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# **Whakapiki Tūhono ki te Whenua**

*Exploring how reconnection to whenua enhances the  
oranga of te taiao and whānau*

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of **Master of Health Science – Māori Health**

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New Zealand

by  
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Kaewa Savage

## Dedication

My Pāpā (dad) once told me a story of the day I was born; my first few moments of te ao marama (the world of light/ the natural world), and his decision to take me to the local school field with my whānau (family) on the way home from the hospital. He wanted to present me to ngā hau e whā, the four winds for the first time. I laughed at this story when he told me a few years ago, but since his passing I have really leaned in to this. What I mean, is that I have come to realise how aligned I truly am to my name, Kaewa; to wander, to adventure, the curious and ambitious person that I am. Someone who seeks adventure, travels the world and is independent. A constant lover of learning, often immersing myself in kaupapa (topic) and putting myself in challenging and sometimes uncomfortable places to push me further into my potential. 360 degree awareness at all times is what my Pāpā would always tell us, I am attuned to this often and feel it brings me closer to awareness and clarity in this life. My path, and the person I am, is not by chance or accident, but by purpose. Guided by the four winds, by my tūpuna (ancestors), and especially by my Pāpā. Although my post-graduate journey has been one without him ā tinana (in person/ physically), he has been right there with me, guiding me gently. This thesis means much more than a tohu paerua (Post-graduate degree) to me, it is bringing his aspirations, his hopes and dreams to life. The opportunities that have developed alongside this thesis and the learnings I have had through connecting to te taiao (the environment) has reminded me of moments that he and I shared. Through kōrero (conversations), fishing, rongoā rākau (healing practices using native trees) harvests, walks, camping, connecting me with different people, studying and reclaiming te reo Māori together. My life has been the accumulation of the many gems he passed down to my whānau and me, all of which became clear as I navigated the journey of grief after his passing. I wish with every part of me that I could have talked with him and asked him questions, but I came to realise his answers were left in everything he taught me and every memory I have of him. My Pāpā was wise, carrying many stories shaped by the different seasons of his life. Through his experiences and the teachings of our tūpuna, he passed down a depth of knowledge that now lives on in me. My Pāpā will always be our biggest inspiration and each one of us in our whānau had a special connection with him.

Ko koe te kaitiakitanga o tōku haerenga e Pāpā. I roto i tēnei ao me te ao wairua. Mei kore ake koe, kāore au i whakaohoho i tēnei huarahi mā te taiao. E haere tonu ana mātou ko tōku whānau i te kaupapa whakahirahira i te whakapiki me te whakaora i te oranga o te taiao.

Arohanui e Pāpā.

## He mihi

He uri tēnei nō Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Rangitīhi, Te Whānau a Apanui me Ngāi Tahu hoki.

I te tuatahi, he mihi tēnei ki ngā hau e whā, e tiaki nei i a au i roto i te wairua me te aroha o te taiao, o ōku tūpuna hoki.

Ka tuku mihi ki tōku whānau e uru mai i roto i te kaupapa o te rangahau. Ko te moemoeā o tōku Pāpā e poihoa nā koutou. Ko tēnei kaupapa te oranga o te mauri o tō mātou whenua me tō mātou oranga kei roto i a koutou. Kua mōhio mātou ki te uauatanga o tēnei kaupapa i muri i te wehenga o tōku Pāpā engari kei te mōhio mātou, kua whakatipu ia i ngā kākano tīmatatanga kātahi ka taea mātou te haere tonu.

E rere kau ana taku mihi ki ngā ahurangi o taku tohu paerua.

Kei a koe Ken, ia te wā he pātai āku, he haumuri, kāore au i te mōhio he aha te take o te kōrero, me tuku karere ki a koe. Kātahi ka tohatoha i ētahi mātauranga, ā, ka taea te haere tonu te kaupapa. He nui tō puna mātauranga māu i roto i te kaupapa oranga taiao, oranga tangata.

Ki tōku tuakana ki a Anna, ko koe te whakatinanatanga o Papatūānuku. He tangata e tiaki ana i ngā tāngata katoa i roto i tō ao, i te mahi whakapiki hauora, whakapiki manawa o te iwi Māori hoki. Ia te wā, e kōrero ana au ki a koe, kia tau taku wairua. Kei te mōhio ka taea mā tō aroha ki a au.

E toru ngā ahurangi e āwhina mai ana i a au i roto i taku rangahau. Ko Helena te tangata, ka whakautu tere ki a au. I te wā i pukumahi koe i tō rangahau, i tō mahi hoki ka tae atu ki te āwhina tonu ki a au. E mihi nei.

Ko te whānau o Manawaora, ko koutou te korowai mōku mai i te tīmatatanga o taku mahi rangahau katoa. Otirā, ki a koe Tasha, taku tino hoa. Kāore he tangata ōrite ki a koe, ko koe te Tīwaiwaka i roto i taku ao.

Ko taku whānau mahi o Hēteri-ā-Nuku, I te nuinga o taku tuhinga, ka tautoko tonu rātou ki a au. Ko te tino akonga kei roto i tēnei mahi, te whakatūhono o ngā kaupapa taiao kei ētahi rohe o Aotearoa. He miharo ngā haerenga o te motu.

Ko Pā Rōpata te pūkenga, te pou kaha, te amorangi i huakina ōku karu ki te waiata o te ngahere. Ia wā ka tae atu ki tō taha, ka rongu ki te kōrero o te taiao, ka ako, ka mihi, ka hono.

Nōku te waimarie i te kaitiakitanga o ōku tūpuna, ngā Atua e tīmata ai i te ao kikokiko.

## Abstract

In a time where the generational impacts on te taiao are felt worldwide through a rapidly changing climate, and associated extreme weather events, the magnitude of the issues can sometimes leave us feeling hopeless. In our corner of te ao (the world) here in Aotearoa, we have an opportunity to take a lead, healing our fauna and flora, healing our whakapapa (genealogy) connections and healing the mauri (life force) of te taiao and the oranga (thriving/ living) of our people in the process. This research explored the innate relationship between the oranga of te taiao and the oranga of tangata whenua (people of the land) using the case study of one whānau based at their papakāinga (homestead) in Edgecumbe, Aotearoa. The whānau utilised a memorandum of understanding (MOU) created by a whānau member before their passing, in the hopes that it will be honoured in due time. The MOU was the foundations of this kaupapa (topic), bringing forth whānau aspirations, values and tikanga (practices/ customs) in order to create re-alignment to a Māori way of healing and uplifting oranga through a place-based whānau approach.

The whānau kaupapa aligned with the Tiwaiwaka principles on how to improve the oranga of te taiao and thus the oranga of the people. This research supports the revitalisation of mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) through rongoā Māori (ways of healing) and māra kai (gardening). The kaupapa incorporated the plantings of native trees, vegetables and fruit trees to create sustainable changes and promote oranga through connecting to te taiao. Identity and belonging are key elements to Māori whānau thriving, and this research kaupapa alludes to what could be achieved across the motu (country) pertaining to different whānau relevant to their contexts in their rohe (region). A collective approach such as the one utilised within this research promotes kotahitanga (unity), whanaungatanga (relationships) and manaakitanga (respect) for a common goal. Rather than our differences being hindrances, we identified them as the gifts we bring.

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## Glossary

<b>Māori Term</b>	<b>English Meaning</b>
Atua	Deity/ Supernatural being
Awa	River
Ā tinana	In person/ physically
Ā wairua	In spirit
Hapūtanga	Pregnancy
Hauora	Wellbeing
Huahuatau	Metaphor
Kai	Food
Kaitiakitanga	Guardianship
Kapa Haka	Performing Arts
Karakia	Prayers
Kaupapa	Topic
Kawenata	Covenants
Kohanga Reo	Language nests/ Te Reo Māori preschool
Kotahitanga	Unity/ togetherness
Kupu	Word
Kura Kaupapa Māori	Māori immersion school
Kākano	Seed
Kōrero	Conversation
Kōtahitanga	Unity
Kōura	Freshwater Crayfish
Mahi	Work
Mana	Authority
Manaakitanga	Respect/ care
Mau Rākau	Māori Weaponry Training
Mauri	Life force
Mauri Tau	calmness or balance
Moana	Ocean
Moteatea	Chants
Motu	Island/ country
Māra kai	Gardening
Māramatanga	Awareness
Mātauranga	Knowledge
Mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge
Mōhiotanga	Knowing
Ngahere	Forest
Ngā iwi Māori	The Māori people
Ngā Kete o te Wānanga	Three baskets of knowledge
Oranga	Thriving/ living
Papakāinga	Homestead
Pepeha	Introduction that locates and identifies linkages with people and place)
Poipoia	Nurture
Pou kōrero	Foundation
Pukenga	Knowledge holders
Puāwai	Blossom
Pāpā	Dad
Pūrākau	Narrative/ story
Rākau Rangatira	Chiefly trees

Rangahau	Research
Rohe	Region
Rongoā Māori	Ways of healing
Rongoā Rākau	Healing practices using native trees
Roto	Lake
Takaro Tāwhito	Traditional Games
Tangata	People
Tangata Māori	Māori people
Tangata Whenua	People of the land
Taonga species	Species of cultural significance
Tau	Balanced
Te Ao hurihuri	The everchanging world
Te Ao Marama	The world of light/ the natural world
Te Reo Māori	Māori language
Te Taha Hinengaro	Mental Wellbeing
Te Taha Tinana	Physical Wellbeing
Te Taha Wairua	Spiritual Wellbeing
Te Taha Whānau	Social Wellbeing
Te Toi-o-ngā-rangi	The twelfth heaven
Tikanga	Practices/ customs
Timatanga	Beginning
Tino Rangatiratanga	Self-determination
Tohu	sign
Tohu paerua	Post-graduate degree
Tānemahuta	God of the forest
Tūpuna	Ancestors
Tūpuna Whenua	Ancestral land
Tūhononga	Connection
Ukaipo	Connection to home
Uwhi	Woven native flax mats
Wai (bodies of water)	Bodies of water
Waiata	Songs
Wairua	Spirit
Wairuatanga	Spirituality
Waka	Canoe
Waka ama	Outrigger Canoeing
Whakaaro	Thoughts
Whakapakari Tinana	Action
Whakapapa	Genealogy
Whakapapa Kōrero	Intergenerational knowledge transfer
Whakataukī	Māori Proverb
Whakawhanaungatanga	Process of establishing relationships
Whanaungatanga	Relationships
Whare Wānanga	Māori immersion tertiary institutes
Wharekura	Māori immersion secondary schools
Wharenuī	Māori traditional meeting house
Whenua	Land / Placenta
Whenua kaitiaki	Land guardians/ the descendants
Whānau	Family
Whānau tikanga	Family customs
Wānanga	Places of learning

## 1. Te Timatanga

Ka poipoia te kākano, kia puāwai – If we nurture the seeds they will bloom. This whakataukī (Māori proverb) aligns with the purpose of this research as my Pāpā planted these seeds in our whānau, seeds of wisdom, of knowledge, of hope, of kotahitanga in the hopes of achieving whakapiki tūhono ki te whenua (uplifting connections to the land). From his view, reconnecting whānau to whenua is important, both for the whenua (land) itself and for tāngata whenua – people of the land. Whenua and taiao are referenced similarly through this thesis as they have a dual relationship, whenua being a traditional reference to the earth and taiao being the kupu (word) utilised in relation to te taiao (Te Aka Māori Dictionary, n.d). It is important to note this to provide context of the relationship of both kupu and their significance within te reo Māori (Māori language). The kaupapa of this research derives from a whānau led initiative that began through my Pāpā before his passing. My Pāpā recognised the privilege of our Māori-owned land, with shares between three siblings and a shared vision for the future. He wanted us to revitalise our connection to our whenua and to each other through a whānau Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) he created. Whānau hui were utilised to develop and implement strategies to reconnect to whenua such as planting natives for the purpose of rongoā Māori (ways of healing) for the whenua and for our oranga, revitalising our māra kai (garden) and restoring the mauri of the whenua.

The kaupapa is about honouring my Pāpā and his influence by moving collectively towards what he began establishing before his passing. The MOU outlines the named kaitiaki o te whenua (guardians of the land) who he included as the three landowners and ngā uri o ngā kaitiaki (land guardians/ the descendants) (Gertie Savage whānau, 2023). The two parties are those who are responsible for the management and tikanga of this whenua and any developments, decisions and visions for the future of this whenua (ibid). Any developments on the whenua must be led by aroha, whakapapa, values, respect, trust and a shared vision to ensure the benefits are felt by everyone and not one individual. Rather than a legal heavy document, an MOU was the chosen method of outlining what our aspirations are and the pathway towards them, grounded in our connection to one another and to our whenua.

In terms of land management there are four key pillars to the MOU:

- *Land management decisions need to be discussed collectively, should there be a disagreement, then a three-way vote will be cast.*
- *Decisions made for the ongoing management or improvements that will benefit the future generations.*
- *No additional structures (sleepouts) included on land block without necessary planning and approvals.*
- *Short, medium and long term whānau and whenua planning will be conducted on a regular basis with at least 3 wananga conducted per year. All whānau will be able to, and encouraged to, participate.*

(Gertie Savage whānau, 2023).

The purpose of an MOU is similar to a framework of understanding, simply created to identify the determinants of decision making while outlining the foundations and tikanga of the whānau. By having this MOU written by my Pāpā, it created a clear and simplified basis of how the kaupapa of this research was formed and the direction it took. My Pāpā and his vision are memories that I hold close to my heart and are a part of what drives me to nourish these seeds he planted.

## 1.2 Aim

The research set out to explore how whānau reconnection to whenua enhances the oranga of te taiao and of our people - oranga taiao, oranga tangata. The approach to oranga involves empowering whānau to enable collective tino rangatiranga (self-determination) towards achieving our aspirations for oranga taiao, oranga tangata.

## 1.3 Objectives

To achieve the aim of this research there are five main objectives:

- Use qualitative methods to identify what it is that the whānau already know of the importance of reconnecting to te taiao and what that looks like for future generations.
- Activate whānau kaitiakitanga (guardianship) responsibilities to clean up the whenua, begin the māra kai and plant native trees as well as fruit trees.

- Use wānanga as method to engage whānau with the MOU.
- Use haerenga kitea as method to document the healing journey of whenua and whānau.
- Create and implement a framework of sustainable practices within the whānau to continue through future generations.

## 2. Literature Review

This literature review centres on the importance of *oranga taiao oranga tangata*, exploring the health-giving relationships Māori maintain to places of belonging as a foundation for the current research project. It begins with a discussion of *oranga taiao oranga tangata* and then moves to Māori models of health as a grounding for these relationships. It then turns to kaupapa Māori, methodology and methods before explaining how these are used in the methods section of this thesis. Collectively the literature provides a strong framing through which to conceptualise the broader aim and objectives of this research.

Aotearoa New Zealand (here on referred to as Aotearoa) is known for the many beauties of its natural habitats, ecologies and taonga species (species of cultural significance), protected and cared for through the intergenerational knowledge systems; of the Indigenous Māori people (Erueti et al., 2023). The deeply intrinsic, holistic and relational understandings Māori maintain with *te taiao* are well recognised (see for example Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013; Jefferson, 2023; Hutchings, 2020; Marsden, 2003). *Mātauranga Māori*, commonly referred to as Māori knowledge systems, was developed as a result of these deep-seated connections to place and represents the influence of living in harmony with all living things as ‘co-producers’ of nature (Hutchings, 2020, p.47). These relationships inform the uplifting notions of *oranga*, we as *tangata whenua* experience when we connect to our places of belonging. Through a *tangata whenua* worldview, we acknowledge that we belong the land rather than owning it (Whaanga, 2021). However, this has been compromised through colonising processes that marginalised *mātauranga Māori* and Māori ways of being and doing (Jones, 2022). This literature review will discuss some of the approaches that have been revitalised through connecting to *te taiao* and how it impacts and improves the disparities *tangata whenua* have endured through colonisation. A central part of these traditional practices that are being revitalised includes mobilising whānau capabilities to produce their own kai (food) and *rongoā rākau* sourced on their own soil. An analysis of different kaupapa and research are included to demonstrate the

different elements that contribute to enabling tino rangatiratanga, promoting self-sustainability, while also indigenising practices of connection to te taiao and to one another through a Māori worldview (Moore, 2022).

Human health is relevant in the context of environment health however it is critical to engage with this relationship through a whole person approach, including the influence of te taiao (Agarwal, 2024). In the literature review, the word ‘health’ is often used, but it is important to note that this term is derived from a Western framing. Within this paradigm, health often centres on diagnosing and treating biological dysfunction and infirmity, frequently overlooking other understandings of wellbeing and the wider determinants that influence it (Conti, 2018; Fabrega, 1990; Taiapa & Moewaka Barnes, 2021). Within a Māori context, having a strong relationship with te taiao is a crucial part of how Māori nurture health, through maintaining balance and healthy interaction between key domains of health (Turner et al., 2024; Durie, 1998). To better understand these health-giving relationships it is best to begin with a closer inspection of the concept *oranga taiao oranga tangata*.

## 2.1 Oranga Taiao, Oranga Tangata (thriving environment, thriving people)

A te ao Māori approach to *oranga* stems from concepts, values, and philosophies rooted deep within the Māori culture that are interconnected (Reid, Varona, Fisher, & Smith, 2016). *Oranga* encapsulates a holistic approach to thriving and living from a Māori perspective, one that recognises the relational dimension with te taiao. Within this view, the wellbeing of *tangata* is understood through the strength of connection to te taiao (Awatere et al., 2023; Awatere & Harmsworth, 2013). Elaborating, Panelli, & Tipa, (2007) support moving away from an anthropocentric approach, and instead advocate for placing te taiao at the centre of decision-making, in line with traditional Indigenous views of wellbeing. In order to interpret this relationship, it is vital to understand that according to Māori cosmogonies different environmental domains are inherently connected to Atua (deities/ supernatural beings) (Rangiwai, 2018). For *tangata whenua*, knowledge of Atua is shared through *pūrakau* (narratives), that contribute to Māori understandings of identity and origins (Rangihuna et al., 2018). Atua, such as Papatūānuku and Ranginui, the primal earth mother and sky father, are acknowledged as *tūpuna*, linking *tangata whenua* to the celestial world through *whakapapa* and *mauri* (Wakefield, 2008; Marsden, 2003). These foundational beliefs articulate the depth of

Māori relationships with te taiao where identity is inherently grounded in ancestral connections.

Whakapapa begins in pepeha (introduction that locates and identifies linkages with people and place) connecting tangata whenua to tūpuna whenua such as maunga (mountains), moana (oceans), and awa (rivers) (Ngawhare, 2019; Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2019; Menzies, 2021). In this context whakapapa and pepeha enhance a Māori understanding of identity and positionality (Cunningham et al., 2023). Significance of whakapapa is evident through a Māori approach to introducing oneself by the sharing of pepeha during whakawhanaungatanga (the process of establishing relationships) within a new group (Rata & Al-Asaad, 2019). The use of pepeha is a way to create connections, represent identity, and bring tūpuna alongside you, into a new space (Opai, 2022). The ability to share ancestral landmarks can foster a sense of mauri tau (calmness or balance) (Cunningham et al., 2023). As a result, many tangata whenua, remain guided by a focus on and alignment with te taiao, meaning that Māori actions are deeply rooted within connections to the natural world (Hikuroa, 2017). Within these relationships, tangata whenua understand themselves as the potiki (youngest) in the cycle of life, with te taiao as the tuakana (elder), as it existed before us and will remain after our passing (McGowan, 2020). The tuakana/teina relationship establishes an understanding of the reciprocal roles and responsibilities inherent in being either the tuakana or the teina, a dynamic that parallels the principles of oranga taiao and oranga tangata. The significance of these concepts forms the foundational basis of this kaupapa and must be understood individually before their dual relationship can be meaningfully understood. For this reason, the following section is organised into two subheadings Oranga Taiao and Oranga Tangata to explore how the oranga of the environment influences the oranga of people.

### 2.1.1 Oranga Taiao

Māori are part of te taiao, inherently connected through whakapapa, in contrast to Western capitalist perspectives predicated on land ownership and resource exploitation (Whaanga, 2021). The distinctions between Māori and non-Māori worldviews of te taiao underpins many of the ecological crises facing Aotearoa today, as colonial structures continue to suppress Māori whenua-based knowledge and practices (Wynyard, 2023). Colonising processes have eroded traditional understandings of kaitiakitanga, disrupting the relationship between tangata whenua and te taiao (Arnt, 2024). It is important to note that kaitiakitanga is more than just guardianship, it is an active, reciprocal guardianship that sustains the mauri of the land, guided

by tikanga and ancestral responsibility (Lockhart et al., 2019). These practices embody a balanced and intergenerational way of living while ensuring the wellbeing of both whānau and whenua. Through kaitiakitanga, environments are cared for not only ecologically, but spiritually and culturally, reinforcing the mutual nurturing tuakana/teina relationship fundamental to Māori wellbeing (Walker, 2019). Kaitiakitanga in practice is exercised through protecting and uplifting relationships with te taiao, derived from Atua. Papatūānuku is well known by her characteristics of a caring and nurturing mother (McGowan, 2024) and her traits are reflected upon tangata whenua, with the mauri she brings and resources she shares which sustains life (Robertson, 2019). Through these deep-seated relationships, mātauranga Māori continues to support the understandings of how to care for her (McGowan, 2020).

Western capitalist concepts that see te taiao as another commodity to be exploited have led to the over use of resources from Papatūānuku such as water, metals, coal and fossil fuels (Crewdson et al., 2020; Barber, 2019). The harmful over consumption of Papatūānuku and her resources, contributes to increased rates of global warming through the production of greenhouse gases and the destruction of habitats and ecosystems that provide vital processes for planetary health; resulting in catastrophic weather events and volatile environments (Höök & Tang, 2013; Soeder, 2021; Whyte, 2017; McGregor et al., 2020). This means that weather instability, temperature rises, loss of biodiversity, ocean acidification, extreme droughts, and floods will continue to apply pressure on humanity's ability to survive on planet earth (Willett et al., 2019) while potentially accelerating progression towards the sixth mass extinction (Ukaogo et al., 2020). On an international scale, the global impacts of climate change also have a direct impact on Aotearoa, through habitat and ecosystem decline (Keegan et al., 2022). Global warming has altered the functioning of ecosystems, disrupting understandings of climate patterns and seasonal predictions that sustain taonga species (ibid). While monitoring species is a common approach to tracking climate change, it does not in itself address the underlying issue.

Such a morbid outlook reminds us that a collective approach to oranga taiao is required in order to improve the quality of our environments in both local and international contexts. It is important to note that interventions such as treating water to ensure it is drinkable, using chemically formed amendments and sprays to reduce weeds and increase the health of the soil, and flood defences to ensure that rising water levels do not affect communities, are only temporary adaptations (Seneviratne et al., 2012). Instead, more dynamic and longer-term

solutions are required to address the environmental complexities humanity is facing (Taiapa, Wright & Moewaka Barnes, 2024). As a result, it is increasingly recognised that Indigenous concepts, values, understandings and practices must be integrated into local and national environmental planning to mitigate the effects of global climate change through restoring balance within our environments and between te taiao and tangata (Bashmakov et al., 2022). Within Aotearoa colonising processes have resulted in widespread degradation of native forests and extensive draining of wetlands, significantly altering the relationship within and between natural ecosystems (Parsons, 2019). Pastoral farming and plantation forestry are two large industries within Aotearoa that contribute considerably to the economy (Ministry for Primary Industries, 2020). However, it is estimated that pastoral farming covers 50% of land in Aotearoa and plantation forestry cover 2.1 million hectares, 20% of total forest cover (ibid). In total 15 million hectares of the 27 million hectares in Aotearoa is used for agriculture and forestry. Despite such a staggering scale, there is a significant disconnect between what communities want their lifestyle, land and landscapes to reflect in relation to the current economic, agriculture and environmental policies that uphold such destructive industries (Kaye-Blake, et al., 2024). The fact that half of the land in Aotearoa is used for practices that critically harm te taiao further highlights the current priorities of vested industries and those in seats of power (Caradus et al., 2023). If these industries continue to place economic gain at the expense of te taiao, there will not be enough sustainable land for their operations and for communities to thrive alongside in the long term. Considering this dire predicament in Aotearoa we are forced to look for other measures of success.

Clearly, given the imbalance caused through the fixation with pastoral farming and forestry, it is critical to adopt a taiao-first approach grounded in mātauranga Māori; where kaitiakitanga and place-based knowledge is crucial to sustainable outcomes for te taiao in Aotearoa (Black, 2020). The flourishing resurgence of Māori-led initiatives aimed at restoring the health of te taiao across a range of ecosystems and habitats attests to the advancement of Māori being crucial advocates in the management of environment resources (Forster, 2023).

The Raukūmara Pae Maunga restoration project was born from the cries of the ngahere (forest) in the Te Whānau ā Apanui and Ngāti Porou area of the East Coast region of Aotearoa. Ecological decline due to introduced animal species such as deer, goat and possums meant that the Rakūmara ecosystem was on the brink of collapse. The impact of these pest species led to taonga species being eradicated while creating space for other introduced plants to take over

the native plants that ordinarily keep the mauri of the whenua in balance. Through the support of Te Papa Atawhai - Department of Conservation and other partners, the groups involved aimed to restore the mana and the mauri of the whenua. This required an integrated approach drawing on Western science and mātauranga Māori to deal with such a complex ecological breakdown. As a result of strategic planning and monitoring the following activities were developed:

- **Deer and goat pest control** - Targeted management to reduce browsing and allow understory regeneration in the Raukūmara.
- **Monitoring operations** - Implemented to address the lack of updated habitat data, providing a knowledge base to guide restoration mahi (work).
- **Whānau connection to whenua** - Strengthening whakapapa-based relationships to ensure knowledge, guidance, and tikanga shape operations through a tika (correct) process.
- **Use of 1080** - Introduced in 2024 to restore biodiversity efficiently; 107 hectares treated with positive regrowth observed in a short timeframe.
- **Intensively managed sites (IMS)** - Raising awareness of pest impacts in the vast, remote Raukūmara and working to prevent ecological collapse.
- **Community engagement events** - Wānanga, hui, BBQs, and workshops used to share the kaupapa and involve the wider community.

(Raukūmara Pae Maunga, n.d.)

To create cohesion around this project guiding values were developed; aroha - people at the forefront, pono - local knowledge and invited experts to uphold the integrity and mana of the Raukūmara and manaakitanga - strength of connections through the restoration of te taiao of the Raukūmara. Collectively these values represent an iwi-led initiative, collaborating with a government department operation, which highlights the importance of collaboration and connections.

A further illustration of a place-based approach is through a project led by Te Arawa Lakes Trust centred on restoring the oranga of their taiao in Te Arawa region, drawing on traditional methods and mātauranga Māori of their rohe (Te Arawa Lakes Trust, 2021). The trust was established post Te Arawa Settlement 2006 to support hapū and iwi members in creating further flourishing potential for the spiritual, mental, emotional and whānau wellbeing of Te Arawa (Te Arawa Lakes Trust, 2024). A part of the mahi involve the monitoring of taonga species

populations in their lakes such as kōura (freshwater crayfish), through pest and weed management.

### **Key historical events of Te Arawa Lakes**

- In the 1950's, aquarium water was dumped into the lakes around Rotorua leading to an increase in weeds, so vastly that it is having a negative impact on the migration of the kōura into the lakes (Tebbutt, 2021). The lagarosiphon weed also contributes to the displacement of native flora, and oxygenated water levels (Lakes Water Quality Society, n.d.).
- In 2016 the brown bullhead fish was spotted in lake Rotoiti, prompting the beginning of the pest management plan for the lake alongside the support of the Bay of Plenty regional council and community volunteers (Bay of Plenty Regional Council, n.d.).

Mātauranga Māori approaches were utilised in the weed management plan that started in 2021, where uwhi (woven native flax mats) were placed into areas where the weeds were prominent (Te Arawa Lakes Trust, 2022). The uwhi worked to suppress the weeds while creating better habitats for the kōura and in turn, contributing positively to the oxygenation within the lakes.

Another approach utilised in this project is the use of tau kōura, a traditional Māori fishing method using native fern bundles (NIWA, n.d.). Tau kōura was adapted within this kaupapa as a kōura species monitoring method in the lakes, which has been the most beneficial and cost-effective tool. Traditional methods utilising mātauranga Māori are an expression of tino rangatiratanga and have shown to be a positive attempt at resolving modern-day issues with as little obstruction to the natural ecosystems within te taiao (Roberts et al., 1995).

The kaupapa of Raukūmara Pae Maunga and Te Arawa Lakes Trust demonstrate the contribution and impacts of mātauranga Māori utilised and sustained from local hapū and whānau. The importance of these kaupapa is their approach of connecting local volunteers, and kura while providing education on the importance of restorative practices from within a te ao Māori perspective (Tapsell, 2023). Promoting community involvement supported the recovering and long-term flourishing of te taiao through exercising tino rangatiratanga, kaitiakitanga and other te ao Māori concepts (Roberts, 2013). Together these initiatives demonstrate how people are merely a part of the interconnected processes of all living things and web of connections to ensure the continued cycle of balance is sustained (Heke et al., 2018). It is the responsibility left by tūpuna to ensure future mokopuna know strategies for ensuring the health of te taiao and how to connect to it for their oranga (Paul, & Laird, 2023).

For Māori, enabling values and knowledge systems are central elements to enabling oranga tangata, by enhancing our sense of identity, sense of belonging and existence (Rāwiri, 2012).

### 2.1.2 Oranga Tangata

Colonisation set a paradigm shift in motion for Māori that completely transformed society, laws and practices within Māori society (Ngata, 2019). Pre-colonial Māori were able to express their identity freely by speaking te reo Māori, utilising and connecting to tūpuna whenua (ancestral land) and wai (bodies of water) (Nicholson, 2021). Through colonising processes, Māori society was assimilated into a western way of living; being beaten for speaking te reo Māori, having land confiscated, being forcibly removed from tūpuna whenua, forced into urbanisation and being systematically marginalised through racist attitudes and institutions (Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2019). As a result, the connection between te taiao and tangata whenua has been steadily eroded across generations. The urban drift saw many Māori leave rural tūpuna whenua for cities, seeking employment and resources (Sepie, 2024; Keiha & Moon, 2008). As a trend, urbanisation affected Māori from the late 1950's significantly disrupting oranga tangata by reducing everyday interactions with te taiao. Tangata whenua were forced to a lifestyle that did not align with our cultural wellbeing, by reducing connections to natural environments combined with being integrated into a more Western, sedentary and passive urban environment (Warbrick et al., 2023; Morrow, 2014). The repercussions of this demographic transition resulted in generations of Māori who were multi layered through the way they expressed their identity and the challenges they experienced through being displaced.

The urban drift created a wave of Māori living in cities, defining them as urban Māori (Ryks et al., 2016). The term refers to Māori who are disconnected to whānau, hapū and iwi. Insight into this phenomenon is provided by a participant in research on the urbanisation of Māori in Wellington, who, when asked about the term 'urban Māori,' Her response highlights the complexity of identity:

... urban Māori to me is a Pākehā colonisation word that I will never ever use at all, but that's me, we are not all the same. Ko tēnā kupu, he whakaitia taua te Māori – that word, it belittles us in a way – and because we were colonised we should hang on to it? No, and that's what I am talking about because a lot of people lose their traditions and

their language and they grab on to these kupu, kupu Pākehā, which doesn't mean a bit to you and I as Māori responded (Keenan, 2014, p. 34).

The above quote is from a kaumatua named Huhana Clarke who objected to the term urban Māori and highlighted that although whānau may move into the cities they are still whānau, and when they come home you greet them and welcome them (Keenan, 2014). Clarke's quote alludes to a Māori conceptualisation of the term ahi and the varieties of it; ahi kā, ahi teretere and ahi mātao (Rewi, 2014). Ahi kā relates to whānau and hapū who live on tribal land, who continue the traditional customs and practices pertaining to that area as well as keeping connected to whānau and whenua (Te Maihāroa, 2019). The term ahi kā is commonly used to refer to the people that keep the home fires burning. Ahi teretere is the in between state of ahi kā and ahi mātao, who are whānau that do not live on their tribal land but return from time to time (Pēwhairangi, 2019). Their fires are still a flickering flame but they are not as strong as those of the ahi kā. Lastly the ahi mātao are those who do not tend to their home fires and do not attempt to have a connection to their whānau living on their tribal lands, they are disconnected and live away (Vallance et al., 2025). Such disconnection has profound implications for oranga tangata, as wellbeing is inherently tied to maintaining ahi and sustaining intergenerational connections with whenua and whānau. The ahi kōrero is an example of how traditional methods of sharing knowledge through pūrākau have a metaphoric way of teaching lessons, passed down through the generations. The pūrākau reflects tangata whenua ways of sustaining oranga through connection to tribal land (Pouwhare, 2016; Paul, & Laird, 2023). In this context ahi directly uplifts oranga tangata through sustaining cultural identity.

Often pūrākau such as the kōrero of ahi kā share a Māori worldview, explicitly connecting te reo Māori, te taiao and te ao Māori, highlighting the history of tūpuna connections to te taiao thus enhancing oranga tangata (Hikuroa, 2017). Advancing oranga tangata requires a deliberate shift towards strengthening connections with te taiao, ensuring that environmental wellbeing is upheld as a foundational priority while recognising that human health cannot be separated from the health of the natural world (Panelli, & Tipa, 2007; Taiapa, 2022). In this context the whakataukī “Ka ora te whenua, ka ora te tangata” - Pā Ropata, translates to; when the land is well the people will be well, reminds us of such fundamental thinking (McGowan, 2020). The disconnect of exercising tino rangatiratanga and upholding the relationship with te taiao has detrimentally impacted oranga tangata (Broughton et al., 2015). There is an imbalance of the

relationship with te taiao, meaning that the ability to live accordingly to our own values, principles and tikanga has been suppressed. To illustrate, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, (2002) summarises that “the freedom for Indigenous peoples to live well, to live according to their own values and beliefs, and to be respected by their non-Indigenous neighbours” (p.11). The statement aligns to the pursuit of tino rangatiratanga that Indigenous peoples uphold in alignment with their own health and well-being (Ahuriri-Driscoll et al., 2008). Through this understanding of achieving oranga tangata, the initiatives that have created a pathway of reconnecting to whakapapa, belonging and collective identity has been through whānau-centric approaches.

In recent times a key method of oranga tangata is through deepening understandings of our knowledge systems, through the use of pūrākau and place-based knowledge to reconnect to a Māori understanding of concepts such as mauri. As tangata whenua, the ability to sense and uphold the mauri of the whenua through accessing its strength, is central to the enhancement of oranga tangata (Ware & Walsh-Tapiata, 2010). The development of the *Mauri Model* (Morgan, 2006) has made significant contributions to this kaupapa by providing a practical framework for understanding how human actions affect both te taiao and tangata whenua. The model measures wellbeing across four interconnected dimensions: environmental wellbeing (taiao), cultural wellbeing (hapū), social wellbeing (hapori) and economic wellbeing (whānau). These dimensions mirror the holistic nature of oranga tangata, recognising that human flourishing cannot be separated from the health of the environment, culture, community, and economy. Indicators are chosen to represent the impacts upon mauri within each dimension, with the purpose of identifying what sustains or undermines long-term wellbeing. In this way, the *Mauri Model* does not simply measure the state of the environment, it provides a tool for aligning decision-making with relational Māori values and supporting the collective pursuit of oranga tangata.

Such models can support the restoration of the mauri of te taiao and tangata whenua. In recent documentation of environmental disasters, mauri has been recognised within recovery plans such as the MV Rena 2011 (McLean, 2018) and Cyclone Gabrielle 2023 (Goode et al., 2025). The MV Rena was declared the worst ever maritime environmental disaster of its time in Aotearoa, spilling around 350 tonnes of oil and 950 tonnes of oily waste along the beaches of Tauranga and surrounding areas (McLean, 2018). The moana is a vital source of sustenance for kaimoana, and a vital part of oranga tangata through the mauri giving aspects of the moana

(Matthews, 2018). Embedded in many pūrākau, the moana has healing energy while also being a space for water activities such as swimming, diving, waka ama (outrigger canoeing) and fishing (Straker, 2020). The impacts of the MV Rena on oranga tangata of the people and the environment at the time, had to endure a long journey of healing for the moana and thus the oranga of tangata whenua. Exercising kaitiakitanga of te taiao is central to Māori through identity, however the impacts of disasters such as the MV Rena, were detrimental to Māori. Their inability to share their knowledge of te taiao to their mokopuna by polluting their source of oranga, mauri and the depletion to the health of kaimoana species is unjustifiable (McCarthy et al., 2014). Within the 2012 MV Rena recovery plan, the set goal was to “restore the mauri of the effected taiao to its pre-Rena state” (Fa’au & Morgan, 2014, p. 1). In order to achieve this goal, the *Mauri Model* was used to adequately monitor the progress through a culturally aligned tool (Faau & Hikuroa, 2017). Clearly, such a move acknowledges the value of mauri in the context of te taiao and the aspirations of tangata whenua, recognising the importance of Māori concepts in leading recovery and restoration of te taiao and thus uplifting oranga tangata.

The *Cultural Values Impact Assessment* by Wayne Ngata (2023), was another example where understandings of mauri and the role of keeping people safe while enhancing oranga was addressed (Goode et al., 2025). The assessment was a part of a report for Waka Kotahi NZTA focussed on the SH35 Hikuwai Temporary Road Diversion following the loss of the Hikuwai bridge during Cyclone Gabrielle 2023 in the Tairāwhiti (Gisborne) area (ibid). During the reconstruction, ensuring that the whakapapa of the whenua is upheld rightfully while understanding the mauri that each living being is bringing to that area was highlighted. The impact of the cyclone, not only physically impacted the people in the Tairāwhiti and surroundings areas, but it also impacted oranga tangata. Whānau and communities of Tairāwhiti were isolated with limited access to resources due to land slips, as well as tūpuna resting places being disrupted and marae being completely ruined (Stone et al., 2024). It was important to provide an understanding within the Ngata’s impact assessment of how the strength of the mauri closely aligned with sustainable practices that were used to support recovery of the Tairāwhiti area. The report included a careful assessment to ensure that the mauri was minimally disrupted, while putting the needs of ahi kā at the forefront through salvaging whakapapa of those areas. Environmental disasters such as Cyclone Gabrielle highlight how recovery efforts grounded in mauri create pathways for oranga tangata that endure across generations. Indigenous approaches centre not just immediate recovery but the long-term flourishing of people, whenua, and whakapapa.

These examples highlight the need for a Māori lens, local iwi knowledge and tino rangatiratanga towards decision making in response to our depleting taiao and thus ensuring that oranga tangata is sustained. It is clear that Western strategic responses to oranga taiao and oranga tangata are culturally incongruent and must be led by tangata whenua. All groups living on the land can benefit from Indigenous knowledge systems, which are deeply rooted in the practices of tangata whenua. This approach also allows non-Māori who are attentive to the mauri of te taiao to contribute meaningfully. However, in the context of Aotearoa, Māori have generations of significant connections to the mauri of our whenua (Pomare et al., 2023). The role of mauri is key to aligning to the rhythm of te taiao and tangata whenua and thus creating sustainable life (Reweti, Ware, & Moriarty, 2022). Understanding Māori concepts ensures oranga tangata can continue to be supported through identity, belonging and acknowledging the innate relationship between oranga taiao, oranga tangata.

## 2.2 Hauora Māori Frameworks

Māori, like other Indigenous Peoples living in colonised societies around the globe, have been forced to engage with a Western health system lacking in cultural relevance (Durie, 1998; Taiapa & Moewaka Barnes, 2021). Despite recognition on these health-giving relationships we as tangata whenua maintain with te taiao (see for example Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013; Harmsworth & Roskrug, 2014) the dominant health system remains centred on biomedical approaches to health (Miles et al., 2025). Such approaches focus on physical ailments rather than taking a whole person approach and recognising the importance of holistic principles such as the spiritual and mental wellbeing of patients (Loomis, 2000; Graham, & Masters-Awatere, 2020). Health inequities developed throughout the 1900's were not addressed fairly until further research was developed to represent the need for health treatment to align within the worldview of the patient rather than a 'one size fits all' approach (Durie, 1994).

A Māori approach to healthcare emphasises a patient and whānau centred approach, providing a deeper understanding of how to prevent further health decline rather than treating the issue exclusively (Walker et al., 2008). Within a Māori worldview, approaches to health centre on identity, connection to te taiao, and other philosophical concepts while considering all aspects of wellbeing (Mark & Lyons, 2010). It is important to compare and contrast Western, Māori and holistic understandings of health as it creates a baseline understanding of the barriers that

Māori face through our ability to access relevant services for health in alignment with our worldview (Wilson et al., 2018; Durie, 1999; Reweti et al., 2022). It is important to note, however, the inadequate health treatment of Māori, led to the evolution of hauora Māori frameworks that were utilised to enhance Māori experiences through health services while supporting a Māori understanding of oranga taiao, oranga tangata (Durie, 1999, 1998).

In this section three different hauora Māori frameworks will be outlined and discussed including *Te Whare Tapa Whā*, *Atua Matua*, and *Te Rau o Rongo*. Each have unique attributes drawn from different whakapapa but equally advocate for the advancement of te taiao and tangata whenua. The relevance to the kaupapa of this thesis, is to further understand how the interconnections between oranga taiao and oranga tangata can uplift the health of tangata whenua. It is important to recognise that although referred to as 'hauora Māori Frameworks,' these are contemporary tools used to articulate a Māori worldview through a Māori lens. These frameworks provide culturally grounded contexts that support and enhance Māori health and wellbeing (Nelson & Tipa, 2012). The kōrero that pertains to each of these frameworks have been developed to address intergenerational Māori health inequities, and in doing so they enable both Māori and non-Māori to understand Māori perspectives on our relationships with te taiao and how these contribute to our oranga.

The inequities Māori faced and continue to face through Western medicine and the lack of culturally relevant care was a primary influence for Durie (1984) in developing *Te Whare Tapa Whā*, a hauora Māori framework. The aim of doing so was to address the key factors to consider when engaging whānau in a health context, as well as identifying pathways to hauora (Durie, 1984). The model (Figure 1) focuses on the four metaphoric walls of a whareniui (Māori traditional meeting house) that represents wellbeing: te taha hinengaro (mental wellbeing), te taha wairua (spiritual wellbeing), te taha whānau (social wellbeing) and te taha tinana (physical wellbeing) (Durie, 1998; 1985). In this context the wellbeing of people relies on the healthy interconnection between these four pillars to maintain balance (ibid). If one of the pillars is compromised or not being prioritised, then the whare will be imbalanced and negatively impact wellbeing (Te Tai, 2019). *Te Whare Tapa Whā* provides a holistic approach through a Māori worldview to health, based on analysing an individual's entire being and the wider determinants that may affect them (Rochford, 2004). To understand the importance of each pillar, as well as in the context of the overall structure, a closer inspection is required:

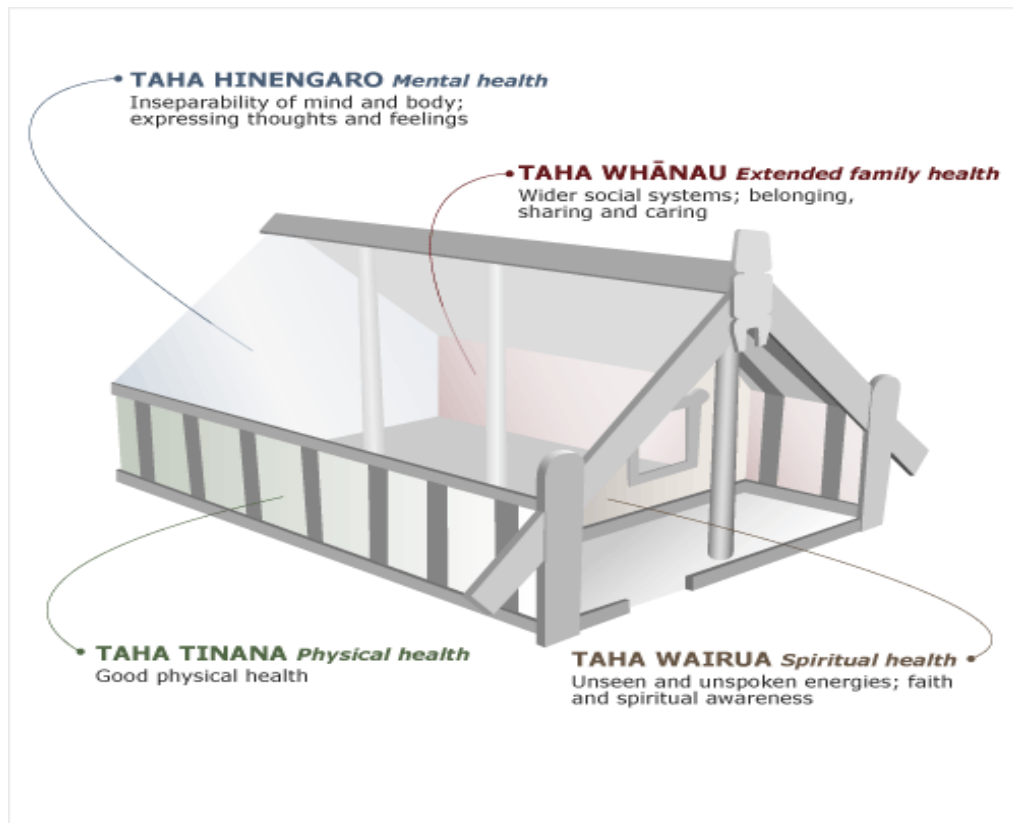


Figure 1 Te Whare Tapa Whā; Adapted from Mason Durie, *Whaiora: Māori health development* (1998, pp. 68–74).

### Te Taha Hinengaro (Mental Wellbeing)

Te Taha Hinengaro focuses on the mental and emotional well-being of how someone thinks, acts, and feels when expressing themselves (Sculley & Smith, 2023). Hinengaro relates to the psychological processes of experiences had by an individual and the ways in which they can address these experiences (Durie, 1984). Mental impacts to an individual may deflect and impact other domains of hauora which in turn is what enables or restricts a flourishing te whare tapa whā. Imbalances can be restored into a tau (balanced) state when interacting and being connected with te taiao. There is a unique calmness that comes from being within te taiao. The more activated senses are experienced when a person is in te taiao such as knowing where you are, what you can feel, smell and touch brings you into your present state, closer to being tau (Lipsham, 2023).

### Te Taha Wairua (Spiritual Wellbeing)

An unseen yet impactful concept that can only be felt is Te Taha Wairua, relating to spiritual well-being and the giving aspect of meaning and purpose to self-identity (Harris, 2016). Māori are connected deeply to tūpuna who have passed, and the Atua of environmental domains (Sampson, 2021). Wairua is felt through everything living, especially through the connections of te taiao and tangata whenua (Valentine, 2009). There is a special wairua to te taiao, a strong rooted web of connection that people are a part of (McGowan, 2020).

### Te Taha Whānau (Social Wellbeing)

These are relationships that are more than nuclear whānau alone such as friendships and connections made with people that have a positive impact on social wellbeing (Purdy, 2020). Whānau is one type of relationship strongly linked to the beginning of life and how ideologies are shaped through whakapapa. Other relationships are formed based on common interests or connection through whānau ties, concepts of belonging and other impactful societal relations (Burton, 2023). Te Taha Whānau is multi layered through a Māori lens, including the relationship with te taiao. The communication and connection metric of te taiao are how people have been able to survive and thrive for generations before colonisation. This connection can only be achieved when spending time with it, to understand it deeply.

### Te Taha Tinana (Physical Wellbeing)

Te Taha Tinana relates to how the body works, grows and the way it is cared for (Tinirau et al., 2021). It also includes physical health and issues, sleep, eating patterns and other physical patterns (Tulip, 2021). Being in tune with your physical wellbeing can benefit your mind and body connection which is a recognised strategy to improving overall wellness (Sodi, 2025). Te Taha Tinana is the enabler of physical feeling which affect other domains of *Te Whare Tapa Whā*. For example, the act of physically engaging with ngā rākau o te ngahere me te wai o te moana (the trees of the forest and the waters of the ocean) can have a profound impact on a person's thoughts and emotions.

Although te taiao relates to each domain of *Te Whare Tapa Whā*, the framework highlights the hauora of a person clearly from a Māori perspective. However the framework has not evidently

identified te taiao being centric to a Māori understanding of hauora, but the common understanding is that a whare cannot be separated from te taiao in which it resides.

A recent model that uses traditional methods of physical activity to enhance the oranga of te taiao also illustrates the centrality of te taiao as a domain of health. The *Atua Matua framework* (2014) by Dr Ihirangi Heke focuses on environmental concepts to support Māori connecting to a Māori ancestral model revolved around te taiao. The *Atua Matua framework* focuses on shifting the mindset of health by removing people from the centre and replacing them with the pursuit of knowledge. The basis of the *Atua Matua framework* was formed through a pre-European Māori understanding of health, drawing on mātauranga Māori, whakapapa and Atua. Health and hauora are new terms relating to oranga however, Heke's research identifies that traditional physical activity had purpose and meaning, involving taiao elements to gain tribal knowledge and understandings to provide for whānau, hapū and iwi. Some of these examples would be kapa haka (performing arts), mau rākau (Māori weaponry training) and takaro tāwhito (traditional games) to name a few.

There are three key concepts within the pursuit of knowledge in a Māori worldview mātauranga (knowledge), mōhiotanga (knowing) and māramatanga (understanding) (Forster, 2006). The concepts are interchanging within one another and are practically applied differently between iwi and kaupapa. There is a deeply rooted understanding of the *Atua Matua framework* being a productive framework for shifting from hauora Māori frameworks focussed on health, which derive from a non-traditional term to connecting with ways that tūpuna kept well through the continued pursuit of knowledge through environmental domains. The four pillars of the *Atua Matua framework* are mātauranga, whakapapa (connection), huahuatau (metaphor) and whakapakari tinana (action) (Heke, 2023). Each of the concepts explained below provide more context on each domain to enable more of a perspective on an Atua Matua framework as a way of living.

### **Mātauranga (Knowledge)**

Engaging with specific bodies of knowledge and the taiao from which they originate.

### **Whakapapa (Connection)**

The ancestral and lineage-based connection tangata whenua have with environmental domains. This concept is about deepening understanding of te taiao as tūpuna and the roles of Atua. An example is Rongomatane and his ability to foster balance and well-being for both people and environment. This contrasts with the Western paradigm of resource exploitation without regard for its impacts.

### **Huahuatau (Metaphor)**

A way of interpreting te taiao through whakapapa, recognising that individuals perceive and understand environmental messages differently based on their experiences.

### **Whakapakari tinana (Action)**

The last phase applies the first three concepts into action by shifting from short-term, health-focused physical activity to sustainable initiatives grounded in environmental connection and knowledge.

(Heke, 2023)

These four concepts are the foundations of the *Atua Matua framework* and illustrate the purpose of returning to a traditional way of being. The focus is a taiao centric model, aligned with the pursuit of knowledge. *Atua Matua* is a framework that relates closely to the kaupapa of this research as it is another environmentally centred way of conceptualising health grounded in relationships between tangata and te taiao.

A recent unpublished thesis from Te Kahurangi Skelton (2023) shared her experience with her whānau from Taranaki and how they expressed their tino rangatiranga through developing Taranaki-centred conceptualisation of climate change and hauora. It led her to the creation of a Taranaki framework of hauora '*Te Rau O Rongo*' incorporating three pou (foundations); Tino Rangatiratanga, Whakapapa and the notion of Kia ū ki a Rongo (healing and reconciliation). The significance of this research is to understand a uniquely Taranaki perspective of climate

change and hauora while connecting the whānau to their whenua. A pūrākau by the researchers' late father, 'Haere whakamua - Ngā kōrero o Rata Pue' was a collection of her father's thoughts around tino rangatiranga in the understanding of climate change in her whānau. Skelton's research is a representation of intergenerational knowledge transfer from her passion beginning with her Pāpā and the mahi he did within te taiao, to then putting his words into action with her whānau. She has captured an in-depth understanding of the impacts that reconnection to te taiao can have on whānau. The research has potential to positively impact others within her community as well as other iwi in understanding climate change, hauora and what that may look like within their whānau.

The evolution of utilising frameworks from within te ao Māori has been a transformative process in supporting Māori to understand ourselves better through the underpinning values of tūpuna and how they lived. Embedded within these frameworks are examples of traditional ways of understanding, living and being. Placing these values and beliefs within these frameworks, is creating tools to rebuild connection to identity (Reweti, 2023). The loss of identity is one of the detriments of colonisation that is being rebuilt and the representation of Māori voices through these initiatives to advance hauora supports the notion of connection to identity (Te Huia, 2015). Utilising frameworks to understand a Māori worldview to health is a way to enhance the effectiveness of the current Western paradigms of healthcare for Māori. These frameworks also represent potential proactive whānau Māori strategies in taking ownership, action and care for their own hauora. The different frameworks speak to the benefits of culturally grounded philosophies of health that embrace the importance of connection to multiple domains of hauora. Examples of this are whānau, wairua, mauri, te taiao, mātauranga and whakapapa. There are many other concepts that represent Māori understandings of hauora; thus, the ones represented in this chapter are only a snapshot of the multifaceted ways we can support oranga taiao, oranga tangata.

### 2.3 Kaupapa Māori

A resurgence of Māori political consciousness, activism, and cultural revitalisation of the 1970's and 1980's created a new breed of politicised and Western-educated Māori, inspired by civil rights rhetoric and discourse, wanting to change the status quo (Jackson, 2015). This led to what Graham Hingangaroa Smith (2003) describes as a "shift in mindset" (p. 2), in which Māori gained greater control over the narratives and knowledge they shared in research. Previously, they had been positioned as the subjects of Western research, often framed in terms

of failure and underachievement (Tiakiwai, 2015). The resurgence of activism in the 1970's Māori political movement, called for recognition of tino rangatiranga (Smith, G.H et al., 2017). The movement towards an aspirational and positive advancement approach for Māori, by Māori, was empowering and transformative. It created the early impetus for a positive Māori-driven initiative that became known as, kaupapa Māori (Mahuika, 2008; Pihama et al., 2002; Smith, G.H, 2017). Grounded in Māori worldviews, kaupapa Māori is a critical theory that seeks to critique and transform oppressive structures (Eketone, 2008). It was through these developments, and the call to action against colonising agendas, that new pathways of resistance emerged, particularly those centred on producing and reclaiming their own knowledge.

According to Graham Hingangaroa Smith (1996), this movement was spawned from within the Māori-led transformations of the education sector in Aotearoa in the 1980s. Kohanga Reo (language nests/ te reo Māori preschool) Kura Kaupapa Māori (Māori immersion school), Wharekura (Māori immersion secondary schools) and Whare Wānanga (Māori immersion tertiary institutes) were a part of the movement (McDonald, 2016). The movement was the gateway to revitalising and remobilising Māori people. Language is the heart of culture and provides a way of passing on cultural knowledge, thus connecting people to te ao Māori (Robust, 2002). In Aotearoa, as tangata whenua, whakapapa connections mean that the whenua can be heard and communicated with intricately; and language helps to do so te reo Māori is deeply rooted within te taiao as it is woven into karakia (prayers), moteatea (chants), waiata (songs), pepeha and many other forms (Hikuroa, 2017). These oral traditions are a way to ensure that knowledge of tangata whenua, tikanga and traditional practices can be passed onto future generations. The Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa movement set the precedence for kaupapa Māori demonstrating a shift in mindset. Replacing the focus from decolonisation which is centred around colonisation to an uplifting mindset of conscious raising (Huygens, 2011). Critical awareness and connection to traditional practices were woven into this movement through educating tamariki Māori (Māori children) to develop cultural competency and responsibilities at a young age, thus better supporting the development and adjustment of young Māori into education and adulthood as Māori. These developments set other Māori-led initiatives in motion.

## 2.4 Kaupapa Māori Research

There is a long history of research in Aotearoa grounded in colonial imperialism that has been detrimental to Māori (Gemmell, 2013; Smith, L.T, 1999). Such research was used to reinforce colonial notions of identity through highlighting Māori ‘otherness’, focusing on perceived deficits, underachievement, and negative stereotypes such as being lazy, untrustworthy, and prone to violence (Wilson et al., 2021). The diminishing representations of Māori fuelled their distrust of Western research, with the term research eventually becoming a dirty word to Māori (Smith, L.T, 1999). The lack of Māori participation in research reinforced the imposed Western hierarchy of knowledge that placed Māori as the observed and classified Māori as objects alongside flora and fauna (Mikaere, 2011). The exclusion of Māori knowledge, experiences and voices in research during the early years of settlement created a ripple effect of oppression, poor health, poverty, racist beliefs and behaviours towards Māori (Mahuika, 2015). Kaupapa Māori research is a Māori driven response to the monocultural research approaches in Aotearoa that have caused intergenerational damage (Pipi et al., 2004).

In the present context we benefit from these earlier movements through having the ability and space to control the development and implementation of our own research for our own benefits. For example, the development of kaupapa Māori research came a set of important principles to consider as a Māori researcher. The reality for kaupapa Māori researchers is that Western research continues to be well established in the research world in Aotearoa, therefore there needs to be a clear understanding of the tikanga and kawa of kaupapa Māori research by those who are involved.

Although diversity within kaupapa Māori research is evident, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) lists seven kaupapa Māori practices to help guide the process:

- Aroha ki te tangata (a respect for people)
- Kanohi kitea (the seen face; that is, present yourself to people face to face)
- Titiro, whakarongo ... kōrero (look, listen ... speak)
- Manaaki ki te tangata (share and host people, be generous)
- Kia tupato (be cautious)
- Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata (do not trample over the mana of the people)
- Kaua e mahaki (do not flaunt your knowledge).

These principles are an important aspect of kaupapa Māori research as they help researchers to be reflective throughout the research to ensure the mana of the researched and researcher are upheld. Furthermore, they guide and ensure that the research continues to be grounded in tikanga through a process that is tika to Māori.

These practices that guide the process of kaupapa Māori research, are equally enhanced through the *Te Ara Tika framework* Hudson et al., (2010), a crucial set of guidelines for Māori ethical issues in the context of decision-making. The framework is designed for researchers, ethics committee members and those who choose to engage, consult or need advice on Māori ethical issues from a local to international level (Came, 2013). Its key objectives are to explain Māori ethical concepts, support decision-making, identify ways to address Māori ethical concerns, and clarify the kaitiaki roles of Māori ethics committee members (Hudson et al., 2010, p. 2).

The *Te Ara Tika framework* is underpinned by four central principles; whakapapa, mana, tika, and maanakitanga while being grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Indigenous values and previous contributions in the field of Māori ethics (Te Awekotuku, 1991; Cram, 1993, Smith L.T, 1999, Hudson, 2004). Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) articulation of kaupapa Māori research positioned ethics in alignment with Māori ways of knowing and being within a research space. In correlation with *Te Ara Tika*, it reflects evolution within kaupapa Māori research. It ensures that engagements within research involving Māori is done in a way that upholds tino rangatiratanga, protect whakapapa, and create safe spaces where tangata whenua can flourish as active partners in research processes.

The values, belief systems and practices of Māori are key contributing factors of positively influencing kaupapa Māori research to enhance the health and wellbeing of communities involved. It differentiates between different whānau, hapū and iwi involved, relevant to the context of place, whakapapa, language and histories (Marsden, 2003). For Irwin (1994) this means that the Māori world leads, and the research world follows.

Within this framing we see how kaupapa Māori research works to enhance how Māori are represented in research (Walker et al., 2006). Since the renaissance efforts in the 1970's, kaupapa Māori research has evolved rapidly, fostering tangata whenua to exercise tino rangatiratanga through sharing their own stories and truths (Mihaere, 2015). Two examples of how kaupapa Māori research has been used and in what ways are described below through the

*Manaaki Tangata – The Secret to Happiness* and *Pūrākau o te Ngahere* (McDonald, 2016; Erueti et al., 2023). The examples within the different research kaupapa showcase the impacts of kaupapa Māori research in practice.

Based in Bay of Plenty, Aotearoa; *Manaaki Tangata - The Secret to Happiness* shares the narratives of Māori elders written in a PhD thesis by Marama McDonald (2016). The study investigates a group of 16 Māori elders aged 80-90 years old and their experiences of happiness over their lifetime. The methodology of this research is underpinned by kaupapa Māori theory and uses a qualitative approach to explore participant meaning-making. A critical Māori lens was used to support the thematic analysis using Māori norms, words and concepts which enabled the creation of a conceptual framework where happiness is viewed in a holistic way. The concepts within the framework were mana enhancing through the promotion of meaningful existence using four pou for illustration:

*Mana Atua* - A connection and commitment to the larger universe;

*Mana Tūpuna* - Strengthened genealogical relationships;

*Mana Tangata* - Realisation of human potential;

*Mana Whenua* - Harmonious integration and unity with the environment.

The 2016 study provides a positive representation of kaupapa Māori research, sharing the experiences of Māori and how the participants narratives have shaped the conceptual framework of mana. Analysing another kaupapa Māori research project to demonstrate an approach to conservation methods through a te ao Māori lens is represented in the following example. To show the adaptations of kaupapa Māori research to enhancing experiences for te taiao and tangata whenua.

*Pūrākau o te Ngahere* (Erueti et al., 2023) is a research project led by a group of researchers, funded by Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. Aligned with kaupapa Māori methodologies, pūrākau was used as method, to capture the understandings of participants and their lived experiences through the meaning and value of te taiao, ngahere and taonga species. Of the 73 participants within this study, all were recruited through family affiliations, leveraging the principle of whanaungatanga (relationships) and its consistent presence represented in kaupapa Māori research (McGill, 2023). Participants were located in different areas of Aotearoa, in order to gain a diverse collection of pūrākau. The key themes developed from the kōrero were ūkaipo (connection to home), whakapapa kōrero (intergenerational

knowledge transfer) and wairuatanga (spirituality (Erueti et al., 2023). The study shares an interpretation of how Māori express and connect to taonga species and address biosecurity issues (ibid). Current conservation practices reflect a Western knowledge system, with limited acknowledgement of Māori beliefs and values (Moller, 2009). The findings conclude that a successful long term biosecurity plan for Aotearoa must be in alignment with strategic goals of Māori. *Pūrākau o te Ngahere*, affirms that the use of mātauranga Māori frameworks, principles and values is necessary in the environmental management and protection of te taiao, ngahere and taonga species (Erueti et al., 2023).

In these studies, the intimate relationship that researchers and participants have, brought a special and connected element to the sharing of kōrero. A connected approach with participants is demonstrated in both *Manaaki Tangata - The Secret to Happiness* and *Pūrākau o te Ngahere*. The two studies show the importance of whanaungatanga that enabled the sharing and receiving of in-depth pūrākau. Through using wānanga it ensured a tika process of upholding the integrity of what is shared through trustworthy and respected relationships. Interviews were held kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) which was imperative within the process of whanaungatanga (Mead, 2003). As we see in these examples, kaupapa Māori theory support us in the “... affirmation and legitimation of being Māori.” (Pihama et al., 2002, p.30) and in the use of Māori concepts and frameworks to generate our own knowledge (Smith, L.T, 1999). Both examples share the impact of intergenerational knowledge transfer and its prevalence through Māori whānau and communities.

In alignment with mātauranga Māori knowledge systems derived from the whenua, kaupapa Māori research provides pathways to connect and strengthen the interrelationship between oranga taiao and oranga tangata. To support guiding reconnection to te taiao and leading with a whenua first approach, we must turn to Māori frameworks and understandings for guidance in restoring and revitalising connection. The Tīwaiwaka Principles provide such insight.

## 2.5 Tīwaiwaka Principles

The creation and sharing of the Tīwaiwaka principles was an initiative led by Pā Ropata, grounded in mātauranga passed down from tūpuna of Whanganui. Tīwaiwaka is a set of six principles aligned with the whakataukī ka ora te whenua, ka ora te tangata - when the land is well, the people will be well (McGowan, 2023). It shares an outlook and way of living where

we focus on the land as being the priority over ourselves, as human. The key takeaways of these principles are that they stem from a traditional Māori approach, in tune and aligned with the balance of te taiao. The principles aim to restore hope, and bring unity in a world that often feels divided in its approaches to keeping well.

Principle 1 - Te Whenua, Papatūānuku, is the source of all life. She is the mother. Ka ora te whenua, ka ora te tangata.

Principle 2 - We are not the centre of the universe, but we are part of it.

Principle 3 - The mauri is the web of connections that sustains life.

Principle 4 - Te tangata, people, are not the masters of the mauri; we are part of the mauri and embraced by it.

Principle 5 - No individual person is more important than any other.

Principle 6 - We give special care to the tiniest living creatures.

Perhaps these principles read simple, because they are. The more we listen to the tohu (signs) of te taiao and what it is showing us, the closer we are able to get to restoring and healing the mauri of our whenua. Pā Ropata often says we won't find the answers to the issues within the thinking that created it (R. McGowan, personal communication, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2023). Having this set of principles, enables people to come together and work towards finding a collective way forward that is leads with caring for Papatūānuku first. If we can return to this way of being and thinking in decision making, then we will return to a sustainable way of life. Drawing the focus on our differences as benefits rather than inhibiting our ability to effect change collectively is how we will create the critical mass required to address the current climate crisis. Tīwaiwaka unites us, with a shared vision and by utilising our differences in a positive way. Differences enable a range of strengths to come together, bringing innovation and thus uplifting each one of us to contribute.

The knowledge of Tīwaiwaka comes from the whenua of Aotearoa, and much like the manu it aims to spread itself far and wide and make itself known. The knowledge of these principles is not new but derived from mātauranga Māori and shared through many different wānanga spaces. Both the Tīwaiwaka Principles and Wānanga come from knowledge woven through Atua; Papatūānuku and her oranga giving attributes, enabling whenua to thrive, along with Tāne retrieving the knowledge systems of tangata whenua.

## 2.6 Wānanga

The concept of wānanga stems from the well-known pūrākau *Ngā Kete o te Wānanga* (the three baskets of knowledge). This pūrākau tells the story of Tāne, Atua of the ngahere and its dwellers, and his journey to Te Toi-o-ngā-rangi, the twelfth heaven (Te Aka Māori Dictionary, n.d). There, Tāne met with Io Matua Kore, the supreme being, to request the three baskets of knowledge: **Te Kete Tuauri**, the basket of sacred knowledge/darkness; **Te Kete Tuatea**, the basket of ancestral knowledge/light; and **Te Kete Aronui**, the basket of love, peace and the arts (Taonui, 2006). To obtain them, Tāne had to ascend through each of the twelve heavens, undertaking tasks and negotiations along the way. His eventual success enabled him to retrieve and share *Ngā Kete o te Wānanga*. This pūrākau is significant in understanding the meaning of wānanga, highlighting its foundations in a Māori worldview that values the sharing and exchange of knowledge. Wānanga is therefore understood as a traditional practice, derived from Atua and pūrākau, and a continual reminder of tangata whenua connections to te taiao and all living things (Maniapoto & Cormac, 2023).

Wānanga is a multifaceted word in te reo Māori as it can be applied as a noun and a verb (Smith, L.T et al., 2019). In the context of a noun, the meaning of wānanga relates to traditional tribal knowledge of pukenga (knowledge holders), philosophy, seminars or conferences (O'Brien & Strongman, 2006). As a verb, wānanga means to meet, discuss and deliberate which is a common implementation in today's practice of wānanga. Traditionally, where wānanga had distinctive tribal variations demonstrating the differences between the expertise of knowledge shared. In a modern context, where wānanga are known as formal institutions of teaching at higher learning such as tertiary level (Mahuika & Mahuika, 2020; Smith, L.T et al., 2019). Wānanga is a way of transmitting and sharing knowledge through different methods such as waiata, kōrero and karakia (Motu et al., 2023). The alignment of wānanga with cultural safety, invites deeper conversations in an environment that feels more comfortable and grounded in te ao Māori perspectives (Rahiri et al., 2024). Key elements when using wānanga as a method to build research excellence within Te Ao Māori are ritual, protocol, whanaungatanga, cultural context, knowledge transmission and relationships (Pohatu, 2007). There are increasing examples today of the ways in which wānanga is being used to advance Māori aspirations.

Ngāti Rangiwewehi and their deeply rooted use of wānanga spans back through generations (Mahuika, 2019). Pūrākau of their ancestors are shared such as the arrival from Hawaiiiki, tribal

research projects, whānau knowledge or teachings and community wānanga (Pihera-Ridge et al., 2023). The use of wānanga as a methodological tool enables tino rangatiratanga over Ngāti Rangiwewehi narratives and mātauranga that are shared amongst whānau and groups involved as collective knowledge (Mahuika & Mahuika, 2020). Wānanga provided an opportunity to come together with whānau including those who grew up around the marae and those who may were still reconnecting and learning their tikanga, kawa and te reo Māori. The wānanga have evolved intergenerationally, reconnecting whānau to who they are and where they are from through the sharing of memories and learning of their identity pertaining to Ngāti Rangiwewehi. The healing nature of these wānanga within Ngāti Rangiwewehi showcase a positive representation of Māori learning in an environment that aligns with traditional models of practice and applying it to a modern-day setting.

Another example of wānanga in practice is through a research kaupapa aimed at examining Māori connection to the ocean in order to understand the outcomes pertaining to Hauteruruku ki Puketeraki, a subtribe waka (canoe) club based in Karitane (Mita et al., 2023). The research adopted kaupapa Māori theory within a Ngāi Tahu worldview through the methodology of wānanga. Mita et al., (2023) utilised water-based activities for rangatahi which emphasized the importance of whānau involvement and engagement in research. The wānanga provided rangatahi with an opportunity to build their skills, knowledge and confidence on the water. The kaupapa also encapsulates mātauranga pertaining to the hapū and iwi of Hauteruku and Ngāi Tahu, thus an uplifting research project around reconnecting to te taiao and restoring the health of the people of Puketeraki and Ngāi Tahu.

Wānanga represents the revitalisation and creation of both traditional and emerging knowledge, evolving through time to provide spaces for learning within various rohe across Aotearoa (Baron, 2019). Oranga taiao, oranga tangata is a large knowledge system that is continually being revitalised and reintegrated (Awatere et al., 2023; Te Huia, Maniapoto-Ngaia, & Fox, 2022; Straker, 2020). As a result of wānanga, it has enabled the reconnection of mātauranga Māori understandings pertaining to place based connections through utilising tools such as frameworks and methodologies to enhance the experiences of Māori. In more recent years, there have been different methods within kaupapa Māori research to support how Māori share experiences. Haerenga kitea is one of those methods, utilising technology of today through a Māori way of representing storytelling in research.

## 2.7 Haerenga Kitea

Haerenga Kitea is a kaupapa Māori method of data collection developed by Moewaka Barnes et al (2019). As a method, Haerenga Kitea combines the ‘go along’ method of interviewing with the visual documentation of photovoice (Taiapa, 2022). As a form of visual documentation, it uses a ‘fly-on-the-wall’ approach where the researcher videos participants as they walk around important sites and immerse themselves in unique settings to help them focus on memories, experiences, reflections, perspectives and aspirations, associated with these sites (Taiapa, 2022; Moewaka Barnes, et al., 2019). The process captures valuable kōrero in the moment which might not otherwise be evoked in a standard interview setting. Although this method of data collection is relatively new, it is an example of a kaupapa Māori method which seeks to redefine research with Māori into a more culturally aligned and empowering way. A key part of haerenga kitea is removing power imbalances which are traditionally observed in Western research between the researcher and participants (Cameron et al., 2025). While being immersed alongside participants the researcher uses a video camera to capture verbal and non-verbal forms of communication such as body language, facial expressions and tone of voice (Jewitt, 2012). An imperative part of haerenga kitea is to allow participants to lead the kōrero while the role of the researcher is to be as least intrusive as possible. In turn this creates a comfortable environment for participants to guide the direction of their own kōrero and feelings as they walk around the site of significance.

Taiapa (2022) used haerenga kitea as method in his PhD titled, *‘Te Moeone Mārakai: Connection Ahi Kā and Healing’*. Taiapa used this method to explore participant experiences and perspectives of being involved with a hapū māra kai kaupapa during a guided kōrero through the māra kai. Two distinct groups were involved, one being a group of hapū members and a group of people who were involved with the māra kai but not hapū members. Through the method, both groups guided the researcher around the māra kai as they recalled different aspects of growing and harvesting kai as well as sharing and learning kai growing knowledge. The haerenga created an environment where the researcher and participants listened to kōrero of tūpuna actions, felt and heard the wairua of participants in their māra kai and the oranga benefits of being involved in the māra kai.

Pertaining to the research of this thesis, collecting data through haerenga kitea can uplift the whānau and document the journey of understanding what oranga taiao and oranga tangata

means to them. It can be used as a tool to assist future planning and direction of the kaupapa and how our whānau framework may develop. Haerenga kitea can be used as a reflective tool for the whānau as well, in watching aspirations grow over time. The method can be used in addition to other kaupapa Māori methods such as wānanga, to enhance the experience of the participants and enable an environment closely aligned to an approach embedded in a Māori strategy of sharing knowledge. This thesis will contribute to a valuable example of how haerenga kitea is utilised in practice and thus adding to the knowledge system of kaupapa Māori research.

## 2.8 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a tool used to analyse qualitative data, through identifying and reporting on commonalities and patterns within data collected that are developed into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis tool is useful as it can fit into a range of theoretical frameworks, broadening the potential to analyse the experiences and what that means for participants of research within a range of contexts. It provides a flexible method to analysing qualitative data which can also work in collaboration of other frameworks (Joffe, 2011). Having a cohesive approach to analysing data enhances understandings of the relationship that participants had through their experience in research. This is important to note as it strengthens the relationship to the aims and objectives of what was set out to be achieved within the research.

Although thematic analysis is not derived from kaupapa Māori research, it can be effectively used within a kaupapa Māori context when applied through a te ao Māori lens. Thematic analysis supports the validation of whānau knowledge through their own voices and lived experiences. It is based on the researcher's interpretation of themes that emerge from the data. When undertaken through a kaupapa Māori lens, this method enables the representation of Māori concepts, values, and aspirations, centring mātauranga Māori, tikanga, and te reo Māori. While thematic analysis typically identifies patterns and themes within qualitative data, kaupapa Māori enhances this process by aligning it with a Māori worldview through the use of a critical Māori lens. This ensures that Māori norms are privileged, and that Māori understandings and connections to te taiao, are foregrounded. Thematic analysis has been used widely in kaupapa Māori research (see for example McDonald et al., 2021; Haitana et al., 2020; Moewaka Barnes, et al., 2019). Within a Māori-led kaupapa, it becomes a powerful tool for understanding and amplifying Māori participant perspectives.

## 2.9 Literature Review Summary

Deepening insights that were identified within this literature review, broadened the scope of understanding from a researcher's perspective in engaging in this research kaupapa. Identifying what literature is currently available and how the different concepts interact with one another enhanced the notion of the interconnectedness within te ao Māori. The literature, highlighted within the Oranga Taiao Oranga Tangata section, identified current projects and impacts on a whānau, hapū and iwi level and how the momentum of self-sustainability is integrated within those projects. Comparing the different Hauora Māori Frameworks and the evolution that has taken place demonstrated the effectiveness of Māori tino rangatiratanga. Highlighted within the frameworks was the importance of a collective approach to improving a shared vision or goal, aligning with oranga taiao, oranga tangata. Lastly the revelation of kaupapa Māori research and the different elements that contribute to the research world in both Western approaches and mātauranga Māori approaches shared important insights. The development of kaupapa Māori in the academic and Western research world has given a stronger voice to Indigenous knowledge, experiences and ownership of knowledge. This has enabled a range of methods in alignment with a Māori worldview of research such as the use of wānanga, haerenga kitea and the integration of thematic analysis. Each having their place in this research kaupapa to enhance the understandings of what the data shares in relation to reconnecting whānau to te taiao.

## 3. Methodology

This research, '*Whakapiki Tūhono ki te Whenua*', focusses on the understandings, planning and implementation of how my whānau intended to restore our connection to our whenua. In this section I outline the qualitative methods that were used to achieve the aims and objectives of this research. The chosen methods were appropriate for this research as they foster a connected approach, immersing the researcher and participants together. This approach created a culturally relevant space where participants were able to share kōrero, reflections and experiences. Those that were shared during whānau hui were used to align the research with whānau aspirations by determining what is known of the importance of reconnecting to te taiao.

### 3.1 Kaupapa Māori Methodology

Kaupapa Māori methodology was woven throughout the planning and implementation of this research kaupapa. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) list of the seven kaupapa Māori practices that guide Māori researchers were continuously applied throughout this research to support the practice of being Māori. Using kaupapa Māori methodology in the context of this research enabled research with Māori through a lens that only Māori understand and live.

Ensuring that the whānau participating were well informed of the research processes and were engaged through the research was important in alignment with kaupapa Māori theory. While whānau and whakapapa connections between researcher and participants are not new in kaupapa Māori research, such relationships require a different approach maintaining clear boundaries while continuing to lead the kaupapa. It was valuable having this relationship within research as it provided a sense of comfort to participants as well as the researcher knowing each other well before taking part in research. These pre-existing connections enabled participants to connect and share rich insights with myself as the researcher more easily. It was important to lead this kaupapa with a tika and pono process, keeping participants safe and enabling them to be able to exercise tino rangatiratanga. The research kaupapa was also guided by the Tīwaiwaka principles (see for example, McGowan, 2023) to enhance understandings of how the kaupapa can impact te taiao and reconnect the understandings to environmental knowledge systems.

### 3.2 Tīwaiwaka Principles

The principles guided the research kaupapa and the position that it had to achieving the intended aim of understanding how whānau reconnection to whenua enhances the oranga of te taiao and our people. In alignment with this research kaupapa, Tīwaiwaka enhanced our whānau approach to how we understood what reconnecting to whenua means to us. There are differences amongst our whānau, and we have disagreements but this kaupapa was a rallying point that kept us unified to achieve implementing our whānau vision on the whenua. The kōrero of Tīwaiwaka was shared with the whānau at each whānau hui including the opportunity to hear it from Pā Ropata himself. The kōrero of Tīwaiwaka is one that uplifts the mauri, it creates a space to connect and bring hope. The mauri of Tīwaiwaka was evident through my whānau often revisiting the kōrero Pā shared and the importance of the Tīwaiwaka principles

in alignment with our kaupapa. The principles served as a vital framework in guiding this research, offering tangible insights into applying the knowledge across various settings. At the whānau level, it exemplified how reconnecting to te taiao can be achieved by embracing values that prioritise the mauri of the whenua, while fostering holistic well-being and restore ancestral ties.

## 4. Methods

### 4.1 Participants / Sampling

The participants of this research were selected through their whakapapa connection to the whenua of the papakāinga that the research was connected to. The participants were made up of a multi-generational whānau ranging from 84 years to 3 months old. The importance of including the whānau that are closely connected to this whenua was to ensure that the benefits of this research continue through the generations that are here now and into the future. There were approximately 48 whānau members present, with 22 participating over the two data collection sessions, with half of the participants being tamariki. Only children over 7 years old were included therefore 11 were given written consent by their parents to be involved over the wānanga and haerenga kitea data collection. The remaining children under the age of 7 who were present but not included in the data collection were still a part of the mahi and present at these whānau gatherings. Participants are all based in Bay of Plenty, New Zealand with the research taking place at the whānau papakāinga in Edgecumbe (Ngāti Awa).

### 4.2 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this research was gained through Massey University Human Ethics Committee (OM2 24/59). All participants read an information sheet and signed a consent form before participating in the research. The research was guided by tikanga and kaupapa Māori principles and values. Tamariki participation required a parental guardian present with them alongside the researcher supporting their understanding of their participation within this research. This was to ensure the safety and ethical procedure with the inclusion of tamariki and ensure that they understood the consent form that was being signed. A parent/ guardian signature on the participation form was obtained on behalf of the minors who we collected data from.

## 5. Data Collection

The research included the use of questions delivered in two different forms, wānanga and haerenga kitea over the two data collection sessions. During the first data collection session, wānanga took place in order to understand more about what the whānau were aspiring to achieve on our whenua. The whānau were put into two evenly split groups and given a section of questions at a time to answer as a collective. They were then asked to share their answers to the wider group before moving onto the next section. Audio recordings were used to capture the kōrero shared. The audio recordings were then transcribed and analysed. The second data collection used haerenga kitea, the go along interview process. Haerenga kitea involved asking the participants in small groups or individually a range of questions around their thoughts and experiences of this revitalisation kaupapa and what it meant to them.

### 5.1 Wānanga

Wānanga was the first data collection, facilitated and led by myself as the research lead, with a kaikōrero opening the kaupapa. 21 whānau members participated in the wānanga, sharing kōrero in alignment with the kaupapa. Wānanga provided collective spaces where I could engage with participants in a context of manaakitanga and kotahitanga in order to:

- Develop a shared whānau vision for the revitalisation of our whenua
- Develop a set of guiding concepts/principles
- Reconnect whānau to one another and the whenua
- Support data analysis from haerenga kitea
- Record kōrero through the wānanga on my phone audio recording.

The first data collection of wānanga was completed within a day long whānau hui. The wānanga began with providing the participants information about the kaupapa and signing consent forms. Our kaikōrero Pā Ropata, came and shared his kōrero and whakaaro around the importance of connection to whenua in relation to the Tīwaiwaka principles. The participants then worked in small groups, answering a range of questions, categorised into four key pou. The four pou included: whānau aspirations, whenua connections, the MOU and the framework. The next section details the meanings that were developed for each of these pou and why they were chosen to be included within this research.

### 5.1.2 Whānau Aspirations

The questions in this section were asked to understand how whānau viewed their relationship to the whenua. It included questions of reflection of the experiences whānau have had and what kind of future they would want to create for future generations to come.

### 5.1.3 Whenua Connections

This section centred around how the whānau aspire to rebuild whānau connection to whenua and the steps that need to happen in order to achieve reconnection. Barriers were highlighted within this section to understand what was inhibiting whānau to connect and how can we collectively overcome the challenges.

### 5.1.4 The MOU

The MOU is derived from my Pāpā and what he had previously written of whānau aspirations, whānau tikanga and opportunities. Previously, the MOU was spoken about to understand what the whānau understood of the MOU and if they found it effective for what we are trying to establish on our whenua.

### 5.1.5 The Framework

Lastly the framework was to understand what whānau agreed with, within the MOU and if there were any additions they had in order to progress the whānau framework. Having this time to consult with whānau was to encourage this whānau led kaupapa to be more led as a collective.

These four pou supported the creation of what the next data collection included, specifically how we implemented these whānau aspirations in an action-oriented way including plantings and cleaning up of the whenua.

The wānanga was held at the papakāinga where the research was took place, to support the appropriate developments on the whenua. Many of my own learnings have stemmed from the different kaupapa I have been a part of through learning spaces of wānanga and the connection of being immersed in a traditional atmosphere of learning through a Māori lens.

## 5.2 Haerenga Kitea

Haerenga kitea was held two months after the first data collection, with 22 whānau members participating and facilitated by myself as the researcher.

For the purposes of this research, haerenga kitea was used to explore and report on:

- Mahi taiao and revitalisation processes
- Participant experiences, perspectives and aspirations of being involved in this mahi
- Participant reflections of papakainga and other key concepts developed in the initial wānanga

The second data collection was in the form of haerenga kitea, while the whānau were working on the whenua. The questions of this data collection took no longer than 30 minutes total, while the researcher went around to ask different whānau members what their experience of the wānanga was and what the revitalisation mahi meant to them. The whānau members were asked individually or in pairs which was different to the wānanga process of giving the whānau the patai to work together on in discussions groups. The haerenga kitea meant whānau had to think on the spot of what their initial answers were and speak from their own whakaaro and experience in that moment. The haerenga kitea method gave variation within the data collection.

The use of this method captured the process by recording with a video camera to then be transcribed. The method enabled a natural essence to the collection of kōrero to capture mātauranga and lived experiences while engaging in the revitalisation mahi. The removal of traditional power imbalances within research visibly empowered the whānau to share video footage and dialogue. In the first data collection participants had time to process and kōrero about the answers of the patai compared to the second data collection of thinking on the spot with more individualised responses. By using both wānanga which facilitated spacious, collective kōrero grounded in cultural practices and haerenga kitea, which enabled more fluid, experiential go-along interviews, deepening insights into whānau aspirations and connections to whenua.

## 6. Data Analysis

During the analysis of the data collected through wānanga and haerenga kitea, it was important from a kaupapa Māori research lens to draw on what the data was representing. It was clear

that the results were likened to a rakau (tree) and the different contributing aspects there are to support a rakau to flourish. The understanding of a life cycle of a rakau is the phases of a seed, nurtured through water, good soil, sunlight, protection and then observing as it transforms and creates its foundations to grow. I looked at the themes that were developed from the data and how they interconnect with one another to tell the story of this whānau. The story of the themes derives from the seed that was planted of this kaupapa and the notion of reconnection. The elements that are going to nurture this seed of reconnection to whenua are understanding what the meaning of whenua is to the whānau and how they plan to achieve our aspirations. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was applied to the qualitative data gathered during the wānanga and haerenga kitea. Through an immersive process involving coding and theming of the data, codes were grouped into meaningful themes reflecting whānau experiences, aspirations, tikanga, and connections to whenua. The themes are presented in the findings section below and use verbatim quotes to represent the whānau and our experiences from the memories they have growing up on the whenua, how they perceive their connection to the whenua and what they aspire to do to deepen our connection. Pseudonyms are used in this data to keep participant identity confidential.

## 6.1 Results / Findings

The creation of this kaupapa by my Pāpā is firmly planted through the ideas and themes that surfaced throughout the findings. The vision he had for our whānau was woven within the whānau wānanga we had already done together and the MOU he created. To open this chapter, I have included a quote from Rangi (34) of her whakaaro on what this kaupapa means to her, “... *Continuing legacy even when people are obviously gone. Dad started it but we are continuing it for him...*”

The tūāpapa (foundation) that shapes the growth of this seed of reconnection are dictated by the elements that are there supporting it such as the themes of whanaungatanga, kotahitanga and kaitiakitanga. Once these foundations are established, it opens the space for the seed to flourish and thrive through intergenerational impact and the continued oranga of the whānau. Analysing the themes through this understanding connects the kōrero in a way that is relatable to a te ao Māori worldview by envisioning a process within te taiao of the growth cycle of a rakau and likening it to the themes that were present within the data.

### 6.1.1 Tūāpapa

Fortunately, for our whānau, the tūāpapa were already planted by my Pāpā. The theme of tūāpapa encompasses the sub-themes of whanaungatanga, kotahitanga and kaitiakitanga. Beyond this, tūāpapa represents the foundations that bind these sub themes together and anchors them to the overarching kaupapa of reconnecting to the whenua.

Approaches to ensuring the tūāpapa continues to uplift whānau through this kaupapa were discussed. Ensuring that a productive strategy was utilised throughout the journey was important for the whānau. In terms of tūāpapa, this meant ensuring that the environment that we worked together within was positive, Uncle Greg (55) pointed out, *“Everything’s just been positive, all the whānau, they’re all happy, the house is alive otherwise its only three of us who stay here.”*

Positivity again was highlighted when discussing the MOU developments around shared vision and what the whānau should include within it. The kōrero often referring to positive outcomes and positive inputs ensuring that the process is done in an uplifting coalition. For Kani (45) this was about, *“Adding to it positively.”*

When considering our tūāpapa, developing our whānau values aligned with the MOU underlined the need for aroha and respect. Whānau discussed what they wanted our values to be but also how they intended to achieve this through the ways in which we raise and lead one another. Below, Hone (30) describes the importance of aroha and respect as guiding whānau values, and how they can be practised, *“...aroha and respect guide our whānau, teaching good manners, good manners, good character and good people.”*

Understanding what our values are as a whānau to our approach of revitalising the tūāpapa of the kaupapa was important. Looking at what matters to whānau contributes to aligning the next steps to reflect what whānau care most about.

### 6.1.2 Whanaungatanga

Whanaungatanga is a fundamental concept in te ao Māori that refers to the sense of connection through relationships, kinship and shared experiences (McGill, 2023). Whanaungatanga was consistently highlighted during the two data collections, emphasising the value of connection

and relationship between our whānau and whenua. Maka (11) had a powerful reflection of what whenua meant to him when asked, he simply said, *“Whanaungatanga mum.”* Sharing the intergenerational impact.

As mentioned above, my Pāpā laid the tūāpapa of this kaupapa through the writings within the MOU based on future planning on and with our whānau whenua. In his eyes whanaungatanga was a more relevant concept for us as a whānau in rebuilding connections to our papakainga. This approach still resonated with whānau, as Rangi (34) explains, *“I think that part around relying on whanaungatanga rather than like a legal document is still pretty bang on.”* Similarly for Mere (27), the power of the MOU is its focus on whānau, *“I think it’s more whānau centred.”*

It was clear amongst whanau, that whanaungatanga is essential to creating stronger bonds to people and places of belonging. It was clear that individual and collective identity are tightly woven, as whānau considered the value of whanaungatanga towards this kaupapa. The ability to build stronger identity connections through the practise of whanaungatanga was seen as fundamental for building and maintaining cohesion across the whānau. As Rangi (34) explains, this is important to *“Help guide our relationships.”* and represents *“identity.”* While for Kani (45) enabling whanaungatanga in our whānau is about creating stronger bonds, so *“... we know where we come from.”*

The importance of whanaungatanga was also evident within the tamariki, at the end of the second whānau hui, one of the tamariki was asked what his favourite part of the day was, he said, *“The whakawhanaungatanga”* (Kohi, 14).

When whānau shared whakaaro on the barriers of achieving whenua and whānau reconnection, having more support was a pillar that arose. The support that was talked about was around financial, ride sharing to get to the whānau hui together and feeling as though we are time poor. These barriers come under the whanaungatanga theme because it draws on leaning on one another and creating mitigations for these barriers, as Hone elaborates:

*.... Support within, like supporting each other by turning up to these things will actually help everyone. So as much as there’s support that we can’t control like financial*

*support but we can actually support each other by being present, yeah and turning up to these things (Hone, 30).*

The acknowledgement through the generations of the importance of whanaungatanga was evident throughout the kōrero. Central to the kaupapa, it uplifts the relevance of supporting one another such as being present at the whānau hui.

### 6.1.3 Kotahitanga

During the wānanga other concepts were identified and discussed that were not explicitly stated in the MOU but were considered important to ensuring the success of this kaupapa. The process of wānanga enabled the whānau to kōrero and reflect on these values more closely and explore significance of these values. Kotahitanga is the concept of unity, togetherness and collective action, and was considered to be an important concept for guiding the collective path ahead (Meredith et al., 2025). In our context whānau reflected on this as simply being about maintaining unity and as Leila (14) said “... *working together as one.*” It was agreed that the value of doing so, according to Hone (30) is to “*ensure our goals and visions are met as a collective.*” Through this collective approach, Rangi (34) also emphasised, “*Everyone’s responsibility to look after the mara, not just Mere.*”

Throughout the wānanga, being together more and working collectively was spoken about frequently. The value and importance of contributing and caring for one another was intrinsically connected to caring for the whenua.

*It’s a good experience to be together as a whānau and getting stuff done together for the whenua and helping our nan and uncle because it can be quite a lot just for one whānau or one person. So it’s really nice to come together and yeah get stuff done together as a whānau (Tania, 32).*

Whānau reflected on our upbringing and what it means to come together on the whenua that we grew up on. Realisation of the intergenerational impact of growing up on this whenua and how we cherish those memories highlighted the value of kotahitanga through the way we interact with each other and the whenua. As Hera (33) put it, “*Coming together for me as a whānau is everything, and especially working on our whenua, where we grew up, where our parents grew up and where our nan sustained it.*”

When engaging with my whānau about how it feels to be implementing our whānau aspirations and visions that we have talked about at the previous wānanga, it highlighted how we, as a whānau, see value in the collective input. Our approach to kotahitanga is about allowing everyone to have a say in what happens on our whenua; this was emphasised many times throughout the wānanga, as Hone (30) describes, “... *bringing the whānau together is probably the best part about working on our whenua.....*”. Carl (32) agrees, “*Just the whānau coming together and working as a collective it’s not just the one person or its not, like everyone gets to have a say.*” Creating unity and kotahitanga is also about more than just working together, it’s also important for future planning and moving forward:

*.... coming together and figuring out what the plan is for the long term, not only for our generation but for the next generations to come too. And how we can keep everyone connected obviously when the whānau gets bigger, things can start to get loose but keeping this whānau, the Gertie Savage line connected for all the generations to come (Hone, 30).*

For Rangi (34),

*kotahitanga is also about translating planning and goal setting in to practice, having the resources here and all the pre work that you’ve done and getting the space ready and seeing the vision. Just makes it easier so that when we’re coming together like this - we’re getting it done rather than just still talking about it.*

In order for this journey to be sustainable, appropriate planning and goal setting must be implemented. Ensuring that our future generations understanding the kaupapa and the foundations of how it began will be outlined through the planning towards oranga.

#### 6.1.4 Kaitiakitanga

Kaitiakitanga as a sub theme of tūāpapa, relates to how our whānau recognise ways to continue protecting te taiao and through whānau voice, what that looks like for them. The quotes within this theme show some of the understandings of the whānau in relation to climate change impacts and what the relationship of our connection and presence on the whenua is in relation to kaitiakitanga practices.

Whānau took our roles as kaitiaki seriously and highlighted the need to clear and clean up the land while ensuring we weren’t adding to the problem of pollution. It was clear through kōrero that kaitiakitanga of our whenua needed to begin with creating space. Rangi (34) said “*Move*

*the cars.*”, in reference the cars that have been deteriorating on the whenua for years. She also said more skip bins to try and get rid of the other junk that has been collected. Keeping in mind that we are trying to make use of as much as we can without adding to the problem of waste. Hera (33) had similar whakaaro relating to the need for clearing space and wanting to “*get rid of the rubbish.*” as well as Leila, (14) sharing how she envisions caring for te taiao by “*picking up rubbish.*”

Being more present and immersed in the kaupapa when we are on the whenua was also highlighted as a part of our guardianship. This meant that kaitiakitanga was clearly recognised as a practice that is not about only the physical essence of guardianship, but also the spiritual. For Rangi (34) kaitiakitanga is also about presence and occupation of whenua “*... even just coming back and being here, you know that helps us look after the whenua.*”

Alongside cleaning and clearing space, and increasing time spent coming back home on our whenua, whānau also felt that kaitiakitanga was about making a good impact on our whenua when we are there. There was a clear consensus that recloakng the whenua should be a priority for us a kaitiaki of our whenua. For some this is about supporting the wider taiao, such as Aunty Pare (66) sharing, “*...plants are always a good thing aren't they for the air, air that we breathe.*” Whereas for Aria (26) recloakng the whenua is about both aesthetics and healing, “*... when we were planting the trees its therapeutic and it will be cool to come back and look like, our grandkids can eat the fruits of the trees that we planted.*”

Our tamariki also understood and acknowledged the importance of kaitiakitanga, further highlighting the intergenerational nature of this kaupapa. For Maka (11), being involved in the wānanga is energising and uplifting, “*Makes me feel good because we are protecting our environment and that our family can come together.*”

Having tamariki acknowledging what it feels for them when they are being kaitiaki to our whenua is a strong pillar to achieving oranga taiao, orangata tangata. By instilling these foundations it brings hope that our future generations will have the understandings of how to be connected to our whenua.

### 6.1.5 Sense of Belonging

The concept of belonging stemmed from whānau reflecting on what the papakāinga meant to them, as well as the mahi that we were engaging with during the implementation of our aspirations on the whenua. Building on other concepts like whanaungatanga and kotahitanga, it was clear amongst whānau that being connected to the whenua provided feelings of stability, legacy, belonging, and pride. In many cases these feelings contributed to the collective effort and the accomplishments achieved towards the broader vision, as Hone (30) explains, *“Proud, and not just proud of myself but proud of the whole whānau getting in there, and getting their hands in the whenua, and yeah, played a part in the bigger picture of getting everything up and running.”*

Sense of achievement directly draws on a sense of belonging, by engaging with meaningful mahi such as being in the garden and knowing that you were a part of growing that kai source for the whānau. Uncle Greg (55) put it as *“Being proud of your accomplishment after you harvest your garden. And the achievement you feel when you harvest.”*

Making the link clear between uplifting the oranga through connecting and planting to sense of belonging was recognised by Hera (32). Her enthusiasm stemming from seeing her kids making memories like she once had on the whenua, and bringing life back into the whare her nan and dad occupy, a full circle moment of realisation for her. *“I think this mahi uplifts our oranga 100% in anything that we do but with all these all these trees, all this land that we’ve done it gives a sense of real belonging.”*

During the kōrero of what the whenua means to the whānau, Uncle Greg (55) had some powerful quotes that reflected his feelings and what it means to him. A man of few words but through the mauri, his engagement and body language during these quotes, he was able to summarise the whānau’s feelings of belonging, *“Whānau ora.”* and the linking to connection, *“The whenua is me.”*

Uncle Greg (55) felt his connection to his whenua giving him a deeper sense of belonging. He grew up on this whenua and still lives here now, but when he compared the depth of connection he experienced in his upbringing, to what our whānau have as of recent years, he has observed a growing disconnection among our wider whānau. Hence bringing an increased awareness to

wanting to enhance our connections to how Uncle Greg experienced it when he was a young boy.

#### 6.1.6 Intergenerational Impact

Intergenerational impact is how the whānau see this mahi impacting the future generations. This theme was strong amongst most of the kōrero during the wānanga and haerenga kitea, ensuring that we leave a good foundation for future whānau to continue. The MOU will be passed down and modified to the context of our future generations, to ensure that we are removing barriers and creating opportunities for connection to both our and collective aspirations.

Collectively it was felt that the whānau having a grasp on the intentions of the MOU is essential to ensuring they can continue the aspirations of tūpuna and enhance it sustainably through the generations.

*... could be one wānanga a year, talking and going through the MOU so any new kids that are coming to the table understand what the MOU is about and the ones that have been at the table for a while may have things that we can do to better, make it more effective. Like it's easy to have wānanga but like having a purpose of the wānanga that could potentially be the purpose of the wānanga for one of them... (Hone, 30).*

For many of the whānau, comprehending the concepts that my Pāpā and others from our older generations aspired to have on our whenua is clearly a priority for how we move forward as a collective. For Hone (30) this requires a “... *clear understanding of our older generations vision I guess, the generation that's gone before us.*”

The discussion around our whānau vision initiated the idea the MOU would be a living document, Rangi (34) stated “*Using the MOU as a living document so it can be modified like it was 01.01.23.*” Kani (45) expanded on this, reinforcing this perspective “*so our future generations will find it more adaptable to their living situation.*” In order for the MOU to be modified and adapted to the circumstances, aspirations and visions of the whānau in the future, Rangi (34) concluded with notion, “*that's right, weaving and moving with the times.*”

Exploring the past generation's vision allowed our whānau to explore what they wanted to implement for the next generation and our whenua. The ideas strongly linked to whakapapa Wiremu (46) shared, “*Setting up the next generation...*” Whānau understood that a part of

connecting and staying in touch with one another for intergenerational impact was important. Carl (32) suggested, “*Keep up communication.*” when discussing with Hone how they intended to achieve our whānau aspirations for our future mokopuna, Hone (30) concurred, “*Communicate future visions...*”

Aunty Lala (64) insisted in order for this kaupapa to create an enduring impact across generations we need to, “*...keep your fullas kids growing up and involved, the things we are doing now like the wānanga, carrying on.*” Mere (27) was in support, “*Cause they will have ideas.*” Adding to the conversation, Carl (32) agreed, “*Yeah cause we want it to be second nature for when they grow up.*” Acknowledging the importance of intergenerational contribution means that we can evolve with their aspirations.

Whānau used reflective kōrero of our upbringing on the whenua and what they want to instil into our tamariki. Connecting them to our whenua and whānau aspirations was seen as an important strategy for ensuring intergenerational impact. Carl (32) shared, “*... feels good, especially having our kids around with us too so they also get a just of what’s going on here, not just us and the adults*”. Hone (30) agreed, “*Keeping our kids tight like how we had it when we were coming up...*”

Intergenerational impact was about influencing our tamariki and future generations to have a more connected relationship with one another and the whenua like older generations experienced. Bringing memories to life and creating close relationships was important to whānau.

#### 6.1.7 Oranga

In order to determine the success of this kaupapa attention was placed on the oranga-giving aspects derived through our approach of connecting to the whenua. In this context activities that supported plantings, whānau connections and the preparation for sustainable change within this whānau came to the fore. Oranga as a theme, shares some of those identified enablers to improving oranga and what that looks like in both tangible and intangible examples for the whenua and our whānau, and importantly our uri (descendants). Reflecting with whānau it was clear that supporting the oranga of the whenua and whānau is in part about using wānanga to come together, and creating opportunities to be action-oriented around our MOU, whānau values, and aspirations. Composting, planting fruit trees, māra kai and rongoa were all seen as

examples of supporting the oranga of te taiao and us as tangata whenua. Aunty Lala (64) affirmed the connecting of whenua and whānau, “...*healthy whenua, healthy whānau.*” This perspective is reinforced by Hone (30), “*Yeah, making time for these aye, and having it as a priority. Like what (kaikōrero) said, if our whānau is thriving then we will be thriving outside of this too. But if we don’t have our whānau and our backbone, obviously it could feel like a bit lonely and on our own.*”

Enhancing our connections to the whenua and each other through these whānau hui was highlighted as a key factor to lifting our oranga. Making effort to get together, enjoying the time together and doing something good for our oranga was important to whānau. The momentum to continue wānanga frequently throughout the year is a part of the oranga being able to thrive. Hone (30) described, “... *being able to connect more often obviously lifts the oranga of our whānau as appose to seeing everyone once or twice a year, we’re seeing everyone every couple of months now.*”

Hera and Rangi shared examples of how connection to land and one another has already made them feel uplifted. Hera (32), shared “*It makes me feeling awesome and amazing, especially for our whenua and our whānau, coming together and making something into something that we’ve never thought would happen.*” Following on from this, Rangi (34) added, “*And I think doing the goals that dad had set for us a while back, you can kind of see it coming to fruition now which is cool.*”

They both reflected on how it started with our Pāpā and some of his mahi and now those ideas have come to life. Identifying that it is something they never thought would happen before is having that real sense of hope and feeling as though the oranga of our whenua and one another can be impacted if we work collectively in line with our values and principles as a whānau.

#### 6.1.8 Tūhononga (Connection)

Tūhononga relates to the building and strengthening of connections and togetherness. The theme identifies what whānau value when it comes to our relationship with one another and the whenua and how they envision this connection to strengthen moving forward.

At the first whānau hui during the kaikōrero, Uncle Greg shared some of his thoughts on loneliness and the struggles of connection that our whānau has experienced, even when we are

fortunate to have more ways to communicate than older generations had. He shared stories of what it was like with his old people in his childhood. Growing up having to do the harvesting chores before and after school and always enjoying the time spent with whānau. In those days it was harder to connect, without mobile phones and each whānau having a car like we are fortunate to have now, his point being that we still aren't connected the same.

*They had nothing but they were happy. You know, that's what I can't understand, we have all the things we need at our hands but we can't connect with each other as much as what they did then (referring to older generations). They only had one car between three families, so the one car had to go backwards and forwards to pick each family up and take them to our kuias up in Te Teko, and we were all happy and everyone harvested, at the time it was a chore and I would tell my cousin I can't wait to grow up, to just watch the kids running around and the women in the kitchen. And that's what I find it hard, cause we are the old people now, we've got more than what they ever did and we can't ya know (referring to connection) (Uncle Greg, 55).*

Our kaikōrero acknowledged the differences between generations today vs how my uncle grew up in the 70's and 80's, but he also challenged it back to my uncle. Having our older generations who hold the memories of tūhononga from their upbringing with whānau, have the responsibility to support reigniting tūhononga in our whānau for future generations. Kaikōrero (75) highlighted, *“So the thing is, the ones who have got the memories, it's up to you to bring the memories back to life.”*

Understanding how the kaupapa is able to weave the whānau together for the greater vision of our whenua is reflected in Hone's (30) kōrero, *“.... I don't think we have anywhere else where we can all come together and connect as a whole big whānau. The only time we are all together like this is when we are on this whenua.”*

The impact of our kaikōrero coming in and sharing his whakaaro on whenua connections for oranga was felt deeply through the whānau and empowered some of the amazing kōrero that was shared during the wānanga. It spoke to the theme of tūhononga through the importance of connection, to place, to knowledge and to one another. Our kaikōrero had a connection to our whānau through my Pāpā and myself which has enriched new knowledge within my whānau through the sharing of his kōrero. Hone (30), shared *“... The sharing of knowledge, I think growing knowledge enough, more understanding. Like with (kaikōrero) coming in today just from that little 20 min talk it kind of got the wheels turning a little bit aye.”*

Acknowledging the impact of our kaikōrero in igniting ideas for our wānanga and how it created impact was evident through tūhononga. Ensuring that we make time for each other and keep the connection to one another and our whenua strong.

## 6.2 Results/ Findings Summary

During the wānanga and haerenga kitea the whānau shared different experiences, kōrero and memories focussed on our understanding of connection to whenua. The whānau came from a collective stand point of what they aspired to do in order to reconnect to the whenua. There were values such as whanaungatanga, kaitiakitanga, kotahitanga and manaakitanga that were often referred to throughout. It was evident that what drove the whānau to wanting to succeed in these aspirations was around future thinking, for the generations to come and using the future vision as a motivation. It was clear that the whānau had understandings of what is needed in order to achieve whānau reconnection but having the experiences during the wānanga and haerenga kitea, activated and empowered the whānau to create these aspirations and be a part of them coming to life.

## 7. Discussion

Experiences of the participants are reflected on and shared through a framework based on three key phases of this research; ngā kakano (the seeds), ka poipoia (nurtured) kia puawai (to blossom). The concepts that form the basis of this discussion derive from the whakataukī used in the introduction of this thesis; Poipoia te kākano, kia puāwai - If we nurture the seeds they will bloom. Within this research the three points outline a journey of the kaupapa pertaining to the whānau who participated. Ngā kākano speaks to the seeds that had begun to be nurtured aligning with this research kaupapa. Ka poipoia is the processes and kōrero of growth that arose through the findings of this research and what this looked like for the whānau through a collective journey of revitalisation and connection to our papakāinga. Lastly, kia puawai is the blossoming that is beginning and what this kaupapa is shaping to look like for the future generations, including what future recommendations there are for this research kaupapa.

### 7.1 Ngā Kakano - The seeds

Personal development begins through our understanding of identity which can be influenced by our life events, and people in our upbringing and our environment (Sachdev, 1990). For Māori, traditionally a whānau environment is where teachings and understandings of societal

norms stem from (Moeke-Pickering, 1996). As time has continued, the whānau dynamic has become more complex and diverse. Māori identity stems from whakapapa links and understandings, however this has altered and there are many different layers to knowing who you are and where you come from (Carlson et al., 2022). Belief systems, values and cultural perspectives have a diverse impact on the relationship between the oranga of te taiao and tangata whenua. Ngā kakano includes the MOU as a guiding document of the kaupapa, sharing the importance of whakapapa and how it frames the foundations of the whānau. Lastly ngā kakano will discuss the significance of mauri and what the whānau aspired to achieve, being visionary led through the processes of this kaupapa.

### 7.1.1 Whānau Values

The importance of Māori identity within this kaupapa is acknowledging the many seeds of concepts, values, understandings and ways of being that have led to the creation of this kaupapa. The whānau-led kaupapa initially established by my Pāpā was continued in alignment with this research. Drawing from the MOU as a woven map, it clearly outlined a pathway of reconnecting to te taiao and to one another while being grounded in te ao Māori values. Within the research findings, the MOU was often referenced to help guide us through values such as aroha, respect, support and tikanga. Flowing on from these values, stemmed whanaungatanga, manaakitanga and kotahitanga. These fundamental values adhere to our worldview as Māori, by ensuring that we know where we come from through our relationship to te taiao and one another. By utilising wānanga and haerenga kitea as method, it enabled kōrero and whakaaro amongst whānau to access what our understanding were of our connection to whenua and what they believed were uplifting practices for the mauri of the whenua.

A collective approach means leading decisions with the whānau values and tikanga from the beginning to ensure that what we do is in alignment of who we are. Whānau acknowledged that what we decided to instil as our values, will create an important impact on our future generations through creating good people and teaching them our way of being. Relying on whanaungatanga rather than a legal heavy document represents how our whānau is approaching the kaupapa, through strengthening our relationships and being reminded of these values throughout. Working together and ensuring that goals and visions were met collectively was a part of how whānau understood our position in achieving oranga taiao, oranga tangata. It was evident that our experience through the whānau hui, gave them insight into what can be

accomplished when working together on the whenua alongside each other. Often reflections of childhood memories arose, remembering what it was like to tend to the gardens with cousins, go to nans house to help her with chores, seeing whānau all the time and swimming in our river when it was in a less polluted condition. Luxuries we didn't know we had at the time but are committed to instilling into our whānau and restoring for future generations.

With the guidance of these values shared through the MOU and those developed by the whānau, there was a clear comprehension that whānau understood foundational concepts of how we can reconnect but implementing these findings was another aspect to consider. Kaitiakitanga is a key pillar in initiating reconnection, identified through practices such as planting our native trees, revitalising our māra kai and developing a way forward to ensure the stability of our connection to our whenua was strong. Clearing the space of piled up waste such as old cars and rubbish were additional thoughts from whānau. It was clear that whānau were making the connection between whenua and whānau, through identifying that being present on our whenua is a way we care for it, and to feel good about giving back to it. The realisation of planting fruit trees and māra kai on the whenua in the hopes that one day our mokopuna will eat from, was meaningful for whānau. Through these experiences, our values were led with mana and pride, exercising what our tūpuna once did on this whenua and ensuring the wellbeing of our future whakapapa.

#### 7.1.2 Whakapapa - Ancestral Connections

The interconnected relationship to whenua stems from a traditional Māori understanding of whakapapa, connecting us to our tūpuna acknowledging our sense of identity and belonging (Rangiwai, 2018). Adding to this context, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2000) makes the point that “whakapapa is a way of thinking. A way of learning, a way of storing knowledge, and a way of debating knowledge. It is inscribed in virtually every aspect of our worldview” (p. 234). The quote expands on what whakapapa means to tangata whenua and how it shapes who we are. An example of our understanding of whakapapa is through whenua and its double meaning. Whenua connects us to not only Papatūānuku, mother earth through whakapapa but also to our māmā during hapūtanga (pregnancy) by the whenua (placenta) we are nurtured through until birth (Berryman et al., 2022). Traditionally, the whenua that sustains us through hapūtanga is returned to the whenua of Papatūānuku with varying tikanga amongst each whānau, hapū and iwi, determined by their location and tribal customs. Relationship to whenua is intricately

placed within a Māori worldview and is central to te ao Māori. Although some Māori practices have been disrupted within te taiao, there is a revitalising movement of re-emerging traditional customs and honouring the connection between te taiao and tangata whenua (Rameka et al., 2023).

As a foundation of this kaupapa, using whānau voice to share our intentions and aspirations in alignment with the MOU was crucial. Wānanga and haerenga kitea enabled the whānau to articulate our kōrero in our own words, producing a clear and refined pathway toward our moemoea (aspirations) from the beginning. The first whānau hui which included wānanga, began with questions focussed on what our whenua meant to them and examples of the memories that we had growing up on and around the whenua. Whānau reflection was important to gain an understanding of the different experiences our whānau had intergenerationally growing up on the whenua. Some of the responses from the whānau of what the whenua meant to them drew on the feelings of belonging being a strength through feelings of gratitude to have whenua in the first instance that they can return home to. Deep reflections were prominent when whānau were sharing stories, sparking memories that had been forgotten for a long time, remembering those who have passed on and what the landscape once was. It led to an acknowledgement of the privilege in holding these memories, alongside the collective ability to shape future opportunities through our connection to the whenua and to one another.

The ideas of privilege of whenua ownership draws on a kōrero from Dr Mere Whaanga (2021) of *Ahikāroa - To keep the Fire Burning*. Her PhD journey is shared within this kōrero, focussed on reclaiming ownership of whānau land, where she grew up with many memories and to no avail was successful (Whaanga, 2021). The land unfortunately remains compulsorily amalgamated within a farming trust, meaning her children and mokopuna will not be able to build a home there, or plant a garden or create memories such as the ones and generations before her have experienced. The prohibition to reside on tūpuna whenua means the loss of connection, loss of mātauranga and denial to exercise ahikāroa. The loss of ahikāroa is what my whānau and I are trying to avoid, often through our kōrero we spoke on the importance of a close and strong bond where we have a united vision and aspirations for the future. If we continue to uphold the value of whakapapa through future generations, we strengthen our ability to uplift connections and improve oranga. This unity in practice enables us to remain connected and exercise tino rangatiratanga over our whenua. Ahi kā is our way of being able to sustain our tino rangatiratanga of our whenua, through strong connections and ensuring that

occupation of our whenua continues in our whānau through the generations. We discussed as a whānau collectively that we are to always keep our whenua within our whānau. The MOU is in place to ensure decisions are made collectively and in the best interest of our whenua and whānau, Ensuring that generations in the future have this understanding is crucial to keep our ahi kā ignited and the mauri of our whenua and whānau strong.

### 7.1.3 Mauri - Energy Source

According to Pā Ropata, mauri is the key to oranga and healing (R. McGowan, personal communication, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2023). Mauri of local environments impacts the mauri of the people that live within those environments (Reweti et al., 2022). The resilience of bonds is measured by mauri, signalling that we are a direct reflection of the environments we are surrounded in. We each have our own unique mauri and when coming together with others in a collective, the mauri is expressed intensely and with clear presence (Walker et al., 2007). Implementing practices that uplift the mauri of the whenua honours our connection to its mauri and enhances a mutual relationship of manaakitanga. The concept of mauri is grounded in the Tīwaiwaka principles, particularly principle 3; the mauri is the web of connections that sustain life and principle 4; te tangata - people - are not the masters of the mauri; we are part of the mauri and embraced by it. The principles speak to the interconnected and reciprocal relationship that mauri binds us to. Ensuring that we protect and care for mauri of all living things should have greater priority than the rights and needs of individuals or species. In adopting this philosophy within the foundations of our whānau led kaupapa, will ensure that we have a strong stance aligned with tūpuna ways of being, closing the gap to achieving oranga taiao, oranga tangata.

This research has highlighted themes identified within the kōrero of the whānau, it drew on themes such as whanaungatanga, kotahitanga and kaitiakitanga that have guided the success of this kaupapa. These concepts establish a supportive understanding of values that heal the mauri of the whenua and whānau. By recognising these concepts within ourselves as a whānau collective, we came to honour the role of mauri in activating and guiding us to put these concepts into practice, which simultaneously reigniting our ahikā on the whenua. Within the kōrero of the whānau, it was identified that the feeling of purpose and the fulfilment through seeing the improvements through the whānau gatherings of cleaning up the whenua came through strongly. The changes the whānau implemented were a collective approach to working

towards our aspirations. Mauri links the spiritual and physical world, amplifying the importance of reconnecting whānau to whenua (Bowring, 2021). Relative to this kaupapa, the transition that was felt through the whenua and whānau embodied the restoration of mauri, signifying the appreciation of my Pāpā's approach to implementing the original kaupapa. Led through whakapapa; linking us to who we are and where we came from, sharing stories and acknowledging the importance of staying a tight knit whānau are important aspects to enhancing the mauri. Reflecting on the journey previous to the research, inclusive of whānau wānanga during the time when my Pāpā was still here, demonstrates the evolution of the kaupapa and its vitality through what it is now. It created a new motivation and appreciation amongst the whānau towards the opportunity we have, in having land together, where we can all come together and tautoko this kaupapa and foster the mauri within ourselves and our whenua.

Engaging with the whenua allowed whānau to express our aspirations, plan our goals, and take practical steps towards achieving them by breaking through self-doubt and reconnecting with our inherent strength and capabilities. Reconnection to land is nurtured not only through physical wellbeing through kai and mahi māra but also emotional and spiritual health by reawakening ancestral knowledge and purpose. Haerenga kitea enabled whānau to reflect and understand the correlation between caring for the whenua and the oranga benefits gained through mahi such as plantings of natives and māra kai. Kōrero around intergenerational continuation highlighted the importance of planning and preparation to embed this kaupapa into the whānau legacy. Through collective effort, bonds were strengthened with each other and with the whenua, creating a sustainable and empowering approach to oranga underpinned by aroha. The kaupapa reminded the whānau that they possess the skills to carry this vision forward, not dependent on any one individual, but by honouring and combining our unique strengths to uphold the oranga and mauri of the land and in turn, themselves.

Ngā kakano acknowledges the foundations of this kaupapa and the realisation that occurred during the wānanga and haerenga kitea. Having the MOU as a guiding document to begin this kaupapa grounded our direction and created a platform to work from. Tīwaiwaka and the kaupapa Māori research principles were exemplified inherently as this kaupapa derived from the whenua for the whenua, culturally anchoring us. This meant we were able to build on the ideas of my Pāpā and realise that through our collective approach, our whakapapa and bringing forth our mauri we are on the path to reconnecting to the oranga of te taiao and us as a whānau.

## 7.2 Ka poipoia - Being nurtured

The concept of ka poipoia explores the ongoing journey of growth experienced by whānau through our active engagement in this kaupapa grounded in whenua-based practices. Central to this growth has been the use of wānanga as a powerful tool for reflection, connection, and collective transformation. As whānau engaged in the research processes new strengths emerged, confidence grew, barriers were acknowledged and addressed, and a deeper understanding of our own potential was realised. Ka poipoia shares these insights, through the learnings and strengths that surfaced by navigating unfamiliar research settings to embracing shared leadership and tino rangatiratanga. Through this, the powerful role of wānanga and haerenga kitea in sustaining momentum was demonstrated while reinforcing our collective commitment to reconnecting to whenua.

### 7.2.1 Whakaahuatanga - Reflection

Building on the momentum of the research to ensure it continues to be enhanced in the future requires taking time to reflect on the barriers and strengths of the processes involved. A reflective approach naturally unfolded through the data collection, which became an important space where growth was acknowledged. Honest and open discussions were vital, not only for collective learning but for ensuring that the connection to whenua remains a living priority for future generations. In doing so, the vision for oranga through whenua-based practice was continually reaffirmed and strengthened. As this whānau-led kaupapa was part of a research project, whānau also encountered new and sometimes daunting experiences, such as navigating consent forms, reviewing information sheets, and being recorded for data collection. Yet through these challenges, transformation was clearly visible. From the first to the second data collection, whānau demonstrated increased confidence, greater openness in kōrero, and deeper engagement with the pātai. Wānanga and haerenga kitea proved to be more than a method, it was a vessel for creating a safe, inclusive space where whānau could ground themselves, share authentically, and engage in a process that honoured our lived experiences. In this way, reconnecting to whenua was not just a physical act, but a holistic journey through strengthening relationships and deepening knowledge. These research methods supported a culturally relevant approach to research and having whānau connections, enabled whānau to have a more comfortable experience.

Wānanga and haerenga kitea as place-based learning approaches, enabled connections that wove the whānau and the research together. These methods revealed the relevance of whenua connections and seeing the potential of what can be achieved while being on the land both physically and spiritually (Manning, & Harrison, 2018). The restorative mahi led by the whānau was a chance for whānau to share our perspectives and aspirations aligned with a vision for the future and a way to reflect on the mahi that has already begun from previous working bees and kōrero of those who have passed. During the beginning of the second whānau hui, the whānau went through a reflective session of the key elements discovered within the kōrero from the wānanga (figure 2) within each section of questions. Haerenga kitea enhanced reflective processes in the whānau by looking back at what has been achieved through the different whānau hui. It was apparent that by starting to implement our aspirations, it boosted whānau engagement by recognising what we were capable of when working together. The effectiveness of haerenga kitea was the engagement of whānau being able to share kōrero, experiences and whakaaro while being outside on our whenua engaged in restoration mahi, compared to sitting in a room being interviewed. The openness and vulnerability of the kōrero shared exceeded anything I could have imagined. The raw and real feelings were brought to the surface by the safety of sharing among our own whānau.

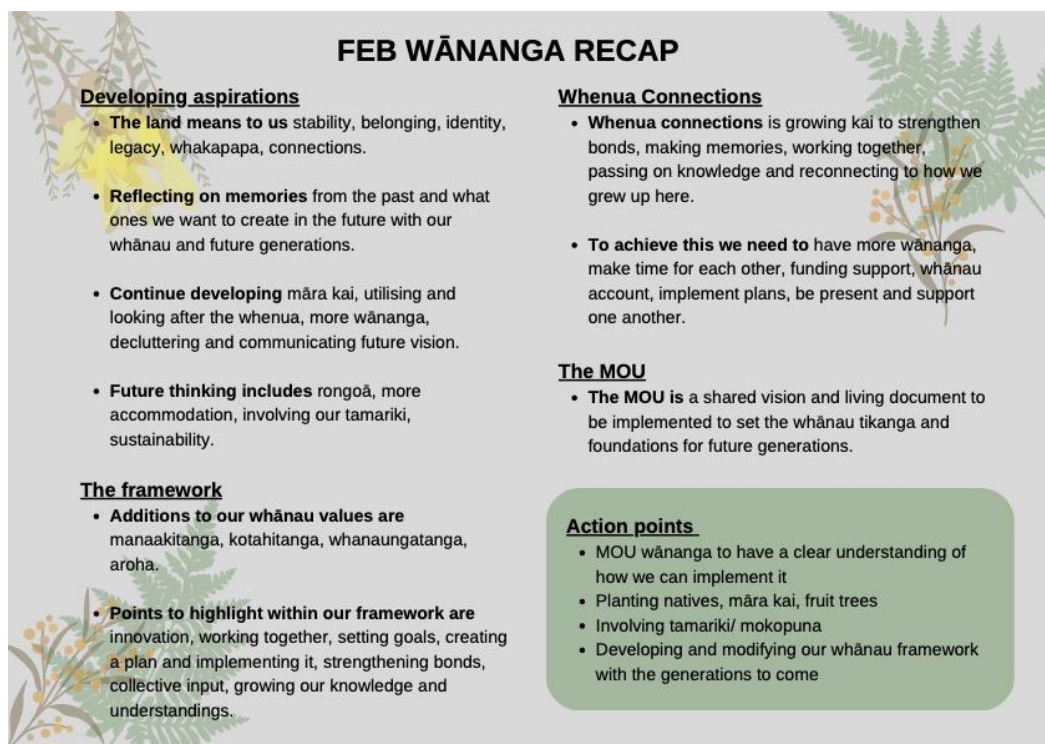


Figure 2 Feb Wānanga Recap (Personal Image, 2025)

Throughout the data collection, emotions were evoked, unfolding layers and leading to more meaningful conversations. An important part of this research was implementing the physical contribution of plantings to enhance the mauri of the whenua and connecting with one another in the process. The association of being able to physically feel and see what changes were happening, led to the strong notion of pride amongst the whānau. There was pride in the mahi that they had completed and through supporting directions for the future. Lastly pride was infused in knowing that they collectively continued to add to the whakapapa of the whenua in a positive way, establishing roots that will one day be watered by our mokopuna.

### 7.2.2 Akonga Hou – New Learnings

During the journey of this research, my early thinking was guided by the literature review and focused on aligning the kaupapa with broader government conservation strategies, including Te Mana o Te Taiao (2020) and DOC - Te Papa Atawhai's Biodiversity Strategy (Biodiversity in Aotearoa Report, 2020; Our Purpose and Outcomes, n.d). However, as the research progressed, my perspective shifted. I came to realise that the true essence and relevance of this kaupapa lay not solely in the frameworks of Crown entities, but in the place-based initiatives led by whānau, hapū, and iwi, such as the work of Te Arawa Lakes Trust or Raukūmara Pae Maunga. Government support may sustain a collaborative approach by being complimentary rather than in place of whānau, hapū, and iwi leadership involving te taiao. Ngā Whenua Rāhui is a funding pool for Māori land projects, underpinned by kawenata (covenants) (Ngā Whenua Rāhui, n.d.). Although the Department of Conservation serves as the overarching organisation for Ngā Whenua Rāhui, the programme itself enables a deeply grounded and self-determined approach. One that is created and governed by Māori, on Māori-owned land, reflecting a unique and powerful model of partnership where Māori leadership is prioritised, and tikanga is upheld through kawenata. While national strategies and place-based initiatives each have place and significance, this thesis has led me to the realisation that the ultimate aspiration is mutual ora for te taiao and tangata whenua underpinned by tino rangatiratanga of tangata whenua. Achieving this requires a collective commitment to learning from one another, guided by the mātauranga and legacy of our tūpuna, to activate both kaitiakitanga and rangatiratanga on our own whenua, with our own people. For me, this is the essence of *Whakapiki Tūhono ki te Whenua*. While the shift in thinking throughout this thesis may appear radical to some, it is, in truth, a holistic and necessary reframing that centres an Indigenous worldview and seeks long-term intergenerational wellbeing.

During the time of my thesis there has been Te Tiriti o Waitangi activation around the motu as a response to the treaty principles bill (Jones et al., 2024). The bill aimed to redefine decades of law and policy implemented into government involving the impairment rights of Māori. The impact the bill was going to have on society meant a decrease in addressing structural disadvantages of Māori, negatively impacting equity approaches to health services for Māori and reducing the right of Māori to lead and develop public health solutions. The Treaty Principles bill was a moment in history that will be spoken about for generations and although one that has caused *mamae* (hurt) and *amaimai* (anxieties) of what the future may be for our people, it has also united us, not only Māori but *tangata tiriti*. It has been seen and heard from around the world and has uplifted and inspired others. The awareness our *tamariki* Māori have for this *kaupapa* is preparing a future of *tangata whenua* who will stand for what's right, through conscious decision making and representation in all forums.

The insights gained from the Treaty Principles Bill as a historical event significantly deepened my understanding of political justice and its profound impact on Māori rights and our ability to exercise *tino rangatiratanga*. It served as a powerful reminder of why this *kaupapa* is so important. The reflections align closely with the *kōrero* found within *He Whakaputanga o Niu Tīrene 1835*, reaffirming our relationship as *tangata whenua* with the *whenua* of Aotearoa (O'Malley, 2017). Associate Professor Manuka Henare highlighted a key phrase within the *He Whakaputanga* document; “*ko mātou te mana i te whenua,*” which holds deep significance. These words align with a *kōrero* in Henry, 2021, which is that our *mana* does not exist over the land, but rather flows from the land itself, because the *whenua* lives within us (Henry, 2021). If we can continue to re align with a philosophy that is *mana* enhancing and strengthens our relationship to *whenua*, it will strengthen our voice and stance as a united people. By working on these relationships, it will innately support the *oranga* of our *whenua* and one another through having a more connected approach shifting to approaches that our *tūpuna* highlighted in documents such as *He Whakaputanga* and more recently, The Treaty Principles bill. Drawing on these documents will enhance *kaupapa* such as place-based initiatives and guidance for government agencies to align to their obligations as treaty partners. It will show strength in our knowledge systems and our ability to demonstrate *tino rangatiratanga* of our *whenua* and our people.

### 7.2.3 Marohi – Strength

Describing the transformation of the whenua and its impact on uplifting the oranga of our whānau is challenging to articulate. Returning to our tūrangawaewae (place where someone has rights through whakapapa) for this kaupapa proved to impact many more layers of healing than could be imagined. When I think of my whānau and our journey with the grief of losing my Pāpā and others within our whānau, it brings great sadness that they are not here to experience this ā tinana. We know that we are able to feel their presence ā wairua (in spirit) through every kōrero, every laugh and every quite moment, with our feet firmly in the soil or feeling the breeze of the wind connecting us to the mauri of te taiao. Whatever the moment along this journey, it often returned to the collective strength of working together as one whānau with a shared vision. The spiritual and the subconscious are woven together through the same accord, subtly affecting one another in ways that are not always visible or easily understood (Nikora, et al., 2013). Such insights highlight the layered influences that shape whānau, often unnoticed, yet revealed through tohu to those willing to remain open to them.

At the first whānau hui, my aunty gave me a photo of my Pāpā (Figure 3), which had unexpectedly resurfaced while she was sorting through old papers. The image, taken some 20 years ago at a whānau wānanga at our marae, showed him alongside my nan and aunty. In the early stages of this kaupapa, I often questioned whether I was honouring his legacy, guiding it in the right direction that he would want, and whether I was equipped to continue his work. Receiving the photo reminded me that his presence endures and that this mahi is not carried by one person alone, but through the collective strength and gifts of our whānau.



*Figure 3 Personal Image, 2025*

Ensuring we continue to have a united approach to decision making involving our whenua and whānau was something my Pāpā also reminded us of and ensured we remained steadfast in. Now that we have created a stronger approach together it is important to analyse the next steps of this kaupapa. Problem solving through identifying barriers to achieving our visions and aspirations of the whenua improved when we worked together on solutions. Kōrero amongst the whānau shared vulnerable moments about loneliness, disconnection, financial stresses, being time poor and busy-ness. The whānau identified strategies to dealing with these problems such as improving our communication, being more present, showing up for one another and engaging in the kaupapa. If we can draw on strategies to mitigate potential barriers to achieving reconnection then we are creating a better approach of ensuring that this connection will stay strong through the generations to come.

Looking at our differences and using them to work together to enhance our kaupapa, demonstrates that we bring different skills and everyone has value to contribute. An example within our whānau context was when uncle was retrieving his chainsaw and prune our trees, or when my aunty prepares a kai to sustain us through our mahi, or when my brother innovatively thinks of ways to achieve our aspirations long term. This highlighted to whānau the confidence of being able to do the kaupapa and taking the opportunity to utilise our own abilities in a space where we are comfortable, on our own whenua. The use of wānanga and haerenga kitea discovered the importance of creating intentional and culturally grounded spaces for kōrero and collaboration. Spaces where our whānau were able to exercise leadership and manaakitanga demonstrated significant growth that connected us to identity and thus uplifting whānau to feel strong in our sense of belonging. It also demonstrated the deepening of relationships, the revival of ancestral knowledge, and the collective resilience to carry kaupapa forward. Three key themes emerged from this process: Whakaahuatanga, Ākongā Hou, and Marohi. Each of these reflected different dimensions of growth and were central to the nurturing journey experienced throughout this research.

### 7.3 Kia Puawai - To Bloom

The protection and management of the whenua is a long term moemoea for ngā iwi Māori (the Māori people), which can only be achieved through our connection to whenua. The issues that have risen through breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi lead back to disconnection and, displacement from our places of belonging. Acknowledging the past is important to

understanding how to pave the way of the future. What we need to consider is what has already changed in our taiao and what implementing this kaupapa in other whānau and communities will do to prevent further disconnection and harm to te taiao. By uplifting this kaupapa in future research endeavours and spreading the message of connection, will also work to create intergenerational impact to ensure that we can have a thriving taiao and people.

### 7.3.1 Te Panonitanga o te Taiao - Changes of the Environment

‘Ko te wai te toto o te whenua, water is the blood of the land. The water is the mauri of the land, keeps the people alive. If the water goes bad, the land goes...bad, the people die’ (Te Huia et al., 2022). The quote identified within the he oranga wai, he oranga whakapapa research, supported by Pūnui River Care acknowledges the innate relationship of tangata whenua, ancestral lands and waterways. The interconnected relationship and the impacts the mauri of each of these living domains have on each other is significant. Disconnection has led to a lack of understanding of the existential crisis the climate is facing and through government impacts globally, impacting the way people perceive, relate to and care for it (Menzies, 2021). However on a localised level amongst whānau, hapū and iwi, Menzies (2021), also highlights that Māori understanding of the relationship between whenua, tinana and wairua support an integrated approach for land and water management issues that can be taught to non-Māori. The relation of this kōrero to the kaupapa of this thesis is broadening the scope and positive impact that it could have on the wider communities within different rohe. The kōrero, values and implementations we have begun on our whenua was our way of healing the connection to it as well as creating a foundation to learn from. When we see the changes to our taiao in the plantings we have done as well as the reconnecting and revitalisation that we have instilled within our whānau, it encourages us to continue to support our whānau to sustain this kaupapa.

The kaupapa of the thesis is a way to learn from our own whenua and share our journey with other whānau who will engage in activities aligned with revitalisation of te taiao in their rohe. A way we can share our learnings is through tools such as social media, a controversial resource however can be used beneficially to spread a message impactfully. Māori influencers are able to share their positive impact through social media, showcasing the different kaupapa around the motu. By doing this, it can bring more awareness to a Māori way of living from the land exercising kaitiakitanga and reuniting with the mauri of the whenua. Mahinga Kai exemplifies impactful social media presence, led by Māori astronomy expert Dr Rangi Mataamua and Te

Aorere Pewhairangi. Following Cyclone Gabrielle's devastation in Ngāti Porou, Te Aorere launched the "Waewae the 35" campaign to raise awareness and funds (Waewae The 35, 2023). This experience deepened his understanding of te taiao and the climate crisis, inspiring the creation of Mahinga Kai. Together, he and Dr Mataamua use the platform to highlight traditional environmental practices and share pūrākau and Matariki campaigns annually. Social media is a powerful platform not only for sharing and documenting a collective approach, but also for influencing perspectives and driving meaningful change. Through the journey with our whānau, we created a video that was shared on social media for our future generations to reflect on what we have begun and what we aspire for them to continue.

Social media demonstrates a modern way to communicate and impact change, a part of Te Ao hurihuri (the everchanging world). Currently we are experiencing changes in real time, we have a generation of Māori leaders in fields from government status to doctors and CEO's. The awareness of what is happening from government level policy to place-based initiatives, all from the power of social media and influential role models is using the tools of the new world to our advantage. Māori are a people of adaptability, creativity and innovation. Although we know we have been detrimentally impacted for generations there is also a strong resurgence of working collectively to improve the outcomes of whānau and whenua (Bidois et al., 2009; Erueti et al., 2023). Within this research we spoke with participants about their understandings of what climate change impacts may have on the oranga of the whenua. An observation within the data showed the whānau saw the kaupapa of climate change as a large topic they were yet to fully grasp however a self-reflection of this was that the climate change question could have been explained further of what was being asked. Climate change understandings are important for this kaupapa as they provide a further understanding for the whānau of why this kaupapa is impactful and important, particularly for our future generations. From a climate change perspective, this kaupapa reflects climate action through uplifting the mauri of the whenua through the connections that are being reestablished in the whenua through the native trees through the benefits to the soil along the bankside of the awa.

Climate change is not a new concept, traditionally Māori have always been in tune with the changes of te taiao and knew how to engage with te taiao, through karakia, stillness and healing (Knox, 2021). Te taiao taught us to use our senses and feel into what the whenua was saying to us, a skill that only those who spend time in te taiao can truly understand and hear. What this research worked to create was the first step of acknowledging the importance of why we

need to reconnect to whenua and how it relates to the oranga of the whenua and our connection as a whānau. On a larger scale this kaupapa although only at a whānau level establishment, has the potential to have a positive influence on a much larger scale. Future research for our whānau would be in the space of understanding climate change impacts further and having kōrero of how our mahi māra and native plantings impacts the whenua positively and thus contributing to climate action approaches within a whānau centric approach.

### 7.3.2 Rangahau ā mua - Future Research

Future research in this space could look at another layer of connection, through spending more time in te taiao and understanding whenua through the different seasons. Bernard Lassus (1998), a landscape architect said *“become impregnated with the site and its surroundings, in the course of long visits at different hours and in different weathers, to soak it up from the ground to the sky until boredom sets in, or almost”*. Tūpuna used consistent observation, mauri, wairua and aroha to guide them through their learnings to deepen their understanding of te taiao (Hikuroa, 2017). Different knowledge systems were uniquely applied to the diverse climates and environments of hapū and iwi across Aotearoa. Today, they are being revitalised as essential pathways to restoring Indigenous knowledge, wellbeing, and connection to the land. In relation to a whānau placed-based approach, deepening our understandings in alignment with the MOU came through the data. To access the full potential of what the MOU outlines, includes developing a food forest strategically placed around the whenua to sustain and enhance the oranga of our whānau, enhance our rongoā rākau area, including whānau hui that can share knowledge of rongoā and how we use it (Gertie Savage Whānau, 2023). Whānau identified our knowledge of the MOU being minimal and wanting to have a whānau wānanga with a key focus on what the MOU is in more detail. As whānau knowledge bases grow, future research may include ecological monitoring of water and soil quality to ensure that it is viable for the plantings and to sustain the māra kai if we look to expand it. Having these expansions, shifts to a tino rangatiratanga approach, increasing access for our whānau to support our own oranga.

When identifying approaches to revitalising mātauranga Māori, we must seek to engage in practices that embellish our values and our mana as tangata whenua. Within the approach of revitalisation, considering the mauri of a place is a good starting point to restoring and revitalising practices as mauri is connected to a place or a being as it presents now (Flynn,

2021). Through this research it has amplified the importance of connection and has refined the pathway of how to reconnect in a way that is unique and relevant to this whānau. Future research looks like connecting with this whenua on a deeper level, enabling whānau access to apply tino rangatiratanga, expanding on the current area and learning more closely. This could look at riparian plantings and understanding the impacts of the whenua to the awa that runs adjacent to the papakāinga and how we can continue to nurture our taiao for the future generations. Involving our tamariki in these practices as well is essential, through teaching them how to harvest rongoā, practice karakia and eventually introducing pest control measures to ensure we are protecting our rākau and māra kai.

Building on the revitalisation of Māori knowledge systems, enables us to exercise these practices in a modern context. Mātāuranga Māori will always be effective to support tangata whenua to thrive as it is knowledge that is derived from the whenua of Aotearoa. While this research is grounded in one whānau's journey to reconnection, future research could examine how similar approaches could influence other whānau, hapū and iwi led strategies, in order to reconnect to whenua. Getting together as a whānau and storytelling is innate to Māori, aligning to what memories whenua hold and what whānau aspire for the future is a strategy that can be implemented to achieve oranga taiao, oranga tangata. Broadening this kaupapa to an even wider scale of Indigenous-led conservation approaches globally, would contribute to the understandings of how important place-based approaches are to thriving communities, in particular Indigenous communities who make up minority groups (Barten, 2015). Healing connection to whenua will enhance our ability to create a sustainable future for the generations to come.

### 7.3.3 Pā Harakeke - Intergenerational Impact

As the environment has been changing, there has been a resurgence of Māori connecting to changing intergenerational behaviours, trying to heal disconnection to te taiao and tūpuna whenua (Renata, 2021). What tends to drive whānau is wanting to make a difference for future generations, returning to a minimalistic lifestyle and values more closely aligned to generations before us. A strong pou kōrero (foundation) within this research is that whatever decisions are made involving this whenua, it is to be made not only collectively but to ensure positive impact for the future generations. Through the findings, whānau identified the MOU as a living document and wanting to ensure that when our tamariki are growing up, they have a

comprehension of the MOU. Therefore consistently having kōrero to remind whānau at whānau hui about the values and aspirations of the whānau was highlighted. It is important with this kaupapa of reconnecting to whenua to try and mitigate any issues that may arise for future generations. Ensuring planning and preparation for the future generations will enhance our experiences of reconnecting to whenua. An opportunity for the future generations is to create a framework, aligned with the MOU to support decision making in the future. Awatere et al., (2015) created a kaupapa Māori decision making land use assessment framework aligned with economic, social and environmental wellbeing. The wellbeing of the whenua is assessed based on ngā pou herenga (core values and principles) that were identified within the research such as kaitiakitanga and manaakitanga.

What the example of Awatere et al., (2015) demonstrates for this research, is the potential benefit of growing the tools we use for decision making for this whenua. At this stage we have the MOU as a foundation and the kōrero that we collected over the whānau hui. The Tīwaiwaka Principles that were introduced to the whānau is used as a guiding framework that relates closely to the aspirations that the whānau have set out for our whenua. To ensure that decisions are made relating to the whenua through future generations, we want to use this kaupapa to guide the processes in a tika way. What these processes look like are aligned with a Māori worldview and empowers our whānau in the future to sustain our connection, strengthen the mauri and sharing of mātauranga Māori. Having a te ao Māori criteria to measure decisions against also ensures that we aren't leading with one lens such as economic return alone, but in fact leading with the wellbeing of multiple areas in order to continue to thrive and enhance sustainability practices for the future generations (Awatere & Harcourt, 2021). What is important to acknowledge is that this kaupapa is creating a pathway with an intergenerational plan that can be altered to give relevance of our whānau in the space and time that it will be applied in the future.

#### 7.4 Discussion Summary

The kaupapa that was established by my Pāpā is a part of the pūrakau of this whenua, created to be shared with the future generations. With an everchanging world, environment and government, amongst some of the things we are unable to impact on a large scale as of yet, it can feel diminishing and unachievable to improve the current relationship with the whenua. What this kaupapa aims to create is the message of hope, shining a light on what can feel like

a diminishing reality that we face with te taiao. Pa Ropata says “ Together we can be like the rain that comes at the end of a long drought. Just as the brown and burnt hills slowly begin to turn green and then burst into new life, so we want to bring hope to a dry and desperate world” (McGowan, 2024). Leading our kaupapa with whānau tikanga and decisions made collectively and in alignment with our values and principles, we are creating good practice for our whānau in the future to stay connected and respond to the current and future realities, it is our way of igniting hope (Kake, 2021). The preparation that has begun on this whenua and within this whānau ensures that we have a better structure for reconnection to continue through the generations and enable intergenerational impact by drawing back to the shared vision and aspirations that our whānau have.

## 8. Kupu Whakamutunga

This research set out to explore how whānau reconnection to whenua enhances the oranga of te taiao and our people - oranga taiao, oranga tangata. A connected approach to oranga involved empowering whānau to enable our tino rangatiratanga. The findings from the wānanga and haerenga kitea acknowledged the whānau’s aspiration for a collective approach, aligned with the MOU. Our vision ensures that decision making about our whenua positively impacts future mokopuna. Barriers and enablers were discussed to ensure we could mitigate issues that may arise as best we can, this included ensuring we have the appropriate planning in place for any kaupapa involving our whenua. Each whānau hui, shifted the mauri of the whenua through implementing moemoea and contributing to the pūrakau of this whenua. Te taiao will continue to evolve, change and grow, and we as tangata whenua need to reconnect to how we listen, feel and hear the mauri of the whenua.

Titiro whakamuri kia anga whakamua - We must look to the past in order to move forward (Kake, 2021). The whakatauakī speaks to the seeds that were planted from our tūpuna for this kaupapa, and the revitalisation that we have begun nurturing. The kaupapa adds to a system of knowledge that supports the notion of connection through enriching the oranga of our whenua and to one another through aroha, manaakitanga, whanaungatanga and many more values shared within this research. It is important to highlight that this kaupapa does not come from new knowledge. Instead it implements a way of living derived from our tūpuna aligned to a Māori way of being. Demonstrating how a te ao Māori way of living impacts whānau Māori positively in the research space is a growing field. This research demonstrates that reconnection

is not only possible but essential to strengthening whānau pathways towards oranga taiao, oranga tangata. The journey continues, but the foundations have been reignited, ensuring that our embers will keep burning for generations to come. The flames of ahi kā were reignited through our grief journey as a whānau, through this kaupapa and leaning on each other to keep alight. Now we can be confident that what we have created together will keep our embers burning, through the future generations who will sustain it.

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