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Mahi a Atua: Awakening Indigenous Resistance Through the Voices of Our Atua

Charlotte York
Manager, Radiology, Te Whatu Ora - Health New Zealand. Tribal affiliations: Ngāpuhi

Paulè Ruwhiu
School of Social Work, Massey University, New Zealand. Tribal affiliations: Ngāti Porou, Ngāpuhi nui tonu

Ange (Andrea) Watson
School of Social Work, Massey University, New Zealand. Tribal affiliations: Te Āti Awa, Ngāti Mutunga, Taranaki Tūturu, Ngāti Pākehā

Jane Lee
School of Social Work, Massey University, New Zealand. Tribal affiliations: Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Pākehā.

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Abstract

Indigenous resistance comes in many forms, such as attendance at Rangi Parauri (a five-day a-tinana wānanga) aimed at addressing institutional racism, healing, and reconnection for participants. This article unpacks the Mataora (change agents who attend Rangi Parauri) journeys of four wāhine (Māori women), three social work educators, and a healthcare worker in Radiology, who attended the Rangi Parauri training in October 2024. This article promotes not only speaking our truths in the form of narration (pūrākau) but also holds space for discussion and experiences, which centres around our own traditional ways of healing and transforming. Colonial forces are heavily indoctrinated into our everyday lives; therefore, taking five days out of a year to RE-learn and RE-claim and RE-remember our birthright as tangata whenua (people of the land) is essential to reconnect with the learnings and teachings of our tūpuna within our ancestral spaces. The training provoked thought on a personal level through stories and narratives, inviting participants to sit with a range of emotions as highlights of the wānanga are revealed. This way of writing allows Indigenous storytelling and emancipation to be showcased and is grounded in kaupapa Māori narrative praxis whilst utilising pūrākau and wheako as method.

Indigenization Statement

All authors in this article are tangata whenua (people of the land) from Aotearoa New Zealand. We are all deeply involved in supporting our communities and the whānau (families), hapū (sub-tribes) and iwi (tribal affiliations) within our own boundaries and the places where we live and participate. We have showcased one of the core programmes offered to tangata whenua and others that is based in te ao Māori (the worldview of Māori). Our thanks and honour go to our tūpuna, our atua, and our people of Aotearoa.

Mā te kimi ka kite, mā te kite ka mōhio, mā te mōhio ka mārama

Seek and discover, discover and know, know and become enlightened

Tīmata

This article is an opportunity to showcase one of the most transformative wānanga (a space to gather and share and learn) in Aotearoa New Zealand. Mahi a Atua, an Indigenous form of resistance, is a Māori therapeutic intervention involving the sharing of pūrākau (narratives) and is grounded in Māori ways of thinking, being, and doing. Pūrākau encompasses our connection to the whenua (land) and helps us use stories to understand our lives and make meaning from them (Lee, 2009). This article also aligns with a collaborative pūrākau approach. Mahi a Atua is also situated within an extended Indigenous liberation movement that fosters systems transformation (Kopua et al., 2025b). Rangi Parauri is the Mataora (change agent) training programme that delivers Mahi a Atua. The article will reflect on our five-day experience in Gisborne, Aotearoa New Zealand, in 2024. We have personalised our approach because it was a personal journey for each of us. This article also outlines our commitment to the kaupapa (purpose) after we left Rangi Parauri, discussing the bonds we share, our connection to maramataka, and the insights we gained. Maramataka is the lunar calendar that reflects on the cycle of the moon as opposed to the Gregorian calendar that is embedded in Western societies. It is hoped that this article will inspire our kaimahi Māori (Māori workers) and health practitioners to participate in this space. However, the invitation is extended to all who wish to immerse themselves in the ambiance of our atua Māori. Our immense appreciation goes out to those people in our workplace who supported the idea that we wanted to attend and funded the experience.

For this article to be collaborative and collective, we decided that we would each write under the subheadings we designed so that the reader could enjoy four perspectives in

one space. We have included our names at the start of each section, so the reader knows who is speaking in the space. There is a glossary at the end (see Appendix A) which includes the words written in te reo Māori, the language of the Indigenous peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, it is recognised that te reo Māori is an official language of Aotearoa New Zealand, therefore it is encouraged that the reader research more to understand the deeper meaning of our language (Ruwhiu, 2023). All these tools help with navigation when reading the text.

Mahi a Atua

Mahi a Atua was initiated in the 1990s within Māori mental health services (Levy & Cherrington, 2025) and is a kaupapa Māori therapeutic intervention involving sharing pūrākau narratives with whānau. Grounded on a framework of "Indigenous ontology and epistemology" (Kopua et al. 2025a, p. 23), Mahi a Atua draws from kaupapa Māori and mātauranga Māori sources and is a tool for systems transformation (Kopua et al., 2025b). It is a philosophy guided by ancestral knowledge positioned as a way of being and meaningfully engaging with whānau Māori in mental health settings (Kopua et al., 2025b). It is a therapeutic practice that leads to systemic transformation (Kopua et al., 2021) and is expressed as a way forward for Māori mental health (Rangihuna et al., 2018). Mahi a Atua is grounded in our atua pūrākau (narratives related to our tūpuna) and are in whakapapa and whenua (Lee, 2009).

Te Whare Wānanga o Te Kurahuna is the kaitiaki (guardian), the organisation of Mahi a Atua and focuses on the connection between institutional racism and inequity for Māori and, in 2023, it received funding from Te Aka Whai Ora (Māori Health Authority) to deliver Mahi a Atua to the Māori health workforce via the Rangimatauru, Rangi Parauri, and Ranginuikātika training programmes (Levy & Cherrington, 2025). Mataora are the Māori and non-Māori workers who undertake this training and are named as "change agents" (Levy &

Cherrington, 2025, p. 7). Rangi Parauri is the five-day wānanga that kaimahi undertake as part of their training to become Mataora.

Indigenous Resistance

Mahi a Atua is a form of Indigenous resistance because it requires different ways of knowing, being, and doing that "privileges Indigenous knowledge and practice as the basis for strengthening best practice, addressing institutional racism and realising equitable outcomes for Māori" (Te Whare Wānanga o Te Kurahuna, 2021, p. 3). The framework nestles within an extended Indigenous liberation movement focused on shifting institutional racism and training Mataora into collective leadership roles to ignite system transformation (Kopua et al., 2025b). Mahi a Atua is a strong form of Indigenous resistance, particularly to Western frameworks and knowledge bases, which have often not suited our Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing (Smith, 2012).

Our Journey to Mahi a Atua: Expectations

In this section, we share our own expectations coming into Mahi a Atua and what this meant for each of us. Although we joined the training as a collective, individually, we came carrying our own challenges.

Paulè: I was not sure of my expectations. I had heard that it was transformative, that it would change my perspectives and the knowledge of atua and be an experience that would be beneficial for the future. Rangi Parauri created an opportunity for me to invite the healing and take that responsibility for myself to make changes, to see things from a different perspective, and to move closer to my tūpuna.

Ange: I was unsure what to expect going into the Mahi a Atua training as I did not know anyone who had completed it, and my only knowledge was through what my hoa mahi

(work colleague) had told me. I was nervous and excited to take the five days out of my regular life. Nervousness and excitement often go hand-in-hand for me when trying new things. The pre-work that we had to complete before we arrived was valuable in terms of setting the scene around the knowledge of the atua, the karakia (incantation), and meeting online beforehand to find out more about the Mahi a Atua philosophy and principles, and to whanaungatanga with other members was helpful.

Jane: When I learned there was a space for me to attend Rangi Parauri, I felt both excitement and apprehension. A friend who attended the wānanga the previous year described it as deeply transformational, which heightened my anticipation. Yet I found myself questioning whether I belonged there, wondering if I was an imposter, or "Māori enough" to participate. These thoughts lingered until I intentionally connected with my tūpuna. In that stillness, I felt their presence and guidance, reminding me that notions of not being 'Māori enough' have no place within whakapapa (genealogy). Their reassurance allowed me to understand that belonging is not something to be earned, but something inherent in who I am.

Charlotte: I had minimal expectations coming into Mahi a Atua, other than it had been transformational for other hoa mahi (work friends) I knew who had been. The online pre-requisites gave us an understanding of what material we would be undertaking, but I had no idea as to the breadth or depth we would traverse. I entered a new National Leadership role, which in part was to specifically advocate for kaimahi Māori (Māori workers), to address health inequities for Māori, and to ensure Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the founding constitutional document of Aotearoa New Zealand) is upheld within all our practices. I was searching for ways to support an Indigenous way of leadership as my role involved navigating a very Western model, so Mahi a Atua seemed timely not only for this role but on my journey to reclaiming my reo and my relationship with te ao Māori.

Mahi a Atua Training: Powerfulness of Wānanga

Wānanga is described as a *taonga tuku iho,* a treasured gift handed from the past, and represents a process within te ao Māori of coming together to meet, share ideas, learn, and exchange knowledge (Kopua et al., 2020). A defining feature of wānanga is its anchoring in ancestral wisdom while remaining fully engaged in the present. This interplay between the past and present is regarded as essential for generating insight and guidance for the future (Kopua et al., 2020). Within wānanga, communal conversations create transformative spaces that are deeply connected to the past while being responsive to the present moment, fostering growth through dialogue, shared experiences, and collective inquiry (Kopua et al., 2020; Kopua & Skirrow, 2023).

Mahi a Atua positions wānanga at its centre, extending this practice through the use of pūrākau as both a therapeutic resource and cultural framework. Pūrākau provides a way to explore, through storytelling and critical reflection, how the atua understood and interpreted their experiences within particular contexts and collective spaces (Kopua et al, 2020). They also serve as a foundation for individuals and communities to reflect on the journeys and stories of their atua, helping us make sense of our own experiences through our cultural lens (Rangihuna et al., 2018). Just as wānanga connects past and present to create spaces for learning and transformation, engagement with pūrākau similarly fosters shifts in awareness and understanding, both individually and collectively (Kopua et al., 2020; Rangihuna et al., 2018).

Wheako: Experiences all Around us

Wheako are workshop experiences inside the wānanga, that provide participants with the opportunity to share and interpret collective knowledge and to apply learning in personally meaningful ways. Our reflections describe these experiences.

Paulè : One of the wheako I chose to partake in meant that I branched off from my hoa mahi and went to an experience that I was interested in, rather than my comfort zone around my colleagues. The wheako I chose was with Pani Hokianga, who had performed healing karakia and mirimiri (massage, touch healing) with me the day before. My interest was to ensure that what he had accomplished was maintained when I went home. Pani gave us an exercise to do that required us to tap into the 'oro', the vibrations of our voice, using the vowel sounds, I, O, E, A, U. This exercise was an excellent space to connect with those who had come to the same wheako, sharing our 'oro' with each other in a circle. Shifting energies together, igniting the senses, and feeling the resonance of everyone around me was one of the most exhilarating exercises I have done.

Jane: I entered the wānanga carrying significant grief following the recent suicide of my brother, to whom I was extremely close. I have long recognised the healing power of music and its ability to provide comfort during times of distress. When the opportunity arose to join Whirimako Black's wheako, which involved composing and performing waiata (song), I felt drawn to participate despite my apprehension. Growing up, singing with my whānau (family unit) was familiar and intimate, something done in safe and known spaces. Standing to sing within this collective, however, felt entirely different. I reminded myself that wānanga invites learning and transformation through participation, not comfort. I experienced waiata not just as an artistic expression but as a living medium of healing, linking my own grief with collective strength. Through this wheako, I was reminded of the transformative power of stepping into vulnerability and opening myself up to restoration, connection, and renewal.

Charlotte: One of the wheako I joined was with my four wahine hoa (women friends), to learn how to construct and sing waiata from Whirimako Black. It was way out of my comfort zone to sing on my own, let alone in front of people. However, it was awesome

to see Jane in her absolute element! It was in the presentation back to the wider roopū that I witnessed another roopū present on theirs. It was a movement piece supplemented solely by the call of a Ruru (an owl); the roopū was small and was supporting one of their own going through something emotional simply by sitting with her, standing her up, and making the eerie call of the Ruru. My friend had died by suicide only a week prior, and I hadn't fully grieved the loss of her; I hadn't let it sit anywhere other than the surface of my skin, and this piece brought the grief so deep I couldn't hold back tears. The power of the movement piece, the Ruru call, and the simplicity of it all were so incredibly powerful.

Ange: Three of us attended Tina Ngata's wheako following her kōrero (her talk) on the Doctrine of Discovery. Tina had given a kōrero about this with the bigger group earlier in the week, and this wheako was an opportunity to kōrero further and go deeper. One learning that resonated with me was to look at and understand our own privilege, dismantle it, and use our privilege for liberation. The Mahi a Atua mātāpono (principles) require us to Indigenise the spaces we occupy, and Rangi Parauri is "a creative liberatory praxis which understands healing is fundamental to our liberation" because in liberating our minds collectively, new opportunities and possibilities start to open (Kopua et al., 2025a, p.32). This is what happened when Tina requested that our group to write a poem.

We split into three groups—one group focused on what we would say to our tūpuna, one group focused on what we would say to this generation now, and the last group focused on what we would say to our mokopuna, the future. We have permission from five of the seven authors–Jane Lee, Charlotte York, Andrea Watson, Rawiri Doorbar, and Kurupo. We attempted to contact the other two authors via a group email thread, however they did not respond to the email, and we do not know their names. They may have not responded to the email as they could have changed employment since October 2024. The outcome of this wheako is this poem:

E ngā tīpuna:

Ka aroha

You didn't know what you were up against

It wasn't your fault

You are not a savage,

You are not a commodity to be exploited

You are within me

I know you

I am you

E Heemi, we are going to rediscover

Your true mana

That was never lost

Your true tapu

Ko Uru, ko koe

E Heemi, your anger is valid

You were told you're never good enough

You've got so much against you

Just for being Heemi

You're on a chain

Machines can be dismantled,

Whose anger is this anyway?

This is not yours to carry

But until you can put it down

Let us carry it together.

Because e Heemi

You were born from a seed of greatness.

E ngā mokopuna

I descend from gardeners and deities

Those weeds and rotten soils no longer nourish me

My roots are in our pure

Continue to cleanse

He kākano koe, i ruia mai i a Hinepūtehue

You will grow beyond the confines

You will bring peace.

The writing of the poem was a collective and transformative effort. Each group focused on their part of the poem, and when we came back together, we were amazed at how seamlessly the three parts flowed together. The Mahi a Atua mātāpono *Ka mā te ariki, ka mā te tauira* encourages participants to be active learners and be alert to others' perspectives and to our environment, and in so doing, “we learn to be open to other perspectives and grow our ability to expand our thinking” (Kopua et al, 2025a, p.26). This mātāpono also sees the teacher (Tina) as actively learning alongside the tauira (learner), and the tauira being open to absorbing the knowledge from the pouako (Kopua et al., 2025a). Tina surprised our group the next day by giving us all framed copies of the poem that we could take home with us—a tangible reminder of the mahi we had done in this wheako.

Moments of Difficulty and Transformation: Diverse Layers

Levy and Cherrington (2025) highlight that sitting in personal discomfort helps us better understand ourselves and that on the Mataora Journey, Te Pō can be a space of

uncertainty, overwhelm, and discomfort, and that for some, "these thoughts and feelings are swirling within us before we have even set foot in the Rangi Parauri wānanga" (p. 20). Being in this space can lead to understanding what has happened to ourselves and where our feelings and reactions have come from, and then we can start to see our colonised selves being reflected to us (Levy & Cherrington, 2025). We now reflect on our moments of difficulty and transformation.

Paulè: Being in the academic space means standing in front of students to teach, and I am also involved in facilitating Noho Marae (overnight stay - land based) for our social work students. Therefore, attending or facilitating a wānanga is not new to me, but what was surprising was the nervousness I felt leading up to attending and the overwhelming stimulation. The nervousness, as I reflect, was about the unknowing, the unfamiliar space of where I was going to, and the overwhelm was all the taonga puoro (musical instruments) awakening my tūpuna, the brightness of the wharenui, and the sheer volume of people I was sharing the space with. This was short-lived, and once I was able to settle in, get used to, and centre myself, I found the learning environment enjoyable, exciting, and stimulating.

Ange: The process of looking at our own story/narrative, not through a trauma lens, but by following the process Dr. Di (Dr. Diana Kopua was one of the main facilitators) led us on, was hard for me. It was hard because at times I may still feel the discomfort of my own trauma; however, I was open to looking at this through a te ao Māori lens, as this does not happen in Western spaces and can be minimised in that space. The learning within the process for me was that the story/narrative of trauma does not hold the power that it once did. The feelings have changed and softened now, but I still struggle to find the words to express this in a comprehensible way, and it is a reminder that there are many layers to my healing.

Jane: I entered the wānanga feeling both familiar and foreign. I could sense my tūpuna with me, guiding me to stand strong in my identity, yet I still carried the weight of

racist comments I had heard over the years: “Plastic Māori,” “Māori when it suits them,” “Not even a quarter caste,” “Can’t even speak the language.” These words had become internal walls of doubt and shame. Although I was in a space of reclamation and reconnection, those internalised messages echoed loudly in my mind. Within the wānanga, those voices grew quieter. Mahi a Atua invites us to look inward and reconnect through whakapapa, to recognise that belonging is not something to earn but something to remember. I began to feel that shift, like I was finally coming home to myself. Then one of the kaiako (teacher) shared her own story of struggling with her belonging. Her openness embodied *ka mā te ariki, ka mā te tauira*, the reciprocal learning that transforms both teacher and learner. Hearing her speak was deeply healing. It permitted me to hold both doubt and pride, and to hold space for myself as Māori with compassion and confidence.

Charlotte: I am a leader in my professional life, my personal life, and the one in my whānau who’s always organising and vocal about things that matter. When it comes to wānanga or any spaces where it’s predominantly Māori or on the marae, I nervously shy away. I always feel as though I’m having to prove something because I am a white-facing Māori and I don’t speak te reo. In the same breath, these spaces are the very same spaces where I feel the most at home, where I am never judged and always feel so welcome. It is so odd, this juxtaposition, and I have never been able to come to terms with it. So, when it came to voicing opinions or ideas in front of the whole roopū, something I am usually so incredibly comfortable with, I felt I could not. Mostly, I feel it stems from feeling too white to be able to speak on behalf of Māori. I feel as though my struggles, my lived experiences, are not the same as those of my cousins, or e hoa mā (friends). This is somewhat true, and I recognise the privilege I have been afforded due to how I physically present to the world, and that often my voice is not the one that needs to be heard. Equally, I needed to learn that my voice is important, I can have an impact and say, “the difficult thing,” especially when it needs to be

said and others cannot find theirs. Dr Di's (one of the main facilitators) consistent narrative around this kaupapa was so powerful for me and a constant reminder to speak up, even when it feels challenging to do so, and how important it is to sit in the uncomfortable feeling.

Indigenous Thinking: Decolonising our Thoughts

Moving to Indigenous ways of thinking and being confident in doing so, flourished throughout the wānanga. Our reflections highlight this growth.

Paulè: Indigenous thinking is all a change, a twist for me, it is a journey that I have hungered for years and years. My thoughts often take me back to my upbringing, that house, that way of doing things, that deprivation of my own cultural paradigms. So, sitting in Rangi Parauri allowed me to flourish, to be who I am, and to return to my ancestral rights and start to think Indigenous. I am so thankful for the space, the people, the sounds, the tastes, and the feels, because this is where I can fill my cup.

Ange: Indigenous thinking ensures we can hear our own tūpuna stories and connect with them and be in that space to ponder and remember what this is. Being at the training allowed us to step out of our known and often very Western, colonised thinking, and reconnect with what it is to be tangata whenua (people of the land). Having the music and waiata in the background as we heard the pūrākau of our atua was mirimiri to my wairua (inner essence) and having the opportunity to explore and unpack the pūrākau in small groups and in different forums, helped to put the pūrākau in perspective and see and hear other interpretations. A key learning for me in the space of listening to and understanding the pūrākau was that I could just take the learning from the pūrākau that I needed in that moment of time. I didn't have to memorise and know all the names of the atua and know exactly what their role was—I think the Western influence of learning says we should memorise and pay attention to all the details, but my Indigenous mind would grasp the idea of the light of a

significant learning from the pūrākau rather than the details. Being in the space allowed this to happen more easily.

Jane: For me, Indigenous thinking is deeply rooted in connection; connection to the whenua, to our tūpuna, to each other, to ourselves, and to the spiritual and natural worlds that surround us. Nothing exists in isolation. Learning about the maramataka (lunar calendar) brought this understanding to life. It reminded me that living in tune with the rhythms of te taiao (environment) is both ancestral and deeply restorative. It also shifted my thinking from a Western, linear concept of time to an Indigenous, cyclical one. This Indigenous way of thinking invited me to unlearn the constant drive to be productive and busy, and instead live more in alignment with the cycles that I am part of times for action and times for rest, times to gather and times to go inward and reflect.

Charlotte: Although I was not raised on my marae, we lived a long way away from my ancestral whenua in the Hokianga. My father raised us very Māori; tikanga practices were rife throughout our upbringing, we regularly did pūre, and the community-led way in which my dad operated was cognizant of his Māori upbringing. It was ingrained in me. However, he never explained why, never had the pūrākau behind why he did the things he did; he just did them, and we followed suit. So leading teams compassionately and in a collaborative wānanga style, knowing there was a reason behind my high energy productivity and to take caution at other times, always caring so much for the underprivileged, seeing tohu (signs) in te taiao and taking heed comes directly from the fact that I whakapapa Māori, my father taught us led by our tūpuna whose ways flow through my veins. Mahi a Atua gave me a chance to understand why, give reason for the beautiful te ao Māori ways of working, and it finally all made sense.

Taking Mahi a Atua with us: Being a Mataora

Although the experience of wānanga was powerful, it was never intended to be contained within that one experience of Mahi a Atua. Our following narratives describe how we have taken Mahi a Atua with us within our personal and professional lives.

Paulè : The framework for Mahi a Atua was easy to implement when I understood it, as a guiding force, a community of Mataora, a group of like-minded people who have just gone through an experience of hope, an experience of healing, and an experience of revitalisation. The call for finding our collective was effortless, as were the two colleagues I came with and the colleague we met while we were there. Setting up a Facebook Messenger chat so we could come together after we parted, email addresses, and Facebook friend requests ensured our technology for keeping 'on screen' in touch was simple. The reliability of our collective was important as it allowed the collective to be responsible, be accountable, and to create motivation.

Jane: After the Mahi a Atua training, I felt a strong responsibility to carry what I had learned into my personal and professional worlds. For me, it meant consciously weaving the principles of Mahi a Atua into everyday practice. I am slowing down, I am aligning with the Maramataka, I am creating space for reflection, and I am holding onto relational ways of being. The Mahi a Atua book has been a constant source of guidance and inspiration on this journey, and I feel excited to continue learning, practising and growing through it.

Charlotte: I am a changed person ever since leaving Mahi a Atua, just being able to be unapologetically Māori, especially as a white-faced Māori who never quite felt enough. Being a Mataora for me ensured I continued to live and breathe the teachings of Mahi a Atua. Keeping aligned with my wāhine toa to understand and be held accountable to maramataka. To continue to karakia and pūre (cleansing) in my daily life, to seek out alternative health pathways in rongoā Māori (healing from our natural resources). To teach my tamariki (children) pūrākau about our atua and ways of being. To continue and stick to my te reo

Māori journey. I have aligned myself with like-minded individuals, Māori and non-Māori, who are on this waka together (Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou, ka ora ai te iwi—with your food basket, and my food basket, the people will thrive). But most importantly, advocating for all these learnings in my mahi and daily life and promoting Mahi a Atua with all interactions with Māori health professionals.

Ange: When we were doing the Mahi a Atua training in Gisborne, my brother, who is currently in prison, had the opportunity to do a week-long training on te reo and tikanga (principles of te ao Māori) in prison. We talked by phone before our training weeks started, and again on the Friday after we had both finished. We both found our training transformational and excitedly shared what we had learned. Upon sharing, my brother requested the resources from my training, and I sent him the booklet. When the Mahi a Atua book was published in early 2025, I sent a copy to him. He rang me constantly excited by his new learnings of karakia and pūrākau and how he could apply the pūrākau to himself. The pūrākau gave him a framework to help him understand his life and see patterns in his life that did not serve him well. Watching my brother's journey, which has been impacted by my attendance at Rangi Parauri, has been awe-inspiring as he navigates new pathways to his own healing and the healing of our whānau.

Pūrākau gives us the ability to connect to our own narratives when we are disconnected, and this can assist in shifting perspectives and awareness through moving into growth and healing (Kopua, 2019). Pūrākau also supports critical reflection and grows our way of thinking to act differently (Kopua et al., 2020; Rangihuna et al., 2018), which affirms that pūrākau are forms of Indigenous resistance.

Maramataka: Saying Goodbye to the Gregorian Calendar, Inviting Hina

Maramataka was a key theme throughout the wānanga, and it was significant to our group, which keeps us connected today. Maramataka is the Māori lunar calendar and focuses

on the phases of the moon, traditionally used for planting, fishing, hunting, and other activities. Western-based colonial ideologies allow us to follow a Gregorian calendar based on Christianity and the sun's movements. The opportunity to indigenise our mindset by understanding how our tūpuna navigated the whenua (land) in Maramataka was exciting to us all (Elder, 2024). Being able to sit in the atua space together as tangata whenua allows our connection to multiple deities to permeate and appreciate how each one in the maramataka space gives us the ability to pull them closer, but also finally feel that environmental rhythm our tūpuna felt. Each of us has special relationships with them and see their significance as we orbit around Hina (the moon) (Elder, 2024). According to Rikki Solomon (personal communication, October ,16, 2024), it takes three years for Maramataka to be cemented in our everyday life before the Gregorian Calendar. We have hit the one-year mark of practicing Maramataka, and our narratives below provide our reflections on this journey.

Paulè: When we came home, I was eager to start engaging in Maramataka, which I had always been interested in but never really pursued. The resources that we had been given at Rangi Parauri were very helpful for us as a starting point. Understanding the movements of Hina, the moon, meant going outside and looking at her as she moved across the sky at night. It was interesting to notice quickly what each phase physically looked like, but also what it was named, and what this connection meant to us. Soon, it was more than just looking and seeing Hina, and knowing what phase we were in; it became a relationship, a connection, and an excitement of what the day and night brought for our household.

Jane: Learning about the maramataka has been a deeply transformational experience for me. As a woman, a monthly cycle resonated strongly, offering a frame of reference that felt natural. Understanding the different phases of the maramataka helped me view my own energy and wellbeing more holistically. I recognised that high-energy, productive times, preparation times, and reflective and rest times all have a space in the broader cycle of the

maramataka. Going outside and looking at Hina helped me to start recognising the different phases and anchored my felt knowledge as I noticed the impact of the different phases on my tinana (body), hinengaro (mind), and wairua (spirit).

Ange: The journey of maramataka began at the training where Rikki Solomon shared kōrero and resources related to maramataka. “I am a recovering Gregorian” was his introduction to us, and this statement really stuck with me as I did not really know a lot about maramataka and probably didn’t feel there were alternative ways of considering the lunar phases and moon cycles. I had no idea how different my life would be nearly a year later, where I am intentionally checking where we are at with maramataka and choosing my times to do things in my life (e.g., looking to the high energy times and the low energy times to plan events or self-care and look after myself). I have a long way to go to embed these learnings; however, the fun is in the journey.

Charlotte: This part of my journey has been the hardest for me to stick to. Having my hoa mā tell me what phase we’re in has helped hugely. I purchased a couple of maramataka wall planners, calendars, and a journal written by Dr. Hinemoa Elder to help with journaling based on the Maramataka calendar. This has all been exceptionally invigorating, but I’ve found it incredibly hard to stick to. Unfortunately, I missed Rikki’s maramataka talk at Mahi a Atua, as I was having a romiromi (massage) at the same time, so it could be why I feel so disconnected at times. It’s also one of the main aspects of te ao Māori that I want to delve into more.

Implications for Practice: How Could Mahi a Atua be used more Widely?

Three of us are social work educators, and the knowledge and learnings gained from Mahi a Atua can be utilised in our teaching practices at Massey University, in the lecture rooms, but predominantly in the Noho Marae settings with students. For our radiology wahine, these teachings can be incorporated into a healthcare setting for both public and

private, ensuring the spaces incorporate mātauranga Māori, but also invite developing policies, procedures, and frameworks from an Indigenous standpoint. The Mahi a Atua mātāpono *Ka mā te ariki, ka mā te tauira* demonstrates that as the teacher is enlightened, so too are the students, and that we remain active learners (Te Whare Wānanga o Te Kurahuna, 2021), and because we have become enlightened with the Mahi a Atua knowledge, we can share this enlightenment with our students. Paulè commented, "As an educator, I can think about the activities in our Noho Marae and what purpose they have for the participants. There is a deeper understanding of why I do what I do and how I do it. This was a realisation after attending Rangi Parauri". Also, shifting our students from *Tēnei te pō, nau mai te ao*: coming in from the dark, welcoming the light (Kopua et al., 2025b), ensures that the teachings and learnings are transformational for our students through Indigenising *all* spaces. Three of us work in a Western-based university that remains inherently Western with Western-based systems and institutional racism; therefore, being able to sit in the space of experience rather than intellectualise the experience was hugely beneficial for us. It not only heeds the call for our students to learn in this way of wānanga but also challenges the universities to consider the transmission of knowledge through indigenisation and wānanga.

As outlined earlier, Mahi a Atua originated in the mental health field; however, it now crosses into many social service fields, including health, education, and justice, rationalising a wide-ranging Mataora workforce able to effect transformative change with whaiora and whānau (Kopua et al., 2025b). For example, the programme has the potential to be vitally beneficial in the corrections prison system. Lisa Cherrington, as cited in Kopua et al. (2025b), introduces the idea of imagining that instead of a court hearing for rangatahi, there were Mahi a Atua wānanga utilising the principles to hold space for transformation and move from *Tēnei te pō, nau mai te ao*. Take this imagining out further, what if we used Mahi a Atua in spaces such as in prisons alongside our tāne Māori? The Mahi a Atua training meets the participants

at their own level of learning and can work from that space to gain understanding and is effective in moving people from vulnerable spaces to rangatira spaces.

Conclusion

This article has unpacked the Mataora journeys of four wāhine, three social worker educators and a healthcare worker in radiology, who attended the Rangi Parauri training in October 2024. Mahi a Atua has been discussed as an Indigenous resistance movement that privileges Māori knowledge and practice over Western constructs and is an Indigenous liberation movement that leads to transformational change for Māori and non-Māori. Our Mahi a Atua journey continues, and we are holding the light within our small collective. The reality of moving in a Western-based world makes it difficult to balance ourselves in te ao Māori and a Pākehā space. We already contend with assumptions and discrimination when we turn up as wāhine Māori, therefore having programmes like Mahi a Atua provides safety for us to stand in our own mana, to be who we inherently are, and to re-learn and re-claim our own traditional identities as Māori.

> Rawiri Waititi (co-leader of Te Pāti Māori in Aotearoa) states,
>
> Don’t let anybody treat you like a second-class citizen in your own country. You may not know your maunga (mountain), you may not know your awa (river), but your maunga and your awa know you. You may not know your reo (language), but your reo knows you. You may not know your marae, but your marae knows you. You are good enough because our tūpuna (ancestors) made it so!” (Tipene Music, n.d.)

Our whānau may not know the pūrākau of our atua, but the pūrākau of our atua know them. This is how Mahi a Atua is awakening Indigenous resistance through the voices of our atua.

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Appendix A

Glossary

Māori Words	English translation
Atua Māori	our deities, our tūpuna, our existence
Haenga	Journey
Hina	the moon, who is female
Iwi	our tribal affiliation
kākano	a seed, depicting the start of growth
Kaiako	a teacher or a person we can learn from
Kaimahi Māori	workers who are Māori
Kaitiaki	a protector, guardian, someone who watches over, protects
Kaupapa Māori	a purpose that is centred in te ao Māori, a Māori lens.
Karakia	an incantation
Ko koe	you
Mana	our status, prestige, our presence
Mahi a Atua	an Indigenous movement
Marama	another word for moon
Maramataka	the Māori lunar calendar
Mātauranga Māori	the knowledge of Māori, through a Māori lens
Mirimiri	a massage that has aspects of spiritual connection
Noho Marae	staying on a marae, a place where Māori gather, meeting places
Papatūānuku	our Earth mother
Pouako	another word for teacher
pūrākau	narratives, stories
Pūre	a ritual of removing tapu, a ceremony, the rites to lift, letting go of.
Rangi Parauri	training within an Indigenous space, part of Mahi a Atua
Ranginui	our Sky Father

Rongoā Māori	remedies, to treat, to apply, medicine, to preserve, medicinal plant
Romiromi	to press firmly with hands, to squeeze, to massage
Tapu	be sacred, prohibited, restricted, set apart, forbidden, under *atua* protection
Te ao Māori	the world of Māori
Te reo Māori	the language of Māori
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	the document that was written in the Indigenous language 1840-1844, the English version is The Treaty of Waitangi.
Tuakana-teina	older sibling and younger sibling, usually described in a learning capacity, the one with knowledge teaching the one who is learning
Tūpuna	our ancestors, those who have passed through the veil of Te Arai
Uru	to qualify, to enter, to go in, to enlist, to join, the head
Urutengangana	the name of our oldest atua
Wahine Māori	women, woman, female, who are Māori
Wānanga	A place and space of learning
Whānau	to be born, to give birth, a family, part of a Māori society
Whakapapa	our lineage, heritage, our genealogy, our alignment
Whanaungatanga	connections, to connect, build relationships
Wheako	an experience.

Appendix A. Translations were completed using the Te Aka Māori Dictionary (2003)