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FROM PLANNING TO PRACTICE: NOHO MARAE AS A LIVING EXPRESSION OF TOI OHOMAI VALUES

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Mā mua ka kite a muri, mā muri ka ora a mua

Those who lead give sight to those who follow, those who follow give life to those who lead

INTRODUCTION

The Early Childhood Curriculum *Te Whāriki* emphasises the importance of kaiako (teachers) weaving te reo Māori me ōna tikanga (Māori language and Māori ways of knowing and doing) into their everyday curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2017). Policy documents such as *Our Code Our Standards* ensure kaiako make a commitment to upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnerships within their teaching (Education Council, 2017). Te Tiriti o Waitangi is, in essence, honouring equitable partnerships and agreeing to retain language, culture and identity (Riki-Waaka, 2023). Tino rangatiratanga is a foundational concept referring to the authority and power for Māori to uphold their own tikanga (customs), language and worldviews (Heretaka, 2024). Walker (1990) and Orange (2015) emphasise the importance of understanding narratives such as whakapapa (genealogy), pepeha (personal introduction), pūrākau (traditional stories), tikanga, te ao Māori (Māori worldview) and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge), to ensure education practice honours mana whenua (authority over the land) and equitable futures. Toi Ohomai kaimahi (staff) teaching in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) programmes are committed to ensuring tauira (students) are equipped with the knowledge required to meet the first standard outlined in *Our Code Our Standards* – Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership (Education Council, 2017). Upon application into the ECE programme, tauira agree to attend a noho marae (overnight stay at a marae) once per year during their studies. Green et al. (2023) recognises that in te ao Māori the marae is a place that records whakapapa and identity. The noho experience exemplifies tino rangatiratanga (leadership) by privileging Māori-led knowledge and practices within a Māori space (Paemanu, 2023). For tauira, Williams et al. (2023) contend a noho marae experience allows experiential learning in a contextual and authentic environment with a result of tauira learning te ao Māori knowledge, social norms and cultural practices (Green et al, 2023).

Noho marae provides tauira with Māori values such as manaakitanga (care) and whanaungatanga (relationship building), enabling tino rangatiratanga with mātauranga Māori leading the pedagogical process (Paenamu, 2023). In this cohort, there were no Māori tauira participating in the noho marae experience. The noho was therefore designed to support non-Māori tauira in developing their understanding of te ao Māori and their responsibilities as future ECE kaiako in upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi and implementing core Māori values from Te Whāriki. Tauira were intentionally placed in different rōpū (groups) and participated in different activities related to Māori ways of being and doing. The learning centralises tikanga and kawa (protocols) on the marae through pōwhiri (welcome ceremony of a marae), whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, aroha (love), tuakana-teina (reciprocal peer learning), karakia (incantation), waiata (song), kapa haka (performing arts), rongoā Māori (traditional healing), poroporoaki

(farewell) and mana (dignity) enhancing practices. Such values and practices centralise tino rangatiratanga reflecting a deliberate shift toward privileging mātauranga Māori. Opportunities to engage with te ao Māori offer a deeper connection to the diverse cultural heritage of Aotearoa (Ford, 2020). Taurua learn to be as one, eat as one and sleep as one, in the context and power of a noho marae.

Kaimahi teaching in the ECE programme make a commitment to uphold Toi Ohomai's purpose of delivering innovative learning, guided by the vision of empowering people and communities. Within everyday practice kaimahi authentically weave Toi Ohomai values into their teaching and learning environments. These values are:

- Manaakitanga – showing care and respect for taurua through mana enhancing practices. Ensuring inclusive, generous and supportive relationships.
- Toitūtanga - upholding long-term wellbeing – of people, knowledge, environments and practices ensuring sustenance for future generation.
- Whanaungatanga – building strong and meaningful connections with taurua through shared experiences and working together emphasising collective strength and unity.
- Kotahitanga – working collaboratively with a shared purpose. Valuing collective effort, harmony and inclusivity in decision making and action.

The Toi Ohomai core values serve as a framework for this article, providing a lens through which the integration of Māori culture and language in educational practices can be understood. Stewart et al. (2024) claim, noho marae experiences create culturally responsive learning environments enacting tino rangatiratanga, fostering manaakitanga, toitūtanga, whanaungatanga and kotahitanga through upholding tikanga and respecting the mana of the marae. Through noho marae, taurua *and* kaimahi develop leadership skills and build strong relationships, essential in fostering a supportive learning environment for tamariki of Aotearoa.

HE AHA AI? – WHY?

Ko Tangatarua te marae
 Ko Ngāti Tūhourangi ko Ngāti Wāhiao ngā iwi
 Ko Ihenga te whare tūpuna
 Ko Ihenga te tāne rongonui o taua rohe
 Ko Hinetekakara te tūpuna wahine
 Ko Lynel Grant te tohunga whakairo
 Ko Tina Wirihana te tohunga raranga
 I whakatūwheratia a Tangatarua i te tau 1996
 Ko Tangatarua te taonga puiake o Toi Ohomai
 Ko tēnei tā tātou mihi ki a Tangatarua

As a component of the Master of Teaching Early Childhood Education (MTECE) and Bachelor of Teaching Early Childhood Education (BTECE) programmes at Toi Ohomai, 67 taurua embarked on a noho at Tangatarua Marae located on the Mokoia campus of Toi Ohomai in Rotorua. Both MTECE and BTECE programmes at Toi Ohomai include three hours of te reo Māori lessons each week incorporating kawa and tikanga practices, reflecting their commitment to tino rangatiratanga. Recent research conducted by kaimahi teaching in the MTECE and BTECE programmes highlighted a strong desire from our international taurua to interact with tikanga Māori in culturally authentic spaces. The research findings affirm the importance of incorporating noho marae into our programme, not only as a stated requirement within our programme documentation, but also as a lived expression of our ongoing commitment to Tiriti o Waitangi.

The noho at Tangatarua was planned and facilitated by kaimahi in the ECE faculty to embed tino rangatiratanga, recognising that marae are culturally significant spaces structured by Māori traditions that embrace the core values of tikanga and whakapapa (Tapsell, 2002). As Green et al. (2023) explain, educational institutions are frequently dominated by Western cultural norms, thus deliberate efforts are required to embed alternative ways of knowing and being into learning environments. For the majority of our international MTECE taura, this noho was their first experience staying on a marae. Kaimahi at Toi Ohomai teaching on the MTECE and BTECE programmes view such engagement as a vital obligation, providing a meaningful foundation for understanding te ao Māori, tikanga Māori and te reo Māori. Noho marae as lived experiences offer a bridge between theoretical learning and cultural immersion, helping to shape future ECE educators who are culturally grounded and responsive (Williams et al., 2023).

Tangatarua marae, meaning “two peoples together in one place on one land,” was a fitting location for this kaupapa. Tangatarua stands as a symbol of inclusivity and connections and is a space recognised for nurturing cross-cultural relationships, welcoming both Māori and tauwi (non-Māori, foreigners, people from afar). Among the many aspects to the marae, the pou (pillars) within the whareniui (meeting house) reflect the diversity of whakapapa, acknowledging Māori, Polynesian and Pākehā tūpuna. The whāriki (mats) are the weavings within the whareniui that link everything together and the Tāhūhūroa o te Tupuna Whare (the backbone at the apex of the tupuna whare) represents Te Waka o Te Mātauranga (the canoe of education) (Toi Ohomai, 2023). This symbolism reinforces the kaupapa of unity and shared learning taking on all the knowledge for our tamariki and mokopuna (children and grandchildren) of future generations.

After the pōhiri, Matua Erueti Biddle, our Toi Ohomai Kaitiaki Māori, shared his mātauranga of the whakapapa of Tangatarua. His kōrero (speech) enriched the experience for our taura and kaimahi, offering both a historical context and opportunities for thought, questions and dialogue. We extend our heartfelt thanks: *tēnei te mihi nui ki a koe e te rangatira, Matua Erueti*. As kaimahi, we are immensely grateful to have access to Tangatarua as a taonga within our institution. It is through spaces and experiences of noho marae that we can walk alongside our taura in the ongoing journey toward meaningful bicultural competency.

NGĀ UAUATANGA – CHALLENGES

While numerous studies have outlined the benefits of noho for taura (e.g., Passells & Ackroyd, 2006), there appears to be limited research that critically analyses the challenges associated with these experiences. Attending a noho marae requires taura to be vulnerable and step outside of their comfort zones (Legge, 2015). This can be especially significant for taura from diverse cultural backgrounds who are relatively new to Aotearoa New Zealand and may have limited understanding of te ao Māori. For some, the noho may represent the first time they have spent a night away from their families or young children, because of this kaimahi fielded questions about whether students could miss the experience or leave early.

The wider socio-political context also impacted planning. The noho marae took place during a period of significant social and economic change in the vocational education sector (Waiwiri-Smith, 2025). Following the government's decision to disestablish Te Pūkenga, budget cuts were implemented at Toi Ohomai as these changes took effect. Consequently, kaimahi responsible for organising the noho marae had very limited financial resources. Kaimahi were fortunate to secure Tangatarua, which helped reduce costs associated with booking fees. Nevertheless, finding a suitable date proved challenging, as the marae is also used for institutional events. Wherever possible, existing or free resources were utilised. These included gathering natural materials, poi materials from the homes of kaimahi and feathers from the environment for workshops, furthermore, drawing on kaimahi knowledge.

One of the most important aspects of a successful noho is kai (food) and the plentiful provision of kai is an authentic expression of manaakitanga (Mead, 2003). With a restricted budget, staff needed to plan a menu that would keep everyone sustained throughout the stay without exceeding financial constraints for both the

institution and taura. Kaimahi organised parakuihi (breakfast), paramanawa (morning and afternoon tea) hapa (dinner), while taura were asked to bring a plate for tina (lunch). The meals had to be suitable for a large group and adaptable to a variety of dietary requirements.

Due to budget limitations, our stay was limited to two days and one night. This shortened timeframe has been criticised by Williams et al. (2023), who argue that such brief stays fail to meet Te Tiriti obligations. The Springboard Trust (2023) agree in such instances, arguing that systemic barriers undermine genuine tino rangatiratanga in shaping educational content. Williams et al. (2023) contend that non-Māori need to be immersed in the noho marae experience for several days to meaningfully engage with te reo and tikanga Māori and to develop genuine cultural competence and understanding of te ao Māori. As our noho unfolded, it became clear that one of the biggest challenges was allowing sufficient time in our condensed stay, both to complete activities and to foster whanaungatanga (relationships) in a relaxed, unhurried way. Taura in their different rōpū (groups) rotated through workshops and shared responsibilities. However, our schedule proved overly ambitious. Workshops were reduced from 30 minutes to 20 and some activities had to be omitted.

Time pressures also extended beyond the noho itself. Planning required many hours of hui (meetings) for staff to ensure smooth delivery, including coordinating around regular teaching commitments, collecting koha, shopping for kai, gathering resources, arranging transport and preparing students in terms of tikanga, waiata and what to bring. Since the noho took place during the week and kaimahi teach across multiple programmes, timetables had to be adjusted, with some classes moved online to allow staff to participate.

MANAAKITANGA – HOSPITALITY

Noho marae enables Māori communities and educators to lead learning in their own terms exemplifying tino rangatiratanga cultivating manaakitanga practices (Paemanu, 2023). As part of the noho, taura and kaimahi facilitated a range of various purposeful activities extending beyond simple entertainment to those offering meaningful vehicles for connection, care and reciprocal learning. These included kitchen duties, raranga (weaving with harakeke/New Zealand flax), poi making, tītī tōrea (traditional Māori stick game), waiata, ukulele, rongoā Māori (Māori medicine) and mask making (connection to the chosen pūrākau of Hatupatu rāua ko Kurungaituku – specific to the rohe (place) of Te Arawa). Through shared experiences taura were encouraged to recognise and respect each other's knowledge and skills (K.I.N Author Collective, 2021), demonstrate kindness and care and contribute to a safe and supportive learning environment ensuing mana enhancing practices (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). By placing taura into specific rōpū, they mixed with different cohorts, fostering opportunities for cross-group collaboration and whanaungatanga.

Manaakitanga was also facilitated and expressed through taura bringing a plate of food to share with the wider group. The sharing of kai was thoughtfully considered to ensure it did not place financial burden on taura. By inviting each taura to contribute a small dish, the experience enhanced tino rangatiratanga which cannot be separated from manaakitanga as this experience becomes both a relational and political act rooted in the care for others (Macfarlane et al., 2022). An oven hāngī was chosen to maintain cultural connectedness to te ao Māori, as options for a traditional in-ground hāngī were limited. Having lunch together gave opportunities for taura to sit and interact with each other enhancing manaaki and whanaungatanga practices through the feelings of being welcomed, valued and included in conversations (K.I.N Author Collective, 2021). The overall atmosphere of noho offered taura to engage together from their cultural perspectives, with open and non-judgemental minds showing kindness, respect, care, generosity and shared learning for all (Passells & Ackroyd, 2006).

TOITŪTANGA – BEING COURAGEOUS AND HUMBLE IN OUR PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE AND BEING SUSTAINABLE

Tino rangatiratanga and toitūtanga are deeply inter-woven as self-determination ensures sustainability of connections, language and tikanga for future generations (Brown et al., 2023). Success within any event or programme requires collaboration, whanaungatanga, intentionality and adaptability. Through a culture of purposeful planning and active engagement with other experts and stakeholders, a noho can be impactful, successful and sustainable. Initial planning was a key aspect to ensure success, through meetings, gathering ideas and collective knowledge and expertise. Responsibilities were shared among kaimahi such as wātaka (agenda), pānui (newsletters), activities, rōpū, administration, dietary requirements, kai (food), teaching waiata tautoko (song to support speeches) and gathering resources. Follow-up meetings ensured all kaimahi were supported and had opportunities to highlight any issues. In addition, a Microsoft Teams chat group established an easy flow of communication for planning enabling idea sharing and collaboration (Ganmote, 2019).

Upholding tino rangatiratanga means ensuring a continuation of tikanga practices within education spaces, therefore institutions must resource and ensure noho marae continue to ensure cultural knowledge is passed on to future generations (Paenamu, 2023). Inviting and seeking knowledge from kaumātua (elders) of Te Kura Māori was important to gain the cultural wisdom they hold (Durie, 1999). Furthermore, practical problems, such as needing more ovens, were solved with support from the Hospitality faculty offering access to cooking facilities. Key elements pivotal to ensuring successful collaboration were, being courageous to reach out, being humble to accept support from others and calling upon old and new connections with others exemplifying Toitūtanga. Kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) interactions enabled kaimahi to build strong communication, forming and sustaining relationships (Tilley & Love, 2005) that foreground tino rangatiratanga in our practices (O'Carroll, 2013).

WHANAUNGATANGA – RELATIONSHIPS

An overnight noho powerfully supports ako (reciprocal teaching and learning) in a culturally rich environment. Green et al. (2023) emphasise that tikanga Māori and collective participation during noho builds reciprocity through core values such as whanaungatanga, tuakana (more experienced person) teina (less experienced person), belonging and manaakitanga. Tuakana-teina relationships emerged through programme experience and leadership confidence, rather than assumptions of cultural expertise. Whanaungatanga builds nurturing relationships which contributes to actualising tino rangatiratanga in education (Macfarlane et al., 2022). Tino rangatiratanga therefore resonate with the principles of *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017), encouraging kaiako to centre Māori knowledge and practices within everyday curriculum. Noho marae provides the space for tino rangatiratanga to move from abstract theory to a lived, embodied experience.

A key benefit to noho marae is the opportunity for taura to connect with others, thereby building a wider network of co-learners to draw experience and perspectives from. The diversity within the rōpū allowed enriched interactions and supported deeper understandings of te ao Māori allowing taura greater insights into a uniquely Aotearoa New Zealand context. These relationships were deepened through equitable and culturally sustaining everyday tasks such as preparing kai, sleeping together in the wharehau, engaging in pōwhiri and contributing to the running of the marae (Hamley et al., 2022).

Tuakana taura supported their teina by teaching ukulele chords, preparing kai, guiding them in waiata (songs) and tikanga and sharing cultural experiences that resonated with their peers. The roles were fluid and at times reversed – a living example of ako in action. Through active participation in shared tasks, taura develop a sense of ownership, purpose, accountability and pride. This reinforces tino rangatiratanga by supporting their agency and self-determination. In doing so, taura experience education within learning environments that flourish – spaces where trust, respect and shared purpose bind people together and create conditions for cultural, social

and educational growth (Macfarlane, 2022). These flourishing spaces allow taura to engage in truly immersive experiences (Passells & Ackroyd, 2006). The shared responsibilities, collective purpose and time spent together in acts of service fostered a strong sense of belonging between kaimahi and taura. This whanaungatanga practice transcended individual roles and backgrounds, laying the foundation for deeper engagement and ongoing support within the learning journey once back in the classroom.

KOTAHITANGA – UNITY AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Kotahitanga is a core organisational value where kaimahi celebrate unity toward a shared purpose. Noho marae provides a useful backdrop for the MTECE and BTECE programmes where taura and kaiako experience a sense of kotahitanga through leadership practices. There is an expectation for kaiako, regardless of their role or setting, to develop their leadership capability (Education Council, 2018). Similarly, *Our Code, Our Standards* (Education Council, 2017) outlines the importance that every kaiako is “showing leadership, particularly in areas of responsibility” (p. 18). As taura are working towards meeting the expectations of the teaching profession, it is essential they are immersed in a supportive environment to develop and practice leadership.

Mahuika (2022) explains kotahitanga as harmony and collective mobilisation toward tino rangatiratanga outcomes. Within each rōpū, a positional leader was assigned to each rōpū based on a hierarchical system (taura closest to graduation) who supported the management of the rōpū further extending tuakana, teina. The positional leader kept the group organised and on time for each workstation. Conversely, the arrangement was useful in highlighting the distributed and relational leadership practices and participation of students who were not tasked as a positional leader (Klevering & McNae, 2018). Cooper (2018) articulated the concept of teacher leadership, working collectively toward a greater purpose as “everyday collective leadership.” Macfarlane et al. (2022) emphasises when Māori-led initiatives foster inclusive, whanau-based participation and decision making, they reinforce tino rangatiratanga through culturally safe spaces upholding unity and leadership. This practice was visible during noho in students’ encouragement of their peers when facing challenging tasks, interactions while preparing kai and working together to ensure the marae was clean and tidy.

Kotahitanga also celebrates diversity. Purdue et al., (2020) discuss intentional teaching and “ensuring difference is viewed positively (as being) an important aspect of intentional teaching in early childhood settings.” Leaders know that “by being true to one’s core beliefs and values and exhibiting authentic behaviour, the leader positively fosters the development of associates until they become leaders themselves” (Gardner, 2005, p. 345). Taura realised that they could be ‘seen’ and recognised for their own gifts as tino rangatiratanga was expressed through their emergent leadership. Potaka (2011) defines moral leadership as “using one’s attributes to change people’s lives. Leadership rooted in moral values starts with how people are treated, how they are shown respect and how they are interacted with” (p.7).

Poipoia te kākano kia puāwai
Nurture the seed and it will bloom

Exercising tino rangatiratanga was clear throughout the noho marae experience as taura and kaimahi were provided with profound opportunities to deepen their te ao Māori knowledge. The noho experience powerfully illustrated Toi Ohomai values, providing taura with a meaningful space to develop and demonstrate culturally responsive practices. Through intentional selective rōpū, taura were able to both practice and witness diverse forms of manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, kotahitanga and toitūtanga. The positive impact of the noho marae experience on taura understanding of core Māori values from Te Whāriki was evident through rich verbal feedback during whanaungatanga sessions following the noho. Through these reflective discussions, taura articulated how the experience deepened their understanding of values such as whanaungatanga and manaakitanga and how they intended to integrate these into their professional practice.

Jenkins (2018) has reported on a specific marae-based initiative designed for migrants to Aotearoa New Zealand. The participants, who were mostly of Chinese ethnicity and thus shared some similarities with our international tauira, provided overwhelmingly positive feedback, with Jenkins noting that cultural awareness was fostered among all participants. It is important to note that this feedback relates to Jenkins' study rather than our own noho marae initiative. However, Jenkins' findings offer useful insights and parallels, highlighting the potential value and challenges of marae-based learning opportunities. The report does not elaborate on these circumstances, but it can be inferred that one of the ongoing challenges for institutions is securing adequate funding for experiences such as noho marae. Without deliberate institutional commitment to creating time and space for these kinds of immersive experiences, they risk discontinuation. As we move forward, the noho continues to serve as a vital bridge between theory and practice, equipping future kaiako with the relational, cultural and leadership skills needed to honour the diverse communities they will serve. It is essential that tertiary institutions recognise the value of noho marae, particularly for international tauira who may have had little prior exposure to te ao Māori.

Despite challenges, the noho marae demonstrated the transformative power of tino rangatiratanga reinforcing the importance of kaumātua wisdom and community expertise, intentional planning and collaboration. Our intention moving forward is to evaluate the effectiveness of noho through quantitative and qualitative data in the hopes to continue upholding tino rangatiratanga through noho marae.

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