Teaching the Mana Model—A Māori framework for reconceptualising student success and thriving

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KEY POINTS

- From a Māori perspective, all students possess mana; inherent capabilities that enable them to positively transform the world around them.

- The Mana Model proposes that schools are an influential space to harness and transform students' motivation, knowledge, skills, capabilities, and interests.

- Students thrive at school when they are connected to their culture, feel a sense of belonging at school, and experience a synergy between their family, community, and school lives.

- Increasing student self-efficacy, embedded achievement, and resilience has positive implications for student learning and wellbeing.

This article explores how schools and educators can create learning environments that foster the innate mana of students. Mana is a concept that comes from a Māori worldview and refers to a person's sense of authority, influence, self-efficacy, purpose, pride, and belonging. The Mana Model contends that student thinking, behaviour, and wellbeing are motivated by the desire to achieve a sense of mana. The Mana Model explains how student connectedness, belonging to place, cultural identity, academic efficacy, and willingness to develop diverse academic, cross-cultural, social, and psychological competences are crucial foundations for learning and should be central to learning environments, teaching pedagogy, and practice.

Introduction

The Mana Model is derived from the field of educational social psychology. It proposes that when teachers create "mana-ful" contexts, conditions, and content for learning, students are able to express and enact their inherent mana. The Mana Model was initially developed in a project called Ka Awatea (see Macfarlane et al., 2014), and then further refined in a larger project called Kia Tū Rangatira Ai: Living, Thriving and Succeeding in Education (see Alansari et al., 2022). That project investigated how students learn, succeed, and thrive at school by surveying large numbers of students (*n* = 18,996), whānau (*n* = 6,949), and kaiako (*n* = 1,866) from primary and secondary schools across Aotearoa. Both studies sought to reconceptualise student success by examining student, whānau, and teacher perspectives about the positive influences on student thriving and success. The two studies suggest five optimal conditions for Māori student success (see Figure 1): *Mana Whānau* (connectedness to others and collective agency); *Mana Ūkaipō* (belonging and relationship to place); *Mana Motuhake* (positive self-concept and embedded achievement); *Mana Tū* (social–psychological competence); and *Mana Tangatarua* (a diverse knowledge base and skill set).

The Mana Model proposes that student thinking, behaviour, and wellbeing at school are motivated by the desire to achieve mana—a sense of authority, influence, self-efficacy, purpose, pride, and belonging. The five optimal conditions are not linear or

FIGURE 1. THE MANA MODEL (WEBBER & MACFARLANE, 2020)

hierarchical in nature, but instead evolve, overlap, and flourish depending on the classroom environment. Importantly, the mana of all students is always present, ebbing and flowing in response to classroom content, conditions, and contexts for learning. Significantly, the Mana Model frames student success and thriving from a Māori worldview, making it unique to Aotearoa.

By focusing on a range of optimal conditions for learning, whānau, schools, and teachers can nurture learners who are confident in themselves; connected to peers, culture, places, and communities; purposeful and aspirational; and driven to succeed academically and beyond. The role of schools and teachers is to develop students' academic, social, and personal competences and confidence by promoting positive mental health and wellbeing (Frydenberg et al., 2017; Ministry of Education, 2022). Additionally, it is important that schools and teachers value and incorporate students' cultural identities and knowledge (Webber et al., 2021; Webber & Waru-Benson, 2022). Teachers, whānau, and communities can have a profound influence on student learning and development. Therefore, collaboration and relationships between all parties are fundamental to incorporating academic, social, and cultural learning in schools in ways that are meaningful and relevant for students (Berryman et al., 2018).

He mana tō te tamaiti: Reconceptualising student potential

This article contends that all students are driven to actualise their mana. While each child is born with mana derived from their whakapapa and innate tapu (sacredness), mana can also be achieved "through the enactment of dignified behaviour, extraordinary achievement and momentous actions" (Dell et al., 2018, p. 54). According to the esteemed Māori scholar Hirini Moko Mead (2016), there has always been a "high value placed upon mana" (p. 29), and he described it as a "creative and dynamic force that motivates the individual to do better" (p. 51). Other scholars have referred to it as "a supernatural force in a person, place or object" (Moorfield, 2004, p. 238), "a spiritual authority or power" (Reverend Māori Marsden, cited in Royal, 2003, p. 4), and a "quality, energy or consciousness in the world which can be harnessed and expressed in human activities through acts of generosity and wisdom" (Royal, 2006, p. 8). From a Māori worldview, all children are born with mana, which is developed according to how they see themselves and how others see them. These two elements are inextricably linked. If teachers are interested in reading more about the concept of mana, I would highly recommend an article by Dell et al. (2018).

Mana relates to an individual's self-concept, influencing their sense of authority, self-esteem, confidence, and wellbeing. Royal (2006) posits that it is *mana* (honour, pride, and esteem) that lies at the heart of Māori self-worth and the degree to which Māori feel healthy, empowered, and self-assured. Western research also contends that students who have academic efficacy (Zander et al, 2018), academic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017), high expectations of themselves (Rubie-Davies et al., 2018), aspirations for the future (Morgenroth, 2015) and social connectedness (Allen et al., 2016; Blum, 2005; Garcia-Moya, 2020) are more likely to persist and thrive at school. Therefore, mana can be said to be a force that influences students' thoughts and behaviours, enabling them to feel capable and connected, and motivating them to act purposefully in the world to achieve their goals and aspirations (Webber & Macfarlane, 2018, 2020).

Mana also has an inherent social component. Royal (2006) states that the "mana of an individual or group is measured in the thoughts of others" (p. 12). In this way, the concept of mana is relational; it is ascribed by others and enabled by reciprocity and mutuality which results in positive social relationships (Royal, 2006). Those with mana work to dignify others and positively change the world around them. As Dell (2017) writes, mana is "a potent human state with a profound ability to impact upon, affect and positively transform the lives of others" (p. 89). Students must come to understand their own mana, and the ways their strengths, interests, and personal authority can enhance their relationships, and positively influence others.

He mauri tō te tangata: Reconceptualising student motivation

Māori worldview asserts that all humans have mauri. Marsden (in Royal, 2003, p.174) described mauri as "the bonding element that holds the fabric of the universe together" and "a force or energy mediated by hauora – the breath of the spirit of life". Mead (2016) stated that mauri "represents the active force of life" (p. 83) that activates the body, mind, and personality of people, while Durie (2001) contends that this active life force is evident in all living things. In the context of schools, a element of mauri might be a student's motivation, drive, or "spark" for learning. Fitzpatrick (2017) contends that identities are formed from many factors including past, present, future, and requires the "constant negotiation with the process of becoming" (p. 43). Mauri can be likened to this process of becoming and can fuel—through active engagement—the development of identity as well as a sense of purpose and belonging in the world.

Mauri is an inherent force. It is also a motivation that enables students to develop a sense of self that is relational, aspirational, and categorised by wellbeing. This perspective proposes that when students arrive at school they each already possess mauri to develop their wellbeing and enhance their mana. This mauri derives from their sense of connectedness to people and the natural world around them. Students possess a mauri to learn—and teachers must harness this motivation and drive by ensuring students have opportunities to learn through challenging, authentic, and relevant content and contexts.

Kia tū rangatira ai: Reconceptualising student success

Mana and mauri are interdependent constructs that enable a student to stand with confidence and authority. All students possess an energy and motivation, derived from the world around them (mauri), which can be harnessed to develop a positive sense of self as they learn through respectful and reciprocal engagements alongside others (mana). When we believe that all students have an innate mauri and mana, the purpose of education and the role of teachers is transformed. Students become active as opposed to passive in their own education (Freire, 2000). Education is reframed as an opportunity to tailor learning according to the strengths, interests, and aspirations of students as well as the whānau and communities they carry on their shoulders with them to school every day. The concepts of mana and mauri encourage teachers to pay deep attention to the knowledge of students, whānau, and communities, thereby challenging traditionalist conceptions of education. Teachers have a critical role in coming to understand and grow students' mana and mauri. As such, they must be receptive to learning from their students (whānau and communities) and open to building learning opportunities together that align with the academic, social, spiritual, and cultural worlds around them. The Mana Model is a useful framework for understanding how schools and teachers might do this.

The Mana Model

The Mana Model was developed by privileging the perspectives of students, whānau, and teachers. It asserts that all students are motivated by the desire to achieve a sense of mana. The Mana Model proposes five optimal conditions that enable student thriving. These conditions are: Mana Whānau, which is connectedness to others and collective agency; Mana Ūkaipō, which is belonging and relationship to place; Mana Motuhake, which is embedded achievement and self-concept; Mana Tū, which is social–psychological competence; and Mana Tangatarua, which is a diverse knowledge base and skillset.

Mana Whānau: Connectedness to others and collective agency. Mana Whānau highlights the importance of social relationships and child-centric learning environments for student development and learning. This condition for learning stresses that students are motivated to learn when they feel others believe in them, when they understand that they are capable of succeeding, and when they believe that they are an important and contributing member of a collective. Mana Whānau is grounded in the idea that humans are intrinsically motivated by social relationships or the "need-to-belong" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and that self-esteem is derived from the degree to which individuals feel they belong and matter to others (Baumeister, 2012; Gowing & Jackson, 2018). As such, Mana Whānau develops when students believe that they occupy a central and valued position in their family, which includes their school "family".

When educators deliberately approach relationships with their students to develop social relationships, autonomy, individuality, and care, students develop a sense of belonging, positive wellbeing, and an increase in self-esteem. A sense of connectedness involves students developing significant bonds with others (relational) while still being supported to express and develop their individuality within these relationships (autonomy) (Barber & Schluterman, 2008). Importantly, students' individuality encompasses their unique social identities, which includes their cultural identities and affiliations (Webber, 2012). Furthermore, students need to feel valued by others, otherwise referred to as a sense of *mattering*— "the perception that, to some degree and in any of a variety of ways, we are a significant part of the world around us" (Elliot et al., 2004, p. 339). Elliot et al. (2004) highlight the importance of reciprocal relationships, in which individuals feel seen and know they are important to those around them. The research indicates that a sense of social connectedness is linked to positive academic behaviours and outcomes (Bower et al., 2015), can act as a buffer against negative mental health outcomes (Gunn et al., 2018), and negative behaviours (Juvonen, 2006). By connecting with others, students are able to satisfy their need to belong, establish a positive sense of social wellbeing, and increase their self-esteem.

When learning environments foster connectedness, students are motivated to succeed not only for themselves, but for and with others. At home, Mana Whānau is fostered by whānau being invested in their child's education, talking to the child about school and learning, motivating their child to persist when things get tough, turning up to school events, and celebrating their child's achievements (Flores-Verduzco et al., 2020). Schools can foster Mana Whānau by strengthening school–home

relationships and involving students' families in their child's academic planning for the future (McKinley & Webber, 2018). Classroom practices that foster Mana Whānau include giving students responsibility, involving whānau and other important people in academic goal-setting, and providing space for individual expression and connectedness. Students with a strong sense of Mana Whānau have healthy relationships with others, ask for help when needed, contribute to their home and school communities, and believe that their contributions and achievement are valued by those around them.

Mana Ūkaipō: Belonging and relationship to place. Mana Ūkaipō is a sense of belonging and connection to place, which is inextricably linked with tūrangawaewae and the idea of being "sustained and nourished [through] a deep connection to the land" (Boulton et al., 2021, p. 49). All students need to feel belonging and connection both to their environment and to others in that environment. This has been shown to be particularly important for Māori students as tangata whenua and members of hapū and iwi (Webber & O'Connor, 2019). Goodenow (1993) defined the psychological sense of school belonging as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment" (p. 80). Being connected and feeling a sense of belonging and attachment to school has been linked to academic achievement and engagement (Korpershoek et al., 2019). Additionally, students who feel connected to their school are more likely to experience positive mental health and wellbeing (Arslan, 2018; Korpershoek et al., 2019; Pikulski et al., 2020).

Mana Ūkaipō is fostered when students know that their cultural identities, knowledge systems, and histories are important and valued at school. Rieh (2020) reminds us that, for many children, school is their first opportunity to "encounter the world outside the home" (p. 156), and as such school environments are foundational to academic, social, and emotional development. When students feel connected to school, school sites are not simply spaces, but rather places with ascribed emotional attachment (Rieh, 2020), also referred to as a "meaningful location" (Lewicka, 2011). Mana Ūkaipō develops as students have experiences in places that make them feel good about themselves.

Teachers can facilitate Mana Ūkaipō through encouraging students to learn about their own whakapapa, family history, or the history of where they reside and attend school (Webber & O'Connor, 2019). In place based learning (PBL), two core questions are proposed as critical to learning: What is this place? and What is our relationship with it? (Penetito, 2009, p. 5). PBL promotes contextualising learning within the surrounding landscape, history, and culture so that students can meaningfully learn through those elements (Webber & Macfarlane, 2020). The synergy that PBL establishes between people and the natural world is also believed to have a positive impact on wellbeing (Basu et al., 2020; Durie, 2004). A powerful way of fostering Mana Ūkaipō is through learning that is derived from the landscape, history, and context of the school's location. Students who enact Mana Ūkaipō know that they belong, are keen to learn about and alongside diverse others, find ways to integrate their language and cultural knowledge into their learning, and can compare and contrast different points of view respectfully.

Mana Ūkaipō requires teachers to engage with difficult knowledge and their own complex family histories. May and Sleeter (2010) have proposed that teachers require a *critical* multicultural disposition to meaningfully reflect upon their position in the context of the learning environment. A critical multicultural disposition asks teachers to contextualise their own positionality in terms of learning about history, place, and identity, and recognise the interplay between power, privilege, and bias within their own lives and practices (Fitzpatrick, 2017). In addition, the recent introduction of the Aotearoa New Zealand histories curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2021) has created an "identity" imperative for both teachers and students. Teachers must equip themselves to teach this new curriculum content by first grappling with their own whakapapa, family history/ies, and sense of belonging/not belonging in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Then, and only then, can Mana Ūkaipō thrive and improve learning in classrooms.

Mana Motuhake: Self-concept and embedded achievement. Mana Motuhake is a form of mana that develops when students have a positive self-concept, academic self-efficacy, and a sense of embedded achievement. Student self-concept involves their thoughts and feelings about themselves (Rosenberg, 1979). It is derived from their perception of past experiences, the views of others, and their own characteristics (e.g., skills and strengths) (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Embedded achievement refers to the belief that group membership involves valuing and achieving in academics (Oyserman & Lewis, 2017). When students believe that being a member of their cultural group involves academic achievement and success, then they can be said to have a sense of *embedded achievement* (Altschul et al., 2006; Oyserman et al., 1995). In sum, self-concept is students' views of themselves based on perceptions of past experiences, while embedded achievement is the degree to which they believe they can succeed academically in the future. Mana Motuhake asserts that both concepts are important for students in enabling the alignment of their thoughts, behaviours, and actions with their academic expectations and aspirations.

Mana Motuhake contends that in order for students to develop positive self-concept and academic efficacy they must also perceive their cultural identities as an asset. Mana Motuhake involves feeling connected to a cultural group, and perceiving that group to value and be capable of achieving educational success (Oyserman & Lewis, 2017). It is also developed through "culturally rich learning opportunities" (Webber & Macfarlane, 2020, p. 39) that strengthen students' cultural and academic identities simultaneously. It is also critical that students have positive role models who demonstrate that their goals and aspirations are attainable for people "like them" (Morgenroth et al., 2015).

School environments can foster Mana Motuhake by making sure that students know that success is not only dependent on their achievements or capabilities at school. Mana Motuhake develops when students can identify positive role models in their life and talk about the ways those role models have navigated adversity, utilised their strengths, worked in ways that are "mana-ful", and positively transformed the lives of others around them. This might include emphasising the learning process rather than focusing solely on the outcome. Students must come to believe that they are capable and that their strengths (including their cultural knowledge, language, and beliefs) are an important part of who they are and can be drawn upon in a variety of contexts.

Mana Tū: Social–psychological competence. Mana Tū are the social–psychological competencies that students need to be academically persistent and successful. Webber and Macfarlane (2020) contend that students need to develop a range of social and psychological competencies that help them deal with challenges and adversity. The competencies mentioned most often by students include courage, tenacity, self-discipline, humility, self-reflection, and kindness. Research supports the significance of these social–psychological skills for student learning and social development. For example, the concept of Grit (Duckworth et al., 2007) is characterised by both perseverance and consistency (Credé et al., 2017). Research contends that students with grit continuously work towards their goals with tenacity despite setbacks and challenges. Wolters and Hussain (2015) have suggested that grit can influence achievement through self-regulated learning, including motivation, strategy use, and avoiding procrastination. Thus, Mana Tū enables students to be self-disciplined, reflective, and make good choices conducive to achieving their goals.

Self-reflection and insight are also important cognitive tools when working towards goals. Self-reflection involves students being able to inspect and evaluate their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour (Grant et al., 2002). When self-reflection is done with a positive outlook (Stein &

Grant, 2014), it can lead to students understanding their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour with clarity and insight (Grant et al., 2002; Hixon & Swann, 1993). Mana Tū is developed when students engage in self-regulated and self-directed learning (Colomer et al., 2021; Voskamp et al., 2020). This is because students learn and adapt from previous learning failures and refine what works for them (Grant et al., 2002; Zimmerman, 2015). Mana Tū is also developed when students self-reflect, understand, and accept themselves, and productively work towards their goals (Harrington & Loffredo, 2010; Lyke, 2008; Stein & Grant, 2014).

Being self-reflective also strengthens students' capacity to be resilient (Crane et al., 2020; Falon et al., 2021). Resilience is the individual or collective ability to overcome obstacles and experience positive outcomes despite facing challenges or adversity (Masten, 2001, 2014; Penehira et al., 2014). It is important to note that resilience is enacted in multiple ways in classrooms, and Māori students in particular often employ resilience approaches that resemble resistance, sovereignty, and self-determination (Penehira et al., 2014). Māori students adopt resilience strategies that are located in their social ecologies, and schools need to consider the reasons why students resist at school and what they resist against (Watson, 2020). Students develop Mana Tū when they reflect on past experiences, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours and are able to learn from them (Crane et al., 2020), and have confidence in their ability to grow from, and strategise to overcome, challenges (Falon et al., 2021).

Mana Tangatarua: A diverse knowledge base and skill set. Mana Tangatarua develops as students acquire the skills, knowledge, and confidence to navigate multiple worlds with cultural competence, an inclusive mindset, and a sense of wellbeing. A core component of Mana Tangatarua is cultural connectedness which is developed through knowing where you come from and knowing what connects you to others. In addition, Briones et al. (2009) define cultural self-efficacy as "a person's perception of his/her own capability to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity" (p. 301). Cultural efficacy develops as students become curious about their own cultures and those of others, and learn though cultural knowledge exchange (Mikhaylov, 2016). Schools and teachers can respond to the cultural diversity of students by ensuring that diverse cultures and worldviews are actively incorporated, taught, and valued in school culture and curriculum (Schachner, 2019). Whānau are valuable sources of cultural knowledge and support for students (Webber & Macfarlane, 2020). Schools must establish relationships with whānau and communities in order to incorporate diverse cultural knowledge in meaningful ways that are relevant to students.

Being aware of racism, discrimination, and the negative impact of social exclusion is an important element of Mana Tangatarua. Many students face an added challenge to their success owing to experiences of racism and negative stereotypes associated with their cultural identity (Webber et al., 2013). Racism is associated with a higher prevalence of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, decreased self-esteem, and school disengagement and underachievement (Benner et al., 2018; Priest et al., 2013). An awareness of racism can buffer its effects on mental health (Houkamau & Sibley, 2011), help develop resilience against discrimination (Webber, 2012), and can mobilise collective and individual agency to fight for change (Diemer et al., 2017). Therefore, the development of Mana Tangatarua necessarily involves critically engaging in the colonial history of Aotearoa and exploring the socio–political–historical realities of diverse groups. Not only does this provide ample opportunity for students to learn from the different worldviews and experiences of others, it also strengthens their own cultural identities in the face of racism and other forms of societal discrimination. Furthermore, it provides learning opportunities for dominant students who might have no lived experience or awareness of racism (Webber et al., 2013).

Mana Tangatarua involves students being respectful and interested in learning about other cultures and communities. This includes correctly pronouncing place and people's names. Mana Tangatarua enables students to develop a simultaneous sense of themselves as tuakana (someone who can teach others) and teina (someone who can learn from others). Students who make decisions with moral courage and integrity and are open to new ideas and doing things differently demonstrate Mana Tangatarua because they prioritise leaving other people's mana intact in their interactions with them. By doing so, they maintain and increase their own mana.

Conclusion

All students must be seen as capable of learning, and as having the mauri (motivation and drive) and mana (authority, pride, and purpose) to succeed at school. The Mana Model emphasises the centrality of students' cultural and social identities to their self-concept and proposes a myriad of possible positive consequences when their cultural knowledge, language, community connections, and history are intrinsically linked to classroom learning, contexts, pedagogy, and relationships. The Mana Model proposes that all students and teachers in Aotearoa would benefit from better understanding the concept of mana and the educational content, conditions, and contexts that enable its development. Importantly, the Mana Model emphasises the critical role of teachers in facilitating the optimal conditions for students to realise their innate mana and transformative potential at school. It is hoped that the Mana Model encourages teachers to reconceptualise what student success and thriving means, and what it looks and feels like in their particular school and community. This reconceptualisation of student success will require teachers to reject negative stereotyping and the deficit framing of particular groups of students. Instead, they must employ an unrelenting and strengths-based focus on concepts such as student mana, strengths, interests, motivation, sense of connection, belonging, and aspirations for a positive and promising future.

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