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ICP 2026 Abstract Proposal

Title Leaders Grow Leaders: Weaving Cultural Identity into Leadership Mentorship

Full abstract (

Context counts before content. As the first wahine Māori President of the New Zealand Principals' Federation, I have learned that effective leadership mentorship requires understanding who our emerging leaders are - their culture, language, and identity - before determining what they need to learn.

My leadership journey resembles a Māori korowai, where each feather represents mentors who invested in my growth. Māori principals taught me to lead authentically without leaving my indigeneity at the door when working within eurocentric frameworks. Through leading culturally responsive programmes and mentoring Māori beginning principals through Auckland University BP programme, I discovered that indigenous leadership models were absent I needed to emphasise emphasize whanaungatanga (relationships), rangatiratanga (self-determination), and holistic approaches that honor cultural identity.

Indigenous leaders face unique challenges navigating eurocentric systems that often undermine cultural contexts and impose Western-centric priorities. As NZPF President, I experienced tensions between Māori collective decision-making values and expected individualistic leadership styles, yet found strategies to maintain authenticity while achieving systemic change.

This workshop will explore how understanding cultural context transforms mentorship effectiveness. Participants will examine their own cultural backgrounds as leaders, practice culturally responsive mentoring techniques, and learn to identify when eurocentric frameworks may inadvertently marginalize emerging leaders from diverse backgrounds.

Through wānanga-style dialogue and reflection, participants will discover practical tools for weaving cultural identity into leadership development. We will address common challenges: How do we support leaders who feel pressure to conform? How can mentorship honour diverse ways of knowing and being? How do we create inclusive pathways that celebrate rather than suppress cultural identity?

The goal is developing mentors who recognize that sustainable leadership emerges when we nurture the whole person- honouring their culture, teachings, languages, and gifts. Delegates will leave equipped to grow leaders who can lead authentically from their cultural strengths, creating more inclusive and effective educational leadership for diverse communities.

Presenter Experience

I bring extensive keynote and workshop experience to this kaupapa, having presented on indigenous leadership at MATSIPA (More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers 2012-2013), NATSIPA (National Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander Principals Association),

and the World Indigenous Peoples Seminar Education 2017 on Māori Principal Leadership Framework. My presentations have reached international audiences through ICP, UNESCO Principals Seminars (2023-2025), Fiji Principal Conference opening keynote (2025), and numerous NZPF workshops, panels, and keynotes (2023-2025). From 2010-2018, I facilitated NZ Beginning Principals workshops, grounding this work in lived experience of culturally responsive mentorship.