



Commentary

A Māori perspective of well-being

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When asked ‘what is Māori well-being?’, my immediate reaction aligns to the Whānau Ora Taskforce (2009) which defaults to the collective perspective of *whānau ora* where Māori well-being recognises the state of the *whānau* (family) and in so doing also recognises the *toi-ora* (well-being) of the individuals that make up each *whānau*. With this in mind, we must recognise that only the individuals that make up the *whānau* can honestly determine their *whānau ora* (Lawson-Te Aho, 2010; Whānau Ora Taskforce, 2009; Metge, 1995), but this does not exclude non-*whānau* members from gaining insights into the well-being of both the individuals and subsequently their *whānau* (Workplace Wellbeing, 2001). Lawson-Te Aho (2010) believes that “[t]he mental, emotional, physical and spiritual state is shaped, maintained and contained in context of whānau relationships” (p. 11). This places great emphasis on the social domain of relationships and offers insights as to how we as parents and family member can learn about our *whānau*, and therein our *whānau ora*.

The New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whariki*, advocates for connections, relationships and partnerships with *whānau* Māori (Ministry of Education [MoE], 1996), but these are often broached through a Western lens of relationship building. If we truly and authentically wish to connect with Māori, then the key lies within the evolution of these relationships and partnerships into *whānaungatanga*, which is a more intimate and personalised connection. *Whānaungatanga* is not limited to blood quantum associated with *whānau*, *hapu* (clan or sub-tribe), or *iwi* (tribe), but embraces other connections founded upon shared experiences, interests, commonalities, geographic proximity, and philosophies. Durie (2006) believes that *whānaungatanga* can be utilised to understand the realities of the *whānau* in relation to health and nutrition, happiness, work, home, sports, and entertainment, but there are also cultural facets that influence the *whānau ora* and *toi-ora*. My *whānau* incorporated Durie’s points and the cultural facets by raising our children to be dual citizens of Aotearoa/New Zealand. To achieve this we draw on the proverb ‘*E tipu, e rea*’:

<i>E tipu e rea mō ngā rā o tō ao</i>	Grow and branch forth for the days
<i>Ko tō ringa ki ngā rākau a te</i>	destined to you
<i>Pākehā</i>	Your hands to the tools of the Pākehā
<i>Hei ora mō te tinana</i>	for the welfare of your body
<i>Ko tō ngākau ki ngā tāonga a ō</i>	Your heart to the treasures of your
<i>tīpuna Māori</i>	ancestors
<i>Hei tikitiki mō tō māhuna</i>	as adornments for your brow
<i>Ko tō wairua ki tō atua,</i>	Your spirit to god,
<i>Nānā nei ngā mea katoa</i>	who made all things
(na Ta Apirana Ngata, 1949, cited in MoE, 1996, p. 3)	

Our *tamariki* (children) and *mokopuna* (grandchildren) are of *Te Whānau-a-Apanui*, *Ngāti Porou* (Eastern tribes of New Zealand), Danish and Irish descent,



and we encourage them to celebrate and embrace their multiple identities so that these serve as the foundations upon which they can construct their future by being able to define themselves (*mana tangata*), know where they belong (*mana whenua*), and where their *mana* (rights, social status, and lineage) guides their choice (*mana Atua*). We saw the success of these teachings when Jade (at age 8) defined herself not as Māori or *Pākehā* but 'Makeha'; and Hunter (at age 3) who corrected his teacher from Taranaki, a Western region of New Zealand, by using his *Ngati Porou pepeha* (a Māori form of identity). We role model *tikanga* (ethical and sensitive practices) to expose them to culturally appropriate practices within *Te Ao Māori* so that they can immerse themselves in their *korowai* Māori (sense of Māori-ness), but we also discuss the core values that underpin *tikanga* as these are universal where they can apply them more broadly in their lives as global citizens (Henderson, 2000). We ensure educational achievements are recognised and celebrated so that their attitude toward learning remains positive and progressive; and we collectively finance their educational opportunities so that none of them miss out.

We also encourage their passions and interests, one of which is *kapa haka* (Māori performing arts). As a result of this, all of our children's passion for *kapa haka* peaked when 'Tu Te Manawa Maurea' (a *kapa haka* group) of *Whangara Mai Tawhiti* (a settlement on the East Coast of the North Island of New Zealand) performs their *Pukeko poi* (poi dance about a bird). While watching our *tamariki* singing along we realised they became a lot more animated and vibrant when singing the section '*puku katakata*' (belly laugh), which led to a probing conversation. We discovered that they loved it because it was fun and made them want to laugh. We also discovered that laughter for them was a rarity due to the stresses and nature of the competitive world they live in. *Whakana mai nga whatu* (eyes wide open) – all this time we had assumed our *tamariki-mokopuna* to be happy because we were active in their lives. What we had overlooked was that their lives existed beyond our *whānau* and that while they are the centre of our world, we were but a part of theirs.

This humbling realisation led us to focus on their *toi-ora* and our *whānau ora* in two ways: the first is our *whānau ora* where we now use *puku katakata* as a family bonding time full of laughter, meaningful conversations, great food, and expressions of *aroha* (love). The second is their *toi-ora* where we are attempting to understand their world and lives beyond our *whānau*. We are becoming 'tech savvy' and have started using social media to learn their languages and networks; we have adapted our home cultures and environment so that their non-Māori friends will feel welcome; we are trying our hardest to change our palates to eat more culturally diverse foods and in so doing we are learning to appreciate the cultures they hail from; and finally we are learning to hear and listen to their voices more so that we understand who they are growing into, and how that growth will evolve our *whānau ora* to better fit modernity.

This journey of awakening, realisations, and epiphanies has not been easy but it is necessary because we now understand that it is through our children's *toi-ora* that our *whānau-ora* will be sustained, enhanced and will thrive; thus, changing our approach now to truly include their *toi-ora* can only benefit our *whānau-ora* more.

Toi tu o tatou tamariki, ka ora ai to tatou whānau
When our children endure, so too will our family



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