

Chapter 9

CONCLUSION

We are where we are today in Taranaki is because of all the ‘stuff’ that was dumped on our great, great, great ancestors... the muru raupatu, the loss of land, the loss of livelihood, of whānau; the powerlessness and the despair. We are the results of all that. Our grandparents’ generation were the ones most severely affected – beaten for speaking Māori, growing up experiencing discrimination, misery and grief. They didn’t want their children to go through what they had gone through so they tried to bring them up as Pākehā. But their children, our parents, were still discriminated against and ridiculed. And I think a lot about what it must have been like for them to feel like manuhiri on their own marae. They couldn’t understand what was being said, or what was going on! Actually, they didn’t fit anywhere – in a Māori or Pakeha world! When I listen to the people of my parent’s generation, all I hear is the voices of people who are in pain, who want to belong. I reckon our generation is about trying to understand the ‘stuff’ that they had to deal with and trying to find a pathway forward. Because that stuff happened and there is nothing we can do about it. But understanding why so and so’s family alcoholised themselves to death, or smoked themselves to death, or killed each other to death, gives us purpose and strength to ensure that our children and grandchildren don’t pay the price for that pain of the past. There’s nothing we can do about what happened. It’s about acknowledging that, and each other and finding new ways and processes to do and be. (Kaitiaki reflection, 6.3.07)

When the whānau of Te Kōpae Piripono embarked on the Centres of Innovation research, the focus was on the ‘innovation’ of our centre with the aim to better understand *how whānau development at Te Kōpae Piripono fosters leadership, across all levels, to enhance children’s learning and development* (research question). This was so we could improve practice and also share what we had learned with the Māori and early childhood education community. The process of answering this question led us on a different journey to the one we envisaged. We discovered that rather than simply confining our investigation to ‘what’ we were doing at Te Kōpae Piripono, we also had to look at the context in which we were operating and ‘why’ we were doing what we

were doing. The strength of the data compelled us to confront difficult issues and to look for solutions. The journey and the reach of the research was uncomfortable at times, but it proved hugely rewarding.

The Tātai Whakapapa framework allowed us to conceptualise whānau development and leadership in terms of the ‘morals in the stories’ of the archetype family, that of Ranginui and Papatūānuku and the balance/imbalance of the atua dispositions. From this perspective, the atua dispositions are enabled or disabled by circumstances and the events of the history of each person, and of the group. Many of us are unaware of the inner power we have to reverse those effects. On closer scrutiny, much of what had historically been recognised as the desired outcomes of good practice at Te Kōpae Piripono (high levels of development and the assumption of the four responsibilities of leadership) had, for some whānau members, been replaced by the inverse behaviours of denial, withdrawal and paralysis. We wanted to know what it was that tipped the balance for those members.

For this purpose of understanding, the fusion of kaupapa Māori with participatory action research and case study/self study was the ideal research approach, making possible an up-close and personal look at our organisation. The indigenous paradigm of kaupapa Māori is the bedrock of Te Kōpae Piripono. Kaupapa Māori embraces Te Tātai Whakapapa as the analytical framework for our COI research. This approach inspired in both the research team and the whānau, a confidence and a sense of freedom to undertake the project in ways we felt were appropriate. The search by the whānau for answers to the research question began with a review and reaffirmation of Māori and Kōpae ideology. Once a unity of thought was achieved on fundamental themes, the whānau then identified and explored the manifestations of key concepts in the structures of whānau and whānau development, leadership (mana tangata) and the relationship to learning.

Whānau is at the core of Māori organisation. At Te Kōpae Piripono it is no different. The traditional genealogical basis of whānau may be absent, but the cultural understandings inherent in a traditional kin-based whānau are integral to Te Kōpae Piripono and, over time, become normalised for the children and their families. The principles of interdependence, human connection and shared journeys were reinforced through the COI research process. The research has shown that whānau is indeed significant in the development and wellbeing of the children. The process of developing

‘whole’ children depends on the development of ‘whole’ families. The child is inseparable from the community and community from our people’s history. Child and family development is simply a component of whānau, hapu, iwi, and people development. Therefore, all activity aimed at enhancing children’s learning and development and mediating the better future that we wish for them, must involve whānau with a view of the wider context in which the children are located. It is in relation to the whānau that members rise or fall. We believe that whānau is the springboard and safety net and without whānau the individual is adrift. We strengthen the child by strengthening the whānau and this requires a deeper and broader level of care and attention than is traditionally provided by early childhood facilities. All Māori children are entitled to this level of care.

At Te Kōpae Piripono, leadership is about being fully functioning and secure in one’s mana tangata, able to assume the four key responsibilities (having, taking, sharing and being) to be effective within the community. The responsibilities should be an integral part of every facet of our daily lives. The journey to achieve mana tangata is a process to reverse the negative effects of colonisation and acculturation by filling the head with knowledge and the heart with the comfort of knowing, understanding and belonging.

The fears and anxieties that afflict so many of us, young and old, and impede our development are not the problem, although they are problematic. These emotional difficulties are merely the indicators of the damaging effects on us of colonisation. Too-low participation rates in education amongst our people and especially among fathers in early childhood education, are the long-term consequences of the hardships experienced by our forebears. There are many others. It is also true that this is not a local phenomenon. Equivalent families around the globe will experience similar difficulties. The good news Te Kōpae Piripono has to share is that it does not need to be that way. As espoused by the Kaitiaki at the beginning of this chapter, the past cannot be changed, nor should it be ignored. If we ignore the relationship between past events and present outcomes, we permit those damaging events to continue to harm our people. By acknowledging the events of the past and understanding better ourselves in relation to those events, we gain a new perspective and can begin to heal and move forward. An important first step toward overcoming the emotional difficulties that underlie anti-social and oppositional behaviours is to understand these difficulties and being able to self-

reflect. With support we can find the strength to create a brighter future for ourselves and for our children and their children and so on, that we so keenly strive for...

At Te Kōpae Piripono there is a commitment to following processes of healing that help move people along a pathway of learning new ways of being and doing. These processes support people to reclaim their mana and develop a sense of self. They can also see that they are significant in the wider scheme of things and have a valid and valuable contribution to make. The process of learning to feel good begins with the individual and spreads to the whānau, radiating out through the community. This is the healing process of whānau development. Whānau development is the structure within Te Kōpae Piripono that ensures the process does happen. The COI research provided us with the opportunity to better understand and to improve the processes of whānau development at Te Kōpae Piripono.

Our findings reveal that for many of us who have had little experience of trusting relationships, we sometimes need support to help us to begin to trust - no matter how scary the prospect. Whānau support strategies are therefore central to the healing processes of whānau development. As outlined in Chapter 5.4, there are five essential elements of whānau support including following agreed processes for open and honest communication and for dealing with issues positively, the crucial role of the teacher, providing critical friends and effective enrolment and induction processes for new whānau. This journey is therefore about learning new ways of doing and being that can help us develop a sense of trust – in others and more particularly in ourselves. Positive whānau relationships rely on following agreed processes for communication. When we do not trust those around us, we need to be able to trust the process – to get us through. The process neutralises the power imbalances inherent in difficult relationships. Having agreed processes allows us to consider ‘other’. Having ways to support whānau development aims to ameliorate the difficulties whānau members experience and to sustain them so all can strive for an equilibrium that will result in fulfilled lives.

As we conclude this part of our journey, we return to the whakataukī that we have held dear throughout this research, “*Ko koe ki tēna kīwai, ko au ki tēnei kīwai o te kete*” (you carry your handle and I’ll carry my handle of our kete). This whakataukī connotes contribution, interdependence, responsibility, working together, supporting each other and having a shared purpose - symbolised by the kete. At Te Kōpae Piripono we emphasise personal responsibility and personal choice. People will step up and assume

responsibilities when they are ready and able to do so, not before. Irrespective of the time and energy that may be spent, we must learn to be comfortable about the choices people make. Rather than constantly ruminating on our position and performance, it is our responsibility to allow others to embark on their own development journeys, while always leaving our door open. Our collective journey is convoluted and there may be dead end paths encountered on the way, however, this is the reality of our situation. At Te Kōpae Piripono, we have learned to be patient and persistent. Our responsibility is to find ways and opportunities for ourselves and others to have, take, share and be responsible.

The whānau of Te Kōpae Piripono hopes that our COI journey will contribute in some way to research in kaupapa Māori early childhood education. The outcomes of our research have opened up a whole range of avenues for further investigation. We believe that we have been able to provide some new or different thinking about whānau and leadership with examples providing explanation and evidence of this. We hope also that we can be a reference point for others wishing to explore our approach to early childhood education, that truly puts children and their whānau foremost in any thinking about teaching and learning. The child is paramount but he or she does not sit in isolation of his or her own context and also the shared context of Te Kōpae Piripono. Our COI research has been a self-study, centred on the 'Kōpae way'. This will not be the way for everyone. However, we hope others will be prompted to reflect on their own paradigms of practice, and consider different ways of doing and being – while recognising the universality of the core principles of our approach. We understand that our learning journey is lifelong and we continue to be inspired by others' contributions and leadership. We are open to others' questions, contributions and challenges. We believe that being open to change enables true learning to occur.

We have had an amazing, incredible time on our COI research journey. Not only have we researched our innovation, we have discovered so much more about ourselves. And we have developed even more as a whānau. We feel very privileged to have been part of the Centres of Innovation programme.