

Identity, Culture & Careers

Finding Yourself in the In-Between

01 Opening , Your Story

10 min

PURPOSE

- Establish psychological safety by modelling vulnerability from the front of the room.
- Locate the personal before the theoretical , the room needs to feel the theme, not just understand it.
- Set the relational tone: this is a conversation, not a presentation.

FACILITATOR ACTIONS

- Share personal migration and identity story , the experience of feeling too Arab for the Kiwis, too Kiwi for the Arabs.
- Name it clearly: this is not just a personal story. It is a structural story. Systems created the conditions for that in-between. That matters.
- Bridge to careers: belonging , or its absence , shapes how young people imagine themselves in professional spaces, who they think those spaces are for, and what they dare to reach for.
- Hold space after the story. Do not rush. Let it breathe.

OPENING REFLECTION , INDIVIDUAL, QUIET (2 MIN)

When have you , or a young person you support , felt caught in-between two worlds?

How has that experience shaped their confidence, their career choices, or their sense of what is possible for them?

And quietly: has the system ever confirmed that feeling , and called it something else?

02 Te Whare Tapa Whā , Wellbeing Through an Identity Lens

25 min

PURPOSE

- Introduce a holistic, culturally grounded framework for understanding the whole person.
- Apply each dimension specifically to the experience of navigating multiple identities and careers.
- Create space to name grief, loss, and structural pressure alongside strengths , not instead of them.

FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

Developed by Sir Mason Durie, Te Whare Tapa Whā describes wellbeing as a wharenui with four walls. Remove or weaken one wall and the entire structure becomes unstable.

For rangatahi navigating identity in-between, any of these four walls can be weakened , not by personal failure, but by systems, environments, and narratives that do not hold them fully.

The framework is culturally flexible in its application: mosque, church, temple, fale, sports team, creative space , whatever holds meaning for the young person belongs here. The architecture is Māori. The humanity it describes is universal.

THE FOUR DIMENSIONS , APPLIED TO IDENTITY & CAREERS

Taha Tinana

Physical Wellbeing

The body holds the story

IDENTITY & CAREER LINK

Physical safety and energy directly affect career readiness. A young person who is chronically fatigued, without stable housing, or managing a body that does not feel safe in certain environments cannot fully engage in career exploration, regardless of how motivated they are. The body keeps the score of every environment it has had to navigate.

WHEN DEPLETED

Withdrawal, low energy, avoidance of new or unfamiliar environments, frequent illness. The body is communicating what words may not yet be able to say.

THE STRUCTURAL LAYER

Ask: what environments is this young person required to inhabit, and are those environments physically safe and culturally comfortable? Dress codes, food environments, language demands, commute barriers, these are physical. They are not neutral.

PRACTITIONER PROMPT

What does this young person's physical environment tell us about their sense of safety and belonging? Is their body resourced enough to take the risks that career exploration requires?

Taha Hinengaro

Mental & Emotional Wellbeing

The mind narrates the world

IDENTITY & CAREER LINK

Identity strain is a cognitive and emotional load. Code-switching, managing stereotypes, suppressing cultural identity to fit in, these drain mental bandwidth that could otherwise go toward learning, aspiration, and risk-taking. A young person running this background process every day is not unmotivated. They are exhausted.

WHEN DEPLETED

Perfectionism, imposter syndrome, catastrophising about failure, difficulty articulating their own strengths. Often misread as lack of ambition or engagement.

THE STRUCTURAL LAYER

The dominant culture sets the standard for what 'professional,' 'articulate,' and 'capable' looks like. When a young person does not match that image, the system often reflects this back to them, in feedback, in hiring decisions, in who gets mentored and who gets managed out. This is data about the system, not the person.

PRACTITIONER PROMPT

What story is this young person telling themselves about who gets to succeed? How much mental and emotional energy is being used to manage identity, and how much is left for building a future?

Taha Wairua

Spiritual & Purposeful Wellbeing

The spirit seeks meaning

IDENTITY & CAREER LINK

This is the dimension most often overlooked in career conversations, yet it is frequently the one that, when touched, unlocks everything else. When a young person is disconnected from culture, ancestry, language, or any sense of deeper purpose, careers become a transaction rather than a calling. Reconnecting to wairua can surface direction that no skills assessment will ever find.

GRIEF LIVES HERE

Cultural disconnection often carries grief, for a homeland not chosen, a language that was never passed on, a version of themselves that did not survive migration or family fracture. This grief is real, and it is often unnamed. A young person may not call it grief. They may call it confusion, anger, numbness, or nothing at all. Name it for what it is, gently, and give it space. Grief that is witnessed can move. Grief that is ignored becomes a ceiling.

THE STRUCTURAL LAYER

Systems rarely hold space for the spiritual or cultural dimension of career. When a young person is asked what they want to do with their life without first

being asked who they are, something essential is skipped. That omission compounds disconnection.

PRACTITIONER PROMPT

What gives this young person meaning beyond employment? Is there a cultural, ancestral, or spiritual thread we can reconnect them to, one that could inform where they want to go, and why it matters?

Taha Whānau
Social & Family Wellbeing
Belonging is infrastructure

IDENTITY & CAREER LINK

Careers are not built alone. For rangatahi navigating cultural in-between, the relational landscape is complex, whānau expectations can both anchor and constrain, community ties can open doors or narrow vision, and isolation can make the already-hard work of career building feel impossible.

WHEN DEPLETED

Isolation, people-pleasing, pursuing careers to satisfy family expectation rather than personal vision, or rejecting community connection altogether as a way of escaping pressure. Loneliness is also a career issue.

THE STRUCTURAL LAYER

Professional networks, mentors, and workplace cultures are rarely neutral. Who has access to informal career networks? Whose accent, surname, or background opens doors, and whose quietly closes them? This is structural, not personal.

PRACTITIONER PROMPT

Who genuinely sees and affirms this young person? Are there family or community expectations that are helping or limiting, and how do we work honestly with both, without dismissing either?

MAPPING ACTIVITY, WELLBEING AUDIT (8 MIN)

- Participants map a young person they currently support across all four dimensions.
- For each domain: one strength and one area of concern or absence, including any grief or loss that may be present.
- Pair share (3 min each): where is this young person well-resourced? Where is the wall weakest, and is that weakness personal, systemic, or both?

FACILITATION PROMPT

Which dimension is most depleted for the young person you have in mind?
Is that depletion something inside them, or something being done to them?
If you could strengthen just that one wall, what might become possible?

PRACTITIONER SELF-AUDIT, TURNING THE LENS FULLY INWARD

PART ONE: YOUR OWN WELLBEING

We cannot take someone somewhere we have not been willing to go ourselves.
Silently, honestly: which of the four dimensions is most depleted in your own life right now?
How might that be shaping the way you show up, what you notice, what you avoid, what you rush past?

PART TWO: YOUR CULTURAL POSITIONALITY

Your cultural background is not neutral. It shapes what you see in a young person, what you assume is normal, what you read as strength, and what you miss entirely.
A Pākehā practitioner working with a Pacific rangatahi will have blind spots. So will a Māori practitioner working with an Arab young person. So will a practitioner who has never experienced the particular grief of a language that was not passed down.

This is not about blame. It is about honesty. The question is not 'am I biased?' The question is: 'How is my positioning shaping this work , and am I being honest enough about that to be truly useful?'
Sit with that. It is not a comfortable question. It is a necessary one.

SELF-AUDIT PROMPT , INDIVIDUAL, QUIET

What cultural assumptions do you carry into this work that you have rarely examined?

Is there a young person you are currently supporting whose experience sits outside your cultural frame of reference?

What would it look like to be genuinely curious about what you do not yet know , rather than defaulting to what you do?

03 Narrative Therapy , Witnessing and Reshaping the Story

15 min

PURPOSE

- Help practitioners support rangatahi to reclaim and reauthor their own story.
- Create a framework that witnesses grief and loss before moving toward reframe.
- Introduce identity capital , naming the in-between as a professional asset.

A CRITICAL SEQUENCING NOTE

WITNESS BEFORE YOU REFRAME

Narrative therapy is often taught as a tool for reframing , and it is. But reframing too early is its own kind of harm.

When a young person carries grief , for a culture they were not allowed to hold, a language that was not passed to them, a version of themselves that was shaped by loss , that grief needs to be named and witnessed first.

The practitioner's role is not to fix the story. It is to sit with the young person in it long enough that they feel truly seen. From that place, reauthoring becomes possible. Without it, the 'preferred story' is just a performance built on an unexamined wound.

Practically: before you ask what they want their story to be, ask what the old story cost them. Let that land.

KEY CONCEPTS

- The dominant story vs. the preferred story , what gets told about us versus what we choose to tell.
- Externalising the problem: the person is not the problem; the problem is the problem. And often , the problem has a name, and that name is systemic.
- Unique outcomes , moments when the dominant story did not win. These are the entry points for a new narrative. Find them and hold them up.

NAMING IDENTITY CAPITAL

KEY REFRAME

Identity capital is the professional value embedded in having navigated multiple worlds, languages, and expectations.

Bicultural and multicultural rangatahi are not behind. They are carrying skills , code-switching, cultural intelligence, cross-difference empathy, perspective that monoculturals cannot access , that are genuinely rare and increasingly sought after.

The practitioner's role is to help them name it, own it, and take it into career conversations without apology.

What they thought was a liability	The identity capital it actually is
Switching between two languages Navigating different cultural expectations Not fully belonging in either world Being the 'different one' in every room	Bilingual communication & code-switching Cross-cultural intelligence & adaptability Unique perspective , seeing what monoculturals miss Cultural bridging , a rare and valued professional skill

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS , NAME THEM, DON'T ERASE THEM

HOLD BOTH

Narrative therapy can inadvertently suggest that the right story will overcome any obstacle. It will not. Name this with participants: we are building identity capital because it is real and valuable , and because systems should not get to define what a young person is worth. We are not building identity capital instead of acknowledging what systems do. We are doing both.

What the system does	What we must not confuse it with
Name discrimination in hiring processes Credential non-recognition for overseas qualifications Institutional whiteness in organisational culture Racialised expectations about what roles 'fit' certain people Microaggressions that erode confidence over time	A lack of ambition in the young person A personal mindset problem to be coached away Insufficient resilience or grit A gap in their skills or character Something they simply need to work harder to overcome

NARRATIVE MAPPING TEMPLATE , WITH THE YOUNG PERSON, NOT ABOUT THEM

PAST EXPERIENCES	CURRENT STRENGTHS	FUTURE GOALS
Challenges, key turning points Identity shifts & losses Moments of grief or disconnection Times the dominant story was loudest	Skills & values Cultural knowledge Passions & community supports Evidence of resilience , the times they kept going	Aspirations How to use lived experience as a professional asset Next steps grounded in identity, not despite it

EXAMPLE

A young woman in care felt disconnected from her cultural roots and could not see a clear career path. The practitioner first made space for her grief , the language not passed down, the culture held at arm's length, the sense that she did not belong anywhere. From that witnessed place, narrative mapping surfaced resilience and deep empathy as core strengths , assets she had never been invited to name. Outcome: now mentoring others and pursuing social work. Her 'in-between' became her professional edge. The grief did not disappear. It became part of the story she chose to tell.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

What has this young person lost that they may not have named as loss?
What difficult experience, once witnessed, becomes a strength they can build on?
How would you use the identity capital language with them in a way that feels true , not like a reframe they have not earned yet?

04 Networks & Community , Belonging as a Career Tool

10 min

PURPOSE

- Expand the idea of a career network beyond LinkedIn , to include cultural, community, and creative spaces.
- Position belonging as professional infrastructure, not just a personal need.
- Acknowledge that access to networks is not equal , and that building them takes more for some young people than others.

NETWORK CIRCLES FRAMEWORK

Inner Circle	Middle Circle	Outer Circle
Whānau, close friends , people they can be fully themselves with	Mentors, peers, community leaders who open doors	Cultural spaces, clubs, professional groups, creative outlets

ACTIVITY & STRUCTURED PAIR WORK

- Map a young person's current networks across the three circles , ideally in conversation with them, not on their behalf.
- Identify: Which connections support both identity and career confidence? Where are the gaps , and are those gaps personal or structural?
- Structured dyad , 3 minutes each way, one speaks one listens: What would change for this young person if the missing connection existed?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Share how Khawat became a space of cultural, professional, and social belonging simultaneously , where all three circles overlapped.

Make the link explicit: that belonging gave the confidence to step into new professional opportunities. It was not a personal achievement built in isolation. It was infrastructure.

Invite participants to name one space , in their own life, or their young person's , where all three circles could overlap. If it does not yet exist, what would it take to build it?

05 Practical Takeaways & Action Planning

8 min

PURPOSE

- Consolidate learning into one concrete, doable next step.
- Equip practitioners with both tools and the wisdom to know when not to use them alone.

KEY PRACTITIONER STRATEGIES

- Use Te Whare Tapa Whā as a holistic map , and always ask what is structural before assuming what is personal.
- Witness grief and loss before moving toward reframe. Sequence matters.
- Introduce identity capital language , give young people precise words for what they carry.
- Use narrative therapy with the young person, not on them. Co-author. Do not prescribe.
- Build networks that hold identity and career together , across all three circles.
- Hold both truths: the young person has real agency AND the system is making it harder than it should be.

WHEN THE TOOLS ARE NOT ENOUGH

KNOWING WHEN TO REFER , AND DOING IT WITHOUT APOLOGY

Some of what this workshop surfaces will sit outside the scope of career support or youth work. That is not a failure. It is information.

If a young person begins to disclose trauma, acute grief, suicidal ideation, family violence, or a level of distress that requires clinical support , your role is not to contain it with a coaching tool. Your role is to be a safe, calm presence, to acknowledge what you are hearing, and to connect them to someone who can hold it properly.

Referring well is not stepping back from the young person. It is one of the most respectful things you can do.

Know your referral pathways before you need them. Have the names, numbers, and warm-handoff processes ready. Do not improvise this in a moment of crisis.

ACTION STEP

Write one small, specific action you can take this week to support belonging, identity, or career confidence for a young person you work with.

Make it concrete: who, what, when.

And write one referral pathway you will confirm or update before you next meet with that young person.

TAKE-HOME REFERENCE CARD

TE WHARE TAPA WHĀ	NARRATIVE MAPPING	KEY PRINCIPLES
• Tinana , body & physical safety • Hinengaro , mind, emotion & grief • Wairua , spirit, meaning & loss • Whānau , belonging & relational safety	• Name & witness grief first • Externalise the problem • Surface hidden strengths • Co-author the preferred story	• With the young person, not about them • Hold both: system AND story • Name identity capital explicitly • Know when to refer , and do it

06 Closing Ritual

5–8 min

PURPOSE

- Close with ceremony, not just content , the ending must be as intentional as the opening.
- Give participants something to carry, not just remember.
- Acknowledge the weight of this work alongside its possibility.

CLOSING SEQUENCE

- Facilitator names what they heard across the room , weave it into a brief, unhurried reflection.
- Name what was hard to hold today alongside what was hopeful. Both belong in the close.

CLOSING THOUGHT

Owning your story , and supporting others to own theirs , is not soft work. It is the work.

The in-between is not a gap to fill. It is a vantage point. From there, you can see what people on either side cannot.

The grief is real. The system is real. And the young person in front of you is also real , full of capacity that belongs to them, not to their circumstances.

You do not have to fix the in-between. You just have to refuse to look away from it.