Abstract

Industry Training is an important location for Māori learners, with over 30,000 trainees identifying as Māori annually. The skills and qualifications gained through this training are important for meaningful careers, potential business ownership, and social and economic wellbeing. Despite this there has been little research exploring the experiences of Māori in workplace based industry training.

The Industry Training Federation in partnership with the NZ Motor ITO, the Electrotechnology ITO and the Building and Construction ITO have recently completed research exploring the experiences of Māori workplace learners. Kahui Tautoko Consulting, a Kaupapa Māori research firm, undertook the project in collaboration with the ITOs.

The project aimed to answer three questions:

1. What is distinctive about how Māori workers learn in workplace settings, specifically in trades industries?
2. Are there aspects of how Māori workers learn that may provide pointers to how completions can be increased?
3. How can training and career pathways be strengthened for Māori workers?

The 18 month project involved a literature review; data analysis; focus groups; and, most significantly, monthly interviews with Māori learners. During these interviews learners were able to tell us in their own words what it means to be a Māori trainee, what factors have helped with their training, and what barriers have stood in their way.

It is anticipated that the research will lead to practical recommendations concerning how ITOs and others can better serve the needs of Māori workplace learners.

This research responds to the conference themes: The “voice” of VET research: Whose and who listens?; The economic and industry impacts of VET research; and The social and community impacts of VET research.
Introduction

This paper provides the initial findings from a research study titled ‘Māori Learners in Workplace Settings’, which was recently undertaken by Kāhui Tautoko Consulting Ltd in collaboration with the Industry Training Federation (ITF), the New Zealand Motor Industry Training Organisation Inc (MITO), the Electrotechnology Industry Training Organisation (ETITO) and the Building and Construction Industry Training Organisation (BCITO).

Industry Training is an important location for Māori tertiary learners, with over 30,000 trainees identifying as Māori each year. However, despite this there has been little systematic exploration of the experiences of Māori in industry training. Moreover, while there is an established body of research around Māori learners in institutional settings, there is far less concerning the experience of Māori learners within workplace settings – particularly in trades industries. This means that ITOs’ practices to address the needs of their Māori trainees have developed in an ad hoc manner, with little opportunity to capture and share ‘what works’ as well as identify barriers to success.

There is therefore a clear need for research to provide analysis and interpretative comment that can be used to inform policy, learning and achievement strategies and evidence based tools.

This project seeks to remedy the research gap by exploring the experiences of Māori workplace learners in ITOs across three ‘trades’ settings: building & construction, the motor industry, and electrotechnology. In particular, the project aims to answer three specific research questions:

1. What is distinctive about how Māori apprentices learn or approach learning in workplace settings, specifically in trades industries?
2. Are there aspects of how Māori apprentices learn or approach learning that may provide pointers to how completions can be increased?
3. How can training and career pathways be strengthened for Māori apprentices?

These findings in this paper bring together qualitative data collected through the research programme which has included: focus groups with a range of key stakeholders such as learners, employers, ITO field staff, careers-advisers and iwi representatives; and a series of learner interviews conducted over a six month period which occurred between July 2011 and February 2012.

Literature Review

In August 2011, Kāhui Tautoko Consulting Ltd completed the first phase of the research programme – a desk based research study which comprised a literature review and analysis of data obtained from the partnering ITOs and data located on relevant websites such as Ministry of Education and Tertiary Education Commission. The purpose of the desk research was to ‘set the scene’ to the overall research
project and to identify characteristics concerning Māori learners, predominantly involved in trade settings.

Key findings from the desk research were:

- The profile of Māori learners engaged in industry training was that they are younger, are pursuing lower level qualifications compared to their peers and many are not completing the requirements of their courses;
- A disproportionate number of Māori learners have few or no secondary school qualifications prior to enrolling into an industry training programme;
- Higher termination rates exist amongst Māori learners relative to non-Māori;
- Not all Māori learners are the same and there is no single characteristic or definition of a Māori learner. Understanding individual learning approaches, needs and background is important to successful learning outcomes;
- The teacher, often the employer in workplace settings, is one of the most important influences on learner progression and achievement;
- Whanaungatanga was identified as a critical success factor for Māori learners which stressed the importance of incorporating and engaging the wider whānau in the learning process as well as highlighting the need for peer relationships that help to create a comfortable working and learning environment; and
- Cultural identity is important for Māori learners which suggests that incorporating these values assists in maintaining Māori learners. Further, developing a Māori presence encourages Māori success.

Methodology

A Kaupapa Māori approach provided the overall methodology to this research. The naming of this research framework as Kaupapa Māori research explicitly states the position from which the Māori researchers involved engaged in the research process.

Kāhui Tautoko ground their work within established principles of Kaupapa Māori practice using an approach similar to Pipi et al. (2003) which embodies:

- Aroha ki te tangata - a respect for all participants involved in the research;
- He kanohi kitea - The seen face; face to face presentation;
- Titiro, Whakarongo ... kōrero - Look, listen...speak
- Manaaki ki te tangata - Share and host people; be generous
- Kia Tūpato - Be cautious culturally and professionally
- Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata - Do not trample over the mana of people
- Kia ngākau māhaki - Don’t flaunt your knowledge

The project used a staged mixed methods approach in which each phase informed the research in the next phase. This research project was conducted in three stages:

- A data and literature review in order to ‘set the scene’ to the overall research and to identify characteristics concerning Māori learners, predominantly involved in trade settings;
Focus groups held in three regions, comprising ITO staff, employers and other key stakeholders to get an ‘external’ view of Māori learners’ experiences of training, and any enablers and/or barriers to completion;

Interviews with a cohort of Māori learners drawn from the three regions and the three partnering ITOs, who were visited on a monthly basis over the course of six months to discuss training experiences and key success factors.

The final sample achieved for the focus group engagements comprised 35 responses in total. These responses included findings from both focus group discussions and electronic surveys that were completed. A total of 20 surveys were completed, with 15 participants engaged in the focus group process.

At the beginning of the learner engagement process a sample of 41 learners were confirmed to participate. The final sample achieved at the end of the six month engagement process comprised 34 learners in total. The reduction in learners that occurred during the engagement process is predominantly due to issues such as ceasing employment or the apprenticeship or potentially a loss of interest in participating in the research.

Findings and discussion

Findings are divided into two sections – one based on responses from stakeholders and the other based on responses from learners. In each of these sections several themes are explored.

Responses from stakeholders

Personal attributes
A number of comments received from stakeholders related to the personal attributes and qualities needed by learners to successfully complete their apprenticeship. Having a passion and enthusiasm for the chosen trade was seen as key to successful outcomes. Learners who lacked a real interest in their chosen trade were unlikely to complete their apprenticeship or moved into another career path.

Attitude was key in undertaking an apprenticeship. One comment was “skills you can teach but a bad attitude is difficult to change”. Professionalism was also signalled as being a key skill and attribute of successful apprentices. A number of comments received indicated that there were a number of young Māori apprentices who lacked basic workplace skills such as punctuality, communication skills (particularly with clients) and taking instruction.

Importance of positive relationships
A number of success factors were identified by stakeholders in regards to learners completing their apprenticeship. One issue repeated many times was the influence of relationships on learning outcomes. Relationships between learner and employer, learner and whānau, learner and tutor, whānau and employer were all highlighted as being important to the learner progressing well through the apprenticeship.
Developing quality relationships with Māori learners could often be challenging. Māori learners tended to be more reserved and it took longer to build confidence and trust. Regular engagement, constant communication and taking an interest in learners beyond just the programme requirements were seen as key to building positive relationships. Learners who had good relationships with their employers and tutors tended to be more open to asking questions and asking for help.

The relationship with the whānau was seen as being important, particularly for Māori learners. Whānau were seen as being a huge motivational force, monitoring progress and keeping learners on track. Despite this a number of advisors, employers and tutors found it difficult to get good engagement from the whānau.

**Distinctiveness of Māori**

When asked what was distinctive about Māori learners, it was commonly stated that Māori learners performed better and more comfortably when working in groups of similar interests and values. In particular Māori tended to be more comfortable when surrounded by other Māori.

There were a number of comments from stakeholders who believed that Māori tended to be more “hands on” and more suited to practical learning styles. Māori were more inclined to grasp knowledge and new ideas through being shown or working with their hands as opposed to reading it in a book.

Māori learners also tended to be “casual” in the learning style which was seen as being somewhat different to non-Māori learners. Māori learners were seen as being laid back, liked to be in environments with a lot of humour and where they were surrounded by peers. Māori learners tended to be shy and did not often ask for assistance or ask questions if unsure. This meant that the training advisors, tutors and employers tended to have to prompt more to be sure that learners were clear on the instructions and requirements. It also meant that Māori learners tended to need more one on one support.

**Barriers to completion**

Discussions also focussed around what stakeholders considered to be ‘barriers’ for Māori apprentices in completing their apprenticeship. Responses focussed particularly around learners’ upbringing and environment and identified these as key influences on how prepared apprentices are or contributing to how determined a learner can be in the working forum.

Financial responsibilities sometimes impacted on the success of the apprentice with some Māori unable to finance transport to/from the job and particularly gaining access to outside assistance such as night classes or block courses.

Other external factors which were noted as often hindering success included issues such as whānau needing them at home, or a partner being recently pregnant or had
a baby which meant they were required to be at home. Generally it was discussed that often the home environment took priority.

Responses from Learners

Learner Backgrounds
Learners come from a variety of backgrounds which makes it difficult to characterise Māori apprentices. Some were from poor families, rurally based, very whānau orientated that didn’t do well at school while others had excelled at school, were from middle class families and urban based.

Furthermore, many learners had a variety of educational backgrounds. Many of the learners within the electrical industry had completed high school requirements and chose to pursue vocational forms of education. Many of the remaining apprentices finished school early and preferred ‘hands on work’ which guided the learners to follow ‘hands on’ type work. It was often noted by the learners that the nature of the work was an obvious reason behind why learners remained in their chosen trade. A large number of the apprentices who participated in the research had little or no formal qualifications.

Getting into an apprenticeship
All learners had an interest in their chosen trade yet many of them have different motivations for getting into an apprenticeship. Some got into it because it was “in the family” e.g. dad was a builder, brother was a builder etc. Some just wanted a job. Some were pushed hard by their whānau. Some just came in off the street and asked their employer if they had a spot available. Some had gone through Gateway or a similar programme at school and some showed interest in the nature of the work they were undertaking. In a few cases they got into their apprenticeship through personal connections e.g. dad knew the boss, completed work for their brother etc. For one or two of the learners, the ITO had played a part in securing the apprenticeship. This was often due to previously established relationships with the ITO staff. All of the learners saw huge value in “getting their ticket”.

Progress with Apprenticeship
Most of the learners had enjoyed and spoke highly of their apprenticeship thus far. Some had identified that personal circumstances affected earlier stages of the apprenticeship, but are now determined to complete the remaining components of their apprenticeship. Most had supportive employers who were committed to getting them through and providing them with opportunities to broaden their skill base and experience. An employer had commented that he reminds his apprentice that “I’m not training you if you’re a slacker” which provides motivation for his apprentice.

Many had also commented that the ITO staff provided many different avenues of support which included setting up extra tutorial style classes and also providing the apprentice with the flexibility of contacting them at any time if they needed assistance. Some had spoken of changing employers because they felt like they
weren’t being treated very well or weren’t being given the opportunities to complete the various aspects of the apprenticeship. Some learners also talked about a ‘slow down’ within the industry which affected their employment and their ability to get experience working on different jobs.

**Apprenticeship Model**

Most of the learners believed that the apprenticeship model was pretty good. Most believed that the expectations were clear from the outset, that the training advisors and tutors were very helpful and that the majority of the theory work related to actual practice.

Apprentices commented that additional support was required at times which wasn’t always available. Many indicated that they had received support through night classes which was seen as providing a positive working environment for those who attend them. Cost, transport and time barriers were highlighted as being reasons why classes could not be attended. Having dedicated time focused on completing the theory work was seen as hugely beneficial. Working alongside other learners who often encountered the same issues (such as not understanding questions) was also seen as being helpful.

**ITO**

ITO field staff are seen as the face of the organisation and play a highly influential role in the learning outcomes of learners. Apprentices found the ITO advisors to be very helpful and always able to be contacted if required. Most would see the ITO staff every 2-3 months. Some believed that more regular visitation was required to keep things on track and moving along.

Many had commented that often the ITO staff member was a driving force behind them completing the necessary components. Many noted that their ITO advisor was a primary factor in completing the books on time. Training advisors who provided an ongoing “push” for their learners was viewed positively. Some felt that more support could be offered and more regular contact was preferred (e.g. once a month) especially towards the end of the apprenticeship.

Two responses indicated that they thought it was a positive having a Māori training advisor as it was easier to relate and there were usually whakapapa connections. These learners felt that if the industry had more Māori, particularly at more senior levels, that would encourage more Māori to become interested and involved. In any case learners felt that the knowledge, experience and relationship style of the ITO advisor was more important than ethnicity.

**Personal characteristics**

Many of the learners acknowledged that completing their apprenticeship was ultimately up to them. Most said that it requires a lot of discipline, self-sacrifice and a positive attitude. Apprentices who had completed their apprenticeship spoke of the need to be professional in their approach to work, showing initiative and a willingness to listen and learn.
A number of learners spoke of friends or other whānau who had started an apprenticeship but did not complete, which was largely put down to a lack of personal commitment and very distracting personal lives.

Relationships
One topic that was repeated many times was the influence of relationships on learning outcomes. Relationships between learner and employer, learner and whānau, learner and tutor, whānau and employer were all highlighted as being important to the learner progressing well through the apprenticeship.

Developing quality relationships with Māori learners could often be challenging. Māori learners tended to be more reserved and it took longer to build confidence and trust. Regular engagement, constant communication and taking an interest in learners beyond just the programme requirements were seen as key to building positive relationships. Learners who had good relationships with their employers and tutors tended to be more open to asking questions and asking for help.

Whānau
Many learners have noted the important influence their whānau has had on their apprenticeship. Many also pursue their apprenticeship because it is the “family business”. Many commented that their whānau only ever wanted the best for them so they are an ongoing reminder of why they are undertaking their apprenticeship.

However, many had different backgrounds when it came to whānau. Those who had done well generally had good support from whānau and this had been a driving force in them doing well. In other cases whānau had been a barrier often not getting involved or in a couple of cases actively dissuading learners. Whānau was seen as playing a big part in the outcomes achieved – both good and bad.

A number of the learners also had young families – a couple of children were born during the course of the research process. This was viewed as a huge motivational force for doing well and completing the apprenticeship but also threw up a few challenges in terms of cost, time and additional responsibilities.

Partners were identified as hugely influential in successfully navigating and progressing through the apprenticeship. A number of learners commented on their partners being the one who provided encouragement and support, as well as a stern reminder of their responsibilities when they slackened off. A number of the learners made comment that they did not think they would have kept with the apprenticeship if it had not been for their partners.

Relationship with Employer
Many learners spoke of the importance of having an employer who was genuinely committed to seeing them succeed. Many learners discussed the relationship with their employer/manager as very positive which means trust and confidence, open communication as well as offering support and mentoring. Learners spoke of the
good employers who provided them with an opportunity to work on a variety of different projects, essential to their apprenticeship, as well as get opportunities to sometimes project manage specific jobs. This results in a higher chance of completing the apprenticeship quicker and also adds variety to the job which the learners enjoy.

A small amount of the learners have not had a very positive working relationship with their employer which has meant they have changed their employment agency. This has added more stress on the apprenticeship because time is taken out of the programme to look for an employer willing to take them on and to continue with the apprenticeship. Some learners have remained out of the apprenticeship for a small while because they have not managed to find an employer. Others have commented that it was an easy transition.

**Differences for Māori**

When asked whether the learners think that being Māori makes a difference in how they learn or work, responses have been varied. All learners were keen to note that they want to be judged “just like everybody else” and that ultimately each individual apprentice is responsible for the outcomes they achieve, or don’t achieve.

There were varying responses however with some saying that the way Māori learn and/or work is distinctly different to their non-Māori peers. In particular some felt that the self-directed learning approach was less suited to Māori learners who needed more of a “push”. Some stated that to get any help, you generally have to ask for it. This was noted as something that Māori learners do not do often enough. The shy factor was seen as hindering some Māori learners.

There were a few comments that spoke of inherent characteristics of Māori that were different to non-Māori. Responses highlighted a common ‘relaxed’ nature of Māori learners. A number of responses also indicated that Māori were more suited to physical activity and work. Comments were made by learners that they joined a trade and an apprenticeship to avoid theoretical work. Some stated that they have a short concentration span, which means that they struggle to dedicate long hours to the ‘book work’.

There were small but not insignificant numbers of learners that believed that Māori were often stereotyped as the ‘dumb and lazy’. Some felt that tutors or advisors had low expectations of them and gave off the impression that it was only a matter of time before they terminated.

Other learners also discussed that often being the only Māori within the team; they were regularly trying to work harder than others to ensure that they were seen to be contributing positively to the working environment. Some learners who manage their own projects believed that they sometimes had to prove to the client that they had the adequate skills to complete the job.
Others believed that there was no difference between Māori and non-Māori learners and that any challenges, such as struggling with book work, were challenges faced by all ethnicities.

**Barriers**

The biggest barriers identified by apprentices were time, cost, difficulty in completing the theory component, the self-directed learning model and family or personal circumstances. Many said that it was difficult to complete all of the aspects of the apprenticeships because there weren’t always enough hours in the day. Some said that after working a full day that it was hard to go home and then complete all the book work, especially with home responsibilities like children or other members of the wider whānau. In some cases apprentices talked of employers not really providing many opportunities to complete the workbooks during work time which meant having to do it outside of work.

Also having to take time off for block courses was also difficult in terms of both time and cost (e.g. not getting paid during this time). Many said that the self-directed nature of completing the workbooks was difficult at times especially when help was needed. Most preferred if there was additional support available to help guide them through. In any case employers were often helpful, night classes and tutors were available (however some noted that it was cost prohibitive).

**Conclusions**

The primary objective of this report was to provide initial findings from the research that will help to inform the analysis and recommendations of the final report.

At this stage the research has provided an overview of lessons relating to experiences and issues regarding Māori learners in workplace settings. The contribution of the learners and stakeholders will assist in testing assumptions, increase understanding and helping to identify where improvements can be made.

As mentioned previously it is expected that the research will be a focused, practically orientated piece of work that points directly to specific actions and changes that the ITOs involved can make to ensure that they are meeting the needs of Māori learners in their industries. It is intended to build understanding of what is working with current models, what isn’t, and what can be done to improve them to better meet the needs of their Māori learners and thereby improve completion rates and pathways to higher-level qualifications.

The research team is now working with the participating ITOs and advisory group members to unpack the preliminary findings and discuss the potential implications for the ITOs and wider industry training sector.

The research project is expected to be completed by mid-2012.