



MAINTAINING TRADITIONAL MĀORI KNOWLEDGE in EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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In New Zealand, mātauranga Māori continues to evolve within early childhood education (ECE). In some cases, the transmission of indigenous knowledge to mokopuna has been distorted by religious patriarchal undertones. According to Monte Aranga, the epistemological knowledge of the indigenous peoples has been adulterated by Christianity and is now far removed from its original context (Aranga, 2002). The values and beliefs of the dominant European culture have effectively been assimilated into the cultural values and beliefs of the tangata whenua thus creating a gender imbalance for future generations of iwi Māori. Colonisation has infected many generations of Māori knowledge and the karanga for the authenticity of indigenous knowledge is long overdue. A critical analysis of mātauranga Māori in ECE will reveal how to de-colonise our own learning and teaching processes so that we do not re-colonise the mātauranga we share with mokopuna Māori in the 21st century and beyond. Maintaining authentic traditional knowledge in ECE requires an ongoing inventory of the personal and professional philosophy of the teacher in support of the holistic empowerment of Māori mokopuna in early childhood education.

In the 21st century, it is becoming more acceptable for ECE academic authors to generalise and conceptualise te reo and mātauranga Māori. In 1996, the Ministry of Education implemented *Te Whāriki*, the ECE state curriculum, with all intentions of marrying up indigenous concepts with the New Zealand Curriculum Framework. However, the European values and the values of the tangata whenua have very different cultural philosophies and the translations of te reo and English could not possibly correspond with one another. In some places, the English translation is completely different to the whakamārama Māori and I struggled to find evidence of how the 'English and Māori texts parallel and complement each other' (Ministry of Health, 1996. p.10). For

example, the whakamārama of Mana Atua and Mana Aotūroa had in-depth explanations in the Māori language version of the many gods and goddesses, from a Māori world view, but none of them were mentioned in the English translation (Ministry of Education, 1996).

Critically examining the western world view, the foundational cornerstones of science, technology, biomedical disciplines and religious doctrines, there are very few European disciplines that accept or even acknowledge the spiritual world views of the tangata whenua. Instead the Māori world view is defined as *mythology* and seen as *superstitious, evil, and black magic*. In contemporary New Zealand society, Christianity is the religious base that the government systems endorse, the foundation of which is the Bible, the oldest and most revised book in the history of mankind.

Irrespective of what your own values or beliefs are, all peoples in New Zealand are expected by law to place their hand on the Bible as a testament to telling the truth. Still today, the rituals of Christian prayers are performed before politicians meet in parliament. However, since the coming of the Pākehā, the patriarchal hegemony of Christian values has lowered the status of wāhine.

The theory of the Bible is primarily based on the superiority of a male god with no mention of an ultimate goddess at his side. Only one book, *Ruth*, written by a female, survived the many King James revisions. The first woman in the Bible, Eve, is accused of tempting Adam to be disobedient to God. Her sin was punishable by childbirth pain and death. Women are therefore responsible in the Bible for the downfall of man even though he was and still is the head of the family and the religious congregation.

On the other hand, the esoteric knowledge of the tangata whenua was traditionally interpreted by the tohunga, both male and female experts who were trained from infancy (Moon, 2003). The learning of te reo Māori did not stop at school but was a life time learning journey (H. De La Mere, personal communication, 2003; Kereopa, cited in Moon, 2003; Ngāti Kurī Tohunga, A. Muru, personal communication, 2012; Te Whanau a Apanui Tohunga, Ngāpuhi Tohunga, M. Korewha, personal communication, 2012). Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the origins of the spiritual phenomena and their natural environment was not interpreted through a gender-specific lens (Pere, 1982; Yates-Smith, 1998). Rather, the traditional tohunga acknowledge the synchronicity of the male and the female elements in the history of the people through karakia and chants (Kereopa, cited in Moon, 2003; Pere, 1982; Yates-Smith, 1998).

From an indigenous perspective, the interpretation of the word *atua* is not minimised to being specific to a male god or gods. The indigenous language interprets many words with either gender, like the word *ia* (he/she/it) or *tōna/tāna* (his/hers/its) (Yates-Smith, 1998). Likewise, the word *atua* acknowledges both genders because of the many female spiritual phenomena that exist in the universe (Yates-Smith, 1998). To interpret *atua* as anything else is a misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the culture of the tangata whenua. Based on these findings, it is evident that the English interpretation of *atua* is based on the values and beliefs of the western world. The definition of *atua* as a male god has been normalised today, but this serves to denigrate the timeless wisdom and epistemological origins of the tangata whenua and oppresses the mana of women and their children.

Te Whāriki interprets Mana Atua as a translation in the English language to well-being (MOE, 1996). Defining Mana Atua as well-being is a misinterpretation of the deeper philosophies of Atuatanga. In more simple terms, the Williams dictionary translates the word mana as ‘power, authority or prestige’ and the word *atua* as god, to describe a supreme male spirit (Williams, 2006, pp. 20, 172). In contrast to this, Dr Arikirangi Turuki Rangimarie Rose Pere, an international educator and traditional tohunga, defines Mana Atua as ‘the divine right from Āio Mātua ... within the ancient teachings of Hawaiki’ (1991, p.14; Pere, cited in Ofoske-Wyber, 2009). Authenticity can be a dilemma when it comes to traditional knowledge and Dr Pere often urges people to ‘get it right’ as the consequences can be detrimental to the evolution of the cultural values of future generations in New Zealand. Dr Pere (1982) describes her own inter-generational sociocultural education with her elders: ‘The advantage I have, is that I have never been programmed by the ‘State or Religion’ (R. Pere, cited in an unpublished interview with Fe Day, 2012).

If ECE teachers do not have an awareness of mokopuna being conditioned by a state curriculum that is heavily influenced by the dominant culture, then mokopuna become vulnerable to colonisation. As an oral culture, it was the responsibility of the elders to tell pūrākau, sing takutaku (spiritual prescriptive incantations) and make whakairo and raranga into works of art to pass down the whakapapa, morals, values and beliefs of the people to the mokopuna.

All of these systems were used in the transmission of knowledge and told real life stories that instilled mana and pride in the mokopuna. It was the job of the learned tohunga kuia and tohunga koroua, who held great esteem in the traditional Māori culture, to guide mokopuna in the spiritual lores and mentor

them for roles of leadership. Now in the 21st century, mokopuna play western TV games, and aspire to being movie stars, pirates, ballerinas or an Indian, but none want to be a Māori tohunga.

At primary school I remember thinking I was lucky not having a Māori name. My parents said I would go much further learning English and forbade me to have anything to do with my Māoritanga. It was not until I felt quite lost as an adult that I went in search of my whakapapa and my culture. Every time I shared my research with my family about what the Pakēhā had done to Māori in New Zealand, they flinched as though I had whipped them. Even my aunts and uncles hung their heads in shame and did not want to acknowledge the colonising tools they had effectively utilised in our own family.

The dominant culture categorised some Māori as half-castes, so my parents told me I was about an eighth-Māori because they were only a quarter-caste. Some of my school friends said I didn't seem like a Māori because I didn't talk like one or act like one, so I was more like a Pakēhā. Growing up I did not understand what this did to my self-esteem as a wahine Māori.

Thirty years later, my mokopuna came home from an ECE centre at three years old, adamantly denying that neither his father nor mother were Māori. Of course both his parents are Māori and my mokopuna found it extremely difficult to accept that even I, his grandmother, was Māori, and so were both his great-grandmothers. The only major change in his life was starting at an ECE centre in Palmerston North.

According to Williams and Broadley (2012), the majority of ECE centres in New Zealand are predominantly staffed by European teachers, with only a small percentage of Māori staff in comparison. However unintentional it may seem, the values and beliefs of non-Māori teachers are being subliminally fed into the minds and hearts of mokopuna Māori. Some mokopuna go to ECE centres from birth because their mothers have to work to make a living. As a result, an ECE staff member will become the primary caregiver of the baby and the ECE centre is largely responsible for the first five years of the child's everyday care and development. What long term effects does this have on mokopuna Māori?

If we gazed into the crystal ball, what silent messages could an ECE give our mokopuna, especially when the teachers do not understand the language, the culture and the values of the mokopuna in their care? Look what happened to my own mokopuna at three years old. ECE in the 21st century is a far cry from

the wisdom of an eighty year old grandparent whose life experience far extends the mātauranga Māori content of the ECE Bachelor of Teaching degree.

In my own childhood, I grew up in the arms of my maternal grandmother who lived with us from my birth. My Nanny was my primary caregiver until I went to school. She did not read books to me even though she was literate in both Māori and English but her transmission of knowledge was rich in cultural literacy — weaving kete, growing vegetables, caring for the chooks, singing Rātana hymns and mōteatea, karakia, Māori action songs, comical songs and old stories of her life experiences; all of which showed a deep spiritual cognisance of her fluency in the spoken and unspoken (spiritual) reo.

The spiritual, unspoken reo is almost non-existent in ECE today. Teachers in Te Kōhanga Reo and the Puna Reo centres in Gisborne have a special focus on the relevance of the spiritual content of Atuatanga Māori. It is not at all based on the religious doctrine of Christianity. The Steiner philosophy is somewhat similar to Maori spirituality, whereby it aligns the human being with a metaphysical theory of the physical, spiritual, elemental and esoteric phenomena in the universe. According to Papa De la Mere, the unspoken te reo is the real reo, and is otherwise known as the voices of nature (personal communication, 2003). In these contemporary times, te reo Māori has evolved to such a point that universities teach grammatically correct reo with transliterations and macrons; all of which devalue the original context of te reo Māori as told by our tohunga.

The spoken reo Māori is a challenge for many ECE teachers and a thorn in the side for others who struggle with proper pronunciation and phrases, even though *Te Whāriki* was implemented over 16 years ago. Williams and Broadley (2012) identified a number of responses to explain the deficit of te reo Māori in the teaching practice of ECE teachers and the one that stands out the most for me, is not using te reo because there are no Māori in the centre.

The effects of colonisation are evident in education today, uncovering multitudes of people who did not understand their whakapapa links, even though they were essentially Māori. One of my friends knew that her grandmother was somehow part-Māori but there was no one in the family to guide her in the learning of whakapapa, so she eventually surrendered to being Pākehā. She looked like a Pākehā and spoke like a Pākehā and her children identified as Pākehā in a Steiner school. Even in my own family, my brother looks Pākehā and so does my daughter. If neither of them identified as tangata whenua, you simply wouldn't know the difference.

Similarly, there are many student teachers who begin the discovery of their own Māori cultural heritage when they research their pepeha and subsequently find contacts who share information about their iwi connections. Until that point and time, they denied their whakapapa, not knowing that this is only a result of many generations of colonisation. With all of these factors in mind, how is it that ECE teachers can assume that they can distinguish between Māori and non-Māori families from a tick box on a child's enrolment form?

A number of student teachers have shared stories of how the staff, head teachers and liaison teachers struggle with implementing te reo in their centres. Yet when the Education Review Office (ERO) inspector comes, the student teachers watch their superiors cover the walls of the centre with cultural resources and te reo phrases to make it look like te reo Māori is an everyday part of the centre's practice, when it really isn't. Is this what biculturalism looks like or is this in all reality, a gesture of tokenism to secure funding for the centre?

Biculturalism for ECE student teachers requires a genuine commitment and a conscientious awareness of the traditional values and beliefs of the tangata whenua found in te reo me ōna tikanga. The contemporary ECE interpretations of te reo and tikanga are also continuing to evolve, becoming increasingly conceptualised, generalised, shortened and simplified.

Many non-Māori teachers are strangers to the elders on the marae and lack funding for people resources; so instead, ECE teachers use CDs and books to compensate. It does not even come close to replacing the smiles and unconditional love of the knowledgeable and expert kuia and koroua on the marae. The ECE teachers suffice with singing contemporary waiata, inoi (Christian prayers) at meal times or mat times, and read contemporary fiction written in te reo to acknowledge biculturalism. Are the traditional pūrākau, mōteatea, whakairo, raranga and takutaku being shared with mokopuna in ECE centres?

Nowadays, teachers are reading modern stories that often have violent themes and abusive undertones; but more than often, this is all they have. The story of Māui starving his grandmother and taking her jawbone to make a fish hook is a contemporary version, but in all reality, which indigenous value of the tangata whenua supports cruelty to a kuia? This story has been re-told through a patriarchal lens to colonise traditional knowledge. It describes the grandmother of Māui as a nasty, ugly old woman who tries to kill her mokopuna for stealing her fiery fingernails. Which mōteatea supports this

description? Repeating stories like this destroys the mana of the tangata whenua and oppresses the value of cultural knowledge.

From these findings, it is critical to translate and examine the content of a book in te reo for abusive undertones, for they make very effective colonising tools. Violent and abusive undertones can subliminally imprint on the minds and hearts of the mokopuna and may not be a memory that can be easily erased. Not only can such undertones have an effect on the self-esteem of the child but it can also condition the child to think that violent, abusive behaviour is the norm in their culture when this may be far from the truth.

Another example of maintaining traditional knowledge in ECE is considering how the pūrākau have been termed 'mythology' today, the word myth being described in the dictionary as 'untrue, unproven or fictitious' (Collins, 2009, p. 57). Some ECE academics use whakataukī and traditional concepts to support their writing, but the cultural values and beliefs are sometimes lost in long-winded explanations that try to match up with European ECE concepts. Others define tikanga with modern day examples in ECE that simply don't match the English ECE concepts and end up looking more like academic camouflage.

With the interpretations of indigenous knowledge, some academics try to re-frame it, critically analyse it, re-name it, then re-define it some more until it is even more complicated than it was in the first place. Suddenly, it doesn't make sense anymore. Kupu are sometimes being used like a wordsmith tool to conceptualise mātauranga to give it a cultural perspective, even though it doesn't quite fit. The example of mana atua translating to wellbeing has superfluous explanations that act more like a smokescreen than a window.

The concepts defined in *Te Whatu Pōkeka*, a cultural teaching assessment for Māori children (Ministry of Education, 2009), is generalised for academic purposes and simplified by ECE teachers. The real essence of the tauparapara (traditional karakia) in *Te Whatu Pōkeka* is deep in an ancient theory of whakapapa Māori but is lost in the application of the English explanations with 'the ways of being, ways of knowing and ways of doing' (M. Kingi, personal communication, 2012). Is it any wonder that some Pākehā teachers are confused and can only locate *Te Whatu Pōkeka* on a bookshelf? It is not the whakapapa that is confusing but rather the academic interpretation that changes its meaning to make it fit into an ECE context. Adding unsubstantiated, patriarchal, hegemonic stories of a heroic playful and cunning Māui, makes the foundations of *Te Whatu Pōkeka* even more confusing. Teachers may well

ask, what does this look like in practice? How effective is an ECE assessment tool if the student teachers or graduate teachers don't understand it, although the sole purpose of the document was to inspire a cultural transformation in a teacher's practice? Some centres have never even heard of it, let alone practise it. For some centres, *Te Whatu Pōkeka* is that Māori book gathering dust on the shelf.

Another example of the generalisation of traditional knowledge is how the word *karakia* is being used in ECE to describe *inoi*. According to Papa Huirangi, there is a distinct difference between *karakia* and *inoi* and it has nothing to do with tribal dialect or *mātauranga ā-iwi* (Doherty, 2009; Tohunga H. Waikerepuru, personal communication, 2013). Defining Christian prayer as *karakia* undermines the very foundation of indigenous knowledge because the Christian prayer is a supplication to a male god who is acknowledged as being a supreme being to whom we pray. Therefore he is separate from us. The blessing of the food is a Christian doctrine which implies that the food is not in a wholesome state, whereas a *ruruku kai* (acknowledgement of the sources of food) more aptly acknowledges the spiritual and holistic source from which the food originates, and has no intention of changing the energy of the food.

Karakia is an acknowledgment of the many supernatural phenomena, whereby both the male and female entities and elements are personified in the physical universe such as the land, the wind, the sky, the moon, the sun, the stars, the waters, and the mist, to name but a few (H. Waikerepuru, personal communication, 2013). Dr Pere supports the metaphysical 'oneness' concept where all living and non-living beings are an inherent part of the universe within us, not separate from us (Ofsoske-Wyber, 2009; Pere, 1982; Pere, cited in an unpublished interview with Fe Day, 2010). When Dr Pere does a *mihimihi*, she begins with the *mātua tīpuna*, from whom we descend, and she is not just meaning *Papatūānuku* and *Ranginui* but rather, the ancient mother energies of *Hawaiki* (Pere, 1995).

Yet another example of sustaining traditional knowledge is the generalisation of the *mihimihi* and *pepeha* processes. In my undergraduate studies at Te Wānanga o Raukawa, the difference between *mihimihi* and *pepeha* was drilled into us as students. Sometimes we had to sit through a whole day of *whaikōrero* and hours of *mihimihi* sessions as part of our learning. Likewise at wānanga with Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, the *mihimihi* went until late at night in the *whareniui*, because it is not *tikanga* to ask somebody to shorten their *mihimihi* as this can trample on the *mana* of the person and the culture.

If you listen carefully to the mihimihi performed on the marae by a traditional kaiwhaikōrero, the koroua or kuia may begin with an ancient tauparapara followed by a greeting to the mātua tīpuna. He/she will then go on to acknowledge the hunga mate (the deceased), urging them to return to the spiritual homeland, Hawaiki. The spiritual kaitiaki and waka are sometimes acknowledged at this point, then all the living and non-living beings in the spiritual and the physical realms are remembered and revered as an integral part of the ancient history of Māori.

Once this has been completed, the speaker will mihi to the physical world, to the mountains and waters that sustain the people on the marae, the kuia and the koroua, the hau kāinga followed lastly by welcoming the manuhiri. This is only one example of a traditional formal mihimihi process. According to the lecturers at Te Wānanga o Raukawa, only then does the speaker begin their own pepeha — their own mountain, waters, marae, wharenuī, wharekai, waka, whānau, hapū, and iwi of their descent.

Currently student teachers are being shown how to perform a pepeha but it is being called a mihimihi and this gives very little acknowledgement of the spiritual phenomena of the ancient world of Māori. What is simplifying this process really doing to the mana of the indigenous peoples? Learning the mihimihi is a decolonising tool but in this instance the pepeha is replacing the mihimihi which essentially makes it a contemporary re-colonising tool to devalue traditional knowledge and tikanga rituals.

Contemporary waiata that are short, simple and easy to remember are also examples of devaluing the culture and really only serve to rob the people of the ihi of the ancestors. It is actually an embarrassment to the elders on the marae to use short, contemporary songs as a waiata tautoko (supporting song) and some koroua sing their own mōteatea to ensure that this does not happen as it tramples on their mana. The traditional mōteatea hold much mana for the tangata whenua on the marae.

Often contemporary waiata in ECE are in the form of rhymes and ditties to a European tune and are used as second-language strategies for teachers to teach the mokopuna. The energy of these contemporary waiata not only lacks the ihi but often reflect religious Christian doctrines. Sometimes waiata are accepted simply because they are in te reo without recognising the underlying doctrines and intentions. But you just do it anyway because everybody else does. For example, the waiata, *Ka waiata*, is generally known as a women's song, but did you know you were singing to Mary, the mother of Jesus? When

some realise this they change the word Maria to Papa. As a teacher, can you honestly say you have translated karakia, inoi and waiata so that they genuinely reflect your own values and beliefs?

Some teachers believe that mōteatea are too long for mokopuna to learn but the ancestors have passed these mōteatea down for many generations. My own great-grandmother prided herself in singing *Pinepine te kura* every day and this is how my Aunty Charlotte learned it as a child (C. Nikora, personal communication, 2005). This mōteatea describes the history and genealogy, with different versions sung from all of my tribes in Hawkes Bay, Gisborne and Waikaremoana.

The kuia and koroua at the Hastings base wholeheartedly supported my teaching *Pinepine te kura*, to the student teachers even though it is very long. At first, the other lecturers at the base were concerned that it would be extremely challenging because the more lengthy, historical karakia and mōteatea were in stark contrast to the short, contemporary waiata and inoi being taught in ECE.

Last year, the Pasifika student teachers, took to learning *Pinepine te kura* like 'ducks to water' even though it was a third language for them. An Australian student teacher discovered a film of a three-year-old child singing it on YouTube and showed it to us all on the base. Initially, the student teachers would watch the film of this three year old singing it to inspire their own learning. Within two months, some of the year one students sang the first verse without any prompting, on completion of a class presentation and without reading the words. Within six months, the third-year students performed two verses at the end of year *noho marae*. The key indicator of success for the most outstanding outcome was when some of the mokopuna started singing *Pinepine te kura* spontaneously, during play at an assessment of one of the Pasifika student teachers.

Ko te manu e kai ana i te miro, nōna te ngahere
Ko te manu e kai ana i te mātauranga, nōna te ao

The bird that eats of the miro tree, the forest belongs to him/her
The bird that eats of the tree of knowledge, the world belongs to her/him

This year, the current year 3 student teachers have become really impassioned about the sustainability of authentic indigenous knowledge. As a group, they have all decided to learn what they consider to be the correct tribal version of the action song *Tūtira mai ngā iwi* composed by Wi Te Tau Huata. After urging

them to take responsibility for their own learning of te reo, making us as lecturers accountable for providing valuable learning opportunities in te reo, the students approached me with a request to learn the action song, *Kōtiro Māori e*, by Tommy Taurima. Although this waiata ā-ringā is long, it describes the matriarchal leadership of the eponymous chieftainess, Rongomaiwahine, the last wife of the charming ancestor, Kahungunu. Learning waiata like this inspires the student teachers to strive towards matriarchal leadership in ECE.

The student teachers were not only taking the lead in their own learning journey of mātauranga Māori in ECE but were even pushing their own boundaries of learning. The longstanding matriarchal leadership of Māori kuia in ECE awaits aspiring leaders of excellence, not obedient followers of authoritarian corporate leadership. It is so rewarding to experience these student teachers questioning the validity of knowledge, making sense of the invisible matriarchal leadership of the local tribe, Ngāti Kahungunu, and challenging the status quo of colonised whakaaro in their personal and professional practice. Maintaining traditional Māori knowledge in ECE demands that the female energies work in perfect synchronicity with the male energies to maintain the mātauranga of our ancient forebears for mokopuna:

There is no limit to us as “Star Beings”... He Atua! He Tangata! ... I come from a world that gives the same divine right to all generations and both genders. There were four generations in our whānau when I was a child and we all linked into the Kura Huna (ancient school) ... there was no separation of the generations or genders ... I don’t know a world without my tribal brothers (R. Pere, cited in an unpublished interview with Fe Day, 2012).

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I have worked as a Pouako at the Hastings base of Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand for over three years. I received honours for my Master's thesis in Indigenous Studies at Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi and I am currently studying for my PhD; researching *romiromi* as a traditional form of healing in Aotearoa. The holistic wellbeing of future generations of mokopuna, whānau and our earth mother Papatūānuku is a strong focus of my thesis.