

# Culturally relevant assessment

## *Kaupapa Māori assessment in early childhood education<sup>1</sup>*

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Tihei Mauriora! Ki te Whai-ao, ki te Ao-mārama.  
Ka tu kei runga, ko wai koe?  
Ko Tū, ko Rongo koe, ko Tāne koe.  
Ko te manuhiri i ahu mai i Hawaiki, nau mai.

*This sneeze is the sign of the new life, in this world.  
And when you are mature, who shall you be?  
You shall be Tū (god of war), Rongo (god of vegetation),  
Tāne (god of man and forest).  
To you who come from Hawaiki,  
We welcome your presence.*

(Marsden, 2003, p. 11)

This chant according to Māori tradition is part of the dedication used at the birth of Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga, the demigod, ancestor superhero of the Pacific. It was also sometimes used to welcome visitors on to marae, linking the visitors with the spiritual world and powers of the Māori gods, Tūmataunga, Rongomatāne and Tāne Mahuta and to Hawaiki, the spiritual Māori homeland. It also provides a model of the universe that dates back thousands of years (Shirres, 1997); a model made up of two intimately connected worlds: the spiritual and the material. These worlds are closely linked with activities in the everyday material world coming under the influence of and interpenetrated by spiritual powers (Reilly, 2004a; Shirres, 1997). Consequently people are connected with the universe, with the world of spiritual powers, the world of the gods.

Perceptions of reality, including what is viewed as real, probable and possible, relate to ideas of what reality is, including the way the world is structured, ways of knowing and being, and traditional experiences (Wearmouth, Glynn & Berryman, 2005). Furthermore, these views of reality permeate cultural narratives and logic and are the basis of worldviews.

Traditional Māori narratives are part of Māori symbolism, culture and worldviews. Walker (1978) claims that mythology can be likened to a mirror image of culture, reflecting the philosophy, norms and behavioural aspirations of people. According to Marsden (2003), traditional Māori narratives

such as the Māui narratives were deliberate constructs used by ancestors to condense their worldviews and ideas about reality. Narratives provided morals, values, ethics and formative elements that were central to the culture and that guided ways of being and interacting within the world.

This article will explore how the Māui narratives not only contribute to our perceptions as Māori in New Zealand society today, but can provide both a guide to understandings of being and interacting within the context of early childhood. It will also discuss the journey of the Best of Both Worlds Bilingual Preschool (BBW) in the development of their Māui assessment framework. The rationale for using the framework and the features of the framework will be explored, along with exemplars developed by the centre to reflect the framework.

## Reconsidering assessment

Located in Papakura, South Auckland, BBW serviced a low socio-economic community with a high population of Māori and Pacific Islands families. The founders of the centre were frustrated at the rate of Māori educational underachievement that they were witnessing, especially within South Auckland, and they established the centre in 1995 with the specific goal of supporting children to achieve academically in the New Zealand education system. They believed that by exposing children to the 'best of both worlds', including all aspects of Māori worlds and western worlds, children would be better prepared to succeed in the education system, or in spite of the education system.

Prior to 2002, BBW was using a variety of assessment approaches, borrowed from other centres, aimed at measuring skills, finding gaps and filling them. The supervisor (Ruth) stated that the assessments had little fit or coherence with the service philosophy and were being completed primarily to meet the requirements of outside agencies such as the Education Review Office and Ministry of Education (MoE), rather than to highlight children's learning for educators, whānau and children.

In 2002, BBW began work on the MoE-funded project: *Kei Tua o te Pae* (Ministry of Education, 2005). It aimed at supporting teachers to develop practices that incorporated

1. This paper is based on the keynote address to the NZARE ECE Special Interest Group hui held in Auckland, 2010.

assessment and quality learning experiences. Ruth reported that participating in the project:

*... made us look at assessment and how we do things. It was one thing to do observations but looking at the continual picture and where to from here really made us reassess our way of assessment.*

A year later in 2003, work began on *Te Whatu Pōkeka* (Ministry of Education, 2009). This MoE-funded project focused on developing a professional support assessment resource for Māori early childhood services that would validate Māori values, philosophies and practices, and explore cultural contexts and methodologies.

According to Ruth, working on the *Te Whatu Pōkeka* project made them realise that they were, in fact, not 'the norm' and that it was important to express and reflect this difference in their assessment practices:

*First we did the [Kei Tua o Te Pae] project ... but I felt as though it was just really conforming to what was already out there and just using their guidelines like the learning stories ... [Te Whatu Pōkeka] was a chance for us to see ... to put in our assessment ... what we believed and what is ... not so much the norm.*

For teachers at BBW, participation in these assessment projects allowed them to take another look at their assessment rationales and processes, including the exploration of what kaupapa Māori assessment meant for them as individuals and as a team. This process required reflection on what made them Māori, what made them different to mainstream centres, and how this was and could be reflected in the centre.

As 'being Māori' relates to 'who one is', it was not easy to separate this from 'what one does'. Nor was it simple to differentiate Māori early childhood practice from generic early childhood practice. The process required exploration and articulation of what the centre did that was specifically Māori, what elements expressed and reflected 'being Māori', and dialogue on why these practices, routines and understandings were important to 'being Māori'. According to Ruth, they realised:

*.... there's a very big difference between European culture and our culture, what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. We are very different.*

Recognition of what made them Māori, what they valued, how they viewed the world and how this was reflected in centre practice and assessment processes, was key to the development of understandings. A further realisation was that Māori assessment did not have to parallel Pākehā or western assessment; that it was acceptable to be different, that, in fact, difference was crucial if it was to fit with or make sense to Māori.

## Assessment frames

Over the research period, BBW explored a number of assessment framings, all of which were derived from strong Māori philosophical and epistemological foundations. These

framings included:

- Mapping the development of mana, aimed at supporting and enhancing the inherent power of the child, in order for them to succeed and achieve.
- Tāne and baskets of knowledge, related to 'levels of engagement' and how to cater for children who were interested in delving deeper into specific areas or activities.
- Ngā Atua Māori, focused on how the characteristics of each atua could be utilised to assess children's learning. This framework required that kaiako [teachers] examine each atua and flesh out aspects that related to valued learning for children.

In early 2005, Māui emerged as a focus of interest. The service had for many years viewed Māui as a mentor, an inspiration for the service practice and operation, and teachers were able to articulate their understandings of how Māui's characteristics could be utilised in assessing teaching and learning. What became clear from the work was that the answers to their questions on assessment framings were already part of kaiako thinking and had been all along. What was needed was a reimagining of that thinking in terms of assessment.

The articulation of Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga as an assessment frame involved exploration and interpretation of his characteristics. It also involved trial and error, ongoing discussion with community, whānau and knowledgeable others, and further research. Ruth recalled:

*Once we realised we used Māui continuously we then started defining what Māui meant to us as a mentor. His characteristics were what we strived to encourage or facilitate in our children.*

Māui's place as mentor and inspiration for centre practice and operation was cemented.

## Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga

Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga was the ancestor hero, known throughout Polynesia. He was, according to Walker (1990), the most important cultural hero in Māori mythology. His significance comes initially from his birth circumstances and then from his subsequent accomplishments. In Māori hierarchical society where social status was bound by birth order, Māui, the youngest of five brothers, was inherently low in status - Māui-pōtiki (youngest child).

However, through his resourcefulness, adventurousness and determination, Māui was able to overcome this disadvantage and become a model and benefactor for humanity. He was the prototype culture hero who overcame disadvantages and barriers to achieve fame and prestige. He served as a model, characterising personal qualities and traits valued in Māori society:

- Māui-mohio (great knowledge),
- Māui-atamai (quick-wittedness),
- Māui-toa (bravery).

According to Walker (1990), “He was quick, intelligent, bold, resourceful, cunning and fearless, epitomising the basic personality structures idealised by Māori society” (p. 15).

Maui was also a trickster who used deception to achieve many of his accomplishments. This is where he derived his names:

Māui-nukurau (trickster)

Māui-tinihanga (of many devices).

## Māui assessment framework

Best of Both Worlds Bilingual Preschool developed an outline of the theoretical framework for assessment focusing on Māori understandings, Māui narratives and children’s learning and development. This assessment framework includes the following values, attributes and characteristics:

- *mana*: identity, pride, inner strength, self assurance, confidence
- *manaakitanga*: caring, sharing, kindness, friendship, love, nurturance
- *whanaungatanga*: developing relationships, taking responsibility for oneself and others
- *whakatōi*: cheekiness, spiritedness, displaying and enjoying humour, having fun
- *rangatiratanga*: confidence, self reliance, leadership, standing up for oneself, perseverance, determination, working through difficulty
- *tinihanga*: cunningness, trickery, deception, testing limits, challenging, questioning, curiosity, exploring, risk taking, lateral thinking.

## Mana

Mana can be translated as ‘prestige, power, or reputation’, but, it also has a deeper meaning of ‘spiritual power and authority’. Mana is inherited from tūpuna [ancestors], however, until it is actioned, it is only potential power (Hemara, 2000; Marsden, 2003; Metge, 1995). Mana is accrued and actioned through one’s service to whānau, hapū, and iwi (Keelan & Wood, 2006).



An aspect of Maui: Is manaakitanga evident here?

It could however be lost, thus great care was taken to ensure that children’s spirits were never broken, and that children had every opportunity to assert themselves within and across the wider extended whānau (Hemara, 2000). *Te Whāriki* affirms the importance of mana, stating:

Ko te whakatipu i te mana o te mokopuna te tino taumata hei whaingā mā tātou. / *Enhancing the power/status of the child is the highest objective for us all* (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 32).

So Māui-pōtiki (youngest child), being the last born of five brothers, was inherently low both in status and in the family hierarchy. Through his deeds he was able to acquire mana and serve his community. This not only provides a model for younger siblings to follow if they dare, if they have the required qualities and abilities to aspire to leadership roles in the community, but it also highlights the importance of mana acquisition to the community (Walker, 1990).

For BBW, the enhancement of each child’s mana was fundamental to the centre’s philosophy and aspirations of addressing Māori educational underachievement. The expression and assertion of mana included standing up for oneself and others (being courageous), confidently stating ideas and thinking, and having a positive view of others and one’s own: abilities, views, relationships, and place in the world. For this to happen children needed to know ‘who they were and where they belong’, and acknowledge and respect this in others.

## Manaakitanga

Manaaki is derived from the word ‘mana.’ Manaaki can be translated as “to entertain or befriend, to show respect or kindness” (Patterson, 1992, p. 148). Hirini (1997) links identity with the kinship group, referring to the Māori view of self as fundamentally non-individualistic. Manaaki denotes what the social group members owe each other in feeling and displaying love and affection, giving and helping (Patterson, 1992; Rameka, 2007).

Māui’s feats can be seen as a quest for mana. More importantly, his feats benefit humanity through sharing with his human descendants. For example he obtained the secret jawbone of his ancestress Muriranga-whenua, thus providing humanity with the important knowledge of bone weapons and



An aspect of Maui: Is rangatiratanga evident here?

fish-hooks and he fished up Te Ika a Māui (the North Island). These deeds supported and provided sustenance for his people (Keelan & Woods, 2006; Walker, 1978), and were acts of manaakitanga.

Manaakitanga for BBW is reflected in behaviours that reflect the mana inherent within each person. It includes showing respect and kindness to others, caring, sharing and being a friend. It requires that children develop empathy and connectedness with others, social and communal identities, and understandings of roles and responsibilities associated with those identities.

## Whanaungatanga

The whānau (extended family) is the basic social unit of Māori society, the inner circle of kinship, the smallest unit of societal organisation (Reilly 2004b). Whanaungatanga (kinship) comes from the word whānau and refers to the way Māori view, maintain and strengthen whānau relations. It involves rights, responsibilities, obligations and commitments among members that generate whānau cohesion and cooperation.

In Māori society, where being surrounded by whānau was considered the natural way of being, a person without whānau/family was viewed as an aberration, outside the bounds of normal human life (Reilly, 2004b). It is understandable therefore that Māui, a miscarried child cast into the sea by his mother, would make it his mission to find and reconnect with his whānau.

BBW recognised that assessment approaches must support the connectedness of the child as a central being embedded within whānau [family], the visible and invisible worlds, the living and dead. This idea strongly links the child with his or her whānau, hapū [extended family], iwi [tribe], history, whakapapa [genealogy] and identity (Hemara, 2000). Children's self-esteem is, therefore, not a matter for the individual. Rather, it depends on positive relationships with others, and it is reflected in the way children develop and maintain kinship relationships, take responsibility for themselves and others, and connect with others.

Written by Parewai's mother, the following story highlights how children are able to express whanaungatanga and manaakitanga, and nurture the mana of others, by taking



An aspect of Maui: Is *tinihanga* evident here?

responsibility for another's wellbeing. Despite their young ages, these two children are able to ask for and receive compassion, empathy and reassurance:

### **Kaua e haere, Paawai! / Don't go, Paawai!**

Today when I went to pick up Parewai (aged 2 years 4 months) from kōhanga [Maori 'language nest'], we were walking out the gate towards the car, and Tū (same age), began calling out "Kaua haere Paawai, kaua haere [Don't go Parewai, don't go]". She was holding onto the bars of the gate with her face between two bars as if in jail. She looked very sad and Parewai went back. They touched hands affectionately and talked quietly, face to face. This went on for a few minutes, then, Parewai turned to leave. Tū called out again "Kaua haere, Paawai" and again Parewai turned back. The talking and touching took place again and finally Tū said "See ya". Parewai replied "See ya" and both went happily their different ways.

It was amazing to see the affection, and caring these two girls had for each other. I was very touched to see my baby being so loving towards her hoa [friend].

- **Manaakitanga:** Parewai acknowledges and is respectful of Tū's feelings and takes responsibility for her friend's wellbeing.
- **Mana:** Parewai's action not only acknowledges Tū's mana but also reflects her own 'mana' and understandings of manaakitanga.
- **Whanaungatanga:** Parewai has developed a strong relationship with Tū and therefore has a commitment to her friend.

## Whakatoī and whakakata

Whakatoī can be translated as 'cheeky', 'annoying' or 'teasing'. Whakakata can be translated as 'to make people laugh'. These characteristics can be understood more clearly when we look at traditional Māori childrearing practices. Children were the centre of attention and affection, often indulged, fed on demand, undisciplined and wilful. Traditionally it was important that children assert themselves and the mana of their whānau. Children were therefore encouraged to be spirited, and chastisement was very rarely condoned.

Māui was the youngest of the family, the pōtiki. Pōtiki held a special status in traditional Māori society. They were considered taonga [treasures] and were often the favoured, more indulged, precocious child. When Māui reunited with his mother, she treated him as the most favoured child.



An aspect of Maui: Is *whakatoī* evident here?

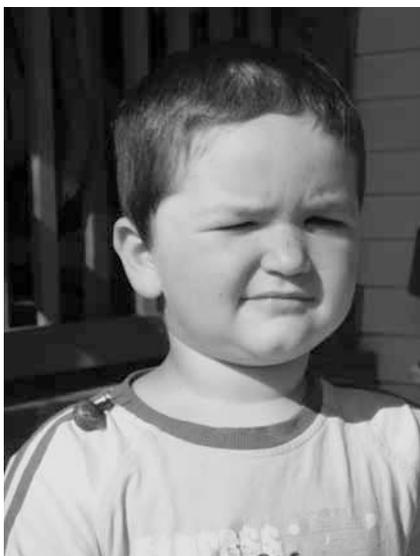
The following exemplar describes Te Hirea (4 ½ years), Dujournae (2 years), and Ariana (2 years 3 months). It was written by a teacher at BBW and illustrates how whanaungatanga roles and responsibilities are enacted, or more precisely, attempt to be enacted, in the centre. It also highlights the spirited Māori child, the confident cheeky child:

**These babies don't whakarongo! These babies don't listen!**

Today Te Hirea asked if she could be my helper/ kaiawhina with the younger children for the nappy changes and I agreed. We held hands as we walked to the changing area, four children and Te Hirea, the helper. All the children sat down awaiting their turn to change. While I was changing the first child, I heard Te Hirea say "E noho darling, darling whakarongo, titiro ki a Ariana" [Sit down, darling. Listen. Look at Ariana]. After a few more tries at getting the children to sit, Te Hirea pointed at Dujournae and in a stern voice said "E noho or turu kino!" [Sit down or naughty seat!].

I finished the change and quickly stepped in because Dujournae was becoming quite unhappy, saying, "Whaea [Aunty] Estelle will take over now". I did have a laugh to myself but laughed even more when Te Hirea put her hands on her hips and said "Whaea, these babies don't whakarongo [listen]. Can Ihipera (another child) help you tomorrow?"

- **Whanaungatanga:** Despite the difficulties, Te Hirea takes on her tuakana responsibilities with enthusiasm and authority even in the face of perceived 'disobedience' from the babies.
- **Whakatoi:** Te Hirea displays spiritedness and a touch of cheekiness in her ability to clearly articulate what she will and will not agree to. The above also exemplifies confidence and self-assurance characteristics associated with **rangatiratanga**.



**An aspect of Maui: Is mana evident here?**



**An aspect of Maui: Is whanaungatanga evident here?**

## Rangatiratanga

Rangatira is a term for 'leader' or 'chief'. Rangatiratanga can be translated as chieftainship and encapsulates many of the Māori virtues, aspirations and human possibilities including ideas of beauty, strength and courage (Patterson, 1992). Although not born into the rangatira role, through his deeds and accomplishments Māui was able to meet these responsibilities. Keelan & Wood (2006) propose a model of leadership based on Māui's adventurous spirit, his observation skills, and ability to plan and reflect on outcomes. In this model, leadership is a combination of:

- having an adventurous spirit that takes advantage of opportunities;
- possessing an ability to observe, plan, work hard and learn; and
- accepting a responsibility to nurture, mentor, share and be grateful.

These rangatira qualities contribute to BBW's assessment framework. They illustrate valued learning for Māori while providing social prescriptions for model behaviour.

## Tinihanga

Oral literature contains many examples of the use of deceit and trickery to attain important knowledge and skills. For example:

Ko te tui whakapahuhu a Kahukura. *There is the slip-knot of Kahukura's string* (Karetu, 1987, cited in Patterson, 1992, p. 59).

This whakatauakī [proverb] relates to how a man uses a slip-knot that comes undone to delay events in order to discover the secret of how to make fishing nets. In this way the use of trickery and deceit is commended as a way of gaining important knowledge and information (Patterson, 1992). Walker (1978) states that trickery is not only about gaining knowledge, it is more importantly about achieving outcomes that are socially acceptable. Deceit and trickery are acceptable if they result in gaining mana. The intention, whether good or bad, is not of importance.

Māui was the arch trickster, which is a key element to his achievements (Patterson, 1992), which include, obtaining the secret of fire from another ancestress, concealing himself to trick his brothers and trying to pass through the body of Hīne-nui-te-pō while she is asleep, to conquer death.

Cunning and resourcefulness were, therefore, valued and key

to acquiring knowledge and achieving desired outcomes. It was vital that children gain the knowledge and skills required for life, such as ingenuity, resourcefulness, lateral thinking, cunning and, sometimes, a modicum of deception. These qualities indicate depth of thinking and reflection, the ability to forward plan with an emphasis on possible and probably outcomes, an understanding of human nature including emotions and social conventions, strategic positioning and the ability to utilise resources.

The following exemplar considers the efforts and achievements of George, a child aged one year eight months. Written a BBW staff member, it reflects a rich, competent child who displays determination, problem-solving skills, persistence and strength of character, all characteristics of a great chief.

### **Tumeke George! / Awesome George!**

George was playing with a toy in his area with his friends. He then turned around and threw it over the gate into the babies' area. He tried to climb up over the gate, tried to unlock the gate, he kicked the gate, and then tried to crawl under the gate. He wanted his toy one way or the other. After being unsuccessful at getting the gate opened George then lay on his stomach and pulled himself under the gate using his arms. It took George a couple of minutes to get in the baby area but he finally did it with a big smile on his face. He picked up his toy, looked at it for a bit, then threw it back over the gate to his area. George then got back on his stomach again and crawled back under the gate. George then picked up his toy on the other side and started playing with it, showing all his friends. The look on George's face when he had retrieved his toy was as though George had just climbed a mountain.

- **Rangatiratanga:** George displays wonderful perseverance and determination to retrieve his toy. George is able to work through the difficulty of retrieving his toy. He attempts a number of strategies before achieving his goal. Lateral thinking.
- **Tinihanga:** George takes a risk and succeeds in his chosen task. Tumeke [fantastic] George!
- **Mana:** George is so proud of his achievement. His smile is a mile wide. He rangatira mō āpōpō tēnei! [A chief of tomorrow!].

### **Final comments**

The Māui narratives contribute to our perceptions of Māori in New Zealand society today, and can provide legitimate pathways for future schooling change and development. They provide a culturally authentic way to re-orientate and interact within the world, as Māori. For BBW, Māui is a mentor, an inspirational being whose characteristics can be emulated to support Māori children's educational success. Assessment for BBW is contingent on recognising and further supporting Māui characteristics in children. Children have Māui characteristics and abilities within them, and it is our

responsibility to nurture these wondrous superhero qualities, to celebrate and honour our children and ensure their potential is realised in what the future holds.

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