Māori and Pacific Infant and Toddler Cultural Pedagogy: Reclaiming a Cultural Lens

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An Indigenous cultural renaissance emerged in the 1980's in Aotearoa New Zealand. Communities established early childhood programmes that reflected native spirituality, values, and Indigenous knowledge, with instruction in local, Indigenous languages (Hunkin-Tuiletufuga, 2001). Indigenous communities sought ownership over the education of their children, within a culturally driven framework that focussed on retention of knowledge, language, and cultural identity.

These strong early stages have lost traction, with increasing numbers of Māori and Pacific community services unable to meet the rigorous regulatory criteria, assurance auditing processes, funding restraints, and other considerations that have impacted the numbers of families using these services. Nowadays, a mere percentage of those once in operation remain, with the majority of Māori and Pacific children and their families enrolling in mainstream early childhood education services (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Central to the educational success for Māori and Pacific children is an understanding that they are culturally located and the acknowledgement that effective education must encompass their culture. A cultural discourse gaining prominence reveals the need for culturally sound pedagogical practice for Māori and Pacific communities (Rameka & Glasgow, 2016; Rau & Ritchie, 2011). This trend is gaining impetus in the wider Pacific region (Glasgow, 2012), thus driving a movement for reclaiming and reframing education for Pacific peoples (Sanga, 2012).

Western Theoretical Paradigms

Exposure to a Western education system has been a significantly disenfranchising and colonising experience for Polynesian communities across the Pacific, including Aotearoa New Zealand (Berryman, 2008; Vai'mene, 2003). Education has been framed by a large array of Western theories to provide justification for teaching approaches and pedagogy. Most have occurred within timeframes and for particular purposes that have not aligned with Polynesian world views and ways of being. Undoubtedly this marginalisation process is evident within the field of infant caregiving practices in Aotearoa New Zealand.

A sociocultural theoretical lens foregrounds human development as a cultural process (Rogoff, 2003), which defines and prepares participation within cultural groups using language and cultural tools. Research and theory on human development is based largely on middle class communities in Europe and North America (Dalli, Rockel, Duhn, Craw, & Doyle, 2011), which serves to draw universal 'truths' around child development. This leaves little room for cultural variation, further perpetuating the colonizing process (Thaman, 2003). We 'speak back' to the prevailing Western European's model of raising infants that is sometimes contradictory and marginalising for Māori and Pacific cultural worldviews (Jenkins, Harte, & Ririki, 2011). Reclaiming knowledge and practices will inform educational audiences, including teachers of infants and toddlers seeking pedagogical alternatives, and the wider Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood sector.

Cultural research reinforces that children acquire skills and knowledge based on the specific cultural activities of the community (Rogoff, 2003). Accordingly, this research focusses on Polynesian perspectives of infants and toddlers that originate within the wider Pacific region whilst ensuring specific cultural identities are upheld. Acquiring knowledge of Māori and Pacific infant caregiving practices will benefit and empower those within communities, will assist in preserving traditional practices that might otherwise diminish, and will make available a repertoire of Polynesian cultural practice to a range of audiences and purposes.

Decolonisation

This study seeks to advance the process of decolonisation for the Indigenous peoples of the wider Pacific region (Smith, 2012). The key aim is to locate research on Indigenous peoples under the control of Indigenous peoples. In this case, we focus on traditional knowledge, cultural beliefs, customs, and expressions (United Nations [UN], 2008). Māori children have a right to have their cultural *tikanga* (cultural practices) recognized, but an increasing body of research shows that educational practices have failed to do so (Skerrett, 2010).

Pacific educational researchers seek to counter colonisation, and to consider what is worthwhile to teach and learn (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2016; Thaman, 2008;). Countering educational colonisation, Indigenous research both strengthens and values traditional, Indigenous ways of thinking. The result is that we see newly emerging, culturally relevant educational philosophies and pedagogical methods (Rau & Ritchie, 2011).

There has been an increasing call for Indigenous research that is framed and located within Indigenous paradigms (Nabobo-Baba, 2008). The objective is to extend the knowledge about Indigenous peoples, and to transform understandings about their social and cultural worldviews. The Fijian Vanua research framework, the *Kakala* (garland) framing, and the Kaupapa Māori research model are decolonising methodologies (Smith, 2012) that are bolstering the field of Indigenous research and decolonizing educational practices.

Anti-bias Curriculum

The principles that underpin anti-bias curriculum programmes support this discussion. Implementing a curriculum that is culturally responsive is imperative (Gay, 2002). Anti-bias education seeks out ways to deal critically and creatively with issues of bias in order to free the oppressed (Freire, 2000). This work seeks to develop cultural consciousness and work towards transforming practices that ensure culturally located practice and pedagogies. A further motivation is to both challenge and counter the personal and institutional behaviours that perpetuate oppression (Lin, Lake, & Rice, 2008). Alongside our quest to strengthen culturally relevant practice for Māori and Pacific infants in ECE programmes, we are guided by the goals of the anti-bias approach proposed by Derman-Sparks ansd the ABC Task Force (1989). This approach enables every learner in the early childhood environment the ability to construct confident cultural identities, and to develop fair, empathetic, and inclusive relationships with everyone. An equally compelling goal is to help teachers become more culturally competent by teaching them how to implement anti-bias principles and cultural practices in the classroom. The hope is that this knowledge will motivate and encourage them to seek opportunities to discuss issues of injustice and inequality (Corson, 2000).

Overview of Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa New Zealand

In Aotearoa, the early childhood education system integrates education and care, which covers children from birth until the age of school entry. Increasing numbers of Māori and Pacific children are participating in early childhood services in Aotearoa. Between 2010 and 2013, enrolments for Māori children were 92.3% and Pacific children 88.6%, respectively. Numbers of enrolments for children aged less than 2 years of age have also increased by 21% between 2007 and 2013 (Ministry of Education, 2014). This increase continues, however little research has been conducted on the implications of this social, cultural, and educational trend.

The early childhood teaching force in Aotearoa New Zealand is predominantly Pakeha (European). The Ministry of Education's 2013 statistical data revealed that 12,723 registered teachers identified as Pakeha/European, 1,847 identified as Māori, and 1,780 were of Pacific origin (Education Counts, 2016). Meeting the cultural needs of many Māori and Pacific children in early childhood services requires a level of expertise that is often beyond the experience and ability of mono-cultural speakers of English who have little experience with Māori (Bevan-Brown, 2003; Ritchie, 2003) and Pacific cultures (Mara & Marsters, 2009). *Te Whaariki* (Ministry of Education [MOE], 1996) is lauded for its bicultural ethos and content. The curriculum is celebrating its 20th anniversary and is currently undergoing review. Cultural research studies such as this one can inform curriculum content, and strengthen the bicultural and Pacific lens around culturally responsive teaching practice that the youngest children in early childhood education need.

Educational services are failing to meet the academic, social, and cultural needs of Polynesian early childhood learners (Chu, Glasgow, Rimoni, Hodis, & Meyer, 2013; ERO, 2010; Rameka & Walker, 2012) and their families. A respondent recognised that it is important to find out what the cultural parental practices are at home, and how we can connect our teachers to practices such as spirituality and using the first language of families.

Māori and Pacific Language Nests

This study is conducted in Māori and Pacific language nests. These services provide language specific and culturally oriented programmes, such as Te Puna Reo and Pacific language medium services. There are six case study settings: three are Māori Puna Reo language services, and three are Pacific Island language nests. The Cook Islands, Punanga Reo, Samoan Aoga Amata, and Tokelau Islands Akonga Amata respectively, are the Pacific language nests.

Springs of language are *whanau* (family) based, bilingual cooperatives where the families are responsible for the overall management of the centres. They provide full day Māori language immersion early childhood services. Their primary aim is to maintain the language of the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand by fostering young children's and parents' knowledge of *te reo Māori* (Māori language) and *tikanga Māori* (Māori customs and practices). The centres are community based and are administrated by local management groups affiliated with the local *iwi* (tribal groups).

Pacific language nest services offer programmes that are based on the values and languages of Pacific Islands cultures, such as Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, Tuvalu, and Fiji. They range from licence-exempt family playgroups, to licensed and chartered centres. These programmes emphasise cultural and linguistic

development, full language immersion, and bilingual approaches that use the Pacific language and English. Parental and family involvement are key to the operation of these settings, particularly the cultural, linguistic, and traditional knowledge that they provide for the language nest programmes. The first Pacific language nest was opened in 1985 and since then many new Pacific services have been licensed. In 2013, here were 150 services reported offering a Pacific language immersion or bilingual language programme (MOE, 2013).

Methods

This qualitative case study research project involved working with six community-based centers. Each center offered full-day services for early childhood education and care. In addition, each center comprised of Māori and Pacific language nest settings, including three Māori, one Cook Islands Māori, one Samoan, and one Tokelauan. The study investigated how Māori and Pacific cultural knowledge can support the development of culturally responsive theory and practice for the care of infants and toddlers in contemporary early childhood settings

The primary questions of this study sought to examine how traditional Māori and Pacific cultural knowledge can be expanded, and how this traditional knowledge can be reclaimed as a basis for contemporary infant and toddler practice. We investigated how traditional Māori and Pacific cultural knowledge may be reframed to provide new conceptualizations of theory and practice. Finally, we examined how a reframing of traditional Māori and Pacific cultural knowledge may look like when implemented with infants and toddlers in contemporary early childhood services.

This article outlines findings from the first stage of a two-stage research process: the gathering of *pūrākau* (stories) from each community group. During the first stage, each of the case study services involved working with communities to collect and gather cultural *pūrākau* about infant and toddler care, education, knowledge, and practices. These stories were analysed to learn how they could be reframed in contemporary early childhood services. Providing insights and tools for culturally responsive teaching in mainstream Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood education programs was a key motivation for our research.

We used a *pūrākau* (narrative) traditional methodology to access and reclaim traditional knowledge and understandings. *Pūrākau* refers to traditional Māori oral narratives, which comprise philosophical thoughts, epistemological constructs, cultural mores, and world views (Lee, 2009). This approach enables Māori teachers to undertake research in cultural contexts (Lee, Pihama, & Smith, 2012). Likewise, Pacific teachers expressed a cultural alignment to the narrative research method. For example, the concept of *Talanoa* (storying) is a well-practiced Polynesian process of imparting cultural and traditional knowledge through oral narrative and storytelling (Vaioleti, 2011).

During the research process, our investigators worked closely with the people in the case study settings. The case study settings were divided into two clusters, one Māori and one Pacific. The Māori investigator provided support and mentoring to the Māori cluster, and the Pacific investigator supported the Pacific cluster group. Each investigator gathered *pūrākau* from the respective cultural communities.

The cultural communities consisted of teachers, parents, and *whanau* (extended family members). Each of the case study settings had anywhere between 5 and 25 study participants. Teachers within each setting approached their community members for stories of their own and their families' experiences of raising infants and toddlers. The interviews were carried out by teachers when it was convenient for the study participants. One-to-one and large group meetings were conducted. *Pūrākau* were gathered from community elders, parents, and teachers in each respective setting. These were conducted in settings of the participants' choice, both in their homes and at the centers. Interviews were framed around the main research question and sub-questions.

Gathering *pūrākau* data adhered closely to Kaupapa Māori theory. The research communities used culturally relevant ways for gathering the data. This was an organic process in which the *kaiako* (teachers) sought *pūrākau* in a range of ways. Ethics approval was sought and granted allowing centres to determine the process of gathering stories that fit most closely within cultural practice. Adhering to cultural protocols while conducting research was important for our participants (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu & Finau, 2001). Narrative story gathering can number from one-to-one conversations between many in a room. Our research team took important cultural beliefs into consideration throughout the data gathering process. For example, we were sensitive to the time of day the *Talanoa* (storying) were held; we asked the most high-ranking member of the group to conduct the blessing to begin and end each session; we provided food and drink at each gathering; we listened intently and respectfully to each speaker; and we listened for how subtle nuances were acknowledged and processed, including throat clearing and *Va'a* (silence) (Thaman, 2008). Our efforts to respect traditional practices for gathering data demonstrated the desire of the researchers to uphold cultural protocols in the Aotearoa New Zealand research community (Bennett et al., 2013).

Researcher Backgrounds

This study is a collaboration between the Māori and peoples of the Pacific, who share cultural, historical, and linguistic connections (Mafile'o & Walsh, 2007). Strengthening Indigenous research processes across the Pacific has foregrounded and affirmed Indigenous world views and aspirations. Somerville (2012) notes that Māori and Pacific connections are marked by discourses of relationship and reconnection.

The lead researchers are early childhood teacher educators whose cultural backgrounds are Aotearoa Māori and Kuki Airani Māori. Each has a strong aspiration and commitment to support cultural endeavours, and to work with Māori and Pacific language nest communities. A key aspect of this project is the cultural connectedness of the research team to the research communities. This cultural connectedness includes an adherence to cultural mores, *kaupapa* (values and beliefs), and *tikanga* (practice). Empowering the research community is fundamental to cultural research. This includes the participation of members from the cultural communities, and adhering to cultural guidelines to determine practice. When we adhere to cultural guidelines, we can seek ongoing advice from key participants and steer our research process accordingly.

Research Findings

Grounded theory provided the theoretical framework for gathering and analyzing research data. This involved simultaneous data gathering and analysis in an iterative process (Charmaz, 2005), and an ongoing interchange between analysis and data gathering (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). An important aspect of grounded theory is the emergence of themes (Mutch, 2005). Through thematic analysis, researchers were

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able to concentrate on identifying themes or patterns from the data in order to support meaning making and understandings (Welsh, 2002). Using a constant comparison method of data analysis, researchers identified recurring patterns, and then constructed themes, or categories (Yin, 2014). The themes derived from data analysis are outlined in this section. We included links to literature and anecdotes from the research in order to strengthen and expand upon each theme.

Tuakana/Teina

Tuakana/Teina was often recalled in terms of infant and toddler caregiving. *Tuakana* and *Teina* refer to the relationships that exist between the older, more able sibling or expert, and the younger, or less able, sibling or novice. This is a term that all case study settings were familiar with, and there were several examples of *pūrākau* (stories) shared across the settings. In the Cook Islands, knowledge was often passed down orally, with the younger child or novice gaining knowledge in the process of learning (Glasgow, 2010). The *tuakana* (older child) caring for the *teina* (younger infant) was a common practice. Stories described the pivotal role of the *tuakana* in caregiving practices. These roles and responsibilities in all aspects of caregiving indicate an expectation and confidence in the competency of the *tuakana*.

S., a grandmother raised in Samoa, recalled:

> It was my older sister and myself who were mostly responsible for the looking after of the baby.

T., a Samoan mother, told of her experience as a child, in her Samoan village:

> My role was to make sure he was not hurt, he is not left alone, feed him when he is hungry, put him to sleep, and always pick him up and cuddle him when he is upset and cries.

The responsibility for caregiving demonstrates trust and acknowledgement of the *tuakana*'s skills and abilities. In play situations the *tuakana* would also take responsibility for the *teina*:

> I had to take him everywhere I went, and playing hop scotch and marbles with my friends meant that [I] had to balance him on my hip while playing. My friends and cousins were doing exactly the same thing with their own infant and toddler siblings.

Effective relationship-building strengthens cultural understandings (Morehu, 2005). Spending time together strengthened the sibling relationship, as well as their sense of belonging to the family and community. These practices continued into their adult lives and provided role models for subsequent generations. S., a Samoan grandmother, stated that in the village:

> My younger brother and I have a very special attachment bond (as a result of their tuakana/teina caregiving relationship). We share that relationship even now.

The *teina*, in turn, recognised the role and skill of the older sibling by acknowledging that responsibility for nurturing is a shared, collective endeavour. *Tuakana* were well versed in *tikanga* (practices) around safety, and were trusted in their roles. A Māori grandmother, from the Kohanga Reo recalled her childhood:

> Our tuakana always looked after us. The adults trusted them. Because tuakana were taught their tikanga on how to manage and keep safe, we were fine. There was trust and it was safe.

Tuakana/Teina practice is yet to be fully explored within the early childhood field in Aotearoa New Zealand. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the current infant and toddler care literature compartmentalises children into three stages: infants, toddlers, and young children (ERO, 2015; MOE, 1996). This approach runs contrary to the feedback from the study, and stands as a distinct barrier to instilling the tuakana/teina relationship approach to caring and learning in the wider field.

Intergenerational Relationships and the Role of Grandparents

Intergenerational caregiving was also provided by grandparents and community elders. Grandparents played pivotal roles in customary caregiving practices across the Pacific (Ama, 2003). Traditionally, *mokopuna* (firstborn) children were raised by their grandparents. Doing so would ensure that the valuable knowledge of the grandparents, such as *whakapapa* (genealogy) and culture were retained and passed on to future generations (Morehu, 2005). Participants recalled the significant role of their grandparents in their childhoods, including day-to-day activities and instilling traditional practices.

T., an older teacher, recalled her upbringing in Samoa:

> I was brought up by my grandparents on my mother's side. I lived
> with them in the bush where our plantation was.

Grandparents, who had moved with their families from other Pacific Nations, played a key role in ensuring that culture and traditions were not lost to their *mokopuna* (grandchildren). A young Cook Islands mother, who was raised in New Zealand, reinforced the importance of having the guidance of her Cook Islands grandmother:

> 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. I would learn the language and
> culture as an infant and toddler through singing and dancing.

Māori kuia (grandmother) and *koro* (grandfather) took care in ensuring their *mokopuna* (grandchildren) were raised with Te Reo Māori (Māori language).

P., a teacher from a Māori Kohanga Reo, acknowledged the influence of her grandmother on her upbringing in Aotearoa New Zealand:

> Nana was fluent in Te Reo Māori which had a big impact on my
> upbringing.

Being raised by grandparents demonstrates a caring system within a collective social structure, which is a hallmark of Māori and Pasifika social groupings. Children were cherishedand lavished with love and praise. They were kept close to their grandparents to ensure their needs were promptly seen to and met. The *koro* (grandfather) played an equally prominent role in nurturing the next generation.

R., a Tokelauan grandmother, confirmed the role that her grandfather took in caring for her own children, his grandchildren:

> My grandfather and extended family were all involved in caring
> for my babies.

A member of the Samoan cultural community, and a grandmother herself, recalled how she had been warmly nurtured by her grandfather:

> I remember being very spoiled by my grandparents. My grandfather would set aside the best food and he would call me to eat the food he had wrapped and put aside for me.

The practice of carrying the infant was a widespread practice (Rameka & Glasgow, 2015), and this practice was recalled by an older *kuia* who shared memories of growing up with her own *kuia*. She would carry her around the *kainga* (home) whilst she continued with her work. Although she had been raised by her grandmother she recalled that there were lots of *whanau* (family) to *awhi* (love) and *tautoko* (care) for her.

Traditional practices carried out by grandparents, such as baby massage, were recalled and shared in the *Talanoa* (storytelling):

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

The presence of the elders in caregiving and learning ensured that wisdom, knowledge, and practices were promoted. The presence of grandparents and elders is cherished and is often requisite in culture endeavours (Glasgow & Rameka, 2014). Traditional knowledge was imparted in authentic and meaningful ways and was woven into daily chores. Children learned by direct supervision and by observing and modelling expected behaviours and practices. This was a key way of learning for Polynesian peoples. The term '*ako*' refers to the process of reciprocal learning in which the learning and teaching roles can be interchangeable according to the context (Glasgow, 2012). Practical skills were acquired by the learner in the presence of a more able expert:

> Grandmother exemplified weaving, cooking, and decorating. Cooking was on a fire stove. Grandfather shared stories of the war and taught her to ride. He love the mara and the planting for kai.

Children learned by spending time with their grandparents, and by engaging in traditional ways of gathering food. This transmission of knowledge was done in a practical, hands-on way. Episodes recalled by elders revealed the powerful and effective nature of these 'hands on' learning experiences:

> 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.

A recent ERO (2015) report on responsive curriculum for infants and toddlers notes that some differences need to be acknowledged between Western and Māori perspectives. Gaining a wider view of 'Te ao Māori' (the Māori world view) (Rameka & Walker, 2012) is imperative for practitioners to work in culturally responsive ways with Māori infants. Furthermore, being open and receptive to culturally located practices, and consulting in respectful ways with Māori and Pacific communities will provide teachers with an increased repertoire of practices, skills, and knowledge. Narratives shared in this study act as important guides; the voices from Māori and Pacific communities provide a range of cultural practices that are requisite for raising Māori and Pacific infants and toddlers.

Role of the Collective Community

The *whanau* (family) are pivotal in caring for the new mother and the newly delivered infant. A central theme across all case study groups was caring for the mother to ensure the infant's wellbeing. The extended family provided support in a range of ways, including caregiving, and providing food and meals:

> When my baby and I came home from the hospital my aunty took us straight to her house so that I could be cared for and nurtured (alongside my baby).

Strong connections to the land were made at the time of birth, thus reinforcing the importance of place and land to identity and belonging:

> The enua (placenta) must be buried as it emphasizes the relationship between humans and the earth. The enua is traditionally buried outside the family house and has a plant or tree planted over the placenta so that the tree can grow with the child.

A close nurturing bond was very important in community relationships. Connecting to the culture and modelling these traditional practices were ways of showing love, care, and respect for the baby:

> Another way where we nurture our babies in the islands was to wrap them in a pareu (sheet) tight (similar to swaddling). This would give the baby a sense of security and nurturing. We still do this to our babies today, it gives them a sense of love from us mamas to our children.

> My mum raised me but I was also raised and nurtured by my aunties and uncles

> I was brought up around my marae surrounded by kaumatua.

In the Tokelau Islands, the practice of Inati supports sharing resources (Kupa, 2014). Upon birth, the child is given a role and responsibility to contribute and share with the community:

> We decided not to give away our first child (to our parents). We have another way of doing this. When men go fishing early, family has 'inati' (sharing of food, feeding, and caring responsibilities for the elderly). I had seven children, my first child's inati (share) was given to the grandparents of my husband's family to help feed them. This was the way that the first child took care of his grandparents. Our second child's inati goes to my family and my aunty.

This communal approach to caregiving extended to feeding the infant. Due to a range of circumstances, wet-nursing responsibilities were shared among mothers; for example, if the new mother was experiencing problems with feeding, if she had insufficient milk, or if her baby was being cared for by another nursing mother:

> When I was breastfeeding I had to breastfeed my cousin's child as she had a nipple infection. I thought this was odd at first but only learned that my mother and my sister had to do the same for babies in my families. I believe that this is still done in the islands. I would go to my cousin's house to breast feed her baby as I did not want to do this in public.

Communal and collective practices clearly demonstrate the values of sharing resources, time, knowledge, and understanding. These values then get passed to the next generation.

The Role of Spirituality and Christianity

Mokopuna (grandchildren) raised by their grandparents would learn *karakia* (prayers), *waiata* (songs), *oriori* (lullabies), *möteatea*, and *mätauranga* (knowledge) as a process of indirect teaching (Metge, 2015):

> Tikanga at this young age were simple things like karakia mo te kai (prayers to bless the food), waiata hïmene(spiritual hymns), songs that were based around tikanga were how you learnt tikanga – E toru nga mea- so not to impose on individual religious beliefs.

Spirituality

Wairuatanga (spirituality) is an integral part of maintaining emotional and spiritual wellbeing. *Wairuatanga* encompasses *Io*, the Creator or Supreme Influence (Makirere, 2003) and the sacred seed and river of life stemming from the Creator (Pere, 1988). Polynesia had vibrant religious systems, which were retained in the Pacific migration. Aspects of the spiritual realm remain and are practiced today, such as giving the first fish back to Tangaroa, the Polynesian God of the sea, in order to ensure a good catch of fish.

Christianity

Christianity in the Pacific has been a colonising process (MacPherson, 2001). Pacific communities and Pacific peoples are renowned for their high levels of affiliation to religious groups. These beliefs were confirmed in this study. Recollections of early life refer to the church, as well as religious beliefs and practices. For most of the Pacific participants, their daily religious devotions were an important part of raising their children. The following quote reflects the central place that Christianity holds in the lives of Pacific peoples:

> My parents were very religious and they made sure all of us children are in the house in the evenings for prayers. We all sit in a circle including babies while our Dad led us in singing a hymn and prayer. This is our family routine every evening seven days a week.

Findings from the research reveal that spiritual elements are woven into children's learning and development from an early age. Spirituality may be viewed from a wider perspective in which Christian principles sit within a holistic view of spirituality. This wider perspective may allow a holistic view to develop (Bone, Cullen, & Loveridge, 2007), particularly in a nation that is becoming increasingly secular.

Common cultural practices shared between the Māori and Pacific groups were significant. The findings affirm the importance of language and culture for individual well-being and identity (Thaman, 2008). Capturing stories strengthens understanding of culturally relevant pedagogical practice. Common threads emerging from each setting, respectively and collectively, affirmed and reconnected the cultural values and practices that originated from Polynesia, and were passed down inter-generationally by Māori and Pacific communities. Findings affirm the existence of Māori and Pacific ways of learning and their distinctive understandings of knowledge and wisdom (Huffer & Qalo, 2004).

Research participants emphasised early childhood practices and pedagogies that reflected their cultural worldviews, identities, protocols, and behavioural expectations. The themes that emerged from the research in Māori and Pacific settings affirm a set of knowledge and practices that are pivotal to raising our babies, supporting and enhancing our cultural identities, belonging and connecting to our communities, and ensuring that these practices are not subjugated by Western theoretical models.

Implications from the Research

The themes which the collective community voice has confirmed includes culturally located practices for caring for and raising infants and toddlers. If we are to ensure a just education system that promotes the rights of cultural groups in society, such as that of Māori and Pacific peoples, we must include their voices. The feedback provided by these communities provide clear directives for action.

Tuakana Teina Relationships

Learning through relationships between older and younger children, which encompass the *tuakana/teina* model of learning, needs to be considered and foregrounded in teaching practices. The practice of compartmentalising children into age and developmental stage groups of infants, toddlers, and young children will need to be revised. Current learning environments that are set up to cater to these learning groups may need to be upgraded to allow space for the *tuakana/teina* model of learning. These mixed-age range learning opportunities allow children to spend time together so that they can develop and strengthen their learning relationships.

Intergenerational Relationships, Including Elders and Grandparents

Much value is given to the wisdom and knowledge of the *kaumatua* and *kuia* (Grandfathers and Grandmothers) and other elders of the community. Their opinions are revered and sought out. Early childhood centres will need to strengthen their ties to the extended families of children, particularly the elders. This will ensure that *kaumatua* and *kuia* have input into policies, practices, programmes, and curriculum development. Grandparents and other community elders will take on the *tuakana* (mentoring role) by supporting teachers, (as *teina* in this relationship). The operational management and strategic planning objectives for each center will include documenting the ways in which the elders and are included, thus weaving cultural traditional values and practices into the educational programme.

Role of the Collective Community

A 'village approach' to raising children was very apparent in our research findings. The entire collective community took on the responsibility of raising children, with members providing support, particularly with caring for infants and toddlers. Currently, mainstream educational provisions require that teachers work together in teams in order to provide educational curricula and programmes for children. Adopting a communal approach opens many opportunities for cultural learning, particularly for teacher practitioners with a Western theoretical training.

Reviewing the Place of Spiritual Learning Within a Holistic Approach to Learning

The spiritual realm is a key factor in a holistic approach to learning. Implementing learning programmes with a spiritual lens, which includes the guidance from elders, will protect the *mauri* (spiritual essence) of children. Careful guidance from the elders may involve the importance of place-based learning, the legends and stories from the local area, tribal protocols and rituals, *karakia* used for blessing food, and the timing of certain cultural practices.

Further Considerations

The responsibility lies not only in the hands of the teaching teams, but across the wider strata of society. At the government level, more research, funding, and planning into culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy will provide further guidance for culturally located measures to emerge.

Foregrounding traditional cultural principles and practices must be a requisite for developing culturally responsive curricula. Furthermore, early childhood settings should conduct cultural self-review (Bevan-Brown, 2003) against a culturally bound set of criteria. These criteria will include the key principles that Māori and Pacific peoples consider imperative to raising children.

Māori and Pacific language nests provide exemplar settings based on which mainstream settings can begin to model their evolving pedagogical practices. For example, language nests provide a model of how *tuakana/teina* relationships develop. These settings are decreasing in the early childhood landscape and measures need to be applied immediately to stem further loss. Ideally, maintaining Māori and Pacific language nests will encourage the further development of this community-based, culturally driven service provision.

Finally, ongoing and authentic research and consultation with Māori and Pacific communities is called for and needs to grow. The overwhelming positivity by which this study was embraced by the participating cultural groups revealed a keen desire by these cultural groups to share their cultural stories and provide guidance. Practices that have been hitherto marginalised in the colonising education systems are foregrounded as valuable knowledge. Importantly, they also provide key insights into ways of educating and caring for Māori and Pacific children. Moreover, increasing access to this cultural knowledge will promote stronger implementation not only within the Indigenous language nest services, but among a wider range of early childhood provisions and contemporary practices.

Summary

This research is located within a human rights discourse in which children from cultural groups have the right to an education that acknowledges and promotes their home language, culture, and traditional practices. If children are not enabled access to their cultural and linguistic learning, they are at risk for losing their cultural identity. This perpetuates a cycle of increased marginalisation within an education system that does not represent or recognise the significance of cultural learning to holistic wellbeing.

Using a culturally suitable research process for gathering *pūrākau* with Māori and Pasifika communities has given a voice to their invaluable knowledge and learning ways, especially with regards to working with infants and toddlers in the early childhood contexts. Working with Indigenous groups, and empowering them to use cultural tools to gather research data, was a positive process. The research findings have provided valuable insights, from which emerge a range of possibilities for practice; and, a strengthening of the conceptual framings embedded in Māori, Pasifika, and Polynesian cultural values, beliefs, and practices.

These concepts provide guides for early childhood teachers to include Indigenous principles, and to enhance and extend their pedagogical practices. Teachers and communities will be better served to meet the growing numbers of Pasifika and Māori infants and toddlers in contemporary early childhood education services in Aotearoa New Zealand. Importantly, children will be cared for and educated in culturally located and relevant ways.

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