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Partners in He Taonga

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Nuhisifa Seve-Williams spoke to Rachel Harper, an early childhood teacher at the Glen Eden Kindergarten on the Te reo Māori: He Taonga mō ā tātou mokopuna: A teaching and learning guide (He Taonga teaching and learning guide) and its utility in supporting the teaching of te reo Māori in the kindergarten. Rachel supported the Raranga Reo research project that led to the revised teaching and learning guide. She was visited again to see how te reo Māori and tikanga Māori were being enhanced through the use of the He Taonga teaching and learning guide.

Rachel has worked at Glen Eden Kindergarten for four years. She is bicultural in her teaching practice and has been learning te reo Māori for five years. She is passionate about te reo Māori and this passion is reflected throughout the kindergarten in their notice boards and art work of the children centre and in her mihi:

Kia ora, Ko Ngāti Raukawa te iwi, No Pōneke ahau. Kei Glen Eden Kindergarten ahau e mahi ana. Ko Rachel Harper taku ingoa.

Rachel spoke about the teachers' commitment to The Treaty of Waitangi and how this commitment is put into practice at the kindergarten:

Te Reo Māori is reflected throughout the kindergarten on wall displays, notice boards, children's artwork and the children's portfolios. Tamariki are supported and encouraged by kaiako to speak te reo and learn about tikanga Māori. The teachers are committed to The Treaty of Waitangi. They recognise the Māori language is a taonga and use it daily to keep it alive. Whānau involvement is a priority for our Māori and Pacific families so we have developed a strong partnership with them. We listen to their aspirations for their child to grow up knowing their culture, their language and have a strong sense of identity.

All new families that start kindy are asked to make a paper korowai with feathers to display on our Tūrangawaewae wall. The parents write down their family tree and a family photo hangs next to their child's korowai. The korowai is a symbol of whanaungatanga-kinship, a relationship through shared experiences and working together. A child feels a sense of belonging to our centre and knows that we respect their cultural traditions and practices. Last year we had a hangi during matariki, this is the first time that we had an event after the centre closed but it was very successful and many of the parents attended with their children. The parents were invited to mihi and they got up with their families and did a mihi to each other. It was an emotional event as many of the parents had not done it before, but they embraced the challenge with enthusiasm. I have found that new migrant parents are more enthusiastic about learning te reo...the He Taonga book has been useful in helping staff to write their own mihis.

Mana reo - communication has been identified as a learning outcome for all tamariki. Which is why we are encouraging children to learn their mihi. Tamariki are supported to create their own mihi. During mat time they are invited to share their mihi with other children. Our male teacher Daniel carved a talking stick or tokotoko, which is used at mat-times to get everyone's attention. To foster oral language we are teaching children how to mihi and introduce themselves in Te Reo Māori while holding the talking stick. Other children are encouraged to Manaakitanga -be a good listener and sit quietly when another child is holding the talking stick.

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Kaiako use simple commands titiro, turituri and whakarongo and appropriate body language or actions to match the words.

Tamariki are also taught the importance of preserving the natural environment and in one instance they were shown how plants like the harakeke (flax) are preserved. In teaching the children the importance of the harakeke plant the teachers made connections to the whānau (family) by showing the tamariki what the leaves of the plant represented. The inner young leaves were the baby of the family the middle leaves were the mum and dad and the outer leaves were the grandparents. Hence only the outer leaves were cut for weaving. Tamariki were first taught to weave with paper and then using harakeke. The children's whariki were used as resources to learn colours in te reo. Rachel explained that the tamariki's activities are noted in their weekly newsletter and sent home so that their whānau was aware of what their children were learning in terms of *tikanga Māori*. The centres emphasis on extending children's experiences of te reo Māori in practice was evident in the recent celebration of Māori language week. Rachel shared:

This year our centre staff made a conscious effort to improve their use of te reo and to extend our children's knowledge of te reo Māori from our usual practice of learning waiata and greetings to one where children were able to see and touch some tangible elements of Māori culture. We took the children to the Auckland museum to deepen their awareness of Te ao Māori. We wanted our tamariki to see and experience the Māori cultural taonga following on from the creation of our tokotoko. Our main focus was on Māori culture, carvings and mythology. Our learning outcomes for the day was mana reo (the languages and symbols of children's own and other cultures are promoted and protected; mana whenua (making connections between places and things in their word; and tataiako (the cultural identities and heritage of our Māori tamariki is affirmed and validated.

The tamariki experiences at the museum included a creation story told by museum staff inside a wharehau (meeting house). As the children knew the story they were able to actively engage in the telling of the story. The children also learnt a haka and they reciprocated by singing their favourite waiata - *Tu Tiri mai nga iwi*. The experiences that the children had at the museum Rachel noted linked in well to the activities they were learning from in the He Taonga teaching and learning guide. I asked Rachel her thoughts on the He Taonga teaching and learning guide to which she replied:

The teaching guide is a great source for everyday greetings and farewells and we share words/kupu by adding phrases to our welcome board for parents to read each day. I try to use a different greeting/farewells every day and encourage staff to give it a go and make it a part of their everyday conversation. Relievers and student teachers have commented on how easy it is to use the resource book. The content and colour coded pages are ka pai.

Last year in 2016 we read a lot of the Peter Gossage stories, including In The Beginning and Maui catches the Sun, Maui goes fishing. We noticed that children identified with the Māori gods- Maui, Ranginui, Papatūānuku, Tangaroa, and Tāwhirimātea and many more. They were able to retell these stories in their own words and draw pictures of their favourite kaitiaki or guardians. Their knowledge of Māori mythology is impressive and parents and whānau gave us positive feedback. The teacher guide was useful to learn about the environment for example: Kei te ua! - It is raining!. He aha ngā tae o te purehewa? - what colour is the butterfly?

For learning stories that involve Māori children, I often refer to the resource book for kupu/words and talk to the parents to get feedback and they are motivated to use simple phrases at home. I am confident to use most of the sections in the teaching guide to plan activities and share my success with my peers. At Glen Eden Kindy,

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we are a community of learners and appreciate that Māori parents and whānau are the experts in Māori culture and tikanga. We therefore value their contribution to our curriculum. Evidence of this is Matariki 2017.

Matariki 2017 celebration was a huge success! Families enjoyed feasting on traditional Māori food (hangi), fried bread, mussel chowder, a few salads and sweet treats. Our Māori whānau provided the kai cookers and they stayed all day to peel all the vegetables, prepare the meat, cook the hangi and serve the kai to our manuhiri guests. The children tautoko supported our Matariki dinner with a beautiful waiata and stayed behind to clean up at the end of the night. Our kaumatua Henry blessed our food and shared a story about Matariki. It was a humbling experience for us all and our children and families thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Using te reo Māori in the centre has its own challenges but they continue to persevere. Rachel adds that in terms of staff at the centre they have also been working on extending their use of te reo Māori:

We wanted to extend our greetings and as Kaiako I would say morena to other staff but they would need to find another greeting to reply back to me like ata marie. This simple exercise encourages staff to think outside the normal greetings that they are familiar with. Every day we change the greetings. The same is used for saying good bye also.

Rachel commented that the *Te reo Māori: He Taonga mō ā tātou mokopuna* book and accompanying *Te reo Māori: He Taonga mō ā tātou mokopuna: A teaching and learning guide* comes at a time when there was a greater awareness of Māori learners. The resources were useful in meeting Tataiako aspirations for Māori learners. Tataiako is a government initiative designed for teachers in early childhood education (ECE) services and in primary and secondary schools, to support teachers in their work to personalise learning for and with Māori learners, to ensure they achieve education success as Māori.

The *Te reo Māori: He Taonga mō ā tātou mokopuna: A teaching and learning guide* alongside the *Te reo Māori: He Taonga mō ā tātou mokopuna* book was used to develop a karakia for the kindergarten. While the kindergarten is still working on the karakia these two resources alongside a number of other Māori te reo resources have added value to the teaching of te reo to tamariki, their whānau and teachers.