

**“Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Moe” catch hegemony by the toe**  
**Validating cultural protective constructs for indigenous children in Aotearoa**

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**I te timatanga ko te kupu – Our indigenous spoken word**

Indigenous children are central to the development of wellbeing strategies for their families, communities and people. Within Aotearoa New Zealand society mokopuna<sup>1</sup> Māori (indigenous children) are critical to the long-term transformation and progress of *oranga whānau*<sup>2</sup> - Maori wellbeing for future generations (Ruwhiu & Eruera, 2015; Eruera, 2015; Eruera & Dobbs, 2010; Erai, Pitama & Allen, 2007). Inherent in our collective histories as Māori people mokopuna were valued and highly significant within the social structures of whānau, hapu and iwi<sup>3</sup> (Ruwhiu & Eruera, 2015; Cooper and Wharewera-Mika 2011; Jenkins and Harte 2011), and as such are a key priority and focus for the future growth of Māori tribal nations.

The current reality within Aotearoa is that Māori make up just under 15% (14.9) of the total population. However, of significance is the fact that mokopuna Māori under the age of 15 years represent more than a third (33.1%) of that total (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). A sobering issue of ongoing concern is the large disproportionate number of mokopuna Maori within the New Zealand statutory child welfare system. At June 2014 more than 55% of children in state care were Māori (Child, Youth & Family key statistics, 2014). History speaks of the lack of culturally informed statutory approaches to address these anomalies. Correspondingly, from 2012 Child Youth and Family (CYF), responsible in legislation for statutory social work in New Zealand began shifting gear, to explore indigenous thought leadership, indigenous activities and strategies, indigenous literature and research to activate best responsive practice for working with vulnerable mokopuna in our care systems.

Given this contextual background, the purpose of this chapter is to critically explore and evaluate indigenous developmental and protective constructs. These are embedded within Māori customary values, beliefs, and principles that contribute to self-determination and inform culturally responsive practices. Furthermore, these provide solutions and interventions grounded in *te reo me ōna tikanga*<sup>4</sup> to guide safe practices with mokopuna and their whānau (Ruwhiu, 2013; Kruger, et al., 2004; Grennell & Cram, 2008; Eruera & Dobbs, 2010).

The two indigenous protective and developmental theoretical constructs to be explored in depth within this writing are tapu and mana. Implicit in Māori philosophical beliefs is the

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<sup>1</sup> Mokopuna – there are varied understandings and translations for the word ‘mokopuna’ and the most common literal translation into English is grandchild. However when used in the spoken language the translations are much broader to reflect the child's significance inside the extended whānau/family system. For the purposes of this writing the following description has been adopted; moko can be translated as tattooing or blueprint and puna means a spring of water, therefore the *mokopuna is often referred to as the reflection or blueprint of its ancestors*.

<sup>2</sup> Oranga whānau is a term currently used to express ‘whānau or family wellbeing’.

<sup>3</sup> whānau, hapu, iwi – commonly recognised as the key Māori social structure starting from the smallest; family, sub-tribe and tribe.

<sup>4</sup> Māori language and customary practices and protocols.

paramountcy of weaving both female (mareikura) and male (whatukura)<sup>5</sup> perspectives. Subsequently, tapu will be explored through mareikura eyes, while mana is analysed using whatukura lenses. Both critiques will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of whānau wellbeing for mokopuna Māori. As we critically unravel, tapu and mana, the indigenous methodology we have chosen begins with a storyline, 'he ngakau korero' narratives drawn from real lived experiences to set the scene. 'Whakamaramatia' provides a discussion that recognises, reclaims and celebrates significant cultural learnings using these two theoretical constructs. 'Te hohonutanga o te kupu' is the equivalent of an indepth literature review on these concepts and scopes the depth of tapu and mana as healing tools from the narratives. 'Wharikitia hei oranga' brings both the narrative and critical analyses together to provide insights concerning indigenous transformative social and community work practice with mokopuna and whānau Māori. 'Te wa whakamutunga, he whakaaro' enacts a conclusionary summary of our contribution to mokopuna wellbeing.

Our final spoken word gives notice to proponents of Western human development and maltreatment theories guiding interventions for indigenous children, to shift over, to relinquish power, to share critical thought leadership, to recognise practice diversity, and to acknowledge their need for cultural expertise and wisdom to guide these matters. As indigenous people it is our time to inform, guide, lead and direct strategic thinking, practices and solutions in child development, care and protection for the health and wellbeing of indigenous mokopuna, whānau and their peoples.

### **TAPU – Cultural construct for the protection of mokopuna**

A fundamental principle for Māori in the traditional raising of their young was the underlying belief that children are gifts from Atua (spiritual deity) and Tūpuna (ancestors) through their geneology which meant that they were tapu or sacred, special, protected under specific rules, restrictions and any negativity expressed to them was breaking that tapu (Eruera & Ruwhiu, 2015; Jenkins & Harte, 2011; Jenkins, Harte, 2013, Mead 2003, Barlow 1991). The whole whānau put mokopuna at the centre of their lives. Within todays society the promotion of traditional positive parenting practices and protective cultural factors may contribute to prevention or support to moderate indigenous minority groups higher exposure to risk factors and the impact of risk on childrens outcomes (Cram, Gulliver, Ota & Wilson, 2015).

### **He ngakau korero – *Our hearts speak of the sacred potential of children***

In a tapu mareikura (womanhood) state my body nurtured your growth for 9 months. A cherished but daunting responsibility for the manifestation of your whakapapa lines into the human form. The beating of your heart, the warmth of your little body growing while love surrounded both me and you. Excited about the birth of our first child we planned your arrival into the whānau with intention and purpose, reclaiming the old ways. A mother's vision guided by my Nanny's birthing story we were determined to provide your

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<sup>5</sup> Māreikura (spiritual deities representing the female dimension) and Whatukura (spiritual deities representing the male dimension) were used to describe the tane and wāhine elements of gender at an esoteric level.

safe passage into this modern world embraced by our Māori practices. But how do we reinstate these ways we asked ourselves sitting at our kitchen table in the city?

Tihei mauri ora<sup>6</sup>! The sacred wonder of new life as you took your first breath. A physical transformation connected to our Atua. Te tapu me te mana o tenei mokopuna. Shouts of pain soothed by your father's reo (voice) reciting incantations, the first sounds of this world as greenstone severed the physical connection between you and me. Surrounded by whānau who travelled there to welcome you, their eyes wide, some wet with tears of joy as they witnessed the awesomeness of your arrival into te aō marama (the world of light). Their presence reaffirming whakapapa<sup>7</sup> obligations to love, protect and grow your potential from your birth day forward. The afterbirth carefully captured and stored to be returned to your ancestral land. Exhausted, elated and determined we worked hard in your first hours to introduce you to our customary ways while nestled in our metropolitan home. Scared and nervous the enormity of responsibility for this delicate vulnerable and tapu human treasure became a reality. Finally, holding you next to me we slept.

Three weeks passed until the whakapapa brought forward your name 'e Kahurangi'<sup>8</sup>. The meaning, a precious gift, captured the prominence of your presence inside our whānau lines and connected you to the heavens. We travelled the country to introduce you to your lands. The afterbirth placed under the tapu protection of the Puriri tree beside your maternal relatives of generations gone. The pito<sup>9</sup> buried securely in motherearth binding you to the land of your paternal lineage. These customs established a cultural safety net to protect and advance your tapu and mana from this time forward. Returning to the city put distance between the land and people who carry the knowledge of our tribal roots but those beliefs are transported inside us and with what we had we tried our best to live our people's ways wherever we were so they surrounded you every-day. One day we would return to live on our tupuna lands sharing our turn as caretakers.

And now as a man you walk forward humbly but proudly as Māori with your Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Ruanui, Ngāti Rangiwewehi, Te Whānau a Apanui, Rangitane, Ngāti Kahungūnu roots embedded. Never forgetting that Celtic genes also grace you. Carrying forward the hopes, dreams, customs, legacies and beliefs of our whānau for the continued evolution of whakapapa. But how you ask? You will find your own unique way just as we did.

### **Whakamaramatia – Discussion (recognise, reclaim and celebrate)**

Throughout our history as indigenous people there are many accounts that show how highly valued and important mokopuna are within Māori social structures (Eruera, 2015, Eruera & Ruwhiu, 2015; Cooper & Wharewera-Mika, 2011; Jenkins & Harte, 2011,). When we retell and reflect on the birthing story of our son Kahurangi there are many insights to be shared about the value of mokopuna within our own whānau. These are encapsulated below within a decolonisation framework highlighting activities that recognise, reclaim and celebrate our own contextual paradigm and unique positioning as Māori.

<sup>6</sup> Tihei mauri ora is an expression often used to describe the breath of life at birth

<sup>7</sup> Whakapapa is of paramount importance to Maori, as it retells in an ordered process the evolution and genealogical descent of all living things, the interconnectedness of relationships between people and their environment (both spiritual and physical) as well as people to each other.

<sup>8</sup> Kahurangi – often translated as 'something precious' and is known in many tribes as one of the 12 heavens (commonly the highest heaven).

<sup>9</sup> Pito – connection to the umbilical cord.

**Recognise** – At the time we birthed our eldest son we didn't realize consciously that we were on a pathway to reclaiming Maori cultural birthing practices for our whānau that would embed principles and practices for the protection of mokopuna within our whānau for the future. On reflection through our experience, retelling our story and other whānau members also using these tikanga we now know this to be true.

When I became pregnant with our first child, our eldest son, my husband and I were elated. We were in our twenties and lived in the biggest city in New Zealand. Although a long way from our own family cultural sources in the rural regions we always ended up surrounded and supported by other Māori. At that time in Aotearoa New Zealand many Māori our age were immersing themselves in the revitalization of Māori language, customs and practices and this was evident within our network of friends and whānau. One day a friend described her amazing experience of home birthing to me and I was attracted to the natural and empowering nature of giving birth planned in ways that allowed us to determine and prioritise cultural practices. Prompted by this desire I found inside our own family birthing stories that my grandmother had given birth to my Dad on the side of our river while she was eeling. No big deal in those times, in fact in 1940 it was normal for Māori women not to have or want medical intervention in this natural process. This was inspiring to me and with my ambitious nature I thought to myself if she can do it so can I. After discussions my husband and I agreed to home birthing our baby. We began planning with a clear knowing that this was right for us and our baby while not realizing consciously at that time that we were in fact taking a pathway of recognizing, reclaiming and celebrating our cultural birthing practices as Māori. We did however clearly understand that we wanted Māori cultural home birthing processes and practices for our selves and our baby and this allowed the journey to begin.

**Key Reflection** - *Recognising initiates liberation.*

**Reclaiming** – The ability to learn, reconstruct and implement our own indigenous knowledge, principles and practices into our birthing process created many opportunities for us to reclaim the old ways as transformative and part of the decolonization process for our whānau within today's modern society.

We found Māori midwives who introduced us to cultural birthing practices. For example they arranged several wānanga (learning forums) with Māori elders and experts about traditional birthing practices that used Māori language, terms, beliefs and stories. The wānanga covered topics like; the use of Māori music within birthing including traditional Māori instruments called tāonga puoro, all sourced in the realm of mareikura with unique and specific purposes through the different sounds and vibrations carried to the listener, some soothing and peaceful, others vibrant and bright. We learned about 'oriori' or lullabies written specifically for mokopuna that recorded and expressed genealogy, whānau traits and aspirations for the newborn throughout their life, an intergenerational process for the transmission of whakapapa. Wānanga also included learning about and receiving traditional Māori healing, relaxing techniques and pain relief to support our preparation and birthing process such as massage (mirimiri/romiromi), Māori herbal remedies (rongoa rakau) and the use of pressure points. We learned about the changing nature of my body and ways to care for ourselves that reinforced Māori lifestyles such as sources of kai (food)

that is common to Māori that was healthy for myself and baby such as kutai and kina (shellfish found in New Zealand that are high in iron) or puha (a green vegetation of New Zealand eaten by most Māori and also high in iron). While I was pregnant I was performing in competitive kapa haka (Māori performing arts) so he was introduced and exposed to many moteatea (chants), waiata (songs) and a lot of Māori language while in my womb. We also had access to kaimatakite (Māori spiritual healers) within the whānau who supported us regularly throughout the pregnancy with karakia and other spiritual healing and oversight. We were immersed in new learning about cultural birthing practices.

**Key reflection** - *The power of reclamation.*

**Celebrating** – The learning for our whānau within this life event of birthing is indeed something to be celebrated as we see the intergenerational benefits enacted through shared values and behaviours for the protection of mokopuna.

On reflection there is so much to celebrate in this story of the events of the birth of our mataamua (first born). Although we may have stumbled upon it, I know now, in an informed way, that this story contains clear examples of the construct of and protective nature of 'tapu' in real terms around the phenomena of birthing. The 'tapu o te tangata'<sup>10</sup> in this case the sacred state of a pregnant woman and baby, and 'tapu restrictions'<sup>11</sup> or protective actions were reinforced throughout this experience to protect this newborn mokopuna. We learned many lessons to be shared.

**Key reflection** - *Ancestors messages relived.*

### **Te hohonutanga o te kupu 'tapu' – The concept of tapu**

He tapu tō te wāhine, he tapu anō tō te tāne  
Kia kua tētahi e whakaiti i tētahi.  
Engari kia whakanui tētahi i tētahi i runga i  
te mōhio mā te mahi ngātahi a te wāhine me  
te tāne e tupu ora ai ngā tamariki me te iwi hoki.

*Honour the sacred potential of women and men.  
A natural balance of gender attributes and roles.  
Recognising that it is the combined and co-  
operative efforts of male and female that  
contribute to the wellbeing of children and their  
communities.*

(Te Rūnanga Nui o ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori o Aotearoa, 2000)

This introductory statement exemplifies tapu as one of three interconnected principles in this discussion about cultural constructs that strengthen protective behaviours for indigenous child safety in Aotearoa New Zealand. Firstly, it highlights the principle of 'tapu', a belief about the sacredness and potential of humankind that can inform how and why we behave in particular ways so as to treat people, in this case mokopuna, both respectfully and safely. Secondly, it claims the cultural importance and distinctiveness of both men and women, and their co-operative roles together in nurturing and protecting mokopuna within Māori social constructs of whānau, hapu and iwi. Thirdly, it identifies the prominence of the purpose of these endeavours as contributing to 'ora' and the potential and position of mokopuna as vulnerable whānau members within this stage of their life cycle. Therefore

<sup>10</sup> Tapu o te tangata - sacredness of all human beings and sacred states we are in at certain times

<sup>11</sup> Tapu restrictions - those tikanga or customary practices put in place to guide safe, protective and nurturing behaviours and processes to protect te tapu o te tangata

indicating the need to be protected and developed as critical to the future wellbeing of the next generation, their family and tribal collectives (Eruera, 2015). Te tapu o te mokopuna offers a cultural construct and guide for the protection of mokopuna and is explored using the following six key definitional guides:

Te tapu o te mokopuna affirms that mokopuna have personal tapu

Te tapu o te mokopuna is founded in the belief about the sacredness of humanity and underpins how we value and behave with mokopuna

Te tapu o te mokopuna provides a guide for safety practices and behaviours between people

Te tapu o te mokopuna challenges western notions of abuse, violation and healing

Te tapu o te mokopuna demands an indepth understanding of your cultural roots

Te tapu o te mokopuna is a fundamental cultural construct to begin the discussion about protective behaviours for indigenous child safety within te ao Māori, a Māori worldview

**Te tapu o te mokopuna affirms that mokopuna have personal tapu** - There are many descriptions of tapu, and within most tribal histories tapu and mana are interlinked and the terms sometimes used interchangeably. Most analysis of tapu present two themes: sacredness and restrictions (Peri, 2006; Royal, 2000; Tate, 2003, Mead, 2003). There is common agreement that every person is born with tapu, often known as ‘te tapu o te tangata’ (Shirres, 1997; Tate, 2002) or personal tapu, frequently considered the most important spiritual attribute. It can be described as the intrinsic sacredness and potentiality that exists within the human person, inherent at birth through their connection to a higher spiritual source or power (Kruger, Pitman, Grennell, McDonald, Mariu, Pomare, Mita, Maihi, Lawson-TeAho, 2004; Patterson, 1992). Therefore mokopuna are born with personal tapu into a collective network and social structure of whānau, hapu and iwi (family, sub-tribe and tribe).

In our own story of birthing our son Kahurangi (although we did not consciously recognise and name it as ‘personal tapu’ at that time), we were focused and determined to honor the process of his birth by using cultural birthing practices that acknowledged his sacred arrival into our whānau as a new born baby. Our own journey of growth and learning has assisted us to now reflect on our son’s birthing story and frame it clearly as an active whānau expression of ‘te tapu o te mokopuna’.

**Te tapu o te mokopuna is founded in the belief about the sacredness of humanity and underpins how we value and behave with mokopuna** - Each life is a sacred gift with personal tapu linking to the spiritual realms while embodied in the physical realm connecting them to their geneological birth whānau and wider tribal network. Therefore, the human being is tapu connected to both spiritual and physical paradigms and should be valued for their unique birthing role and position within the whānau, hapu, iwi construct. As such they are to be treated with respect for their potential to contribute positively to the wellbeing of this social network. Whakapapa was central to understanding a child’s potentiality as they would be considered in their future capacities as a result of their mothers and fathers lineage (Eruera, King, Maoate-Davis, Moananui-Makirere, Tukukino, 2012). Mokopuna are born with tapu and infants have an increased vulnerability due to dependency on others for their care, safety and development while in this stage of their life cycle.

Within our own story this pregnancy was to birth our first child, known as mataamua, and the significance of his birth for us as first time parents was immense. When his birth was considered in a way that recognised that he was to be the first child born to the union of two lines of whakapapa it reinforced his importance, not only to ourselves as the parents but to both maternal and paternal whānau collective structures. This motivated us to think in an intentional way about his birth. It lead us to enquire about our own whānau birthing stories and learn intergenerational knowledge of some of the practices we wanted to continue to reinforce our values and beliefs. We wanted to enact right from his birth the value we placed on mokopuna and as such culturally specific behaviours and practices that we wanted surrounding him to protect him both in the present and the future.

**Te tapu o te mokopuna provides a guide for safety practices and behaviours** – Traditionally in order to support ‘te tapu o te tangata’, rules or restrictions were put in place to protect personal tapu and a person’s relationships and encounters with other people and human life. They impose on an individual the obligation to abide by the norms of behaviour and ‘tikanga’ or customary practices passed down through whānau, hapu and iwi to enact protective and safety measures for collective wellbeing. Therefore, tapu has traditionally played a strong role in the social controls and rules that determine acceptable behaviour and boundaries within Māori society (Mead, 2003). Where tapu may require a state of restriction, seperateness or prohibition the complimentary state called ‘noa’, is the normal, common or relaxed state. There are times when individuals are in a more vulnerable state or elevated state of tapu and therefore more protective measures and practices are required. For example, children and elderly, menstruating and pregnant woman, death may need specific safety mechanisms, protective behaviours and practices. Once this raised state of tapu comes to an end and tapu restriction is no longer necessary, in order to return to a state of ‘noa’ or the natural state, a customary practice would be enacted and tapu returned to its ordinary state. Mokopuna are born tapu, that is in a vulnerable state as infants due to their dependency upon adults for their care, development and safety. This requires tapu restrictions that guide behaviours as a protective mechanism until such time as the mokopuna is able to interdependently enact his/her own wellbeing.

Within our own story we acknowledged that wāhine when hapu are in a highly vulnerable state. At that time we didn’t name it as a state of tapu but we recognized that while pregnant I had to keep well ensuring the safe and healthy development of our new baby. Understanding and valuing the baby’s antenatal development within the wider whakapapa system and the significance of his birth motivated us both individually and collectively as a whānau to behave in particular ways. For example this meant that most whānau members who interacted with me during this time were aware and careful of my pregnant state. There was a protective whānau network around my physical, spiritual and emotional welfare that would support and nurture me ensuring I did not suffer any violence or behaviours that would put the unborn child at risk. Whānau support to help wāhine maintain a healthy pregnancy is critical. A review of mother-child relationships research (McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007 in Jenkins & Harte, 2013) showed that baby’s experiences in the womb and perinatal are critical to the baby’s future health. Furthermore the wellbeing of the mother is the primary protective factor for shaping the brains systems to enable baby to form close and healthy emotional relationships in the future (Perry, 2002:95). Therefore ‘te tapu o te mokopuna’ was enacted by whānau through valuing and

caring for me while pregnant. This is not the experience of all Māori women when pregnant due to the prevalence of whānau violence within today's society, however this information provides insights for those offering support or working with mokopuna and whānau, either formally through the provision of social services or informally as whānau or friends. When whānau have access to and positive experiences of cultural beliefs in action it is highly likely to provide cultural understandings about the value of mokopuna and whakapapa. Cultural beliefs such as 'te tapu o te mokopuna' when valued may promote and influence the enactment of protective behaviours.

**Te tapu o te mokopuna provides a pathway to indepth understanding of your cultural roots** - Traditionally early childhood socialization instilled unquestioning belief in the power of tapu and behaviours that reinforced how people were valued by the whānau were advanced. The concept of tapu works best when it is understood, recognised and enacted by whānau collectives in practical ways. Transgression against tapu in all its forms could bring about a state of ill health or even death.

Within our story Kahurangi's birth was a collective process inclusive of the extended whānau (18 in total were present at his birth). It was educational as for many of us it was the first experience of using our own birthing practices as Māori. This all occurred at our home in the city away from our own tribal homelands. The involvement of our whānau members, most who travelled distances to support us in our birthing process, established a strong network of kaitiakitanga or family members who had an obligation through whakapapa to care for, protect and keep Kahurangi safe. All of these whānau members have remained active and protective in our son's life to date as he heads towards his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday this year. Moewaka-Barnes (2010) affirms the significance of strong family connections as protective factors for Māori along with particular traditional markers promoting values and behaviours. She concludes by stating that a range of positive connections, both traditional and non-traditional may be strong contributors to resilience for Māori youth (p.31). As a whānau we realized that we were able to enact tikanga processes and practices for birthing in an urban setting supported by those whānau members we had invited to participate. Therefore with the right supports in place it is possible for any whānau Māori to choose to learn and implement our own cultural processes and practices into their lives where ever we are living, eg. overseas.

**Te tapu o te mokopuna challenges western notions of abuse, violation and healing** - A Māori worldview has its own valid and legitimate understandings about both the protection and abuse of the human person and as such of mokopuna. Tate (2002), in his dynamics of whānaungatanga (DOW) theory on abuse, describes behavioural transgressions as a violation of tapu. Peri (2006) explains this theory:

*"Abuse is a violation of one's tapu. It is a perpetration or an act of violence, referred to in Māori as 'hara', which subjects the victim to a state of 'noa' or tapu restriction. The concept of noa depicts a person being in the state or the absence of mana, that is, having the power to effect change.... Abuse is a violation against the victim, the perpetrator and both of their whānau collectives... the effects of the violation and prolonged state of noa makes them vulnerable to further abuse and violent behaviour themselves... the prolonged state of noa is called 'whakamā'.... In this sense whakamā refers to the symptoms of prolonged unaddressed abuse (an externalisation of the victim's hurt emotions and a subconscious plea for help to be cleansed from the violation or the transgression of their tapu)." (p.3)*



This DOW theory also extends to a model for healing. The approach to restore or redress violations of tapu are held within 'hohourongo.' Hohourongo is the principle and the process required to sustain and heal the whānau in situations of stress, violation or complete breakdown. It is made up of two components: hohou (to enter) and rongo (peace), therefore the process of reconciliation for the victim, the perpetrator and their whānau collectives.

There is contention on the premise that cultural interventions offer the potential to change violence and other dysfunctional behaviours. The rationale used to displace 'culture' is that Māori are diverse, many do not function on Māori cultural understandings (Kruger et., al, 2004) and that they are not empirical interventions. Our whānau story contests western dominant birthing practices often framed inside of clinical medical processes as the most prevailing for whānau Māori. Collectively gathering whānau together to participate in Kahurangi's birth supported this belief to be understood in practical ways and modelled some practices that applied the belief into our whānau life event of birthing.

When whānau experiences are valued by whānau members it begins to generate motivation for other whānau members to practice in similar ways. Within our own whānau, after participating in the birth of my two boys, my sister then undertook the same approach in the birth of her second child and again as a whānau we all gathered (including our children) to support and participate. It was there that reclaiming our cultural birthing practices started to become a reality for our whānau as we began to normalise and mobilise these birthing practices inside our whānau. This is evidenced again currently in the next generation as our nephew who was present at three of our whānau birth's (Kahurangi's was the first) is promoting this process with his partner as they are now expecting a baby. Whānau Māori have birthing options which do not have to be dominated by western notions and norms that provide opportunities to reclaim our own cultural ways, and reconstruct our own whānau tikanga.

**Te tapu o te mokopuna is a fundamental cultural construct to begin the discussion about protective behaviours for indigenous child safety within te ao Māori, a Māori worldview –** a Māori worldview of 'ora' or wellbeing has core principles and constructs such as tapu and mana that reflect from a cultural perspective our components of wellness. Tangata whenua in Aotearoa alongside other indigenous groups continue to develop cultural frameworks and models of practice founded on cultural values, principles and customary practices. These frameworks contribute to self-determination and improved wellbeing for our whānau, hapu and iwi Māori. Our position contends that tangata whenua frameworks, ways of knowing and practicing through the development of indigenous social and community work theories, competencies, practice tools are transformative and provide both conceptual understandings and practices to bring about change for Māori (Ruwhiu, 2013, Kruger et., al, 2004, Grennell & Cram, 2008; Eruera & Dobbs, 2010; Hollis-English 2012a, 2012b).

#### **MANA – cultural construct/principle for the healing and strengthening of mokopuna**

Often preceding a critique of conceptual phenomenon such as Mana, academia often demands the use of research rigor based on a literature review to measure and legitimize

writer speaking rights to open up valid discussions and debates on the topic in question. However, the power of the spoken word, within Tangata Whenua indigenous circles places a premium on the use of pūkōrero/pūrākau (story telling/with embedded messages of cultural learning).

### He ngākau kōrero – Our hearts speak of nurturing vulnerable children

A mokopuna blends into our home - I whānau mai te ihi o tetahi mokopuna ki runga i Te Upoko o te Ika a Maui e . . . My niece, a mareikura soul from the house of Rauroha, gave birth once again to another generational seed, a son, her man-child, our mokopuna, fully from te ira wairua, through birth now an ira tangata manifestation, none-the-less from the house of Rangi-a-tea, indeed a whatukura sentinel in embryo. What cultural understanding and practices graced his entry into this world of the living? Did love sing his arrival lullaby? In what form did whakapapa caress and cup him to their hearts? How did circumstances surrounding his birth impact on mana acquired from his ancestors?

Tikal's litany of pureness - Tihei Mauri Ora<sup>12</sup>, was silenced by parents in battle mode, and strangers replaced ukaipo with infant formula five days on, in Te Ao hurihuri<sup>13</sup>. Hui-a-whānau<sup>14</sup> drew a plan and two months later this treasure came into our lives and blessed our kainga. Pākehā<sup>15</sup> were satisfied, another indigenous reclamation and one less destined for state wardship. Who hears him, listens to him, understands him and acts on the depth of his vulnerable voice? Did he feel his cultural tongue lay down a known world while in the womb? And who bears the burden of securing his sense of mana?

Soft, quiet, peaceful, reverent conversations adorn his space of nurturance protected by ancestral kaitiaki<sup>16</sup> and Atua<sup>17</sup> – A contrast to harsh sounds of a basketball game in Papaioea - his first attended social event. But this time, Tikal's pureness that celebrated his birth, now is a piercing cry of anguish, of fear, of frightfulness, of unsafeness, of loneliness, of loss, of suffering. A different child to all the others begs that we master new skills of patient engagement. What were some of his acquired mana attributes? How might we advance his states of 'ora'? Why is it necessary to have a clear cultural framework for building mana enhancing experiences of our mokopuna who through no fault of their own are in unsafe and deficit centred environments at birth? How might we develop relational equations that increase his ability to achieve mana and help channel him towards oranga?

12 years on, a man in waiting he speaks with heart and sees with wairua a pathway that he may well travel. Albeit in education, sport, future occupation and/or faith, now surrounded in whānau ora, he asks life 'why not' not 'how come'. He knows his birth mother, and respects his whangai mum. His mana reverberates clearly in his swag. He knows who he is, and is finding his place to stand in this world. A Ngāpuhi<sup>18</sup> (Utakura, Otua, Mangakahia) Taitama tane<sup>19</sup>; a Ngāti Porou<sup>20</sup> (Horoera, Waipiro) rangatahi<sup>21</sup>; a Ngāti Kahungūnu<sup>22</sup> &

<sup>12</sup> I breathe it is life – the first sound of a child after its umbilical cord is severed.

<sup>13</sup> The evolving world – personification of the current world we live in

<sup>14</sup> A Family gathering based on a purpose, that is determined by Maori ways of engaging

<sup>15</sup> A post-colonial ethnic identification of White New Zealanders who have made New Zealand their home of origin

<sup>16</sup> Cultural guardians

<sup>17</sup> Gods

<sup>18</sup> A northland northern tribal indigenous nation of New Zealand

<sup>19</sup> A Ngāpuhi way of describing a male youth

<sup>20</sup> A North Island eastern tribal indigenous nation of New Zealand

Ngāitahu<sup>23</sup> (Mohaka) whangai mokopuna<sup>24</sup>; a rarotonga<sup>25</sup> drummer and Pākēha grandson. He is his own person and he belongs to many others. How does one raise a mokopuna with their mana intact and vibrantly growing? Why is it important to nurture their right to both the characteristics of Tawhaki and Maui? What needs to be done to imbed significantly respect for mareikura and whatukura (Te Tapu to o te wāhine me te tapu to o te tane)? Given the power of ngākau korero, how does one strengthen the right of these mokopuna to find their 'spoken word', to tell their story?

### **Whakamaramatia – Discussion (recognise, reclaim and celebrate)**

Being able to recognise, reclaim and celebrate the nature, function and distinctiveness of Tangata Whenua perspectives concerning the impact of mana on mokopuna wellness and wellbeing from the pūkōrero shared, is the purpose of this section.

**Recognise** – The journey of practicing cultural support in the form of 'whangai mokopuna'<sup>26</sup> (to feed, nourish, bring up, adopt, raise, nurture, and rear our most vulnerable young) has been a reality within our whakapapa lines for many generations. My maternal grandmother was a whangai mokopuna raised as a sister to her father's siblings, by her paternal grandparents. Within my own whānau, my younger brother (by a year), Morgan, was also my father's step brother, and youngest of 14 natural siblings. So in reality he was my younger brother, my dad's step brother and also my uncle. Recognition of taking on board the responsibilities for nurturing, maintaining and strengthening the mana of Tikal as a whangai mokopuna was not consciously understood by Nicky, I and our children on his initial arrival within our whānau.

2002 held so much promise for the Palmerston North Ruwhiu whānau. Our youngest son (of 4 brothers and 1 sister) began his journey as a tauira in Central Normal Primary. My hoa rangatira<sup>27</sup>, Nicky was in her final year at Massey's College of Education completing a Degree in Physical Education (PĒ) and Health, plus a Diploma in teaching to begin a career in secondary schools. I was immersed in all aspects of what senior lecturers do - presenting coordinating and engaging at the border predominantly with Tauwiwi<sup>28</sup> in the School of Social Policy and Social Work - Faculty of Social Sciences, Massey University. I was carving out an indigenous legacy inside my profession. Life was singing sweet melodies as Nicky and I became part of the Cafe culture. My interests in Maori community development accelerated through research pursuits such as 'using sports as a means of teaching social responsibility' galvanised by our involvement with the Highbury Whānau Centre and the Kia Ora Junior Youth Touch Module. Indeed a bewitching time of self-satisfaction to view movement of our aspirations for improving the lot of mokopuna and whānau Māori in our part of Aotearoa, our Eden. Then that one phone call, like a pebble hurled into our puna reverberating a crescendo of chaos, where all the butterflies flapped their wings together

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<sup>21</sup> A Ngati Porou way of describing a male youth

<sup>22</sup> A mid and lower North Island eastern tribal indigenous nation of New Zealand

<sup>23</sup> A Southern tribal indigenous nation of New Zealand who on their travels also inhabited Mohaka.

<sup>24</sup> Refers directly to our young who are fostered or adopted out to their kin. Mātua Whangai is the reference given to those who are caregivers of our young who need to be cared for, protected, supported, and nourished

<sup>25</sup> Rarotonga is part of the Cook Islands in the South Pacific

<sup>27</sup> My most revered partner – wife or husband, but in this case my wife

<sup>28</sup> Tauwiwi was used initially to describe – strangers to a particular area in Aotearoa New Zealand and then through the early stages of colonisation was used to describe all you arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand. Tauwiwi is irrevocably connected to Tāngata Whenua – the term used for the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand. Do Tauwiwi belong to Aotearoa New Zealand? Yes, because of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Tāngata whenua partners of the Treaty are Tauwiwi

and change happened instantly. A whakapapa weave braced the trauma unfolding. My first cousin, dad's eldest brother's son, was the father of a niece who had just given birth to her fourth child, a son called Tikal. He had been taken into care of the State . . . he was only 5 days old. His siblings, all sisters, the two eldest had different fathers had been placed in State care and fostered outside the Ruwhiu whānau, we were not informed of their plight. Tikal's third sibling who passed away at birth and buried in Uakura was his eldest blood sister. The State had intervened due to concerns about care and protection and while Tikal's future would be decided through a legislated Family Group Conference, he was in the interim being cared for by Taiwi CYF foster parents. A Pākēha social worker voice at the other end of the line, asked if I had time to talk and my affirmation opened the flood gates. A travesty unfolded.

**Key Reflection** - *Recognition unravels cultural healing patterns for vulnerable mokopuna.*

**Reclaim** – Arriving at the border of engagement with differing cultural realities concerning the future care of 'Tikal' required a reclamation of whakapapa (our genealogical and care obligations for mokopuna) based on the centrality of 'tikanga' (our cultural ways of responding) surrounding mokopuna ora (states of wellbeing based on nurturing and weaving mokopuna to whānau). Tikal's situation raised our right to reclaim a voice in his future care and wellbeing.

Tikanga was observed as I made phone calls first to my parents for advice regarding protocol about whangai, and then to my cousins, Tikal's Grandfather's siblings about the call and invitation of a Family Group Conference (FGC). Tikal's Grandfather was terminally ill and unable to respond. History with their niece and her mother (a pākēha sister-in-law) was fraught with accusations of abuse, deceit, distrust and negativity. They did not take up the invitation to attend the FGC, but were respectful of our decision to represent the Ruwhiu whānau. Mum and Dad, Nicky and I, my brother and sister-in-law with another cousin (the daughter of a young brother of Uncle Wati & my dad) and her partner committed to the pending Family Group Conference. Laid down was the kaupapa – Na wai e tiaki, e awhina mai te oranga o Tikal? (Who would care for and look after the wellbeing of Tikal?) Our niece – Tikal's mum, made the journey to Palmerston North as whānau and State representatives gathered at the border; frank and honest reflection ensued concerning his wellbeing. He would not be going back immediately to his mother. Two tono (requests) were placed in front of our niece to act as whānau kaitiaki (Interim care givers, protectors and safety development stewards) of her son - Tikal, by both Nicky and I, along with my first cousin and her partner. Her internal battles and external turmoil did not stop her from accepting our tono to enact kaitiakitanga for Tikal. The only proviso we marked in that contract was Tikal would remain protected, cared for, and safe guarded within the embrace of our whānau until he was old enough to decide for himself his care arrangements and that we would make sure that he knew his birth parents. This would not be a short term stay.

**Key Reflection** - *Reclamation of cultural obligations advances mokopuna mana & ora.*

**Celebrating** - My niece wept tears of sadness at his parting, while we wept tears of joy at his arrival. Exchanges of cultural obligations entrusted to advance his state of wellbeing (Ora) centred around four key aspects: first, to immerse Tikal fully in a social normality based on pure aroha (love) displayed within safe caring papa kainga (home environment)

where shared responsibility strengthened his support network; second, to strengthen and draw from inherited mana embedded within Tikal's whakapapa/genealogical lineage; third, to advance Tikal's mana acquisition rights based on that potentiality emerging out of his whakapapa; fourth and finally, to mark and celebrate significant moments of growth and development of Tikal's shift out of vulnerability into mokopuna ora. Pausing to reflect on Tikal's emergence in care, the first point of celebration began at the onset when a pākēha social worker not of our cultural reality, recognized the surname and pushed through a cultural boundary by thinking inclusively – thus came her call that changed our world. Collective responsibility won the day and the needs of a vulnerable mokopuna that we had whakapapa to, became, our obligation. The next celebration came with our niece who shifted past her addictions, and lifted the onus of responsibility off her shoulders for selfless purposes and provided her son with care, safety and protection within her extended whānau – an enactment of her mana wāhine (Mareikura). The third celebration, continues to resonate as Tikal weaves his own living taniko (life patterns) drawing from of his ancestors of old (mana tūpuna, mana tangata, mana tāne, mana wāhine, mana māori), owning culturally significant enhancing spaces of engagement that he has whakapapa to (mana maunga, mana awa, mana moana, mana whenua and papakainga), and exceling in his unique potential and contribution to his own mokopuna ora (mana ake, mana ahua ake o nga mokopuna). Now Tikal's mana – his influence, honour, power, authority, self-esteem, and humility is validates clearly by his nephews and nieces – it's his mana that they value in simple terms when we gather - 'where is uncle Tikal?' Gone are the screams of anguish, of fear, of frightfulness, of unsafeness, of loneliness, of loss, of suffering. His tune of service embellishes others within our whānau and adds to his own sense of self-worth.

**Key Reflection** - *Mana is something that celebrates mokopuna selflessness in service to others.*

### Te hohonutanga o te kupu 'Mana' – The concept of Mana

Nō reira, i roto i ēnei rā

Ka whakawehea ngā momo āhuatanga o te mana

āra, he mana atua, he mana tupuna

he mana whenua, he mana tangata

In modern times

the term mana has taken on various meanings

such as the power of god the power of the ancestors

the power of the land and the power of the individual

(Barlow, 1991: 60, 61)

The preceding quote from Barlow reinforces 'Mana' as a complex multi-layered cultural concept that influences all dimensions of reality, but more significantly has a huge impact on the health and wellness/wellbeing of mokopuna Māori. It isn't surprising that Tikal's pūkōrero raises a challenge about the need for reclamation of our definitive words. Subsequently, an in depth full and robust understanding of the concept of 'mana', its impact and significance in activities focusing on indigenous healing, strengthening and reinforcing resilience of vulnerable mokopuna', will be scrutinized using the following six key definitional guides:

Te mana o te mokopuna is the cultural adhesive that weaves generations to each other

Te mana o te mokopuna prioritises indigenous notions of growth, development & support

Te mana o te mokopuna can be measured to advance wellness, wellbeing and healing

Te mana o te mokopuna demands an in depth understanding of cultural wisdom & practice

Te mana o te mokopuna enhances cultural resilience and cultural responsibility

Te mana o te mokopuna challenges the significance of untapped potentiality

**Te mana o te mokopuna is the cultural adhesive** - For our mokopuna, the question often posed is what is mana? The proposition articulated here is that the human (He Tangata), natural (Te Ao Tūroa) and the ideological (Wairuatanga) dimensions are woven together by the cultural adhesive of Mana (Ruwhiu, 2013, 2001, 1999). Mana has been widely defined as power, honour, prestige, authority, influence, self-esteem and humility of entities in those three dimensions (Ruwhiu, Ashby, Erueti, Halliday, Horne & Paikea, 2011; Mead, 2003; Hemara, 2000; Barlow, 1991). Within the dimension of 'Wairuatanga' we have mana Atua (the power, prestige, honour, humility, authority, influence and esteem of our cultural values & beliefs), In 'Te Ao Tūroa' we have manifestations of mana in all natural elements, e.g. mana maunga, mana āwa, mana moana, mana whenua, etc (the power, prestige, honour, humility, authority, influence and esteem of all natural & environmental entities). In 'He Tangata' we have mana tūpuna, mana mokopuna, mana tangata, mana wāhine, mana tane, mana mokopuna, mana ake (the power, prestige, honour, humility, authority, influence and esteem of all human relational roles & entities). Those significant people, places and values/belief provide a Māori construct of the world. Mana is the conceptual cement that sets conditions for interaction and exchange to occur between those three dimensions. From a Tauwi perspective, Tikal was taken into care at five days old, because he was vulnerable, and needed someone to provide advocacy to make sure his health and wellbeing was addressed. At the same time, from the onset of engagement with Child Youth & Family, our whānau Māori understanding of mana determined the course of action we took. We knew, Tikal had mana as a mokopuna, he belonged to a genealogical line imbued with mana, his homelands and significant sites of engagement had mana and likewise those values and beliefs informing tikanga (protocols and ways of engaging) from the Māori worldview he belonged to, also had mana. At the same time we were also mindful and respectful of his other cultural realities (Maternal Grandmother – Pakeha; Paternal grandmother – Cook Islander) that also provided him with sources of mana.

**Te mana o te mokopuna prioritises notions of growth, development & support** - The lines of engagement across dimensions (Human, natural, ideological) contends that Western human growth and development theories are culturally bound. Therefore, a view of Tangata Whenua theories of growth and development of mokopuna Māori should not discount humanity and its weave to their environmental settings and cultural ideologies. The contention is that inter-relational engagements of mana realities within each of those dimensions impacts on the protection, health, wellbeing, care, safety, support and development of vulnerable mokopuna. Within the spectrum of Tikal's initial care, much of the directional actions were mitigated by Tauwi Human Development Theories. Stages of development both mentally, physical and emotional were mapped out clearly by professionals from the Health, Education and Child Welfare bastions of knowledge and practice. Respectfully, the push was to make sure he was on par with his age cohort based on dominant cultural growth and relational landmarks. However, central to Kaupapa Māori human development theories is the guiding premise that we all have inherited mana and therefore at birth our mokopuna come with many potentialities and whakapapa. Professionals in the care environment, view attachment theory as a given, but often at the expense and demise of valuing mokopuna whakapapa connections that is an inherent part of Māori human development theory based on understanding the multiple facets of 'Ira

Tangata' – the human essence (Tangaere in Te Whaiti, McCarthy & Durie, 1997). As one Māori contributor to a discussion paper on Māori Psychology stated,

It (the child) was never born as an empty vessel (as assumed in Western psychology)...that's actually the difference...with an empty vessel and all that's been put into it, like education, like life experience, and when that Maori child is born, it's already half full because...nga taonga o nga tupuna...it already exists, actually exists prior to birth, and so when they're born they don't come as an empty vessel anyway (Milne, 2005: 13)

For Nicky and I, the most significant part of his socialisation and growth was to introduce him using aroha nui atu (not with just a little bit of love but a whole lot of love) to build up his whakawhānaungatanga (relational connections) with his large and resourceful extended whānau.

**Te mana o te mokopuna can be measured to advance wellness, wellbeing and health -** Mana is the outcome of living Māori qualities, values and beliefs and is affected by changing environments. This can be measured and a plan of action can be incorporated to strength vulnerable mokopuna wellbeing and mana: their self-esteem, their voice, their power to choose, their sense of honour, their authority and decision making, their sense and active use of mokopuna influence and comprehending in their words what humility means for them (Eruera & Ruwhiu, 2013; Te Kani 2004; Durie, 2001). Taking into account Tikal's ira tangata, his tinana (physical needs); his whānau (family ties); his hinengaro (mental & emotional development) and his wairua (his cultural values & belief/his sense of spirituality) became the focus of our efforts to nurture his inherent potential and uniqueness (in relation to his right to be part of a contributing member of a whānau). Spending quality time with a healthy immediate and extended whānau accelerated his 'ora' (wellness/wellbeing states).

**Te mana o te mokopuna demands an in depth understanding of cultural wisdom & practice -** Mana can be enhanced, nurtured, strengthened, gained, inherited or acquired and used to bless others but it also can be stripped, change depleted, damaged, trampled on, abused, and even lost. Mana can be worked on or with to improve the wellbeing of vulnerable mokopuna. However, in order for this to occur, an in depth understanding of Tangata Whenua cultural wisdom (nga taonga i tuku iho) and regional/local cultural practices determined by whānau, hapu and iwi (tikanga a rohe, tikanga a iwi, tikanga a hapu, tikanga a whānau) is critical. Cultural wisdom imposes an entire set of social obligations and rules for 'engaging'. These sets of social obligations and rules for engaging often referred to as tikanga are adaptable to the changing environment but nonetheless draw their origins from a clear understanding of cultural wisdom. Marsden (in King, 1992), Henare (1988), Barlow (1991), Ruwhiu & Ruwhiu (2005) and Eruera (2012), all contend, that cultural wisdom and milieu instantly changes healing engagements with vulnerable mokopuna because it connects ira wairua (spiritual/cultural values and beliefs) with ira tangata (the mana enhancing aspects of humanity). There is an 'intimacy' that is relational between the realm of the gods and humanity that is interdependent. Often people just say 'oh I did that because I'm Māori', but this particular aspect of mana is based on 'knowingness'. Knowing who you are, where you come from, and why you are here is strengthened as you unravel, and then own your cultural space as a valid legitimate way of viewing this world. In order to do this effectively in caring for Tikal, I had to be pono (True) to my cultural understandings. I knew that disconnecting him from his parents of birth was

not an option. Nicky and I valued 'whangai' as a real meaningful cultural action to care for our mokopuna. We will not pursue legal adoption of Tikal unless he desires that to occur. Being a whangai mokopuna is legitimate and valid to our whānau. We don't own Tikal, he is not our asset, but rather the cultural rationale is that we belong to him as he belongs to us.

**Te mana o te mokopuna enhances cultural resilience and cultural responsibility** - With mana comes responsibility and that tends to display itself in various forms of resilience. Within Tikal's pukorero, that cultural resilience was evidenced in his comfort around the use of drums (linking back to his Cook Island whakapapa) and the apparent ease he was able to slip calmly into Tangaroa's realm indicating a future role as kaimoana gatherer for whānau hui and hui a whānau (Ngāti Porou, Ngā Puhi, Ngāi Tahu & Ngāti Kahungūnu legacies). The acceptance of cultural responsibility embedded in both living and non-living entities, reinforced the kaitiakitanga roles they still had, even as vulnerable mokopuna. Engaging in those responsibilities strengthened their own reputations and mana. Part of understanding the restorative powers of mana, even from a place of abuse, a child can be nurtured towards resilience and being culturally responsible. Tikal suffers from an immune disorder that has left him with increasing patches of white skin over his legs, buttocks and now partly appearing on his face. Nonetheless, the development of mana mokopuna, has seen him enter into all spheres of living with a thirst for knowledge, a desire to engage with his peers in all sporting activities and to be an active significant member of a whānau. He already is viewed by his nieces and nephews as 'Uncle Tikal'. The first port of call before other whānau members, which displays clearly that Tikal has mana, that is valued and sought after.

**Te mana o te mokopuna challenges the significance of untapped potentiality** - Untapped potentiality is based on the relationship between inherited and acquired mana. It opens up your possibilities for change and reinforces the potential for you to act as a conduit for displays of mana enhancing behaviour towards others. For our vulnerable mokopuna, this belief system acknowledges that the mantle of mana is passed down through the generations, however the challenge is to utilise that potential to provide real illustrations of acquired mana – to increase the mana that you will ultimately share and pass on to your next generation. Vulnerable mokopuna have that right as well, when mana is trampled on, to redress those wrongs (Eruera, King & Ruwhiu, 2006; Reedy, 1993; Sinclair, 1976; Kohere, 1949; Beaglehole in Sutherland, 1940) Thus, the healing terrain is not just a physical process but the potentiality of our universe is based on everything both innate and living having an essence, an inner power (Mana) that mokopuna can use to advance their wellness and wellbeing. As mentioned when discussing the relationship between mana and wellness/wellbeing/health of a mokopuna, potentiality is the growth component of mana that can lead a child to heights unimagined. In Tikal's situation, he wanted to play rugby league in the under 13yrs unrestricted weight age group. Both Nicky and I were concerned because of his slight build (yes the second smallest boy in his team), but while there is a long way to go regarding his knowledge of the game, the enthusiasm he has for this sport amongst all his other interests (soccer, rugby, swimming, paua diving, skateboarding, scooting etc) infectiously displays his untapped potential. His tupuna were well known for Herculean deeds as both Tohunga (Spiritual leaders) and Toa Rangatira (reptilian fierce warriors) and being of that lineage he also has much to attain yet as he grows further into manhood.



In concluding this section on providing an in-depth analysis of the conceptual construct of Mana there are two manifestations in dealing with vulnerable mokopuna. The first manifestation is that 'Ora' is closely associated with advancing tangata 'mana'. The second is a theoretical construct for informing indigenous social and community work healing and critical principle based practice is essential when working with vulnerable mokopuna Māori.

Subsequently, States of ora' also known as 'Mauri Ora' umbrella all aspects of collective and individual wellness, welfare and wellbeing such as whānau ora, mokopuna ora, toi ora, koi ora, manawa ora, wai ora, etc. It is the fuel that principled practice is guided by. Engagers at the border need to have a working knowledge of these concepts embedded in Tangata Whenua kaupapa Māori frameworks of wellbeing (Māori Social Policy). A key indicator of ora being address for our vulnerable mokopuna is based on manifestations of their mana acquired.

### **Wharikitia hei oranga – the connection of tapu and mana for indigenous social work**

A principle concern in the construction of 'welfare' and 'wellbeing' for mokopuna Māori involves providing them with the best possible care available within one's own cultural paradigms (Ruwhiu & Eruera, 2015). Unfortunately in Aotearoa society today, due to a range of complex contributing factors, both historical and current, many mokopuna and whānau Māori are disconnected from their cultural roots. As such, traditional values and beliefs may not be a lived reality. While this is true, social workers' as agents of social change and advocates for powerless minority groups, must practice in responsive ways that understand the history of colonisation on indigenous peoples (Grennell, 2006). Furthermore, they will need a firm in depth analysis of socio-economic determinants that are key drivers of whānau vulnerability and poverty (Cram, 2011). These contributing factors impact greatly on the health and wellbeing of mokopuna safety (Ruwhiu & Eruera, 2015). In contrast solutions require a multi-layered approach. Such an approach aims to strengthen cultural whānau conditions for positive mokopuna development and wellbeing. An understanding of tāpu and mana in the protection, safety, growth and development of mokopuna is paramount to responsive practices when working with Māori.

Subsequently, the purpose of this section is to weave together both conceptualisations of tapu and mana as indigenous Tangata Whenua theoretical constructs. An illustration of each conceptual construct will be directly drawn out of the pūkōrero. Application of each conceptualisation within the context of indigenous social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand is then manifested and explored. As an outcome one enabler and barrier towards it's utilisation in the wellbeing of vulnerable mokopuna Māori within the care spectrum are tabled for your consideration.

### **Weaving Moana's pūkōrero to 'tē tāpu me te mana o tē mokopuna'**

In order to summarise 'te tapu me te mana o te mokopuna' as a protective cultural construct, my whānau story will provide a final exemplar. The application of this principle into social work practice will be discussed and key learnings will be identified for our social work profession to consider in working with indigenous peoples. Te tapu o te mokopuna as a protective cultural construct implements a belief about the importance and value of children within the collective whānau social system that motivates protective guardianship behaviours towards mokopuna. Identity reinforcing a sense of belonging has been

described and recognized as a prerequisite and determinant of Māori health and wellbeing (Ruwhiu, Ruwhiu & Ruwhiu, 2008; Durie, 2001). This must be supported by access to cultural and physical resources, for example the whānau collective network and participating in whānau cultural engagements (Durie, 2001). Our whānau story provides many examples of implementing 'te tapu o te mokopuna' both the belief and in practical ways through the birthing process. It demonstrates aspects of 'whānau ora' through whānau connectedness, active whānau relationships and whānau capacity that provides access to people, places and cultural knowledge. For many whānau these enablers are not in place and there are many barriers to them being able to pursue their whānau aspirations. As such they may require support to reconnect and reconstruct these cultural practices, networks and processes.

In examining the ritual of burying our son's afterbirth under our Puriri tree this action enacted through ritual secured his attachment from birth both physically and spiritually to his ancestral land. It also embedded his sense of belonging to his tribal nation. Furthermore it opened up a pathway for him to learn all of his customary intergenerational cultural rituals. However, many of our whānau are not in such fortunate position as our son. Often they have no connections to their papakāinga or homelands and significant knowledge holders who are able to enact, model and teach the rituals to them. They are, through severed genealogical relationships and connections, in deficit impacted by intergenerational trauma through colonisation. Added to that due to the impacts of socio-economic inequities many of our people are living in poverty which means they do not have the financial resources required to travel to their tribal lands and undertake the protocols within these cultural activities. The conditions that enabled our son to have a proactive experience were affirmed by Durie (1999) who described the importance of a secure cultural identity as requiring access to and connection with the Māori world, including Māori language and customary practices, family networks, ancestral land and access to engage and participate as equal citizens within wider society.

### **Weaving Leland's pūkōrero to te tapu me te mana o te mokopuna**

In regards to Tikal's arrival within our whānau environment, there were many issues to address that required an in depth understanding of the dynamics of whānau, inclusive of whakapapa/genealogical connections, a full comprehension of mana in all its forms and a working knowledge of practice (tikanga/protocols). For example, after being contacted by CYF to attend Tikal's Family Group Conference (FGC) in Palmerston North, I still had to initiate a collective decision making process about whānau representation at the FGC. My first obligation was to speak with my father (mana holder of our Ruwhiu whānau speaking rights) to seek his advice about how to engage with Tikal's grandfathers siblings, my older first cousins. This required a whānau hui with my parents, siblings and our children to let them know all the circumstances around Tikal's wellbeing status. Furthermore, Dad said that I needed to make contact with my cousin Bill's (Tikal's grandfather) eldest sister to inform her of the situation, eg. pending FGC for Tikal. I was also to ask if representatives from their line would be attending the FGC. I was also told by Dad to let them know that we would be attending because Tikal had a direct whakapapa line to us (he is the great grandson of my Dad's oldest brother). They were very supportive of our attendance, particularly because my father (the only surviving whānau member of that generation) was leading us. They did not take up the invitation to attend because of past negative

experiences with the State. This opened the door way for our ropu to represent the needs of our extended whānau and in particular our mokopuna 'Tikal'. CYF came to the cultural engagement border with concerns about Tikal's care and protection and now mandated by our whānau to represent our whakapapa lines we proactively requested to take back our custodial rights as whānau members to care for him.

There are two points being made here: first, Indigenous and bi-cultural social work practitioners dealing with vulnerable mokopuna need to be able to understand and take into account the whānau dynamics, inclusive of mana so that they can fully participate in decision-making processes. Second, having an understanding of Māori worldviews, Māori practices, Māori concepts, Māori behaviour and relational theories can support your ability to identify and address various levels of abuse (violations of ones tapu) suffered by our mokopuna. In this case Tikal's tapu had been indirectly violated by the actions and behaviour of immediate loved ones. His tapu was also affected by being placed with good Tauwi caregivers who while providing a safe environment had very limited knowledge of his cultural needs.

Finally, Tikal came into our whānau and was exposed to the depth of his culture drawn from the mana of his tūpuna. That is the type of thinking and supported actions that can only come if the social work practitioner is familiar with Indigenous and Bicultural tools of engagement to address states of wellbeing for mokopuna Māori. The enabler in Tikal's situation was extending the search of his whakapapa lines not just lineally but horizontally to find healthy whānau to support his 'ora' journey. This was facilitated by the CYF tauwi social worker identifying a key whānau ora activist. A significant barrier to navigate in Tikal's story was distrust that limited real conversations about his cultural needs without getting caught up in the unhealthy politics of human self-centred frailty that took the focus off Tikal, our mokopuna.

### **Te wā whakamutunga, he whakaaro – the end of our spoken word gathers learning**

In drawing this chapter to a conclusion, it is important to say that the weave between Tapu and Mana is irrevocably connected to best social and community work practice. When practicing responsively with mokopuna and whānau Māori to affirm 'te tapu me te mana o te mokopuna' social workers must ensure they;

- understand core principles of a Māori worldview and support to reclaim and promote Māori beliefs and values that recognise and affirm children's position inside of their whakapapa and their potential for wellbeing both individually and within the collective
- are aware of the history of dispossession that has restricted many Māori from access to their cultural heritage, values, beliefs and practices such as 'te tapu o te mokopuna'
- support Māori in reclaiming our values and beliefs associated with tapu
- are open to Māori philosophical ways of understanding 'wellbeing, protection and abuse'
- are able to engage with mokopuna and whānau Māori in meaningful ways that enable them to discuss cultural issues, perspectives, aspirations and options for their children
- can promote, initiate and facilitate the inclusion of cultural processes that is relevant to the context of that mokopuna and whānau
- practice in a way that seeks to strengthen mokopuna sense of identity and belonging in culturally responsive ways
- value and have a working knowledge of Māori theories of abuse/maltreatment, safety, human development, human engagement, wellbeing, wellness and healing.

Let the learning resonate in our concluding eight key statements that capture the contribution we are making in this critical space, at our border of engagement with social work in Aotearoa New Zealand concerning mokopuna ora:

1. Te tapu me te mana o te mokopuna intrinsically weaves collective cultural attributes, values & beliefs
2. Te tapu me te mana o te mokopuna are protective constructs to address abuse & healing
3. Te tapu me te mana o te mokopuna strengthens resilience to enhance wellbeing
4. Te tapu me te mana o te mokopuna supports transformative development and behaviour.
5. Te tapu me te mana o te mokopuna are critical concepts culturally grounding practice.
6. Te tapu me te mana o te mokopuna validates indigenous child rearing practices
7. Te tapu me te mana o te mokopuna requires whānau to nurture and grow potential
8. Te tapu me te māna o te mokopuna provides us with indigenous theories of abuse, safety, humana development, human engagement, healing and wellbeing

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