

Building a localised curriculum in partnership with parents, whānau and tamariki through shared interests and identities.

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Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi engari he toa takitini.

I come not with my own strengths but bring with me the gifts, talents and strengths of my family, tribe and ancestors.

Aotearoa, New Zealand's national early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum* (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2017), is underpinned by sociocultural perspectives and highlights the importance of kaiako partnerships with whānau and the local learning community through its principle of Whānau Tangata – Family & Community. Much literature focuses on the importance and benefits of building these partnerships with whānau as part of the curriculum and programme design, and in supporting the identity, sense of belonging and wellbeing of both tamariki and whānau. This article reflects on stories of whānau-kaiako partnerships in building a localised curriculum. Chelsea is a lead kaiako at *Lil' Seeds*, a small 0-3 years infant and toddler setting in West Auckland with a passion for working in partnership with parents to support positive experiences in the early years and a strong sense of whanaungatanga/relationships in the learning community. Julia, a lecturer with New Zealand Tertiary College (NZTC), has a personal connection to this setting, as her son Louie attended for two years, before transitioning to the sister centre, *Wilde Meadows*, in Oratia. Together, Chelsea and Julia reflect on how whānau, child and kaiako interests and identity can contribute to meaningful, authentic, localised curriculum.

Examining a localised curriculum in the early learning settings in Aotearoa

The Ministry of Education places great emphasis on the curriculum in New Zealand being tailored to the learners and the local learning community. Both *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2017), and *The New Zealand Curriculum* (MoE, 2007) address the importance of children learning in the context of their social and cultural environments. "Your local curriculum should be unique and responsive to the priorities, preferences and issues of your community and your people" (MoE, 2019, p. 5). Learning should be personalised, and tailored to consider

students' strengths, interests, identities, languages, cultures, aspirations, dispositions and skills, as well as those of their whānau (MoE, 2019; MoE, 2017). A localised curriculum is also discussed in the Aotearoa context as fostering the Tikanga Māori concept of tangata-whenuatanga, "place-based, sociocultural awareness and knowledge" (MoE, 2011, p. 3) and is often linked to the notion of whakapapa – one's lineage, genealogy and ancestral connections, including whakapapa connections to whenua (land) and Ngā Atua (gods) (Mead, 2016; MoE, 2017). Penetito (2009) emphasises that the objective of place-based education is to "develop in learners a love of the environment, of the place where they are living, of its social history, of the biodiversity that exists there, and of the way in which people have responded and continue to respond to the natural and social environments" (p.16). Wilson (2018) adds the idea that through place-based education, children will learn in a meaningful context how to care for the world in which they live.

Utilising the *Te Whāriki Online Local Curriculum Design Guide* (MoE, n.d.), the following anecdotes from whānau and kaiako from the West Auckland learning communities of *Lil' Seeds* and *Wilde Meadows* share authentic partnerships, relationship building and contributions of individual and collective identities to centre programme planning and curriculum design. Whilst these stories are unique to the children, teachers, family and community members of these specific settings, the aim is to share these stories to inspire partnerships in your settings relevant to your learning communities, and to realise that working in power-sharing partnerships (Hadley & Rouse, 2018) with whānau can be immensely rewarding and beneficial for all parties involved.

Getting to know our people and place

The Ministry of Education (2017) encourages kaiako to get to know their people and their place, by looking at members of the learning community's identity, language and culture to inform and add value to programme planning and curriculum design. "Knowledge, perspectives and tikanga of mana whenua" (MoE, n.d., para.3) are also important when designing a localised curriculum. Tikanga Māori concepts of whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, kotahitanga and rangatiratanga contribute to the overall culture of the setting, coming together to create a sense of:

Pūmanawatanga – the overall tone, pulse and morale [of the setting] by embracing the mana of each person, drawing on individual and collective strengths, seizing opportunities to enable potential, honouring uniqueness, and celebrating success for all students (MoE, 2015, para.3).

Core values at both *Lil' Seeds* and *Wilde Meadows*, include kaitiakitanga, tangata-whenuatanga, kotahitanga, aroha, rangimarie and whanaungatanga. Community and relationship building are key to the families enrolled in these settings, and a love of the land and the great outdoors are dominant themes with locals. Both settings are located in West Auckland, at the base of the Waitakere Ranges. Kaiako and whānau come from Piha, Oratia, Glen Eden, Titirangi and the surrounding areas. Many in the local community here have a strong focus on sustainability, being kaitiaki of Papatūānuku. Whilst *Te Kawarau a Maki* are the original ancestors and guardians of the whenua here, the local area is also renowned for its history of orchards dating back to early colonial times when European settlers obtained lands in the area. The local Parrs Park which many of the children frequent, is named after the pioneering orchardist and nurseryman of the time, Thomas Parr.

It makes sense then, that many of the tamariki and whānau members of *Lil' Seeds* and *Wilde Meadows* share interests in and around the whenua. Many of the families in these West Auckland communities share commonalities of a love of nature, sustainability and environmentalism. Whilst not all have a strong knowledge of the histories, whakapapa and pūrakau/pakiwaitara of the local whenua, most care deeply for this place they call home. Additionally, many of the kaiako within these settings have been working as part of this community for years and share common interests. Speaking with kaiako at *Lil' Seeds* and *Wilde Meadows*, kaiako identity, strengths and interests lie within gardening, hiking, environmentalism, fishing, farming and horticulture, and spending time exploring te taiao, the natural environment. These interests contribute strongly to the emergent interests and planned curriculum at both settings, as new interests and learning moments arise in the most unsuspecting of places. The kaiako are a tight knit community of friends and family members, who have been working together to support their communities for a sustained period of time. The motto the 'village raising the child' is a familiar feeling in these settings, which contributes to the centre whānau feeling a strong sense of their children's early childhood care and education settings as being an extension of their own homes and families – a 'home away from home' philosophy.



Image 1: Julia (co-author) and son Louie weed and re-set the worm farm and vegetable garden for planting during Matariki with Louie's *Lil' Seeds* friends.



Image 2: Children at *Wilde Meadows* walk to their neighbouring orchard & explore the environment together.



Image 3: Whilst visiting the orchard, children explore the fruit stalls in the shopfront and taste the produce.



Image 4 & 5: Kaitiaki come in many forms! One dad at *Wilde Meadows* pilots the Police Eagle Helicopter, a visit from the team creates a special opportunity for discussion around what being a kaitiaki means in our community.



Image 6: *Wilde Meadows* kaiako, tamariki & whānau visit the hāngī site for our Matariki celebrations at a local farm in the Waitakere Ranges.

Deciding on learning priorities

Tamariki, kaiako and whānau contribute ideas to the setting, sharing a wealth of knowledge, expertise, and mana to strengthen children's holistic learning opportunities. The following story highlights the benefit of strong whānau and kaiako relationships in supporting the emergent localised curriculum.

Recently, my son and I discovered some frogs and frog spawn at his grandparent's farm. He had been talking about wanting a pet frog for some time, so we decided to collect some eggs to nurture into tadpoles, and eventually frogs. Upon sharing about our weekend with his kaiako at *Wilde Meadows*, Caitlin (kaiako) became excited to hear about Louie's adventures on the farm, and shared that the centre would soon be getting some chicken eggs in time for spring. The intention of supporting children's emergent interest in animals, as well as social and emotional competencies, was a current focus of the centre's group planning. It was hoped that the children would learn to care for the chickens, as well as benefit from learning about environmentalism, sustainability, recycling, composting and more. I offered the centre some of the frog eggs we had collected, and Caitlin suggested that the children could go on a trip to collect an unused frog tank later that week. Following the children's interests, we had set the ball in motion for an incredible learning journey around spring, frogs, lifecycles and being kaitiaki of Papatūānuku, Tane Mahuta and ngā kararehe o te taiao. I shared the following photos with the teachers via EDUCA, and followed up with a link to the *NZFrogs* website on how to care for frogs and tadpoles.



Image 7: Louie holds a Green & Golden Bell Frog on his grandparents farm.



Image 8: Frog spawn collected from the pond at the farm.



Image 9: A week later, the frog spawn hatched and baby tadpoles were observed by the tamariki and kaiako at *Wilde Meadows*.

Plan our response and Make it happen

Within days of us touching base and dreaming up a plan, Caitlin and the team had set up a space at *Wilde Meadows* for the children to learn about and observe the frog eggs, and soon-to-be tadpoles. Discussion with tamariki prompted an emergent curriculum to be put in place, linking in with other core elements of programme planning, and the variety of interests, strengths and dispositions children demonstrated within their learning community. One teacher drew a huge outdoor mural of the frog's lifecycle for the children to explore. Another supported a child who wanted to make a frog puppet, and still, another supported a messy play project to create some lily pads and flower decorations for the frog display. One parent donated a collection of story and reference books on frogs, which prompted children to revisit and reflect on their funds of knowledge around frogs, eggs and lifecycles. Other children used these books to explore their working theories around frogs, drawing pictures of the animal's anatomy, habitats and lifecycle. The result was a spontaneous curation of planned and emergent learning experiences, supported by kaiako and whānau through a range of meaningful teaching and learning strategies. Play provocations were provided to learn more about children's ideas, and planned teacher-led experiences were provided to build on from children's current level of understanding, content knowledge and abilities. Children's voices were captured, and learning documented, to support children to revisit these at a later date.

My son Louie explored his working theories about frogs and his newly acquired knowledge of the word 'camouflage' in his artworks at home, which I later shared with the teachers at *Wilde Meadows*. Kaiako began to hear language from children including 'metamorphosis', 'amphibian' and 'lifecycle' and they discussed their observations of the eggs and tadpoles in great detail. Mat time kōrero moved to focus on the changes children would soon see in the tadpoles, and support their hypotheses, sharing knowledge, and to work through the theories they had about these exciting creatures. Comparisons were made to other animal's lifecycles, and the chicken eggs that would soon be arriving at *Wilde Meadows*.



Image 10: The tadpole habitat display, complete with lifecycle wheel, magnifying glass, images and basic information.



Image 11: Steven (Kaiako) initiated a visual exploration of the frogs lifecycle, from spawn to tadpoles, froglets to frogs, prompting new language and concepts to emerge.

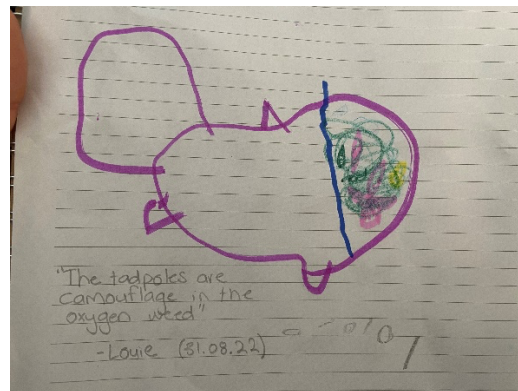


Image 12: Louie (3) explores his working theories around newly learnt scientific terms in his artworks at home, "The tadpoles are camouflage in the oxygen weed".

Find out what and how tamariki are learning and Review and respond

Throughout this emergent process, kaiako have continued to spontaneously review, reflect upon and intentionally respond to children's evolving learning interests, needs, strengths and dispositions. Whilst some children have shown a keen interest in further exploration of frogs and their lifecycles through art, others have taken on the role of caregivers, and focus on finding food for the tadpoles each day. Various skills, interests, dispositions and strengths of the children are carefully considered by their kaiako as they each gain value from this emergent group interest. Kaiako come together to plan, brainstorm and reflect upon prior and future learning possibilities, continuing to touch base with and update the centre learning community about progress, empowering continual engagement and input from whānau, through daily kōrero and online platform updates. Each of the teachers own interests are supported throughout the process, as kaiako share their own enthusiasm and ideas for future learning possibilities. Perhaps most challenging, but also most excitingly, no one knows where this interest may lead next. That is the beauty of a truly emergent, child-led, localised curriculum – the possibilities are endless.

Conclusion

In supporting an authentic localised curriculum, relationships and a sense of partnership must be at the forefront of your setting's philosophy. The image of the parent as a valuable contributor and 'expert' in their own child's learning and developmental is crucial, and supports exciting possibilities for learning that kaiako may not have thought of themselves. Seeing whānau and tamariki as tāonga, with unique mana, knowledge and skills that can be celebrated and embraced in your programme is well worth the effort in building these relationships, and make for a rewarding learning journey for all involved. Capturing whānau involvement and engagement may look different in each setting. However, that is part of the unique identity of your learning community and what sets in motion an opportunity to conceptualise an exciting, meaningful localised curriculum, that supports the best possible learning outcomes for tamariki.

Glossary

Aroha – love

Hāngī – traditional method of cooking food on hot stones under the ground

Kaiako – teacher

Kaitiakitanga/kaitiaki – guardianship/guardian

Kotahitanga – unity, common goal/vision

Kōrero – discussion, talking

Mana – the power of being, authority, prestige, spiritual power

Mana whenua – people of the land, indigenous people

Manaakitanga – hospitality, kindness, showing respect to others, manaaki is the act of lifting and supporting those around you

Matariki – māori new year

Ngā Atua Māori – māori gods, ancestors with continuing influence

Ngā kararehe – animals

Papatūānuku – mother earth, wife of Ranginui

Pūmanawatanga – “a beating heart” – in the context of education, the overall tone, pulse and morale of a setting

Pūrakau/pakiwaitara – māori myths and legends, stories of the histories of māori

Rangatiratanga – self-determination, leadership, authority

Rangimarie – peace

Tamariki – children

Tāne mahuta – god of the forest

Tangata-whenuatanga – place-based, sociocultural awareness and knowledge of the whenua or land we come from

Tāonga – a gift/a highly prized object or possession; includes socially or culturally valued resources, both tangible and intangible

Te Kāwarau a Maki – iwi (tribe) of the Oratia region

Te taiao – the natural environment

Tikanga Māori – Māori ways of doing, including practices, customs and rituals

Tīpuna/tupuna – ancestors, forbearers

Whakapapa – lineage, genealogy, ancestry

Whānau – extended family, multigenerational group of relatives or group of people who work together on and for a common cause

Whanaungatanga – kinship, sense of whānau connection – a relationship through shared experiences and working together that provides people with a sense of belonging

Whenua – land (also, placenta)

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