

**Ahakoā he iti: Early childhood pedagogies affirming of Māori children's
rights to their culture.**

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Abstract

This paper considers the position of *tamariki* Māori, the indigenous children of Aotearoa (a Māori name for New Zealand), in relation to the impact of colonization on their rights, including a focus on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the current educational policy arena. It then provides an explication of a Māori perspective of tika and tikanga, Māori rights as enacted through a Māori worldview. We then proceed to offer some illustrations from our recent research projects in this country of ways that teachers are engaging with tamariki and whānau Māori (Māori children and families) in endeavours which give expression to pedagogical enactment respectful and reflective of tikanga Māori (values and cultural practices). It is concluded that there are possibilities for early childhood pedagogies which enable a re-narrativizing of Māori ways of being, knowing and doing, in affirmation of children's rights to identity possibilities sourced in their own tikanga (knowledges and practices which are culturally right).

Introduction

In order to understand the current early childhood education context for the rights of Māori children in Aotearoa, it is necessary to reflect on the particular history of colonization in this country. This was characterised by an enlightened treaty of settlement, the undertakings of which were subsequently disregarded as a wave of assimilationist legislation and policy swept aside any notion of protecting the rights of the indigenous people to their language, culture and prestige. The first section of this paper will outline some aspects of this colonization process as far as they impacted on the rights of Māori children. The lens is then broadened to outline the international context for indigenous children's rights. We then move to a brief discussion of early childhood education in Aotearoa, which has been characterised in recent years by a strong commitment both from within the teaching profession and reflected in our curriculum document to validation and enactment of the Māori language and cultural ways of being, knowing and doing.

Māori are currently around 17.7% of the population in Aotearoa (Statistics New Zealand, 2007), whilst 78% of early childhood teachers are *Pākehā* (of European descent), and 8% are Māori (Harkess, 2004). Early childhood educators need more than just a commitment to honoring obligations to Māori children with regard to their rights to language and culture. Authentic enactment of indigenous culture by non-indigenous educators requires that these teachers have had the opportunity and experiences that provide them with deep understandings of the particular indigenous values (Ritchie, 2002). However, the hegemonic power of the discourses of colonization and majoritarianism have perpetuated education provision has been sadly lacking in this regard, rendering the vast

majority of early childhood educators with a limited capacity in terms of Māori language and cultural knowledges (Harkess, 2004).

In a counter-colonial response to this invisibilisation of Māori epistemologies, this paper offers an overview of various components of *tikanga* Māori, the values and cultural practices that are not only *tika* (right) for Māori children, but are also the right of Māori children, in terms of their access to these within everyday educational experiences. Lastly, we offer some illustrative examples from recent research in early childhood centres where the teachers have been demonstrating their commitment to delivering programmes with a strong representation of Māori content.

Impacts of Colonization for *Tamariki* Māori in Aotearoa

Despite promises made to protect Māori rights by the British Crown in order to legitimate settlement in the then Māori sovereign nation, the subsequent colonization era has breached the rights of Māori children and their families in ways that are immeasurably devastating, as evidenced for example in the negative social statistics attached to Māori (Ministry of Health, 2006; Policy Strategy and Research Group Department of Corrections, 2007). The losses include the rights to their language, and the cultural understandings it expresses, along with deeply damaging impacts on Māori knowledges and the traditional institutional infrastructures that enable Māori children to access these.

The 1840 treaty by which the indigenous Māori of Aotearoa New Zealand allowed for co-habitation of their lands with British settlers, *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*/The Treaty of Waitangi, contains within it notions of implied rights to Māori children. The second article of the Māori version of the treaty, protected Māori *rangatiratanga* (self-determination) and

their '*taonga katoa*', all things of value to Māori. The Waitangi Tribunal, established as a form of government commission to investigate historical grievances due to breaches of the treaty, later confirmed that the Māori language was one of these items of value (Waitangi Tribunal, 1986). The Tribunal not only condemned the education system's failure in regard to the protection of the *taonga* of the language. They went further however, in proclaiming that "Maori children leave school uneducated by normal standards, and that disability bedevils their progress for the rest of their lives" (Waitangi Tribunal, 1986, section 1). They further considered that "instruction in Maori should be available as of right to the children of parents who seek it" (Waitangi Tribunal, 1986, section 1).

Inseparable from the language, are the *tikanga*, the belief systems and cultural practices that underpin enactment of 'being Māori'. This extends from the root word '*tika*' which may be variably translated as: correct, accurate, appropriate, decent, and ethical. Interestingly, *tikanga* can also be translated as 'rights' as seen in the equal citizenship rights granted to Māori in Article Three of the *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*/The Treaty of Waitangi (Kawharu, 2010). This convergence of meanings for the term '*tikanga*' is demonstrated in the evidence provided by a Mr J Watson to a pre-treaty (1838) House of Lords Select Committee inquiry into 'New Zealand affairs':

The Customs and Laws appear to be very much alike, and they seem to be remarkably tenacious of them, and they initiate their children into them in very early Days. It is very amusing to see them teaching their Children; they will teach their Children as if they were old persons and in return hear them as patiently as if they were

old People speaking, allowing the Child to ask any questions. (Watkins, 1838, cited in Benton, Frame, & Meredith, 2007, p. 393)

The colonization process which followed the treaty signing in 1840 led very quickly to an abrogation of those treaty commitments. The disregard for *te reo Māori* (Māori language) and for the rights of *tamariki* Māori to educational achievement are only two aspects of the multitudinous breach of faith demonstrated by the British Crown towards Māori after their assumption of sovereignty. The exclusion of Māori from the 'democratic' parliamentary system blatantly disregarded the Article Two promise to uphold the *tinio rangatiranga*, absolute authority, or self-determination of the Māori chiefs. A raft of subsequent legislation and resultant land confiscations led to the socio-economic marginalization of the dispossessed. Education policy not only banned the speaking of the Māori language, but confined Māori to education that aimed to prepare them solely for manual and domestic labour roles within society. Colonization has denied *tamariki* Māori their right to access to conceptualizations grounded in *tikanga* Māori, with consequent negative multi-generationally compounding consequences of alienation and marginalization.

The Māori-led revitalization of language in recent decades has involved a reassertion of *tinio rangatiratanga* (self-determination) through the *kōhanga reo* (early childhood) and *kura kaupapa* (elementary school) movements which are managed and taught by Māori and through the medium of *te reo Māori* (the Māori language). Outside of this small sector, *tamariki* (children) in regular education settings are likely to be taught by a teacher who is not Māori, and does not speak Māori. In 2009, fewer than a quarter of those Māori children who attended an early childhood education service were involved in a Māori language

immersion programme (Waitangi Tribunal, 2010). Of the general population only 1.6% of *Pākehā* (citizens of European ancestry) are reported as being able to speak Māori compared to 24% of Māori who considered that were able to converse in the Māori language (Ministry of Social Development, 2009).

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People

The New Zealand government has recently signed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) (United Nations, 2007). Article 14.1 of UNDRIP states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.” Similarly Article 15.1 recognizes that “Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information” (United Nations, 2007).

The longstanding *Tiriti o Waitangi* commitments, as well as enduring aspirations of Māori for the self-determination which would ensure the maintenance of cultural integrity, along with recent international affirmations of these indigenous rights, uphold the need for both educators and researchers to re-position *tamariki* and *whānau Māori* at the centre of educational and research endeavours. Recent developments in educational curriculum and policy in *Aotearoa* New Zealand have provided both philosophical rationale and strategic leveraging for Māori in reasserting their rights to language and tikanga as an explicit component of their children’s educational lives.

A wide range of previous research with *whānau Māori* (Māori families) has confirmed that even those who choose to bring their tamariki to early childhood centres other than *kōhanga reo* want their children to develop a facility in the language that is their birthright as Māori, and would like this to be supported within mainstream educational settings (AGB/McNair, 1992; Dixon, Widdowson, Meagher-Lundberg, McMurchy-Pilkington, & McMurchy-Pilkington, 2007; Else, 1997; Te Puni Kōkiri/Ministry of Māori Development, 1998). *Te reo Māori* is the first language of this country and of its indigenous peoples. Its national status as a *taonga* (something of high value to Māori) should have been protected by Article Two of the 1840 *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*. This was belatedly acknowledged when Māori was made an official language of New Zealand in 1987. Māori whānau aspirations for their children to grow up knowing their own language are enduring despite the negation of these over many generations of state school policies, and practices which included beating children for speaking Māori. Data shared by an *iwi* (tribal) Education Initiative research partner supported these previous findings. Aspirations from their surveys of educators and whānau included the following: “I would like to see our *tamariki* being bilingual and being completely comfortable in either *Māori* or *Pākehā* settings—having an understanding of the protocols or expected behaviour in these, i.e. bicultural” (Ritchie & Rau, 2006, p. 24).

The Early Childhood Education Context for Tamariki and Tikanga Māori

There are a number of key early childhood education documents that have bearing on the situation of the rights of tamariki Māori to education that reflects and upholds tikanga. As early as 1988, the Labour government-commissioned ‘Meade report’, *Education to Be More*,

affirmed that both *te reo* and *tikanga Māori* were to be considered as components of ‘quality’ early childhood education in this country (Meade, 1988).

In 1996, *Te Whāriki. He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1996), the early childhood curriculum was a national ‘first’ on two counts. It was our first early childhood curriculum and the first bilingual national curriculum document, reflective of the early childhood sector’s commitment to Tiriti-based obligations. *Te Whāriki* recognises that:

New Zealand is the home of Māori language and culture: curriculum in early childhood settings should promote *te reo* and *ngā tikanga Māori*, making them visible and affirming their value for children from all cultural backgrounds. Adults working with children should demonstrate an understanding of the different *iwi* and the meaning of *whānau* and *whanaungatanga*. They should also respect the aspirations of parents and families for their children. (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 42)

Whilst the curriculum document has been widely celebrated for its sociocultural and holistic paradigm, the aspirations it contains have nevertheless remained challenging for an educator workforce that is predominately monoculturally *Pākehā* (of European descent) (Ritchie, 2003a, 2003b).

More recently, the Ministry of Education’s Māori Education strategy, *Ka Hikitia. Managing for Success* (Ministry of Education, 2008) has been ground-breaking in its vision of shifting the long-standing colonialist discourse pertaining to Māori educational achievement

away from the longstanding racist deficit thinking, towards its 'Strategic Intent' of 'Māori enjoying success as Māori' (p. 18). This will entail "having an education system that provides all Māori learners with the opportunity to get what they require to realise their own unique potential and succeed in their lives as Māori" (p. 18). *Ka Hikitia* further recognizes that "Succeeding as Māori captures and reflects that *identity and culture* are essential ingredients of success" (p. 18). Fluency in the language that reflects and encapsulates one's identity and culture seems an obvious goal. However, it would also be advantageous for *all* students in this country to gain fluency in the Māori language, since "Bilingualism and biliteracy have consistently been associated in the literature with high educational aspirations and school achievement" since this "allows children to gain access to a broad array of cultural resources" to support their learning and understandings (Moll, 2010, p. 456).

Kei te Tika te Tikanga – the Ethics of Doing What is Right

As explained previously, the term *tika*, in the Māori language, refers to that which is correct, or right. *Tikanga*, are the right ways of being, knowing and doing, as well as 'rights'. *Tikanga* should not however, be viewed merely as an equivalent to the Western body of law. Not only does *tikanga* form the body of Māori customary law, it also outlines fundamental Māori ethics and values, underpinning "customary obligations, rights, and interests, and indeed the whole Māori worldview" (Dr Manuka Henare cited in Waitangi Tribunal, 2004, p. 2).

Tikanga shapes Māori philosophy and religion, and explains Māori motivations and behavior. This includes the notion of *tika* as that which is right, and of *tikanga* as the

‘ethic of the distinctive nature of things, of the right way, of the quest for justice’. (Dr Manuka Henare cited in Waitangi Tribunal, 2004, p. 2).

The following sections discuss various applications of *tikanga* within a Māori worldview: *tikanga-a-reo* (tikanga as expressed through the Māori language); *tikanga-a-iwi/hapū* (tikanga as specific to each tribe and sub-tribe), *tikanga-a-whakapapa* (tikanga in geneological context); and *tikanga-a-wairua* (tikanga of spiritual interconnectedness).

***Tikanga-a-reo* – The power of language**

A Māori worldview recognizes the central importance of *te reo* (the Māori language) as the source and mechanism for reflecting and transmitting tikanga. Valued and gifted from one generation to the next, *te reo* imprints *Te Ao Māori* philosophy, weaving values and beliefs through metaphors, proverbs and traditional stories (whakatauki, whakatauākī, pūrākau, pakiwaitara and kōrero). *Te reo* is therefore critical to shaping Māori ways of knowing, doing and being in articulations which are tika (right). *Te reo* is a lived language, a *taonga* (treasure) that was officially recognized and preserved in law through the 1987 Māori Language Act (New Zealand Parliament, 1987). The Act preamble cites Article Two of *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* as having confirmed and guaranteed to Māori all their *taonga*, thus acknowledging *te reo Māori* to be one of the treasures meant to have been protected by our nation’s founding document. The Act also instigated *Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori* (The Māori Language Commission), which adopted the phrase ‘*He taonga te reo*’ (The Māori language is a treasure) as the slogan for the national Maori Language Year in 1995 (King, 2003). Māori, as a metaphoric people, view *te reo* as ‘he taonga tuku iho nō ngā tūpuna’ -

the language is considered to be a treasure handed down from the elders to the mokopuna (grandchildren).

Te reo Māori narratives and stories embedded in Māori metaphoric lore provide cues mapping pathways and life passages. Māori have held on unrelentingly to their collective knowledges. Traditionally, ritual occasions of oratorical immersion provided opportunities to transmit moral messages, metaphors serving as a mechanism of collective consciousness. The transmission of shared understandings through storying highlights Māori conceptual understandings as being accessible to *tamariki* through the dual meanings of *tikanga* – both ritually and as a right.

Māori mythology contains messages and guidance for all aspects of daily life. Myths are recognized as “not simply stories that belong to the past, but are more like a blueprint for the present and future, relating past, present and future together as inseparable” (Prentice, 2004, p. 220). *Te reo* expressed as *tikanga* articulates *Te Ao Māori* practical and theoretical constructions, rites and rights embedded in indigenous education philosophy and practice.

***Tikanga-a iwi/hapū* – Specificity of tribal identities**

A recent report of the Waitangi Tribunal, the government appointed commission of inquiry charged with making recommendations on historic and contemporary breaches of the Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi, makes the statement that “everything is about tikanga, and tikanga is about everything” (Waitangi Tribunal, 2004, p. 1). Tikanga Māori can be viewed as potentiality, in offering ways that are right to conduct oneself as *iwi*, *hapū*,

whānau and as an individual. *Tikanga* does vary from *iwi* to *iwi* (tribe to tribe). Hirini Mead explains:

The ideas and practices relating to *tikanga* Māori differ from one tribal region to another. While there are some constants throughout the land, the details of performance are different and the explanations provided may differ as well. There is always a need to refer to the *tikanga* of the local people. (Mead, 2003, p. 8)

This variation of *tikanga* from people to people and place to place is moderated through recognition of the notion of *tangata whenua* status, the recognition of the connection of the *iwi* (tribal people) from a particular area with the geography of that place, and their consequent rights to occupy that *whenua* (land). What is *tika/tikanga* for *iwi* from one area may well differ to that of *iwi* from another region. It is therefore *tika* (right) for *tamariki/mokopuna* (children) to have access and be immersed in the *tikanga* of their own *iwi*. As the result of colonization impacts, many indigenous *tamariki/mokopuna* have been dislocated from their birthright of educational systems that are *tika*, that is, *tikanga*-based. This poses challenges for educators who may know little of the generalities of *tikanga Māori*, let alone the specificities of particular tribal contexts.

Tikanga-a-whakapapa – Genealogical inheritances

Māori cosmological belief locates *te ira wairua* (spiritual realm) at the beginning of the recitation of *whakapapa* (geneology), *ngā Atua* (the Spiritual Ancestors/Gods) preceding the acknowledging of *te ira tangata* (mortal beings) (Walker, 2004). The Māori worldview encapsulated within *whakapapa* describes the origins of the world in the format of an

ancestral narrative (Walker, 2004). *Whakapapa* is ordered, dynamic, representative of time and the future. Knowledge of *whakapapa* establishes one's *tūrangawaewae*, a place of belonging which connects the *mokopuna* with their *tūpuna* (ancestors), *whānau*, *hapū*, *iwi* and *whenua* (land) and ultimately himself/herself. It allows Māori to position themselves in relationship not only to *hapū* and *iwi*, but also to the *whenua* (land), *awa* (rivers) and the universe. *Mokopuna* are literally the imprint of their *tūpuna*, *whānau*, *hapū* and *iwi*. *Whakapapa* stories our existence, providing the foundation of Māori beginnings. Andrea Morrison writes that:

Whakapapa links Māori as descendants of Papatūānuku (mother earth) and Ranginui (sky father) and records an intimate link for Māori with the earth and the physical world. We can be linked through whakapapa in the varying relationships of whānau, hapū and iwi to the landscape of tribal areas, specifically to mountains, rivers, lakes and sea. Whakapapa also means that a person's ancestors populate space through historical time and present time. (Morrison, 1999, p. 46)

Māori theorizing integrates the animate and inanimate, recognizing an indivisible natural world. *Tikanga-a-whakapapa* inculcates protocols and rituals which regulate and uphold reciprocity of respect for all that is living and non-living.

***Tikanga-a-Wairua* – Spiritual interconnectedness**

Māori spirituality upholds a philosophical belief system that positions *Ranginui* (Sky Father), *Papa-tū-a-nuku* (Earth Mother) and *ngā Atua* (the Gods) at the centrality of our whakapapa, deriving our cosmological beliefs recorded in ancient *mōteatea* (traditional

Māori song poetry) describing us as “direct descendants of the heavens” (Mead, 2003, p. 210). Māori reality embodies *ngā Atua* as critical to a Māori holistic worldview which interconnects the spiritual, the human element and the environment in ways that articulate the intimate relationships existing between *tangata* (people), the environment, *hapū*, *iwi* and *wairua* (spiritual interconnectedness). Mihipeka Edwards explains that “Wairua is from the beginning of time and never changes. Everything and every person has wairua and mauri – your spirituality and your life force - they are something you are born with” (Edwards, 1992, p. 55).

Māori view *wairua* as a “dimension internalized within a person from conception” (Pere, 1982, p. 14). *Tikanga-a-wairua* is embedded within *karakia* (spiritual incantations) and rites, underpinning both esoteric expression as well as everyday ways of knowing, doing and being. The gathering of *kai* (food) from the *moana* (ocean) is described as;

something we all did and continue to do. We were taught not only where to go for kaimoana (seafood), but also when to go. Collecting kaimoana was part of our childhood, our upbringing. It is important to our wairua (spiritual wellbeing) and to our mauri (life force) to be able to do such things. It brings us in contact with our tipuna (ancestors) and our surroundings when we go to the moana and collect kai (Christian as cited in Waitangi Tribunal, 2004, p. 7)

Tikanga-a-wairua visibly and invisibly maps life pathways and journeys undertaken, upholding the paramountcy of spiritual wellbeing of both individual and collective.

Whilst *Te Whāriki* contains some explicit expectations with regard to its holistic, bicultural and sociocultural nature, such as the need for “recognition of the spiritual dimension of children’s lives in culturally, socially, and individually appropriate ways” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 41), many early childhood educators continue to feel challenged as to how they might deliver such expectations (Ritchie, 2003a, 2003c). Research had indicated that whilst many teachers were aware of the demands placed on them to deliver practice that honours a commitment to *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*, they felt ill-prepared and ill-equipped to do so. However, there are some teachers and teaching teams who have been working with great dedication to enhance their delivery of what we have begun to term “*Tiriti*-based practice,” that is, practice in line with *Tiriti* obligations to respect Māori authority over things of importance to Māori, whilst working to ensure that Māori values, language, and ways of being, knowing and doing are enacted inclusively throughout the lived early childhood curriculum. We have been fortunate to have been facilitated in conducting a long-term array of research studies that have been designed to provide illustrations of these teachers’ work.

He Ahuatanga o ngā Tikanga - Enacting tikanga within early childhood education

Between 2004 and 2009 three related consecutive two-year studies focusing on the enactment of *Tiriti*-based practice within early childhood education in Aotearoa were conducted with funding from the New Zealand Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (Ritchie, Duhn, Rau, & Craw, 2010; Ritchie & Rau, 2006, 2008). The studies utilised collaborative narrative research methodologies (Bishop, 1996; Clandinin, 2007; Schulz, Schroeder, & Brody, 1997), informed by kaupapa Māori research methodologies (Bishop,

2005, 2008; Smith, 1999, 2005). In each study we worked with teachers from a range of early childhood centres from across the country, beginning with an initial *hui* (gathering) to outline and discuss the research questions, ethics, and methodologies. Teachers then worked in their own teams, and settings, supported by the research directors, to design and refine their approaches to data collection, which included collecting narratives from interviews with children and parents, centre documentation, photos, video and audio recordings, and co-theorising discussions. At a final *hui*, the data from the respective centres was shared and further co-theorising discussions took place.

In the following sections, we share some narratives from these studies: ‘*Whakawhanaungatanga: Partnerships in Bicultural Development in Early Childhood Care and Education*’ (Ritchie & Rau, 2006); ‘*Te Puawaitanga: Partnerships with tamariki and whanau in bicultural early childhood care and education*’ (Ritchie & Rau, 2008); and ‘*Titiro Whakamuri – Hoki Whakamua – Caring for ourselves, each other and the Environment in Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa*’ (Ritchie et al., 2010).

Ngā Taonga o ngā Tūpuna: Te Reo a Gift from our Ancestors

Oral, visual and scribed traditions form part of a great legacy handed down to us from our tūpuna (Meyer, 2003, p. 75). Māori epistemology actualizes an intergenerational model of learning, involving elders and *mokopuna* (grandchildren). Co-researcher Poua, an elder from the southern reaches of *Aotearoa*, shared insights of what *tikanga-a-reo* means on his *whenua* (land), with his *iwi* (tribe) and through his experiences. Poua recalls that

I was brought up with Māori right through my life, and we were very, very specific, like we had no word for 'birds', we had no word for 'ocean', had no word for 'bush'. Every tree had a name and some trees even of the same species had different names.

In this Māori realm, *te reo* (Māori language) has shaped Poua's world. Poua articulates the significance of naming, of specificity in valuing the uniqueness of all things. The word 'bird' as a collective term did not exist. Instead, every separate species of bird was named in its own right. Sharing knowledges and understandings with teachers and *mokopuna* in early childhood centres, Poua's *kōrero* focused on *whakapapa* (origins) expressive of Māori relatedness to the environment:

We ensured that each centre knew where their centre was - the surrounding hills and the valleys, the rivers, the place names, the stars at night. They are very important because they're part of our *tikanga*. They are the messengers that brought us here from Hawaiiki.

Poua's narratives resonate innate wisdoms, a lived literacy with an intimate connectedness to the landscape, to the universe. Poua reads the landscape, utilises language specificity, and recognises the *mana* (prestige) of the stars as *whānau* (relatives), "messengers that brought us here", who helped Māori navigate Aōtearoa.

Poua talks about the differences in dialect. He refers to a word used in the North Island of New Zealand. The word is '*Pāpa*', meaning 'Father'. However, in the very south of the South Island there is a dialectal difference. Poua explains that for his hapū, "*Rangi is*

the father. So I am Rangi to my children, and my good lady is Papa to the children". These terms are sourced in Māori *whakapapa* (origins), since *Ranginui* is the Sky Father whilst *Papa-tū-a-nuku* is the Earth Mother. The relationship is symbolized metaphorically. *Te reo* utilised is unique to a particular region. The *tamariki/mokopuna* with whom Poua has engaged have had the privilege to have been enriched through their access to the specificities of Poua's narratives and the knowledge these convey, as will be illustrated in the following section.

Southern Iwi/Hapū Kōrero – Voices from Southern Māori

Teacher co-researchers from Richard Hudson Kindergarten [RHK] in Dunedin posed a research question which focused on learning about *Ranginui/Rakinui* and *Papa-tū-a-nuku* as inspirational to *tamariki* and *whānau* in considering ecologically sustainable choices. The teachers articulated their outcomes:

We consulted with Huata Holmes, our *kaumātua* (elder), for guidance, expert knowledge and inspiration. The Southern Māori perspective or "flavour" is important. Lee Blackie, our Senior Teacher, accompanied Huata and gave us a practical aspect that could sit side by side with Huata's ideas. In order to add authenticity and depth we arranged for Huata to come and narrate his Southern mythology/stories/*pūrākau* to the children and *whānau* as told to him as a child by his grandmothers and great grandmothers.. Huata's *kōrero* was excellent and by working together we have achieved more of a shared understanding. He told of the great *waka* (canoe) of *Aoraki* coming through the sky down to the South Island. He also used the *waiata* (song) '*Hoea te Waka*' to support his *kōrero*. This has become a

real favourite. His *kōrero* has supported our teaching of the importance of *Papa-tū-a-nuku* in our lives [RHK].

The intergenerational *kōrero* shared by Huata is specific to Southern *hapū* and *iwi*, it also reflects Māori pedagogy. This *kaumātua* (elder) repositions a narrative from ancient times into the present generation. The teachers used these narratives as the basis for instilling understandings around our responsibilities as *kaitiaki* (guardians) of the *whenua* (land).

By teaching the children about the importance of looking after *Papa-tū-a-nuku*, they are learning, thinking and teaching others about the conservation and protection of the *taoka/taonga* of the land. The *whenua* is of utmost importance in the production of food, which affects us all. It is about our wellbeing. This is empowering the children to learn to become the *kaitiaki/guardians* of the land [RHK].

The classical narrative of cosmological origins has generated new links to *Te Ao Māori* with teachers and tamariki together experiencing new relationships with *Ranginui*, *Papa-tū-a-nuku* and *ngā Atua*. *Tikanga-a-whakapapa* is expressed through evolved *tamariki* respect for their surrounding environment.

He Arahi Tapu – Sacred Pathways

Journeying within *Te Ao Māori* is to experience ‘*wairua*’, an uplifting of spirit or “*hau* (the breath of the divine spirit), the source of existent being and life” and of “*mauri*, the elemental essence imparted by *wairua*” (Marsden, 2003, p. 47). Teachers from other early

childhood centres in our recent study also shared narratives reflective of this sense of spiritual awareness and interconnectedness, such as the following from Hawera Kindergarten:

In caring for our natural environment, the *tamariki* are developing respectful relationships with nature whilst nurturing their health, well-being and *wairua* (spirituality/soul) within. The children freely interact with our garden to express their inner thoughts and emotions. Sadly, we lost our pet rabbit, Misty. The children miss our pet rabbit and often pick flowers from our garden on theirs and lay them on the ground by Misty.

Our little pot plants had finished flowering so we recycled them by transplanting succulents in the pots. First we had *karakia* to acknowledge Tane Mahuta (God of Forests), then broke off pieces of the succulent plants, sat them in the pots and watered them. The children carried river stones from the gravel pit and poured them into the planter boxes. We talked about gardening, looking after the plants, where the stones came from and experienced the *mauri* (life force) in the plants and stones. It was a good team effort. [HK]

Rituals experienced by *tamariki* and *kaiako* (teachers) in caring for plants, stones, pets and each other resonate a sense of connectedness, an awareness of *mauri*. *Tikanga-a-wairua* is imbued within a *Te Ao Māori* paradigm.

Te Reo a ngā Tamariki – Children’s Voices

An objective which proved challenging for many of the educator co-researchers within all three of our studies, was to seek the voices of *tamariki*. More important than the methodological and logistic strategies was the need, first and foremost, to build trusting reciprocal relationships with the children and their families. Vikki, a Māori head teacher, recalled the blossoming (*puawaitanga*) of a Māori child and her mother who had joined Galbraith Kindergarten in 2006, shortly before the death of our Māori Queen, Te Arikinui Dame Te Atairangikaahu. The kindergarten is based in Ngāruawahia, a town central to the Tainui people. Vikki recalled:

I remember they were very shy, Mum was looking around and Katerina wouldn’t even look at us. I think back to our welcome. What’s important for us as a *whānau* at Galbraith is to make *whānau/tamariki* feel welcome, to feel it’s okay to be here — don’t bombard them with the paperwork! So that’s how we started.

Initial *hui* can make a critical difference to engaged Māori responsiveness. A feeling of being valued both through *kaiako* enactment and the environment was clearly powerful, in that this family chose to make their way across town on foot to attend this particular centre. Vikki’s narrative continues:

Mum decided Galbraith was the place she wanted her daughter to be at so they used to walk over and back everyday. I asked her where she was from, as Māori people do. She was from the Tainui *rohe* (the area of the local tribe, Tainui). I talked about some of the practices that happened at Galbraith as an acknowledgement of

the *tangata whenua* (people of the land). She said “Oh that’s really cool”, and because the regatta was on I suggested she might want to take a walk with us and help supervise the tamariki. She did that, from then on she’d go and make a cup of tea for herself, not only for herself but also for teachers. So I think we helped create a place of belonging for her.

After the kindergarten had attended the *tangihanga* (funeral) for Te Arikinui Dame Te Atairangikaahu, Vikki encouraged Katerina to share her *pānui* (news) at the morning mat-time. After several days of encouragement, Katerina finally agreed, on condition that her mother would stand beside her:

Katerina stood up and she said, “Come on Mum, let’s go.” So Mum went to stand beside her and she began with “Katerina went to the Māori Queen’s funeral but we were there for all the days and we saw . . .”, and then Katerina talked about her Uncles and Aunties being there and what she thought was important there. So Mum was starting to instigate the *kōrero* (talking) with her daughter so she could talk to the *whānau*. Previously you just couldn’t get “boo” out of Mum either. So what we saw of this girl, a very shy Māori girl who previously wouldn’t talk—once she started you couldn’t stop her! It was like she thought “It’s okay to do this now, I can do this, my Mum is here.” When she finished it was like: “Yes! Katerina!!!” And you could see the smiles on Mum’s face and her face and we took a picture of them both together and next day Mum goes, “Oh, have you got that photo?” and of course we blew it up. There was one in Katerina’s folder for her stories but there was also one of her and Mum and we laminated it and she took it away. Katerina just loved having her

Mum—“This is my Mum—my Mum’s doing this—my Mum’s doing that”, you know, her whole *kōrero*, her language it just extended, all her *kōrero* and many times she would *pānui* after that about a range of things, but a lot of it was based around *whānau* and the *marae* (meeting place), recalling things from when we were at the *marae*, when we were at the regatta. That was the link for her and she felt comfortable talking about her Māori *tikanga*. And the other thing that we noticed too about Katerina is she was entering a lot more curriculum areas, it was like a door opened for her and she was able to cope with what was out there now and I truly believe it was from the *kōrero* when Mum came in and did all that with her and she could see the value of it and for Mum too, she goes “This is choice, this place is choice”.

This narrative of empowerment illustrates how this particular teacher and early childhood setting enabled Katerina and her mother to access affirmation of identity, recognition of their status as *tangata whenua* (people of the land), through enactment of *tikanga Māori* and *te reo Māori*. Embraced within this *Te Ao Māori* knowing and being, the pair responded at their own pace to the sensitivity and respect shown to them. Their eventual confidence to stand up at mat-time and share their experiences of having attended the Queen’s *tangihanga* reflects a significant collaborative learning paradigm, that of a *whaea* (mother) and her *tamaiti* (child), feeling a sense of safety in a space that recognises and affirms their contribution. This narrative of a *puawaitanga*, a blossoming, encourages us as an early childhood community to implement praxis which recognises children as centrally positioned with their *whānau*, *hapū* and *iwi*, their family and cultural milieu, and which

affirms, supports and celebrates their rights to access the particular knowledges of this cultural positioning within their educational setting.

The following is an excerpt from a conversation from the same study, with two teachers in which Pat, who is Pākehā, and Pera, who is Māori, discuss some of their kindergarten children's responses during the time of the week-long *tangihanga* (funeral ceremonies) for the Māori Queen, Te Arikinui Dame Te Atairangikaahu. Pera, who is a member of the same tribe as the Queen, had been away from the kindergarten as a worker supporting the funeral proceedings:

Pat: And four-year-olds saying something like "The Māori Queen died and she was like the rain and the wind". That is very, very strong and so even while Pera was away, everyday we had newspaper cuttings on the board and children would stand there or sit there and talk about what was happening and why people were crying and then they'd talk about their Grandmas or Granddads who died and their dogs who died and pets and I think it helped them understand what it meant for someone to die. And the parents were involved with the conversations and would come and talk about what the children were saying at home to what was happening there as well.

Pera: *Pākehā* Mums would come and tell us about what their children were talking about at home. Children were drawing pictures at home and one of our Mums wrote little snippets about, "She would love to be Māori" and why she was envious of people who were Māori and the connections that they had.

In this excerpt, all the children attending this kindergarten were swept up in the national outpouring of grief at the Queen's passing, this connection for them made more personal by the absence of Pera. The sense of acceptance of grieving as a natural process had spiritual resonance, reflected in the child's description of the Māori Queen as having now been transformed into another realm of "the rain and the wind". There is a sense of reflection of Māori spiritual and grieving processes within this early childhood setting, which is one where there are a great many different ethnicities present. This has become so normalised in the modelling and *ahuatanga* (way of being) of the two teachers, that some non-Māori expressed appreciation (and even envy) of the sense of spiritual interconnectedness they perceived. Furthermore, whilst *tamariki* Māori in the centre received affirmation of their right to spiritual wellbeing, all the children and families at this centre experienced access to deeper understandings of spirituality and grieving, aspects which are frequently sanitised from the education of young children.

Our most recent study focused on fostering and ethic of caring for ourselves, others and the environment, through incorporating Māori values and philosophies (Ritchie et al., 2010). Māori children responded to the opportunities provided to become involved in gardening, visit beaches, and so forth, these experiences resonating with their lives within their wider *whānau* and community. A four-year old boy, K, described a drawing he had done with his mother: "That's me fishing and that's my *Koro* (Grandfather). I'm catching a fish with my rod, and there's *kinas* (edible sea urchins) and *pauas* (abalone) and eels. My Mum did the fish and I did the rocks. *Koro* goes in the water and gets them."

His elaboration provided further insights into his connectedness to the process of gathering *kaimoana* (seafood), his excitement at using real implements to catch eels, and the sense of wellbeing he derives from these shared experiences and connection with his *whānau*:

My Koro and my Nanny go to the beach and get kai from there. My Koro dives in the sea and eels under the rocks to find pauas (abalone). Sometimes kinas (sea-eggs) and mussels. Koro takes me fishing but we haven't caught a fish yet! We go to catch eels at night in the rivers, with a long knife – I have caught one! When I have a headache my Nanny and Mum tell me to lay down where it's nice and quiet so it goes away... and it does!" [K, HW]

The teachers at this kindergarten have generated an atmosphere that is validating and affirming of this child's identity and positioning as Māori, whereby he is able to express and have reflected back to him traditional Māori intergenerational knowledge transmission.

Te Reo o ngā Matua – Parents' Voices

Our research processes encouraged teachers to explore the perspectives of both children and families. During the most recent of our studies (Ritchie et al, 2010), Carolyn, a teacher at Papamoa Kindergarten near Tauranga, spent time in conversation with a Māori parent, Estelle. They discussed ways in which the research *kaupapa* (focus), was enacted within their kindergarten. The *Pākehā* teachers at this kindergarten have worked very hard over the years to integrate their commitment to *kaupapa Māori* (Māori philosophy) within their programme. Significant and evident in the narrative which follows, is the comfort of

Māori parents to be involved within this kindergarten on a regular, often daily basis, even to the point of taking the initiative to lead the organisation of a fund-raising event. Estelle makes a number of observations pertaining to current practice within the centre, and offers suggestions as to how this might be strengthened. She appreciates the way in which her son has learnt local Māori *pakiwaitara* [legends] from the kindergarten, and has shared these with his father when they have visited the locations depicted in these stories. She further considers that the children attending the kindergarten have gained an appreciation of Māori seasonal ritual celebrations such as Matariki, the Māori New Year, as Carolyn relates:

Estelle has a son Jackson who has been with us since last year He will turn five next year. She also has Elizabeth who is just two. Estelle is on our enviorgroup [parents' group supporting the ecological sustainability programme within the kindergarten] and is very active in our kindergarten. She will often stay and work with children and has been great with our environmental programme helping with gardens, paper-making and the wormery to name a few things. She set up our wonderful market day.

We talked about different aspects of our programme and Estelle felt that to enhance the Māori side of our environmental programme that we could use the [maramataka – Māori seasonal calendar] fishing and planting charts a bit more and get back into weaving, maybe using a community member. We reminisced about having Rina [a former Māori parent and teaching assistant] with us who was great at supporting us in the areas of te reo and tikanga.

We talked about the children saying karakia (grace) before food. She felt that maybe with so many families moving through the kindergarten that this may not be understood and that constant reminding would be good.

The *pepeha* [each child's individual narrative of their *whakapapa* (geneology) is arrayed on a special wall] she felt was a good idea as it gave children a sense of belonging. She said it was important for the community and that children can share their stories about their family. She had an idea about using a talking stick like they do at the marae [Māori community central meeting place] for children to tell their stories. It would be good as a prompt recall of their knowledge.

Jackson enjoys the [Māori] legends and it is important that they are passed down. He especially likes the legend of the Papamoa hills. Estelle tells me that Jackson thinks that the spring at the top of the Kaimais [local mountain range] is the spring that the whales drank from. She said that he told his father the story of the whales once when they were there. She considers that the children being seen out in the community contributes to the community valuing children. Estelle felt that the children understood the Matariki [Māori New Year mid-winter] festival and that they loved the concept and story about the stars.

This narrative demonstrates the extent to which the teachers at this kindergarten in a very *Pākehā* middle-class location have transformed their practice to generate a teaching environment that demonstrates respect for *tikanga* Māori in integrated and profound ways. The comfortable relationship between this teacher and Estelle, a Māori mother, is also

evident, in Estelle's willingness to offer feedback to Carolyn about ways in which the Māori content of the programme might be enhanced. This is also indicative of a shift towards enactment of *tino rangatiratanga*, or self-determination for Māori, within a mainstream early childhood education setting.

Te Ao Hurihuri – Changing Worlds

Tikanga adheres to ethical principles, heartfelt respect and integrity imbued within its rituals and protocols. Articulations of ancestral *tikanga* transcending western trajectories in some *Aotearoa* early childhood services illuminate transformations towards honoring what is tika, what is right for indigenous *tamariki/mokopuna*. *Tamariki/mokopuna* Māori are sited at the cutting edge of potentialities and possibilities in an *Aotearoa* early childhood context. The role of *kaiako* (teachers) and *kaumātua* (elders) is crucial in delivering pedagogical programmes that serve to restore the rights and rites of *tikanga Māori*.

As educators and researchers, we adhere to our own set of personal and professional ethics, which also include a duty to respect and advocate for others. Working, as many of us do, in localities with histories of colonization, the enormity of our task in creating spaces for indigenous *tamariki* and their *whānau* to access their *tikanga* is recognised. The examples from the research outlined above, serve to illustrate the re-narrativizing possibilities of early childhood education that is committed to the service of *tikanga*, of delivering to *tamariki Māori* what is their birth-right, the access to identity possibilities located in *Te Ao Māori* conceptualisations (a Māori worldview).

Glossary

Aotearoa – a Māori name for New Zealand, literally, “Land of the Long White cloud”

awa – river

hapū – sub-tribe

hau - the breath of the divine spirit

hui - gathering, meeting

iwi - tribe

kai –food

kaiako – teacher(s)

kaimoana - seafood

kaitiaki - guardian(s)

karakia - spiritual incantations) grace

kaumātua – elders

kaupapa – philosophy, topic or focus

kina – sea-eggs, sea urchins

kōrero – talking, speech

mana - prestige

marae – community meeting place

Matariki - the constellation also known as the Pleiades or the Seven Sisters, whose emergence in mid-winter signals the Māori New Year, a traditional celebration of renewal

mauri - the elemental essence imparted by wairua, life force

moana - sea

mokopuna - grandchildren

mōteatea - traditional Māori song poetry

ngā Atua - the Spiritual Ancestors/Gods

Pākehā – citizens of European ancestry

pakiwaitara – legends

pānui - news, notices

Pāpa - Father

Papa-tū-a-nuku (Papa) - Earth Mother

paua - abalone

pepeha - proverb, aphorism, local saying

puawaitanga - blossoming

pūrākau - stories, oral histories

rangatiratanga – traditional leadership, chiefly authority, self-determination, independence

Ranginui/Rakinui (Rangi) - Sky Father

rohe – area, region

Tainui – central north Island tribe

tamaiti - child

tamariki - children

Tāne Mahuta - God of the forests, plants

tangata – person/people

tangata whenua - person/people of the land, indigenous people

tangihanga – funeral ceremony

taonga katoa – all treasures, all things valued

taonga/taoka – treasures, aspects of great value

Te Ao Māori – the Māori world, Māori worldview

te ira tangata – of mortals

te ira wairua – of the spiritual realm

te reo Māori – the Māori language

Te Tiriti o Waitangi - The Treaty of Waitangi

tikanga – customs, habits, methods, rules, plan, Māori cultural values and practices

tikanga-a-iwi/hapū - tikanga as specific to each tribe and sub-tribe

tikanga-a-reo - tikanga as expressed through the Māori language

tikanga-a-wairua - tikanga of spiritual interconnectedness

tikanga-a-whakapapa - tikanga in geneological context

tino - absolute

tūpuna - ancestors

tūrangawaewae - place to which one belongs

wairua – spiritual dimension

waka - canoe

whaea - mother

whakapapa - geneology, geneological interconnectedness

whakataukāki, whakatauki - sayings, proverbs

whānau – family or families, extended family

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