



Abstracts

The impact of Te Atakura on teaching practice

By the Te Atakura team

2025



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**Transforming Tertiary Education in
New Zealand by focusing on the learning
experiences and outcomes of ākonga Māori**



Te Atakura is an organisation-wide, culturally responsive, relationship-based practical inquiry model aimed at achieving *ōritetanga* (equitable outcomes). It began at UCOL in 2013 as a pilot programme based on the research and efforts of Te Kotahitanga, designed and implemented by Professor Russel Bishop and his colleagues at the University of Waikato, and funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. Since its inception, Te Atakura has demonstrated significant impact as an evidence-based approach that is inclusive, scalable, and sustainable for educational reform. A decade later, it continues to expand, responding to invitations from other Tertiary Educational organisations in New Zealand.

This workshop will allow participants to explore the practice of Te Atakura and discover how prioritising Indigenous learning experiences can shift the attitudes and beliefs of teachers and leaders towards their *ākonga Māori*, transform their teaching and leadership practices, positively shift the voices of *ākonga Māori* regarding their learning experiences, and increase course completion rates for both *ākonga Māori* and all *ākonga*. The workshop will be co-led by Te Atakura coaches Janell Kiriona and Tim Seaholme, whose positionality acknowledges the unique potential of *Tangata Whenua* and *Pākehā* relationships, intending to reflect *te Tiriti o Waitangi* in how Te Atakura operates within a *kāwanatanga* sphere.

The workshop will combine presenting evidence and interactive small-group activities, allowing participants to explore key components of the Te Atakura model that contribute to its success. These activities and discussions will enable participants to examine the voices of *ākonga Māori* as they articulate their educational experiences and outcomes, unpack why adopting agentic positioning is crucial, and experiment with the model's iterative knowledge-building and inquiry cycle that fosters change in practice.

The workshop aligns with all conference themes. Te Atakura is an initiative that unites all involved in educational organisations to collaborate and strive for *ōritetanga* and improved learning experiences and outcomes for all *ākonga* (*ako*). Te Atakura engages *kaimahi* in evidence-based discussions regarding the quality of their educational practice (context and quality). It centres on empowering *ākonga* to take agency in their learning (accessibility and resilience) and is dedicated to prioritising the voices and experiences of *ākonga Māori* and *kaupapa Māori* values (Indigeneity). Te Atakura promotes innovative educational approaches by offering professional learning, dialogue, idea-sharing, and coaching (Innovation and Openness).

The outcomes for the session are:

- Sharing Te Atakura practices that empower an organisation, its leaders, and educators to address disparities in ways that enhance educational experiences and outcomes for ākonga Māori and all ākonga.
- Providing space for participants to collaborate as they explore ākonga voices, reflect through the lens of culturally responsive, relationship-based practice, and utilise an iterative knowledge-building and inquiry cycle model for change in evidence-based practice.
- Participants will leave with an understanding of the key working components of the Te Atakura model and essential considerations for scaling and embedding such a model within an organisation.
- Inspiring and motivating educators and their organisations about the positive impact they can achieve by prioritising the learning experiences of Indigenous peoples.

Bios for presenters

Tim Seaholme and Janell Kiriona (Ngāti Huia, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāi Tahu, Te Arawa, Muaūpoko) are Te Atakura Coaches at UCOL in Palmerston North, New Zealand. Tim holds an MSc in Exercise Physiology, postgraduate qualifications in teaching, and has over 20 years of experience in tertiary education in both the UK and New Zealand. He has presented at conferences, led workshops, and published research articles. Tim has been an active member of the Te Atakura team since its inception in 2013. Janell possesses a PgCert, a Bachelor of Exercise and Sports Science, and is currently studying towards her Tāhuhu Ahunga Tikanga (Masters in Māori Laws and Philosophy). After initially experiencing Te Atakura as a teacher, she joined the Te Atakura coaching team in 2020. Janell also plays a leading role in Māori cultural capability as Pouahurea – He Kakano Rua. Together, Tim and Janell draw on their diverse culturally located backgrounds, experiences and perspectives as Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti, to lead educational reform in New Zealand's tertiary sector. Both have held leadership positions, are recognised as Teaching Fellows, and have received institutional teaching awards. Their collaborative approach centres on embedding and sustaining Te Atakura within UCOL and beyond, fostering inclusive and effective educational practices that prioritise ākonga Māori and enhance the educational experiences and outcomes of all.

ENHANCING OUTCOMES FOR ALL:
THE IMPACT OF PRIORITISING ĀKONGA
MĀORI LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN
TERTIARY EDUCATION



In Aotearoa, tertiary education has historically struggled with parity gaps in the learning experiences and outcomes for ākonga Māori. Despite efforts to address this, prioritising the needs of ākonga Māori often encounters resistance, with some arguing that it unfairly favours one group. This research examines UCOL's decision to prioritise a focus on ākonga Māori learning experiences and outcomes through Te Atakura, a culturally responsive, relationship-based practical inquiry model developed in 2013. Inspired by the research of Te Kotahitanga, it aims for ōritetanga (equitable learning experiences and outcomes).

Te Atakura has become embedded and sustained within UCOL, transforming attitudes and practices among educators. The voices of ākonga Māori and educators, alongside outcome data, demonstrate positive impacts: shifts in teacher and leader attitudes, changes in teaching and leadership practices, and increased course completions for both ākonga Māori and non-Māori students. Te Atakura is implemented by a team whose positionality acknowledges the unique potential of Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti relationships, intending to reflect te Tiriti o Waitangi in how it operates within a kāwanatanga sphere.

This study shows that prioritising Indigenous learning experiences can significantly improve outcomes for all ākonga, challenging the notion that such a focus is unfair. Over a decade later, Te Atakura continues to expand, with other tertiary institutions in New Zealand expressing interest. This research provides compelling evidence to support prioritising ākonga Māori in educational practices, demonstrating that by embracing this approach, educational institutions can drive meaningful educational reform and achieve more equitable learning experiences and outcomes.

