



# Encountering the Face of Tū-mata-uenga: The Educational Experiences of Rangatahi Māori Apprehended for Offending

Tania Cliffe-Tautari<sup>1</sup>

Received: 13 October 2023 / Accepted: 25 January 2024  
© The Author(s) 2024

## Abstract

Marginalised and ousted from the New Zealand education system, 70% of youths apprehended for offending and appearing in a New Zealand Youth Court or Rangatahi Court experiencing complex needs are not engaged in education, employment, or training (Oranga Tamariki, Oranga Tamariki. (2020). Quarterly report—September 2020). This article reports findings from a broader PhD study investigating the educational experiences of 10 rangatahi Māori (Māori youth) aged 15–17 years apprehended for serious youth offending and excluded from mainstream education. Drawing on mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) and kaupapa Māori, notions of indigenous resilience are used to unpack the rangatahi Māori participants' responses to negative educational experiences in the mainstream English medium secondary school education system. This article posits that resilience was evident when the rangatahi Māori exercised tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty) through boldness (a characteristic of Tū-mata-uenga the guardian of war), resistance and liminality to reject educational spaces where they perceived they were underserved, discriminated against, and marginalised. Changing the negative Māori student exclusion and disengagement statistics in mainstream education is critical. To address the exclusion statistics, classroom practitioners could be more responsive to rangatahi Māori experiencing complex needs by recognising their experiences and understanding their responses to those experiences. Understanding how resilience as resistance, liminality, and boldness is understood within te ao Māori (the Māori world) perspectives will enable a more culturally responsive approach to working with these rangatahi Māori in mainstream education.

**Keywords** Disengagement · Exclusion · Rangatahi Māori · Resilience · Resistance

---

✉ Tania Cliffe-Tautari  
tania.cliffe@auckland.ac.nz

<sup>1</sup> Te Puna Wānanga, Waipapa Taumata Rau - University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

## Introduction

Rangatahi Māori (Māori adolescents) represent the highest percentage (63%) of young people appearing in the New Zealand Youth Court for offending behaviours (Ministry of Justice, 2022). Research has indicated that education is a significant protective factor in reducing youth offending in New Zealand (Sutherland, 2011). More broadly, positive social and educational opportunities for all including rangatahi Māori who offend, are needed to enable them to thrive in society. Without such opportunities, rangatahi Māori who offend may be susceptible to wider social issues in the future, such as unemployment, poverty, and a trajectory towards adult offending. However, rangatahi Māori apprehended for serious offences must be engaged in education to access these opportunities. Of the young people appearing in a New Zealand Youth Court, 70% are not engaged in education, employment, or training (Oranga Tamariki, 2020). The education sector is morally obligated to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline through addressing the exclusion of rangatahi Māori from mainstream education.

This article draws on qualitative findings about the experiences of 10 rangatahi Māori (15–17 years) from a broader PhD study (Cliffe-Tautari, 2021). To examine their educational experiences leading to exclusion from the mainstream education system, I use *mātauranga Māori* and *kaupapa Māori* to theorise how Māori notions of resilience, particularly resistance, liminality, and boldness (a characteristic of *Tū-mata-uenga*, the Māori guardian of war) provide resilience mechanisms which enable rangatahi Māori to buffer negative schooling experiences and exercise *tino rangatiratanga* (sovereignty) to enter liminal spaces. Through hearing the voices of rangatahi Māori apprehended for offending, we will better understand what psycho-social processes may be at play for this cohort. This will enable mainstream schools to stem the negative disengagement statistics, be culturally responsive to Māori, and tailor educational practices to engage this group of the most marginalised rangatahi in the education system.

## Māori Student Exclusion in Education

Disengagement and alienation from mainstream education are risk factors for persistent youth offending (Becroft, 2016). Stand-down, suspensions, and exclusion statistics can indicate where disengagement leads to exclusion. In 2021, Māori students represented 50% of the total suspension figures, 50% of exclusions and 49% of expulsions (Education Counts, 2022). Assaults on other students and continual disobedience were the areas of the highest suspension rates (Education Counts, 2022). Although the statistics are not specific to Māori youth who offend, they illustrate the high rates of rangatahi Māori exclusion in education compared to non-Māori.

Beyond disciplinary action, school attendance rates are also concerning, with a downward trajectory since 2015. Regular attendance in 2023 was only 45.9%

overall, with Māori students recording the highest absence rates (Ministry of Education, 2023a). Māori students' regular attendance rates were 33.7% (Ministry of Education, 2023a). Truancy, throw-away reasons, and other unknown reasons were identified as key explanations for unexplained student absences (Ministry of Education, 2023b).

In a 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment survey, students reported systemic issues such as bullying which included name-calling, physical threats, being left out, spreading rumours, and theft or damage of belongings which contributed to truancy from education (Ministry of Education, 2020). Teacher unfairness "...included being overlooked, harsher discipline, assessment grading, and being "ridiculed in front of others" (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 6). Two reasons reported by students for teacher unfairness were unsuccessful student–teacher relationships and perceived teacher bias in treating students who are frequently absent more unfairly (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Consequently, rangatahi Māori may exit mainstream to attend Alternative Education (AE). A recent Education Review Office (2023) article into AE stated that seven out of ten young people engaged in AE are Māori, with nearly one in ten having had engagement with youth justice. They were also "... 25 times more likely than other young people to have had a Family Group Conference" (Education Review Office, 2023, p.4). Thus, it is important to consider resilience for rangatahi Māori who offend within cultural frameworks as it may enable greater retention in mainstream education.

## Western Notions of Resilience

There are multiple definitions of what resilience represents within Western paradigms which are primarily centred on the individual and their inherent coping strategies. Existing literature suggests that resilience is an individual's innate ability to overcome challenges as a protective factor, enabling young people to bounce back from adverse conditions (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011). Zolkoski et al. (2016) maintained that resilience is ecologically bound, with the resilience to overcome adversity being external to the person. Within Western paradigms, the "nature of the threat" and the "quality of adaptation" of the individual following exposure to the threat are fundamental to understanding resilience. Zimmerman (2013) further added that youth development resilience research is focused on contextual, social, and individual promotive factors which can interrupt developmental trajectories that lead to negative affect. However, O'Dougherty Wright & Matsen (2015) have suggested that defining positive resilience adaptation is becoming increasingly difficult due to different cultural and contextual situations.

Western resilience literature presently suggests a gap in understanding resilience for some students whose experiences are located within different cultural contexts in which resilience is understood. Panter-Brick (2015) suggested that some resilience vocabulary has not necessarily translated well into other cultures (Panter-Brick, 2015). Feldman and Masalha (2007) stated that "[c]ulture is perhaps the most neglected topic in the study of risk and resilience" (p. 2). To understand resilience

for rangatahi Māori, resilience must be considered as an all-encompassing strategy located within the confines of the collective whānau (family), hapū (subtribe) and iwi (tribal) structures. It also needs to be understood within Māori epistemologies. Take the well-known Māori whakataukī (proverb) ‘Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, he toa takitini’ ‘My strength is not mine alone, but of many’. This whakataukī speaks to an individual’s strength being grounded within the collective. Understanding Māori cultural values and identity for Māori alongside this whakataukī can enable a culturally centric understanding of resilience.

Recognising different contexts of resilience was further evident in the New Zealand Pathways to Resilience Study findings. This study investigated key risk and protective variables with Māori, Pacific and Pākehā youth who were multiple service users (enrolled with more than one government agency) due to extenuating circumstances in their lives (Sanders & Munford, 2015). Māori were reported as having the highest levels of risk yet scored on higher levels of contextual resilience than other cultural groups. The results alluded to cultural resilience processes amongst Māori and Pacific youth and the potential of cultural identity as part of the “culturally anchoring resilience processes” (Sanders & Munford, 2015, p. 88). Therefore, this article argues that we must move beyond Western understandings of resilience to consider culturally relevant contexts that align with te ao Māori perspectives for rangatahi Māori.

Indigenous critique of Western resilience theories further challenge Western notions of resilience as based on the deficit theorising of Māori as needing to cope better, bounce back and be resilient, alongside the “...acceptance of responsibility for our position as disadvantaged dispossessed peoples” (Penehira et al., 2014, p. 103). Moving beyond Western understandings of resilience considers culturally relevant contexts that align with te ao Māori perspectives.

## Māori Notions of Resilience

Māori discourse about resilience considers other important aspects such as colonisation, cultural traditions, and beliefs (Waiti, 2014). Penehira et al. (2014) argued that resilience definitions should consider protective mechanisms to resist colonisation and retain self-determination with the greatest example of Māori resilience being evident when Māori ‘traverse’ a continuum between reactive and proactive strategies to effect change (Penehira et al., 2014). Te Rito (2007) argued that whakapapa (genealogy) is central to resilience for Māori. He argued that our relationship with the environment as tangata whenua (people of the land) grounds us to the earth, and this sense of connection to the land causes us as Māori to be resilient. Other Māori scholars acknowledge the collective or whānau system because Māori tend to be more whānau oriented toward inter-dependence rather than independence (Penehira et al., 2014). Waiti (2014) investigated whānau resilience strategies to ascertain resilience mechanisms in whānau and found that whānau drew on already identified factors that mitigate risk and adversity (education, income) as well as cultural identity and Māori cultural constructs to overcome adversity. He identified that having supportive and significant people enhances resilience (Waiti, 2014). Resilience

for rangatahi Māori who offend may be external rather than internally bound and grounded within te ao Māori (Māori worldview) perspectives.

## Resilience Definitions in Te Reo Māori

Drawing on te reo Māori (the Māori language), pūrākau Māori (Māori storytelling), whakataukī and whakatauākī (proverbs) we get an understanding of resilience from within te ao Māori perspectives. As a preface, multiple Māori words used for resilience can change, depending on the context and the dialect used in different tribal areas. Moorfield (2020) stated that aumangea, manawaroa, and mārohirohi are translations for resilience. Aumangea is resilience based on determination and focus, whereas manawaroa refers to resilience as endurance (Moorfield, 2020). Mārohirohi, on the other hand is resilience in the context of physical fitness and stamina (Moorfield, 2020). Ngata (1993) recorded manahau as resilience when faced with misfortune.

To gain a full appreciation of resilience within a Māori paradigm, it is important to enter the repositories of pūrākau Māori, whakataukī or whakatauākī. Take the proverbs of “he manawa tītī”, a muttonbird’s heart, and “he manawa piharau”, a lamprey’s heart as examples (Mead & Grove, 2001). The tītī or muttonbird, though a delicacy to eat was also known for its “exceptional power of sustained flight” (Mead & Grove, 2001, p. 94). Likewise, the piharau or lamprey is known for its “sustained endurance” (Mead & Grove, 2001, p. 94). These whakataukī can be used in everyday conversations with Māori speakers to encourage someone to be strong in adversity. Pūrākau Māori also speak to resilience with characteristics of resilience being found in the acts of tūpuna (ancestors) or atua (gods/guardians).

Take the creation story about Ranginui (sky father) and Papa-tū-ā-nuku (earth mother). Tū-mata-uenga (guardian of war) in the quest to separate his parents he was first to suggest that he and his siblings kill their parents to bring forth light. Here Tū-mata-uenga can be regarded as impulsive and impassioned. Reedy (1996) records that Tū-mata-uenga is known as “Tū te ihi – Tū the impassioned one” (p. 31). Other translations of the word ihihi in te reo Māori are thrill, excitement, exhilaration, elation, or to be inspired by awe and respect (Moorfield, 2020). Tū te ihihi in this article is characterised as boldness and confidence, which ignites desire, excitement, and challenge.

## Resistance

Where resilience has been a popular term when discussing adolescents and their ability to buffer adversity, ‘resistance’ is becoming a construct that is pertinent to understanding how Māori overcome challenging situations. Penehira et al. (2014) argued that a Western notion of resilience was not an apt construct for describing the experiences of Māori. Instead, resistance is more fitting for describing both Māori experience and response. Penehira et al. (2014) described resistance as “...collective fight back, exposing the inequitable distribution of power, and actively opposing

negative social, political and economic influences” (p. 96). Giroux (1983) offered that resistance is more than a label for every act of “oppositional behaviour” (p. 291). Resistance can be seen in different ways, such as trying to be funny, as silence, as threatening behaviour, as daydreaming (Toshalis, 2015). Resistance is however based on imbalances of power and domination (Giroux, 1983). Although not popular in Western literature, Māori academics record resistance as a strengths-based, more culturally relevant mechanism. It is therefore a fitting understanding term to consider rangatahi Māori who offend and their educational experiences in line with mātauranga Māori and kaupapa Māori understandings.

## Liminality

Notions of liminality from te ao Māori perspectives is emergent. Liminality in this article is used to discuss how rangatahi Māori navigate negative educational experiences and the in-between spaces they find themselves in because of exclusion from education. Van Gennep (1960) developed the concept of liminality about rites of passage, arguing that liminal states were more pronounced during times of transition (including the transition from adolescence to adulthood). Turner’s (1969) concept of liminality considered the person in the liminal as being “be-twixt and between” places (p. 95). Thomassen (2009) highlighted three dimensions of liminality as contextual to: (1) subjects, including groups, individual and whole societies; (2) temporality, including periods and epochs; and (3) spatiality, which included places, areas, zones, regions, or countries. Wood (2016) posited that school classrooms and playgrounds represent spaces of liminality where there are neither adult nor youth spaces and instead represent in-between spaces, which allow for adolescent negotiation and agency. Rangatahi Māori who offend bridge a cultural fault line between Māori and Pākehā societies whereby they do not feel that they belong or fit into either society. Inclusionary and exclusionary measures of belonging mean that they potentially face dual marginalisation. This can cause rangatahi Māori to enter liminal spaces where acceptance and belonging are realised. This article seeks to understand how rangatahi Māori who offend traverse these social complexities and how they exercise tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty) in their worlds, in the liminal and in the borderspaces (Wood, 2016).

## Research Participants

This project included semi-structured interviews with ten rangatahi Māori including three females and seven males between 15 and 17 years of age. All rangatahi Māori participants had been excluded from mainstream education and had previously been sentenced in court for serious offending behaviours. Participants were recruited through an Alternative Education (AE) provider or a social services provider in the greater Auckland or Northland regions in New Zealand. Regarding educational engagement at the time of the interviews, five participants were engaged with AE providers, one was engaged in correspondence school. The other four participants

were not in formal education, employment, or training. Due to sentencing requirements, these four participants were engaged with a social service provider.

## Methodology

Underpinned by mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge), kaupapa Māori and Te Matataki Methodology (a new methodology developed during the PhD), the discussed findings are from Study Two in a part of a broader PhD project (Cliffe-Tautari, 2021), Interviews with rangatahi Māori were between 45 min, and 60 min long and all interviews were transcribed and analysed using Te Matataki Analysis Praxis (Cliffe-Tautari, 2021) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each interview was recorded on a digital device. Following tikanga Māori (Māori protocol), the interview included the opportunity to get to know the rangatahi through pepeha (tribal aphorisms), mihi mihi (greetings), whakawhanaungatanga (establishing relationships and connections). We also opened and closed our interview with karakia (prayer) and kai (food).

The ethical requirements of the study were approved through the University of Auckland Human Participant Ethics Committee. The reliability of the study was enhanced through member-checking processes, with each participant being offered their transcript(s) to edit and peer debriefing with the thesis supervisors. Every rangatahi Māori was presented with a small greenstone taonga (treasure) to acknowledge participant contribution to the research. This was the first taonga that some rangatahi Māori had ever received. While some rangatahi chose to do one interview, other rangatahi Māori requested to participate in a second interview where the main themes arising from the first interview and any concluding thoughts were discussed.

## Negative Experiences in Education

All ten participants had negative schooling experiences in mainstream education which were central reasons for disengaging and/or being excluded. Bullying, racism, stereotyping, a lack of teacher support, low teacher expectations, and feeling judged were predominant factors affecting their participation in education. Participants Three and Four spoke about bullying, struggling with class work, and a lack of teacher support, which led them to have negative attitudes towards the teachers and a desire to disengage. Participant Four said:

*Cause just the teachers, eh. The teachers never really liked me. I could just tell, you know, all the bad vibes around, yeah. I had older brothers that went there before me and like, yeah, and they just didn't like me. 'I used to get picked on at school because I was like too dumb, that's what everyone was saying and like I had anger issues, yeah, but I didn't really. I didn't care. Yeah, and I would just leave the class and ... I just didn't care. I kept drawing. They were telling me to do my work and I would say, "It's too*



*hard” and they would tell me to do it. Yeah, I’d go for a little bit [doing class work] but then I’d get frustrated and I would just draw.*

Boredom was another issue affecting participation in education. Five participants spoke about how they found school boring. Sometimes, this boredom was due to the content, and at other times, it was because the work was either too complex or inaccessible. Participant Three said, “*Sometimes I would sit in class and just daydream because I was just bored out of my brain. The works boring.*” Participant Four spoke about how boredom and a lack of support led to truancy. They said:

*I would like show up to school and like just get booked in and then probably just leave halfway through the day. Just got too bored and, yeah. I just couldn’t handle it. But they were just chucking work at me and expecting me to finish.*

Four of the participants had suffered from bullying during their schooling experience. For three out of ten participants, bullying inhibited their participation in education and affected their overall well-being and sense of worthiness. Two of the participants stated that bullying had detrimental effects on their health and for one, this led to suicidal thoughts. Participant Six said:

*Because I think I was like the tomboy of the school and I don’t know what their problem was with me hanging out with boys. [They] made me look like the slut of the school. I was only like seven. They [teachers/principal] didn’t do anything about the bullying. The bullying just went on for three years straight. I got grief every day and that’s when I started getting suicidal. Nobody saw how bad it was getting. Nobody really believed me. I used to just make up excuses, so I didn’t have to go to school. That three years of school was hell. I hated it. That’s what put me off school.*

Participant One also discussed how they were bullied in school. When I asked who had bullied Participant One, they said:

*Mostly kids but sometimes even adults. There was this one teacher that didn’t like me. He was a man. He didn’t like Māori kids, like Māori people. I didn’t know why, but like he just really hated me. I didn’t know why, and I was too young to even know why he hated me and stuff, because when I was little, I thought Māori was like a normal thing.*

These findings show that bullying impacts on student well-being and affects school attendance. New Zealand has a higher rate of bullying than most OECD countries (Education Review Office (ERO), 2019). In 2019, in research with 138 primary, secondary, and composite schools, ERO found that bullying was relatively high in schools. However, less bullying was reported in the most effective schools with policies to deal with student bullying (ERO, 2019). As a response, rangatahi Māori participants in this study used boldness to navigate the challenges they experienced.



## Boldness

For eight participants, racism and feeling judged by others was a barrier to their engagement in education. Some participants felt bullied and isolated because of their heritage as Māori, because they were speakers of te reo Māori, or because of their skin colour. Boldness, a characteristic of Tū-mata-uenga, is theorised in this article as a resilience-based mechanism used by the rangatahi Māori participants to buffer negative educational experiences. Boldness provided the participants with the strength to stand up for themselves. It enabled them to take on challenges, regardless of the context such as offending or standing up to racism, being stereotyped or being judged. For Participant Eight, boldness was demonstrated as a form of protest in their learning when they felt that their pleas for help were disregarded.

*I used to do that like four years ago [correspondence school]. That was hard. They were sending like big stacks of paper. They gave me a computer though. They told my uncle not to help me. Not to help me. They said to let him do it by himself and they were just sending stacks [of paper] like that. Yeah, so I just started burning everything. They were talking to my uncle and they were just asking, “How is the work, how is the work?” and I was just telling them, “Ow it’s too much, it’s too much” and they were like, “Oh, there’s going to be some more coming in this week”. I just started hanging up and burning their stuff.*

Boldness as a response, provides a buffer to make a stand to invoke justice, challenge racism and bullying, and disarm negative judgements and stereotyping. For Participant Three, boldness enabled them to speak back to racist attitudes and behaviours towards them as Māori.

*If you’ve got a problem with me being a Māori, well I’ll stand there and say, “Well, what’s your problem, you know? I’m a Māori and what? What are you going to do about it? You can’t change where I’m from, I can’t change where you’re from. I can’t have your genes, you can’t have my genes, in that way. So why have a problem? We’ve all got to live in this world together somehow, one way or another or else, you know, we’ll be living in chaos”.*

As evidence, boldness was not only a resilience strategy to disarm the negative effects of stereotyping and racism. It also gave them a strengths-based mechanism to aspire to change to lead positive lives. All the participants aspired to a better life. Boldness allowed them to aspire to greater things and to want to achieve ‘boldly’ despite negative perceptions or negative expectations held by others that they were destined to fail. Areas of aspiration included sports, education, careers, and giving back to their families who had supported them. The participants wanted to be leaders in their families, pave new standards and seek opportunities. Boldness gave them the courage to believe that they could do so.

Participant Two talked about how education was a pathway that could support them to gain employment to make that change and shift from a lifetime trajectory of offending. Participant Three spoke about wanting a job. For them, getting a job would show a real sense of achievement. Participant Five said addressing the

negative undertones of racism and stereotyping of Māori in the media could be overcome through boldly succeeding in life. When asked how they can do that, Participant Five said: *'by succeeding in life, I just want to, yeah, I want a degree in social work'*. Boldly achieving in education and setting a new standard in their family was a high priority. This participant also said:

*I just want to be successful because like none of my family graduated from high school and so I am trying to like beat that, to not be just like my mum and drop out of high school and like get pregnant and stuff but I think that's like, not wrong but I could do better than that.*

For rangatahi Māori who offend, the desire to try things out, aspire to greatness, accept challenges, dare to be the best, and be 'bold' aligns with the characteristics of Tū-mata-uenga. Boldness should thus be recognised as a positive strengths-based resilience mechanism for rangatahi Māori and it should be one that we as educators are cognisant of in recognising their response to their experiences in the education system. As a legitimate resilience response to an unjust education system, I argue that understanding what boldness represents should motivate educators to move beyond face value, seek the underlying issues, and address these. For example, the rangatahi Māori participants in this study spoke about underlying issues of racism, bullying, low teacher expectations and learning support needs.

## Tino Rangatiratanga in the Liminal Space

Adolescence as a state of liminality is characterised as a time of enacting and articulating their own versions of the self, whilst negotiating the expectations of others (Erikson, 1968). Due to dominant offending discourses, rangatahi Māori who offend navigate adolescence and negotiate the disruptive forces of colonisation and living within a marginal status because they are Māori. For rangatahi Māori participants, their experiences of marginalisation in education were the impetus to exit mainstream education which was perceived as a colonial space. Exiting mainstream refers to a deliberate decision by rangatahi Māori to no longer engage in, attend, or participate in mainstream education because it did not recognise, nor cater to their learning or wellbeing needs. Where marginalisation puts individuals involuntarily on the periphery, some rangatahi Māori participants consciously exit places representing marginalisation and exclusion. By doing so, they enter liminality as a statement of their tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty) and resistance to colonialism. In the liminal of "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1969, p. 95), rangatahi Māori who offend are afforded a space to exercise tino rangatiratanga, a space to reject deficit discourses and a space to recreate themselves as rangatahi Māori. Where Thomasen (2009) discussed the three dimensions of liminality: subjects, temporality, and spatiality, I argue that the liminal is a space of dual realities where rangatahi Māori can first resist deficit narratives to buffer racism, bullying and low expectations and second be free to recreate, rearticulate, and reaffirm their identities as Māori without the burden of inclusion/exclusion binaries.

Consciously occupying spaces of liminality as a resistance to colonialism, in the in-between spaces, the expectations of others are suspended, dismissed, or resisted as they recreate and define the rules of belonging. Munford and Sanders' (2015) research found that agency allowed the participants in their study to navigate adversity. The liminal for these participants also represents a fluid space where they can bracket stereotypical views of being Māori, deficit narratives which seek to label them and recreate new identities. In the liminal spaces, rangatahi Māori who offend politically activate their sense of justice to recreate new identities, this is their response to the prevalent microaggressions of racism and exclusion they experience in the mainstream education system.

## Discussion

The places that represented the greatest injustice for the participants were their experiences with teachers in mainstream schools. Racism, low teacher expectations, a lack of learning support, and teacher bullying can affect their desire to stay in education and their self-efficacy (Cliffe-Tautari, 2013; Huxford, 2015; Sutherland, 2011). Although the rangatahi Māori desired to succeed in mainstream education and voiced their concerns about bullying and needing help in their learning, they felt they were not being heard. When a school does not represent a place of belonging or a positive experience, rangatahi Māori may resist education altogether.

Resistance is often seen as a negative trait inherent within individuals who display oppositional behaviour to authority figures. Giroux said, “[i]n the most general sense, I think resistance must be situated in a perspective that takes the notion of emancipation as its guiding interest (p. 290). Resistance in these findings signalled that the educational experiences for rangatahi Māori must change (Toshalis, 2015). However, their resistance should not be mistaken for disinterest in doing well. Rather, resistance should be interpreted as agentic in that they took control. This was their way of speaking back to education as an institution representative of injustice.

If emancipation is the goal, and schools represent sites of power and domination (Giroux, 1983), then these findings suggest that schools are not a neutral space for rangatahi Māori experiencing complexities in their lives. Instead, mainstream can represent spaces of marginalisation where being misunderstood is prevalent. Rather than remaining marginalised, these findings illustrate that rangatahi Māori who offend may enter liminal spaces instead to gain a sense of tino rangatiratanga over their lives. Liminal spaces can thus represent a place of emancipation, a space to articulate themselves and resist negative experiences. Resistance and reasserting ourselves as Māori has become the common ground for kaupapa Māori movements in response to colonisation and a desire for self-determination to re-center te ao Māori perspectives in understanding the plight of rangatahi Māori who offend.

When we return to mātauranga Māori and consider boldness in Māori cultural narratives, it is evident that it is not a new trait within te ao Māori. In referencing back to the Māori creation story, Tū-mata-uenga, the son of Ranginui (the sky father) and Papatūānuku (the earth mother), known as the atua of war, conflict, and aggression is portrayed as being bold and fearless and as embodying human

characteristics (Reedy, 1996). Tū-mata-uenga (Tū-who-incites) has several other names such as Tū-kā-riri (Tū-the angry-one), Tū-te-ngaehe (Tū-who-tears-apart), Tū-Tawake (Tū-who-hastens), Tū-whakamoana-ariki (Tū-who-enriches-the-sea), Tū-kai-tauā (Tū-who-destroys-war-parties), and Tū-kai-tangata (Tū-who-destroys-mankind) (Reedy, 1996). For the participants in this study, being bold and embracing the qualities of Tū-mata-uenga enabled them to challenge the status quo, act boldly without fear, and to stand up for what they thought was right, even if it was not right to others or the majority.

While boldness may be viewed as frank and impolite in one cultural context, this is not necessarily true for all cultural contexts, including Māori settings. Boldness gave the participants in this research the confidence to stand up for what they believed was right and accept challenges. The courage and boldness to assert themselves, create their own rules for engagement, and boldly aspire to what they desire is their response. The fact that they aspire to succeed in life and boldly pursue their dreams despite the challenges they have faced in the education or justice systems, is a testament to the fact that they, like Tū-mata-uenga, are resilient.

Although some rangatahi Māori experience complex needs in their personal lives, like the participants in this research, they may not complain about circumstances which cause them to be “betwixt and between” (Turner, 1969, p. 95). Instead of voicing their concerns, resistance and liminality may be how they respond to systems which represent places of injustice to them. Wood’s (2016) concept of liminality in children’s geographies offers critical insights into agency within the liminal. In her study, Wood (2016) stated that adolescents “were spatially and socially (symbolically) excluded, yet also demonstrate[d] resistance and agency... at the intersection of experiences of inclusion” (p. 495). This is true of the participants in this study. Although there was an acknowledgement that some teachers had been positive influencers in their identity development journey, nine of the ten participants had significant negative schooling experiences in mainstream education, leading to feelings of exclusion. The liminal space thus represented a place where the rangatahi Māori participants could recreate themselves by removing the binaries of inclusion and exclusion.

## Conclusion and Implications for Classroom Educators

The findings from this study provoke classroom educators to develop a broader understanding of rangatahi Māori. First teachers need to acknowledge that some resistant behaviours may not necessarily characterise disobedience or disrespect. Instead, resistance may be a legitimate response to negative interactions like the examples the participants discussed in this study: racism, bullying, low teacher expectations or learning support. The presence of resistant behaviours thus necessitates teachers and schools to be responsive to address underlying issues which may impact learning and engagement in education.

Providing a culturally responsive approach for all rangatahi Māori in education requires classroom practitioners to also move beyond the rhetoric of pontificating what resistant behaviour represents to understand the context in which resistance

is created. Being responsive to address student concerns like bullying, racism, and learning needs requires that teachers first acknowledge student concerns and then put in strategies to address these concerns. Second, teachers must consider that resistance in one culture may be characterised as negative, but in other cultures, such as Māori culture it could be a rightful resilience response to unjust cause(s). In education, teacher unfairness could represent an example of an unjust cause. Third, boldness is characterised in this article as *tū te ihiihi*, a characteristic of *Tū-mata-uenga*. Adolescence as a time of change and identity-making is where challenging the status quo is important. These findings suggest that teachers could be more responsive to rangatahi Māori by finding ways to harness boldness in rangatahi Māori to ignite challenge, excitement, desire for learning, and personal development. Education is a known protective factor in addressing offending. Although tackling the causes of rangatahi Māori offending specifically is not a specific teaching council requirement for classroom educators, teachers and schools have a critical opportunity to keep all learners engaged in education by addressing key pedagogical practices that inspire students to remain in education. Areas discussed in the findings are: engaging in positive relational pedagogy with rangatahi Māori who offend; addressing boredom; and creating a participatory atmosphere founded on challenges and stimulating learning opportunities. Finally, liminality, and exiting mainstream education as a conscious choice that some rangatahi Māori choose should alert schools to the deep layers of distrust that some rangatahi Māori have of the mainstream education system. To disrupt the prevailing disengagement statistics and the exclusion of rangatahi Māori in education, classroom practitioners must first be cognisant of their response to student resistance and that there are potentially deeper layers of distrust in the teacher-student dynamic that must be first addressed. Resistance, boldness, and liminality should thus be considered genuine responses from some rangatahi Māori to resist negative schooling experiences. Such responses should urge teachers to speak with rangatahi Māori to determine what their response means.

In finishing, shifting teacher beliefs and developing a broader understanding of resistance, liminality, and boldness is critical to truly embrace a culturally responsive approach for all rangatahi Māori in the mainstream education system. I leave you with this quote from Linda Smith as food for thought about the power of the liminal spaces:

“[t]o resist is to entrench in the margins, retrieve what we were and remake ourselves” (Smith, 2012, p. 4).

**Funding** Open Access funding enabled and organized by CAUL and its Member Institutions. There are no financial interests attached to this publication. This publication is generated from a PhD study belonging to the author.

**Open Access** This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line

to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

## References

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Cliffe-Tautari, T. (2013). *Transitory Māori identities: Shape-shifting like Māui: Pūrākau of Māori secondary school students experiencing 'complex needs'*. [Unpublished master's thesis]. <https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/handle/2292/22009>
- Cliffe-Tautari, T. (2021). *Kua takoto te manuka Cultural identity as a resilience factor to reduce Māori youth offending*. [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. University of Auckland. <https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/2292/57555/Cliffe-Tautari-2021-thesis.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y>
- Education Counts. (2022). *Stand-downs, suspensions, exclusions, and expulsions from school*. <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/stand-downs,-suspensions,-exclusions-and-expulsions>
- Education Review Office. (2019). *Bullying prevention and response in New Zealand schools*. <https://www.ero.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/BullyingPrevention-and-Response-in-New-Zealand-Schools-May-2019.pdf>
- Education Review Office. (2023). *An alternative education? Support for our most disengaged young people*. <https://ero.govt.nz/our-research/an-alternative-education-support-for-our-most-disengaged-young-people>
- Erikson, E. (1968). *Youth: identity and crisis*. Norton & Co.
- Feldman, R., & Masalha, S. (2007). The role of culture in moderating the links between early ecological risk and young children's adaptation. *Development and Psychopathology*, 19(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S09545794070070010>
- Giroux, H. (1983). Theories of reproduction and resistance in the new sociology of education: A Critical analysis. *Harvard Educational Review*, 53(3), 257–293. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.53.3.a67x4u33g7682734>
- Huxford, R. (2015). *An investigation into Māori students' academic disengagement from the mainstream education system and re-engagement in the alternative education system* (Master's). <http://hdl.handle.net/10179/6907>
- Mead, S. M., & Grove, N. (2001). *Ngā pēpeha a ngā tīpuna*. Victoria University Press.
- Ministry of Education. (2020). *He whakaaro: School attendance and student wellbeing*. <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/hewhakaaro-school-attendance-and-student-wellbeing>
- Ministry of Justice. (2022). *Children and young people in court data notes and trends for 2021/2022*. <https://www.justice.govt.nz/assets/SzOAP-Children-and-young-people-data-notes-and-trends-jun2022-v2.0.pdf>
- Ministry of Education. (2023). *Students attending school regularly – term 3, 2023*. [https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/224715/Term-3-2023-Attendance-report.pdf](https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/224715/Term-3-2023-Attendance-report.pdf)
- Ministry of Education. (2023). *Reasons for student absence – Term 3, 2023*. [https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/224716/Term-3-2023\\_Reasons-for-student-absence.pdf](https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/224716/Term-3-2023_Reasons-for-student-absence.pdf)
- Moorfield, J. C. (2020). *Te aka Māori dictionary*. <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/>
- Munford, R., & Sanders, J. (2015). Negotiating and constructing identity: Social work with young people who experience adversity. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 45(5), 1564–1580.
- Ngata, H. M. (1993). *English-Maori Dictionary*. Learning Media
- Oranga Tamariki. (2020). *Quarterly report—September 2020*. <https://www.orangatamariki.govt.nz/about-us/reports-and-releases/quarterlyreport/text-only/>
- O'Dougherty Wright, M. O., & Masten, A. (2015). Pathways to resilience in context. In L. Theron, L. Liebenberg, & M. Ungar (Eds.), *Youth resilience and culture. Cross-cultural advancements in positive psychology* (Vol. 11, pp. 3–22). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9415-2\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9415-2_1)

- Panter-Brick, C. (2015). Culture and resilience: Next steps for theory and practice. In L. Theron, L. Liebenberg, & M. Ungar (Eds.), *Youth resilience and culture: Commonalities and complexities* (pp. 3–22). Springer.
- Penehira, M., Green, A., Smith, L., & Aspin, C. (2014). Māori and indigenous views on R and R: Resistance and Resilience. *MAI Journal*, 3(2), 96–110.
- Sanders, J., & Munford, R. (2015). The interaction between culture, resilience, risks, and outcomes: A New Zealand study. In L. Theron, L. Liebenberg, & M. Ungar (Eds.), *Youth resilience and culture. Cross-cultural advancements in positive psychology* (Vol. 11, pp. 81–92). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9415-2\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9415-2_6)
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Sutherland, A. (2011). The relationship between school and youth offending. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, 37, 51–69.
- Te Rito, J. S. (2007). Whakapapa: A framework for understanding identity. *MAI Review*, 1(3), 1–10.
- Thomassen, B. (2009). The uses and meaning of liminality. *International Political Anthropology*, 2(1), 5–28.
- Toshalis, E. (2015). *Make me!: Understanding and engaging student resistance in school*. Harvard Education Press.
- Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Aldine.
- Ungar, M., & Liebenberg, L. (2011). Assessing resilience across cultures using mixed methods: Construction of the child and youth resilience measure. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 5(2), 126–149. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689811400607>
- Van Gennep, A. (1960). *The rites of passage*. Routledge.
- Waiti, J. (2014). *Whakaoranga whānau: A whānau resilience framework* [Doctoral dissertation, Massey University]. Massey Research Online <https://mro.massey.ac.nz/handle/10179/7406>
- Wood, B. E. (2016). Border spaces: Geographies of youth exclusion, inclusion, and liminality. *Space, Landscape and Environment*, 3, 1–28. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-044-5\\_21](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-044-5_21)
- Zimmerman, M. A. (2013). Resiliency theory. *Health Education & Behavior: the Official Publication of the Society for Public Health Education*, 40(4), 381–383. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198113493782>
- Zolkoski, S. M., Bullock, L. M., & Gable, R. A. (2016). Factors associated with student resilience: Perspectives of graduates of alternative education programs. *Preventing School Failure*, 60(3), 231–243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2015.1101677>

**Publisher's Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.