



TEACHING & LEARNING  
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NĀU I WHATU TE KĀKAHU, HE TĀNIKO TAKU

# Te Kura Mai i Tawhiti: He Tau Kawekaweā—Building the foundation for whānau educational success and wellbeing; a Kaupapa Māori ECE approach

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# Introduction

Te Kōpae Piripono (TKP), Māori immersion early childhood education (ECE) centre, was recognised by the Ministry of Education in 2005 as a Centre of Innovation (COI), funding a 3-year practitioner research project which looked at whether *Whānau Development at Te Kōpae Piripono fosters leadership across all levels of the whānau enhancing children's learning and development* (Tamati, Hond-Flavell & Korewha, 2008). The COI research identified obstacles to individual and collective whānau development and participation in TKP that can have negative consequences for the educational and life outcomes of children and their whānau (families).

This study, He Tau Kawekaweā, has built upon understandings derived from that earlier research. The aim of this study is to strengthen and build an evidence base around the effectiveness of the whānau development approach of TKP in overcoming barriers and motivating whānau to enter ECE and become engaged in their children's learning; thereby gaining access to growth and development opportunities that may lead to improved education and wellbeing outcomes. Former parents and whānau of TKP were interviewed about their experience before, during, and following the enrolment of their children in TKP. Expert stakeholder interviews were undertaken to provide broader historical, community, and professional perspectives.

The findings of the study indicate the effectiveness of the whānau development approach for whānau Māori, including those described as hard-to-reach. Key elements of the approach are identified along with specific practices that have the potential to be employed to great effect by other ECE settings. An outcome of the project was the development and trialling of a practical tool, Te Ara Manaaki Whānau, to support and monitor whānau engagement and progress.

## Background

### Research context and questions

This study is part of a long-term research programme, Te Kura Mai i Tawhiti, a collaborative multidisciplinary project investigating the effectiveness and long-term benefit of TKP's ECE programming. The wider research programme is being carried out in partnership between Te Pou Tiringa Inc. (the parent body of TKP) and the University of Otago's National Centre for Lifecourse Research.

He Tau Kawekaweā addresses the following research questions:

1. What factors (e.g., historical, cultural, socioeconomic, psychological) have impacted the engagement of whānau in TKP, and therefore their participation in their children's education and access to whānau development opportunities?
2. What are the specific teaching, learning, and whānau development practices inherent in the TKP approach to ECE that have influenced the levels of engagement and contribution among whānau?
3. How can TKP and other ECE centres intervene for 'hard-to-reach' whānau members in order for them to overcome their barriers to engagement, and to enhance the ability for them and their children to achieve improved whānau wellbeing outcomes across the lifecourse?
4. How can the efficacy of key identified practices in the TKP programme be measured using kaupapa Māori assessment approaches and protocols that support whānau engagement, and are non-disruptive in Māori ECE settings?

## Importance of the research

The research questions that this study addresses are important to learning and teaching in New Zealand for five key reasons outlined below.

1. Whānau, hapū, iwi, and other Māori communities have repeatedly asserted their aspirations for tamariki to thrive in childhood and throughout their lives, and for an end to the wide and enduring ethnic inequalities in educational achievement and wellbeing (Taskforce on Whānau-Centred Initiatives, 2010).
2. ECE has been identified as a key setting that provides opportunities for ‘critical moments’ (Thomson et al., 2002) where children’s learning and development and the wellbeing of vulnerable families can be improved (Munford, Sanders, Maden, & Maden, 2007). High-quality ECE is arguably one of the best investments a society can make to ensure an optimal start to life, with social and economic benefits throughout the lifecycle (ECE Taskforce, 2010). Further, it is a critical entry point for children and their families to the education pathway.
3. Parents have a key role in determining children’s experiences and learning in ECE, which provide a foundation for later learning (Öztürk, 2013). Further, wider whānau and community engagement in children’s learning strongly impact on children’s aspirations and expectations (Bevan-Brown, 2003). There is evidence that effective parent, whānau, and community partnerships with educational institutions enhance educational, social, and behavioural outcomes (Duncan et al., 2012).
4. There is increasing acknowledgment that whānau involvement in education has wider benefits for whānau. This includes: strengthening literacy; the receipt of support in their role of parents; greater participation in education and work environments (Ministry of Education, 2006); and increased parent confidence (Duncan et al., 2012). Further, locating parent support and development initiatives within ECEs provides support for whānau transformation and has the potential to influence children’s learning and lifelong learning dispositions (Clarkin-Phillips & Carr, 2009).
5. The study enables the potential scaling-up of a whānau development approach and associated ECE teaching and learning best practices and tools for implementation in other settings (e.g., in Kōhanga Reo or ECEs that are Māori-medium or have high Māori enrolments).

Figure 1: Children negotiate to play with a small shell representing the 'Manawa o Te Whiti' from the movie 'Moana'.



## Whānau engagement and development

Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark & Moodie (2009) describe family engagement as a two-way process in that both the ECE programme and families contribute to the relationship. The links between a strong programme–family partnership, high family engagement, and positive child and family outcomes are also emphasised. Locating whānau engagement within the broader societal context is important, as wider structural factors are the underlying drivers of inequities experienced by Māori. Since 1982, Te Kōhanga Reo has successfully encouraged the revitalisation of te reo Māori and tikanga Māori (Māori language and culture) in communities throughout the country, and promoted the participation and development of children and their whānau in the kaupapa Māori early learning settings.

While the Māori language, culture, and immersion education have been key factors influencing whānau to enrol their children at TKP, a central pillar of its kaupapa and operation is whānau development. When a child is formally enrolled at the Centre, effectively their whole whānau enrolls including their parents, siblings, grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles. The wellbeing and advancement of the entire whānau is central to centre planning and activity.

Those who join the whānau collective of TKP assume the rights, responsibilities, and obligations inherent in all whānau groups (Tamati et al., 2008). It is expected that parents and families participate and engage in all aspects of the programme. Every member of TKP has an important contribution to make to the whānau and everyone benefits in some way. The kaitiaki (teachers) contribute their time, professional expertise, and knowledge of reo and tikanga (language and protocols), and in return they are respected and honoured as

professional leaders. The children's parents and extended families contribute their children and their own strengths, knowledge, and leadership. And the children contribute their energy, their mana, their heritage, and their potential.

All whānau members (this includes kaitiaki) share responsibility for the learning and development outcomes of the whānau collective. However, whānau members come to TKP with a wide range of backgrounds, lived experience, and circumstance. They have been impacted by the tragedy that is Taranaki's historical context of colonisation (Tamati et al., 2008). TKP aims to build a positive and vibrant Māori language-speaking community where everyone is supported so they are able to participate and develop at a pace and in ways appropriate for them (Tamati et al., 2008).

The whānau development approach locates every whānau member, child or adult, on a metaphoric poutama (staircase of learning) where step placement and pace may vary but the movement of the group is positive and upwards towards fulfilled life as Taranaki Māori (Tamati et al., 2008). The Centre provides a vital point for whānau to enter the education pathway and/or strengthen learning (Education Review Office, 2013; Hond, 2013).

Te Ara Poutama is a cornerstone of practice at TKP. It is both the principle of open, honest, and solution-focused communication, and a structured process for resolving conflict and building relationships that is practised by both children and adults (Tamati et al., 2008).

Another important aspect of TKP's kaupapa (approach) is the clear intent to foster leadership among the whānau members—young and old. Leadership is conceptualised at TKP as Ngā Takohanga e Whā—The Four Responsibilities of Leadership—which characterise leadership as four pillars of responsibility and contribution: Te Whai Takohanga—Having Responsibility; Te Mouri Takohanga—Being Responsible; Te Kawe Takohanga—Taking Responsibility; and Te Tuku Takohanga—Sharing Responsibility (Tamati et al., 2008). This conception of leadership removes the traditional, hierarchical structure and recognises that all whānau members contribute to the collective strength and achievements of the Centre, and show leadership in their daily lives.

As trained educators, the kaitiaki take a lead as professionals and they are also the daily constant, the point of contact for families. They therefore have a key role that is characterised as being the 'whānau glue', connecting members and providing support as necessary.

Kaitiaki maintain a vital conversation with each family from entry to TKP till exit. These conversations can be informal, but are also formal in the programmed Uiu Whānau (whānau interview). The Uiu Whānau is a key element of the TKP whānau development approach to ECE. The regular Uiu Whānau (four per year) is the opportunity to engage families in the TKP paradigm, while building relationships that foster a sense of whānau—of belonging (Tamati et al., 2008). In the Uiu Whānau there is focused discussion about the learning and development of the children and the role of parents/caregivers and family in that learning. In the Uiu Whānau, kaitiaki acknowledge individual and collective strengths and contributions, provide support and, when necessary, make warm demands of whānau members. The purpose of the Uiu Whānau is to engage with families to co-construct plans for whole-whānau learning and development.

## Research design

This research project has been carried out at the interface between mātauranga Māori and Western science and applies a qualitative methodology (Scott & Usher, 1999).

Data have been collected through: literature review; 20 interviews with former parents/caregivers and five wānanga (discussions) with former and current whānau (i.e., whānau who have been enrolled in the past 23 years); 10 stakeholder interviews with recognised experts who have in-depth knowledge in areas of significance to this research (e.g., kaupapa Māori ECE, the Taranaki Māori historical context, and whānau development); and through observation of practice and participation in TKP including consultations with kaitiaki.

Participants were selected using a purposeful sampling strategy to ensure that those who were most able to provide data of relevance to the research questions were interviewed. With appropriate consents, interview schedules were used and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The University of Otago Ethics Committee approved the study in 2013.

Parents and whānau were asked to reflect on their involvement in TKP; their experience before, during, and since enrolment; the supports and barriers they encountered in relation to involvement in TKP; the impact of involvement on the lives of their families; and any recommendations they might have for improving the effectiveness of TKP and ECE in general. Stakeholders contributed their expert perspectives and specialist knowledge on relevant aspects of the research questions.

All interview and wānanga data have been analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) method for thematic analysis to identify, analyse, and report patterns of meaning for each data set.

Observation of practice and participation in TKP took various forms, including field notes, researcher contribution to whānau development activities, and consultation with kaitiaki. Drawing on the findings of earlier stages of this research, the researchers worked with kaitiaki over a 6-month period to develop Te Ara Manaaki Whānau, which is a practitioner tool designed to encourage whānau participation and engagement, to monitor progress, and to quickly gauge practice impacts in terms of learning outcomes and whānau wellbeing. As part of this study the tool was then piloted over a further 6-month period and refined and is now in regular use within TKP.

## Research findings and discussion

### Factors impacting whānau engagement

**Research question 1. What factors (e.g., historical, cultural, socioeconomic, psychological) have impacted the engagement of whānau in TKP, and therefore their participation in their children's education and access to whānau development opportunities?**

Findings from interviews with whānau and external stakeholders indicate that there are five factors that impact on the engagement of whānau in TKP, and therefore their participation in their children's education and access to whānau development opportunities. Those factors are historical, personal, institutional (i.e., related to TKP), cultural, and socioeconomic.

### Historical factors

Participants highlighted how the impacts of colonisation continue to be perpetuated in New Zealand today. The legacy of the muru raupatu (land confiscation) in Taranaki has included historical trauma, undermining the capacity of whānau and Māori communities to participate in te āo Māori (a Māori world) and wider society, and negative attitudes among the wider community towards things Māori.

*...that's why my mum and dad were the way they were [disengaged from things Māori] due to colonisation, because of what happened to their parents. Our grandparents didn't want our parents going through the traumas they went through, so they thought that if they did what the Pākehā said, and lived the Pākehā lifestyle, their children would be safe and probably better off in the world... (R3—former mother, now kaitiaki)*

Participants experienced ongoing grief at the loss of culture and language among their communities, and expressed the view that this is at the heart of Māori disengagement from education and te āo Māori. In their view, processes of colonisation have denied Māori communities their language, culture, and educational success. Responses indicated that few have had the privilege of growing up with and learning from their old people.

Participants see TKP as part of the solution to the impacts of colonisation, as an initiative that can contribute to healing historical trauma and be transformative for children, their whānau, and ultimately their communities.



## Personal factors

### Personal experiences of the education system

Some parents and whānau wanted their children to have access to the reo and culture that they themselves had been denied, and that were of high value to them.

*But when I had kids I didn't want them to be like me. I struggled terribly [with reo and tikanga] and then mum and papa said you should take the kids to Kōpae cause they're the best place in Taranaki... (R2—former mother)*

Others spoke of how their own experiences in English-medium education had traumatised them, and they wanted to ensure their children did not face the same difficulties. They were therefore motivated to engage with TKP.

### Fear and whakamā (embarrassment and/or shame)

Parents and whānau commonly referred to the fear, embarrassment, and/or shame they experienced in unfamiliar environments where they felt inadequate, particularly in Māori language and cultural immersion settings. This was generally because they were not proficient speakers and/or were not confident in Māori cultural contexts.

*My biggest problem was my lack of confidence to speak Māori. [How did you cope?] Just crapped myself every day... Well [husband] had no Māori back then and he, he was worse than me. He was more anxious than I to come and he hated coming for that reason; he always wanted to come in but it stopped him more than me. (R2—former mother)*

## Institutional factors

### Expectations and level of commitment required

Interviewees indicated that participation in TKP required substantial changes of their whānau in terms of world view, cultural values, and ways of living. According to some, the level of commitment required, including language requirements, was demanding and could be off-putting.

*... It's not just an early childhood centre where you can just drop off and go and pick up. There's a commitment to go and learn te reo Māori. There's a commitment to come in and mihi, to go around and mihi to everybody. There's a commitment to attend whānau hui. If there are any issues there's a commitment to talk to someone about that... (R3—former mother, now kaitiaki)*

The value of caring conversations with kaitiaki and other whānau members about expectations and how to meet them was acknowledged by participants.

### Father involvement

Some male whānau members struggle with TKP as a female-dominated environment.

*...if he [husband] had have seen more males participating. Like he always says I don't want to be around a bunch of girls, what am I going to say to them? (R2—former mother)*

### Inclusiveness

Participants endorsed the Centre's whānau development approach, and noted the importance of being inclusive to ensure that no one feels left out.

*...someone who had been the same way you know, and had come through it type of thing. Yeah like a buddy, someone who goes, 'Yeah man, when I started here shucks I sounded just like you bro. But hey man if you do this, this, and this, tino pai'... I'm one of those ones, I'd rather say nothing than sound stupid. (R1—whānau, former father)*

## Learning and development opportunities

The provision of learning and development opportunities for whānau was identified as a facilitator of whānau engagement. Wānanga that focus on developing critical consciousness and cultural awareness were identified as stimulating a journey of growth and development.

External stakeholder interviewees from the ECE Māori sector indicated that their mission, too, was to support parents and whānau to improve the health and wellbeing of children.

**Figure 2: A young boy's Dad is present at morning tea, along with all his Kōpae whānau, who celebrate his 5th birthday and transition to school.**



## Cultural factors

### Secure Māori identity

Whānau have high aspirations for themselves and their tamariki to reclaim a secure Taranaki Māori identity with proficiency in te reo Māori. This is the foremost factor in driving whānau engagement in TKP. That said, many parents struggled to maintain a Māori immersion environment in the home, particularly where they themselves were not proficient.

For our kids, we wanted them to have that opportunity to be Māori in every sense of the way and without the reo there was a huge portion missing in that equation so that was really, really important for us. And it was equally important that they were well rounded, that they got a start to a good education, tikanga, and mātauranga Māori [Māori protocols and knowledge]. (R20—former mother and later a kaitiaki)



## Whānau and community factors

Facilitators of engagement included the provision of practical and emotional support by their own whānau.

*Any time I thought it might have got a bit tough and thought I can't afford it or I can't do this [mum] would say you know go back and go and talk to them or you know if you need a real big hand we'll help you and stuff like that. I think having someone behind us pushing us a little bit was very helpful otherwise I think you'd have a reason to back out a little. (R2—former mother)*

Barriers to engagement included a lack of support at home to foster te reo and tikanga. This included some whānau members challenging and opposing parents' and caregivers' decisions to enrol tamariki in Māori-medium education.

*I was kind of on my own trying to establish the reo me ōna tikanga in our family. A lot of my family thought I was weird... I would talk to my children in te reo Māori and my mum would tell me to just cut it out and speak English... My mum has only just come on board... (R3—former mother, now kaitiaki)*

## Socioeconomic factors

### Socioeconomic status

Participants' comments indicated that some whānau are in survival mode, grappling to meet the day-to-day requirements of living. In this context, engaging with their children's education was more difficult and may not have been a priority. In these circumstances, whānau require substantial support and healing to achieve transformation.

*...they bring a myriad of issues eh, you know, some of them are solo mums, so you know that's difficult, some have been in abusive relationships, others have good partners but there's a whole lot of issues, financially strapped, they get themselves into financial difficulty and that's embarrassing for them and all those sort of things. There's a whole lot of stuff that families get themselves into which is normal for the society that we...live in. (R14—former father)*

The point was made that, whatever the situation of new whānau, when they seek to enrol at TKP they are demonstrating that they want what the Centre has to offer.

## Teaching, learning, and whānau development practices

### Research question 2. What are the specific teaching, learning, and whānau development practices inherent in the TKP approach to ECE that have influenced the levels of engagement and contribution among whānau?

Parents and whānau identified features of TKP's approach to ECE that they believe influenced their levels of engagement and contribution. These included: the kaupapa of TKP; kaitiaki qualities, skills, and professionalism; the whānau development approach; and a number of specific strategies and practices. Some of these factors can be described as innovative and creative, while others were identified by stakeholder interviewees as essential to any ECE programming.

## Kaupapa Kōpae—philosophy of TKP

The kaupapa or philosophy of TKP guides all aspects of programme planning and delivery.

*...people that stay in there and...are committed to it, they know that [it] is beneficial to their children, they know that it is a good place to be. It's the roots, the values of the organisation have been set a long time ago and they are based on Māori values of looking after [one another], Manaakitanga, tiaki, all those really, really good... whakawhanaungatanga. (R14—former father)*

### Tuakiri Taranaki—Taranaki Māori identity

Participants found involvement in TKP an effective way to learn the language, gain access to te āo Māori (the Māori world), and to strengthen tuakiri Taranaki.

**Figure 3: Te Kōpae Piripono families experience their first visit to Parihaka for the annual 'Pāhua' - commemoration of the sacking of the Parihaka community in 1881.**



The kaupapa Māori ethos of TKP (including reo Māori immersion) enables parents and whānau to participate in local cultural events and activities such as the Pāhua at Parihaka (Parihaka community day of remembrance) and tangihanga (funeral). A few who did not have reo Māori on entry, had turned their homes into reo Māori-only zones by the time they left several years later.

*They would love their kids to be able to speak Māori and to be truly Māori. So, underlying for a lot of Māori families who are disempowered, they see reo, and confidence around the marae, and those sorts of things, as being really good attributes that they would aspire to for their children. (R30—former father, stakeholder informant)*

Parents and whānau were drawn to a setting that would reinforce their children's Māori identity and ensure they grew to be proud as Māori.

*One of the things I really enjoyed was the absolute sense of validation of our lives, that here was an organisation and learning environment where [son]'s Taranakitanga and his whanaungatanga, and his whakapapa, all meant something. (R8—former mother)*

A former father took a long-term view of the outcomes of enrolment for his daughter.

I know that later on she would be on our marae as a kuia, very, very formidable, because for me it was always going to be intergenerational. To retain is one thing, to maintain is another, that's kaitiakitanga, but to sustain it through generation to generation that...that's the key. (R12—former father)

One former parent expressed confidence that TKP had provided a solid foundation for her children so that, regardless of what transpired in their lives, they would be able to cope, supported by their Māori culture.

*I know these kids got the best start and regardless if they go wīwī-wāwā I still believe...they'll always come back...the wairua will bring them back to where they're supposed to be. (R2—former mother)*

The experience of TKP impelled non-Taranaki whānau members to seek out and connect with their own tribal identities.

## Aroha and manaakitanga—Love and caring

### Parents and whānau felt genuinely cared for, valued, and accepted at TKP.

*When my [siblings] would come in, they wouldn't come into Kopae, they'd say, 'Nah one of them is going to grab you and hongī you and then they're going to say something in Māori. I'm not going in there, you tell that kid of yours to come on out.' I just laughed and explained they weren't allowed out unless you go in... So, they'd be all staunch, 'No one's talking to me!' But they'd crumble because there'd be that welcoming and before they knew it they'd be sitting on the mat! (R10—former mother)*

Aroha (love) and its expression as manaakitanga, tiaki, and awhi were terms used by participants when describing the love, kindness, caring, and generosity they and their whānau received.

The views of whānau were consistent with those expressed by a community researcher and trauma specialist that parents and whānau simply want their children to be loved.

*We just want our kids to be loved, actually loving them is always more important than educating them, so without love...so aroha is a really important underlining factor to us. For Pākehā it is often about education, and manaaki is for us an expression of aroha. Without aroha, it is just mechanics. (R22—stakeholder informant)*

Another stakeholder interviewee commented that manaakitanga, as a principle, requires that ECEs persevere with parents and whānau even when there may be difficulties.

### Whanaungatanga—Human relationships

Parents and whānau were more likely to enrol their children at TKP if a relation or friend was already involved. Similarly, the presence of a kuia (female elder) in the centre was identified as a big support for parents and whānau, reassuring newcomers and encouraging participation.

*...because there was a Kui present and they're really nurturing...and she'd just take me aside and say it's alright bub it's alright. And...you know those little things are just enough to let you say well if the Kui says it's okay, I'm doing alright.. (R2—former mother)*

TKP participation in events like Pūanga (Māori new year celebrations), alongside kapa haka nights (cultural performances), hui (gatherings), and whānau kai (shared meals), forced people to participate and were effective at drawing parents and whānau in and reducing barriers.

*Former father: So, the events like Matariki and other kaupapa, wānanga reo, the kapa haka nights, all those sorts of things contributed to that feeling [of belonging] and getting to know other whānau... Former mother: Those things forced people to participate. What I am talking about is, when you go along to those things there is no escaping the interaction that you need to have in the reo, so once they have opened the door and joined in on some of those activities you can't just hide, you have to participate in those activities. (R31—whānau)*

**Figure 4: The whānau of Te Kōpae Piripono prepare to perform a special welcome, a haka pōwhiri, to a group of visitors at Puke Ariki museum, Ngāmotu/New Plymouth.**



In TKP, children and parents learned new ways of communicating, of working together, and of resolving conflict in positive ways, with the intention to achieve outcomes beneficial for all.

It's a whānau approach to resolving anything, so yeah, that's something that you don't get anywhere else... When you have a barrier and you have no one to discuss it with, then there's no way you'll find a solution for that. That's another thing about the Kōpae, it's solution focused and working together. (R19—former mother)

According to stakeholder interviewees, whakawhanaungatanga (relationship building) activities contribute to whānau development and assist the negotiations with whānau regarding participation in their children's learning. The role of centres in creating opportunities for parents and whānau to learn to appreciate the talents and strengths they possess, which can be shared with others, was also discussed.

### **Whānauranga—Sense of belonging as whānau**

The sense of belonging to the whānau of TKP was important to respondents, particularly those who did not have the immediate support of their own whānau. Whānauranga is a TKP construct that refers to the way people see themselves as valid and participant whānau members, engaging in whānau activities, and moving forward as part of the collective, engendered a sense of pride in, of commitment to, and of responsibility for, TKP.

*And it really felt like, over time, this was your whānau, and people really genuinely—not just the kaitiaki, I am thinking of other whānau—really cared for your kids and you cared for their kids, and so it's just the strengthening of the relationships between... (R31—former mother)*

### **Haumarutanga—Safety**

Participants recalled the sense of calm they experienced on entering TKP. The peacefulness and positivity were compelling, influencing behaviour and inspiring confidence that their whānau were in the right place.



*...the Kōpae is a sanctuary really... It's a safe place for their kids to go, they know they are well looked after, they are really well cared for, and the tikanga is always the same and that's why it's got such a good reputation I think because it does provide a sanctuary away from the turmoil of most of our people's lives eh? (R14—former father)*

A 'safe zone' was created in the kitchen and office area, so non-speaking parents could have a quiet conversation in English as necessary; for example, to clarify for them what had occurred in the Centre.

## Kaitiaki qualities, skills, and professionalism

Kaitiaki were described as having the X-factor, and being consistently warm and loving, supportive, enquiring, and approachable. Further, they have life experience and understand the lived realities of whānau and were likely to know how to respond to challenges that whānau face. Alongside these personal qualities, participants noted that, importantly, kaitiaki were connected to their communities and were qualified teachers or in training. Stakeholder interviewees also referred to the importance of educators maintaining strong community connections to enable them to facilitate parent access to wider support. They also noted the value of teachers being from a variety of backgrounds, and therefore being able to connect more easily to those from a variety of circumstances.

According to whānau, the skill and experience of kaitiaki were evident in the quality of the fine-tuned programming for children and the way in which children's learning and development was shared with parents and whānau to facilitate their involvement. Kaitiaki skill and professionalism inspired confidence among parents and whānau. Participants described feeling secure in the knowledge that kaitiaki knew what they were doing. They were therefore open to their example as role models and accepting of advice and guidance.

And you sitting in there too, like when you would sit in karakia and stuff and you would observe how they would deal with behaviours and then you could follow it and [the kaitiaki] were always open if you had a question, they were very approachable. (R18—former mother)

## Whānau development approach

The whānau development approach underpins the TKP operation. Central to that approach is the notion that the entire whānau, of all ages and roles, should be learning and growing. Participants described various opportunities for whānau learning and development.

*Children's programme*—Parents and whānau were encouraged to attend during the day alongside their children. This exposed them to the language and behaviour modelled by kaitiaki as they engaged in the daily programme.

*...you saw at Te Kōpae how the child, if they did something wrong, they would be sat down, spoken to. And it affirmed that it wasn't the child but it was the behaviour. And how better could we do this. That was really, really interesting. And when I started practising that...it worked eh! (R4—former mother)*

*Parenting advice and guidance*—Participants believed they became better parents due to the tips and strategies provided by kaitiaki. This sometimes involved replacing known child-rearing models with new ways of interacting with children, and with one another as parents and whānau.

*Whānau wānanga*—A programme of internal wānanga was organised for parents and whānau. The topics of these weekend or evening wānanga included the philosophy, vision, and approach of TKP, as well as topics the whānau deemed relevant at the time (e.g., te reo Māori, waiata and karakia, parenting issues, and domestic violence). There were also whānau meals, haka practices, working bees, and trips to hui and other ECE—all learning opportunities.

Parents and whānau took advantage of the relationship TKP had with programme providers outside of the Centre, such as Te Ataaringi, Western Institute of Technology, and iwi-based programmes. Stakeholder interviewees discussed the value of a proposed one-stop hub for parents and its potential as the way of future development.



Participants described 'Te Pūmaomao', a decolonisation wānanga run by Takawai and Chris Murphy, as a memorable programme that opened their eyes, ears, and hearts to te āo Māori. Those who were still grieving the loss of language and land within their communities found Te Pūmaomao transformational and some credited the programme as being pivotal to their decision to more fully engage in TKP.

The wānanga were important in allowing people to talk through issues, to arrive at shared understandings, and to empower individuals with new knowledge. For those who hadn't engaged in education or were unused to this type of learning, these opportunities enabled them to learn alongside others whose experience of education had been successful, exposing them to positive role models and alternative views. Gradually, whānau members began to realise the value of learning, and started to put aside time to become engaged.

*And it's a little like Takawai's programme, unless you create those opportunities for them to participate in Te Pūmaomao, they won't engage. The idea that learning suddenly has meaning is a real key in understanding that they have something to offer the learning as well. (R30—former father, stakeholder informant)*

**Figure 5: A Kaitiaki (teacher) plays patient for a young boy who is the doctor.**



## Specific strategies and practices

Specific practices identified by participants as having influenced their engagement are outlined below.

*Structured enrolment process*—For participants, the process for entry to TKP was a critical factor influencing whānau engagement. The enrolment process comprised a series of meetings, led by tumu (directors) and kaitiaki. During the meetings, clear and direct conversations outlined the commitment required of parents and whānau, and issues related to enrolment were discussed. The process included a whānau noho tahi period, where new families could experience TKP for a period to ascertain if it was going to be a good fit. Stakeholder interviewees also referred to the importance of a welcoming enrolment process that reassures parents and whānau that the Centre is a great place where tamariki will be nourished and nurtured and their whakapapa valued.

*Expectation of participation and contribution*—TKP makes it very clear to new parents and whānau that they are expected to participate in their children's learning, and to contribute to all TKP activities.

*[Working bees and chores] allowed me to have a place really and it helped me build a relationship with the people who were involved in Te Kōpae. They were all good people and they were working hard for that kaupapa so I enjoyed that environment and I was comfortable because I felt I was contributing. I couldn't contribute I guess from an intellectual perspective in the setting up of [TKP] and I couldn't contribute in terms of the reo but at least I could feel that I have had a hand in it. (R14—former father)*

**Consistency of TKP processes and programming**—Participants valued the organisational structure and processes of TKP which they believed provided consistency, certainty, and a sense of security, especially at difficult times. The day-to-day routine of the Kōpae was also reassuring for parents and whānau, and supportive of engagement.

*[Participant's brothers] found the structure good. So, if they knew the same thing was gonna happen every time, then they wouldn't be fazed...they didn't have to be afraid. They could understand and be a part of it. There was a sign and a reason the kids weren't allowed out in the carpark, it was safety. Once they knew why the rules were there, they softened hugely. Once they knew why the rules were there, they were better with it. (R10—former mother)*

**Buddy system**—The appointment of a buddy kaitiaki and a buddy whānau to parents and whānau entering TKP. The buddy system provides tuakana (senior) to teina (junior) support at a time when there is likely to be elevated levels of anxiety. The tuakana provides immediate connection to the TKP whānau. The tuakana-teina relationship is reciprocal and can stay in place until the teina whānau is confident.

**Te Ara Poutama**—Both a principle and a technique, Te Ara Poutama required much practice on the part of adults to modify long-held attitudes and behaviours; however, children readily used Te Ara Poutama routinely in their interactions at TKP and at home.

*[TKP] definitely makes a difference. Just in the way we behave, well for me anyway. It's a positive place to be in, you know. When we leave Te Kōpae we're open to a world full of negativity. Sometimes there is negativity in Te Kōpae but it can be overcome in Te Kōpae. There are opportunities to overcome the negativity and there are strategies that are shared. (R3—former mother, now kaitiaki)*

**Courageous conversations**—The honest conversation between kaitiaki and whānau members is the key mechanism for engaging with whānau to encourage and support participation; to address concerning behaviours, issues, and needs; and to plan for learning. The communications can be planned and organised, as in the programmed Uiu Whānau, or casual and unplanned (but equally impactful for whānau) in the day-to-day running of TKP.

*In our interview, they said...they expected us to speak as much Māori as we could to our kids at home and be committed to them learning te reo and stuff like that, and yeah just meant we had to buck our ideas up a little bit, not thinking that we could just drop them off there... (R2—former mother)*

**A health focus**—The Centre's focus on healthy kai and healthy living is a feature valued by parents and whānau. One participant contrasted the parenting decisions she made around food for her older children compared to those for her youngest at TKP, with whom she got to "live cleaner".

## Implications for practice

**Research question 3. How can TKP and other ECE centres intervene for 'hard-to-reach' whānau members in order for them to overcome their barriers to engagement, and to enhance the ability for them and their children to achieve improved whānau wellbeing outcomes across the lifecourse?**

Seven key focus areas for action were identified. The areas are: kaupapa—articulated and practised; kaitiaki—the central role of teachers; kōrero—courageous conversations; rangatiratanga—fostering leadership; whakawhanake whānau—whānau development; hononga—connection; and tūkanga—structured processes.

## Kaupapa—articulated and put into practice

Centres need to be clear about their kaupapa—the underpinning philosophy and principles that guide all aspects of the operation. The kaupapa must then be clearly articulated so that whānau comprehend and are sufficiently moved by it. The philosophy and principles should align with the values of the community a given centre serves and should be reinforced at every opportunity. For TKP, the principles are fundamental truths, reflective of a Māori worldview, and expressed in the whānau development approach. The behaviours that manifest those principles in day-to-day programming require constant reinforcement through practice.

Particular effort is required to foster a culture of genuine caring and commitment among members of the ECE whānau to the collective. This involves strengthening relationships between and within Centre whānau, and building members' sense of belonging to the group, the whānau collective.

At TKP, children and their whānau are immediately included with support in the workings of the whānau collective. This requires a high level of response to the needs of individuals and of whānau groups.

## Kaitiaki—the central role of teachers

Kaitiaki are the 'glue' that holds whānau together in their commitment to kaupapa. While they are skilled educators, ideally, they are of the community and understand the experiences and challenges of whānau members. A mix of ages, backgrounds, and stages of life among kaitiaki will reflect whānau and appeal to different sections of the community; for example, as kaumātua or peers. They are relatable role models for the demeanor, commitment to reo Māori, behaviours, and norms that the Centre seeks to foster. The modelling by kaitiaki of these practices can inspire parents and whānau to a greater extent than instruction alone might. While kaitiaki are a central support for whānau, it is essential that there is also strong support from other parents and whānau, and a network of community supports.

## Kōrero—courageous conversations

Open and honest communication and courageous conversation is highly valued and encouraged at TKP. A courageous conversation takes place when one engages with others on challenging topics. With support, kaitiaki become confident and skilled at responsive communication that is also reassuring and encouraging of whānau participation in all aspects of the Centre operation, primarily in their children's learning. This style of communication builds trust, confidence, and a sense of belonging, which have been identified as essential for engagement. Effective communication is prerequisite to problem-solving and conflict resolution processes (TKP's Te Ara Poutama). Opportunities for courageous conversations may occur opportunistically in and around a centre's programme of activities, but can also be scheduled each term in whānau hui and in the Uiu Whānau.

## Rangatiratanga—fostering leadership

A key objective of TKP programming that has high relevance to other centres is the fostering of leadership (Ngā Takohanga e Whā) in children and all whānau members. This focus supports practices that build skill and confidence among children and adults so they are better able to self-manage and lead in the contexts of their own lives.

## Whakawhanake whānau—whānau development

The whānau development approach of TKP reinforces the historical importance of whānau—of connection and of belonging—in Māori culture and society. The structured Whānau Development Programme is a mechanism for achieving whakawhanake whānau (whānau development). Core elements within TKP's Whānau Development Programme include building critical awareness (particularly as it relates to colonisation and historical trauma) and reinforcing a secure Taranaki Māori identity, as well as fostering key skills and understandings prioritised by the whānau collective.

## Hononga—connection

TKP attaches importance to Centre personnel being of the community and connected within it. Not only does this enrich Centre ethos and programming in terms of local identity (in this case Taranaki Māori), but through those connections parents and whānau participate in Māori and other community networks, activities, and supports. This is of immense benefit to all parties, particularly for the 'hard to reach', and is an approach that may be relevant to other ECEs.

## Tūkanga—structured processes

Structured processes are important for all ECEs as they provide the scaffolding to ensure things get done consistently and well, and are especially important during difficult times or times of distraction. An example is TKP's Te Ara Poutama, the structured process for conflict resolution and a way of being and doing with others that strengthens those vital relationships that will sustain people into the future. Another example is the Whānau Development Programme, which facilitates the learning, development, and ongoing improvement of the entire whānau.

The following section of this report describes a tool developed in response to research findings and intended to provide a structured process to support whānau engagement and monitor whānau wellbeing.

**Figure 6: A girl has drawn a picture for Te Kōpae Piripono's new prospectus. She comes from a large whānau and has drawn each member, along with two of her closest friends.**





## Te Ara Manaaki Whānau—a tool to support whānau engagement

### Research question 4. How can the efficacy of key identified practices in the TKP programme be measured using kaupapa Māori assessment approaches and protocols that support whānau engagement, and are non-disruptive in Māori ECE settings?

Findings of this study indicated the critical nature of the courageous conversations between kaitiaki and families, and the negative consequences when those conversations did not occur. The Uiui Whānau system—that is, the four meetings scheduled each year between kaitiaki and individual whānau from entry (including the enrolment process) until exit from TKP—was reviewed to identify areas for improvement. The researchers recommended a more structured approach to the Uiui Whānau. An engagement tool was developed to be administered in a minimally intrusive way within the kaupapa Māori ECE environment of TKP. Te Ara Manaaki Whānau, as the tool came to be known, is a practical kaitiaki tool for use in TKP, to support whānau engagement and wellbeing (see Appendix 1).

Te Ara Manaaki Whānau is used during the regular meetings with families, as a template of key questions for kaitiaki. It is, however, more than a questionnaire, because the tool is used for routine data collection (such as whānau attendance and language acquisition data) and the recording of children's learning (such as kaitiaki records of learning and planning, and Pakiako—Learning Stories), to inform the Uiui Whānau and build an accurate picture of progress and engagement trends.

Following several iterations, informed by workshopping with kaitiaki and piloting, Te Ara Manaaki Whānau is now used routinely by kaitiaki for Uiui Whānau. A version of the tool is employed during the enrolment process. Te Ara Manaaki Whānau is designed to guide discussion in the Uiui Whānau, and support the ongoing conversation between kaitiaki and parents as they work together to achieve the best outcomes for their children and whānau from involvement in TKP.

Te Ara Manaaki Whānau is administered by kaitiaki in pairs, one recording responses directly into the online form, while the other leads discussions. When electronically submitted at the conclusion of the Uiui Whānau, the data are saved to a spreadsheet for easy analysis and utilisation by kaitiaki for planning purposes.

Te Ara Manaaki Whānau comprises eight sections, as follows:

1. Āronga—Focus and motivations  
Monitoring whānau motivation and goals, identifying supports
2. Te Kaupapa o Te Kōpae Piripono—Te Kōpae Piripono approach  
Maintaining a dialogue about key aspects of the Kōpae Piripono approach to ECE (such as Te Ara Poutama, Ngā Takohanga e Whā)
3. Te Ako o te Tamaiti—Child's learning and development  
Engaging parents in structured discussion about child/ren's learning and development, and setting learning goals
4. Te Whānau—Whānau wellbeing  
The whānau in Te Kōpae Piripono—comfort levels, challenges, and supports
5. Te Whakawhanakē Whānau—Whānau development  
Identifying topics of interest for inclusion in the calendar programme of workshops
5. Te Reo Māori  
Gauging whānau progress to becoming speaker families, identifying blocks, and setting goals
6. Ngā Takohanga—Responsibilities and contribution  
Monitoring engagement and commitment to Te Kōpae Piripono
7. Te Tirohanga Roa—Looking ahead  
Forward-focused discussion about child/ren's education pathway
8. He Whakaaro—Suggestions, comments  
Opportunity for questions or comments



This format supports kaitiaki by bringing a structure and consistency to the meetings with whānau. It ensures that key issues are always discussed and, where appropriate, acted on. The process facilitates routine collaboration between kaitiaki and whānau in their planning for children's learning, and for whānau development. It enables the articulation of whānau goals and co-construction of whānau plans. The collaboration is informed by the learning and engagement data of each whānau, collated for the purpose.

Designed to facilitate whānau contribution to, and benefit from, involvement in TKP, Te Ara Manaaki Whānau enables each whānau to monitor their own progress through reflection and discussion with kaitiaki in the Uiu Whānau, and to be supported to address any issues that arise. As necessary, kaitiaki are able to connect families with an array of supports in the community—services that TKP has relationships with and are also able to provide collegial support for kaitiaki.

Using Te Ara Manaaki Whānau, TKP is able to gauge the efficacy of the teaching, learning, and whānau development practices for families; that is, in terms of levels of engagement and contribution in TKP, of shared understandings about the kaupapa, of children's learning and development, and of family preparedness to navigate the pathways to whānau wellbeing.

## The limitations of this study

This study has applied a qualitative methodology in order to: enable an ecological approach that is context sensitive; avoid preconceived notions; enable findings to emerge from the data; and allow the collection of in-depth and detailed information. However, the qualitative approach introduces limitations in that we are working with relatively small numbers of participants and findings are not statistically generalisable. This study is, however, part of the wider Te Kura Mai i Tawhiti research programme which includes other quantitative projects. The current project will both inform and complement those planned projects.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that TKP's whānau development approach to teaching and learning in the Māori ECE environment has been beneficial for tamariki and their whānau in the past 23 years. There is much potential for the whānau development approach to be employed by centres that strive to overcome barriers to engagement and improve the education and wellbeing outcomes for whānau Māori. However, successful implementation relies upon a combination of factors identified by study participants, and summarised below.

The findings suggest ECEs place whānau at the centre of their operations providing language- and culture-rich environments that validate the Māori heritage of children and their families. Further, that there is acknowledgment of the importance of language and cultural knowledge to a secure identity—and of a secure identity to positive education and wellbeing outcomes. Culturally responsive centres will be well connected and participate within their communities, particularly local Māori communities. Thereby, they are likely to understand people's motivations and constraints, and be appropriately proactive in the planning and development of supportive engagement strategies. In these types of environments, parents and whānau are encouraged to engage in the programme and, importantly, in their children's learning. Over time a support network of relationships may develop in the communities providing whānau with connections to community and access to supports as required.

Paramount to the successful implementation of the whānau development model is a highly skilled, professional, life-experienced, and relatable staff. At TKP, kaitiaki are referred to as the 'glue' that binds people as whānau, supporting and challenging whānau members at once. Their practice is the expression of the philosophy and principles that at TKP include tuakiri Taranaki, aroha, manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, whānauranga, and haumarutanga. Structured processes such as TKP's Te Ara Poutama, the Whānau Development Programme and, more recently, Te Ara Manaaki Whānau, provide scaffolding to ensure that essential practices and scheduled activities occur, even in tough times, and whānau are supported in a consistent way.

ECE provides a crucial entry point for whānau to the education pipeline and centres like TKP can utilise the expertise of teachers and the combined skill base of the whānau collective to provide high-quality programming for children, their parents, and families. The clear articulation of Centre philosophy and guiding principles, reinforced frequently through wānanga, hui, and other learning opportunities, ensures the core values of centres are embodied in practice and are accessible to whānau members, thereby influencing the outlook, interactions, and development pathways of tamariki and their whānau. Whānau members become role models in the community. The steady entry of tamariki and their whānau to the centres keeps the kaupapa vibrant and energised so that the ripple effect is wide and intergenerational.

Future planned research will help to determine whether exposure to the TKP whānau development model influences the levels of engagement of whānau in the lives of their children (including across the education pipeline), participation in te ao Māori, and potential wider outcomes across the lifecourse. This is the focus of a quantitative retrospective Te Kura Mai i Tawhiti study which commences in 2017. The research reported on here provided a basis for the development of the proposal for that project and enabled us to secure Health Research Council of New Zealand funding to move onto the next phase.

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