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*‘Ko te ira tangata, he ira atua’*

**Exploring an indigenous Ao Māori  
early childhood curriculum**



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requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education (Early Years)  
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## Abstract

Te Whāriki – early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996) is New Zealand’s, world renowned, early childhood curriculum document. It is widely heralded as a progressive and dynamic curriculum framework for learning and teaching in the early years because it seeks to be culturally, philosophically and developmentally meaningful (David, 2001). Te Whāriki is described as a “new conception of curriculum” (Carr & May, 2000, p. 67) where local, national and cultural voices have been able to speak “strongly and loudly” (p.58). However, some Kaupapa Māori early childhood settings, such as Te Kōpae Piripono, a Māori immersion early childhood centre in New Plymouth, of which I am a founding whānau, have struggled to make authentic connections with the Te Whāriki, particularly with its usefulness as a practical working document. This study sought to explore the idea of an Ao Māori (Māori worldview) early childhood curriculum as the basis for planning, assessing and documenting children’s learning, in other words, a culturally and practically appropriate “whāriki” for Te Kōpae Piripono.

The study firstly involved interviewing representatives from four Māori immersion early childhood services about how they negotiate curriculum. It found that Kaupapa Māori early childhood settings have difficulties relating to and using Te Whāriki. Centres therefore use Te Whāriki in different ways and access other curriculum models. The study then sought to explore ideas about what an indigenous Ao Māori early childhood curriculum might look like. This involved interviews with people who have an understanding of indigenous Taranaki knowledge. The study found that an indigenous Ao Māori worldview cannot and should not be seen as a singular, universal concept. Individual iwi have their own existential explanations of the world and the negotiation and re-construction of this local knowledge is a critical part of the process of exploring an indigenous Ao Māori curriculum. It is, therefore incumbent on whānau of Kaupapa Māori early childhood settings to take responsibility for negotiating their own Ao Māori early childhood curriculum within a process of engagement and co-construction with their wider context of whānau, hapū and iwi. The study suggests some principles and concepts with which Te Kōpae Piripono might explore its own Ao Māori curriculum. These include the concept of whakapapa as a framework for recognising, describing, and responding to children’s learning; and the use of atua dispositions in providing the dynamic detail of the authentic documentation of children’s learning. The study also raises questions about the impact that the proposed legislating of Te Whāriki might have on this indigenous re-construction of curriculum.

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## Glossary of Māori words

āhuatanga ako	styles of learning
aroha	love/compassion/consideration
aroha ki te tangata	love/compassion/consideration for others
atua	supernatural ancestors; offspring of Ranginui & Papatūānuku)
atua matua	members of the primary family of Papatūānuku & Ranginui
hāhi	Christian denomination
hapu	sub-tribe
Haumiatiketike	child of Rangi & Papa, represented in the form of uncultivated foods
hinengaro	cognition/thoughts/the thinking mind
hui	meeting/gathering
hui kaitiaki	teacher meeting
ihi	essential power and force
iho matua	person's connection with ancestors
io	belief of a supreme being (held by some iwi)
ira atua	supernatural life
iwi	tribe
kai	food
Kai Tahu	tribal group of Te Waipounamu (South Island)
karakia	prayer/indigenous incantation/focus statement
kaumātua/pahake	Māori elder
kaupapa	philosophy/ideology
kaupapa Māori	Māori paradigm
kei tua o te pae	early childhood assessment exemplars
koha	gift/contribution
kōrero	dialogue
kotahitanga	unity
kui/kuia	female elder/grandmother
kura kaupapa Māori	Māori paradigm primary schools

mana	prestige, standing/power, authority
mana ao tūroa	te whāriki strand: exploration
mana reo	te whāriki strand: communication
mana tangata	te whāriki strand: contribution
mana whenua	te whāriki strand: belonging
marae	meeting place (courtyard) and associated complex
māramatanga	enlightenment
matakite	psychic/extra-sensory perception
Matariki	constellation: Pleiades
mātauranga Māori	traditional Māori knowledge and learning
mauri	life force/essence
mauri ora	life principle
mokopuna	grandchildren/great grandchildren
ngā iwi	tribal groups
ngā hononga	relationships
ngā taumata whakahirahira	aims of te whāriki
ngā tūmanako mo te mokopuna	goals for children
ngākau	feelings/how you display your emotions
ngā rangi tūhāhā	celestial domains/heavens
ngāwari	relaxed/easy
noa	free from the constraints of tapu
Papatūānuku	earth mother
pono	integrity/genuine
pūmanawa	natural talents/genetic capability
puna waihanga	creative talents
Ranginui	sky father
reo	language
rohe	region
Rongomātāne	child of Rangi & Papa, represented in the form of cultivated foods
tākuta	doctor
tama-nui-te-rā	the sun
tamariki	children

Tānemāhuta	child of Rangi & Papa/ concept of the forest
Tangaroa	child of Rangi & Papa/concept of the sea
Tāwhirimātea	child of Rangi & Papa/concept of the atmosphere
tapu	sacred/restricted
tātai whakapapa	genealogical descent
Te Aho Matua	charter for kura kaupapa Māori (Māori immersion primary schools)
te ao	the world/wider environment
te ao Māori	Māori world
te ao tawhito	the world of our ancestors, especially pre-contact
te hunga tangata	humanity/human component
te ira tangata	humankind/human genes
Te Korowai	curriculum document for Kōhanga Reo.
te pō	darkness/night
te puna waiora	spiritual component
te reo	Māori language
te reo Māori me ōnā tikanga	Māori language, customs and traditions
Te Rūnanganui o Ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori	National association of Māori immersion primary schools
te tino uaratanga	prime aims and objectives
te tuakiri o te tangata	educational approach for young children by Katerina Mataira (2000)
tika	truth/accuracy/fairness
tikanga	protocol
tikanga Māori	Māori protocol
tino rangatiratanga	self determination, sovereignty
toi ora	health/wellbeing
Tūmatauenga	child of Rangi & Papa, represented in the form of war
tumukāuru	director of Te Kōpae Piripono - management
tumukātaka	director of Te Kōpae Piripono - curriculum
waiata	song/music
wai	water

wairua	energy/spirit/traits
wana	excitement/thrill
wānanga	workshops/seminars/meetings
wehi	awe
whae/whaene	mother/teacher
whakamana	empower
whakapapa	genealogical descent
whakatauki	proverbial sayings
whānau	family/families/community
whānau tangata	family and community
whāriki	mat
whare	building/house/centre
whatumanawa	seat of emotions
whenu	strands