

Chapter 7

Evidence of Children’s Leadership

Children show leadership all the time. They are quite capable at setting their own goals and leading their learning. But how often and to what extent do adults see this and recognise it as such? This chapter provides a number of stories that show children’s leadership learning and also leadership in action. In these stories, most of the children are referred to by their real names, however, where pseudonyms are used these are indicated by a footnote.

7.1 Te Tangihanga o Manu (Bird’s Funeral)

Moses is a 4-year-old boy. He has been at Te Kōpae Piripono since he was a young child. Moses is the youngest in his large family.

One morning we arrived at Kōpae to discover that one of our budgies had died. Moses’s whole demeanour changed. He would not leave the bird’s side, as if he had taken on the responsibility for her care. Our whole whānau went into tangi (funeral rite) mode. The children created, decorated and furnished a small cardboard coffin with Moses organising its manufacture. Once complete, Moses insisted that he remove manu from her cage. Donning gloves, he gently eased her into his hands and ever so tenderly placed her in the box. Next he covered her with a piece of tissue paper, in case she got cold... Now with manu lying in state, we all proceeded to do our mihi poroporoaki (final farewells) to her. Children would come and go, laugh and cry, sing and karanga (call) to her and give wonderful orations. Throughout this whole process, Moses never left her side. At times, he would put his face so close to her that he was almost giving her a hongī. When the time came for us to bury her, Moses again insisted he carry her to our urupā (our pet cemetery. Yes, also buried there are a turtle, and three fish). Then when it came to the actual burial, Moses proceeded to show us how to do it, stamping the earth emphatically around the grave as he went. At the end of the day, when Mum came to pick Moses up, we recounted this fascinating series of events. But instead of the surprise that we expected, it was instant recognition for Mum. Oh yes, it was something she could very well believe, because Moses’ father’s whānau were the

designated grave diggers for his marae. It all fell into place for us. All that knowledge. All that understanding. And all those examples of leadership!

- ♦ ...of Taking Responsibility – having the courage and confidence to take the lead and leading others in the tangi process;
- ♦ ...of Having Responsibility – taking on various roles, including coffin maker, undertaker, caretaker and gravedigger;
- ♦ ...of Sharing Responsibility with his friends to participate and to also take on various roles during the tangi; and
- ♦ ...of Being Responsible – the total dedication and maturity Moses showed throughout the day, particularly his commitment to manu and to the roles he took on.

7.2 Tama⁴ and the Dinosaur

Tama is almost three years old. He sometimes has difficulty articulating his needs, which can result in physical altercations with other children over play space and equipment. For the past few months now we have been using our matawā (egg timers) as one way of helping children resolve their own issues. With Kaitiaki assistance, Tama uses the matawā and is beginning to learn about turn-taking, considering other’s feelings and having the confidence to advocate for himself.

This morning Tama arrived and immediately sought out some dinosaur figures he really liked to play with. Soon after, a younger two-year-old child joined him and started playing with one of his dinosaurs. Tama became anxious and started to pull the dinosaur off the other child. But all of a sudden he stopped in his tracks, as if deep in contemplation, and jumped up. “Whaea!” he called, “Matawā, Whaea,” running to each of the three places he knew the matawā lived. Finding one at last, he raced back to the other child, announcing, “Taku wā!” (my turn) – “rima miniti?” (five minutes?) “Ae,” (yes) was the younger child’s automatic response and she immediately handed the dinosaur back to Tama. Tama smiled

⁴ pseudonym used

and, in exchange, gave the other child the matawā. A short time later, the other child moved off to play in another area – leaving Tama with the dinosaurs and the matawā.

☛Tama shows his huge learning in dealing positively with issues. He has the courage, confidence (taking responsibility) and self-belief (being responsible) to problem-solve his issue over the dinosaur. In his interaction with the other child, Tama takes on the tuakana role (having responsibility) and he approaches the issue positively, enabling a positive solution to the problem at hand. By acting in this way, Tama reveals his leadership learning. Not only does he show the other child a different side of himself – his tuakana side (new ways of doing and being) - and modelling these tuakana traits (acceptable ways of dealing with issues), infinitely he learns something more about himself - as a competent and confident individual.

This story also shows the importance of following an agreed process. The very action of focussing on the process distracts Tama from the anxiety and other negative emotions about the potential loss of the dinosaur and helps him regain and maintain control of these emotions rather than forcing his will over the object and the other child. It is a negotiation of roles and of their relationship.

7.3 “Kaore au i te pīrangī!” (I don’t want that!) - Tapeka’s Leadership

Tapeka is 17 months old and one of the teina (younger children) of Te Kōpae Piripono. She is an only child and her first language is te reo Māori. This story talks about noticing, recognising and responding (Cowie, 2000) to leadership in someone this young.

Recently, we have noticed Tapeka throwing her food onto the floor during meal times. One of the Kaitiaki discussed this with her mother, who explained that, at home, if Tapeka did not like a particular food, she would ‘hide’ it from her parents. On Monday at lunchtime, Tapeka again threw her food. She shook her head vigorously, an obvious “no!” when offered a particular piece of food. But five minutes later, she wanted it. At lunchtime on Tuesday, the Kaitiaki tried a different strategy and asked Tapeka what she would like to eat:

Peaches? E Kao (no)! Rice crackers? Ae (yes)! Tapeka was then asked if she wanted water or milk to drink. She shook her head, 'no', to both. Instead, she pointed to the peaches she had, seconds earlier, rejected. Today at lunchtime, the Kaitiaki tested another hypothesis. Without a word, she opened all of Tapeka's food, leaving it for her to choose. Then the Kaitiaki sat and watched. What did Tapeka do? She sat at the table and promptly ate all her food! No issue! She then proceeded to drink, not only a cup of milk but also a cup of water.

☉Tapeka shows that, even at 17 months, she is a leader. She shows that she has a rapidly growing understanding of her ability to make her own decisions (taking responsibility) and to communicate this to others (sharing responsibility). Tapeka also shows that she has responsibility for herself and her own needs (having responsibility). She tests different strategies at meal times, at home and at Te Kōpae. It is highly likely that this behaviour is replicated in other aspects and interests in her life. Tapeka knows what she wants and, even though she has only a small amount of verbal language, she clearly articulates this. Taking control of her choices around meal times is just one indication of her desire to take responsibility for her own learning, including play, space, play equipment and friends. Leadership is about choice. Tapeka clearly shows she views herself as confident and competent (being responsible). This is leadership but it might easily be misconstrued as naughtiness, bolshy-ness, rebelliousness or put down to 'terrible-tvos behaviour'. By her actions, Tapeka is telling us, 'Here I am. Can you see me? Will you acknowledge me and my right to be respected? This is what I want. Do you hear me? Do you really know me?'

7.4 Te Tito Waiata (Composing a Song)

This story shows shared and collaborative leadership in children. It highlights the importance of AKO - the interchangeability of teacher and learner roles (Tamati, 2005) - and fostering reciprocal Kaitiaki:child relationships. It also emphasises the importance of Kaitiaki understanding the level and nature of their engagement in children's play.

During the past several weeks, the children have been right into dancing and singing – dressing up and turning anything and everything into a microphone with which to perform.

One CD that they really like is, Whare Kōhungahunga 6 (Māori Music CD, Ministry of Education). They play it so much they know all the words! The great thing about this CD is it has different versions of each song: the words only, the music with the words and the music only. Today, a group of five children were singing along to the CD when it got to the music only version of the song they really liked. One of the Kaitiaki sang some different words. Oh what a commotion! “No! Stop! Those aren’t the right words!” the children scolded. What a hoot, these children telling off the Kaitiaki! The Kaitiaki stopped the CD and explained that it was possible to make up your words because this version was just the tune. Well! Off they went! They wanted to write their own words to the song. They got some paper and pens and started to write. It was fascinating to see! They discussed their ideas and wrote down their words. Such focus! Such creativity! Then they tried to put their new words to the tune. But it wouldn’t work. There were too many words! The problem solving began again, in earnest. How could they make it work? They discussed and tried different words then tested whether these would fit. Everyone was involved, Kaitiaki included. However, the children drove the discussion and wrote the words. The Kaitiaki was simply one of the group. Then they sang their words. Kātahi ko ngā manu tioriori ataahua ra! These are the words to their waiata (the English translation doesn’t do it justice!):

Ko te kura o te ao o Taranaki e...	<i>The school of the world of Taranaki</i>
Titiro ki Maunga Taranaki e...	<i>Look at mountain Taranaki</i>
Ngā honu kei te maunga ra	<i>The turtles on the mountain</i>
Kei runga i te ao	<i>At the top of the world</i>
Ahua ataahua me te maunga Taranaki e	<i>Taranaki looks so beautiful</i>
Rere runga e...	<i>Flying up high</i>
E tere wana e...	<i>Going really fast</i>
E paruparu e...	<i>(and) there is dirt (up there too)</i>
Ka haere tātou ki te maunga	<i>We will all go to the mountain</i>
He pai to korowai ataahua	<i>I like your cloak (of snow)</i>
Ka mau au i te panekoti...	<i>It is like my skirt</i>
He rite to korowai	<i>Your cloak is like</i>
Ki taku panekoti kanikani ataahua e...	<i>my beautiful dancing skirt</i>

★ Wow! This story is a fascinating look at how leadership is recognised and fostered, by the level and nature of the engagement of the Kaitiaki. Firstly, the Kaitiaki was engaged in the play, not as the ‘teacher’ but by being actively part of the play. By taking on a participant

role, the Kaitiaki provided the environment for the children to determine the nature, direction and outcomes of the play. Everyone in the group was an active participant – engaging, debating, discussing and deciding how their waiata should go. They were also able to discover cause and effect (because the words did not fit in relation to the music) and then to collectively problem solve. While they scribed their own words, the Kaitiaki also jotted these down, for rest of the whānau to access. The play had a life of its own. The children showed they were quite comfortable taking responsibility (having a go and trying new things), and having responsibility (taking on different roles at different times including scribe, singer, organiser, helper, timetabler, decision-maker and dancer). Working in such a dynamic and collaborative way showed their ability to share responsibility. This is being responsible. This is leadership!

7.5 Hamiora⁵ and the Skeleton Puzzle

This story highlights the way children easily assume the responsibilities of leadership, such as taking on tuakana-teina roles (having responsibility), taking responsibility for another child's learning and collaborating with others in shared learning endeavours (sharing responsibility).

This morning four-year-old Hamiora asked for the skeleton puzzle. He was totally absorbed as he put together the child-sized skeleton, confidently referring to a wall chart to measure his progress and to decide what piece to select next. When three-year-old Tama came over to join him, Hamiora eagerly shared his skills and knowledge, and demonstrated how to use the chart for reference. He also affirmed, with a clap, when the Tama placed a puzzle piece in the correct place. This further encouraged Tama's participation. Hamiora's big smile and easy manner showed he was enjoying this tuakana-teina interchange. The pair had some tricky problems to work out. Not only did the thigh and arm bones look very similar, there were two of each of them – a left side and a right side! Hamiora persisted, mapping each bone against a part of his own body and then against the chart. I asked Hamiora some questions about his skeleton. His responses were that the skeleton was a boy who used to be a Pirate of the Caribbean. Then a vampire came and the skeleton's heart fell out because he

⁵ pseudonym used

had no skin to keep it in! Robots, dogs and dinosaurs have skeletons, and skeletons don’t get sick. When their legs get broken, they have to go to hospital and get a big plaster. Hamiora and Tama, spent most of the day in each other’s company. Their next quest was to investigate whether or not the pūngāwerewere (spiders) that I had brought from home had skeletons or not!

☉ Hamiora shows he is actively making sense of his natural, physical and social world – about human physiology and of social rules about friendship. He uses different strategies for active thinking and reasoning. Hamiora shows his creative imagination and his ability to make connections with previous experiences, stories and movies. He also makes strong connections with home and family. His Dad’s leg was in plaster recently and his Mum is a nurse. But also evidenced during this play is Hamiora’s leadership. He assumes a tuakana role (having responsibility) and takes responsibility for Tama’s learning. But more than this, the pair’s collaborative engagement is evidence of them sharing responsibility and their genuine desire to sustain their relationship in this shared endeavour.

7.6 “You’re the nurses, not the doctors!”

This delightful story highlights children’s leadership in action. The children⁶ determine their own actions, make their own choices, take responsibility for themselves and others, drive their own learning and are self-reliant. They use strategies for initiating and maintaining their relationships with other children (sharing responsibility) including taking turns, problem solving, negotiating, seeking another’s point of view, supporting others, and acknowledging other’s feelings.

Just after morning tea, some of the girls begin to play as doctors, “not nurses, we’re doctors!” one emphatically announces. Anahera (3yrs, 5months) becomes the patient and three other girls, Maria and Roimata (both 2-years-old) and Tui (3-years-old) are the doctors. Then Roimata takes a turn as the patient. She has a ‘sore’ stomach. Anahera and Tui become the doctors and diagnose her complaint. Shortly, 4-year-old Arahia joins the group, announcing she is the ‘head doctor’ and Tui and Anahera are her assistant doctors. Along comes 4-year-old Hohepa. He is curious about what the girls are doing. “Come and

⁶ pseudonyms used for all children in this story

play with us,” Arahia calls out, adding, “You’re the nurses, not the doctors!” Hohepa is not amused at this statement and walks away. The girls’ play continues for some 20 minutes with each of them interchanging roles – from doctor to nurse, to patient and back to doctor again. Tonsils are checked. Temperatures are taken. Operations are performed. All the girls are totally engrossed in their work! Then head doctor, Arahia, decides to be the patient. Doctors Anahera and another doctor (Te Wai, 3-years-old) duly remove her insides because they are ‘too sick’. Next they amputate her leg. It is sick too! Then it is Tui’s turn. She lies on the bed. All of a sudden Arahia holds a plastic microphone above Tui and begins to gently shake it. Then she starts to do a karanga over her. A Kaitiaki asks Arahia what she is doing. Arahia explains that Tui has died and she is sprinkling water on her. She continues with her karanga... “Kua mate ia... ooh, ooh, kua mate, kua mate, tangi, tangi!” (She’s dead, dead, dead, crying, crying). Te Wai gets up and goes to ‘ring’ an ambulance.

☛ This is dynamic, dramatic, spontaneous, social pretend play. There is sophisticated role play, with an awareness and commentary on complex gender and social roles (boys can only be nurses). All participants know their involvement and role in the play and this involvement is valued. The children are also comfortable to try out different roles and allow others to take on roles which may be seen as important, i.e. head doctor/patient (having responsibility). For some children, the aspect of giving up their role for someone else is huge growth. Anahera, 3years 5months, is a very good example of this. She has, until very recently, had difficulty finding ways to be positively involved with group situations. Giving up the prized role of doctor to another child is a new and exciting development. Could it be that she feels so strongly and meaningfully part of the group, so accepted and able to contribute to the group that any of the roles are quite acceptable to her? The most memorable part of the play is when Arahia does a karanga, announcing that the patient has died. Here, Arahia shows her awareness and understanding of the cultural norms and practices of tangihanga – doing karanga and sprinkling water over the body. This shows her confidence in using a variety of strategies for exploring and making sense of the world. This is also evidenced by her attempts to include the boys in the girls’ play - but only on the girls’ terms.

7.7 Te Atahaia's Story

Te Atahaia's story talks about the difference fathers make in the lives of their children, particularly their sons, to enable them to take responsibility, to have responsibility, to share responsibility and to be responsible.

Te Atahaia is the youngest of a family of eight. He has two brothers and three sisters. He likes to listen to music, collect rugby cards and play the drums. When he grows up Te Atahaia says he wants to be a forensic scientist. Te Atahaia's father believed his role was as the breadwinner of the family. His view of parenthood was that the wife was the homemaker who also raised the children.

Te Atahaia became part of Te Kōpae Piripono as a newborn. Generally, he was a happy and confident child. Sometimes he became anxious but, on the whole, he was happy and relaxed. The time came for Te Atahaia to leave Te Kōpae Piripono to go to school. We discovered really quickly that that was hard for him. Before too long, Te Atahaia was strategising many ways to return to Te Kōpae including undesirable behaviours such as yelling, hitting, pushing and throwing things.... While his mother worked with the school to find solutions for Te Atahaia there, she was also working on solutions at home. Tears and years went past. One issue was evident. This was the level of involvement of the father role in Te Atahaia's life.

In 2006, and with planned encouragement from his family and Kaitiaki, Te Atahaia and other Kōpae graduates joined another school's hockey team in the local junior hockey competition. Because of the huge whānau interest, in 2007, we decided to organise our own hockey teams. In all, we had four teams – Kōpae Mana, Kōpae Kaha, Kōpae Pīpī and Kōpae Paopao! Many of Te Kōpae families, past and present, became actively involved. Te Atahaia was invited to play for Kōpae Mana but unbeknown to us he had also been asked to play for his school as well. Te Atahaia was in a fix! If he chose Te Kōpae he would be letting his school team down and if he chose his school he could not face his Kōpae teammates. His anxiety grew. His fear of divided loyalties and of possible rejection was overwhelming. So he decided not to play for anyone. Many whānau made repeated attempts

to get him to play, but to no avail. So we turned to Dad again. We asked him to be the assistant coach of Te Atahaia’s team, Kōpae Mana. But Te Atahaia was not convinced and on the day of the game refused to get in the car and go to the turf. Oh No! Now what? Bob did some quick thinking and asked Te Atahaia if he would be team photographer (having responsibility!). Te Atahaia accepted but insisted there was no way he was going to play, even if someone asked him! When they got to the game, Bob went straight on the turf, to join the team. Te Atahaia went to go on the turf as well but Bob turned to him and said, *“Sorry son, you can’t come on the turf. The only people allowed are umpires, coaches and players.”* *“I used to be a player,”* Te Atahaia asked his mother. *“Yes and you can play again if you want”*, she replied. That week, Te Atahaia started asking questions about who was in the team, what was the name of the team and was it too late to join.

The following Saturday, Te Atahaia went to hockey with his Dad, just to ‘watch’. But when they got there, the team was short, and losing. Wahi (the coach of Kōpae Kaha) put out an ‘SOS’ call to Te Atahaia. He asked if he was allowed to play. Of course he was! His team won the game! After that, Te Atahaia played in almost every game. This is a conversation another Kaitiaki had with Te Atahaia: *“Kia ora Te Atahaia. It’s good to see you playing hockey.”* *“I’m only here because of him!”* Te Atahaia replied, gesturing to his father. The following night, Te Atahaia’s mother asked him what it was about Dad that made the difference. He replied, *“Dad makes me feel confident”*. Then he added re-assuringly, *“Oh, you make me feel confident too Mum, but Dad’s makes me feel better.”*

Bob’s involvement changed Te Atahaia’s thinking. We could tell by his body language that Te Atahaia desperately wanted to play hockey. But his anxiety, fear and lack of confidence had a paralysing effect on him. It was only when Bob took on the four responsibilities that Te Atahaia was able to break free from his anxieties and join the team. What the rest of the Kōpae whānau had unsuccessfully tried for 5 weeks, to convince Te Atahaia to play, Bob managed to achieve in just two conversations!

☛ While this story shows Te Atahaia’s father’s leadership in supporting his son’s involvement in hockey, it also reveals Te Atahaia’s own emerging leadership. The most

obvious is his taking responsibility – as scary as it was, having the courage to have a go, to step up and join the team. But Te Atahaia also assumed roles of responsibility - team photographer and eventually team member (having responsibility). He also shared responsibility (giving and asking for assistance, and engaging and collaborating with others in the team). Te Atahaia shows that, with his father’s support, he came to BE responsible. This experience has been a revelation for Te Atahaia. While there is still a long way to go to on his journey of confidence and self-fulfillment (and we all know journeys are not always smooth!), the most important thing is that Te Atahaia’s journey has started. And for the record, Te Atahaia’s team, Kōpae Mana won their end of season tournament. And Te Atahaia played in every game!