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Transitioning to higher education: journeying with Indigenous Maori teen mothers

Edwina Pio^a and Maxine Graham^b

^aSchool of Business, Economics & Law, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand; ^bAuckland University of Technology, Te Ara Poutama, Auckland, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

Young women giving birth to children or teen mothers are often on the fringes of society. To facilitate the journeys of these young women towards higher education, a number of organisations have been established. Taking Indigenous knowledge as our theoretical lens, our qualitative data were based on interviews with Indigenous Māori teen mothers and teen parent organisations. Our empirical study investigated organisational practices which support teen mothers in their quest for higher education. We make a dual contribution, firstly by extending and enriching scholarship on teen mothers, specifically Indigenous teen mothers, to facilitate understandings of their journey; and secondly we develop a model representing the challenges and successes of their journey and present organisational practices to enhance transitioning to higher education. We suggest that the integration of Indigenous knowledge opens up new avenues for a more sophisticated understanding of organisational practices intertwined with the journeys of teen mothers.

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Indigenous knowledge; teen mothers; organisational practices; higher education; Maori

Teen mothers (TMs) are enmeshed within knowledge production and power interactions which are contextual and function to constitute difference (Ahonen et al. 2014), for example, difference in terms of age (teen), gender (mother) and ethnicity (Indigenous/Māori) and contextual such as structures which disempower and discriminate. A negative discourse on TM is widely prevalent and portrays these women as immature, irresponsible and a drain on society. This discourse includes mental health issues for TM, behavioural issues for their children, health issues pertaining to abortion, infant mortality and low birth weight, low access to support and an intergenerational cycle of poverty, deprivation and economic issues with welfare dependence and educational underachievement (Fergusson and Woodward 2000; De Jonge 2001; Woodward, Horwood, and Fergusson 2001; Chevalier and Viitanen 2002; Nash 2002; Kane et al. 2013). A number of terms have been used to refer to TM, such as school-age mothers (Baragwanath 1997), teenage pregnancy (UNICEF 2008), TM ((Hoffman and Maynard 2008), at-risk youth (Soriano, Clark, and Wise 2008) and younger mothers (Butler et al. 2010). For the purpose of this article, the term 'teen mother' (TM) will be used.

Structural disadvantage resulting in a ‘shackled runner’ (Noon 2010) is a powerful force to consider when investigating TM and encourages the implementation of positive discrimination or the specific recognition of characteristics such as ethnicity which may disadvantage a group through no direct fault of their own. In seeking to side-step ethnic penalties (Brynin and Guveli 2012; Rafferty 2012), a decision-making process that is premised on social justice and fairness (Claiborne et al. 2009), as well as pathways to education, can lead to a way out of poverty and transformative change (Ames 2013). Ethnic penalties refer to individuals from minority groups who may have an ethnic pay gap because they enter less well paid occupations or are paid less for doing the same kind of work; there may also be ethnic occupational segregation, with poorer ethnic minorities being more severely affected (Brynin and Guveli 2012). Attitudes towards the visibly different and ethnic minorities may be deeply entrenched and deeper structural issues need to be tackled, with access to education from an early age, ‘a factor which continues to limit the life chances of less privileged people, just as effectively as the value judgements made by managers within elite organizations, if not more so’ (Ashley 2010, 725). Our article focuses on education for TM, as education can be a precursor to moving out of poverty and to a higher standard of living for the TM and her children.

Representing a disproportionately large share of the world’s poor, Indigenous peoples numbering approximately 350 million, tend to experience social exclusion, discrimination and educational disadvantage, with the structural reproduction of inequality as a legacy of history, coupled with contemporary exploitative practices (Hall and Patrinos 2014). The term ‘Indigenous peoples’ derived in the 1970s from the American Indian Movement and the Canadian Indian brotherhood (Smith 1999) is an international term to describe the experiences, issues and struggles of many of the world’s colonised peoples. This definition includes land and the first peoples of the land and is true of all Indigenous peoples of all lands, including Māori. Māori, the Indigenous people of New Zealand (NZ), are also called NZ Māori or *tangata whenua* (people of the land) embodying spiritual and physical connection to the ecosystem. *Whenua* means land and also placenta and the newborn’s *whenua* (placenta) is buried in the land, physically and spiritually connecting the child to the land (Pio et al. 2014). Fifteen per cent of NZ’s total population identify as Māori with a median age of 23.9 years (Statistics NZ 2013). Māori have higher rates of teen pregnancy than the general NZ population, also live in more deprived socio-economic neighbourhoods and have a lower median personal income than the national income (Statistics NZ 2013). Ethnicity figures from 1997 to 2002 highlighted that Māori teenagers were five times more likely to have a child, than the average for the NZ population. More recent figures on ethnicity noted Māori as having considerably higher percentages of teenage women with at least one child (Dickson et al. 2000; Boddington, Khawaja, and Didham 2003; Kaipuke Consultants 2012). We have highlighted Indigenous knowledge, specifically Maori Indigenous knowledge (*wairua, manaaki, kaitiakitanga* and *mauriora*) to understand the ways in which these TM transition to higher education (HE). It is in this context that it is crucial to point out that the notion of TM itself is Westernised and that some Indigenous peoples may have different notions of pregnancy and may view conceiving in the teenage years as permissible. Hence, we acknowledge that TM are often discussed by researchers using a Western lens which views TM through negative perceptions. Therefore, we enhance the understanding of TM by utilising an Indigenous lens.

Against this backdrop, we are interested in how TM, specifically Indigenous TM, seek to transition to HE and implications relevant to organisational practices. Our research revolves around the following question: What organisational practices support TM in their transition to HE? We focus on how HE can enable TM to carefully steward resources for the present and future and break the cycle of poverty and deprivation while imploding the stigma (Yardley 2008) associated with TM. By HE we mean post-secondary, degree, tertiary or college education. By organisational practices we refer to a constellation of words and actions, which can change over space and time, can involve practices between people, as well as between people, systems and material arrangements and which can be co-created (Ainscow et al. 2003; Connell 2010).

We seek to contribute to gender and education discourse through two key areas: firstly, including Indigenous knowledge to enrich the scholarship on TM; secondly, we develop a model to represent the challenges and successes of TM's journey towards HE and in so doing present inclusive organisational practices with specific reference to enabling long-term formal education and planning for breaking the cycle of poverty, deprivation and negative perceptions of these mothers.

This article is structured as follows: firstly, we review the relevant literature on TM and include aspects of Indigenous knowledge through Māori worldviews. Next, we present our methodology. We then present organisational practices and develop the *whare tangata* model based on our findings to contribute to a more comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of TM. Our discussion and conclusion wrap up extant literature which we embed within Indigenous knowledge for deeper engagement with TM in their transitions into HE.

TMs through scholarly literature

World Bank (2015) figures for 2010–2014 (adolescent fertility rate: births per 1000 women ages 15–19) indicate 2 in Switzerland, 4 in Germany and Italy, 6 in France, 9 in Finland, 25 in NZ, 26 in the United Kingdom and 31 in the United States. Western frameworks tend to ascribe value for the child in relation to a monetary factor and discern TM as problematic, and this could be construed as the re-imposition of colonised perceptions of mothering. This tension is apparent as for example, in the US teen childbearing costs taxpayers approximately US\$ 10.9 billion annually, however, through a variety of interventions such as programs on youth development and community service, abstinence and safe choices, contraception usage, and academic assistance, teen birth rate has changed dramatically and dropped by 57%, so that in 2013 the teen birth rate was 27 births per 1000 girls (The National Campaign 2015). However, teen birth rate by ethnicity indicates that there are 39 births per 1000 for non-Hispanic black teens and 31 births per 1000 for American Indian or Alaska Native teens (The National Campaign 2015).

Teen parent support organisations are located throughout the world. They are variously focused on educational services; ensuring access to childcare, transportation, health and social services (Crean, Hightower, and Allan 2001; Furey 2004; Pillow 2004; Amin et al. 2006). Support structures such as strong case management, access to role models, and support groups are also noted as important for TM (Rowe 1994; De Jonge 2001). In the cornucopia of literature and research available on TM, six themes emerged, all of which interact with each other in TMs journeys pertaining to education. These themes are presented in Table 1. It is pertinent to note that in this article, we have focused on TMs who were able

Table 1. Main themes in literature on teen mothers.

Main themes	Sources
<i>Mental health issues for TM</i> (less likely to access antenatal care, depression and substance abuse)	Johnson and Denny (2007); Kaye (2012); McDonell, Limber, and Connor-Godbey (2007); Sadler et al. (2007); Vaughn (2008)
<i>Health issues of children</i> (infant mortality, low birth weight, behavioural issues such as more likely to be involved in risky behaviour as an adolescent)	Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, and Morgan (1987); Shaw, Lawlor, and Najam (2006)
<i>Cycle of poverty</i> (twice as likely to become teenage mothers themselves)	Chevalier and Viitanen (2002); Fergusson and Woodward (2000); Hindin-Miller (2012)
<i>Economic issues</i> (welfare dependence, often long term)	Chevalier and Viitanen (2002); Maynard (1995); Ministry of Social Development (2010)
<i>Educational underachievement</i> (difficulties in completing high school, progressing to higher education)	Families Commission (2011); Fergusson and Woodward (2000); Kiernan (1997); Madhavan and Thomas (2005); Thompson and Caulfield (1998)
<i>Transformational well-being effects for the teen mother</i> (sense of purpose and maturity)	Kirkman et al. (2001); Seamark and Lings (2004); Smith, Skinner, and Fenwick (2011); SmithBattle (2000)

to transition into HE, though they were also impacted by circumstances such as economic deprivation and poverty, but can progress to transformational well-being.

There has been an overall decline in the proportion of teenagers giving birth in NZ including Māori, but the number of Māori young mothers is still high, reflecting higher teen pregnancies among Indigenous peoples (Dickson et al. 2000; Boddington, Khawaja, and Didham 2003; Palacios et al. 2013), many of whom live in low socio-economic areas with deprivation (Kiernan 1997; Woodward, Horwood, and Fergusson 2001; Kaipuke Consultants 2012).

In response to the high number of teen pregnancies in NZ, government funding and communities have prioritised the support TM receive (Ministry of Social Development 2013). Baragwanath (1997, 1998) set up the first teen parent unit in Wellington, NZ and emphasises the need for an alternative model of education that includes teen parents and the community. She believes that it is possible for TM to reverse their educational loss through organisations which focus on education, governance, incentives, dual enrolment, self-motivation, mutual respect, staff education and training, social development and curriculum.

The interruption of secondary school education due to becoming pregnant is cited in literature as the demise of educational achievement in teenage mothers. Only 40% of TM finish high school and less than 2% of these girls have a college degree by age 30 (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy 2012). In the UK nearly 40% of TM leave school with no qualification and around 20% of births to under 18s are to TM (Department of Education and Skills 2006).

In the NZ context, there is 'clear evidence of an association between teenage pregnancy and educational underachievement ... being particularly evident for measures of participation and achievement at high school' (Fergusson and Woodward 2000, 157), resulting in TM less likely to enter HE. Moreover, a study completed by the Families Commission (2011) showed that many school-age mothers do not complete secondary school. A range of factors influence this decision, including inflexible school policies and procedures, a lack of adequate childcare, and other practical difficulties that make continuing education in mainstream school difficult. The lack of access to educational services can encourage long-term welfare dependence.

Evans (2000) analysed over 50 articles pertaining to tertiary transition and highlighted significant factors impacting on the tertiary transition process, such as student demographic characteristics, student psychological characteristics, student prior performance, social factors and institutional factors. These findings are similar to a NZ report based on the Starpath Project. The Starpath project aimed to develop a deeper understanding of the processes experienced by students making the transition from secondary school to university study and identified four areas that impact on the transition journey: academic preparation, social transition, inclusion of academic and social support and external demands and their impact on transition (Madjar et al. 2010). This research noted that each area can individually shape the transition process and that collectively the outcomes of each area can determine the likelihood of success in HE. Māori, with mid-level school qualifications and those who took a break were more likely to take lower study loads perhaps due to working or raising a family whilst studying (Loader and Dalgety 2008). Māori girls tend to plan to work full time as opposed to studying, as this brings in regular income, rather than waiting for educational outcomes further down their lives (Education Counts 2014).

Sharing Indigenous knowledge

Indigenous knowledge encompasses an interconnectedness with all of creation, and embodies the woven universe within which we exist in a sacred ecology of relationships (Mead 2003; Rochford 2004; Cajete 2008; Royal 2012; Pio et al. 2014). Such knowledge, embedded for and within community, serve as guiding cultural orientations which are life enhancing, relational and spiritual. Māori knowledge has its origins in the cosmogony of the Māori world – specifically, in regards to the relationship between Ranginui (the sky father) and Papatūānuku (the earth mother) and their children from whom all living things, descend, including all flora and fauna. According to Māori therefore, all living things have a common and consequently sacred (*tapu*) origin. In contemporary society, Indigenous ways are ‘concerned with overcoming negative statistics and factors of Māori educational underachievement, poor health status and more, through research and theory making’ (Royal 2012, 31). Informed by Māori knowledge, Durie (1998) developed his Te Whare Tapa Whā model of well-being. Using the basic construction of a building – the Māori *wharenui* (meeting house) Durie models the four elements of well-being as consisting of the spiritual, mental, physical and extended family. Importantly, this model informs a later goal, albeit for education for Maori, which Durie persuasively argues should be to participate as citizens of the world, while living as Maori along with good health and a high standard of living (Durie 2011). The model we develop uses Durie’s model as a foundation, but we adapt it for relevance to TM. Durie (2011) suggests that reducing barriers for Indigenous people can be viewed from two directions: firstly, to alleviate hardships, efforts can be made to reduce socio-economic inequalities, and it is in this area that HE can have long-term benefits; secondly, educational institutions can incorporate Indigenous knowledge so that pedagogies, research methodologies, campus facilities, and both professional and academic staff can endorse Indigenous ways of being, through an enhanced understanding of Indigenous knowledge.

In the context of this article, we focus on Indigenous Maori knowledge from which Maori culture and ways of being emanate. This knowledge is based on a strong

sense of connectedness and experiences with people and ecosystems (Durie 2011). Among the many concepts shared through Indigenous Māori knowledge, we highlight four: *wairua*, *manaaki*, *mauriora* and *kaitiakitanga* (Spiller et al. 2011; Pio et al. 2014; Keiha and Pio 2015). *Wairua* is the spirit or quintessence of a person and literally means two waters epitomising the flow of energy between the physical and spiritual existence. *Wairua* manifests itself in characteristics often associated with spirituality such as soul, spirit, energy and life-force. *Manaaki* encompasses power, control and influence through caring for others, reciprocity, honouring and leading with moral purpose. This concept embodies collective action through duties and responsibilities which honour self-worth and the power and prestige of individuals, while showing kindness and nurturance. This self-worth is derived from ancestors as well as from one's family, colleagues and self. Well-being or *mauriora* encompasses the realisation and manifestation of one's full potential in relationships and is consciously created well-being. *Kaitiakitanga* refers to guardianship or stewardship of planetary resources and the ecosystems through which life is created, and nurtured, with spiritual and material well-being for future generations. Individuals are in a relational world, where kinship is respected and honoured. Each individual is endowed with obligations and empowered to be guardians of this planet in their thinking and behaviour. Māori terms are explained in Table 2.

Indigenous knowledge can have tremendous transformative potential, for it focuses on the importance of collaborative shared relationships with the individual, society and the ecosystem within which individuals and societies exist. Such knowledge can be dynamic and holographic emphasising the interconnectedness of our fragile planet. Yet, a negative discourse on indigeneity in society can influence how Indigenous individuals are treated in education as these discourses may be enacted through condescension, beliefs in underachievement, with less acknowledgement and responsiveness to cultural and social realities (Santoro 2010; Ames 2013). Hence, we argue for education practices, including those pertaining to HE, to move away from a deficit focus such as underachievement and instead suggest a deeper understanding of Indigenous knowledge to inform organisational practices in supporting Indigenous TM. Indigenous knowledge informed the design and execution of our research and the subsequent conceptualisation and organisational practices developed from our findings.

Table 2. Māori terms and general meaning.

Māori terms	General meaning
<i>Kaitiakitanga</i>	Guardianship of the planet
<i>Kura Kaupapa, Kohanga</i>	Māori immersion schools
<i>Manaaki</i>	Respect/care
<i>Māori</i>	Indigenous people of New Zealand
<i>Mauriora</i>	Well-being
<i>Tangata whenua</i>	People of the land
<i>Te reo</i>	Māori language
<i>Wairua</i>	Spirit/essence
<i>Whanau</i>	Family
<i>Whare tangata</i>	House of humanity
<i>Whenua</i>	Placenta/land

Research approach

A qualitative phenomenological research approach was utilised to gain an understanding and provide a rich description of the lived experiences and meaning-making of the participants (Creswell 2013). Participants were sourced through an internet search by locating potential teen parent organisations (TPOs) in NZ, as well as a list of TPOs from a government department. An identified commonality of all TPO was that they were established from a need that arose within the communities in which they were located. TM were identified through personal networks and purposive snowballing to ensure that the in-depth, semi-structured interviews would yield rich data based on the research question: What organisational practices support TM in their transition to HE? Twelve participants were invited to partake in this research – eight TM – all from lower socio-economic areas, three managers from TPO and one government representative. Table 3 displays TM participant details. The three managers – a CEO, a lead teacher and a social worker, were based at TPOs in Auckland, a major city in NZ. The Government representative was a senior advisor in charge of the establishment of TPO in the northern region of NZ, primarily in Auckland.

All TM had at least one child and were pregnant when they were teenagers. They all currently lived in the Auckland region of NZ and identified as Māori. All the TM had, or were currently completing, HE and three had continued onto postgraduate study. Their study areas included business, media, nursing, health science, education and Māori studies. All the TPOs interviewed operated as a flat structure and received funding from the Ministry of Education.

All interviews were conducted in places of mutual convenience and comfort to the participants and researcher. The interviews ranging from 25 to 90 min, were audio-recorded and notes were taken to further explore points raised by participants.

Questions for the TM included information about their background, their children, what they were studying or had studied, and where they were from; the importance of their Māori culture; reasons for HE; their experiences with TPO. Questions for TPO included the purpose of the TPO, what they thought was important for assisting TM transition to HE, and any barriers or obstacles in delivering their educational services. All interviews were transcribed within two months of the interviews. The transcripts were read a number of times to identify common themes and cross checked with the participants.

Thematic analysis was used for the data which ensured grounding in the raw data and interpreting, summarising and categorising it through the analytical technique of creating

Table 3. Participant details – teen mothers.

Participant	Age range	Age of TM at the time of birth of first child	Number of children	Programme	Field of study
Mother A	16–20	16	1	Undergraduate	Teaching
Mother B	21–25	15	1	Undergraduate	Commerce and Māori Studies
Mother C	26–30	16	1	Undergraduate	Performing Arts, then Nursing
Mother D	21–25	15	2	Postgraduate	Māori Development
Mother E	21–25	18	2	Postgraduate	Communication
Mother F	26–30	16	1	Postgraduate	Health
Mother G	30+	16	3	Postgraduate	Business
Mother H	16–20	17	1	Undergraduate	Communication

initial categories/codes and relating them to themes (Matthews and Ross 2010). The data analysis followed six stages of Braun and Clarke (2006) depicted in Table 4.

From our data, we focus on two aspects, firstly on inclusive organisational practices (Table 5); and three elements, stigma, support and self-attributes which were identified, with the TM as the centre or core of transitioning to HE, as she embraced Indigenous knowledge and sought to make a better life for herself and her child (Figure 1). This core led us to develop a model – the *whare tangata* model, which is explained in the next section.

Findings and discussion: embracing Indigenous knowledge

Indigenous knowledge is at the heart of this study and transitioning to HE was in many ways sustained by this knowledge. Thus none of the TM wanted to conform to the general statistics on TM as being a drain on society and they reached out to the connectivity and relationships that they had or could cultivate with immediate and extended family, the notion of *kaitiakitanga* or guardianship where kinship is respected and honoured. Additionally, support was sought through the TPO as well as peers, based on *manaaki* or reciprocity and influence. However, this support and its cultivation was catalysed through their own *wairua* or spirit, translated as self-attributes and the tremendous need for enhancing their well-being or *mauriora* – self-efficacy, high achievement, resilience, independence and strong Indigenous identity. Hence, steps in transitioning to HE were iterative as they were a blend of circumventing stigma and negative discourses, utilising support as a catalyst for HE and self-attributes through navigating Indigenous knowledge to transition into HE. The TPO were an invaluable asset in this transition, as they placed emphasis on TM being good mothers and through this process raising their self-confidence and aspirations for HE.

Table 4. Data analysis.

Phase	The data analysis process
1. Familiarisation with data	After the completing the 12 interviews, they were listened to followed by transcription by one of the authors, who did the interviews. Notes taken immediately after the interview also formed part of the data set. Personally transcribing each of the interviews and re-reading them repeatedly allowed data immersion
2. Generating initial codes	By taking notes of general points throughout the interviews, through transcription and notes, commonalities, outliers and gaps were identified. This systematic process allowed the generation of initial codes, for example: fear, happiness, crying, help from family, struggling to support baby, worry about baby's father, money issues, grandparents, reaching out to TM, community involvement, being Maori, unsure about entry criteria for higher education, place of belonging and academic capability
3. Searching for themes	The initial coding process resulted in 20 codes. After reviewing the initial codes and discussing them with the co-author, potential themes started to emerge such as emotions, stigma, peer support, institutional scholarships, financial aspects, entry into higher education, concerns about childcare and Maori knowledge
4. Reviewing themes	The researcher went through the transcripts again, allowing for further exploration of the information that had been provided, and the initial codes were able to be categorised into key themes. These were discussed, interrogated and debated with the co-author and knowledgeable peers. There was also critical reflection on possible researcher biases
5. Defining and naming themes	The definition and naming of three themes became evident, though they were inter-related and the thread of organisational practices ran right through each of them. The three themes were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigma • Support • Self-attributes
6. Producing the report	As the study was being written up, it further allowed for a final analysis and the development of the <i>whare tangata</i> model

Table 5. Organisational practices to transition teen mothers to higher education.

Organisational practice	Enablers	Challenge	Indigenous knowledge
Providing incentives to attend the TPO	Incentives such as childcare, transport to the TPO and providing lunch	Space to provide childcare, reliable vehicle with car seats and driver, funding, having a cap on enrolment numbers, providing scholarships for higher education	<i>Manaaki</i> or delicate caring, so that the TM does not feel excluded or obligated
Developing and implementing a holistic curriculum	Access to a curriculum that includes life skills, parenting classes and academic curriculum	Providing a balance between academic and life skills curriculum, irregular attendance by students, balancing of government policy outcomes and delivery with the TPO, regular evaluation of outcomes, lack of academic ability of TM	Focus on <i>Mauriora</i> or well-being
Ensuring well trained responsive staff	Dedicated, committed and well trained staff	High staff turnover, part-time workers, budget for employing full time teachers, teachers having to do shared roles, ensuring adequate levels of professionalism	<i>Manaaki</i> or caring which is tactful and considerate for both staff and the TM
Creating access to a network of agencies and providing safe spaces	Access to adequate referral services like housing, child support, food, clothing and preventive health care services	Agencies not working collaboratively, not having dedicated staff, lack of contacts within and across agencies, TM not following through with referrals	<i>Mauriora</i> or well-being which is the realisation and manifestation of one's full potential in relationships, along with <i>Kaitiakitanga</i> or serving as guardians of each other
Enabling peer and family support	Creating peer and family networks for empathetic understanding	Keeping TM connected, being sensitive to who gets listened to, imploding stigma pertaining to TM, careful engagement with family	<i>Whare tangata</i> model to implode stigma, create and embrace support and self-attributes which lead towards well-being such as higher education
Providing role models	Providing access to role models who relate with and understand TM	Not being able to find relevant role models, role model not having sufficient time	<i>Wairua</i> or identifying and acknowledging the quintessence of the person in order to successfully provide role models for TM

There are approximately 22 TPO located across NZ. Many of these TPO are set up by the Ministry of Education to provide educational support for teen parents. TPO's are 'one way of supporting school-age young people who are pregnant or parenting' (Ministry of Education 2008, 1). Parenting units are an educational facility for young parents under the governance of a host school and the unit is linked to an Early Childhood Education provider where childcare is offered. As the TPO's are guided by the NZ education curriculum document from the Ministry of Education, individual 'host' school board of trustees are responsible for overseeing the vision, strategies and objectives that drive each TPO (Valentine 2007). Inclusive organisational practices, derived from our analysis of the findings are interwoven with Indigenous knowledge (Table 5), and can facilitate the process of transitioning TM into HE. We hasten to add that implications for organisations are not meant to be normative, rather, the hope is that an awareness of Indigenous knowledge can alleviate (though may not eliminate) challenges organisations face when transitioning TM into HE.



Figure 1. *Whare tangata* model.

We also developed the *whare tangata* model (loosely translated as house of humanity) (see Figure 1), from our data and this consists of three elements – stigma, support and self-attributes, each of which are described below along with specific Indigenous terms to which they are linked. This model, while based on Durie’s (1998) *Te Whare Tapa Wha* model incorporates insights from the Māori saying *Ko te Whare Tangata te kohanga tuatahi o te mātauranga* (the womb is the first nest of knowledge), which enables a view of TM that is more holistic than the generally negative portrayal of TM. The model, *whare tangata*, encapsulates the woman as the bearer of children depicted through the symbolic representation of the oval womb in which the child is carried. She is unique in this ability and becomes the nurturer for the child. At the centre of the model, the mother and child are represented in unity to show the bond they share from conception. As a constant source of protection, nourishment and guardianship the mother is in a protective stance with the child. The mother lifting the child represents the mothers’ desire to enhance well-being for herself and her child.

Rather than a deficit approach which focuses on educational underachievement and welfare dependence, *whare tangata* embodies the research findings in a positive transformative manner. Each of these elements will now be interwoven with participant quotes, organisational practices and Indigenous knowledge, displaying how TM shake of their shackles (Noon 2010) in their journeys to transition to HE.

Stigma: circumventing negative discourses

The first element of our *whare tangata* model is stigma which can be linked to *wairua* (Pio et al. 2014). It is the spirit of the individual which prevents her from being beaten down and paralysed by perceptions of society. *Wairua* can also be construed as shadow or alter ego and this vital spark ignites and nurtures the TMs’ desire for well-being or *mauriora* through HE. Spirituality is a fundamental aspect of the life of Indigenous peoples and

helps them to be in tune with the ecosystem within which we are embraced and in which we live. *Wairua* provides balance and harmony, enhances relationships, can foster the creation of safe spaces and is an integral part of being Māori and honouring *kaitiakitanga*.

We use the term stigma in the context of imploding and circumventing stereotypes which stigmatise TM as incapable, bringing shame to their families and a drain on society's resources. The TM in our study actively sought to overcome the stigma and avoid ethnic penalties (Brynin and Guveli 2012; Rafferty 2012), by enrolling in HE. Mother E was from a community where teen pregnancy was normal. She aspired to be different but felt she became part of the cycle. Feeling as though she had become part of the cycle, was a key driver for her to succeed in education.

So I come from a community where it's normal. It's normal for all my siblings, all my family to have kids by 15/16... but I was the only one who aspired to be different ... I still feel part of the cycle ... all my family were disappointed in me and I was disappointed in myself. (Mother E)

The findings reiterated that while only two of the TM were explicitly exposed to this stereotype, all TM interviewed knew of their negative portrayal in wider society and saw this as a problem they had to surmount. A common driver for the TM was not to become a statistic of long-term welfare dependence and to provide more for their children's lives in the hope of circumventing structural disadvantage (Noon 2010; Santoro 2010; Ames 2013). Some TM discussed how their children helped them realise their potential.

I had no idea what I was going to do at all, and I know the stigma about teen parents isn't that great but I really believe he (the baby) opened my eyes to so many things. I don't know where I'd be without him right now. I assume it probably wouldn't be here, so for that I'm really grateful to him. (Mother A)

This quote reiterates the positive effects of having a child early, such as providing a catalyst for maturity, stability and independence (SmithBattle 2000; Smith, Skinner, and Fenwick 2011; Hindin-Miller 2012). Many TM were motivated to enter HE because they were keen to see their child live well as also to create better prospects for themselves.

Butler et al. (2010) research identified the effect that the stigma from service providers, media and the public has on TM' mothering ability. Feeling constantly judged and questioned about how well one is doing as a mother is a heavy burden to carry. TM monitor their communication to deflect judgement and blame, because the discourse of good mothering is rarely attributed to TM purely based on their age and that fact they have not followed what is perceived to be the normal trajectory of a life plan (Ellis-Sloan 2013). In Mother F's story, she was a top student and never got in trouble, but still faced judgement from others.

I was pretty much the top of whatever class I was a pretty good student, didn't get into trouble or anything, but they wouldn't make me a prefect even though they made everyone else in the class a prefect. Just some comments from teachers were upsetting, not meaning to be hurtful, just kind of jokes that I didn't really get. (Mother F)

Mother F exposes her hurt and distress at not being selected as a prefect and ascribes this to her pregnancy and being judged unfairly by those in power who have the capacity to hurt. Thus circumventing stigma was a driving force for TM and they were confident that

HE was the way to a better future. In this context, organisational practices can capitalise on the desire to transition to HE thus sidestepping stereotypes attributed to being a TM, such as providing positive role models, creating access to a network of agencies and providing safe spaces. The significance of space (Wagner 2014) where the TM could feel that their complex issues were understood and respected, facilitated tackling the transition into HE.

We try to address that by bringing in other young people who are in successful careers now, who are young mums who look like them, sound like them, you know, from this community ... what's been a lovely development for us is we have been able to get former graduates coming back and facilitating our sessions for us. It's about them exercising leadership ... (Organisation C)

Here, we note conscious efforts being made to identify role models and then to ensure that they can dedicate time and energy to work with TM. All the TPOs wanted to assist TM to overcome these barriers and to support them to be good mothers and achieve their goals. All the TM identified that enrolling in HE allowed them opportunities to better their lives and not be the stereotypes society places on TM. All the TM recognised the long-term vision of investing their time and resources into completing a degree, which would enable them to financially provide for their child/children.

Support: a catalyst for HE

The second element support is linked to the Indigenous concepts of *manaaki* and *kaitiakitanga* which epitomises caring and building relationships, for as living creatures we are all connected in a web of life. Support also links with the provision of material aspects of existence such as food, clothing, health; and mental and emotional support, so that TMs can feel safe and nurtured, while at the same time igniting their spark for well-being through HE, through the extended and immediate family.

Access to organisations that support teen parents and a supportive family can enhance a TM's well-being (Rowe 1994; Families Commission 2011). Our data found that access to positive support is crucial for TM well-being and included specific individuals who understood the demands of being a TM, access to a TPO, family and peer empathetic understanding, study and financial support, flexible delivery of curriculum and creating a network of other TM and support agencies. The organisational practice of enabling peer and family support was a constellation of words and actions plus material arrangements (Ainscow et al. 2003). The quotes below show how TM saw each other as family whom they could rely on and who had been through similar experiences thus creating strong bonds with each other.

I think they are very tight knit, particularly in the TPO ... They've got a lot of other young mums that all bring their own stories and they have some really good systems around integrating the new students into the environment. (Organisation B)

I think having those people there, they are almost like your *whānau* (family) and they really are that. It is SO TRUE for me they are my *whānau*. (Mother A)

Such support helped the TM realise they were not alone, had a place where they could gain an education, where their children were cared for and where they were helped to realise their potential of going onto HE (Santoro 2010), thus providing 'better life

chances' (Ashley 2010) for themselves and their children. The TPOs organisational practices included providing workshops and appropriate academic curriculum for TM, childcare and transport.

We have an early learning environment, the school, the TPO and the *whānau* ora team. I am a part of the *whānau* ora team and we have a registered specialist nurse on site, community health worker, another social worker and myself, Without that health support, without the parenting support, without the social work support I think the girls, there would be a lot of absenteeism and that, so I see our role as supporting those issues so they are able to apply themselves to their education. (Organisation B)

The challenge with providing these incentives is ensuring there is adequate resourcing. Onsite childcare requires space, additional teachers and ensuring government regulations are met, providing transport means availability of a reliable vehicle with a driver and child car seats, and such resources proved difficult for some of the organisations.

All TPOs placed great value on the TM to be good mothers and aimed to help build their self-confidence, raise their aspirations and achieve academic success for their well-being, as indicated in the quotes below, thus re-inscribing their resolute support for motherhood and education (Reid and Miller 2014).

I think we hope to show them there is different ways ... the underlying goal is for them to be successful at breastfeeding, successful at managing their children in different ways than their parents may have done and as long as a parent does the best they can, we all see better ways. (Organisation B)

I deliberately employ younger practitioners but they are qualified practitioners ... evaluation is really important we really want to know whether what we are doing is working ... we have a planning team that is made up of young mums they decide what they want to do and how. (Organisation C)

TM also helped shape the vision and direction of the organisation and were proud of this involvement.

It was really cool that I was a part of the little team and that I helped ... people came and talked to us about what we needed and wanted. It was a really powerful experience to be a part of something, where people really cared about what we wanted. (Mother A)

The staff from TPOs articulated their passion for TM to mother their children through love and encouragement and to succeed in their respective goals. The TM spoke of staff who went above and beyond their job to enable them to receive course content for assessment or to assist them through the enrolment process and succeed at their chosen study programmes. These dedicated staff and the incentives provided such as childcare, transport and food, supported TM while also legitimising the voices of TM. Hence support is paramount (Santoro 2010), and this encompasses social, financial and institutional support. Access to these support structures, along with scholarships, eased the transition to HE for TM.

Self-attributes: navigating Indigenous knowledge and HE

This third element self-attributes, is a blend of *manaaki* and *wairua*, because one has to be kind to oneself and self-caring, but also cherish and cultivate one's spirit (Mead 2003).

Having a high level of self-efficacy, self-identifying as high achievers, being resilient, gaining independence and being grounded in a strong Indigenous identity were self-attributes to support well-being and achievement in HE. The ability of these TM to be resilient despite facing dire circumstances, such as their teen pregnancy, was evident in all the interviews.

There's all these stereotypes of young mothers and you're just going to drop out of school and go on the dole and be a statistic so I had this big think about proving everybody wrong which is why I went through and I finished my degree. (Mother F)

For example, two TM reported having partners who had joined a gang. Others mentioned being raised in households where education was not explicitly valued, and HE was rarely aspired to. However, TM often attributed such experiences as motivation to transition to HE.

In Mother D's interview, she explained how her Māori culture was of the utmost importance for her well-being. Through her culture based within Indigenous knowledge, she felt that she could source strength for herself and her children.

That's why they (the children) are in *kura kaupapa* and *kohanga* (Māori schools) because I want them to be in full immersion *Te Reo* (Māori language). That's why I want to move back home cause I want to be around it living in it. Yah it's really important. (Mother D)

A balance between learning life skills, academic skills and increasing confidence helps TM to have higher aspirations for themselves.

For some of them the life skills they teach there allows girls to not only learn but to feel worthwhile, because something they've never thought of doing, like higher education, it comes in there and getting the education they could actually do it while thinking this is worthwhile I'm here for a reason. (Mother A)

A challenge for TPOs is increasing the academic capability of the TM whilst trying to provide a holistic curriculum and up-skilling teachers to improve educational outcomes and hence an organisational practice of well trained and responsive staff.

Each student is funded for a certain number of papers. Getting the schools responsible for teaching and learning as opposed to supervision of correspondence and that's been a big move, so we've been trying to push along into the delivery as opposed to the supervision model ... probably the biggest shifts we've had. (Government representative)

Attendance is another major issue and TM who does not consistently attend make the education process more challenging.

Attendance is an issue and it is with all the TPO we decided as a body our goal would be 75% (attendance) and it's a lofty goal that we are still struggling with it. I think part of that is being a bit tougher on the ones that stop coming or erratic with their attendance. (Organisation B)

Having a strong Indigenous identity increases TM's self-confidence by having a sense of belonging. Connection to their place of belonging was a self-attribute identified as beneficial to themselves and their children. Making deliberate decisions for their culture to be prominent in their children's lives was reiterated throughout the interviews. Having a level of self-efficacy and self-defined high achievement motivated TM to feel positive about their HE journey. The resilience of the TM, allowed them to bounce back after

facing adverse circumstances and re-engage in education, and having the financial means to be independent motivated the TM to succeed.

For organisations a pragmatic inspiring approach legitimises the integration of the *whare tangata* model where Indigenous knowledge is honoured and nurtured. Each element of the *whare tangata* model needs to work together to allow the TM to be successful in HE, which then has flow-on effects to the lives of their children.

Learnings for academics and HE practitioners include the following: an understanding of Indigenous knowledge while enable institutes of HE to attract, retain and progress Indigenous peoples, including Indigenous TM; implementing Indigenous knowledge when dealing with Indigenous students for example in being sensitive to the value placed on family and thus including family in discussions pertaining to Indigenous students education progression and futures; advocating for scholarships for Indigenous peoples with the possibility of a pay-it-forward clause so that there is a ripple effect of this HE; creating safe spaces where they can interact with their community members and where Indigenous people can heal, particularly when they have felt belittled by the majority groups who may tend to treat Indigenous people with condescension; interacting with TM families and establishing support networks and facilities such as a crèche in an institution of HE as well as involving families when celebrating success of Indigenous peoples.

Articulating experiences and hopes, listening to and engaging with TM voices and weaving them through inclusive organisational practices is an acknowledgement of the woven universe in which we all live. This weave emphasises a key facet of Indigenous knowledge, that our lives are relational and interconnected. For Indigenous peoples, transitioning to HE can be a significant factor in increasing income and improving well-being (Durie 2011; Tertiary Education Commission 2008).

Concluding comments: inclusive organisational practices

In this article, we investigated the journeys of TM and existing organisational practices pertaining to Indigenous Māori TM transitioning to HE. Research on TM has generally been centred on a deficit model with sparse information on TM transition to HE and meagre interweaving of Indigenous knowledge. Our empirical study makes a dual contribution: firstly, we extend and enrich the scholarship on TM, specifically Indigenous Maori TM, to facilitate organisational understandings of their journey; secondly, we develop a model to represent the challenges and successes of their journey and present some insights on organisational practices to transition TM to HE. Our findings emphasise Indigenous knowledge through the integration of *manaaki*, *wairua*, *mauriora* and *kaitiakitanga*, encompassed within the immediate and extended family as key aspects that can be added to the array of organisational practices used to mould and influence TM. *Whare tangata* illuminates the importance of Indigenous knowledge for TM to transition to HE, and progress towards financial stability for themselves and their children. Three elements in the *whare tangata* model collectively enable this transition to HE. These elements are: stigma (circumventing and exploding stigma was a powerful component anchored in *wairua* and *mauriora*), support (ongoing support from significant others such as family members, peers and individuals within the TPO, based on *kaitiakitanga* and *manaaki*) and self-attributes (grounded in *manaaki* and *wairua* such as resilience and a strong Indigenous identity).

Meaningful findings pertaining to HE for TM on several fronts are evident from our study: it provides policy-makers with evidence of organisational practices to transition TM to HE; involving family members and peer support in TM journeys can have a social impact in imploding the stigma associated with TM; it provides a chance to reflect on TM's journeys into HE and can be used as an initial step for those researchers interested in TM and their journeys; understanding the context within which TM are embedded contributes to the overall knowledge of the scholarship on Indigenous TM; the use of personal stories to study TM provides a richly layered account of their experiences which is often hard to access in such vulnerable populations; finally Indigenous knowledge with its explicit focus on interconnectedness can serve as a unique perspective in fashioning organisational practices.

We are aware that as with all research, there are limitations in our study. This includes the small sample population, only Māori TM, focus on HE and not all aspects of the experiences which TM go through; only NZ as the research context, and possible researcher bias based on our positionality. However, our study does not intend to represent all TM or all TPO, but our study does provide organisational practices derived from the experiences of the participants which can guide organisations in transitioning TM into HE. We suggest that future research can unpack and examine some of the following areas: identification of TM who display specific potential, for transitioning them into HE; the encounters of role models for TM; experiences of teen fathers and how they can better support TMs to achieve in HE; teen parent programs which enable TMs and fathers to grow together; longitudinal studies on Indigenous knowledge integrated for TM; and global comparisons of commonalities and specifics among TM.

Through our article, we gesture towards an important reality pertaining to TM – they are capable of achieving what they set out to do and with the right support they can succeed. Our poignant hope is that we have in some small measure changed conceptualisations of TM through our empirical study, with a sharing of Indigenous knowledge for mutual learning. A Māori proverb (Te Puea Herangi: 1883–1952) epitomises our interconnected stance:

Mehemea ka moemoea ahau, ko ahau anake (If I dream, I dream alone)

Mehemea ka moemoea a tatou, ka taea e tatou. (If we all dream together; we can succeed).

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Notes on contributors

Edwina Pio (PhD, BEd, MNZAC) is New Zealand's first Professor of Diversity, a Fulbright alumnus and recipient of a Duke of Edinburgh Fellowship. She is an integral part of the Auckland University of Technology, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and has been Visiting Professor at Boston College USA and Visiting Academic at Cambridge University, UK. Embodying her passion for interdisciplinary scholarship, her research interests and publications encompass the intersections of work, ethnicity, indigenous

studies, religion and pedagogy. She is a thought leader and knowledgeable interpreter in the diversity domain and is widely published. She is Research Leader of the Immigration and Inclusion Group and Co-director of the Global Centre for Equality and Human Rights.

Maxine Graham is passionate about giving voice to indigenous youth. She is of New Zealand Māori descent and a mother to two children. She works at the Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand/Aotearoa as a Project Leader Strategic Initiatives in the Office of Māori Advancement.

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