Navigating the awa - The story of a Māori doctoral student's journey from start to completion of a PhD

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Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa

Abstract

This paper explores the journey of a Māori doctoral student navigating the *awa* (river). It emphasizes the importance of embedding cultural frameworks in postgraduate research supervision for Indigenous Māori doctoral students. It also considers the key factors necessary for effective cultural supervision.

The paper presents a narrative of the dual journey undertaken by a first-in-family Māori doctoral student, who completed a doctoral qualification while simultaneously strengthening connections within *te ao Māori* (the Māori world). The narrative offers insights into the researcher's experiences, which led to the development of an Indigenous methodology model known as the 'He Pūtauaki Model'. Drawing on the experiences of a Māori doctoral candidate at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), this paper reflects on time spent with *kaumātua* (elders) and efforts to strengthen connections to *whakapapa* (genealogies) and *tūrangawaewae* (the place where one has the right to stand).

Introduction

Navigating New Zealand's mainstream education system can be challenging for many Māori students. However, with the right support mechanisms, Māori doctoral students can achieve educational success. This paper explores the role of *Mahitahi* (Indigenous collaborative methodology) in shaping postgraduate research supervision for Indigenous Māori doctoral students and the factors to consider in their cultural supervision.

A case study is presented on the tensions faced by a Māori doctoral student at AUT, highlighting her dual journey: a personal journey within *te ao Māori* and an academic journey. This personal journey led to the development of the 'He Pūtauaki Model,' a cultural framework for understanding a Māori worldview and strengthening connections within *te ao Māori*. The discussion also addresses issues faced by Māori and Pacific postgraduate students (MaPPs) in accessing higher education in Aotearoa New Zealand. These issues include access to quality research supervision, financial resources for doctoral studies, and culturally responsive spaces in mainstream universities. These equity issues are echoed in the doctoral study, Iti noa ana, he pito mata: A critical analysis of educational success through a Māori lens and two case studies of whānau within Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Tūwharetoa (Abraham, 2021).

Background on cross-cultural supervision of Māori doctoral students in higher education

Given the growing number of Māori research students in master's and doctoral programs, the tertiary sector must examine the effectiveness of cross-cultural supervision relationships and their impact on Māori success. Recent research reveals that barriers still exist in universities, leading to low success rates for Māori and Indigenous students in higher education. These students face challenges during their doctoral journey as they navigate two differing worldviews and knowledge bases (McKinley et al., 2011; Pihama et al., 2019; Theodore et al., 2017; Wilson, 2017).

Critical to students' development and success is the quality of the student-supervisor relationship (Glynn & Berryman, 2015; McCallin & Nayar, 2012; McKinley & Grant, 2012). However, there are insufficient Indigenous academics to meet the needs of the growing number of Indigenous students (Wilson, 2017). This issue is echoed by many Māori scholars and academics, who note that finding supervisors with the relevant background and expertise is challenging. Māori supervisors are often overworked and underrepresented within the pool of postgraduate research supervisors available to Māori students (McAllister et al., 2019; Pihama et al., 2019; Theodore et al., 2017; McKinley & Grant, 2012).

There is a lack of empirically based literature on the supervision of Māori doctoral students (Hohepa, 2010) and the experiences of Māori and Pacific master's students in

postgraduate supervision. Even less is known about non-Indigenous supervisors' pedagogical understandings of cross-cultural supervision necessary to support Māori and Pacific students' participation and academic success. Over 10 years, McCallin and Nayar (2012) critically analyzed the literature on postgraduate research supervision, finding that the debate has shifted from supervisory processes to recognizing the role of supervisory pedagogy in research teaching. Johnson (2014) argues that universities should acknowledge the important connection between supervision, teaching, and research.

McCallin and Nayar (2012) further highlighted that the effectiveness of the student-supervisor working relationship is a major determinant of student success in doctoral completion. Hohepa (2010) emphasizes that the direct work supervisors do with their Māori doctoral students is the most critical component for successful study completion. It is important to note that many factors related to supervision impact students' ability to complete their doctoral qualifications (Hohepa, 2010; Johnson, 2014; Theodore et al., 2015). These issues include the quality of supervision, the use of supervision models, and the structural support systems needed for Māori and Pasifika postgraduate research students (Glynn & Berryman, 2015; Hohepa, 2010; McKinley & Grant, 2012).

The motivation for deciding to undertake a doctoral journey

This research originates from a place of good intention based on the journey of a Māori doctoral candidate, drawing from her lived experiences and perspectives of succeeding as a Māori woman with a dual heritage. Her perspectives are fortified by her upbringing as a child and as a teenager who left home at 14 years of age from Wairoa. Her experiences as a roaming rural and urban primary and secondary teacher working across the Hawkes Bay, Eastern Bay of Plenty, Waikato, Horowhenua, and Auckland regions within many Māori communities, as a teaching principal in a Māori rural community, her involvement in higher tertiary education, and being raised as *rāwaho* (living away from one's tribal lands) of both her iwi, Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Tūwharetoa, all contribute to her unique perspective.

In my roles as a primary teacher, middle school leader, and tertiary educator, I noticed a significant lack of understanding of *Kaupapa Māori* (Māori approach, Māori customary practice) values, knowledge, and ideologies, as well as the use of Māori pedagogy among both Māori and non-Māori educators. This gap represents a missed opportunity to enhance Māori student achievement. Many Māori students' *hauora* (well-being), particularly spiritual wellbeing were not met in mainstream schooling, as most teachers and educators did not recognize or understand the significance of the cultural and spiritual dimensions of a learner's personality and wellbeing, as identified in the Te Wheke model (Pere, 1991). This motivated me to do more for Māori students, their *whānau* (family, families)*,* and communities, leading me to enrol in the doctoral programme at Auckland University of Technology to address the impact of trauma on educational outcomes for Māori *whānau*, *hapū* (subtribe), and *iwi* (tribe)*.*

The PhD journey has been one of personal discovery for the primary researcher, recognizing how personal lived experiences can deepen understanding of the interconnectedness between educational success for Māori and Cultural Trauma (CT) and Historical Trauma (HT), which contribute to transgenerational epigenetic inheritance across generations. Epigenetic research acknowledges that unresolved trauma can lead to the unconscious reliving of trauma and suffering in successive generations (Lehrner & Yehuda, 2018; Wolynn, 2017). My doctoral journey has revealed that Intergenerational Cultural Trauma has been a feature of my own family upbringing, contributing to my understanding of how mainstream schooling impacts Māori students' educational success. Acknowledging and recognizing this trauma is the first stage of the healing process for myself as a Māori doctoral candidate, and for *whānau, hapū*, and *iwi.*

The literature lacks an in-depth understanding of how Indigenous Māori doctoral students navigate higher education, their perspectives on the effectiveness of intercultural supervision, and the dual journey for an AUT Māori doctoral candidate (McKinley et al., 2011) Acknowledging the complexities, challenges, and tensions that exist for a Māori doctoral candidate while navigating the *awa* can begin to address equity for Māori in accessing and participating successfully in higher education.

Strengthening my connections within Te Ao Māori

One of the first steps I took while completing the Māori dual component of my doctoral journey was to reconnect with my people and spend time learning about my *whakapapa*, the connections to the *whenua* (land), and who my people are and where they come from. This process is essential for understanding and learning about one's Māori cultural identity and entry into Te Ao Māori. *Tūrangawaewae* can be interpreted as identifying the origins of a person's whakapapa, sometimes known as one's roots. Ka'ai and Higgins (2004) describe this as a cultural process undertaken when learning about your *whānau, hapū*, and *iwi pūrākau* (stories, narratives) and genealogy. Doherty (2009) emphasizes the importance of *tūrangawaewae,* where an individual can define their identity by linking themselves to their wider *iwi* community, their environment, and the tribal knowledge base.

In this context, *whakapapa* identifies my genealogical connections from ancestors through the whānau kinship model, outlining links within *whānau, hapū, iwi*, and the environment (Abraham, 2021, p. 7). As part of my journey, alongside deepening my understanding of kaupapa Māori ideologies in my doctoral research, I began developing an Indigenous model to explain the dual journey a Māori doctoral candidate takes. I chose to reflect on components of the Rangihau Conceptual Model (Rangihau, 2008) in developing the "He Pūtauaki Model" (Abraham, 2021, p. 7) through the portal of *tūrangawaewae*. The decision to apply Rangihau's Conceptual Model was to reclaim lost knowledge and acknowledge the important *whakapapa* links and connections with one of my tribes, Ngāi Awa and Ngāti Tūwharetoa, and the interrelated connections of my

tūpuna to each other as part of the intergenerational transmission of whānau cultural knowledge for future generations.

Figure 1: He Pūtauaki Model
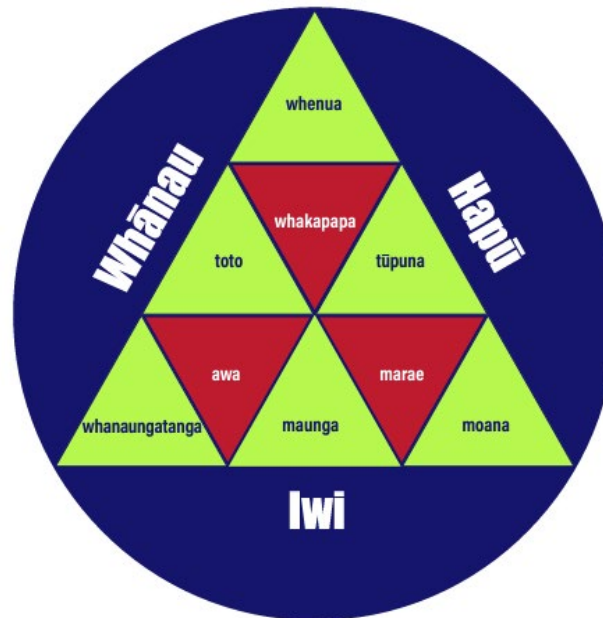
Source: Abraham (2021, p. 7)

Reconnecting and reclaiming my Indigenous self through whakapapa

The following *pepeha* (tribal saying) are introductions that position and identify me as being Māori from Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Tūwharetoa. The direct links to the mountains, lands and waters are features of one's *whakapapa* expressed below.

Ko Pūtauaki taku maunga

Ko Rangitaiki taku awa

Ko Ngāti Awa taku iwi

Ko Mataatua taku waka

Ko Ngā Maihi

Ko Ngāi Tamawera

Ko Pahipoto

Ko Pūkeko ngā hapū

Ko Pūtauaki taku maunga

Ko Tarawera taku awa

Ko Ngāti Tūwharetoa taku iwi

Ko Te Arawa taku waka

Ko Ngāti Umutahi tōku hapū

Ko Waikato Tarewa te tangata

Ko Tom Waikato rāua ko Hazel Wanikau ngā tūpuna

As Abraham (2021) notes:

> The above *pepeha* connects me to sacred mountains, rivers, tribal *waka, iwi, hapū, tūpuna, wharenui* (ancestral house) and the people of which I am connected to genealogically. The intricacies that exist and the interconnections are a result of whakapapa, blood relationships and intermarriage. Through these connections, the one commonality both tribes have is of Pūtauaki the *maunga*. What binds and connects the people of Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Tūwharetoa together, is contained in their significant histories, narratives, and landmarks within the Eastern Bay of Plenty region (p. 16).

The important landmarks that are reflected above in my *pepeha* and illustrative quote further connects to stored memories of my experiences that have influenced the way I engage with reclaiming knowledge contained in *pūrākau* located within a *whānau, hapū* and *iwi* context. At the heart of these stories are connections into *te taiao* (the natural world), located within the context of *te ao Māori*. Other elements of being Māori are being connected to your *turangawaewae* where your *marae* (complex of buildings, area in front of the meeting house) and tupuna come from primarily. My three marae below are connected through *whakapapa*. When you step outside Tūteao and Umutahi Marae and gaze upon Pūtauaki one will see a different face of the mountain. Hirangi is connected to Umutahi through the *iwi* narratives. Turangitukua was the *tēina* (younger sibling) to Umutahi, the *tuākana* (older sibling) and they shared the same father but had different mothers (Abraham, 2021, p. 20).

Image 1: TūTeao Marae (Te Teko) (Abraham, personal collection)

Image 2: Hirangi Marae (Turangi) (Abraham, personal collection)

Image 3: Umutahi Marae, Matatā, Eastern Bay of Plenty. This is one of Koro Waikato

Tarawera primary *kāinga*. From Pū Kāea, 2010. Copyright unknown.

Learning about my *marae* and visiting each of the marae during my doctoral journey has been an unravelling experience. This journey has allowed me to develop a sense of standing as a Māori doctoral student within the Faculty of Design and Creative Technology, while navigating the *awa* as a Māori. Encouraging more use of *kōrero* (talk) and *wānanga* (discussion) is needed within the community to address embedding *kaupapa Māori* ways of being when engaging with Māori doctoral students at AUT.

Key points include addressing equity issues in higher education by identifying the challenges that Māori doctoral students may face while navigating the awa (different stages of the doctoral journey). We must collaboratively find solutions to ensure that Māori doctoral students are empowered and cared for, as intended and reflected in Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) (Abraham, 2021) and in current tertiary education policy, such as Ka Hikitia-Ka Hāpaitia [Māori education strategy] (Ministry of Education, 2021, July 21).

Therefore, a culturally safe space must be provided where *kōrero*, dialogue, and reflection from the community (Māori doctoral alumni, supervisors, leaders, and administrators) can flow. This will help address and recognize where university

structural mechanisms and psychosocial challenges can cause tensions for Māori doctoral students and their *whānau* in navigating the *awa*.

From my individual experience of the PGR9 process, consideration should be given to considering adopting a *kaupapa Māori* evaluation approach to addressing dilemmas and tensions that can exist for some Māori doctoral students when progressing into doctoral candidature and on their journey to completion of the qualification. Adopting a *Kaupapa Māori* Evaluation Approach (KMEA) (Carlson, Moewaka-Barnes & McCreanor, 2017; Kerr, 2012), would be one effective step forward to addressing equity for Māori doctoral students in higher education. KMEA if used, as an evaluation tool has the potential to evaluate the effectiveness and quality of the university's action(s) and intervention(s), for supporting Māori students on their doctoral journey. KMEA allows a cultural space for *kōrero* and respectfully challenging and stating what value has been added or has either impacted on the Māori student in reaching *tino-rangatiratanga* (self-determination) (Moewaka-Barnes & McCreanor, 2017; Kerr, 2012), as Māori doctoral students navigate the *awa* of higher education at AUT.
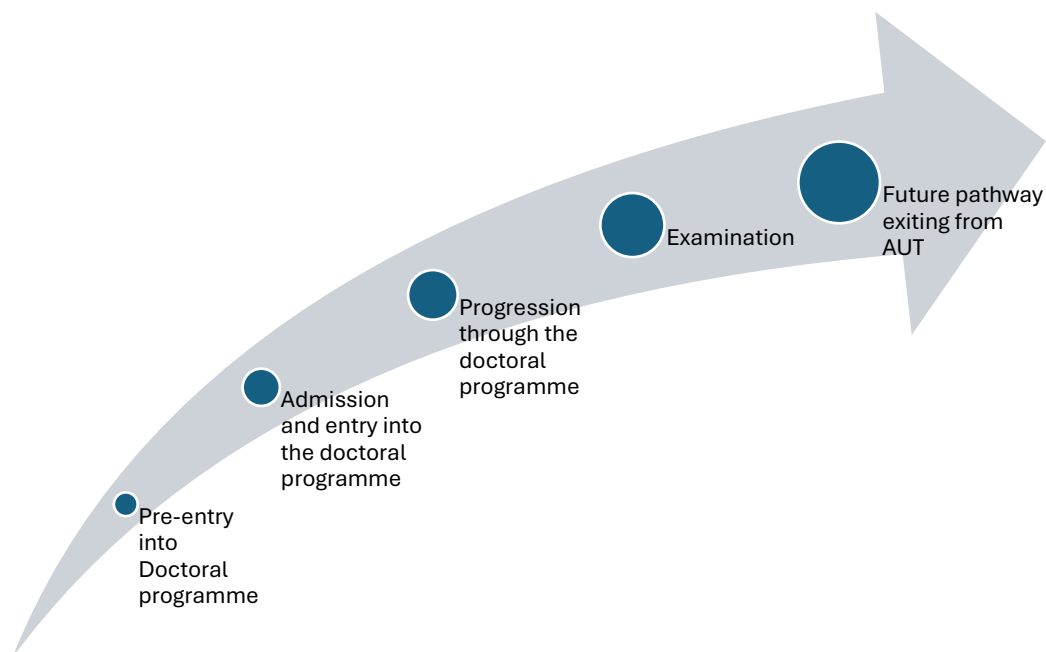
My doctoral journey has not always been smooth sailing. The unexpected undercurrents of the awa during the early stages of the PGR9 process, including three critical reviews and a final warning, impacted my *hauora* (wellbeing) and *māna* (treasure). These experiences highlighted structural issues within the university that need further exploration. However, the Māori journey helped alleviate this tension, and the power of *karakia* (prayer) and *wānanga* with my *kaumātua* provided inner strength. Despite micro-politics and the ongoing impacts of Covid-19, the *Kaupapa Māori whānau* approach from my supervisorial whānau, along with guidance from *whānau, kaumātua*, and the MaPPs community at DCT, reaffirmed my belief that everything would be alright.

Stages of embarking on the doctoral journey as a Māori doctoral candidate at AUT

Gaining candidature as a Māori doctoral student is rewarding and satisfying. It is a celebration of moving one step closer to yourself and the communities that you come from. This step is made up of many smaller steps over a long period of time, where *whānau, hapū* and *iwi* have committed and supported you on a very long and arduous journey. It is about continuing to break down the barriers that have existed since the inception of New Zealand's education system in 1867 (Simon & Smith, 2001), which have and continue to detrimentally impact Māori education and outcomes for successive generations of *whānau, hapū,* and *iwi* (Abraham, 2021). Being the first in your *whānau* as a doctoral student means building on the legacy grounded in our *tūpuna*, when they first travelled to Aotearoa New Zealand, to settle and establish themselves in their communities.

For this paper, I must acknowledge that not all students go through the same tensions, but we do share similar stories and tensions of navigating the awa. By recognising and acknowledging such dilemmas, barriers, and challenges, it opens a way of moving forward so we can create new and better ways of supporting Māori to participate in higher education. These new ways of being mean bringing back in some of the old ways of our Māori people, which reminds us as people, a community of learners in higher education, that *kaupapa Māori* ways of being can provide solutions to how we interact with each other and how Māori doctoral students can enjoy success as Māori in higher education. Figure 3 below indicates some of the important stages that I went through as a Māori doctoral student in completing a doctoral qualification with my supervisors and with my *whānau, hapū,* and *iwi.*

Figure 2 – Navigating the academic stages of the doctoral journey

Examination

Future pathway
exiting from
AUT

Progression
through the
doctoral
programme

Admission
and entry into
the doctoral
programme

Pre-entry
into
Doctoral
programme

Source: (Abraham, 2021)

Understanding the *awa* for completing a doctoral journey can be categorized into five key areas:

Pre-entry:

This is a crucial milestone for a Māori doctoral student. It involves completing the enrolment process, which varies by faculty at AUT. To gain entry, students must have completed a master's degree with honours, including a research project. At this stage, personal commitment from the student and support from *whānau* are essential, as the journey can take four to seven years, depending on full-time or part-time study. The student must be mentally and emotionally prepared, with both head and heart aligned.

The next step is to assemble a support team (supervisors and *whānau*) and create a training plan that fits the student's lifestyle and goals.

Admission and Entry:

This stage involves completing several key tasks before moving into doctoral candidature. Based on my experiences as a Māori doctoral student, these are the necessary steps and actions I took to successfully navigate the *awa*:

- *Supervision team*

Locating, identifying, and securing your supervisors and *kaumātua* (cultural advisory experts) who will work with you to embark on the AUT doctoral journey. Looking outside of the faculty for supervisors is sometimes necessary, and for people with expertise outside of AUT University is possible. I went through seven supervisors and was in three different faculties at AUT. This allowed me to see how different faculties and schools operate within the broader context. For the change of supervisor, I had to complete a Form PGR7 and then submit it to the postgraduate administrator of the school.

Applying for provisional admission to an AUT Doctoral programme.

Complete the PGR2 form for admission into the AUT doctoral programme. This initial proposal of 1000 words allows access free of charge for three months.

- *Access library services*

Gain access to the AUT library by completing the preparation paper. Make sure to get your university student card. Make time to see the specialist librarian and learn about the services that are on offer. Attend referencing and academic writing workshops to broaden skills and knowledge in APA referencing style guides.

- *Enrolment -Offer of Place*

Formally, accepting the offer of place immediately and beginning applications for scholarships and education grants.

- *Financial support - Look for ways to finance your PhD and support whānau*

Looking for substantial scholarships to cover tuition costs and living expenses, checking out other educational grants and scholarships to cover expenses that are incurred during full-time study, while looking after your *whānau* and household expenses. Financing your PhD may involve you considering taking out a student loan for the tuition fees so you can complete the final year. Other factors involved in financing the PhD maybe negotiating how many hours you can work outside of the PhD with both your supervision team and *whānau.* My supervisors provided ample support in completing references for all the AUT and Māori scholarship applications I made over

the four years. Often, this support fits outside of the typical realms expected of supervisors when working with doctoral students. From a *kaupapa Māori* perspective, this added support is the norm for my supervisor, who follows a Māori approach.

I spent a considerable first three months of my doctoral journey locating the many Māori land court grants and scholarships that I *whakapapa* to. During this time, I made a database of other education grants and land grants, which I shared with my *whānau* in Te Teko. Working with *kaumātua* and visiting *whānau* in Te Teko about these Māori land grants further strengthened my connections to my *turangawaewae*. On occasions, I also had to visit local Māori land court offices in Rotorua and Wanganui to file succession applications on behalf of my *whānau* because their parents and *tūpuna* lands had not been succeeded to for many years, in one case of my Nanny's lands had not been succeeded to and *whānau* missed out on 20 years of land dividends because of the structural mechanisms and through continued colonisation processes of a system.

As for the other university scholarships, it is important to accept the offer of a place as early as possible so that it does not affect the timing of when stipend payments from the AUT VC Doctoral scholarship are paid to your bank account. Time delays can occur with the stipend if your enrolment starts in October or November. Due to the university closure, stipends will be back-paid in the following year. Having a good relationship with AUT Scholarship Officers can help ease this delay. Also in the fourth year, the VC's Doctoral Scholarship ceases, so you have to look for other ways to pay the tuition costs. Consider looking at StudyLink and Māori land and educational organisations (like Ngā Pae o Te Māramatanga), that offer large scholarships and grants to pay the final year tuition costs and assistance with completing studies (including presenting findings of research/attendance at conferences). Other opportunities for financing your studies may open with your supervisors' networks in research. You can make initial e-connections for opportunities to gain employment as research assistants with other Māori academics in other universities in New Zealand.

- *PGR9 Confirmation of candidature* – (Review and Presentation)

This stage involves completing the PGR9 form by writing a comprehensive 10,000-word proposal on your *kaupapa*. This process typically takes 6-12 months. For me, it took longer due to the timing of my enrolment and responding to three sets of feedback from PGR9 reviewers and the Postgraduate Research Committee. Everyone's PGR9 experience is unique. I attended four different PGR9 presentations within the Faculty of Culture and Society and the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences, which provided useful tips. However, you often have to wait and see what happens with your own PGR9 oral presentation.

The PGR9 process was the hardest part of my doctoral journey. Be prepared for highly critical feedback but remember that this will set you up well for the oral defense of your doctoral degree. Don't expect the PGR9 outcomes to mirror your oral defense

experience. For me, the oral examination and receiving the two independent examination reports were far better experiences than the PGR9 process.

- *Ethics proposal and completion of research*

Ethical approval is required for undertaking the proposed research. Depending on the data collection chosen should be reflected in the PGR9 research proposal. The approval process can take somewhere between 4 – 6 weeks and feedback from the Ethics Committee may require amendments to the Ethics application. The University provided several support services where students could make an appointment to meet with an Ethics advisor and exemplar templates are provided online. At the end of your research, an EA3 Completion report must be completed and be approved by AUTEC (AUT Ethics committee).

Progressing through the doctoral programme

During this stage for every Māori doctoral student, they may for the first-time experience and encounter many new events and processes. I have detailed some key areas that I experienced during my four years of the doctoral journey that give insight into this journey:

- *Induction into the doctoral programme –*

An important step is to attend an induction programme as a student at AUT. During this orientation, you learn more about the services and expectations of being a research student. You are provided with a space to meet other doctoral students across the university community. After this induction, I spent time becoming familiar with my new *turangawaewae* at AUT. Moving from Unitec to AUT was such a big step. Another step that made a difference for other MaPPs was acting as a *tuakana* to them through the sharing of knowledge of the doctoral journey. This *tuakana-teina* process involved taking *teina* to meet the Māori support services and become familiar with other AUT facilities, such as the Postgraduate Research Rooms, Security (to get access cards), and Student Hub services. Another action that helped me on my doctoral journey was being well organised in my time. I made a timetable and committed to completing postgraduate workshops (such as Endnote, writing literature reviews, applying for scholarships), organised and offered by the Graduate Research School and AUT library. Most of the workshops were available, in person and some went to online during the Covid 19 pandemic. Having access to learning advisors was another support avenue that I took up when I was confronted with issues related to my PGR9 proposal.

- *Study and workspaces at AUT*

Locating a permanent or flexible working space at one of the three AUT campuses. Sometimes depending on supervisors there may be space within their office structures.

Supervisors that make a space for you are offering *manaaki* (care, hospitality), as you undertake the journey.

- *Supervision agreement & Supervision hui*

Completing the Supervision Agreement with your supervisors involves discussing research expectations, managing a full-time workload, and scheduling monthly appointments for accountability. During kōrero with my supervisors, I was advised not to overcommit to activities that might impact my doctoral workload. I chose to focus on one personal activity—training and competing in a sport event annually—and took on one part-time job to help with living costs and mortgage payments.

Depending on the Faculty processes, I submitted regular six-monthly PGR8 reports detailing my progress towards thesis milestones. Any issues were addressed in these reports with my supervision team. While meeting targets, it was crucial to be flexible with deadlines and patient with feedback. Covid-19 impacted my progress, causing delays in submission due to external constraints.

- *AUT postgraduate student resources*

Attend and participate in AUT postgraduate student-wide events – AUT Postgraduate Research Symposium, 3 Minute Thesis competition, University postgraduate research seminar series, AUT Thesislink, Mix and Mingle, research study peer groups.

- *Attend Māori lead student support initiatives*

Where possible, attend Te Kupenga o Mai – Māori and Indigenous scholars support network. This Māori initiative provides cultural and academic support for Indigenous students in navigating the postgraduate journey in higher education. Also, attend any Faculty Māori initiatives.

Examination

Three months before a thesis is to be completed the primary supervisor will begin the process of initiating the *PGR11 form-appointment of examiners*. Before this process, I was allowed to be a *kaiawhina* to three other Māori doctoral students. Being with my peers during break times and being invited to participate in their formal *tikanga* processes of entering the examination process made it easier for me to understand what would be expected for my oral examination. Having the opportunity over *kai,* I was able to ask questions and gain insights into what may happen in the oral examination of the thesis. Having this insight and first-hand experience of walking into the Graduate Research School and being a supportive peer took away some of the anxiety that you may have as a student. However, due to COVID-19, my oral examination needed to be conducted online. The initial meet and greet with the convenor happened while I was away in Wellington in August 2021. The week after, New Zealand went into lockdown on my examination day. I found that my examination went seemingly smoothly. I found

the examination process to be much easier than the PGR9 process because of the guidance and mentoring I had gained through a Mahitahi approach from my supervisors and Māori doctoral peers. This collective insight gave me more confidence and strength that I would make it through the threshold of examination. The positive examiner reports I received following the convenor's hui also gave me an indication that the pathway would be fine. What I have learned during this stage is that having strong relationships with my supervisors and with the student collective made all the difference for me on my doctoral journey at AUT.

Future Pathways-Exiting from AUT

This stage involves receiving notification from the Graduate Research School that you have been awarded the doctoral degree. Correspondence from the Graduate Research School asks you to complete an administration form and an abstract to be included in the graduation handbook. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, my graduation had been rescheduled for September 2022 to accommodate for the unseen circumstances that had impacted AUT. Through the extended gift of *Manaaki (generosity)* from *kaupapa whānau,* and my *whānau,* I have had invaluable opportunities to put some of my doctoral skills and learning into practice within the faculty that I had spent most of my time as a doctoral student. This mentoring and support have helped me not only navigate the *awa* but also have helped me begin the gradual transition from doctoral student to becoming a permanent Māori academic employed in the School of Engineering, Computers and Mathematical Sciences at AUT. This opportunity has allowed me to lead multi-disciplinary teams in the Department of Computers and Information Sciences and work internationally with other international academics in UFRO-Chile and the University of Saskatchewan (Canada).

Conclusion

My experiences are my own and may not reflect those of other Māori doctoral students. The wisdom of my *kaumātua*, who navigate between *Pākehā* (Western) and *te ao Māori* worldviews, has been invaluable. My perspectives highlight the challenges and realities we may encounter as Māori doctoral students. Sharing our lived experiences helps us support current and future Māori doctoral students in higher education. Often, the greatest growth happens during difficult times. The PGR9 process was a pivotal moment in my journey, and I was fortunate to have a great supervision team and *whānau, hapū*, and *iwi* support, which provided me with strength and *tautoko* (support).

Providing cultural spaces within a mainstream university allows MaPPs to share their challenges and successes, ensuring they can navigate the awa in higher education. It is reasonable and fair for the academy to consider Māori doctoral students' voices in strengthening collective practices and eliminating barriers that impact their experience and success in higher education.

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Glossary

aroha	showing care with words and actions
awa	river, different stages of the doctoral journey
awhi	form of support
hapū	sub-tribe
hauora	wellbeing
hohou-te-rongo	reconciling
hui	meeting
iwi	tribe
kaiārahi	mentor
karakia	prayer
kaumātua	elders
kaupapa	topic
Kaupapa Māori	Māori approach, Māori customary practice
korero	talk
mahinga kai	food gathering place
Mahitahi	Indigenous collaborative pedagogy
mamae	hurt
mana	prestige, authority
manaaki	care, hospitality
marae	complex of buildings, area in front of the meeting house
mātauranga-ā-iwi	tribal knowledge
mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge
noho	live in
Pākehā	Western

pepeha	tribal saying
pono	honest
pūrākau	stories, narratives
rāwaho	living away from one's tribal lands
take	issues
tautoko	support
te Ao Māori	the Māori world
te taiao	the natural world
te Tiriti o Waitangi	the Treaty of Waitangi
tēina	younger sibling
tika	upfront
tikanga	customs
tino rangatiratanga	self determination
tuākana	older sibling
tūpuna	ancestors
turangawaewae	place where one has the right to stand
wairua	spirit of a person
wānanga	to meet and discuss
whakapapa	genealogies
whakawhanaungatanga	process of establishing strong links, making connections and relating to people
whānau	family
wharenui	ancestral house
whenua	land