

# Kaupapa Māori and leadership in early childhood education



ECE resources

The term kaupapa Māori is frequently used in education. This research review firstly provides a framework for what kaupapa Māori is, based on research, and secondly outlines how kaupapa Māori can be applied in early childhood education leadership and practice.

## What is kaupapa Māori and why is it important?

Kaupapa Māori theory emphasises the importance of Māori achieving on their own terms as Māori. This approach has developed in response to the effects of colonisation, which have resulted in Māori having poorer outcomes than their non-Māori counterparts in many areas of society, such as the education, health, and justice sectors. From a kaupapa Māori perspective, these inequities are due to the loss of Māori language, culture, knowledge, and identity in Aotearoa New Zealand. A kaupapa Māori view is a transformative approach where Māori language, culture, knowledge, and identity are prioritised.

Whilst a kaupapa Māori approach reflects a Māori perspective, it does not focus solely on outcomes for Māori. It is a consciousness-raising approach that highlights that Māori language, culture, knowledge, and identity have been subjugated by Western language, culture, knowledge, and identity. The early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki supports a kaupapa Māori approach to assessment. The curriculum argues that all tamariki, Māori and non-Māori, can benefit from kaupapa Māori<sup>1</sup>.

## Kaupapa Māori leadership

The international leadership literature has established that language and identity are linked, and that being able to speak in accord with one's culture is critical<sup>2</sup>. This is particularly the case in bicultural Aotearoa, as te reo Māori 'enshrines the ethos, the life principle of a people. It helps give sustenance to the heart, mind, spirit and psyche. It is paramount'<sup>3</sup>. While the leadership literature emphasises the importance and role of the indigenous language for future leadership, te reo Māori is in decline in Aotearoa<sup>4</sup>. Māori elders have an important role in supporting te reo Māori in future generations<sup>5</sup>. Researchers have identified that the leadership provided by elders, such as kaumātua (elderly men or women) and kuia (elderly women), is essential for fostering and keeping te reo Māori alive<sup>6</sup>. Given the link between language and culture, the actions of elders and leaders in this instance have implications for identity.

Whakapapa is an important aspect of Māori leadership. This relates to the importance in te ao Māori (the Māori world) of knowing where we come from, and the link between knowing where we come from and strength and self-awareness. Research has shown that leadership for Māori is underpinned and sustained by whakapapa<sup>7</sup>. The literal translation of whakapapa is 'to place in layers'<sup>8</sup>. From a genealogical perspective, whakapapa is an integral part of Māori cultural practices and is usually presented in the Māori language and supported by whakatauki (proverb), karakia (chants), and waiata (songs)<sup>9</sup>. As Mahuika states, 'for Māori, whakapapa has always been considered the explanatory framework for the world and everything in it'<sup>10</sup>.

There is a strong link between whakapapa and identity<sup>11</sup>. In the book *Te Kai a te Rangatira*, for which more than 100 Māori leaders were interviewed, many of the leaders referred to the inter-relationship between leadership, whakapapa, and identity<sup>12</sup> and the importance of whakapapa for leaders. For example, Alva

Pomare (Ngāti Toro, Ngāpuhi) states that ‘as we move forward, leadership needs to have their own whakapapa intact. More than anything else, I think you need to be true to yourself. Pono to yourself’<sup>13</sup>.

## Kaupapa Māori and mātauranga Māori

The terms kaupapa Māori and mātauranga Māori are sometimes used interchangeably, but these terms do not mean the same thing. An important component of kaupapa Māori and Māori resistance is honouring and using mātauranga Māori. Mātauranga Māori is a modern term that in a literal sense means Māori knowledge, and broadly includes traditions, concepts, worldviews, and understandings derived from te ao Māori (the Māori world). Charles Royal argues that the term mātauranga Māori can be seen to undermine the diversity of iwi, hapū, and whānau, and that mātauranga Māori has two inter-related meanings: a body of knowledge, and a worldview<sup>14</sup>. Using mātauranga Māori concepts reflects a kaupapa Māori approach, but further actions above and beyond the use of mātauranga Māori are required to fully exercise kaupapa Māori. The term mātauranga is used in this article to reflect the traditions, concepts, worldviews and understandings derived from te ao Māori.

Whanaungatanga (connections and relationships) underpin and are evident in Māori leadership. Whanaungatanga concerns relationships between all living things and reflects the te ao Māori focus on the collective rather than the individual<sup>15</sup>. Pere describes whanaungatanga as the bond that strengthens our relationship with kinship groups<sup>16</sup>, while Metge describes it as extending beyond immediate and extended kin to people who become kin due to shared experiences<sup>17</sup>. The multifaceted nature of whanaungatanga is highlighted by Karaka-Clarke who links it with belonging, connecting, relationships, aroha (love), and manaakitanga (generosity), alongside other characteristics<sup>18</sup>.

Aroha and manaakitanga are two essential elements of successful Māori leadership. Aroha is defined as an expression of wairuatanga (spirituality)<sup>19</sup>, and is ‘only meaningful when actioned’<sup>20</sup>. Other essential elements include mana, which is ‘multi-form and includes psychic influence, control, prestige, power, vested and acquired authority and influence’<sup>21</sup>. Manaakitanga is the action of upholding the mana of others and supporting collective wellbeing<sup>22</sup>. Manaakitanga encompasses the concepts of caring for others, generosity, and nurturing relationships. Manaakitanga is often translated as hospitality, although this does not reflect the complexity of the concept<sup>23</sup>.

## How kaupapa Māori applies in early childhood leadership and practice

Kaupapa Māori theory is one of several underpinning theories of Aotearoa New Zealand’s early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. The other theories and approaches that inform the curriculum document are Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model and Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory.

Leading from a kaupapa Māori perspective in an early childhood setting involves understanding and applying Māori culture, knowledge, and language. It is a ‘by Māori, for Māori’ perspective. To teach and lead effectively in early childhood education, early childhood centre leaders and kaiako need to understand and demonstrate commitment to kaupapa Māori theory and practices as outlined in *Te Whāriki*, which states that ‘assessment informed by kaupapa Māori does not view the child in isolation but recognizes that the mokopuna emerges from rich traditions and is linked strongly with whānau, hapū and iwi’<sup>24</sup>. As argued above, a commitment to kaupapa Māori results in benefits for all tamariki. Te reo me ngā tikanga (the language and its customary practices) are at the heart of kaupapa Māori theory.

## How mātauranga Māori applies in early childhood leadership and practice

While this is not an exhaustive list, below is a list of mātauranga Māori values, ideas, and traditions and an idea of what these could look like for centre leaders and kaiako. Whilst these are presented

independent of each other below, they do overlap and they should be used in a holistic way to reflect te ao Māori and the intent of the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. An important point for early childhood centre leaders and kaiako is that they need to practise place-based te reo Māori and tikanga. Māori are not a homogeneous group, and there is significant variation across whānau, hapū, and iwi in relation to whakapapa, pūrākau (stories), and te reo me ngā tikanga. Demonstrating respect and understanding that these differences exist is paramount.

Demonstrating the value of **aroha** in early childhood leadership and practice provides affirmation for tamariki that they are loved, valued, and respected, and promotes a sense of security and belonging. This in turn empowers tamariki to explore and investigate their environment, including developing relationships with others and building a strong sense of safety, security, and belonging. Leaders and kaiako practise aroha in their words and their actions<sup>25</sup>, and manaakitanga and aroha are reflected in kaiako and leader actions such as caring, sharing, being a friend, and showing kindness.

**Mana** is another central concept in mātauranga Māori and can be translated as prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, and charisma. In te ao Māori, by standing tall, our ancestors stand tall, so ‘the mana of a child needs recognition and must be nurtured’<sup>26</sup>. Meeting and upholding the mana of the child in early childhood leadership and practice involves demonstrating through words and actions that a child is valued and loved. This benefits tamariki because upholding the mana of tamariki in conjunction with providing opportunities to explore and interact within a rich, safe, and nurturing environment provides the opportunity for tamariki to reach their full potential<sup>27</sup>.

**Manaakitanga** is to do with supporting and uplifting the mana of others. It involves leaders and kaiako demonstrating caring, generosity, and hospitality<sup>28</sup>, as well as practising rituals and protocols that reflect te ao Māori, including welcomes, kai sharing, and karakia<sup>29</sup>. This benefits tamariki because, when they feel cared for, respected, and valued, they extend themselves and accept that they make mistakes. Their sense of self and identity is enhanced.

**Māuri** describes the concept of life force. Upholding māuri in early childhood leadership and practice involves highlighting and celebrating the child’s voice and views. When the māuri of tamariki is honoured, they develop awareness, pride, and a sense of accomplishment in themselves, which contributes to security in their identity.

**Tangata whenuatanga** refers to acknowledging and respecting the indigenous people, or the people born of the whenua (land). Early childhood leaders and kaiako can uphold this value by demonstrating respect for and knowledge of cultural place-based narratives. This benefits tamariki because upholding the importance of cultural narratives reflects the sense of place for tamariki, and helps to enhance their identity.

**Te reo me ngā tikanga** is central to a kaupapa Māori approach in early childhood education. Leaders and kaiako can demonstrate a commitment to deepen, strengthen, and support the development of te reo Māori me ngā tikanga and te ao Māori, including whānau but without the expectation that whānau Māori will lead this<sup>30</sup>. Another important consideration is ensuring that te reo Māori is used for a range of purposes, and avoiding it being used solely for directive purposes, such as ‘e noho’ (sit down) or ‘whakarongo’ (listen). This can unintentionally result in te reo Māori being viewed as a ‘bossy’ language<sup>31</sup>. For tamariki Māori, celebration and valuing of te reo me ngā tikanga enhances their learner identity. The celebration and valuing of mother tongue language is a right, not a privilege, and when te reo Māori is utilised, respected, and taught by leaders and kaiako, tamariki identify the language and the culture as something of prestige, mana, and value<sup>32</sup>.

Another central concept in mātauranga Māori is **wairua**, which relates to spirituality, the spiritual dimension, and cosmology<sup>33</sup>. Pere sees a strong connection between Papatūānuku (the land or Earth Mother) and wairua<sup>34</sup>, and one way for leaders and kaiako to uphold this in early childhood education is by providing opportunities for tamariki to be in nature, which supports and builds their wairua.

**Whakapapa** is a central concept in mātauranga Māori. It provides a continuum of life from the spiritual world to the physical world, from the creation of the universe to people past, present, and future. While whakapapa permits Māori to trace descent through to past generations, it also allows movement and growth into the future. Furthermore, the literal translation of whakapapa is 'to place in layers'. The multiple layers of whakapapa involve interpretations that are fundamental to Māori values, beliefs, and ways of knowing<sup>35</sup>. Understanding the concept and importance of whakapapa, and understanding one's own and others' whakapapa, including the whakapapa of tamariki who attend the centre from a genealogical perspective, is an important component of kaupapa Māori leadership in early childhood. Leaders and kaiako can acknowledge whakapapa by incorporating local place-based korero, artefacts, and visual symbols within their programmes and the early childhood environment. Leaders and kaiako can also role model the importance of whakapapa: they can share their whakapapa with tamariki, and korero (converse) with them about their whakapapa in relation to people, places, and things.

**Whanaungatanga** (relationships, connectedness) is another important concept in mātauranga Māori. Leaders and kaiako enact this by emphasising the needs of the collective rather than always focusing on the individual<sup>36</sup>. Whanaungatanga is seen in a strong commitment to a Te Tiriti-based approach, rather than simply in a bicultural approach, by working in partnership with whānau, hapū, and iwi<sup>37</sup>. Leaders and kaiako can enact this by fostering a sense of welcome and hospitality for all members of the early childhood centre community<sup>38</sup>. Connections and relationships are paramount, including all levels of relationships that centre leaders and kaiako have. Leaders and kaiako can also acknowledge and emphasise connectedness to place as well as the connection between people, and be responsive to the importance of cultural narratives that reflect the sense of place. This means that each child and their whakapapa is upheld, and their whānau, hapū, and iwi are acknowledged.

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