



# WHAKAWHANAUNGATANGA IN A CULTURALLY DIVERSE ECE COMMUNITY

Hagley Community Preschool Teacher Led Innovation Project, final report.

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## Executive Summary

1. This research report is the outcome of a *Teacher Led Innovation Fund* (MoE) inquiry project where teachers at the Hagley Community Preschool, investigated the concept of whanaungtanga with reference to the many diverse cultures who are part of the centre. The purpose was to identify the core components of changes to practice as we learned about tamariki and whānau. We focussed on who they were, where they were from, and what was important to them in terms of their aspirations for tamariki. We sought to make them welcome and comfortable in the centre as well as in their new country. The project set out to identify the ways in which we;

- Hear the aspirations that every parent has for their child, with a focus on migrants and those from refugee backgrounds,
- Ensure parental aspirations and dreams for their children help to shape our curriculum,
- Make changes in our practice that influence the wellbeing of all tamariki, to promote learning and development.

After the inconceivable tragedy of the Mosque shootings in Christchurch we were more than ever motivated to fulfil the purpose of our inquiry.

2. Participants were five qualified early childhood kaiako and some of the children and families in the centre. Ethical considerations focussed on the teaching code of professional responsibility *Our Code: Our Standards* (Education Council New Zealand, 2017) and the ethical guidelines and policy of Hagley College and Hagley Community Preschool. Data took the form of tamariki learning stories and critically reflective teaching stories written by the team. The Hikairo Schema (Macfarlane et al, 2019) informed the methodological framework and we used this to analyse our data. We also found the Poutama in the Hikairo Schema (p. 32) useful to frame and organise the report.

3. The findings and discussion sections demonstrate our journey from the bottom to the top of the Hikairo Schema Poutama. First, we discuss the role of critical reflection in the personal and professional responses of kaiako when confronted with challenges to philosophy and practice. Reflection indicated how vital the role of trust was in the creation of genuine relationships and partnerships. Kaiako also quickly understood that they needed to put aside resistance that came from their sense of self-as-a-teacher holding the knowledge. They rapidly realised that in this context, they did not.

Second was the desire to encounter new learning and knowledge. The Centre response and compassion toward the families affected in the Mosque attacks (50% of their families identify as Muslim) engendered newly intimate trust relationships that propelled families and teachers into partnership. Kaiako became bolder about asking direct questions, and families were pleased to be asked and willing to explain their beliefs.

The third tier of learning found kaiako reading more about the various Muslim religion and learning in depth about the concepts of halal and haram. They wanted to understand what these beliefs mean to different Muslim groups and wanted to ensure respect within the centre context. As well, they worked with interpreters and with families to explore and enhance knowledge of the many home languages of the centre, making it clear that all languages were welcome and celebrated. Kaiako developed understandings about why certain things are important to parents.

The fourth tier came from the application and embedding of their new knowledge and understandings in their day-to-day programme. They found ways to ensure that the accommodation of parental wishes was clearly part of the curriculum as advocated by Te Whāriki and notable in their everyday practice. This section uses the centre stories of three children from diverse backgrounds and cultures to demonstrate the influences on their learning and in turn, how the children's understandings inspire changes in the curriculum.

The last section explores leadership, and notes that each teacher has taken personal and profession control of this essential aspect of teaching.

4. This early childhood centre community includes kaiako, tamariki, and whānau, and together they enjoy a collaborative authentic partnership. A commitment to sustaining the needs of all the community in this culturally, economically, and socially diverse early childhood centre is a moral and ethical responsibility and requirement for anyone who practices or desires to practise as a kaiako. Outcomes for kaiako, tamariki, and whānau were many and varied. For kaiako, genuine relationships are compassionate relationships; entrenched in practice is team communication, support, aroha, and respect. Whanaugatanga, manaakitanga and wairuatanga are the foundation of their team philosophy. These values contribute to a teaching environment that overflows with learning for all. For tamariki, it is important that their mana is retained, their cultural identity celebrated and nurtured, and they have the time and space to develop understanding that there are a wide variety of languages and cultures in the world. Supported and encouraged within their own areas of expertise, children extend their mana as they become cultural leaders in the centre. For whānau, the widening of cultural and social circles has seen mutual understanding. Enrichment occurs as individuals, respected, and supported by teachers, contribute to writing their scripts on children's stories and pictures, speak in their language and see their tamaiti continuing to speak their own language if they wish. All things Māori are of great interest to families from other countries as they begin to use words in te reo Māori and find out about the tikanga and bi-cultural histories of Aotearoa. Trusting relationships means that families know that kaiako respect for family and cultural aspirations for their tamariki remain endemic in the centre.

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the study

### Christchurch Mosque Attacks: Impetus from an extra-ordinary experience.

*On the 25<sup>th</sup> March 2019, all New Zealand were shocked to learn that two Mosques in Christchurch had been attacked. Many of our New Zealand Muslim community were severely injured and fifty had died. This tragedy directly affected our preschool both in the immediate aftermath as we went into lockdown, and in the long term, as fifty percent of whānau are part of the Muslim faith. Preschool whānau were amongst those who were injured and those who escaped.*

*Hagley Community Preschool management and kaiako worked to support these families over the ensuing months. Several of the men/fathers were injured and in hospital at this time and many of the women/mothers did not have driver's licences. We provided transport for some children to and from the centre, dropping mothers at the hospital along the way. We collected contributions from preschool whānau and other members of our community, and facilitated the distribution of community monetary donations to enable tamariki to continue attending preschool. We stepped in to supply food for tamariki when overwhelmed parents and those lacking an income due to injury, had not been able to, we also extended booking times for children without extra charge. Our trust-based relationships began to strengthen and our new knowledge about these whānau and their lives meant that our relationships with them and tamariki were becoming notably authentic. We were also available to have conversations with any whānau member who indicated they needed support. Our day-to-day conversations took on a more compassionate, personal flavour. Encouraged by these deepening relationships, we knew that we had a lot more to learn.*

*This tragic event strengthened and affirmed our desire to step outside of regular practice and connect to a wider range of knowledge and teaching strategies. By joining together to celebrate all of our backgrounds, and experiences of life, we embarked on a journey to build trust and respect with our whānau, with a specific focus on the best possible outcomes for our tamariki.*

*In March 2019 the kaiako team had begun an application to be involved in a Teacher Led Innovation Project. Our project ended with the backdrop of the final court case a year later. This was a further time when many in the centre community were feeling vulnerable once again and we responded to this need immediately by supporting the community in any way that was needed. This report tells the story of Hagley Community Preschool's kaiako journey of learning at a time of significant cultural and religious enlightenment in the region.*

### Why we undertook this inquiry

We investigated whether a stronger emphasis on building whanaungatanga with our diverse cultural community, through relationships and learning conversations between kaiako and

whānau, could impact on and influence our early childhood education (ECE) curriculum in ways that directly support tamariki as competent multilingual learners. We were also interested to find out about the aspirations that migrant and previous refugee whānau hold for their tamariki and to find ways to weave that into our curriculum.

The 2019 Mosque attacks occurred at the time we had just begun to develop the application for this Hagley Community Preschool project. What we learned from this experience contributed significantly to our inquiry journey. Those early experiences of working to support our Muslim community strengthened our desire to be involved in this innovation project. We were confident that our actions over that period had changed our relationships with whānau. It was as if the removal of a veil had occurred. We began to feel as if we were kanohi ki te kanohi, at a personal level. As a result, we wondered if whanaungatanga like this could be sustainable. We also reflected about how we could do things differently and discussed how we needed to take risks, to ensure we understood what our whānau needed and wanted for their children.

Nurturing the cultural identity of tamariki and their whānau has been at the forefront of kaiako practice at Hagley Community Preschool over the past four years. Kaiako beliefs about quality pedagogical practice, expressed through statements in our teaching philosophy are:

- We build strong links between home and preschool because we value the leading role parents play as caregivers and educators of their children.
- Parents/whānau can become actively involved in their child's learning at preschool through having positive relationships with kaiako.
- We encourage parents/whānau to share their home culture and aspirations for their child, to enjoy daily catch-up chats, pop in to visit at any time, and to contribute to their child's assessments.
- We foster respect for cultural diversity through embracing and celebrating the cultural, social, and linguistic diversity of our whānau.

We anticipated that any change in kaiako practices, including the emergence of new practices, would affect our local curriculum in ways that would engage, motivate, and create a positive influence on learner outcomes. We were concerned whānau may be stressed by our inability to meet their expectations. Our expectation was that the Hagley preschool landscape would evolve to become multilingual and multicultural to include children's first languages and culture, as well as English and Māori. We believed the tamariki who would most benefit from this would be the tamariki of migrants and former refugees, particularly those whose first language is other than English and who may be unable to access all their 'funds of knowledge' in our English medium environment.

#### What we wanted to investigate

Our inquiry focussed on discovering ways kaiako can intentionally weave together a curriculum for all tamariki that is enhanced by the aspirations and dreams of their whānau. The first step in our journey was to find out how to strengthen whanaungatanga as

relationships with our culturally diverse whānau to foster trusting and respectful learning conversations.

The research questions that we asked ourselves included:

- How do we hear the aspirations that every parent has for their child, including migrants and those from refugee backgrounds?
- How do we do this when we do not share a common language?
- Do we inadvertently silence voices other than English?
- How can parental aspirations and dreams for their children shape our curriculum?
- What changes do we need to make and what impact does it have on all tamariki' learning and development?

## Chapter 2: Methodology

### Our approach - Reflective / critical inquiry

The project team developed an action plan that mapped out the activities of the project over the period of one year. We planned for two, three monthly cycles of inquiry followed by a three-month period of embedding practice before writing our report. The main approach to kaiako learning was to be reflecting *in* practice, as part of regular day-by-day experiences, and reflecting *on* practice during regular project team meetings.

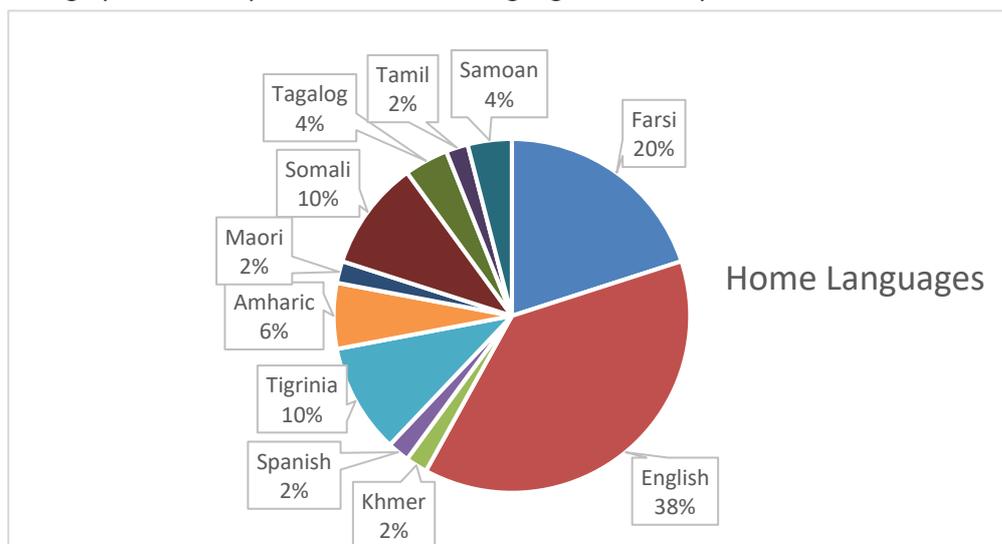
Hagley Community Preschool's teaching approach is socio-cultural in nature and focuses on weaving a child centred curriculum by genuinely knowing our tamariki and incorporating whānau aspirations into the programme. Our philosophy is informed by the learning outcomes of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017). Our approach to developing understandings of whānaungatanga in the preschool followed the familiar process we use for developing understandings about tamariki learning. To facilitate this, we share significant stories at team meetings, contribute different perspectives, and gain shared understandings. At our fortnightly *Teacher Led Innovation Fund* (TLIF) meetings, kaiako shared their documented and ad-hoc teaching stories, sometimes referred to as 'puzzles of practice,' so we could discuss and identify the ways in which we individually build relationships with whānau. We tested and re-tested some of our ideas along the way by 'taking risks' and giving things a go. We found ourselves challenging our own assumptions and deficit thinking to open ourselves to new learning about diverse cultures and ways of being (Lewis, Fickel, Mackey & Breeze, 2018; Magee, 2011). We developed our understandings about why certain things are important to parents and respond accordingly. We maintain open minds and sustain respectful reciprocal relationships in these ways.

### Our background

Hagley Community Preschool (HCP) is located on the Hagley College campus, on the fringe of Christchurch city centre. Hagley College is a well-established distinctive character secondary college. Hagley Community Preschool is governed by a Trust Board consisting of the College principal and members of the College Board of Trustees. Hence, there is a strong relationship of collaboration and support between the two educational entities. The preschool caters for tamariki of College students and staff, as well as those whose parents work in the central city or who choose to come from across the greater city area. Sixty-five percent of our tamariki are from families where at least one parent attends Hagley College as an adult learner.

The preschool group of tamariki consists of twelve under two-year olds and thirty, three- to five-year-old children. Although group sizes differ from day to day, there were and are between 30 and 40 enrolled at any one time. Our preschool community is culturally, linguistically, and socially diverse. We currently have a demographic profile of thirteen different ethnicities and eleven home languages in the preschool. Sixty-two percent of our whānau speak a home language other than English (see Fig.1).

Figure 1. Hagley Community Preschool Home languages, February 2020



The range of ethnicities include 10% who identify as Māori, 6% Samoan, 24% as Pākehā New Zealanders and 60% other ethnicities, 50% of whom are from refugee backgrounds, such as Afghani, Somalian, and Eritrean (see Fig.2).

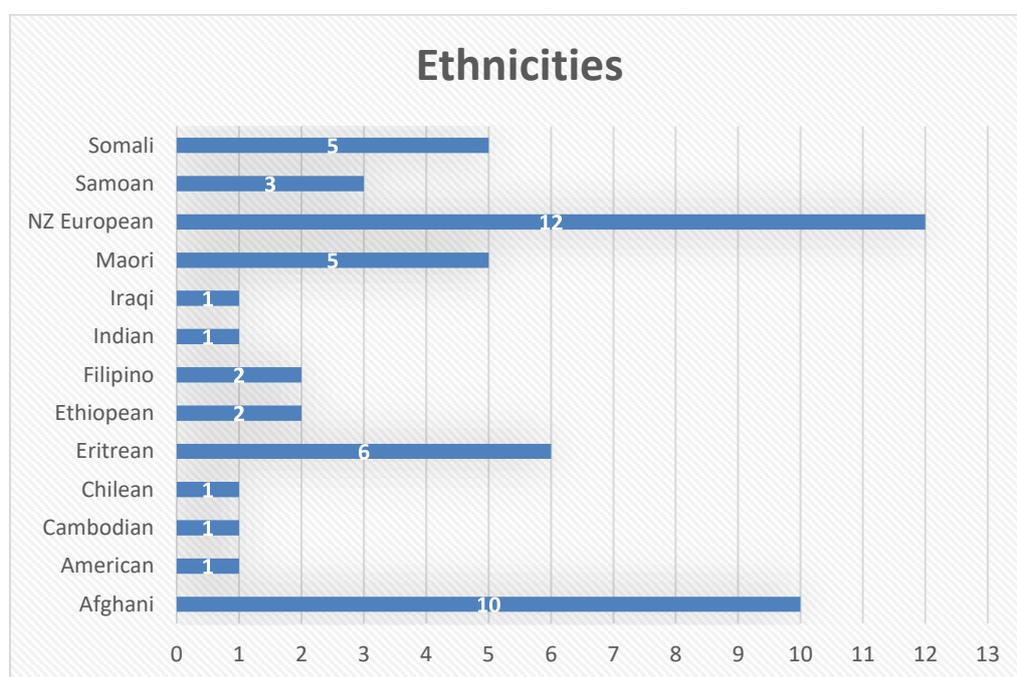


Figure 2. Hagley Community Preschool, Ethnicities, February 2020

Whānau, of New Zealand quota refugee backgrounds, have been supported to settle in Christchurch after spending an initial six weeks in the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre, which assists refugees ease into life and work in New Zealand and includes an early childhood

service. As part of the various families' resettlement plans, parents are encouraged to enrol in education; English language courses in particular. A sizeable number enrol in such programmes at Hagley College and appreciate the benefit of being able to enrol their preschool tamariki in our ECE service on site. Coming to Hagley Community Preschool is the second ECE experience for these tamariki and whānau, although it is the first where they are joining an established ECE community. We are aware that the concept of early education and care services can be unfamiliar to these whānau. Formal early childhood education is often a foreign concept for both tamariki and whānau from refugee backgrounds because most tamariki will, have been cared for by people who are related to them or the community.

### **Ethical considerations**

As fully registered teachers, the entire project team were bound by the code of professional responsibility and standards for teaching found in *Our Code: Our Standards* (Education Council New Zealand, 2017). We also followed Hagley College and Hagley Community Preschool ethical guidelines and policy. To protect the identity of members of our community, names of ākongā and whānau are pseudonyms and any story that might identify a child or family was carefully edited, without changing the purpose of the story, to ensure no person's identities were compromised. Permission was sought from whānau and tamariki to use any imagery and names when the project team planned to use these for public presentations of the project. Written permission for three focus tamariki was attained from the parents to enable their stories to appear in this document.

### **Participants**

Our participants consisted of the project inquiry team, parents, extended whānau and the tamariki through their learning stories.

### **Project team**

The inquiry team were five fully qualified early childhood educators, led by the Director of the centre, who is early childhood qualified and participates in everyday practice as well as ensuring the smooth running of the centre setting. In addition, support of the preschool team occurred with the assistance of an early childhood expert partner, from the University of Canterbury. Detailed below is a brief biography of each teacher:

- Jocelyn Wright, (Project Lead). MTchLn, 2011; BTchLn, 2000; ADipT, 1995; KDip, 1975. My teaching career spans over four decades and includes varied experiences of working within a range of ECE related positions and organisations. I have held the role of Preschool Director at Hagley Community Preschool for the past four years where I enjoy the keen sense of community that comes from having a valued place at Hagley College. My ancestors came to Aotearoa from various parts of England, beginning in the early 1800's through to the most recent arriving around 1910. Many ECE leaders who have shared their wisdom and passion with me over the years have influenced my teaching career. If there was one thing that I have remained passionate about throughout my career, it would be tamariki rights such as, the right to respectful relationships throughout their education and equitable opportunities to be confident in their identity.

- Bee Williamson, DipT (ECE). I proudly whakapapa to the Rekohu (Chatham Islands). My imi is Hokotehi I am Moriori and Māori. I grew up not connected culturally as Moriori or Māori. I have been on a journey both professionally and personally over the past 13 years to learn about my own cultural identity. In 2007, I began study by distance and graduated in 2012. I have mostly taught in community preschools in Canterbury. In 2018, I began to extend my positional leadership and thoroughly enjoy my role at Hagley Community Preschool as the Assistant Director.  
*He tangata, he tangata, he tangata! It is all about the people! Wholehearted relationships with tamariki, whānau, kaiako, and in the wider community are paramount to teaching and learning.*
- Susan Mills, Dip Teaching (ECE), BA. I identify as a New Zealand European. I studied at the Christchurch Teacher's College to receive my teaching diploma. Prior to that, I obtained a Bachelor Degree in the Arts at the University of Canterbury. I enjoy my time working at Hagley Community Preschool as a kaiako and leader of the nursery with the under two-year old children. I have been in this position for twenty-one years. I believe working with our smallest of tamariki and their whanau is about building strong, trusting, caring and respectful relationships.
- Lisa Fleming, K-Dip, BTchLn (ECE). I am an early childhood teacher at Hagley Community Preschool. I am currently studying for a Postgraduate Certificate in TESOL at the University of Canterbury. My interests are language learning in early childhood education, culturally responsive practice, and inclusion. I have worked in a wide variety of early childhood settings over the past 30 years, with a particular interest in unleashing creative minds. Play-based theorists and aspects of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education inspire my philosophy of teaching.
- Badia Sabil, BTchLn (ECE). Level 4 cert. in Te reo Māori. I am originally from Morocco. My passion for the children started within my family. I am the 10th of my siblings and have always been interested in playing with and looking after nephews and nieces. I moved to New Zealand in 2003 to join my husband and begin my family here. In 2004 I started as a volunteer teacher and then decided to study in 2005. I joined Hagley Community Preschool in July 2019 as a nursery teacher. I am passionate about working with tamariki, especially the babies. I am inspired by Maori people and culture and the New Zealand heritage and nature. I value diversity and enjoy working with people from diverse backgrounds. I am multilingual (English, Arabic, French, and a bit of Māori). I use this strength during my working experiences. I have always enjoyed sharing my own culture and enjoyed learning about the culture of others.
- Trish Lewis, (Expert partner). EdD, 2007; MEd, 1999, KDip, 1989. DipT., 1989; BA (Education and Psychology), 1988. Senior Lecturer and Programme Coordinator

BTchLn (ECE), University of Canterbury. I have been involved in early childhood education in several areas and positions for 30 years. My interests lie in enhancing reflection in professional practice using metaphor, genuine university and community partnerships, and inclusion through asset-based programmes. For me, *Relational Pedagogy* is the foundation of teaching and learning. It is my job to ensure that each child's, or adult student's mana remains intact, that they sustain enthusiasm for their learning journey and that I challenge thinking while ensuring that they retain control of their own learning. My role as a teacher is to provide guidance and a pathway.

### ***Parents and whānau***

All tamariki enrolled at the centre and their whānau, were integral to the project. Their involvement included the use of learning stories, as kaiako recorded outcomes for tamariki. As well, recorded in their critically reflective teaching stories by kaiako was the work of enhancing relationships between kaiako and whānau. These stories also told of the effects that changed beliefs and knowledge had on kaiako thinking and practices, which in turn enriched their relationships with whānau.

### ***Tamariki***

The recording of the learning of all tamariki continued in their learning stories in alignment with legislative requirements and we used some of these learning stories throughout this document. In addition, three of these tamariki, deliberately chosen as a small focus group for our project, were *Dariosh, Te Arika and Penny*. The rationale behind this choice was because their backgrounds were representative of the diversity of the Preschool. We used the evidence gathered from their learning stories to illustrate many of the outcomes for tamariki. We present below brief contextual information to demonstrate who these tamariki are and where they come from.

- *Dariosh and his Mum came to New Zealand from Afghanistan because of political and personal circumstances. Their home language is Farsi. They came to New Zealand under the Family reunification immigration plan. As they were not quota refugees, they did not attend the Mangere Refugee Centre and were without benefit of the six weeks spent there. They came with no impressions of New Zealand, no English, and immediately settled into the home of their sponsor family, Nahid's mother, brother, and sister-in-law and Dariosh's older cousin. Extended family recommended the preschool for Dariosh as his cousin already attended. Nahid also wanted to attend Hagley College to learn English while her son came to preschool.*
- *Te Arika was twelve months old when he first came to visit the preschool nursery with his whānau (Mama, Papa and Nanny) who, after visiting, decided that the centre was the 'right fit' for them. Te Arika's parents identify as Māori and during that initial visit, they informed us about their wishes for Te Arika to include a culturally sensitive kaupapa. The home language of Te Arika is Māori and he also speaks English.*

- *Penny began at Hagley Community Preschool when she was three years old. Her parents and extended whānau supported this transition, which also included extra visits from Nana who works at the College. Penny's home language is English. Penny is a confident child who is always comfortable to communicate her thoughts ideas and feelings with her peers and kaiako. Her parents, delighted with her exposure to all the cultures and languages, encouraged Penny to teach them at home all that she had learned about other cultures and about the different languages, and words she was learning from her new friends.*

### Data gathering

The study drew on a range of techniques to collect and collate data such as learning stories, meeting minutes, participant observations and informal parent conversations within the centre included written anecdotes, many of which took the form of reflective teaching stories. Formal conversations with parents included asking them to write down, or talk to teachers about their aspirations for their children.

**Learning Stories:** As part of our teaching practice, kaiako write these for all tamariki and whānau on a regular basis. These documents, posted on the online platform, StoryPark™, became a useful source of communication for both teachers and parents. As well, learning stories prove to be an insightful method for attaining data in relation to kaiako practices and tamariki outcomes for the inquiry project.

**Teaching Stories:** Critical reflection is an ongoing part of the individual work of each kaiako. We constructed stories around our teaching that captured kaiako reflection on practice, in particular our work with parents and whānau. This work became valuable data that helped to assess exactly what parents' aspirations were/are for their children. This data contributed to evidence of positive learning and wellbeing outcomes for tamariki. The director of the centre also collected evidence about her role in supporting the team, parents and other whānau in their aspirations for children, as well as their personal everyday life.

**Meetings and workshops:** The teaching team and our critical friend met every second Thursday (except for holiday times) from mid-July 2019 until the country went into Level 4 Covid-19 lockdown during March 2020. Meeting minutes, taken consistently, revealed movement and change in the way we were working with whānau and tamariki both in the centre and through the Covid-19 lockdown period. There were two face-to-face electronic meetings during this time, followed by a professional learning and development day the first week in July as we began work collating, and analysing the data.

Following our usual protocol, the team continued with normal planning and programme meetings. We used the project meeting times to share our teaching stories and learning stories with the group. During these discussions, significant in-depth critical reflection occurred. These included conversations, and sometimes debate, regarding puzzles of practice that had emerged over the previous two weeks. First, we individually shared our personal and professional perspectives and next, collectively, decided on culturally considerate ways forward.

### Methods of analysis.

The first meeting of the team found us looking for a way to order our data. To this end, at the beginning of this project we prepared a sectioned file to collect the data. Conversations also turned to finding a supporting framework to use as a guide for our ideas and interactions. The newly published second version of *The Hikairo Schema* (Macfarlane, Macfarlane, Teirney, Kuntz, Rarere-Briggs, Currie, Gibson & Macfarlane, 2019, p. 32) included a Poutama we decided would be a useful starting point for analysis of data. An additional reason for selecting this Poutama was that the team wanted to maintain their commitment to the principles of *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* while moving their focus to other members of the culturally diverse preschool community. Kaiako diligently filed all documentation as it emerged during the data collection phase, for later analysis.

In March of 2020, we found ourselves affected by the Level 4 Covid-19 New Zealand wide lockdown. This dramatically changed the way we worked with tamariki and whānau as we worked out the most useful methods to continue teaching relationships with on-line methods. Once this period was over, life began to go back to face-to-face teaching, with changes. Once the centre had settled down, we chose a day at the start of July 2020 and put this aside to work together at the beginning of this stage of analysis of our data. With the guidance of our expert partner, we returned to the Poutama in the Hikairo Schema (Macfarlane et al, 2019). We used this to initially colour code some of our individual data into themes. After this exercise, we came together and began a discussion based on what themes we saw emerging from our data. During this conversation, we found consistent ideas coming from the data of the teaching stories of every kaiako. We realized just how far we had come as a team and how much we valued the input of every team member. These themes, in the form of beliefs and practices were many and we recorded them, using the Poutama, as a framework for cultural competency (Macfarlane et al, 2019). This work was documented and put safely aside as we prepared for a second tier of analysis.

In the month of September 2019, we individually re-examined the collection before coming together to share further ideas and interpretation. The project team, using our latest understandings and the themes from the first tier of analysis, unpacked these insights together to identify the key ideas of our learning and our ongoing shifts in practice, as discerned from the data. It was at this point that we decided to use the stories of our three original focus children as a point of significance to demonstrate how all our efforts to *be together* as a diverse cultural community, influences every tamaiti in the centre in a range of affirmative ways. Through this process we identified, as our taonga, the things that we do to enhance what matters most within our Preschool community; our relationships.

The Poutama, as illustrated in the Hikairo Schema (Macfarlane, et al., 2019, p. 32), gave us the titles and organisation for the following examples. These are:

- **Reflecting** on the need to embark on a new learning journey;
- Having a **desire** to encounter new learning and knowledge;
- **Exploring** and enhancing new learning and knowledge;

- **Embedding** and applying new learning and knowledge;
- **Providing** cultural leadership and mentorship to others.

Above, we have highlighted the descriptive words that have proved to be the underpinnings of our practice; demonstrated notably and repeatedly within our copious data collection. Naturally, many of these overlap and integrate. It is not possible to include every single example we found and for the findings' sections in Chapter 3 below, we chose what we believed were the most pertinent examples from our data with which to make our points in each area.

## Chapter 3: Findings and Discussion

### 1. The role of reflection as we embarked on our new learning journey

The purpose of this section is to explore the professional and personal responses of kaiako, when confrontation and challenges to our thinking about practice, as prescribed in Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017), occurred daily. We fully understood that we worked with people from other cultures, including those fleeing from repression and danger in their home countries, and others with alternative ways of being and doing. We examined a series of stories and incidents, as kaiako began to understand that our practice needed to change, not that of the whānau we encountered, nor the tamariki we teach. This realisation came from deeply critical individual and team reflection.

The following reflective teaching story illustrates the first indications of whānau challenges to usual practice. As a team, we grappled internally and externally with the tension between kaiako and whānau, as kaiako found it difficult to come to terms with what we initially perceived as non-trust situations that challenged the way we performed our work.

*Early on, I was confronted to think differently when some parents arrived during lunchtimes and the first thing said was “Did you feed my child?” Parents came in their lunchbreak to join us and everyone said “Isn’t that fabulous that they can join in”. But that’s not why they came. I soon realised that they felt they needed to be there to ensure their children were fed. I watched, and wondered. I could feel the tension these comments caused kaiako and called a meeting to hear what the team were experiencing.*

*As we reflected, I drew on my previous experience living in India and began to relate this to what I saw unfolding. I realised that whānau may have been conflicted with New Zealand ways of encouraging independence. We later realised this was about interdependence. In the staff meeting, we discussed the issue and how kaiako felt as challenges to their practice happened. Discussions ensued around our obligations to regulatory requirements and our philosophies of teaching culminating in an understanding that we needed to adapt. We discussed two simple changes to our practice. One was to adopt the practice of feeding tamariki rather than encouraging independence and to ensure whānau saw that change. We also added an extra teacher at kai times to accommodate the change. (Jocelyn)*

This change and others like it, made a difference to the way that all kaiako interacted with parents and whānau in the centre. We rapidly learned that we had to put ego aside, and to challenge our New Zealand ways of thinking that our way was the only right way, simply because we have been educated as teachers. These understandings were the beginnings of a way to build mutual trust between whānau and kaiako. As relationship trust grew and whānau came to know us better, those who had previously been in refugee camps and/or in war torn countries or poverty-stricken areas, explained that finding sufficient and nourishing food for

their children was exceedingly difficult. Some days, it was impossible and families went without. Therefore, they needed to know for peace of mind that their child had received sufficient food during the day.

### **The power of trustworthy relationships**

Earning the trust of parents in all areas became a primary focus for the team. This was initially difficult in some cases due in part, to the barriers imposed by language differences. Within the centre, at the time that this study took place, there were 11 diverse languages spoken. Language differences and language barriers were not restricted to one specific language. In addition, because most of our parents from other countries are former refugees, most had faced trauma, both in leaving their troubled countries and then confronted by new, confusing, and unexpected ways of life. Kaiako recognised that most of our whānau with refugee backgrounds had their own stories to tell of extraordinary incidents in their previous lives. This helped us to realise that their experiences had a significant impact on how they wanted their children treated. All families need to know that their children will be physically and emotionally safe and happy when they are in an early childhood setting. However, because of previous distressing experiences such as living in fear of their lives, families who had fled their homes were afraid of different possibilities for further ill-treatment. They needed reassurance that their children and the entire family were safe. The following example from a teaching story gives a glimpse of some understanding of why we have differing perspectives of life in New Zealand.

*With a well-established relationship formed, I asked Nahid, one of our parents originally from Afghanistan if she would come with me to a Network meeting at the Ministry of Education to be on a panel of parents to answer two questions. She asked for the questions and for me to write them down for her. I checked in with her closer to the time and she was all set to go. I explained that I could pick her up and take her home and that it will be fun. She asked some questions and one of them was, "Ministry? Government?" I responded casually "Yeah it's at their building but it will be in a room of teachers from other preschools. I will be with you all the time". The next week before the meeting, she came to me and said she couldn't make it. She apologized and handed me a piece of paper that she had written on. They were answers to the questions.*

*Later, I had to reflect on this incident and on my own assumptions, and wondered if a meeting with 'government or ministry' is something that parents with a refugee background would want to attend, due to their understandings about government departments from their own experiences. I wondered if it would feel a safe thing to do considering whānau backgrounds of threats of war and fighting and keeping a low profile from the gaze of any official department. A few weeks later Nahid and I had a conversation where she shared with me that she was a teacher at a school far away from the city. Girls that are 12 years and over are not permitted to have an education in Nahid's country. They heard the Taliban was coming to check their school, so they had*

*to quickly get all the girls out of the school and hide them at the neighbours' homes. They could have been killed and the school would have been taken away if they were found doing this. (Bee)*

The example above is significant in helping kaiako to think otherwise about people's previous lives and the stress of what they may have lived through. In another conversation, one kaiako found herself obligated to reflect on her practice and her approaches to families. Below is an incident that made her aware of ways that she can work with families with greater understanding and with compassion.

*I recently found out that one of our Muslim fathers was subjected to some very unpleasant treatment in his home country. This gives me a greater impetus to find ways to develop trust-based relationships with everyone I interact with. I am beginning to understand that each whānau member who entrusts their child or children with me asks the question, 'Can I trust you?'*

*I now know I need to continue to be aware of power-based dynamics in my work with all families and I think that this has even more resonance when working with families who are former refugees. (Lisa).*

Reflection and discussion within the team brought everyone to the awareness that they consistently work from an asset-based teaching model (Lewis et al, 2018; Stonehouse, 2019). The korero ensured that every kaiako was primed to remember that many families have survived the most harrowing of experiences and have been brave, and fortunate, enough to escape and begin a very new life in our strange and 'other' country. We believe that for every one of us, our private and public challenges to our assumptive thinking demonstrate growth and change in us as a team and in our centre ideology. As we came to be able to communicate better with parents, we all feel privileged that many parents have trusted us enough to voluntarily share frightening personal stories such those above.

## 2: Our desire to encounter new learning and knowledge

Because of the diverse cultural nature of Hagley Community Preschool, we understood that we needed to work to understand and embrace all our many communities. After the Mosque attacks this stood out even more to us as a team. The work we did to ensure whānau had help and support after this horrific experience, meant relationships became closer and more intimate with Muslim families. It was this knowing that triggered an understanding in all of us, that the acquisition of new cultural knowledge working alongside all our whānau was critical. We set out individually and as a team, to deliberately explore the things we came across that we did not know or understand. This initially took some courage and we became bolder about asking direct questions related to cultural understandings.

We thought about our physical environment, and about whether it authentically reflected our families and children. *Te Whāriki* places emphasis on encouraging children to develop “an ability to connect their learning in the early childhood education setting with experiences at home and in familiar cultural communities, and a sense of themselves as global citizens” (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 37). With this in mind, and with team discussion, one of our kaiako wondered if we could have more whānau pictures displayed in the classroom to enable our new tamariki to have a visual link with their parents when their Mum, Dad, Auntie, Uncle or Nannie, could not be physically present. To that end she took photos of parents as they arrived, printed some photos of children, and framed them for display. Confronted by a dilemma, she wrote a reflective teaching story.

*A father who identified as Muslim asked me, “Please do not take a photo of me.” I agreed and thanked him for telling me. He had to go to his job, so I did not have time to talk about this further. Planning to revisit this conversation with Dad when he had time, I did some research about displaying photographs of people identifying as Muslim. I learned that photographs and the displaying of them are not always considered halal (permissible) and to create an image of someone can be problematic, or indeed haram, (meaning prohibited), according to some interpretations of the Muslim faith.*

*Later in the day I asked another parent who identifies as Muslim about this. She told me that in her interpretation of the rules around this issue, it is not acceptable for someone to take photographs of Muslim women and display them in unfamiliar places. She continued telling me that with some Muslim men it can be fifty-fifty as to whether they are okay with this, depending on their interpretation of the Quran. However, she said that it could be okay here at preschool as it is a halal place and therefore a place where photos can be taken and displayed. We all felt honoured to know that this centre is a 'halal place' for some! I also spoke again to the original father. He and his family were of the belief that to have photographs of him and his son displayed at preschool was not appropriate or halal for their family at this time. (Lisa)*

This was all new learning for our teaching team and we realised that there may be other things that we might do inadvertently that could offend any of our whānau. The learning around the photos was important but we also realised that understanding the concepts of *halal* and *haram* were vital to understanding a great deal about ideas around our teaching with tamariki. One of the team thought these concepts had some similar ideological and practical connections to the Māori concepts of *tapu* and *noa*, in-so-far as the association of something considered *halal*, that is associated with something that is deemed *haram*, may be offensive. Most of us thought that *halal* was only connected with food, in particular meat, and we had no knowledge of the concept of *haram*. As a team, we felt that this understanding was a huge step forward in our learning.

With the decision to transport children from their homes to the centre and back after the Mosque tragedy, came the idea that we could institute home-visiting with our newly arrived and enrolling families from refugee or migrant backgrounds to begin to engender authentic relationships. With this in mind, and understanding that sometimes language was initially a

barrier to certain forms of communication, we sought to find a way to translate our ideas to the family. After a great deal of discussion, we decided there needed to be two kaiako on each visit. One would spend the time talking with parents and the other, taking play resources, would spend time playing with the child.

*During our home visit, Yasmeen's father did most of the speaking. He used an application on his phone to translate his words into English. This was very helpful. Yasmeen shared some smiles with us and enjoyed discovering what was inside the small package we had taken as a gift for her. Taking this small package was a way that we could connect through playful interactions with Yasmeen for the first time. I opened one of the small play dough containers and she first explored the packaging before squishing the playdough.*

*One of the things that really connected with me during this visit was the presence of familiar values such as manaakitanga and whānaungatanga. Being welcomed into the home included shaking hands and saying "Salam". We were offered green tea with raisins and sweets treats. I noticed some freshly planted fruit trees and two grape vines in the lounge. We talked about the grapes growing in Afghanistan, the importance of family and spirituality, and of praying at Al Noor Mosque. (Bee)*

Kaiako have found home visits to be a valuable way to begin a relationship with newly enrolled tamariki and their whānau. The experience of visiting the family home has also enabled us provide some familiarity and authenticity for our families and children when they enter the physical environment of the preschool. For example, through using Persian patterned rugs and fabrics, coffee sets to explore and play with, and other examples of articles we saw in the children's homes, we managed to draw a semblance of the home life of tamariki into the centre. Unfortunately, and although we had great hopes of doing this consistently, we found that time considerations did not allow for all the visits that we had anticipated. That does not mean that we have let go of this valuable idea, as we feel it has huge merit. We have, however, needed to shelve it for 2020 as we found ourselves working on other priorities because of the COVID-19 environment.

Kaiako admit that with the many languages that centre whānau use, there have been difficulties at times with understanding each other and some misunderstandings. However, increasing the ways we use translators to communicate in home languages has been a great deal of help. We try to do as much translation ourselves as we can, using a translator application on the phone and our iPads, as do the parents. With a complex situation, the potential for misunderstanding is still likely. We have occasionally used parents with the same language, but with more advanced English, to translate to another parent or family but try to avoid this situation when information sharing is of a confidential nature. We also use professional interpreters, for translation from English to Farsi. One interpreter, who works for Hagley College, has supported sensitive conversations the centre Director has needed to have at times with parents. These conversations revolve around the Ministry of Education attendance requirements and frequent absence rules, *Work and Income* funding rules, or referrals for learning support. As well, we ensure that there are translations on the informative material we put on our walls. Official documentation is another important item

and includes basic policy, such as that regarding hand washing, and fire and earthquake drills. We have updated some parent information pamphlets to include information in Farsi and have had some significant learning stories translated. We are also aware that some of whānau, may be unable to read due to restrictions on education, particularly that of girls in their previous country. Some have indicated that they are happy just to see photographs or videos of their tamariki' learning and play at Hagley Community Preschool. Sharing digital imagery leads to kaiako, and whānau conversations about what is happening at preschool and what learning is occurring.

An example of a child's learning-story (written by Bee), demonstrates how a translation can enhance the entire experience for everyone.

### Team work

گزارش کار گروه ارسال در کودکنساز  
 ارساله یو جانی غلافند به بازی با مجموعه ساختن قطار هستی و ارا این کار لذت  
 مندی  
 گاهی اوقات که به مدرسه نمیشای وقتی که بر من گزردی دوباره به سختی با محیط  
 مدرسه ارتباط برقرار می کنی  
 امروز تو با دوستانت محبتی، جدی و شهید علی بودی  
 من هم در کناران بودم تا بتوانم در بازی گروهی کمکتان کنم. منوجه شدم که شما  
 ها همکاری خیلی خوبی تا هم داشتند. بعضی اوقات برای ساختن مسیر حرکت قطار  
 صحبت می کردید سپس ساکت و متمرکز قطعاً را کنار هم می جدید  
 شما ها یاد گرفته که ایده هایتان را با هم به اشتراک بگذارید و به نظرات همدیگر  
 گوش کنید  
 من منوجه شدم برای ساختن این قطار کار گروهی خوبی انجام دادید. به خاطر این  
 همکاری شما ها افتخار کردم

Arahan, you are a very big fan of the train set and enjoy building a track. Sometimes when you have been away from preschool for a while it can be hard to settle back in. However, today you had the help of your friends Mutyabo, Jayden and Shahid Ali.  
 I sat alongside you all to be available to support your group play. What I noticed was that you all worked really well together. Sometimes you talked about how to problem solve during the building of the track and other times you were all quiet and focused as you put each piece together.  
 You all are learning to share and take turns, and to co-operate by listening to others and communicate your own ideas. I saw this through the conversations you were having with each other. I was really proud of the team work that went in to building this train track.  
 I will continue to support all of you by facilitating some group games that we can all play together to practise turn-taking, listening and co-operation skills through play.



Learning tags:

Communication - Recognising print symbols and concepts and using them with enjoyment, meaning and purpose | he kōrero tuhihiti

We often find that there are teaching dilemmas that occur around things that we have previously taken for granted. The following example demonstrates how one kaiako, busy doing her usual work, in this case around yoga, reflected about whether it would be appropriate or not to do this activity in front of Muslim men, especially in her yoga clothes. She courageously asked one of the male parents about the suitability of this action. By taking the risk, she discovered the following.

*I spoke to a father who identifies as Muslim, as I was planning to lead a Yoga session with tamariki later in the morning and wondered about the appropriateness of this experience. He said that it was fine for his child to take part, but in terms of his Muslim faith he would not be able to be present when a woman (teacher) is performing dance or yoga movements. I welcomed this information, and warmly thanked him for sharing it with me. Although he was staying for the whole session, we were able to plan a solution together. At yoga time, he took the opportunity to go into our office to have a chat with Jocelyn and then he went out to our garden to walk around and enjoy the sunshine. As a result, we were able to continue with yoga in a way that was respectful and inclusive to all. (Lisa)*

In these and many other ways, the team worked to accommodate individual whānau wishes and beliefs. In this instance, this father was encouraged by an authentic question to share his beliefs, and a solution was reached to the mutual satisfaction of all parties. We have discussed taking risks in depth as a team and we have all discovered that having the courage to ask these questions does not offend anyone. It ensures that we do not get something wrong and the interaction strengthens our respectful and reciprocal relationships with all whānau within the centre.

### 3: Exploring and enhancing new learning and knowledge

By reflecting on the knowledge that we learned, we worked to explore our learning further. We explored how we could enhance our practice by interacting with our new knowledge and insights of whanaungatanga to benefit everyone at the centre. In our TLIF application, we expressed that we want to be confident that we are weaving together a curriculum for our all tamariki, strengthened by the aspirations and dreams of their whānau. We asked ourselves if we listen to, and genuinely hear, the aspirations that every parent has for their child. Flowing from this was our commitment to the principles of Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017). We wondered how parental aspirations and dreams for their children shape our curriculum. We also realised at times that whānau wishes challenged our philosophical beliefs around curriculum particularly in relation to religious beliefs. Our dilemma was to support our whānau and tamariki with their ideology while at the same time not compromising our practice in a way that was uncomfortable for us or antithetic to the principles of our teaching philosophy.

Being a critical pedagogue is an essential element of success as a teacher. Over the past months we have strengthened our critical thinking skills around our practice in terms of increasing a sense of belonging within our families from previous refugee and migrant backgrounds. We believe this has had positive benefits for whānau and kaiako alike. It has been a time of taking risks, trying new things, researching information, and building our collective learning, as demonstrated in the stories that follow.

## Listening to cultural and religious perspectives

Many of our families have never seen the New Zealand use of a sandpit as a play and learning area before coming to this country. When they come into preschool and see children playing in the sand and water, especially in the nursery, they are sceptical about the centre as a desirable choice for their children. Parents have indicated that seeing tamariki playing with 'dirty' water or sand can be quite a shock at first, particularly if put in the mouth or hair. Knowing the high importance many parents place on ensuring their children do not drink, or at times even touch dirty water, eat messy play, or have dirty or marked clothing, hair, or skin, we knew we had to work through this together toward a mutual solution (Massing, 2018). As this kaiako reflection demonstrates, with thought and respect there are many ways to ensure this occurs.

*Clean children are important to most of our parents, especially in the under two area. I do everything I can to keep children clean without denying them the need for messy play. We have also learned that many families prefer their children do not wear clothes that have been worn by others. Sometimes it has meant that I have washed and dried a child's jersey in the dryer if that is all they have that day, so they can wear it again after their sleep. With older tamariki, I now talk about keeping their bodies well and encourage them to take responsibility by reminding them how to keep themselves healthy by not drinking the dirty water. I encourage them to have a drink from their drink bottles or offer a glass of water. I reassure parents that I will not let them eat the sand or drink the dirty water and follow through with this to the best of my ability without interrupting children's play. (Susan)*

These, and other similar interactions have challenged kaiako practice and thinking in terms of philosophical understanding of curriculum, as grounded in and advocated by Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017). As we are aware that this is likely to be something we need to work through, we now start having discussions with whānau early. We have changed the way we discuss enrolment with whānau and now always ask new families questions like, "Is it okay for your child to get dirty?" "Do they have spare clothes in their bag?" "Can they wear preschool clothing?" Most importantly we share our knowledge about how children learn in terms of, for example, sensory play.

Where something is not acceptable for a family, we come to a compromise by directly finding out what is all right and what cannot happen. In one example, we found that singing, music and movement is *haram* for certain Muslim families. A father was clear that his daughter, who clearly enjoyed music, was not able to join music sessions. He explained that the Quran was to be the central thing that brought joy. As a team, we admitted to each other that this was a pedagogical challenge. Eventually, working with the father, we found diverse ways to compromise between our differing philosophical principles while continuing to value and respect the beliefs of the each other. The child's father stated that he was happy if music was happening in the centre if she was not dancing and singing. He also said that chanting was possible. Together, we ensured that the outcome for the child was to be herself in both worlds.

## Trusting whānau

The following story highlights the importance of the development and maintenance of authentic trust-based relationships between whānau, tamariki and kaiako. Spending time with Mohamed and his Mum in the car while travelling to and from preschool, and being a regular visitor to the home, enabled our kaiako to have more time for kanohi ki te kanohi discussions. Kaiako have continued to experience the value of face-to-face communication and unhurried time and space together. These are especially important when diverse language and cultures are present, as gesture, facial expression and time are key parts of communication, not just the verbal communication of specific words.

*I pulled up a chair next to Mohamed and his Dad to ask a few questions about how Mohamed's sleep was last night. Dad told me that Mohamed was awake early at six o'clock, but normally he wakes around eight o'clock. Previously, this man's wife has explained to us that since his gunshot injury, (sustained at the Al Noor Mosque), Dad finds it difficult to use his voice. Today, Mohamed appeared a little unsettled and unwilling for Dad to leave. Coming to preschool with his Dad is a recent change in his routine as he usually comes with Mum. To support Mohamed's transition into the programme I offered a few things for him to do that he might like and his response was a firm 'No'. His Dad calmed him down with cuddles and they stayed sitting with me. Mohamed screamed when his father said he was about to leave.*

*A little later I got up from my seat and Mohamed screamed at me to "Sit back down". I guessed, that he was telling me that he did not want me to take him from his Dad. I recalled one of the times I visited Mohamed at home to transport him and his Mum to preschool after the Mosque shooting. I had seen him counting to a song using the iPad. I thought that this might interest him enough to say goodbye to Dad. He was interested but hung on tight to Dad. His father said, "Put 'The wheels of the bus' on, he likes that". Dad sang along with me. I was thrilled to hear him singing and so was Mohamed who also sang. Then I put the iPad aside and invited Mohamed to see the bubbles. He came over happily and as he did, Dad slipped out of the door. While I wouldn't normally promote slipping away without saying goodbye, it worked for him today. I know that Mohamed has sound relationships with kaiako and other tamariki in the preschool, but he and his whānau have been through an enormous amount of change at home in the past six months. (Bee)*

Reflection on the situation revealed this teacher questioning some parts of her practice using a culturally critical lens. She later reflected with the team on her practice supporting this tamaiti to separate from his Dad. She wondered whether she had fallen into operating from her Western dominated world view. Saying something to this father early on such as, "He will be okay when you have gone" demonstrated a disregard for the father's cultural beliefs in bringing up children. She noted that his response was to sit with his son longer, as he did not want to upset Mohamed. As well, he showed that he was willing to stay as long as he needed to. As kaiako in this situation, she demonstrated that she too was willing to put the time in, to have a chat and to support him to settle his son until they found a solution that confirmed

that whānau, kaiako and tamariki were happy with the successful result. Again, discussion and reflection with the team ensured that all kaiako had a chance to reflect on their own interactions by using one person's example to bring new knowledge to all.

### **Learning languages**

In attempting to communicate through imagery and languages kaiako continued to explore in ways that were certain to enhance their new knowledge in new and innovative ways.

*I had taken a photograph of one of our fathers teaching me to write the Nepali word and characters for hello. I put this photograph on display on the art table with the intention that it might start conversations about different written symbols, with the children. What I noticed instead, was that many adults, including fathers, aunts, mothers, grandparents, were curious about the photo and would look at it as they came in each day. Some whānau would gesture towards it with an interested or quizzical expression on their face or ask me about it verbally. Tamariki would also show their whānau this photo. Taking cues from these interactions, several parents would then take the time to talk with me about their own languages. They would offer to help me with pronunciation and writing the words and symbols down for us to then use with tamariki. These initial phrases were around simple greetings and farewells and helped us to learn many new words to be able to greet different whānau and tamariki in their own languages. (Lisa)*

For the team and this kaiako, all this interest in different languages and symbols, soon moved to us asking about the words and symbols for things that were topical for the children in the curriculum, for example, 'moon' and 'sun' when we were doing a lot of work around the Maui myths and legends. Having the symbols and words of diverse languages written and displayed in our classroom provided a springboard for many conversations with our whānau about their specific languages. A reversal of traditional teacher/parent roles occurred, as whānau become the 'teacher' and kaiako, the 'learner.' This enables the parents to experience more collaborative, equitable and authentic relationships with us, as it opens the pathway for deepening relations and for knowledge sharing (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2017; 2019). In this way, we ensure that the mana of our parents remains intact, upheld, and strengthened as they see their contribution not only sought but also greatly valued (ERO, 2018a;). We believe this also has a positive impact on the mana of the tamariki and demonstrates the value we place upon including each child's heritage language within our curriculum.

### **Interdependent relationships**

By ensuring we work cross culturally, we have learnt to have confidence to follow the lead of whānau. Even though we do not always share a common language, there are ways of communicating that can enable us to work together in making collaborative decisions. With two heads comes two languages and two ways of thinking, doing and being that come together for the wellbeing of the child.

*We had an 18-month-old girl enrol at the beginning of the Hagley College term. Her grandmother wanted to enrol in English classes at the College and, as the child's caregiver during the day, she needed her granddaughter to attend the preschool. Grandmother and granddaughter visited twice before the College classes began, at which time the plan was for granddaughter to stay alone in preschool. On the first visit, kaiako wondered whether two visits would suffice, as the little girl appeared very dependent on her grandmother. On day three, she decided that her grandmother was NOT going to leave! Grandmother became stressed as she was due in class. I walked into the under two room and sat alongside Grandmother. We shrugged shoulders at each other and smiled. With limited shared English, I suggested that she get permission from her class teacher to stay in preschool with her granddaughter until she is more settled. Grandmother indicated she had an idea, and she pulled me by the arm toward the door. I interpreted the move as being asked to go with her to ask the teacher's permission. We left her granddaughter crying after lots of hugs and Grandmother promising she was coming back. Down the pathway toward the classroom we marched. When we entered, I asked the class, "Where is your teacher"? "She is having her break," said one of the class members, all of whom were sitting behind their desks. "Okay, I will wait," I said, all the while anxiously thinking about the crying granddaughter and hoping this wasn't going to take long.*

*The next thing I was aware of was the animated conversation that was going on around me in a language that I didn't understand. Every now and again I heard a question in English aimed at me, like, "Is she going to be okay?" and "How long she (Grandmother) stay?" I explained that I thought we should try Grandmother staying in preschool each morning until morning teatime and then join her class. Everyone nodded their heads in agreement. Then one said, "She can practice English in your preschool". "Yes" I agreed. When the class teacher turned up it seemed that the solution had already been agreed upon. I explained it to the teacher who could not do anything but agree. This became the approach to settling the granddaughter. As granddaughter settled in, groups from the class were often seen walking past preschool at lunchtimes all looking in with big smiles and waves to check that granddaughter was okay. It was clear it had become their responsibility to report this back to Grandmother. (Jocelyn)*

Working interdependently with whānau, while clearly enhancing relationships, demonstrates that positive outcomes for children are unquestionable. The more we have worked to ensure that our whānau are not only comfortable leaving their tamariki with us, but also that their cultures are genuinely valued and upheld, the more we have noticed the trust that has built up between kaiako and whānau. In these ways, among others, we have both explored and enhanced new practices now firmly embedded into our living curriculum and our centre philosophy.

#### 4: Embedding and applying new learning knowledge

The purpose of this section is to look at how we integrated our new knowledge, including our ways of knowing, being, and doing. In terms of cultural mentorship, we had a rich and diverse group of experts to collaborate with to develop and extend our knowledge and cultural understanding. We worked alongside our families to develop broader and deeper understandings of the diversities of the Muslim faith. We discovered knowledge about the possibilities of many interpretations of the Quran. Through understanding, we found we were able to embed our new learning into our curriculum, in our individual beliefs, as part of our team-teaching philosophy, and in our day-to-day practice.

In this section, we use the stories of our three focus children, Penny, Te Ariki and Dariosh, to demonstrate how the newly learned knowledge of kaiako became embedded in curriculum experiences, with tamariki emerging as competent and capable learners.

#### **I belong**

Dariosh's stories, written by Bee, reflect the ways in which building trusting relationships from the initial enrolment period became an essential part of developing a sense of belonging. Diverse languages may hinder communication when first enrolling, however, kaiako developed confidence to communicate in many other ways with both adults and tamariki to build respectful and trusting relationships, which then become the foundation for more learning focused conversations. Kaiako became increasingly intentional about making sure the aspirations whānau have for their tamariki at preschool is woven into authentic and meaningful learning opportunities.

*Nahid and Dariosh came with Aunty to enrol at preschool and have a look around. Aunty stayed this first time and helped with translating English to Farsi to help Nahid and Dariosh settle in and the teachers to understand what was needed. We talked with Nahid about the enrolment process for preschool and asked if Dariosh had any other experience in ECE. We found out that they had both arrived in New Zealand only days previously from Afghanistan under the refugee quota family reunification scheme.*

*This was Dariosh's first ever ECE experience. Over the first week Nahid would often sit on our couch in the preschool, sometimes trying to chat with kaiako as we welcomed her, eager to learn more about Dariosh and how we can best support them at preschool. We offered her a drink of water to show our manaakitanga and learned that it was Ramadan, so she was fasting. After about the third visit Dariosh was happy to see his cousin with whom he had now made a connection. Nahid stayed to settle Dariosh, suggesting she was not ready to leave him just yet. We noticed she was very tired but was beginning to feel a sense of trust and safety as she dozed comfortably on the couch during the next few visits. We knew her intention was to go to English class at the College, but we could see how tired she was. We were accepting of her needs and pleased that she felt comfortable enough to rest at the preschool.*

These first interactions with whānau have proven to be the most important. They set the scene for the following interactions as each partner begins the relationship journey. This time creates a chance to discover what whānau are expecting for their child. For Dariosh, this was a time of initial confusion, then excitement and exploration. He gradually built friendships, and with the help and companionship of his cousin he began to feel as if he belonged.

*During Dariosh's first month he was also very tired, often resulting in his falling asleep on our couch, not lasting through the day although it was not his normal routine to sleep during the day. There were times that Dariosh was unsettled. During this early phase Nahid shared her aspirations with us. This was voiced as things like, 'make sure 'Dariosh eats his kai, goes to the toilet, doesn't go outside when its wet or cold'- 'no running', and she wanted to be reassured that he was liked by his teachers, and was making friends.*

*Dariosh was so excited being at preschool. He would mostly spend his time outside, often running inside to check on his mum. He saw her sleepily on the couch but never disturbed her unless he needed help with toileting. Dariosh would chat and laugh. He only spoke Farsi so we responded to what we thought he was saying from the non-verbal cues he used and the tone of his language.*

*At times when Dariosh was trying hard to communicate and we found it challenging to understand or notice what Dariosh was saying, we would ask his older cousin or other children to help us communicate with Dariosh. Sometimes other mums willingly helped. Sometimes Dariosh would ask 'Where is my mother?,' 'When is my mother coming?' and the other Farsi speaking mums would help us to understand what he was asking, and they would then respond for us. (Bee).*

We could tell Nahid was developing trust that this was a safe place for Dariosh to be. She would always greet every kaiako upon arrival with big smiles. Conversations and questions about care routines became less frequent, indicating that Nahid was happy we were paying attention to Dariosh's needs. Then one day Nahid explained with the help of another mum, that she was going to start her class. Nahid was ready to leave, however, Dariosh, at that time, was less sure. He had begun to enjoy his time with peers although still looked to mum as his anchor. Kaiako reflected on the ways they could support Dariosh to build relationships and were keen to help him find his own way and level of comfort (MoE, 2009, 2017; 2019). Kaiako were acutely aware of the huge change this small child had recently experienced, and there seemed to be nothing in his prior experience that could help him make connections with the sights and sounds of a New Zealand preschool.

*Dariosh often spent time in the preschool director Jocelyn's office. Again, there was a language barrier, however non-verbal communication allowed them to develop a trusting relationship. The office is a small space off our main room where children play. Often children will come into the office for a chat or a quiet space away from the busyness of the preschool. Dariosh and Jocelyn connected*

*over the phone on the desk. For the next three weeks Dariosh was often in the office with Jocelyn. Jocelyn would press a button on the phone and it would ring. Dariosh would laugh and laugh and answer the phone and speak in Farsi before hanging it up. Sometimes Jocelyn would pick up her cell phone and pretend to be on the other end of the phone talking. We noticed Dariosh's personality and humour not only from the laughter in the office but in the little tricks he likes to play on people. He would sometimes try giving kaiako a fright but it was always meant as fun and having a laugh. We wondered if this was how he connected to something familiar? A connection back to Afghanistan? To his mum? Whatever the reason was, we could see he was comfortable, happy, and engaged. As time went by and his relationships strengthened, so did his sense of belonging, knowing what is happening here, and how to play. We noticed he started spending less time in the office playing with the phone. (Bee).*

When Nahid saw her son smiling and having fun in the preschool you could see her relax. We had often heard parents say to us, "My child happy, I happy". This was certainly true for Nahid and Dariosh. This trusting relationship between Nahid and kaiako led to engagement in deeper learning conversations as is noted in the following excerpt of a learning story.

#### **Learning Aspirations from Mum**

*ارزو. Salam Nahid and Dariosh, as we get to know one another better, and you trust us, we can continue to support you to grow in learning. One of the ways that we can do this is to talk with your family about your learning and what they see as important things for you to be learning here at Hagley Preschool. Today I talked with your Mum about this. I asked her "What sort of learning would you like us to support Dariosh in, here at Hagley Preschool?" Mum told me that she thought that writing was an important thing for you to learn. This led to a great discussion about writing, drawing, painting, and all the fun ways that you can make your hands, fingers and eyes work together. I showed Mum all our felts and crayons and paper. You came and chose a felt. You held it in your little fist. You made marks around and around and around! You smiled as you did this, telling us that you enjoy making your marks on the paper! Thank you Nahid for taking the time to talk with me about Dariosh. It is important for us to know your thoughts about Dariosh and his learning. Dariosh is lucky enough to be surrounded by two written and spoken languages and I can understand why you wish us to support him in becoming familiar with symbols, letters, and shapes in the English language. (Lisa)*

In keeping with the pedagogy encapsulated in Te Whāriki (2017, MOE), Dariosh's stories show how kaiako were careful to begin with where he felt secure. Expectations of participation and engagement did not dictate the way in which he settled into the preschool. Rather, he was supported to find his comfortable place and to build relationships in his own time. Similarly, kaiako worked with Nahid to develop her sense of belonging. Nahid's initial requests for kaiako to pay attention to Dariosh's caregiving needs were acted on. This is what was

important at the time for Nahid. Once she trusted that her son was well cared for, she was able to express her desire for other aspects of his learning to be promoted. Beginning from parent requests and expectations was a deliberate shift in kaiako pedagogical practice, resulting from many challenging and provocative discussions during the project. Acting on parental requests is not always a comfortable place, particularly when it comes from a diverse cultural frame or world view. Often it is easier for kaiako to explain to parents how some requests conflict with the New Zealand early childhood curriculum however, this approach immediately creates a power imbalance, one that can damage future attempts at maintaining an empowering partnership. Through this project we found there was always a compromise to be made, frequently requiring kaiako to work 'outside the box' although always within the Ministry of Education regulatory framework (Ministry of Education, 2017; Educational Review Office(ERO), 2017; 2018b; 2018c).

### **Kaiako as ākongā**

In the nursery Te Ariki's learning stories (written by Susan) clearly demonstrated evidence for the embedded practice of kaiako seeking to learn about parental aspirations and weaving these into the curriculum for tamariki.

*What I noticed about Te Ariki's whānau from the beginning was their passion and true acknowledgement of their whakapapa. Mum, Dad and Nanny's aspirations for Te Ariki were not only for him to feel nurtured and safe at preschool but for him to have his mana and his priorities for his learning upheld. For me as his kaiako this meant embracing his culture, his language, his history, his life celebrations, and his community. I must be a collaborative learner, exploring how best to teach Te Ariki in a diverse environment. (Susan)*

Kaiako positioned themselves as active learners with, and alongside Te Ariki's whānau as they sought to learn more about the aspirations, they held for Te Ariki. This occurred by ensuring kaiako were supporting Te Ariki's cultural mana and cultural wellbeing. By making this visible in assessment documentation it strengthened the whānau and kaiako relationship. An example of Te Ariki trusting that his sense of *Mana Whenua* and cultural pride is recognised at preschool was recorded in a learning story and shared with Te Ariki and his whānau.

*I have been learning a lot of words and phrases from your Nanny, Papa, and your Mama. Maururu ki te whakaako i ahau, thank you for teaching me. (Badia)*

*The comment Badia made was soon followed by Te Ariki, now two years old, demonstrating his abilities as a great rangatira when he spontaneously began leading karakia before kai. This took both Badia and I by surprise but also excited us that through our conversations with whānau and by practicing our centre waiata and karakia each day, young tamariki could then take the lead themselves (Education Council, 2011). Mama felt proud of her son and acknowledged that he was leading karakia at home as well.*

*You are greeting everyone with “Morena” and saying “Ka kite apopo,” at the end of the day. You ask for your milk “miraka” and your drink, “inu.” “Kai” is also a favourite word as you love to gather for our hui and share in karakia and waiata. As kaiako, we felt confident in following Te Ariki’s lead, and his understanding of ako. I have felt that by having conversations with Te Ariki and his whānau that my knowledge of Te Reo and Māori culture has grown. I have been able to talk with Nanny daily and ask “How do you pronounce this in Te Reo”? Nanny has been very helpful in her communication with kaiako. She has also praised kaiako for their ongoing efforts in having an environment that achieves unique identities for all tamariki. (Susan)*

We noticed that through Te Ariki’s knowledge of te reo Māori from home, he was able to incorporate the language into his play, including teaching his peers and his kaiako. Part of our changing practice as kaiako was to feel comfortable that we could be the learner, we could show vulnerability, and be able to ask for help. The cultural capital of whānau and tamariki was recognised and valued as kaiako followed their lead and respectfully sought further knowledge.

### **Learning about the world**

Our strong emphasis on promoting and embedding children's home languages, written, spoken, or sung as was often the case, resulted in tamariki hearing a wider variety of sounds and languages within their play environment. Teachers noticed children more often speaking to each other in their shared language, for example, Farsi, Somali, Samoan, and Māori. We also noted that whānau with immigrant backgrounds were extremely interested in learning about Māori culture and listening to *reo Māori*. We had consciously and unconsciously, created multi-linguistic surroundings, where our learning environment was abuzz with many rich languages spoken by tamariki, whānau and increasingly, kaiako. We also found we had normalised this concept to the point that children were confident in creating their own language, as is evident in the following excerpt of the following learning stories, written by Lisa.

*Penny, lately you have been interested in creating potions and lotions and this week you wanted to create scents or perfume. A group of us, under your guidance, set up a little perfume shop in the fale (whare). I asked you, “What should we call it”? You and Zelda both called out lots of suggestions at the same time. Finally, after much robust discussion you decided to call it, “Home Shop America”. I helped you to make a sign in the front of your shop and “Home Shop America” began. Penny, you were busy mixing, stirring, and advising your co-workers on many matters. You took on the leadership role that you are often enthusiastic to do. I asked if I could video you and your co-workers and you all agreed. As I pushed record on the I-pad, you began to use another language. You have created this one yourself. “Zaka means to stir” you told me. You then went on to talk in your special language and explain and translate for me the various meanings in English. For example, “Tala means spoon”. Zelda also joined in these discussions. You both had very definite and differing opinions about your unique language, which resulted in some healthy debates about who was right. ( Lisa)*

Penny's interest in various languages is very evident in her work and play. This kaiako talked to Penny's mother about this amazing learning and she agreed that the many languages, cultures, and customs in the centre meant there was huge value for Penny's development in many areas. Penny's mum also referred to Penny's fondness to commit to wearing a hijab like her close friend. She makes these from the fabrics offered as centre resources.

*During one occasion, we had a small celebration for one of our Muslim teachers to acknowledge Eid Mubarak. In the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions this kaiako was not able to celebrate with her whanau and community, so we thought we would make up for that. Penny and several of her friends, informed and invited to join the festivities, immediately ran off to the dress-up area. At first kaiako wondered what they were doing, then realised they were making themselves a hijab to wear. Penny and her friends knew this would be an important celebration and they dressed accordingly and with respect. (Jocelyn)*

Penny was very enthusiastic and curious about many things and often comes in to preschool saying, "Hey, I've got a really good idea". For example, Penny's learning stories discuss her commitment to making pani-popo, and to celebrating the birthday of Ganesh. The inclusion of children's home languages and active celebration of cultures was very evident in the play of Penny and her peers. We noted that what was happening to tamariki was that increasingly they were contributing, feeling empowered, and taking agency, in their work and play in the centre community. What was happening for kaiako was that we were becoming more intentional and proactive (Houghton, 2013; McLaughlin & Cherrington, 2018) in their customary practice as is clear in the following story.

*In a discussion with Penny and Zeinab, I informed them that we were having some new whānau and tamariki join us at preschool from Eritrea. talked with them about how it might feel being very new to the centre and about ways that they could provide manaakitanga, and help people to feel welcome. The forthcoming ideas were to; create a flower posy, learn to say 'hello' in Tigrinyan language, and to make a welcome poster.*

*Penny and Zeinab chose to draw hearts on the poster. Together we researched some of the animals that live in Eritrea. They chose what they wanted to use, printed them out and glued them to the poster. Penny and Zeinab worked on this poster for over a week with the poster becoming more elaborate and colourful as they revisited their prior work and added to it. Penny's whānau also saw this work regularly as it progressed. It was evident that Penny had been able to involve her parents and wider family, and they listened to her learning about Eritrea. One morning, Penny rushed into preschool and said "Lisa, my Dad told me that you say "E-ritrea". Penny continued to share this ongoing project with her family and her Dad told me that she had been teaching them how to say "Selam" (Tigrinyan word for 'Hello') at home.*

*Both Penny and Zeinab were extremely excited and showed their poster when the new families finally arrived at preschool. Both were able to greet the new*

*tamariki and whānau in their heritage language “Selam”! This greeting was warmly received by our families from Eritea. (Lisa)*

By being proactive and valuing all children’s diverse heritage languages, the languages became a normalised and integral part of our local curriculum. As kaiako knowledge grew and whānau relationships and collaboration strengthened, tamariki were immersed in a ‘sea of languages’ and diverse cultural practices daily. Their knowledge and confidence in the world flourished (Gunn, Surtees, Gordon Burns & Purdue; 2020). One way this was evidenced was children creating their own languages as demonstrated above. They were empowered to play with words, be curious and take some risks; something they saw their teachers do daily.

### **Nurturing learning outcomes**

The stories of Penny, Dariosh and Te Ariki demonstrate the unique ways, regardless of ethnicity and language, all tamariki benefit from a learning environment that values, promotes and respects cultural diversity. During this project we noted that *Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017; ERO, 2018b; 2018c)* lenses of wellbeing, belonging, contribution, communication, and exploration permeated the involvement of our entire learning community as we applied new knowledge and collaborative meaning making.

As we became increasingly intentional about including more home languages in the centre and celebrating various cultural festivals within daily practice, we developed deeper understandings about the relational aspects we would never compromise in our centre curriculum. Children continued to visit Hagley College library where they were able to access a wide variety of children’s books written in each of our children’s heritage languages. The physical environment became an eclectic mix of artefacts to reflect the diverse cultures influencing our work. Various languages become more visible as parents felt comfortable to write words in their own languages. Books, displays, furnishings and play resources linked authentically to the home lives of our whānau. We soon realised that in all the children’s learning stories we were seeing evidence of the ways changes in kaiako practice had become embedded into the preschool curriculum, and the way these changes were influencing tamariki learning.

### **5: Providing cultural Leadership and mentorship to others**

Through the process of exploring parental aspirations and critical reflection on experiences, kaiako opened themselves to learn more about the cultures and religions of whānau. Participating in critical reflection with colleagues became a safe and respectful place to voice differing insights and perceptions. There was no right or wrong as each became a critical conversation partner supporting the collective group to build understandings and respect for others. In turn, kaiako developed confidence in their cultural knowledge, gaining stronger understandings about what is important to families and why, and the implication of this for their practice.

Kaiako became ‘culturally intentional’ as they went about building whanaungatanga with whānau in the preschool community. The term ‘culturally intentional kaiako’ is purposefully

chosen to acknowledge that the term *culturally responsive*, frequently assigned to notions of *cultural competence*, did not adequately describe how kaiako viewed the changes they made. A statement made during a private communication, “Being responsive is something you do, not what you become” resonated with kaiako thinking (Personal Communication: Matt Bateman, Kahui Ako leadership hui Sept 2020). The impact of the inquiry on kaiako was that they had ‘become’ more intentional about their culturally inclusive practice through the shifts made in their own attitudes, values, and beliefs. They had ‘become’ and therefore they ‘do’ things intentionally.

Kaiako pedagogical confidence became evident in the ways they began providing leadership for others, such as teachers in training and the wider teaching community. We noticed that over time kaiako voice strengthened to confidently share insights into culturally intentional and sustainable pedagogy. This shift was evident during the writing period of this report as each kaiako confidently contributed personal reflections and teaching stories that demonstrated aspects of their learning and practice. In these ways, and others, we acknowledge that each member of the teaching team is responsible for leadership in the Hagley Preschool Community.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

### Outcomes for whānau and community

Part of our Hagley Community Preschool philosophy has always included a strong focus on the concept of whanaungatanga within the centre. As we began this project the strengthening of our ideas about whanaungatanga in the preschool were central to our work with the centre community. To this end we wished to further develop a community culture of respect, humility, and compassion to underpin our understanding of whanaungatanga. We believe this was one of the main outcomes for whānau and the larger community as we fought to ensure that every family felt welcome and the centre a home away from home for their tamariki and for them. To ensure this was so, we were clear that the concepts of manaakitanga and wairuatanga, as embedded in whanaungatanga, continue to be foundational to building trusting, respectful and reciprocal relationships.

Genuine relationships are compassionate relationships. For the team, a compassionate relationship requires that we give of ourselves as people, and of our time as we strive to build respect and trust. Here, open communication is strengthened through using home languages, expressions, gesture, and imagery. Whānau know they have a voice, they know teachers have a genuine interest in the wellbeing of the whole whānau as well as tamariki, and they know they are always listened to with respect and understanding. Honouring and valuing where people come from, and including family connections and culture, underpins relationships with whānau who are welcomed as genuine collaborative partners.

### Outcomes for tamariki

The stories of the three focus tamariki, Dariosh, Te Arika and Penny, demonstrate how they are supported in their identity, nurtured, and given time and space to develop relationships with peers and kaiako as they become playful and engaged in learning. They know they are accepted for who they are and that they belong in this preschool setting. We see evidence of them becoming leaders, as they develop compassionate friendships with adults and children alike. At the beginning of this project, we indicated that our inquiry would focus on migrant tamariki, especially those with refugee backgrounds. An unexpected outcome has been recognition of the ways our culturally intentional and inclusive early learning environment has contributed to rich learning for all tamariki immersed in the curriculum.

Tamariki retain and expand their innate mana as they become leaders in their own areas of expertise, such as their cultural knowledge. As they learn alongside each other, their expertise in their cultural understandings is respected by kaiako and other tamariki alike. They are encouraged to enter tuakana-teina relationships as their confidence soars. This contributes to their self-assurance, the certainty of their own identity, and to knowing exactly who they are in the centre setting. In addition, their understanding of, and interest in the diverse cultures and languages always visible and audible in the centre, encourages them to take their conceptual learning home for further discussion.

## Outcomes for kaiako

A direct impact of kaiako inquiry and learning about religions, beliefs and culture has been that conversations with whānau have strengthened, going beyond the social chit chat of welcomes, caregiving updates, and farewells. The assumption of a wide range of communication practices, giving kaiako the gift of working with a hundred different languages (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2011). As kaiako increased their knowledge of cultures and religions they became increasingly confident to ask direct and purposeful questions of parents. These conversations, led kaiako to understand more about what whānau expected for their children as they attended preschool and kaiako became more intentional about discussing a child's learning.

Teacher release time, made possible in this research project, offered extra space for deep thinking, and resulted in innovative ideas as well as major shifts in thinking and practice. During a teacher only day to categorise and analyse each data set that had been collected in the project file, the shifts kaiako made in their thinking, and their actions were made visible. Analysis of the data contributed to the view that we had strengthened our dispositions toward being culturally intentional. We identified within our data throughout this project that kaiako displayed the dispositions of *being curious and open to learning, confident to communicate, courageous to act, and to be an authentic listener*. These were the dispositions that underpinned our culturally intentional practice (O'Neill, Hansen, & Lewis, 2014).

Having the disposition to *be curious and open to learning* requires someone to be confident in their personal identity and to value diversity in language, culture, and religion. It means that they are comfortable to step out of their personal comfort zone to intentionally investigate and learn about perspectives and values different from their own.

The disposition of being *confident to communicate* is visible when communication *kanohi ki te kanohi* occurs regardless of language differences. Kaiako confidently use their understanding of important cultural values and practices, such as whether to shake hands or not, along with a wide range of communication tools (the 100 languages) to respect diversity of perspectives and the expertise of others. Confidence to communicate is also about making sure the language used is inclusive and power balanced, for example the project team avoided using terms such as refugee families as this labelled groups into a position of 'other.' We refer to families with previous refugee backgrounds, in an analogous way as we would talk about Christchurch residents with earthquake background experiences. We also recognised that we tended to use the term 'our' when referring to whānau in the community and rapidly shifted practice to avoid use of the term. The people we encounter everyday are not *our* whānau, *our* tamariki, nor *our* community. Labelling people as 'our' implies that we have some form of ownership of the group and therefore a power imbalance exists. This goes against everything we value in our teaching philosophy.

Being *courageous to act* is about taking a risk, being flexible, and adopting different practices in the knowledge that the actions taken are non-judgemental and respectful of others. Kaiako

learnt to work from a compassionate position when responding to parental requests and cultural values, finding ways to adapt practice within the ECE regulatory and curriculum frameworks. When we are courageous to act, we show whānau that kaiako genuinely care for each child and can be trusted to care for their tamariki. We believe in starting from the space where parents' beliefs are situated, and over time we work toward shared values and practices in the preschool.

The disposition of *being an active listener* is about being less reliant on written and oral language and being more attuned to cues in body language and gesture. A listener is available to communicate and comes to the conversation without putting their own agenda first. When tuned in and listening the true intent of the message can be heard. Kaiako valued time to engage in conversations with families, listening to stories about where they are from and about their personal lives, values, celebrations, and, most importantly, what was important to them in relation to caregiving practices. Much of this occurred in stilted English and over time through sharing photos, or showing images in books. From these interactions kaiako and whānau developed relationships at a personal and professional level of trust and respect.

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