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Grounding Education in Practices of Hope: A Case Study of He Kaupapa Tūmanako

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Abstract
In 2020, in response to the growing expressions of anxiety and hopelessness we saw amongst young people, a team of social scientists at Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa | Massey University, Aotearoa New Zealand created an initiative with high school students: "He Kaupapa Tūmanako/Project Hope". He Kaupapa Tūmanako draws from theoretical traditions in Mātauranga Māori and the Frankfurt School to approach hope as a practice, grounded in the understanding that connection is an antidote to the struggles of our times: connection with other young people, connection with communities, and connection with whenua/land. Over the past four years, we have focused on building He Kaupapa Tūmanako into a suite of courses supported by student mentors that connect young people from around the world. In this article, we reflect on what our experiences are teaching us about engaging hope as a transformative practice in sociology.

Keywords: hope pedagogy; Frankfurt School; Mātauranga Māori; sociology education; sociology of hope

Introduction

Over the last few years, the world has witnessed unprecedented disruptions including climate change, COVID-19, and the resurgence of radically nationalist demagoguery, aggravating social inequalities created historically by a racialising capitalism in the guise of imperialism, colonisation and widespread environmental depletion. Emblematic of those recent disruptions, the COVID-19 pandemic has shaped the ways in which young people experience the world around them, increasing their levels of anxiety and stress (Gasteiger et al., 2021; Siegert et al., 2023). As a team of sociologists at Massey University, we have noticed our students frequently anxious and overwhelmed about growing up in an uncertain world shaped by climate change. Our experiences mirror research that finds many young New Zealanders are feeling hopeless about the prospect of a climate-altered future (Nairn, 2019). In response to what appears as a growing sense of hopelessness among younger cohorts, we sought to address the following question through our teaching: "What does hope look like in a world of spiralling crises?" Given the disparate anxieties experienced among our students, we quickly

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realised that we would need to call upon a diverse array of critical tools to help us make sense of the present and to help young people navigate it.

In 2020, our team from Massey University's College of Humanities and Social Sciences had the opportunity to develop a non-credit short course for high school students, with the aim of providing them with the skills they need to act in the context of social disruption. He Kaupapa Tūmanako/Project Hope is an educational initiative that aims to empower young people to envision and create futures for themselves. The philosophy behind this initiative focused on how periods of uncertainty hold the potential to generate transformative form. In He Kaupapa Tūmanako, we tried to push back against the idea of individualistic hope or religious notions of hope as salvation (Kordela, 2012; Thompson, 2013). Contemporary narratives of hope are framed by neoliberal orthodoxy and often align with market logic, where hope is commodified and operationalised within frameworks of capitalism (Thompson, 2013). This privatisation of hope contrasts sharply with earlier collective notions, focusing instead on individual success metrics as the primary indicators of hopeful outcomes (O'Malley, 2009).

An individualised notion of hope has profound implications for how sociology introduces new audiences to the normative collectivism of the discipline. Educators and activists grapple with the dual task of informing people about critical issues—such as environmental crises and inequality—that are central to sociology courses, while fostering hope and agency. Re-conceptualising hope within educational contexts is necessary to enable learners to engage critically with their circumstances and to envision shared pathways forward. The notion of hope that we think appropriate to the present is the antithesis of individualistic and atomising practices of hope. This approach aligns with critical pedagogical frameworks that emphasise transformative learning and collective action as essential components of education (Boler, 1999; Zembylas, 2014, 2017). Through He Kaupapa Tūmanako, we have sought to challenge students to think more broadly about hope as realised through forms of connection. Our approach is captured powerfully and succinctly in the words of Angela Davis: "It is in collectivities that we find reservoirs of hope and optimism" (Davis, 2016, p. 49). Our desire was to recapture collective ideas of hope using a distinct theoretical underpinning informed by both Mātauranga Māori and the Frankfurt School.

In this article, we explore the theoretical underpinnings of the course and discuss how it has developed in unexpected directions over four years. Drawing on student evaluations and our team reflections, we discuss a puzzling outcome: students engage strongly in the interpersonal aspects of the course and outcomes have far exceeded our expectations, even as coursework completion remains low. In making sense of this conundrum, we argue that the course can tell us something important about how this cohort may be learning in the face of accumulating global crises.

Theorising hope

When we developed He Kaupapa Tūmanako, the critical tools that seemed most appropriate came from two traditions that are well-suited to responding to moments of disruption and uncertainty: Mātauranga Māori and the Frankfurt School. *Mātauranga Māori*, the Māori knowledge system, has deep roots in Aotearoa New Zealand (hereafter, Aotearoa) and has developed in response to the myriad challenges Māori face, including two centuries of settler-colonialism and the violence and suffering that has accompanied it, while the *Frankfurt School* emerged in response to the rising fascist tide of 1930s Germany. As we worked to ground the course in these different knowledge systems, we were very fortunate to have the input of Māori colleagues in Philosophy and Environmental Planning. This input informed our understanding of Mātauranga Māori and of the crucial role it may play in connecting our participants to one another, to our natural environment, and to the past and

potential futures. In this section, we explore these theoretical traditions and discuss how they formed the initial theoretical framework through which we came to understand hope as a set of practices.

Mātauranga Māori conceptions of hope

The relation between Mātauranga Māori and Western sociological perspectives offers a rich dynamic for exploring the play of disparate concepts of hope within contemporary Aotearoa sociology. Mātauranga Māori emphasises holistic understanding and interconnectedness (Hikuroa 2017; Smith et al., 2016). This knowledge system foregrounds relationships between people, the environment and the cosmos, encapsulated in the concepts of *whakapapa* (genealogy) (Graham 2009; Royal 1998) and of *whanaungatanga*, of relations between family, community and the non-human environment (Le Grice et al., 2017). Together, whakapapa and whanaungatanga encompass connections and relationships with humans and the non-human world, and their importance for the maintenance, enhancement and advancement of well-being (Winiata, 2005). Whakapapa also highlights relations of obligation both to the past and to the future, whereby hope becomes an act of duty to future generations. He Kaupapa Tūmanako centres both whakapapa and whanaungatanga as crucial mechanisms for establishing and maintaining the sense of connection on which the course hinges.

The array of relationships that become visible, through mātauranga, with one's ancestors, place and community, are never static. Mātauranga Māori encompasses "theories, practices, protocols for being *in* the world" (Smith et al., 2016, p. 2, emphasis added), which challenge the notion of a separation between humans and the non-human world. In expression of this, Linda Tuhiwai Smith and colleagues note that mātauranga is borne from a relationship between peoples and their geographies, in which (human) survival cannot be assumed: "There is a seascape, landscape and mindscape that has informed and constituted the legacies of language, the storying of peoples and the understandings of human endeavour and survival that is written into the veins of what we now know as mātauranga" (Smith et al., 2016, p. 134). Mātauranga Māori ensures that knowledge production remains deeply embedded within the web of these human and non-human relationships. This embeddedness equips this knowledge system to responsively navigate periods of significant change without resorting to idealism (Smith et al. 2016). Unlike the detached stance often associated with positivist fantasies of academic expertise, mātauranga is actively involved in the same disruptive forces that it seeks to understand.

In He Kaupapa Tūmanako, the course-development team of three sociologists (Alice Beban, Warwick Tie and Matt Wynyard) worked closely with Senior Lecturer in Māori Resource and Environmental Planning Dr. April Bennett (Tūwharetoa, Waikato, Tūhoe, Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga) to design a course structure that is based in a Mātauranga Māori approach to hope centred on the connections between individuals, their communities and their wider environments. As Naepi and Barber (2022) note, the history of encounters between mātauranga and Western-informed social science knowledge has been fraught, with Māori worldviews often ignored or suppressed (see also Forster, 2023). We are painfully aware of the potential for the project to appropriate concepts out of context and to thereby further the colonisation of knowledge. In part, we sought to protect concepts from appropriation through the collaborative relation with Dr April Bennett and later with Associate Professor Watene (Ngāti Manu, Te Hikutu, Ngāti Whātua o Ōrākei, Tonga) (who was a Massey senior lecturer in Philosophy at that time and is now an associate professor at Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland). From Dr Bennett we learned of the importance of connection to the natural environment and from Professor Watene we learned of the importance of whakapapa and the sense of connection to generations past and future. As the course developed, these ideas became central to the project.

Frankfurt School conceptions of hope

Key studies on hope from sociologists and philosophers in the mid-20th century were written during and following the extreme violence and social breakdown of World War II, and amid the looming threat of nuclear conflict during the Cold War era. These writers contrasted hope with fascist leaders' use of fear and sought to create pathways towards a common sense of humanity (Bloch, 1998; Fromm, 1968). In this period, the theorisation of hope was tied to a utopian belief that emancipation could be achieved through collective actions (Marcuse, 1964). The Frankfurt School writers recognised hope as potential rather than mere optimism. This tradition emphasises open-endedness; a disposition towards being surprised; and the recognition that things are not foreclosed, and that the unexpected will happen (Benjamin, 1940, as cited in Jameson, 2022; Bloch, 1998; Marcuse, 1964). Bloch argued that hope is not the opposite of fear but of memory, as it involves moving out of the past, as given in memory, towards the ability to think into the future. Hope in this sense is labour—as Freire (1994) noted, it requires active practice. Hope as embodied practice is something that is not situated in the individual but in intersubjective encounters; it is a labour of imagining with others, of generating alternative futures from both the materials at hand and those that might yet be imagined, and of how these might inform each other (Adorno et al., 1950; Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972; Bloch, 1998; Marcuse, 1964).

An approach to hope that diverges from that of Bloch within the Frankfurt School was offered by Walter Benjamin. His account of hope embraces an uneasy mix of theological and socialist commitments (Jameson, 2022). Benjamin drew upon messianic themes, suggesting that hope comes from the future, and that it is shaped by class position. He believed that the bourgeois classes, with their attachment to education, have a different relationship with hope than the working classes. The tension between Benjamin's theological and socialist inspirations splits his understanding of hope. On one hand, he stated, "Only for the sake of the hopeless have we been given hope", acknowledging that hope is conditioned by class. This implies that hope is not something the educated middle class can simply impart to others, as they do not share the "sense of living your life at the front", a feeling Benjamin associated with the true proletariat. While on the other hand, when asked if hope could exist outside bourgeois culture, Benjamin wryly replied, "Oh, plenty of hope, an infinite amount of hope—though not for us" (Jameson, 2022, p. 175). These two ideas—hope as something given to the hopeless and as an infinite resource unavailable to "us"—illustrate Benjamin's view of history as a process where modern narratives of progress often stall, creating periods of interregnum. In these times, new possibilities arise alongside troubling symptoms of societal stagnation.

For Benjamin, the capacity to sustain hope involves letting go of attachments to a painful past or a specific vision of the future. Instead, it requires the ability to reconfigure hope in new forms. This involves a "weak messianic power" that self-consciously restricts itself (Jameson, 2022, p. 177). This power does not impose new definitions of hope from a position of superiority but works pragmatically, engaging with immediate realities. Through this practical engagement, a vision of a radically different future can emerge, pieced together from present elements and their potential to resonate across diverse contexts (Jameson, 2019, p. 331).

Recent writing on hope as collective practices resonates with Benjamin's approach. Dawney et al. (2017) argue that alternatives to conceptions based on particularist visions of a 'good life' require hope to become an indeterminate set of actions in the present: these are actions "that do not train our attentions on impossible futures but instead serve to amplify joy in the present" (p. 6). Researchers working on understanding and fostering hope among young people emphasise the importance of collective embodied practice (Nairn, 2019; Russell & Oakley, 2016; Verlie et al., 2021). Joy emerges in this approach not as a frivolous emotion but, rather, part of what connects us to others, augmenting our collective capacities. Practices of hope in this way can "produce ways of thinking, acting and being together that generate previously unimaginable futures"

(Dawney et al, 2017, p. 7). Collective practices require "an attentiveness to the moments when 'islands of hope' are established and [to] the social conditions that makes their emergence possible" (p. 8). Key to the possibility of hope here, then, is an attunement to current conditions and to the creation and strengthening of relations with others.

Working between traditions of hope

Between these two traditions we do not anticipate a coming together, as if our small group of sociologists have the power to create a synthesis that overcomes the historical tendency of Western thought to appropriate other's ideas, if not to dominate them. In our attention to the insights available from both Mātauranga Māori and the Frankfurt School for how 'learning hope' occurs in He Kaupapa Tūmanako, we wish to sustain a gap between the traditions such that each remains within their own orbits, even as they each contribute insights to our project. We find the precedent for this in the Oceanic notion of *vā*, of practices among Pacifica cultures to ensure recognition of personal mana in the context of people's participation in collectively significant events (Eteuati & Young, 2021). Such practices also protect *vā* as an object – the *vā* being "a space between two objects that is treated as if it were an object itself" (Kaʻili, 2005, p. 90). Recognition of the *vā* sustains a gap that enables social connections to function anew as circumstances require. As Kaʻili notes (2005, p. 105), "Because *vā* can be organized and reorganized, it is dynamic and fluid, changing all the time in response to other formations of space." In our process of drawing upon Mātauranga Māori and the Frankfurt School, our goal, in keeping with awareness of the *vā*, was to draw upon both while preserving their respective analytic abilities to adjust independently to new socio-historical situations.

Methodology

In this article, we draw on high school students' evaluations of two years of He Kaupapa Tūmanako, together with our team's reflections over the past five years of developing and teaching the course. As described below, we began teaching the course in-person at one school in Manawatū, and we have now run the course online with students from around Aotearoa (Manawatū, Tāmaki Makaurau, Taumaranui, Hawke's Bay, the West Coast) as well as internationally (Reykjavik (Iceland), Nadi (Fiji) and Suzhou (China)). Working with a teacher representative at each school, we recruited students for He Kaupapa Tūmanako by advertising via posters and announcements from teachers. Interested participants then attended an information session online to learn more about the course. The course itself has been run entirely outside formal learning hours (initially, students attended in-person lunchtime sessions, and the online course was run in the evening). There is no formal grading, connection to classroom curricula, nor compulsion to participate.

We used an anonymised survey to evaluate the course, inviting students to comment on their engagement with the course material and how the course has shaped their thinking and practices of hope. Massey University Human Ethics Committee approved the project as low risk (notification number: 4000027070). The primary ethical concerns that required mitigation related to matters of confidentiality and the fact that the participants were young people. An information sheet and consent form were produced as part of this process, using appropriate language for young people. The research was explained in person, and we stressed that participation in the research was completely voluntary and was not a requirement of doing the course. Parental consent was secured for students under 16 years of age. Anonymous survey links were provided at the completion of the course and the survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Ninety students completed the survey over three iterations of the course (a response rate of 48%). All the survey participants were located within Aotearoa. The survey collected both open-ended qualitative

responses and answers to quantitative questions. The rich data that were generated enabled us to undertake a thematic analysis of students' responses. We also frequently met as a team, both during the course and after it, to reflect on the lessons we were learning and to adjust our teaching practices. The ideas and questions generated in these discussions also inform the reflections in this article. We recorded the main points of our reflection sessions in written form on a Google Doc after each team meeting, with one person nominated to be a scribe and others adding anything missed after the document was shared with the team. We analysed these notes by reading back through the reflections and eliciting key themes and moments in the evolution of the course, which we draw upon in the following sections.

Developing He Kaupapa Tūmanako/Project Hope

In this section, we discuss the evolution of He Kaupapa Tūmanako over the past five years, showing how the initiative has developed in response to student requests for new opportunities. Laying out the timeline of the initiative in this way allows us to first discuss the foundational course that was organised around three practices of hope (2020); then to demonstrate how we moved from in-person to online delivery (2021); added student mentors (2022); and developed a Leadership Certificate (2023). Presenting the course evolution in this way demonstrates how our theoretical commitment to grounding the course in Mātauranga Māori and the Frankfurt School entailed not only developing course material that drew from these theoretical traditions, but also the organic way that the course has developed as relationships with students, teachers and community partners have grown over time.

2020: Beginnings

We began developing He Kaupapa Tūmanako in April 2020, under the shadow of the first COVID-19 lockdown and amid questions the pandemic raised about what the future might look like. We approached the course from its inception with a commitment to collaborative course design, bringing together theories and practices of hope from across the social sciences and humanities to create a course that is distinctly rooted in Aotearoa.

The course initially started as a face-to-face, six-week course with students at a Manawatū high school, beginning in August 2020. This was an unsettling time: students were back at school after the first COVID-19 lockdown, but still uncertain as to what the future might hold. We worked with a group of 28 students over a lunchtime once per week, with two sociologists leading the sessions. Our presence was broken up with the use of short talks (video or in person) from colleagues from multiple disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. We developed a course structure consisting of three course modules corresponding to three practices of hope (thought/whakaaro, relationships/whiti and action/ātetenga) that engaged students in individual and group exercises, enabling them to build individual–community–environment connections.

Module one, 'Practices of whakaaro/thought', drew from Mātauranga Māori, particularly the concept of whakapapa. Whakapapa teaches us to gain strength from the past as we look to the future: Te tōrino haere whakamua, whakamuri (At the same time the spiral is going forward, it is going back; at the same time it compels us towards, it is returning). In this, our students were guided by Associate Professor Krushil Watene. Students wrote about people from their past who have influenced them and shared these stories with other students; then together, they created a group legacy that they would like to be remembered for. The second session of this module focused on whanaungatanga, and how to build relationships with people to take collective action on an issue. Students learned from international peace campaigner Thomas Nash about "building a room of the possible" with people who might have very different views to their own, through practices such as

developing relationships based on friendship, checking in with people along the way, reframing issues away from views that attempt to maintain the status quo, being vulnerable, and being bicultural. Students then worked in groups to think about how they would use these practices to build a room of the possible on an issue they cared about.

Module two, 'Practices of whiti/connection', introduced students to the practice of connecting to the environment around them. They learnt about how to find out about the everyday items around them that are connected to people and places around the world, and they shared images and stories of their favourite places and objects that are meaningful to them. Then they practised how simple acts of noticing things can be a powerful way to move, reflect and feel with intention. Dr. April Bennett conducted a session outside, where students drew on Mātauranga Māori relationships with plants, and learnt how to tune into the life in the ngāhere (forest) using all their senses. This is a practice that Dr. Bennett learned from Manaaki Whenua ecologist Mahuru Wilcox (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Ranginui). In the second session of this module, students worked together to trace the commodity chain of a common food item they eat for breakfast, to learn about how, through food, we are connected to things and places around the world. Dr. Carolyn Morris led the students in a practice of 'utopian food thought', which resonates with Frankfurt School conceptions of hope that seek to understand power relations in the present, and then work collectively to re-imagine these. Dr. Morris noted to students, "The first step is understanding the food world as it is currently arranged so that we can think about whether we want things to be this way, imagine the ways it might be different, and together think about what we can do."

In the third and final module, we looked at practices of ātetenga/action. Students learned from Dr. Elspeth Tilley how to actively practise hope through resistive creativity. Dr. Tilley explained that feeling angry or sad about big issues like climate change is normal and healthy, and practising 'active hope' (Macy & Johnstone, 2022) involves embracing these feelings as valid, and "seeing with new eyes by exploring perspectives that increase a sense of possibility". Students worked in groups to collectively construct a short protest ('slam') poem on an issue that they care about. (Several student poems are featured on pages 79–91 of this issue of *New Zealand Sociology*). The second session in this module focused on whanaungatanga, stressing the importance of building relationships and learning from diverse people and ideas. This session also drew on the Frankfurt School's emphasis on recognising current relations of power that shape our relationships with others, so that we might re-imagine relationships based in more equitable social structures. In this session, students listened to Dr. Shine Choi's conversation on hope with her Senegalese collaborator and learned from Dr. Choi about how building relationships with people from different geographical and social locations can be a practice of hope. The students then worked in groups to draw maps of where they might go and who they might meet on a 'gap year' after high school, re-imagining travel as something that could be grounded in equitable relationships.

2021: Moving online

As with so many things during the pandemic, COVID-19 forced changes in how social situations were managed. For He Kaupapa Tūmanako, this saw us adopt a streamlined (four-week) online version of the course. An unanticipated advantage came from this change, in that the adaptation allowed us to reach an audience of students across Aotearoa and overseas. Through the adoption of an online format, we have created an interactive learning environment that blends synchronous and asynchronous activities, using both individual and collaborative activities.

We collaborated with e-learning specialists to create engaging and emotive learning experiences. Research in teaching and learning emphasises the importance of capturing students' attention early on, which is crucial for retention. This can be achieved through priming activities that spark curiosity and immediately highlight the personal relevance of the course while also modelling collaborative work (Barkley & Major, 2020).We continued to centre the course around the three modules (whakaaro/thought, whiti/connection and ātetenga/action), building cumulatively into more involved forms of group engagement as the relationships between students grew. This began with students posting comments on each other's creative work using an online whiteboard (Module 1), moving to the co-creation of a video of their environment (Module 2), to the collaborative creation of a group slam poem (Module 3). Weekly group Zoom sessions provided students with opportunities to work in real-time together. Each group created a website where they showcased their work.

Many of the activities we had developed for the in-person course had to be re-thought to enable students to complete them online. For example, when we shared stories about places we are connected to, students chose objects nearby that were personally significant. Another switch we made from our in-person course to online was how we shared difficult or personal topics. For the in-person course, we could build trust in the room and created exercises that allowed students to share anonymously. On Zoom, we tried to achieve a similar sense of safe sharing with ample use of phrase-cloud tools, where students could anonymously share their thoughts and then discuss in groups some of the common themes that arose. For example, in Zoom sessions we asked students to anonymously reflect on the things that make them feel hopeless. Collectively and in real time, students inputted their answers into a word cloud, sharing some of their fears, worries and anxieties.

By using the word cloud, students could see, feel and relate to the experiences of their peers. After completing the word cloud activity, students went into breakout rooms and talked through some of the big themes coming up. By being vulnerable with one another, engaging in meaningful dialogue, and listening to each other intently, the foundation for trust amongst students was laid.

2022: Bringing in student mentors

After our first cohort of students graduated from the online course, several of them came to us and said they wanted to do the course again. We were concerned they would get bored doing the same thing twice, and after talking with them, we decided to add an opportunity for mentoring, which has become a key aspect of the course architecture. After the completion of a course, students can return as graduates to further develop their practices of hope through leadership and care through a mentorship (tuakana/teina) relationship. We assigned mentors to a small group of students, and mentors assisted students in Zoom sessions and collaborative exercises. This change enabled students more freedom to work together in guided groups without the presence of us adults 'in the room'. The mentors were trained in mentoring practices before the course began, and they engaged together in weekly team reflections after each course Zoom session to talk over how the session went, what they might do next time, and to offer support and encouragement to each other.

Figure 1: Word cloud used to enable students to reflect on the things that make them feel hopeless

2023: The Certificate of Leadership for Troubling Times

In 2023, a group of students who had completed the course and had also mentored came to us and said they wanted to do more. We met with the students and together came up with the idea of a course that would help them to enact practices of hope in their school or community through working in small groups, planning and carrying out initiatives with the guidance of our team. We first held what we called the Certificate of Leadership for Troubling Times in 2023, and we are now holding it again in 2024. This was co-created with students as it developed, with the underlying foundations of the course based on connecting as small groups and with people acting on issues they care about in the community. Every week we meet as a group over Zoom, with the small groups using 'break-out rooms' to work on their projects and reflect on sticking points or things that are not working.

The sticking points are opportunities for trying new things; in this way, the course recognises that in uncertain times, young people need to be able to be flexible when things don't go right, and to learn from failure. This vision of learning through sticking points is at the root of our model of collaborative action. Students record their sticking points and how they worked through them as they plan and carry out their actions. Then, at the end of the course, they publicly present their projects, identifying what the sticking points were, how they worked through them, and what they learned through this process. In this way, the course is centred upon the process of learning to take collaborative action, rather than focusing only on the outcome. Examples of actions the students have done include working towards opening a sustainable bookshop, creating a mentorship programme for young women to connect with industry professionals, engaging school senior leadership teams to develop a proposal for solar panels, engaging with the local Palmerston North Council with a tree-planting proposal, raising awareness about endangered species in the Rangitikei region, and presenting student concerns on vaping to public health policymakers.

What do students gain from the course?

Student feedback

Student evaluations suggest that the course is a transformative learning experience that helps young people become hopeful and resilient in the face of current challenges. In the evaluation survey used across the three most recent iterations of the four-week foundation course (two in 2023 and one in 2024), 98% of the students who responded (from a total of 90 respondents) said they would recommend the course to friends. Ninety-seven per cent of students detailed their plans to use practices of hope as they look ahead to the future, including practices of "regular reflection and gratitude", "connect[ing] more to the spaces around me", "to be more present" and to "take greater action and initiative about the things of importance". Students planned to practise the lessons from the course when they feel stressed or face challenges at school and elsewhere: "Whenever any challenge arises, or I find myself frustrated. So, in every aspect of life" (T4, 2023).

Furthermore, 94% of the students said they feel more knowledgeable about the role of hope-based practices in uncertain times. When we asked the students how they understood hope at the end of the course, many of the responses resonated with the course's core principles of hope as practice and connection:

> One key learning I'll take away is how to reframe hope. It's become more of a sense of connection, a look into the future, and a goal for me now. (T1, 2023)
>
> Not only a feeling but a process of thought and action that we can use to see positive change. (T4, 2023)
>
> Instead of just wishing for things to be different, I think of different perspectives and thoughts. Hope is not only based on our future but our past and ancestors. (T4, 2023)
>
> A way to connect with people. (T1, 2024)

Course evaluations showed that students responded positively to the course activities that drew from the Mātauranga Māori concepts of whakapapa and whanaungatanga, and from the Frankfurt School ideas of reckoning with the present to re-imagine potential futures. For example, students noted that the practices of whakaaro/thought in Module 1 enabled them to think about themselves and their relationships with others in new ways:

> I had never really thought about the legacy I wanted to leave behind. (T4, 2023)
>
> Writing to someone from my past made me think about a lot of people and what they have done/do for me. (T1, 2024)
>
> Hearing about everyone's influences, the people special to them, I could get to know them in a new way. (T4, 2023).

These comments reflect the course focus on building, enhancing and developing networks of relationships. Collectivism, based on the positive maintenance of enduring relationships, is at the heart of a Mātauranga Māori approach. Moreover, the emphasis on whakapapa suggests an obligation to generations past and future. The maintenance of these crucial connections is, then, not a matter of individual endeavour but rather a generational project of connection that exists in sharp contrast to the short-sighted individualism characteristic of late-capitalism.

Furthermore, what Mātauranga Māori furnishes us with specifically is a form of collectivism that incorporates not only ourselves but also the non-human natural world that surrounds us and nurtures us. Several students said that Module 2 (whiti/connection) was their favourite, and pointed to the ways that sharing objects that are meaningful to them allowed them to connect with others and their environments:

> I looked around the table and spotted the mug beside me. I went like 'Yes! That's the one!' I think this course lets you find what's been special to you, but you never paid attention to. (T4, 2023)

Many students also talked in their evaluations about how profound the experience of sensing the ngāhere (forest) was for them. Indeed, we were able to experience the transformative power of this exercise during our first face-to-face course. While Dr. Bennett, who led the session, wanted to take the students to a nearby park, they were not allowed out of school so we headed to the nearest stand of trees we could find—the row of trees on the school driveway. At first, it didn't bode well for deep reflection; cars were whizzing past on the road outside and we had to move every time a teacher wanted to drive past. But as we stood learning about the trees —and smelling, feeling and listening around each of them—April suddenly said excitedly, "It's a kūmarahou!" A small shrubby tree was nestled near a shed on the driveway; this was the kūmarahou, a significant tree in rongoā Māori (the traditional Māori healing system) and one that is difficult to find in Palmerston North. Since that session in 2020, we have continued to hear from students that the school driveway is now a different place to them, one that harbours treasures including the kūmarahou. In this way, students learnt about how Mātauranga Māori creates an obligation for us to foster and maintain healthy connections to one another and to the earth that sustains us.

The evaluations also suggest that students were able to build relationships with other students as the course progressed. In the course design, we aimed for each successive module to invite greater collaboration and sharing among the group, so that students could build trust in each other. This culminated in the creation of a group slam poem in Module 3 (ātetenga/action), which required students to confront difficult issues, talk about things they were concerned about and work together to respond to the issue through creativity. In this way, the exercise drew on the Frankfurt School attention to the injustices of the present and collectively re-imagining the future, and from Mātauranga Māori, a focus on whanaungatanga. Seventeen students in recent iterations (24% of the survey respondents) noted that the slam poem was their most memorable aspect of the course. Their responses suggest that this exercise allowed them to talk about difficult things they had experienced and that they loved the act of creating something together:

> Writing the poem about bullying with my group, it was really great to see us all come together with ideas and talk about what we had been through. (T4, 2023)
>
> When we talked about slam poetry ideas and seeing all the different things that people were passionate about. (T1, 2024)
>
> The poetry was my favourite because it gave people (including myself) ways to express problems we are currently facing or watch happen to our society [sic] so it's good when voicing things like that. (T1, 2024)

The addition of student mentors further enabled students to build trust with each other. In evaluations, students consistently noted how mentors encouraged them to share:

> The Zoom calls were engaging, and the mentors really made me and probably even others to feel confident and safe enough to share their thoughts and views. (T1, 2023)

Students noted that one of the reasons they were able to gain confidence and feel so connected with other students was the atmosphere in the course. The combination of mentors, teaching staff and other students created a community where they could share things in anticipation of being accepted:

> Being able to share my opinions without the fear of criticism. (T4, 2023)
>
> Getting to share and talk about stuff without feeling judged. (T1, 2024)

Coursework completion statistics

He Kaupapa Tūmanako consists of weekly Zoom sessions as well as an interactive course website, where students work asynchronously by themselves to watch short videos and complete weekly exercises. Students upload their completed work to the course site, but it is not graded. The completion rates of coursework in He Kaupapa Tūmanako have been modest. Across the four courses that ran during 2022 and 2023, only 20% of students completed all the coursework. Yet anecdotally (because we did not regularly keep records of weekly attendance for all iterations of the course), the rate of participation in the course's online sessions has remained high throughout. For example, in 2022 when we did keep Zoom attendance records, of 131 students who participated:

- 18 students (16%) completed all individual coursework, with all but two of these students also attending Zoom sessions.
- 58 students (51%) completed at least one of the three main individual coursework activities, with all but five of these students also attending Zoom sessions.
- 55 students (49%) only participated in the Zoom sessions.

These data show that the participation in Zoom sessions was high among all the participants during the 2022 iteration of the course, with 124 students attending at least one Zoom session (95%). However, coursework completion was low, with around half of the participants only attending the Zoom sessions and not completing any coursework exercises. Low completion rates are nothing new in the world of online learning platforms (Jordan, 2015), and, indeed, the completion rates for He Kaupapa Tūmanako exceed those associated with MOOC-type courses by a considerable margin (Fu et al., 2021). That point aside, our experience with students' engagement raises a question as to how the course functions as a site of learning for participants, where we see high levels of student participation even though they may not formally complete the courses.

One answer to this puzzle of high Zoom participation and low coursework completion lies in students' responses to the survey question as to their most memorable aspect of the course. Of 70 students who responded to this question in 2023–2024, 32 students (46% of responses) talked about connecting with other young people as the most memorable aspect:

> No doubt my group. Even in the first week we just got along so good and were all taking part in discussions it was so awesome. I really felt by the end of today's session that my group are my friends. (T1, 2024)
>
> Getting to communicate with others, and getting to hear their thoughts (which help expand my knowledge and be more open-minded to others' ideas). (T4, 2023)
>
> Hope is easier with other people :) sometimes I came into the class a little low, but once meeting with my group and completing the activities I instantly felt more hopeful! (T1, 2023)

> [I learnt] that connecting with different people from different countries or ethnicities is a really good thing. (T1, 2023)

These responses often showed the importance of being able to hear about similar experiences, problems and concerns that other young people were going through, which enabled students to understand others and feel less isolated:

> That there is so many people going through the same thing as me at the same time, and as much as that is distressing, it is really comforting to know I'm not alone. (T4, 2023)
>
> I think hearing people's different stories and backgrounds. There were some that really made me think and I got to see people's other experiences and how different their lives are to mine. (T4, 2023)
>
> …just knowing I'm not alone. (T1, 2024)

As shown in these responses, the sharing of common experiences and learning about people from different backgrounds allowed students to connect with people from across schools, countries and cultural backgrounds. This is the learning that happens in Zoom sessions, rather than through the asynchronous individual coursework elements. In the next section, we reflect further on a contradiction that has confounded us as we have developed the course: In a course with no formal assessment and no recognition through formal qualifications, what is it that keeps students coming back, and what does this tell us about the contemporary moment?

Learning through 'bootlegging' hope

He Kaupapa Tūmanako came together and has adapted organically. We began in 2020 as a reaction to COVID-19 and the isolation created by the pandemic. We had no expectations of the course besides perhaps being a one-off in-person experience of us reaching out to a younger cohort, perhaps fulfilling a desire that we too had to connect in the aftermath of the first lockdown. That the course did not end with this first iteration, but has continued to grow, was due to something that the course sparked among students, as well as among senior managers at Massey University who saw in this initiative a chance to position Massey as a university that responds to the zeitgeist of our time through community engagement.

We have sought to walk something of a tightrope as the course has unfolded. On one hand, the openness and freedom we have experienced from the normal restraints of formal assessment and the bureaucracy of university administration has enabled us to embrace a reflective pedagogy that has seen the course change in new, and unexpected, ways each year, responding rapidly to student desires and new ideas within the teaching team. But on the other hand, the lack of formal assessment and recognition means that the course doesn't constitute the kind of object that is recognisable to an institution that delivers State-validated qualifications and is thus difficult to sustain financially. We have resisted attempts to charge students fees to undertake the course as we want it to be accessible to anyone, and in this, we have been fortunate to receive support first from our College, and then from outside sponsorship. We have also resisted suggestions that the course be more formalised, with assessment that would tie into high school curricula or university credits, because this would necessitate a change to the model of flexible course development. But the lack of formalised measures of achievement also means that there is little external reward encouraging students to complete.

Our analysis of student evaluations and coursework completion rates in the previous section revealed a puzzling outcome. On the one hand, we found that students engaged strongly in the interpersonal sessions

of the course, and this is matched by enthusiastic evaluations of the course offerings. This suggests a desire to connect. But, on the other hand, completion of coursework activities was relatively low. This suggests that students are interacting with the course content in ways that diverge from the intended focus on practices of hope. One way to understand how students learn within He Kaupapa Tūmanako is through a return to the two ways of viewing hope that we identified in the literature review: the juxtaposition between hope as release from a painful past or hope as attachment to a preferred future. Student experiences in He Kaupapa Tūmanako suggest that hope instead requires a human capacity to move the coordinates of hopefulness into forms that are simultaneously the same and different. We term this a 'bootlegged hope'; that is, students taking lessons from the course and the materials involved and creating their own meanings of hope.

We see this bootlegged hope in the reflections from mentors who talk about the unexpected conversations and connections that emerge in break-out rooms, and the student evaluations that speak to the ways the course has sparked new ways of seeing themselves and others around them, rather than any specific course exercise or teaching. We also see it in the concerns students reveal about the current historical situation near the end of the course, when their insights into what personally threatens their hope exceeds the socially approved responses with which they first introduced themselves. Rather than leaving the course with a more hopeful outlook, some students may leave more open with others about their feelings of anxiety. This aligns with the concept of "weak messianic power" from Walter Benjamin, which contrasts with our usual approach as educators who hope to instil practices of hope in our students. For us as teachers, weak messianic power means simultaneously holding the idea of hope-as-practices that framed the course design, and letting that formulation alter as it is put to work by students. By doing so, we can witness how students develop their own forms of hope, often in ways we couldn't have anticipated.

Conclusion

Our process of course development in He Kaupapa Tūmanako demonstrates how collaborative practice grounded in relationships across the social sciences and humanities can create a course that is distinctly situated in Aotearoa. By way of conclusion, we look outward to muse upon the fraught process of working with diverse theoretical approaches, and to what our small initiative can offer to the larger project of knowledge production in Aotearoa sociology.

In our process of drawing upon Mātauranga Māori and the Frankfurt School, we did not aim to merge their insights into a single framework. Instead, we have sought to allow each to stand alongside the other. Mātauranga Māori has continually adapted over centuries to changing circumstances and the profound uncertainty and violence of settler-colonialism, and offers critical tools that allow young people to deal with the myriad challenges from the past, playing out in the present and constitutive of the future. Frankfurt School social theory emerged against a backdrop of ascendant fascism and offered versions of hope that stood in stark contrast to the brutalism of its age. Together these tools provide young people with exactly the kinds of critical skills necessary to navigate a world plagued by uncertainty.

Our analysis of learning within He Kaupapa Tūmanako emphasises the practice of allowing each thought tradition to remain within its own orbit, even as both contribute insights. The writings on hope by the Frankfurt School help us articulate a gap that students' experiences have revealed in our understanding of hope—a gap between hope that moves away from the past and hope that comes from the future. Mātauranga Māori provides confidence that we don't have to resolve this gap. It teaches us that both forms of hope, and the temporalities they inhabit, are always in play. The difference between these visions of hope can thus remain open, with the understanding that future challenges will determine which vision periodically matters.

One key challenge in drawing from diverse theoretical influences is ensuring that Western thought traditions, which have historically sought to dominate and appropriate Indigenous knowledges, may instead walk alongside them. The Frankfurt School has the potential to be a reflective co-traveller in the contemporary "mayhem" of knowledge production in which Māori scholarship finds itself (Smith et al., 2016)—in which the legitimacy of scientific knowledge depends upon recognition of Mātauranga Māori, even as the administrative architecture of science undermines mātauranga. The Frankfurt School can help highlight how the contradictions facing Māori knowledge are not of its own making but stem from the racial capitalism of colonisation, much like how insights from the Frankfurt School supported Māori scholarship in the 1990s in critiquing the contradictions in Māori education, where providers had to choose between autonomy and adequate funding (Smith, 2015).

In the case of He Kaupapa Tūmanako, it is not immediately clear what exactly constitutes the gap to be nurtured—the relational sphere of *vā*—between Mātauranga Māori and the Frankfurt School. This gap is as much a product of our project as it is an outcome of previous interactions between practitioners of the two traditions. The uncertainty surrounding the nature of this gap does not diminish its importance. Rather, ongoing encounters between traditions that take the *vā* as a guiding principle—to which the present account of He Kaupapa Tūmanako contributes—can allow the historically contingent relationship between Mātauranga Māori and the Frankfurt School to evolve into one of mutual support. This could involve practices of translation between the two, with careful attention to the relational space of *vā*. Such translation wouldn't be controlled by an imagined synthesis that dictates the correctness of interactions but would operate through mutual support in addressing the socio-political challenges each tradition faces.

Writing this article together has allowed us to reflect on the unexpected directions He Kaupapa Tūmanako has taken over four years, and that it continues to take in response to students' ideas and desires. We suggest that the course can tell us something important about how this cohort may be learning in the face of accumulating global crises. More than anything, our students appear to value the connections to their peers and to the world around them that the course provides. It is precisely notions of connection and collectivity based on whanaungatanga and whakapapa that students repeatedly tell us are crucial to their reinvigorated sense of hope. The unanticipated, creative ways students engage with the course have produced outcomes that go far beyond our expectations as educators. Our experience suggests that hope is not something that can be neatly taught or contained within formal structures, but something that emerges in unpredictable yet powerful ways as students create their own forms of bootlegged hope. As sociologists we find this to be at once both interesting and indeed hopeful, particularly in the face of 40 years of individualising neoliberal orthodoxy exacerbated by atomising technologies and the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

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