Lead for the Generation Kāinga Trust.

Lani Rotzler Purewa (Tūhoe, Ngāti Pūkeko, Schwarzwälderin) has a deep connection to the whenua and the gifts that it provides. For several years, she has been working on a kaupapa called Cuzzies i te Māra which supports whānau, kura, organisations and kaupapa to learn about

food sovereignty and the importance of looking after the taiao. Lani aims to restore intergenerational harmony between humans and nature and create a world of healing and abundance for all.

Professor Jenny Lee-Morgan (Waikato, Te Ahiwaru, Ngāti Māhuta)

has a distinguished background in teaching and kaupapa Māori research and has contributed significantly to growing kaupapa Māori research and researchers. In 2016, she received the Te Tohu Pae Tawhiti Award from the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, recognising her high-quality research and impact on Māori education. Jenny co-edited the award-winning book *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology* (2019) with Prof Joan Archibald and Dr Jason DeSantolo. Her most recent book, *Tiakina te Pā Harakeke: Ancestral knowledge and tamariki well-being* (2022), was co-edited with Dr Leonie Pihama. Today, Jenny is a director at Pūrangakura Kaupapa Māori Research Centre.