

Reflect on a personal learning journey in a discipline in te ao haka



Te Ao Haka 3.1
Noku Te Ao 91984

Te Rere O Te Poi
Matariki
Maxwell-Mihinui



Introduction

Ko au ko te poi, ko te poi ko au. I come from a long line of poi exponents who introduced poi to world, including Makareti and Bella Papakura descendants of Tūhourangi Ngāti Wāhiao, who were members of the first concert party to tour other nations featuring the intricacy of poi. Ngāmoni Huata, yet another poi exponent and author of "The Rhythm and Life of the Poi" (2020) the only published book on this subject. She is a Māori cultural practitioner who has dedicated her life to the preservation and promotion of traditional Māori performing arts, particularly poi. Her expertise and passion for poi have made her a respected figure in te ao Māori. Also Kiriwaitangi Rei who was successful in introducing the four long poi to Rotorua's concert stage, The concert came to a stunning conclusion with this being well showcased. With such a rich family history in poi and haka, it was only natural that I would try and follow in their footsteps in the hopes of becoming as skilled as they were. (1,2)

Why have you chosen this discipline to exemplify your learning in Te Ao Haka?

I've chosen the discipline Poi because it clearly shows the growth in my performance, and I would like to acknowledge those people who have helped (1)



The Whakapapa of poi.



Poi originated from Tane, who waived three women creating a child for each woman. The first woman he married was Hine- I Te- Repo, who then gave birth to Raupo, Raupo being the bulrush plant found in swamps making up the poi ball. (2) The poi ball is the most crucial element in the sound the Poi creates, determining the song's pitch. Then Tane married Pakoti, who gave birth to Harakeke. Harakeke is the flax plant found in lowland areas. Harakeke is the muka used to make the taura, the poi handle or cord. The taura is tied by the Aho connecting the Raupo ball to Tanes' last-child, Hine- I Te - Iwaiwa, whose mother is Hinerau- a - moa. Hine- I Te - Iwaiwa, also called Here, is the weaving goddess, making up the last portion of the Poi known as the pompom.

What were some key learning moments that stand out for you?

A key learning moment: I had no comprehension of poi and had no idea why we practised it at all.(3) Yet, I decided to try out for Raukura kapa haka in the hopes of learning about its cultural importance and the advantages it provides from my Auntie Laurelle. My auntie Laurelle had always praised poi and its significance in Maori culture, and I accepted her wisdom and advice when I decided to join Raukura kapa haka. I struggled to learn how to single poi as well as double poi (5) I lacked confidence to practice poi in front of anybody, much alone at the Raukura lunch and after school sessions.(3,4)

This was my first crucial learning moment because I realised I needed to spend more time studying how the extension of my arms affects the way the poi fly, how my foot placement affects the execution of my techniques, and how to manage my breathing to keep a constant beat while spinning.(4) With this realisation, I started to practise more deliberately and with the goal of developing these areas As a result, I noticed significant improvements in my performance and was able to execute more complex moves with ease (4). This experience taught me the importance of paying attention to small detail and how it can have a big impact on overall performance. (5)



Key learning moment:

In the following year, I also made a concerted effort to master the Tūhourangi Ngāti Wāhiao regional poi for the Te Arawa Ahurei, spending many hours practising with my Aunty Nikora, who patiently pointed out my many flaws while also enhancing my many successes. (2,3) This year was significant because I was able to stand next to my idols from my childhood; receiving feedback and guidance from them made me feel like a legitimate performer. (7) A lot about humility and the value of learning from others with greater experience were ingrained in me through this humbling experience. (6)



Another key moment:



One of my most memorable memories was competing in my first national competition under the coaching of Raukura in 2022, This campaign was a bit easier for me in terms of poi since I put in more hours to critique myself as an individual performer, which benefited well because I was able to execute the quadruple long poi successfully. (4) In addition, I prepared in a variety of environments and circumstances to prepare for any unexpected issues during the performance. The additional rehearsal also allowed me to develop stronger muscle memory and control over my actions, helping me to execute the routine with more accuracy and fluidity. (3,4) To me, it seemed like I had finally reached the summit of my poi experience, (6) and that all of my hard work and practice had paid off. I will always cherish that moment as it was not just a personal achievement, but a tribute to my nanny Del, who had a love and passion for poi. (7)

How did those key learning moments change you as a performer and as a person?

Those crucial learning experiences changed me as a performer because they helped me advance. (2) I was able to take on more difficult roles and push myself outside of my comfort zone, which elevated my performance level. They also helped me gain a deeper appreciation for the craft and the value of continuous training. As a result, I became more confident in my abilities and developed a growth mindset that allowed me to embrace challenges and learn from mistakes. (5) These learning experiences not only improved my performance skills but also shaped me into a more resilient and dedicated kaihaka.

My comprehension and respect of te ao Māori have grown as a result of learning about the cultural significance of poi and the birds that are reenacted through poi. (7) Gaining comprehension made it easier for me to communicate with others, and I tried out other groups that allowed me to interact with family from other regions. Additionally, I have developed a deeper appreciation for the importance of cultural preservation and the role it plays in maintaining the identity and traditions of Māori. (7) This has motivated me to continue learning about te ao Māori and to actively support initiatives that promote cultural awareness and understanding.

Looking back from where you are now, what are some things you could have done better in your journey?

Time management has been crucial to my poi succession, in my journey of poi I've found it difficult to focus on executing the more advanced moves due to my busy schedule(2,6) but I've discovered that practicing even just a few minutes every day can make a significant difference(4) to my own progress. Additionally, watching videos taken of other kaihaka and attending workshops has helped me learn new techniques and improve my skills (1) however, I've learned that mastering the basics is crucial in building a strong foundation for more complex techniques. (7)

What life skills have you gained through your study of this discipline?

Since the age of thirteen years old I have been performing cultural events and showcasing more than just poi to tourists from around the world as a result of mastering the poi. (1,2) The life skills I have gained is independence, my performances have allowed me to connect with people from diverse backgrounds and share my passion (2,3) for the art of poi. In addition, my experience in performing has also helped me to develop confidence, stage presence, and public speaking skills which have been useful in other areas of my life such as school presentations and job interviews. (7)



What skills have you developed in the discipline, and what moments led to you building those skills

I was taught discipline through poi, so I made sacrifices like giving up my weekends, which I frequently spend with family and friends. But, the thrill I experience when performing in front of an audience and the satisfaction I experience when learning new actions make it all worthwhile. (7) Poi has given me a sense of purpose and fulfilment in addition to learning discipline. This kind of thinking has benefited me in other aspects of my life, like school and work, where I put in the same amount of effort and focus. Poi has also helped me connect with people who share my passion for performing. Through developing with Tūhourangi Ngāti Wāhiao, I have made connections to different whanau who have helped me stay on track with making sure I learn all the correct actions as well as maintaining a high level of accuracy. (7) This became more clear as we prepared for Te Maevanui in Rarotonga. Te Maevanui is a traditional dance competition held annually in the Cook Islands. It involves teams performing complex choreography and showcasing their cultural heritage through music and dance. The preparation for Te Maevanui helped me with professionalism and consistency, as well as the extension of the arms and the length of the poi, which generates a distinct sound that I was unaware of before those rehearsals. (7) I also learned the necessity of coordination and timing between my hands in addition, being a member of a team and working towards a common objective taught me essential teamwork skills.

