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# Our voices

## *Culturally responsive, contextually located infant and toddler caregiving*

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Despite making major advances in educational provision, Māori and Pasifika children continue to lag behind other groups, in New Zealand, achieving disproportionately lower results on national averages. Key to educational success for Māori and Pasifika children is the acknowledgement that they are culturally located and the recognition that effective education must embrace culture. Early childhood education has an important role in building strong learning foundations for young children, however achieving this is a complex process especially with regard to Māori and Pasifika children in early childhood education. This article reports on the first phase of a TLRI research project, *Te Whatu Kete Mātauranga: Weaving Māori and Pasifika Infant and Toddler Theory and Practice in Early Childhood Education (2015–2016)*. The research aims to support culturally embedded infant and toddler provision in Māori and Pasifika early childhood services, and to provide contextually located, culturally relevant theory and practice guidelines for early childhood teachers and services.

### Introduction

Early childhood education has an important role in building strong learning foundations to enable young children to develop as competent and confident learners. The need for more work on how early childhood education can better support Māori and Pasifika children to reach their potential is highlighted in findings from the Education Review Office report, *Success for Māori Children in Early Childhood Services* (2010). This report argued that services lacked strategies which focused upon Māori children as learners, treating all children the same. Services often included statements about Māori values, beliefs, and intentions in their documentation, but these values were very rarely evident in practice. Effective processes to ascertain the aspirations of parents and whānau of Māori children were not evident either, and early childhood services had inadequate self-review processes to evaluate the effectiveness of their provision for Māori children. More recent Education Review Office reports, *Working with Te Whāriki* (2013) and *Priorities for Children's Learning in Early Childhood Services* (2013)

highlighted the lack of responsiveness to Māori and Pasifika children in many of the early childhood services, with only two-thirds of services considering how their curriculum could support Maori children's success as Maori and only one-fifth considering this for Pasifika children. A further Education Review Office report, *How do Leaders support Improvement in Pacific Early Childhood Services?* (2015), stressed the importance of cultural practices in passing cultural knowledge from one generation to the next.

While teachers want the best for children, Māori and Pasifika children continue to lag behind other groups, achieving disproportionately lower results on national averages (Marriot & Sim, 2014; Spasifik, 2015). One of the reasons early childhood services fail to meet the needs of Māori and Pasifika children, according to Bevan-Brown (2003), is that teachers are unaware of the role culture plays in learning and therefore lack understandings of how to address culture within their teaching (Mahuika, Berryman, & Bishop, 2011; Mara & Marsters, 2009). Ritchie (2003) notes that meeting these needs for students:

... is subject to the extent to which a largely Pākeha 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 is exacerbated by increasing numbers of Māori and Pasifika children who are enrolled in early childhood services in Aotearoa New Zealand. According to the Ministry of Education (2015) Māori participation rates rose by 15.4 percentage points, and Pasifika rates by 10.9 percentage points, between 2000 and 2015. By 2015, 91.2 percent of Pasifika and 94 percent of Māori children had participated in ECE before starting school. Numbers of enrolments for children aged less than 2 years of age has also risen with an increase of 21 percent between 2007 and 2013 for this infant and toddler age group. While this demographic continues to grow, little research has been conducted around the implications of this social and educational trend. This has important implications for early childhood provision in addressing the cultural needs of Māori and Pasifika infants and toddlers.

Key to educational success for Māori and Pasifika children is the acknowledgement that Māori and Pasifika children are culturally located and the recognition that effective education must embrace culture. Being Māori, Samoan, Cook Island or of any other Pacific nation is a critical aspect of education.

This article reports on the first phase of a TLRI research project, *Te Whatu Kete Mātauranga: Weaving Māori and Pasifika Infant and Toddler Theory and Practice in Early Childhood Education (2015–2016)*, which aims to develop contextually located, culturally relevant theory and practice guidelines for early childhood teachers and services. Key themes that emerged from the first phase of the research are discussed, including: communal childrearing; intergenerational relationships; oriori and waiata; and tuakana-teina (peer) caregiving. Some initial questions and interventions introduced.

## The research

The overall aim of the research is the creation of new knowledge about teaching and learning in early childhood education, firstly by reclaiming traditional Māori and Pasifika values, perspectives and understandings of care

and education for infants and toddlers. This research is being undertaken in three phases. The first phase (2015) involved each of the six participating case-study early childhood services—three Māori, one Samoan, one Tokelau and one Cook Island—holding wānanga/meetings with kaumātua/elders, whānau and church leaders in their community to collect pūrākau/stories about: how the whānau cared for babies and young children; practices on the marae, at church, or at cultural events that impacted on infant and toddler care and education practices; rites and ceremonies related to babies and young children; the spiritual, physical and social relationships that surrounded infants and toddlers; and values and understandings that underpinned constructs of the child, the learner, the teacher, and learning. This second phase (December 2015–March 2016) involved each service examining their pūrākau and relevant literature in order to identify their research focus, questions, strategies, and data collection and analysis processes. The third phase (2016) involves each service's teams working on developing culturally responsive, contextually located theory and practice guidelines for working with Māori and Pasifika infants and toddlers in their early childhood and community context. The overall aim of the project, is not only to support culturally embedded infant and toddler provision in Māori and Pasifika early childhood services, but to provide culturally relevant theory and practice principles for all early childhood teachers and services.

Our overarching research question was: “How can Māori and Pasifika cultural knowledge support the development of culturally responsive theory and practice for the care of infants and toddlers in contemporary early childhood settings?” We had three sub-questions: What traditional Māori and Pasifika cultural knowledge can be reclaimed as a basis for contemporary infant and toddler practice? How can traditional Māori and Pasifika cultural knowledge be reframed to provide new theory and practice for contemporary infant and toddler education? What will reframed traditional Māori and Pasifika cultural knowledge look like when implemented with infants and toddlers in contemporary early childhood services?

## Research methods

A number of research methods are used, including a pūrākau approach. Pūrākau refers

“How can Māori and Pasifika cultural knowledge support the development of culturally responsive theory and practice for the care of infants and toddlers in contemporary early childhood settings?”

to a collection of traditional oral narratives that contain “philosophical thought, epistemological constructs, cultural codes, and worldviews that are fundamental to our identity as Māori” (Lee, 2009). Lee makes the point that pūrākau is a term not usually associated with research methodology but with Māori myths and legends. She argues, however, that pūrākau “have relevance for today as they are constructed in various forms, contexts and media to better understand the experiences of our lives as Māori—including the research context” (p. 1). Lee, Pihama and Smith’s (2012) TLRI summary report, *Marae-ā-Kura: Teaching, Learning and Living as Māori*, claims that a pūrākau approach enables the nature and diversity of Māori

teachers' work to be articulated and understood within a specific context.

A case-study approach is also being utilised in the research. This approach allows each of the six services to develop their own locally constructed understandings, theory, and practices of infant and toddler care and education. It also highlights the importance of each service maintaining its own autonomy and cultural ways of knowing and being within the research, thus ensuring that Māori and Pasifika knowledge and understandings are not generalised or essentialised.

## Theoretical framework

The research employs kaupapa Māori and sociocultural theoretical lenses. Kaupapa Māori locates Māori and Pasifika understandings as central to the research design, process, analysis and intended outcomes (Lee et al., 2012). It aligns with Pasifika research guidelines (Ane, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu, & Finau, 2001) that promote communities working together and sharing power, and affirms the importance of relationships within the research process. As Māori and Pasifika researchers, our backgrounds and experiences embed us and our research within Māori and Pasifika contexts, communities, and within the cultural values and understandings integral to those contexts, much of which are unspoken and often unconscious. When researching Māori and Pasifika teachers, tamariki, and whānau, being Māori and Pasifika is central to the theoretical and research frame.

Rogoff (2003) reminds us that human development is a cultural process, which defines and prepares participation within cultural groups. Culture shapes the way we think and interpret information, and impacts on teaching and learning. Delpit (1995) argues that "We all interpret behaviours, information, and situations through our own cultural lenses; these lenses operate involuntarily, below the level of conscious awareness, making it seem that our own view is simply 'the way it is'" (p. 151). Metge (1995) adds that because of this Pākehā not only accept their culture to be normal or natural; they are unaware of its influence, not only on them but also on institutions such as education. The consequence of this normalisation of culture is that many Pākehā educators fail to appreciate the ways in which the education system reinforces their cultural values and beliefs. If the learner's culture is congruent with the culture of the

learning environment they are then able to make meaning of new ideas and information by building on existing cultural understandings and experiences. Such congruence of culture allows learners to "bring who they are to the classroom in complete safety and where their knowledges are acceptable and legitimate" (Metge, 1995, p. 14).

The next section outlines some of the themes that emerged from the service's pūrākau. These include communal caregiving, intergenerational relationships, waiata, oriori and mōteatea, tuakana-teina relationships, and caregiving.

## Communal caregiving

A large number of the pūrākau collected during the first phase of the research make reference to communal caregiving, where children were raised surrounded by and cared for by whānau. Wānanga participants (kaikōrero) commented:

The village takes responsibility for the child's upbringing. (Kaikōrero)

My mum raised me but I was also raised and nurtured by my aunties and uncles. (Kaikōrero)

I was bought up around my marae surrounded by kaumātua. (Kaikōrero)

In these traditional Māori and Pacific communal settings parenting was not the sole responsibility of the birth parents (Morehu, 2005), rather the extended whānau and community shared childrearing responsibilities (Patterson et al., 1976). This is stressed by one kaikōrero who stated that her kui and aunty:

would keep house for everyone during the day and prepare the kai. There were her uncle's family, another uncle, a sister and her family in kui's whare, and she lived with her mum in their bach next door. (Kaikōrero)

Another kaikōrero said: We all lived at each other's whare, and we all helped look after each other... (Kaikōrero)

Fitzgerald (1981) highlight that one of the benefits of multiple parenting, where the child belongs to the hapū or a lineage wider than its immediate family, is that it is a protective factor for positive outcomes for a child's wellbeing and development. Metge (2015) makes the point that communal childrearing practices assisted in the development and maintenance of the mana of the child. Kaikōrero described these living arrangements:

I can recall being cared for by my nannies

and the wider whānau ... (Kaikōrero)

My first born was raised and cared for by her grandparents and the wider whānau. (Kaikōrero)

She was raised in the bosom of her whānau. (Kaikōrero)

Children were often given to other whānau to raise, especially if they were unable to have children of their own. This practice of whāngai enabled continued familial connections and communal traditions (Patterson, et al., 2006; Duffie & Wharemaru, 2001). A number of kaikōrero discussed whāngai arrangements in their whānau.

... Whāngai was a part of their upbringing and it was normal to have cousins and family members around them at all times, breast feeding was done by mothers or grandmothers alike.

[She was a] whāngai and cared for by grandmother and grew up with many siblings ...

## Intergenerational relationships

A large number of kaikōrero described being raised by grandparents. This was considered a normal childrearing practice across the Pacific (Abel, Park, Tipene-Leach, Finau, & Lennan, 2001; Worrall, 2009). The practice of grandchildren being raised by grandparents was an important way to transmit knowledge, culture, and tradition to future generations and preserved knowledge of whakapapa (Morehu, 2005). Shared intergenerational living enabled grandparents to take a primary role in the teaching of children in their early years, providing simple foundational knowledge of tribal and cultural knowledge and history, and this connectedness with cultural knowledge ensured cultural survival (Patterson et al., 2006).

I lived at the marae from age 7 till 14, stories in whareniui at least four nights a week, kaumātua told stories. (Kaikōrero)

As I grew up in New Zealand it was my grandmother who would share with me traditional practices within the Cook Islands. She would do this through story telling. (Kaikōrero)

...kuiā and koroua present on a day to day basis, close relationship had formed between kaumātua and mokopuna. Sharing knowledge and skills by the kaumātua was passed down to the next generation. (Kaikōrero)

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Being raised by grandparents fulfils other obligations and demonstrates a caring system of the collectivist social structures of Māori and Pacific societies. The relationship of grandparent and child in childrearing practices provided teaching through modelling with the patience and time that parents did not often have (Metge, 2015; Morehu, 2005). Children were always kept close to the grandparents so their needs were identified quickly and taken care of.

Our grandparents were the ones who would regularly massage baby to increase strength in their muscles and for the baby to feel relaxed and nurtured from their grandparents. (Kaikōrero)

She remembers growing with her Nana. She remembers how her Kuia would carry her around the kāinga, while she continues to tunu kai and maintain the kāinga. She was brought up by her kuia and only remembers her mātua working. There were lots of whānau around her to awhi and tautoko her to kura. (Kaikōrero)

Grandmothers had a special nurturing role with the young moko, while grandfathers tended to take on teaching roles related to physical links to land and food gathering.

Grandmother exemplified weaving, cooking, decorating. Cooking was on a fire stove. Grandfather shared stories of the war and taught her to ride. He loved the māra and planting for kai. (Kaikōrero)

We would go eeling with our koro, that was the type of thing we did. (Kaikōrero)

We used to go eeling. Koro told us never to take the slime off the eel and we would cook it in the ahi. He would hang the sharks to dry. We would learn all the teachings from these experiences. You just did it. We learnt by following it and being exposed to it all the time. (Kaikōrero)

Esoteric knowledge transmission was also accommodated in these communal and intergenerational practices.

Tamariki were nurtured through kaumātua, tikanga, marae and kawa... (Kaikōrero)

My grandmother and my parents would always make sure that we do our prayer before we eat. It is tradition in the Cook Islands that the children would eat before the adults at all times. This is because

children are more important in Cook Island tradition. (Kaikōrero)

Spiritual beliefs came down from kaumātua. (Kaikōrero)

### Orioi, waiata, and mōteatea

Mokopuna raised by their grandparents often slept with them as well and would therefore be exposed to conversations, early morning waiata, oriori, mōteatea, and karakia, as well as recitations regarding mātauranga in the process of waking and sleeping (Metge, 2015). Kaikōrero refer to being immersed in these cultural practices, including waiata and oriori.

Surrounded by her kuia and immersed in her culture ia ra ia ra with waiata, kapahaka, te Reo. (Kaikōrero)

Tikanga at this young age were simple things like karakia mō te kai, waiata hīmene—songs that were based around tikanga were how you learnt tikanga. (Kaikōrero)

I learned a pātere, it talks of the wāhi tapu and the pepeha of our hapū, taonga of our tūpuna. (Kaikōrero)

Waiata and oriori assisted in establishing the child's identity, their roles and responsibilities, as well as their tribal connections and sense of belonging. Regular use of waiata and oriori maintained the child's connections through whakapapa back to deity, anchoring them to the land, guiding them through life, and identifying and reinforcing the aspirations of the whānau / hapū for the child. Kaikōrero stated:

It is through waiata that I have been able to teach my children about who and where they come from. It is through waiata and haka I have been able to establish confidence in them, all at the same time having fun. (Kaikōrero)

Knowledge in the Māori world is first passed down through word of mouth and enforced through ako waiata ... (Kaikōrero)

Poetically composed by older relatives and performed by whānau, oriori instilled in the child the principle of tapu and those listening are constantly reminded that children are tapu, linking the child and their mana back to the Gods and acknowledging the spiritual beginnings of the child. Orioi became a personalised socialising tool, reinforcing the mana confirmed upon them, becoming a guiding principle for their future, indicating

how they were to be treated by others (Morehu, 2005). Oriori, mōteatea and waiata were used at key transition times for young infants and children such as going to sleep and waking times. Used repetitiously, they became reaffirming messages of how tapu children are, that they were taonga and therefore should be treated accordingly (Jenkins, Harte, & Ririki, 2011; Waitoki, 2000).

Her mother-in-law shared that oriori was sung to the babies. (Kaikōrero)

Oriori was a practice my grandfather would do; he would sing a waiata (long forgotten tunes now) to Nana ... I would hear Nana's lullaby in the morning, during the day and at night when going to bedtime. There were no distinct words to the oriori but it had long, lingering high and low humming sounds, it had a sorrowful as well as a calming effect, I would fall asleep. It was normal to hear the oriori, it was a daily practice. (Kaikōrero)

## Tuakana-teina

Tuakana-teina was another key theme that emerged from the first phase of the research. It is a term used to describe the traditional practice of an older more expert sibling or cousin caring for and teaching the younger less expert sibling or cousin. It is a principle and practice that aids socialisation often without adult supervision (Jenkins et al., 2011; J. E. Ritchie, 1962). Kaikōrero stated:

The main thing about growing up was tuākana/tēina. As one of the eldest children I was always responsible for looking after the younger members of the family while our mums / aunts were cooking cleaning and doing their roles ... We grew up with all of our cousins, we were always close to our cousins there was no distinction between brothers and sisters or cousins. We were just a whānau. (Kaikōrero)

I ngā rā o mua, as a child, I was the eldest of 16 siblings whom I was able to raise as well as me growing up. (Kaikōrero)

The tuakana-teina relationship provided role modelling for the toddler. In this way the toddler learnt the relationships and interactions of others across ages (Morehu, 2005). Even in "play", tuakana-teina roles for children were traditionally seen as a socialisation tool to teach and acquire skills important for transmitting

culture and language (White, O'Malley, Rockel, Stover, & Toso, 2008).

We were unsupervised, it was the older children aged 9 up that would care for us, we'd be gone all day, as long as we were back before night time. (Kaikōrero)

Our tuākana always looked after us. We jumped off high things and were never hurt. We would float down the river and walk back up. The adults trusted them. Because tuākana were taught ... how to manage and keep safe, we were fine. (Kaikōrero)

Tuakana-teina is also part of the traditional Māori and Pacific kinship model reflecting the whānau ethic of manaakitanga, or care (Mangeo, 1991; Morehu, 2005). This traditional practice supported the transition from infant dependency to child independence (Fitzgerald, 1981).

My older sister also helped to raise me ... my older sister was my surrogate mother who I referred to as my mum. (Kaikōrero)

From being a part of a large extended whānau the older male members would teach the boys of their role in the whānau and the same as the females. (Kaikōrero)

Tuakana-teina was also viewed as an essential vehicle that mediated some of the most important cultural messages (Gallimore, 1981). Parenting rights to scold or chastise children were shared with the tuakana, as were the responsibilities to care and protect when undertaking the role of tuakana (Metge, 1976).

Stories my mother told me was about how my older brother... a toddler himself, was the one who had looked after me the most while my mother and father worked on my grandfather's garden patches. He had raised and cared for us younger siblings. He would feed, clothe, hold and carry me around and change my nappies. Tuākana teina system awhi atu awhi mai. (Kaikōrero)

## Themes, topics, and questions arising from the pūrākau

Phase 2 of the research involved the analysis of pūrākau, identification of research questions, and planning practice interventions. One service identified mōteatea as a cultural learning tool to support the development of children's leadership/rangatiratanga qualities. Their question—How can the rangatiratanga of pēpi/tēina (babies/

younger children) be embraced and enhanced through mōteatea?—represents these key themes. Interventions initiated to address the research question include composing a service mōteatea that related to the iwi of the region, and singing or chanting the mōteatea to support new children transitioning into service, to support relaxation and as a calming tool for tini kope/nappy change, kai/meal times and te wā moe/sleep times, and as a poi or haka for enlivening. It has also been translated into te reo rotarota/ sign language for use throughout the day.

Another service identified the importance of supporting the development and maintenance of tuakana-teina relationships as a key theme. They also recognised the significance of pakiwaitara/traditional stories and pepeha/traditional introductions, which also emerged from their pūrākau, as a powerful means of reinforcing tuakana-teina relationships, roles, and responsibilities in the service. Interventions initiated to address their research question—"How can pakiwaitara/pepeha support tuākana/tēina (younger/older) relationships and practices?"—included utilising wā whāriki/mat time to introduce and reinforce pakiwaitara from the region, thereby supporting and deepening understandings of tuakana-teina expectations. Tuakana have an important role in teina learning and activities, in terms of providing informal support and guidance when needed, scaffolding, modelling, guiding, consoling, and correcting when required.

The critical place of identity and culture is also becoming increasingly evident throughout the project as a whole. All six services are focusing, in one way or another, on these two aspects of being. For the Māori services these aspects tend to link to iwi/tribal connectedness, mana tangata and rohe/regional connectedness, and they include a focus on mana whenua (for example, Tainuitanga and connections with Waikato/Tainui), pakiwaitara links (for example, to Te Tairāwhiti and Ngāti Porou), and mōteatea as a link to whenua. For the Pasifika services, the importance of their individual Pacific groupings is highlighted in all the research questions, which make links to fa'a Samoa (the Samoan way), the practice of inati (caring and sharing) from Tokelau, and Cook Island Māori identity. Each service has identified cultural understandings, values, and artefacts as a means of achieving strong connectedness and relationships with their identity groupings.

## Implications arising from this research

All children have the right to be raised in culturally and linguistically responsive communities. This enables them to become acculturated within traditional practices, values, knowledge and very importantly, the language of their community, as a means to support a positive identity formation (Glasgow, 2012). Key to providing culturally and linguistically responsive early childhood provision for Māori and Pacific infants and toddlers is the need for practices and pedagogies to be reflective of the children's cultural worldviews, identities, protocols, and behavioural expectations. This includes immersion in cultural and linguistic activities, events, and practices such as waiata and mōteatea that reflect important cultural values, beliefs, and practices. It also stresses the importance of communal and intergenerational caregiving practices, underscoring the input of the extended family including grandparents and elders. In line with the emphasis on communal caregiving is the notion of peer caregiving, including the development of tuakana-teina relationships and associated responsibilities. Mixed-age early childhood settings encourage and are compatible with traditional caregiving practices that challenge the categorising of children and the segregating into specific age group settings.

Kaikōrero voices emphasised that there are alternative caregiving practices and beliefs around caring for infants and toddlers that have been retained throughout the wider Pacific (Ikupu & Glover, 2004; Vini, 2003). These beliefs and practices are important alternatives to the dominant western theory and practice that is prevalent in current early childhood regulations and provision. Ultimately there is much to be gained by capturing traditional Māori and Pacific Polynesian cultural knowledge for raising and caring for infants and toddlers. The research aims to provide a culturally constructed set of principles, practices, and pedagogical approaches to guide early childhood educational provision in Aotearoa/ New Zealand.

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## Rārangi Kupu—Glossary

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>ako</b>          | learn and teach/reciprocity of knowledge learning and sharing |
| <b>aro</b>          | love  |
| <b>kaikōrero</b>    | speaker   |
| <b>karakia</b>      | prayer  |
| <b>kaumātua</b>     | elder   |
| <b>kete</b>         | basket  |
| <b>koro</b>         | male elder  |
| <b>kui/kuia</b>     | grandmother/female elder                                      |
| <b>manaakitanga</b> | commitment and care   |
| <b>mātauranga</b>   | Māori knowledge, education                                    |
| <b>mokopuna</b>     | grandchild  |
| <b>mōteatea</b>     | traditional chant   |
| <b>ngā</b>          | the (plural)  |

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <b>oriori</b>        | lullaby   |
| <b>Pākehā</b>        | European  |
| <b>pepeha</b>        | traditional saying making geographical connections ancient legend/story |
| <b>pūrākau</b>       | child   |
| <b>tamaiti</b>       | children  |
| <b>tamariki</b>      | precious, gift  |
| <b>taonga</b>        | the (singular form)   |
| <b>te</b>            | ancestors   |
| <b>tīpuna/tūpuna</b> | older or more experienced   |
| <b>tuakana</b>       | younger sibling   |
| <b>teina</b>         | singing, song   |
| <b>waiata</b>        | meetings  |
| <b>wānanga</b>       | family / extended family  |
| <b>whānau</b>        | feed /adoption  |
| <b>whangai</b>       |   |

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