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Te rongo ā tinana, ā hinengaro, ā ngākau ā wairua: Enhancing Māori wellbeing in early childhood education

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Abstract

Wellbeing, according to the Oxford English Dictionary is "the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy" and is fundamental to an individual's ability to function and live well (Cram, 2014; Durie, 1998). From a Māori perspective wellbeing or *hauora*, also incorporates, spiritual, physical, mental and emotional, and social aspects (Durie, 1998). *Mana* (power prestige and authority) and *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship) encapsulate a holistic Māori worldview, and the relationships central to Māori understandings of wellbeing (Dobbs & Eruera, 2014; Hutchings, et al, 2020). The recognition of mana is important for *mokopuna* (grandchild/ren/child/ren), as is the understanding of how to accrue and enhance mana through kaitiakitanga (Marsden, 2003; Paul-Burke & Rameka, 2015). This article outlines the findings from the second phase of a Teaching Learning and Research Initiative (TLRI) funded project, *Te Whakapūmautia te mana: Enhancing mana through kaitiakitanga*, which involved working with *kaiako* (teacher/s) in *Puna Reo* (language springs) and *Kōhanga Reo* (language nests). It also discusses some of the implications for Early Childhood Education (ECE). The project aimed to explore the ways that ECE accords mokopuna opportunities to recognise mana and understand ways to accrue and attain mana through being *kaitiaki* (guardian) of themselves, others, and their environment, thereby contributing to a collective sense of wellbeing.

Keywords: Wellbeing, hauora, Māori, holistic, kaitiakitanga.

Introduction

There are a number of perspectives of wellbeing. Spiritual, physical, mental, emotional, and social wellbeing are fundamental to Māori perspectives of wellbeing or *hauora* (Durie, 1998). The Oxford English Dictionary describes wellbeing as *"the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy"*. Wellbeing is fundamental to an individual's ability to function and live well (Cram, 2014; Durie, 1998). Wellbeing statistics in New Zealand, highlight that Māori have some of the worst levels of educational attainment, high levels of unemployment and incarceration, decreasing levels of home ownership, lower than average incomes, higher than average mortality rates, the highest levels of suicide since records began and inequitable access to healthcare (Chalmers, & Williams, 2018). The latest *Innocenti* Report Card 16 (UNICEF (2020) ranks New Zealand 35th out of the 41 EU and OECD countries, in child wellbeing outcomes across academic and social skills, mental well-being, and physical health. A recent literature review on Māori health by Wilson, et al. (2021) states that "Māori are more likely than other groups in Aotearoa, NZ to encounter structural, cultural, and interpersonal forms of discrimination, marginalisation, and racism when accessing healthcare services" (p.2). They add that "Māori are also less likely to be referred to specialist services, less likely to be prescribed effective medication or surgical interventions, more likely to be discharged from hospital earlier, and more likely to die from amenable diseases" (p.2). It is therefore not surprising that Māori experience more "disease, metabolic disorders, mental illness, maternal health complications and substance abuse issues' than other groups in New Zealand" (p.3). A New Zealand Treasury (The Treasury, 2019) discussion paper, highlights the following wellbeing statistics:

- 51% of prison inmates are Māori;
- 61% of children in care are Māori;
- in 2016, 66.5% of Māori school leavers attained at least Level 2 National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), compared with 83.7% of European school leavers;

- 20% of Māori aged 16–25 are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET), compared with 9% of non-Māori;
- the Māori unemployment rate is 11%, compared with 4% for non-Māori;
- Māori household net worth is $23,000, with European net household worth valued at
- $114,000; and
- 28.2% of Māori own their own home, compared with 56.8% of Europeans (p.4).

The above statistics are particularly confronting, given that Māori, make up only 16.5 % of the New Zealand population (Statistics New Zealand, 2018). The Treasury report adds that these negative statistics highlight that:

> "the current wellbeing of Māori is significantly worse than that of other New Zealanders… Māori do not have the same level of capital stocks and have inequitable access to the tools, resources and opportunities that form the foundation to wellbeing" (p.4).

Inequity is also clearly evident in the education system, according to a UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 15 (UNICEF, 2018), with New Zealand being ranked 33rd of 38 OECD countries for educational inequality across preschool, primary school and secondary school levels. It states that New Zealand is in "the bottom third for each of the three indicators of equality in education" (p.10). Furthermore, *mokopuna* (grandchild/ren/child/ren) attending the same school can experience some the highest achievement discrepancies found anywhere, due to widely divergent learning opportunities (Education Review Office [ERO], 2016). Mokopuna Māori are disproportionately represented in the group of mokopuna who under-achieve (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2019), facing achievement barriers, that stem from negative stereotypes attached to Māori as a social group, structural racism, and unconscious bias (Blank, et. al, 2016). These achievement gaps open up at a very young age, often before mokopuna start school, and can have a lasting impact on adult outcomes (Blank, et. al, 2016).

In 2018, an Education Review Office (ERO) report entitled *Awareness and confidence to work with Te Whāriki 2017*, summarised the findings of a decade of ERO reports in *Te Whāriki, He whāriki*

mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa, early childhood curriculum (2017; *Te Whāriki*), and Māori Early Childhood Education (ECE) provision, claiming that differences between promoting educational success for mokopuna Māori and implementing a bicultural curriculum were not well understood in many ECE services. It stated that 31% of services lacked confidence to work with Te Whāriki to support Māori learners and identified that a lack of support to develop pedagogical knowledge was a major issue for *kaiako* (teachers) who were not confident in working with Te Whāriki to support mokopuna Māori. This lack of pedagogical knowledge and confidence is due to what Ritchie (2003) claims are the lack of kaiako understandings of ways to meet the needs of mokopuna Māori. She states that for kaiako, culturally responsive practice is:

> Subject to the extent to which a largely Pākeha [New Zealander of European descent] early childhood teaching force are able to deliver on expectations that require a level of expertise that is beyond their experience as mono-cultural speakers of English with little experience of Māori culture and values" (p.10).

This situation has not changed markedly according to a number of recent ERO reports including Success for Māori Children in Early Childhood Services' (2010); Partnership with whānau Māori in early childhood services (2012); and Awareness and confidence to work with Te Whāriki 2017 (Education Review Office 2018).

Te Whāriki (MoE, 2017) stresses the importance of Māori being able to enjoy educational success as Māori. It highlights a shared obligation for protecting the Māori language and culture. It makes a number of statements that provide *tikanga* (customs/procedures) and practice expectations for kaiako in relation to cultural notions, including wellbeing, *mana* and *kaitiakitanga* expectations, including: "Kaiako should have an understanding, of Māori approaches to health and wellbeing and how these are applied in practice" (p. 26); "Viewed from a Māori perspective, all children are born with mana inherited from their *tīpuna* (ancestors). Mana is the power of being and must be upheld and enhanced" (p.18); and "Kaiako recognise the relationship mokopuna have with the environment. They support them to fulfil their responsibilities as kaitiaki of the environment" (p.42).

Mana and *kaitiakitanga* encapsulate a holistic Māori worldview, and the relationships central to Māori understandings of wellbeing (Dobbs, & Eruera, 2014). These relationships involve the interconnectedness and interdependence of mankind with mana *atua* (spiritual power and prestige), mana *tangata* (person/people), mana *whenua* (land), mana *reo* (language), and mana *aotūroa* (environment/nature); (Ministry of Education, 2017). Mana can be translated as "authority, control, influence, prestige, power, psychic force, effectual, binding, authoritative ... and take effect" (Hemara, 2000, p.68). It also has a deeper meaning of spiritual power and authority (Love, 2004). Royal (2007) makes the point that "Mana is central, fundamental and foundational to the traditional Māori worldview. Almost everything in traditional culture was somehow linked to mana and it is upon mana that one might construct a perspective on the nature and purpose of education" (p.42). All mokopuna are born with mana from their parents and ancestors (Marsden, 2003; Rameka, 2016). Developing understandings of mana is therefore critical to understanding the Māori person or mokopuna, and the Māori world (Huriwai, & Baker (2016).

Understandings of mana are important for mokopuna, as is the recognition of how to accrue and enhance mana through kaitiakitanga (Marsden, 2003; Paul-Burke & Rameka, 2015). Tiaki translates as, 'to look after, nurse, care, protect, conserve or save'. *Kaitiaki* are agents that perform the task of *kaitiakitanga*, or active guardianship (Paul-Burke & Rameka, 2015). Hutchings, et al., (2020) make the point that "…kaitiakitanga in a broader sense involves physical, emotional and spiritual connectedness, and a sense of being embedded in a particular place (*ki uta ki tai/on land and sea*)" (p.187). Kaitiakitanga acknowledges the role of humans including young children to undertake active guardianship and associated responsibilities. Kaitiakitanga refers to the practical doing. Through kaitiakitanga mana can be enhanced (Reedy & Reedy, 2013).

This article discusses the findings from phase two of the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative funded project *Te Whakapūmautia te Mana:*

Enhancing Mana Through Kaitiakitanga and outlines key learnings for ECE. Data from the first phase of the research, which involved the gathering of *pūrākau* (stories, narratives) from *kaumātua* (elders) and educational leaders, has been analysed and key premises identified as the basis for the work in phase two, with *Puna Reo* (language spring) and *Kohanga Reo* (language nest). Implications for ECE are outlined in the final section.

The Research

The overall aim of the project was to explore the ways that ECE accords mokopuna opportunities to recognise mana and understand ways to accrue and attain mana through being kaitiaki of themselves, others, and their environment, thereby contributing to a collective sense of wellbeing. Through this exploration of mana, the project will provide access to deeper understandings of curriculum content and practices related to mana and kaitiakitanga. By growing pedagogical expertise, kaiako confidence and competence to reflect tikanga Māori in everyday practice will be enhanced. At the same time, it can support deeper kaiako understandings and enactments of the cultural competencies related to knowing, respecting, and working with Māori learners, their *whānau* (family or extended family) and *iwi* (tribe). The project also aims to provide opportunities for kaiako to gain the required expertise and skills that can reinforce the enactment of Te Whāriki and express their commitment to *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* as the foundation of the bicultural ECE curriculum.

The two-year project involves four phases of work. Phase one (2020), *Kohikohinga Pūrākau* entailed collecting pūrākau from kaumatua, Māori ECE experts, leaders and kaiako, on mana and how it can be enhanced through kaitiakitanga. In phase two (2020-2021), *Taunaki Puna Reo*, the pūrākau were analysed and theoretical understandings shared with kaiako in the three Māori Medium ECE services, Puna Reo and Kohanga Reo. Kaiako theorising and practices developed through the research were shared with the three English medium ECE services in the *Taunaki Auraki* phase, the third phase (2021), providing a powerful foundation for pedagogical understandings and practice. The fourth phase (2021), *Whanaketanga Ariā*, involved

the analysis of data from all phases of the research. Each phase of the research built upon the last, and in Whanaketanga Ariā all aspects of the research were brought together as a cohesive entity. The Research Questions:

1. In what ways do/can mokopuna in ECE services enact mana and kaitiakitanga?
2. What does the enactment of mana and kaitiakitanga look like for mokopuna, and for kaiako in ECE?
3. What are the people, tools/artefacts, processes, and practices that contribute to enhancing mana and kaitiakitanga for mokopuna?

Kaupapa Māori methodological principles and understandings provide the cultural and ethical foundation for the project. Smith (1991) describes Kaupapa Māori as perceiving the world from a Māori epistemological perspective and assuming the normalcy of Māori values, understandings, and behaviours. Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing are therefore central to the research design, process, analysis, and intended outcomes (Berryman, 2008; Lee et al., 2012; Rameka, 2015). As a *rōpū kairangahau Māori* (Māori research team), our backgrounds and experiences embed us and our research within Māori communities, and the cultural values and understandings integral to those contexts, much of which is unspoken and often unconscious. When researching kaiako, mokopuna and whānau Māori, being Māori is central to our theoretical and research paradigms.

Wānanga with individuals and groups was another important feature of the research design. Wānanga were traditionally places of learning, where knowledge of oral traditions, lore and valued understandings were preserved and passed on. In the research, wānanga were framed as meetings with groups and individuals who were working on and supporting the research goals. Wānanga, depending on participants wishes, were either video recorded, audio recorded and transcribed, notes taken, or participants were able to write their contributions.

A Kaupapa Māori approach was also utilised to analyse the data, emphasising the interpretation of information intertwined with tikanga Māori

and Māori knowledge and understandings (Cunningham, 2000). Through thematic analysis it was possible to concentrate on identifying themes or patterns from the data in order to support meaning making and understandings (Welsh, 2002). A number of types of data were gathered during the research including: kaiako reflections and evaluations; notes from kaiako focus group interviews; whānau feedback and comments; mokopuna feedback; photos and mokopuna assessments.

Results

Phase One of the research, the Kohikohinga Pūrākau phase, involved collecting pūrākau from kaumatua/Māori ECE experts, leaders and kaiako, on mana and how it was enhanced through kaitiakitanga. Key themes that emerged from Phase One include:

- **Aroha me manaakitanga (love and caring)** - Learning was first and foremost about *aroha* (love) and *manaakitanga* (caring), rather than mana and kaitiakitanga. although kaitiakitanga was not a word they commonly heard as mokopuna, Kaumātua and educational leader's pūrākau highlighted that the tenets of kaitiakitanga were understood through activities such as gardening, gathering kai (food), and gathering resources for weaving.

- **Ā tōna wā (in their own time***)* - Understandings of learnings in terms of mana and kaitiakitanga, often weren't recognised when they were growing up but developed when they reached adulthood or had their own mokopuna.

- **Waiho mā tō mahi e kōrero (learning through experiences)** - Understandings of wellbeing, mana and kaitiakitanga were acquired through experience, rather than direct teaching. Deeper understandings were acquired over time, through participating in activities and tasks.

- **He rā anō āpōpō (sustainability and preserving taonga)** - Much of the learning was around preservation, what needed to be preserved and cared for, including reo (language), tikanga (culture) and values, *moana* (sea), *taiao* (natural world/environment), whenua, *kai* (food), and resources. The key concept was that they needed to look after the garden and the garden would look after them.

- **Tōku Māoritanga (language and culture)** - Whānau had clear roles that supported kaitiakitanga, in line with tikanga, which were not usually debatable. Tikanga and expectations were explained, and it was anticipated that there would be consequences if tikanga was breached. This was directly related to *tapu* (sacred) and *noa* (ordinary) and not trampling mana.

- **Wairuatanga (spiritual connectedness)** - Keeping safe and understanding what you could and could not do was important. Involvement in activities, came with instructions about how to keep safe.

- **Whakatipuranga tipuna (intergenerational transmission)** - Many of the kaumātua and educational leaders grew up with one or both grandparents living with them Grandparents passed on teachings about weaving, gardening, spirituality, and Māori ways of doing.

- **Ngākau māhaki (knowledge and humility)** - There was recognition that kaumātua are kaitiaki of te reo and tikanga of each iwi, but it was stressed that knowledge must be accompanied by humility. It was not about maintaining one's own mana but was more related to the maintaining the mana of te reo, tikanga, *marae* (meeting house), and community.

Te Rongo Theoretical Framing

The themes were further analysed in order to develop a draft theoretical framing that could provide guidance for ECE teaching practice, and the required content, context, and pedagogy knowledge in relation to kaitiakitanga, enhancing mana and wellbeing. Four key theoretical premises have been articulated from the kaumātua and educational leader's pūrākau themes. Each one has examples of pedagogy and

practice from kaiako working in Puna Reo and Kohanga Reo.

Te Rongo ā Tinana (Experience and engagement in their worlds).

Mokopuna must have regular opportunities to engage with and experience their worlds, and the contexts in which they function, including whenua (land), tangata (people), reo (language) and tikanga (culture), taiao (environment), and atua (gods). Learning involves experiencing the environment, observing, following instructions, taking part, and engaging in activities and tasks. From an ECE perspective, regular opportunities to access their worlds, allows mokopuna to interact with the people, languages, values, artefacts, cultural tools, resources and norms and expectations, fundamental to their worlds and the entities that inhabited them. Kaiako explain:

> On the atua side of things, they experience our atua in real life that's not through a book about atua Māori it's through kaitiaki whenua. *Tāne Mahuta* [God of the forest] standing in our corner. *Tāwhirimātea* [God of the elements] feel the wind blowing, they go to the moana (sea). Making connections. Tangible. Concrete. It's a real thing for them, it not something they read about or some sort of fairy tale it's part of their world now… Kaitiakitanga is a huge aspect of that.

> As a kaiako for me it means to be gentle, mindful, and unhurried. I see my role like a gardener and the tamaiti [child], the garden. My responsibility is to nurture, feed and protect the garden so that it flourishes and grows up to be healthy and loved.

Te Rongo ā Hinengaro (Develop knowledge and understandings of their worlds)

The second theoretical premise is that in order for mokopuna to take on kaitiaki roles of any description, they must first and foremost develop the required knowledge and understandings of their worlds, and how they operate. Mokopuna learning must be supported by knowledgeable, capable, and committed kaiako who are able to facilitate the required learnings with mokopuna. Appropriate content knowledge and pedagogical expertise are critical to this transmission of both new and traditional knowledge, as is the ability to notice recognise and respond in appropriate ways to further support the learning. Sharing of traditional knowledge, tribal narratives, cultural

expertise, and practices, and keeping oneself safe both physically and spiritually, are important features of identity development and teaching and learning.

> We all got our own mana. It's how we nurture it. Bringing in new learning from home into the puna tōku ao [my world], their pūrākau, to inform our programme and the way we teach also is how we action mana.

> And it's the importance of knowledge. They know about Tangaroa [God of the sea], they know about the whenua, they know about the importance of tiaki, even when you say don't touch that. It's so strong.

> Matariki [Pleiades]is a revolving kaupapa within the curriculum. We plan our programme around Matariki to provide a range of experiences for tamariki. Each cycle of Matariki determines our programme. We use kupu relevant to Matariki when communicating with tamariki. Matariki is used to whakamana our tamariki in their learning. We are becoming aware of our teaching strategies and thinking about how we support tamariki to understanding the importance of mana whenua, tangata, tinana [body], te ao [the world], tamariki, taonga [precious gift].

Te Rongo ā Ngākau (Develop connectedness to and affinity with their worlds)

The third key premise is the need for mokopuna to develop an affinity with and a connectedness to their worlds, especially a spiritual and emotional connectedness. Central to affinity and connectedness development is an identification with their worlds, a sense of belonging and personal and collective identity with their worlds. This is achieved through learning about one's place in the world, one's *whakapapa*, tribal history, cultural ways of knowing, being and doing, karakia (prayer) related to the worlds and reo associated with the contexts. From this learning, comes a sense of being part of the worlds, belonging to the worlds, rather than being a separate entity from the worlds.

> In order for the child to understand her/his role as kaitiaki, a relationship with the land is vital - this is tangata whenua (people of the land).

> Our children speak directly to the kai (food) in the māra (garden) as loving, nurturing guardians, "kia kaha te tipu'" (Grow big and strong) "Kia ora, kei te pēhea koutou i tēnei rā? Kia kaha rā" (Hi, how

are you today, be strong) Kia matomato te tipu o ngā hua kia pakari kia ora mātou" (Please bear lots of fruits so we can be healthy and strong).

Enacting mana through tamariki sharing their experiences about their world, their whānau and their interests, tamariki discussing what is important to them in their lives, and other tamariki having the opportunity to learn about their hoa [friend] and their lives.

Te Rongo ā Wairua (Contribute to their worlds in meaningful ways)

The fourth key premise is the need for mokopuna to contribute to their worlds in meaningful ways. Contributing to their worlds requires the enactment of learnings, action, commitment, and responsibility. In order for mokopuna to contribute to and develop a sense of responsibility for their worlds they must have authentic opportunities to give, be generous, demonstrate caring and compassion, and in this way demonstrate their understandings of aroha, manaakitanga, kaitiakitanga and mana. Kaiako contribute to mokopuna learning of kaitiakitanga through recognising, valuing and further encouraging these caring empathetic behaviours in mokopuna.

> R is there to either offer his hand to protect pēpi or he's like "Watch our pēpi" and then he'd say "Hey kei konei te pēpi" (The babies are here) if (other mokopuna) are coming really quick on their paihikara (bikes) or scooters. He makes a lot of people aware of where the tēina (younger mokopuna) are.

> We've been talking about tiaki i te taiao (caring for the environment). We speak a lot to our tamariki about ngā Atua Māori (God/s). So, in term two when we went to the moana (sea) we talked about tiaki i a Tangaora (caring for the god of the sea) and they've remembered, and they talked about the rapahi [rubbish] in the ngahere [forest]. And they don't want to leave it there, but we don't want them to pick it up, so there's that strong sense of kaitiakitanga. And they'll say we have to tiaki i a Papatūānuku [Earth Mother].

> Our practices have developed and strengthened over 30 years since establishment. There is a normalcy in adhering and upholding te reo Māori and tikanga Māori. It is no longer a 'big deal' that we are harvesting, planting, or working in our māra. It is very much a part of our kōhanga identity. The regular harvest of fruit and vegetables that are then laid out on the table in the foyer for our families to take home and eat is normal.

Discussion

The place of ECE in mokopuna learning and development, is often overlooked or misunderstood. ECE has a critical role to play in addressing Māori wellbeing inequities, through promoting educational success for mokopuna Māori. Te Whāriki, *He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early childhood curriculum* highlights the place of ECE in establishing the foundations for learning and wellbeing, stating:

> Early childhood is a period of momentous significance for all people growing up in [our] culture. By the time this period is over, children will have formed conceptions of themselves as social beings, as thinkers, and as language users, and they will have reached certain important decisions about their own abilities and their own worth.
> (Donaldson et. al, 1983, cited in MoE, 2017, p.23)

The findings from first two phases of the research have been shared with the three English medium ECE services in phase 3 - Taunaki Auraki, to support their exploration of pedagogical understandings and practices related to mana and kaitiakitanga. Kaiako in the English medium services have, in turn, been able to contribute their developing knowledge, practices and theoretical understandings, to the combined research base. In the final phase, Whanaketanga Ariā, the data from all phases were brought together to frame a theoretical and pedagogical foundation that articulates Māori understandings of mana, kaitiakitanga and wellbeing. It involved the articulation of Māori worldviews, concepts, values, and practices that are critical to holistic wellbeing for Māori.

Furthermore, if mokopuna are to receive equitable educational provision and opportunities to succeed, there must be major changes across ECE as a whole, including Initial teacher education, ECE regulations and standards, and kaiako pedagogical knowledge and understandings of ways to implement the ECE curriculum.

As previously stated, wellbeing is fundamental to an individual's ability to function and live well.

What is clear from the wellbeing statistics and literature is that Māori are disproportionately impacted by the structural racism and unconscious bias that is endemic in the governmental service sectors, systems, and services, including the education system. This has resulted in Māori marginalisation, inequitable access to services, and the disgraceful education and wellbeing statistics we have today. This situation must change, and it must change now, to ensure upcoming generations not suffer the consequences of racism and prejudice in their education, wellbeing, and lives.

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