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A large, stylized yellow ribbon graphic with a black outline, winding across the purple background. The ribbon starts on the left, curves down, then up, then down again, ending on the right. It is partially overlaid by a black and white striped railing graphic.

# WAIKATO JOURNAL OF EDUCATION TE HAUTAKA MĀTAURANGA O WAIKATO

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# Waikato Journal Of Education

## Te Hautaka Mātauranga o Waikato

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## Culturally located assessment in early childhood education

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### Abstract

*According to Broadfoot (1996), assessment is one of the most powerful vehicles for educational change. It is a key influence on the shape and quality of education and learning for students. Kaupapa Māori assessment has the potential to make a difference for Māori children. This paper illustrates and provides insight into assessment by and for Māori in early childhood. It analyses the nature of Kaupapa Māori assessment understandings and practices that move beyond current, culturally situated and culturally responsive perspectives of learning to learning and learners being seen as deeply located, embedded within Māori ways of knowing and being.*

### Keywords

Early childhood education; Kaupapa Māori; assessment.

### He Kupu Whakataki / Introduction

The history of schooling for Māori has been one of cultural dislocation, deprivation and subjugation (Simon et al., 1998). Deficit perspectives of Māori have informed and justified successive education policies (Berryman, 2008). The consequences of these policies are still evident today with Māori children disengaging from the education system and consistently achieving disproportionately lower results on national averages (Ministry of Education, 2006; Smith & Smith, 1990). Change is required.

According to Broadfoot (1996), assessment is one of the most powerful vehicles for educational change. She claims that assessment is likely to be the main influence on the shape and quality of education and learning for students. I argue that Kaupapa Māori assessment has the potential to help create educational change for Māori students and address the educational aspirations of Māori people. This paper outlines a number of key arguments from my research *Te Whatu Kākahu – Assessment in Kaupapa Māori Early Childhood Practice* (Rameka, 2012), which case studied the journeys and



emergent thinking of three Māori early childhood services (Māori immersion/bilingual services and *kōhanga reo*) in the development of kaupapa Māori assessment understandings and practice.

### **Te Rangahau / The Research**

In its initial stages, 2003–2005, the research ran concurrently with the development of *Te Whatu Pōkeka: Kaupapa Māori Assessment for Learning Early Childhood Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2009), a Ministry of Education professional support resource. There were two phases to the research. The first phase involved Māori early childhood education services working independently on documenting assessments of children's learning. The documentation included written observations, narratives, transcripts of events or activities, children's work, adults and children's comments, and photographs. This documentation provided the basis for discussions at monthly meetings, the second aspect of this phase of work. Monthly meetings of 1–2 hours' duration were held with the services, between 10–30 meetings total, depending on the service. The foci of these meetings were firstly capturing each service's journey, including successes and achievements, what had happened over the month, any issues that may have arisen, what was supporting or inhibiting work, and emerging assessment and kaupapa Māori understandings. Secondly, they were collaboratively interpreting, reinterpreting, exploring, making sense of and further representing the assessment materials that had been developed. The third focus was planning what might be worked on in the upcoming month. Research notes were taken of key discussions and emergent thinking.

The second reflective phase of the research took place between 2006 and 2008 and involved one or two follow-up meetings a year with kaiako [teachers] (3–6 meetings over the period). These meetings involved firstly discussing, reflecting upon and highlighting issues related to each service's journey: their thoughts about the journey; what had been achieved; how and why; outcomes of the work; and how this had impacted on thinking. Secondly, the kaiako reflected upon and articulated further understandings, issues, patterns, thinking and developments on kaupapa Māori assessment from the documentation developed in the first phase of the research. Depending on circumstances, these meetings took the form of either taped interviews that were later transcribed or informal discussions where research notes were taken.

Central to the research was the articulation of Māori values, understandings and epistemologies within early childhood education teaching, learning and assessment theory and practice. The research questions included

- What is assessment in a kaupapa Māori early childhood education setting?
- What does kaupapa Māori assessment look like?
- Why is kaupapa Māori assessment important? Why should we do it?

Kaupapa Māori, according to G. Smith (1997), is both theory and transformative praxis. It has evolved from Māori communities and has succeeded in supporting fundamental structural changes in educational interventions. Kaupapa Māori theory is aimed at challenging and transforming oppressive structures. Transformation is required to expose, confront and challenge disparities, injustices and inequalities. The objective is social, economic and political transformation through developing understandings of the unequal power dynamics and relations, and empowering people to liberate

themselves from oppressive structures. Barnes (2000) states: “By taking a position that challenges norms and assumptions, Kaupapa Māori research involves a concept of the possibility and desirability of change” (p. 5). Kaupapa Māori has also been described as “being Māori”, of perceiving the world from a Māori epistemological perspective, of assuming the normalcy of Māori values, understandings and behaviours (G. Smith, 1992). The validity and legitimacy of Māori language and Māori cultural capital, values and knowledge are a given.

This study aimed to make a change for Māori children by challenging, critiquing and transforming dominant educational perceptions such as views of the Māori child, the nature of learning, pedagogy and culturally valued learning. The case study services engaged with, endeavoured to make sense of, critiqued, questioned, looked for fit, resisted, and transformed dominant perceptions related to Te Akoranga [*Māori Schooling*]; Ngā Tuakiri o te Tangata [*Māori Identities*]; Te Āhua o te Mōkōpuna [*The Image of the Child*]; and Aromatawai [*Assessment*]. The services focused on their particular understandings of Māori ways of knowing and being within their early childhood education and community context, and how these could be reflected in assessment thinking and practice. Each service’s context was unique as was their journey, emergent understandings, practices and assessment framings.

- Case Study One is an urban early childhood education service located in South Auckland. It is a Māori/English bicultural, bilingual early childhood education service.
- Case Study Two is an urban early childhood education service located in West Auckland with a strong bilingual, bicultural, Christian foundation.
- Case Study Three is an urban Kōhanga Reo located in Hamilton with a strong focus on and commitment to te reo and tikanga Māori (Māori language and culture). All teaching is in te reo Māori only.

In the next section I discuss arguments related to kaupapa Māori assessment that emerged from the study.

### **Kaupapa Māori assessment is culturally located**

Kaupapa Māori assessment moves beyond culturally situated or culturally responsive perspectives of learning to learning being seen as deeply located within Māori ways of knowing and being. Māori ways of knowing and being are fundamentally different to those of non-Māori, influenced and shaped by historical and contemporary interpretive systems. It is these interpretive systems that Māori learners inhabit, enact and reflect in their learning. The systems consist of tools, patterns of reasoning, symbols, language, shared meanings and customary practices which are required to competently participate within a particular social group, community, or culture (Weenie, 2008). Gee (2000) asserts that

one cannot have an identity of any sort without some interpretive system underwriting the recognition of that identity.... The interpretive system may be people’s historically and culturally different views of nature; it may be the norms, traditions, and rules of institutions; it may be the discourse and dialogue of others; or it may be the workings of affinity groups. What is important about identity is that almost any identity trait

can be understood in terms of any of these different interpretive systems.  
(p. 108)

The case study services emphasised the embedded or located nature of assessment, describing the need for the kaiako to “have a Māori heart” or “see through Māori eyes” in order to understand. They acknowledged cultural differences in the ways certain behaviours and actions were perceived, encouraged, discouraged and responded to, and questioned whether it was possible to fully understand and operate within Māori interpretive systems if one was not Māori.

For me, what it says is ... you have to see it through Māori eyes in order to understand. (Case Study One Kaiako, 12/02/08)

It was a Māori heart. What she [Kaiako 2] was seeing and how she was saying it was very Māori, full of heart. (Research Notes, 09/03/08)

I think too that from that questioning, came the realisation that we do things because we see things differently. (Case Study Two Kaiako, 09/03/08)

Kaiako also explored what behaviours and actions were acceptable or encouraged for Māori that may not be so for other cultures. Comparisons were made between Māori and Pākehā ideals of development, what aspects were perceived as important within specific cultures and encouraged or alternatively discouraged. Kaiako realised that their ways of thinking, feeling and behaving were aspects of Māori ways of knowing and being and the service’s practices were located within distinctively Māori interpretive systems that were different to many other early childhood education services.

I think there’s a very big difference between European culture and our culture, what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. We are very different. (Case Study One Kaiako, 18/04/05)

For us it meant that ... if we were to walk into another childcare centre, how they did things was different to how we did things. We thought that we were the same as everybody else ... our practices were different ... we realised our practice was part of who we were, or who we are.

We looked at ourselves and said, “Okay, we’re Māori, how do we use this for us as Māori ... a tool for us?” ... We ... do these practices because it’s part of us or part of our culture.... And so it refined some of our practices ... with a bit more purpose. (Case Study Two Kaiako, 09/03/08)

I started reading Rose Pere, Ranginui [Walker], and also Mason Durie. A lot of what they said sort of took me back to how I was brought up and it ... hit me then ... Here we are talking about all these areas of development ... from European, western research ... and I thought, “Far out! Why are we trying to compare ourselves to something that’s not even us? Why don’t we look in our own back yard?” You know, every time we stand up to mihi, we whakapapa, so that people know who we are and where we’re from ... why can’t we present that in a form, or in a framework that’s culturally beneficial? (Case Study Three Kaiako, 12/03/08)

### **Kaupapa Māori assessment is spiritually located**

Māori ways of knowing and being can be seen as originating in Māori perspectives of the universe and the creation of the universe. The following is a general example of the creation phases.

I te tīmatanga, ko te kore—In the beginning there was a void.

Ko te pō—Within the void was the night.

Nā te pō—From within the night, seeds were cultivated.

Ka puta kō te Kukune—It was here that movement began—the stretching.

Ko te Pupuke—There the shoots enlarged and swelled.

Ko te Hihiri—Then there was pure energy.

Ko te Mahara—Then there was the subconscious.

Ko te Manako—Then the desire to know.

Ka puta i te whei ao—Movement from darkness to light, from conception to birth.

Ki te ao mārama e—From the learning comes knowing.

Tihei Mauri ora—I sneeze and there is life. (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 48)

Rangi [sky father] and Papatūānuku [earth mother], the primal parents, were next in line followed by their children. Māori trace their lineage to Tāne, one of their children, and therefore back to the creation of the universe. (Reilly, 2004)

### **Whakapapa**

Whakapapa denotes this genealogical descent from the divine creation of the universe to the living world (Berryman, 2008). Māori are descendents of the heavens and through whakapapa can trace lineage back to the very beginning of time and the creation of the universe (Barlow, 1991; Te Rito, 2007). Comments made by kaiako highlight this connectedness from the gods to the physical world:

Whakapapa, it is about making both the physical and spiritual links of our culture. (Research Notes, 02/05/05)

Whitt, Roberts, Norman and Grieves (2003) state that the importance of whakapapa within Māori culture cannot be overestimated. It acts as a “fundamental form of knowing: it functions as an epistemological template” (p. 5). Furthermore, the literal translation of whakapapa is “to place in layers”, so there are multiple layers and interpretations that form the basis of Māori values and beliefs (Cheung, 2008; Te Rito, 2007; Walker, 1993). Whakapapa therefore is fundamental to Māori understandings and is at the very core of what it means to be Māori (Barlow, 1991; Berryman, 2008; Cheung, 2008; Rangihau, 1977). “Traditional Māori conceive of personal identity in terms of whakapapa or genealogy—it is your whakapapa that makes you who you are, literally” (Patterson, 1992, p. 157). The kaiako (Case Study Three, 12/03/08) stresses

the importance of knowing the child, who they are and what they bring with them to the kōhanga.

... where they come from ... the past ... the past that brought them to today ... from who they're connected to and what experiences or tikanga or kawa or traditional practices and experiences at kōhanga ... are they [children] having that linked back into who they are? (Case Study Three, 12/03/08)

Furthermore, whakapapa provides the layering structure for assessment perspectives of the child. It creates a basis from which to deepen understandings of the child's learning.

Through documenting and collecting a number of narratives from a range of voices (child, staff, and whānau), the child's whakapapa begins to grow. Even though each story stands on its own, we believe that understanding the collective meaning tells of something more organic and that assessment from our perspective isn't seen in isolation to each story but rather assessment is a layering of events that have substance and connection to the whole.. (Case Study Three Kaiako, 12/03/08)

### Wairuatanga

The concept of wairua is also derived from Māori cosmology. The term literally means two waters, the spiritual and the physical. While there are tribal variations and interpretations, there is general agreement that the spiritual and the secular are not closed or separate from each other. The worlds are intimately connected with activities in the everyday material world coming under the influence of and interpenetrated by spiritual powers from the higher world, the spiritual world (Marsden, 2003; Ministry of Justice, 2001; Reilly, 2004). Wairuatanga recognises that all aspects of the Māori world have an ever-present spiritual dimension, which pervades all Māori values. In its broadest sense it refers to the spiritual dimension, which is internalised in the person from conception, "the seed of life emanated from the supreme supernatural influence" (Metge, 1976, p. 15). Berryman (2008) states:

Wairuatanga may be described as the spiritual and physical warmth and energy radiating from people, places and objects. Wairuatanga denotes the spiritual life principles of both human and non-human entities and may be experienced as both a natural and an esoteric phenomenon. (p. 223)

Marsden (2003) describes this in terms of, "The cultural milieu (of Māori) is rooted both in the temporal world and the transcendent world, this brings a person into intimate relationship with the gods and his universe" (p. 137). Nikora (2007) adds "wairua is not separable metaphysical stuff; it is soul permeating the world of both things and not-things". She warns that "to ignore wairuatanga is to reject the Māori sense of respect, wonder, awe, carefulness, and their application to everything in an orderly way" (p. 69).

The kaiako (Case Study Three, 12/03/08) highlights that what is missing from current assessment thinking and practice is recognition of the child's wairua, the spiritual dimension of the child. This dimension is as vital to the child's holistic

wellbeing as any other dimension of the person, and involves the child's ability to think in rational, creative and intuitive ways.

I started challenging a lot of what is happening in terms of assessment... Maybe we've missed something else. Maybe there's something missing from their *ira tangata* or *wairua*.... We're ... looking at ... our *Taha Māori*, we're looking at *kei te pai te wairua o te tamaiti*? Behaviour management ... why is that child misbehaving? Is it because the *wairua* is not right?

Rather than thinking that she can show me that she is able to zip a bag, which I could see she could do, or whether she could stand on a chair and tell me what activity she wants to do, I saw other signs ... of spiritual personality, which I felt connected my thoughts and observations ... I could see that these linked to what I was trying to describe ... that reflected her *wairua*. (Case Study Three Kaiako, 12/03/08)

Kaupapa Māori assessment is therefore located within these ways of knowing and being and must recognise value, promote and protect the deeply spiritual worlds that Māori inhabit.

### **Kaupapa Māori assessment is heterogeneous**

Before the arrival of Europeans there was no concept of being Māori. Māori had no name for themselves except in terms of their *iwi* connections (Maaka & Fleras, 2005). Identity formation and maintenance within these contexts was a fairly straightforward exercise, founded upon kinship and living in a community. The term Māori as an identifier of person developed in relation to the arrival of European and only came into existence within that particular relationship. The word Māori merely meant normal or ordinary as opposed to the European settlers who were viewed as different (Durie, 1998; Webber, 2008).

Over time, however, as a result of rapid colonisation, Māori soon became a minority population in New Zealand (Durie, 1998). Consequently the term Māori as normal or usual began to lose its meaning (Webber, 2008), and another meaning began to emerge, also based upon contrasts with the settler population. The stark cultural differences with the settlers served to emphasise the commonalities of Māori rather than the tribal differences and aided the creation of a generic Māori identity. Durie (1998) explains that this identity was only really evident when interacting with settlers and that it was more obvious to the settlers, and in "truth largely determined by them rather than a true reflection of any sense of homogeneity on the part of Māori" (p. 53). He adds that it was part of the process of colonisation that framed Māori culture so that it could be easily understood by the colonisers.

In the process new myths were created and a new type of Māori identity was forged. Māori, however, were not entirely convinced that they were the different ones; they were perplexed enough trying to understand the peculiarities of western ways and did not think it necessary to try and decipher their own "normal" culture. (Durie, 1998, p. 54)

The Māori identity that began to emerge in the nineteenth century was therefore as much a result of colonisation and the shifting population makeup as it was a developing sense of Māori nationalism. This identity was further shaped after World War Two with significant alienation from tribal lands (Boyes, 2006). Alienation from land had a devastating effect on Māori identity, personal, social and spiritual. It severed the physical and spiritual bond, with the land and to past generations who had lived on the land. It alienated Māori from a fundamental source of identity, of “being Māori”. Walker (1991) argues that for 70 percent of urban Māori ties to the land were lost completely. Living in urban communities meant that it was not possible to actively participate in and contribute to the day-to-day business of the kin group. Arohia Durie (1997) states that because of this, urban Māori were at risk of losing their cultural identity entirely. McIntosh (2005) adds:

In Māori society, social standing was and is determined by having both a place in a geographical sense and ties through blood and marriage to achieve a sense of self and community. The dominant paradigm of Māori society argues that that whakapapa (genealogical lines) established place and home. In this sense, urban defranchised Māori who have no knowledge of their whakapapa may find themselves culturally homeless, a potent element of a sensed alienation from both Māori and non-Māori society. For many, homelessness begins as a symbolic state and transforms into an actual state. (p. 42)

Identity formation for many urban Māori is now conceived in a symbolic as well as a physical way. For Māori who have been alienated from tribal and cultural roots, gaining knowledge of whakapapa and reclaiming one’s tribal identity offers freedom to choose and develop identity on an intellectual, political and spiritual level. This supports the development and retention of a sense of connectedness to people, place and the wider physical and spiritual worlds, no matter where the individual resides (Durie, 1997; Raerino, 2007).

Contemporary Māori identity is one of both unity and diversity. Māori are unified on some levels and divided by their distinctiveness on others. Māori are, in fact, as diverse as any other people, not only in socio-economic terms but also in fundamental attitudes to identity, and this is reflected in attitudes to teaching, learning and assessment. Contemporary ways of knowing and being Māori are the result of individuals and groups weaving specific combinations of realities, understandings and experiences. This weaving of combinations of Māori realities, understandings, experiences and identities, by individuals and groups, emphasises the point that there is no one Māori way of knowing and being which can be generalised across all Māori communities. Instead there are multiple ways that must be generated and defined by specific communities, based on cultural, historical, political and economic factors. For this reason, developing a “one size fits all” approach to assessment is inappropriate. Kaupapa Māori assessment needs to be flexible enough to reflect the heterogeneous nature of Māori children, whānau and communities (Hemara, 2000).

Furthermore as Māori ways of knowing and being provide the context for Kaupapa Māori assessment understandings, individual and shared weavings are critical for the development of Kaupapa Māori assessment understandings and approaches. For the case study kaiako, “being Māori” was a “taken for granted” and not something many had explored in much detail previously. Most felt confident in their own personal sense

of “being Māori”. However, translating this into early childhood education and assessment practice required individuals to critically reflect on their personal understandings and perspectives in order to develop shared service weavings of understandings.

And often you do it ... because that’s how it feels right to do it, but [Māori educators] very rarely get the chance to actually analyse what it is that makes you do it that way ... you actually had to stop and think why ... then realising it’s because it’s Māori. (Research Notes, 09/03/08)

For the case study kaiako, recognition of the diverse nature of Māori ways of knowing and being provided a sense of freedom and comfort not only to be Māori, but to be Māori differently. They recognised that there are many ways to be Māori and this supported the development of their own processes and protocols, for their whānau, community and context. Kaiako comments stressed this freedom:

I think what it is ... is that you don’t have to be a Pākehā, you can ... celebrate being Māori, and you can do it the way you believe it to be done. And you’ve got the liberty ... and the freedom to do it then you do it. (Case Study Two Kaiako, 09/03/08)

I thought, “Well, we can’t limit that” ... because we don’t have many speakers and we don’t have many kuia out there.... These whānau are urban Māori ... they don’t have the marae so it was like we had the freedom to do it. (Case Study Two Kaiako, 09/03/08)

We’re not tied by tradition, although we want to have tikanga, we’re not tied because we have to use what we can ... and you don’t have to prove anything. It’s okay to be who you are. (Case Study Two Kaiako, 09/03/08)

### **Kaupapa Māori assessment is contextually located**

Kaupapa Māori assessment is not just culturally located, it is located within specific whānau and communities. It is context specific in that what it looks like will be determined by kaiako, services, whānau and communities weaving and negotiating personal and collective understandings of what it means to be Māori, and more importantly what it means to be Māori in this place. For this reason it cannot be fully realised outside of the interpretive systems in which it is located. It is an insider perspective that requires insider understandings. For the case studies what became clear over time was that reflecting one’s own realities, truths, and aspirations meant kaiako needed to look within themselves for answers—within their service philosophies, and within their understandings of being Māori and their personal experiences—rather than developing something completely new. It involved what Parker (2000) describes as an unmasking of those identities which do not fit, which are not one’s own but have been unconsciously internalised, and reclaiming identities and understandings that may have previously been denied to them, and reframing these for a contemporary environment. It required critical reflection and ongoing dialogue to articulate what they already knew, believed in, understood and lived.

I thought, “Well, that doesn’t feel right. I can see other things.” You know, for me I started looking within my inner self and I started thinking

about ... I think I started thinking more Māori rather than mainstream.  
(Case Study One Kaiako, 12/02/08)

Kaupapa Māori assessment reflects Māori ways of knowing, being and doing in this place and involves integrating these understandings into early childhood education assessment theory and practice, effectively forefronting Māori patterns of knowing and learning. Kaupapa Māori assessment is therefore fundamentally different to non-Māori assessment. As Kaupapa Māori assessment is articulated within specific communities and contexts, it cannot be an “add on” or affixed to other assessment approaches. It requires recognition and the incorporation of the subtle differences or nuances within different Māori whānau and communities that may be missed or generalised by those outside of the context. It therefore must be instigated not only from a Māori epistemological base but from the context in which it is located and will be used.

### **Kaupapa Māori assessment reflects Māori images of the child**

Patterson (1992) states that “in Māori society children were under the spiritual protection of the gods therefore treated with the utmost respect due any taonga, with the respect due the gods themselves” (p. 97). Whakapapa connects the Māori child through their parents to generations of ancestors and to the spirit world of the gods. From these ancestors the child inherits spiritual traits fundamental to their wellbeing, spiritual, psychological, and social (Mead, 2003). These spiritual traits include, but are not limited to, tapu, mana, mauri and wairua.

Tapu can be translated as “being with potentiality for power” and personal tapu is the person’s most important spiritual attribute (Mead, 2003, p. 32). It is pervasive, influencing all other attributes, and is akin to a personal force field that can be felt and sensed by others. It is the sacred life force that reflects the state of the whole person.

Mana at a basic level can be translated as “authority, control, influence, prestige, power, psychic force, effectual, binding, authoritative ... and take effect” (Hemara, 2000, p. 68). Mana is a crucial aspect of Māori perceptions of the world and self, with almost all activities linked to upholding and enhancing mana. Understandings of mana are therefore critical to an understanding of the Māori person or child and the Māori world. Furthermore a Māori way of describing a person’s worth is to speak of their mana (Shirres, 1997).

Mauri is a generic life force (Barlow, 1991; Mead 2003). It is an essential and inseparable aspect of the child, an active sign of life and an attribute of self. When the child is physically and socially healthy, the mauri is in a state of balance, known as Mauri tau (the mauri is at peace). It is therefore important to nurture and protect the mauri of the child (Mead, 2003).

Whereas mauri is bound to the person and ceases to exist when the person dies, wairua can leave the body and lives on after the person dies. Wairua has been compared to the shadow of a person that interacts with the spiritual world and warns of possible danger (Love, 2004). Wairua is an unseen energy that impacts upon all aspects of a person’s being and, according to Durie (1985), it is the “most basic and essential dimension of Māori health” (p. 483). All Māori children are born with wairua, which can be translated as “soul” or “spirit” (Mead, 2003, p. 54).

The image of the child or learner within this frame of the world is fundamentally different from that of non-Māori. The child is not only embedded within the spiritual

world, but he/she is also imbued with spiritual traits such as tapu, mana, mauri and wairua, inherited from ancestors and fundamental to their holistic wellbeing and ability to grow and develop to their fullest. Spirituality is therefore not only an overarching feature of the world in which the child resides, but it also resides within the child. Understandings of learning and assessment must therefore also be located within this frame.

Yeah, it's a living thing ... so even though they've got that mana, when they get a bit older, their mana it sort of develops a bit more. It's like they're carrying that kete, eh? And they're filling it up. (Case Study Three Kaiako, 12/03/08)

I started challenging a lot of what is happening in terms of assessment.... Maybe we've missed something else. Maybe there's something missing from their ira tangata or wairua. (Case Study Three Kaiako, 12/03/08)

And then learning stories became a big thing ... people loved them. And I looked at us and said, "It doesn't suit us. It doesn't accommodate what we're on about. We're not looking at taking an interest.... We're ... looking at ... our Taha Māori, we're looking at kei te pai te wairua o te tamaiti?" (Case Study Three Kaiako, 12/03/08)

### **Kaupapa Māori assessment requires a spiritual plane of analysis**

My final argument is that Kaupapa Māori assessment requires the addition of a spiritual plane of analysis. A spiritual interpretive system underscores aspects of the Māori world and people not encompassed within current assessment framings. This plane would acknowledge, promote and protect the spiritual traits within the child and would recognise the relatedness of the child to the universe, to the world of the gods, and to ancestors.

The spiritual plane would provide an overlay of three existing planes—the personal or the intrapersonal; the relatedness of the child to others or the interpersonal; the relatedness of the child to cultural practices or the community. The first plane of analysis, the intrapersonal plane, involves the “individual as the focus of analysis” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 56). Knowledge is constructed by the individual as they engage in the external world. This is premised upon Piagetian thinking that emphasised the individual child's exploration of the world and the subsequent integration of knowledge, learning and representations (Cannella, 1997). The second plane, the interpersonal plane, emphasises “the interpersonal focus of analysis” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 58) and relates to learning interactions with social partners. It is highlighted through the work of Vygotsky, whose central tenet was that learning led the development process, and children acquired knowledge through participating in the practices of their host communities. Rogoff adds a third plane of analysis, the community/institutional plane. This plane requires a “cultural-institutional focus of analysis” (p. 60), in which learning is mediated by the communities in which the learner engages. Included in this plane are the cultural tools, processes and relationships valued by the community or institution.

A spiritual plane of analysis requires that we problematise ideas that assessment should be objective and unbiased, and we challenge what is viewed as valid evidence of

children's learning and development. As Gipps (1999) argues, claims of the objectivity of assessment are mistaken. She explains that assessment is far from an exact science and is, in fact, value-laden and culturally contrived. We experience the world through our values, knowledge and perceptions of how the world is constructed, which are highly subjective. "We are social beings who construe the world according to our values and perceptions; thus, our biographies are central to what we see and how we interpret it. Similarly in assessment, performance is not 'objective'; rather, it is construed according to the perspectives and values of the assessor" (Gipps, 1999, p. 370). Western science has disconnected spirituality from other aspects of individual and institutional existence, and has embedded belief systems that position reason, truth and logic over faith and spirituality. As spirituality could not be proved scientifically, it was viewed as illogical and unsophisticated and therefore had no place in educational assessment (Bone, 2001). As Ife (1995) states, modern Western society "is essentially secular, and has left little room for notions of the sacred or for spiritual values. This can be seen to have denied one of the most important aspects of human existence" (p. 172). Adams, Hyde and Woolley (2008) add that there is little room within contemporary assessment approaches for the recognition and acknowledgement of the spiritual aspects of the child. They argue that "the spiritual dimension of childhood is not measurable against criterion—referenced attainment targets or inspection criteria; it may be difficult to quantify, but this does not negate its importance" (p. 55).

According to Smith, Teemant and Pinnegar (2004) there are three sources of evidence on which to base assessment inferences: observing and seeing what students do, listening to what students say, and examining what students produce. A spiritual plane adds "feelings", "sensing" or "intuition" as sources of evidence for assessment judgements. Spiritual traits such as wairua, mauri, tapu and mana can be viewed as emanating from people, places and objects, and can be sensed by others. For example, wairua has been described as a personal force field that can be felt and sensed by others. In terms of Kaupapa Māori assessment, it is important to acknowledge one's feelings as well as what one sees and hears and what is produced.

Furthermore, I suspect that spirituality is already an aspect of early childhood education assessment practice if not theory. I say this because I believe teachers often use "gut feelings" or intuition in combination with what they see and hear to assess children's learning and wellbeing. Teachers may not, however, be aware of it or acknowledge it as a spiritual sensing or as a spiritual plane of analysis. I believe also that because spirituality is such a significant feature of Māori ways of knowing and being, Māori tend to recognise it, name it and accept it as part of everyday life. Therefore for many kaiako a spiritual plane of analysis makes sense and is already part of existing, mostly informal assessment practices.

### **He Kupu Whakatepe/Conclusion**

In conclusion, Kaupapa Māori assessment in early childhood education moves beyond culturally situated or culturally responsive perspectives of assessment. It is deeply located within Māori ways of knowing and being. Kaupapa Māori assessment recognises not only the spiritual nature of the worlds that Māori learners inhabit, enact and reflect in their learning, but also recognises, values and protects the spiritual nature of the Māori child. Kaupapa Māori assessment is therefore fundamentally different to current assessment thinking.

This study aimed to make a change for Māori children by challenging, critiquing, questioning, looking for fit, resisting and transforming dominant perceptions of early childhood education and assessment. My objective for the study and the participation of the Case Study participants in the study was to develop assessment framings that better suited Māori children, families, communities and kaiako. Kaupapa Māori assessment has the potential to create educational change for Māori children and address the educational aspirations of Māori people. It therefore is an important agenda for Māori and early childhood education.

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