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Pōwhiri: A framing to strengthen bicultural belonging for refugee children and families in early childhood education.

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A crucial task for refugee families and children who settle in Aotearoa New Zealand is to develop a sense of belonging in that place, time and environment. Belonging is a basic human need. It is a driving force for learning how to be and behave in a new setting and a springboard for participation (Guo & Dalli, 2016; Sumsion & Wong, 2011). As a concept, 'belonging' is acknowledged to be multifaceted, culturally-determined, and complex. This article focuses on phase two of the *Refugee families in early childhood education: Constructing pathways to belonging* research project, which involved trialling and evaluating, with early childhood services, the pōwhiri (Māori ceremony of welcome) framing, developed in phase one of the research. The framing offers concepts to enable understanding of the phases and processes for refugee and immigrant families to develop a sense of bicultural belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand. Pōwhiri is the traditional Māori ceremony of welcome or ritual of encounter, performed across Aotearoa New Zealand, by the host people to welcome visitors to their region. Pōwhiri is explained in this article as a physical process following standard phases, with each phase including metaphorical understandings.

Introduction

The world is facing a global refugee crisis. By the end of 2020, as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order, over 82.4 million people were forcibly displaced from their homes. Of this group, approximately 35 million were under the age of 18 (UNCHR, 2021). Aotearoa New Zealand takes part in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees resettlement programme. From July 2020 the annual refugee quota was 1500. In the community, refugees are offered settlement support for up to 12 months, a community orientation programme and help to make links with support services (Rameka et al., 2021).

One of the key tasks for refugee families and children who settle in a new country is to develop a sense of belonging in that place, time and context. Early childhood education provides unique opportunities for addressing challenges in refugee settlement, and its potentially transformative role in building belonging with refugee families deserves

analysis. Belonging is one of the five strands of *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa*, Aotearoa New Zealand's ECE curriculum, (Ministry of Education, 2017). *Te Whāriki* highlights the importance of mokopuna (children) developing a sense of acceptance and belonging in ECE settings. It states "Early childhood settings are safe and secure places where each child is treated with respect and diversity is valued. All children need to know that they are accepted for who they are" (p. 31). It adds "Children are more likely to feel at home if they regularly see their own culture, language and world views valued in the ECE setting" (p. 31). Another relevant quote is "All children and their families are accepted, their diversity is valued and welcomed, and they are actively supported to participate and learn" (p. 37).

This article focuses on phase two of the *Refugee families in early childhood education: Constructing pathways to belonging* research project (Mitchell et al., 2018). It explores the research question: 'How can a framing that builds on concepts of Mana Whenua from kaupapa Māori theory be used to strengthen a sense of bicultural belonging for refugee families in Aotearoa New Zealand, and also help families sustain a sense of belonging in their home countries?' The research involved trialling and evaluating the pōwhiri framing developed in phase one of the research (Rameka et al., 2021), in ECE settings. The framing offers concepts to enable understanding of the phases and processes for refugee and immigrant families to develop a sense of bicultural belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The research

The early childhood education settings

Participants were kaiako/teachers and refugee families from ECE settings that have a total or high proportion of refugee families:

- The AUT Centre for Refugee Education provides the education programme at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre, offering adult education, school-based education and early childhood education for refugee adults and children when they first arrive in Aotearoa New Zealand. Ruth Ham, a co-author for this article and for the initial theorising, is the kaiako (head teacher) for the EC Centre.
- Berhampore Kindergarten, Newtown Kindergarten and Wellington South Kindergarten are three other ECE settings in the study. All kindergartens are administered under the umbrella of Whānau Manaaaki Kindergartens.

Methodology

The project used design-based implementation research (Penuel, 2014; Penuel et al., 2011) involving cycles of data gathering, theory building, critical analysis and evaluation, and adaptation of design, carried out in participation with teachers and families in the ECE settings. Data analysed in this article came from interviews with refugee parents, interviews and focus group discussions with teachers/kaiako, and documentation from each setting.

Participants checked their interview transcripts and were able to amend these if they wished. Participants' first initial is used, along with their role (parent, kaiako/teacher), and the setting name.

Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse and report themes within the data that were linked to each of the pōwhiri phases and underlying concepts.

Pōwhiri - The ritual of encounter

Pōwhiri is the traditional Māori ceremony of welcome or ritual of encounter (Salmond, 1976; Mead, 2003; Powhare, 2017). Hobson et al. (2018) make the point that rituals permeate human life and are fundamental to most cultural practices and traditions. Rituals work to make ordinary actions or gestures into symbolic expressions, reinforcing their meanings each time they are performed (Smith & Stewart, 2011). Unlike habits or routines that can be changed when performed, rituals are embodied by a specific set of physical features or actions which are "sequenced, patterned, and repeated in fixed or bounded ways" (Hobson, et al., 2018, p. 2). The performance of the ritual relates to psychological qualities that enhance the meaning of the ritual, so cannot be changed or relaxed. And finally, ritualised actions are connected with a wider system of meaning and symbolism.

Pōwhiri embodies these aspects of ritual. The ritual of pōwhiri follows a set of fixed actions, referred to in this article as phases. These fixed actions are embedded with culturally-specific meanings. Understanding the symbolism of the pōwhiri process is essential to understanding how pōwhiri is a metaphor for the process of belonging.

The word pōwhiri has two root words, pō or unknown and whiri or plaiting. Pōwhiri refers to the weaving of unknowns (Smith, 2016). Pōwhiri recognises the importance of welcoming people into the area (Smith, 2016). Walker (1990) explains that "Visitors from afar came as waewae tapu (strangers with sacred feet), and with them came the accompanying spirits of their own ancestors" (p.73). The pōwhiri process removes the tapu or sacredness from the visitors. Mead (2003) describes this as "… a transition from one state to another. The actual steps in performing the pōwhiri can be viewed as the gradual reduction of tapu, culminating in the eating of food which ends the ceremony and brings about a state of noa [normality]" (p. 118). These sequenced, ritualised steps include:

- Karanga – call of welcome
- Whaikōrero – speeches/oratory
- Waiata Tautoko – support songs
- Hongi – sharing of breath
- Hākari – feast

Pōwhiri is also associated with acknowledging the mana of all participants. Mana can be translated as "authority, control, influence, prestige, power, psychic force, effectual, binding, authoritative ... and take effect" (Hemara 2000, p. 68). A deeper meaning is "spiritual power and authority" (Love, 2004). Mana is a central to Māori perceptions of the world and self, with almost all activities associated with upholding and enhancing mana. Understandings of mana are therefore critical to an understanding of the Māori person or child, and the Māori world. Manaaki is derived from the word 'mana' and translates as "to entertain or befriend, to show respect or kindness" (Patterson, 1992, p. 148). Manaakitanga is the enactment of manaaki or hospitality and is a key principle in pōwhiri (Mead, 2003). This principle recognises that visitors are strangers at the pōwhiri ceremony, but as the rituals are completed, visitors become guests who must be cared for while in the territory of the hosts (Rameka et al., 2021).

Exploring the symbolism of the pōwhiri metaphor, within the context of belonging in ECE, is further supported by making visible the connecting links to the strands of *Te Whāriki* and by identifying the connections between pōwhiri, and the Māori concept of whanaungatanga.

Te Whāriki recognises mana in the strands. Together with the curriculum principles, the strands provide the framework for a holistic ECE curriculum (MoE, 2017). The strands reflect types of mana including: Mana Atua - Mana from spiritual powers, Mana Reo - Mana from language, Mana Whenua - Mana from land, Mana Tangata - Mana from people and Mana Aoturoa - Mana from environments. Connections between the strands and the phases of pōwhiri are key to establishing understandings of ways refugee families and children can be supported to develop a sense of bicultural belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Whanaungatanga is another key concept in pōwhiri. Whānau is the basic family grouping of Māori society and also means 'to give birth'. From a Māori worldview, the development and retention of a sense of connectedness to people, place, and the wider physical and spiritual worlds is related to whānau. Whanaungatanga or 'kinship' is the way Māori view, maintain and strengthen relationships and acknowledgement of the responsibilities and obligations that family members have to each other. It also includes philosophies and practices that strengthen the physical and spiritual harmony and wellbeing of the group (Rameka et al., 2021). Through shared experiences and working and living together, whanaungatanga supports a sense of belonging (Māori Dictionary, n.d.). Each phase of pōwhiri is further understood in relation to a different aspect of whanaungatanga, or connectedness.

- Karanga - Mana Atua (Mana of the gods), Whanaungatanga ki ngā atuatanga (Connecting our spiritual selves).
- Whaikōrero - Mana Reo (Mana of languages), Whanaungatanga ki ngā reo (Connecting our languages).
- Waiata Tautoko - Mana Whenua (Mana of the land), Whanaungatanga ki ngā whenua (Connecting our lands).
- Hongi - Mana Tangata (Mana of people), Whanaungatanga ki ngā tangata (Connecting our people).
- Hākari - Mana Aoturoa (Mana of the environment), Whanaungatanga ki ngā aoturoa (Connecting our cultures and environments).

Pōwhiri is a collaborative process that is built on mana, manaakitanga and whanaungatanga. It is a process based on recognising mana and works to "weave" people together (Rameka, et al., 2021). It can be viewed through two lenses, the physical and the metaphorical. In the next section these phases will be articulated, starting with the physical, followed by the metaphorical practices and understandings that were utilised by kaiako and whānau from ECE services to metaphorically actualise the powhiri framing.

Pōwhiri phases

Karanga - call of welcome

The karanga is the call of welcome, however there are deeper meanings within the word. Ka translates as energy and ranga as weaving. Karanga is therefore a process of weaving energies. During the karanga, the kaikaranga (caller), recognises the visitor's genealogy as she calls to their spiritual ancestors connecting the visitors, through reference to ancestors, tribes and sub tribes (Smith, 2016).

Whanaungatanga ki ngā atuatanga (Connecting our spiritual selves) acknowledges the physical and spiritual worlds are intimately connected with activities in the everyday material world, coming under the influence of and interpenetrated by spiritual powers from the higher, spiritual world (Reilly, 2004). In this way, people are inherently connected with the universe and with the world of spiritual powers, the world of the gods. For kaiako, families and children this requires the recognition of the mana atuatanga or the uniqueness and spiritual connectedness of families and children, as evidenced in the following comments from kaiako and families:

> They identify the atua. Even now they'll call it out. There'll be someone who can say every atua. They'll relate the role of the atua while they're doing [activities]. You'll hear the children saying, Tangaroa guardian of the sea, or Tāwhirimātea, he looks after the wind. [Teacher, Newtown Kindergarten]

Another example came from the connection a child made between Rongo, the atua of cultivated food, and a lemon tree, planted next to Rongo's image in the garden/mara area. Connecting the atua with the tree, one of the children identified Rongo as "the atua of lemons".

Figure 1. Depiction of Rongo, atua of cultivated food, in Newtown Kindergarten garden

The connection of the spiritual self is acknowledged in the ECE settings in this study through visual references to the atua, along with the learning of atua names. Ruth Ham, kaiako and co-author, notes that:

> Most cultures have their atua and we are respectful of each other's spirituality and atua. We do have a connection. Even though we have different religions and beliefs, [refugee families] are happy to be part of it, for example Māori karakia kai (blessing of the food).

Making atua visible encourages dialogue that foregrounds the spiritual worlds and opens new possibilities for conversation, for connection, and for sharing through a bicultural lens.

Whaikōrero - speeches, oratory

Generally performed by men, the whaikorero, or formal speech is central to the pōwhiri process. Traditionally, only most senior men could deliver a whaikōrero (Rewi, 2010). The bicultural context for whaikōrero is based on the idea that whaikōrero is a spoken search for bringing people together (Smith, 2016). Whai can be translated as search and kōrero to speak, or a speech. Stewart et al. (2015) claim that within whaikōrero "eloquence and expert oratory skills enhance traditional patterns with metaphor, recitation of genealogy, proverbs and tribal sayings, jokes and timing, and the connecting of past and present" (p. 96). Whaikōrero is related to enhancing the mana of all participants.

Within an ECE setting, the pōwhiri metaphor uses the idea of Whanaungatanga ki ngā reo (Connecting our languages) to recognise that language has a life force, a living vitality and a spirit. Language is both a communication tool and a transmitter of values and beliefs. Language is also a means of transmitting customs, knowledge and skills from one person to the other, and from one generation to the next. It is a source of power and a vehicle for expressing identity (Barlow, 1991; Reedy, 2003). Comments from families highlight the importance of te reo Māori (language) for children.

The interviewer spoke about Aotearoa New Zealand as a bicultural country with Māori and Pākehā. She asked parents what they thought of the emphasis in the kindergarten on Māori language and culture, stories and songs from Māori culture. All participating families were very positive about the benefits they perceived for children making connections with te reo Māori.

> The best way to know a culture or a history is to know the language itself. So, if [our child] grows up knowing this language [te reo Māori], English and also our mother tongue, which he is fluent, that's like three languages. It will be amazing. [A., parent, Newtown Kindergarten]

> I think it's good. It's like you said, Māori is the official language. I would love my kids to learn Māori. And it's good they start from now. My daughter knows more than me, you know. [R., parent, Newtown Kindergarten]

Teachers also commented on the value and importance of children learning te reo Māori:

> I feel very strongly that we're a bicultural country. And all children should be exposed to Māori ... in my dealings with immigrant children, or whichever children, I would really, really strive to use a lot of Māori. When one considers children in Europe, they learn three or four languages, all simultaneously, and there's no struggle with that. So to me, these children will learn by using, and waiata I think is a really strong way of inculcating Māori, and the stories. They love the Māori stories. [J., teacher, Berhampore Kindergarten]

Speaking from her experience at the Mangere Refugee Centre, kaiako and co-author, Ruth Ham, shared "For our families the parents and children, them learning te reo Māori is a way of connecting to the Māori people, the people of the land". This connection is recognised through the willingness of parents for their children to learn te reo, a recognition that learning the language will also mean learning about the history and values of the culture.

Waiata Tautoko - support songs

In the pōwhiri, waiata or songs of support are performed to complement the whaikōrero and are often viewed as the *kinaki* or relish to the speech (Salmond, 1975). Ultimately whaikōrero is an expression of individual and collective identity and connectedness to land and place. The language used in waiata tautoko convey tūrangawaewae, or a place to stand, contextualising cultural identity (Smith, 2017). Waiata tautoko are therefore intimately connected with the land, tribal histories, genealogies, ancestors and one's place to stand, and proclaims tribal identities and mana (Rameka et al., 2021).

In the ECE context, whanaungatanga ki ngā whenua (Connecting our lands) acknowledges the relationship, both physical and spiritual to the land itself. The physical relationship is about geographical connectedness to important natural features such as a mountain, a river or a place. The spiritual relationship is a connectedness to Papatūānuku, the earth mother, and places of tribal significance. Comments from parents and kaiako highlight the importance of respect and recognition of culture and lands:

> Because you know, if you respect Māori and I respect Māori, they might respect my culture, and they're going to respect my country too [N., Language Teacher Aide, Berhampore Kindergarten].

> This is New Zealand, and this is our home. This is [us] starting our life here … so they know New Zealand history. Because it is important to learn the New Zealand history … to feel included and to be as New Zealanders, and [to make] contributions to New Zealand as well [T., parent, Newtown Kindergarten].

> They [refugee families] feel proud to be New Zealanders and feel very close to the Māori culture. But their connection to their homeland is first and foremost and always will be. (Kaiako, Ruth Ham)

Likewise, in our interviews, when we asked families what belonging in their home countries meant to them, many talked about plants, mountains and landscapes that they missed deeply. M., a parent from Afghanistan, talked through an interpreter about missing black mulberries. The interpreter related that M "couldn't see the mulberries in New Zealand, and this is the thing she misses". This discussion also brought back memories for the interpreter herself, who was also from Afghanistan. "Oh, I'd forgotten all about our mulberries," she said, adding that she knows those mulberries as well.

A constructive pathway to belonging will acknowledge the significance of both places for refugee and immigrant families, affirming connections with homelands and creating bicultural pathways to belonging for children and their families in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Hongi - pressing noses, sharing of breath

In the pōwhiri ritual, the hongi or the pressing of noses, sharing the *ha*, or breath, represents the physical coming together of people and the sharing of the essence of life (Smith, 2016). The intimacy of this physical contact is a critical aspect of the process of removing the tapu from the visitors (Tauroa & Tauroa, 1986).

In the pōwhiri framing, Whanaungatanga ki ngā tangata (Connecting our people) relates to the establishment of kin groups which provide individuals with a sense of belonging and therefore strengthens each member of the kin group (Berryman, 2008; Mead, 2003). Kinship connections reinforce the commitment, responsibilities and obligations that individuals have to each other (Berryman, 2008, p. 223).

At Wellington South Kindergarten, teachers talked of their desire to connect with families, ensuring that this connection happened in professional, but authentic ways. R., a teacher, discussed using the pōwhiri framing, which their team had learned about during the research, to support a new process for welcoming families into the centre, by making occasions at kindergarten events for introductions of the whole community and a welcome of new families. R., noted that this new process:

> actually kind of really set a nice atmosphere to welcome families. It was relatively informal. But we did notice that it set a really nice tone for the rest of the evening in terms of how the evening went and just … welcoming (R., teacher, Wellington South Kindergarten).

A., a Newtown parent, commented on the importance in the resettlement process of retaining a strong sense of self identity and also recognising and taking responsibility for collective identity.

> It's more about integration rather than assimilation. Like keep your identity ... we human beings are the citizens of the globe. And no matter how long you've been here, like we all trace back our roots somewhere different.

Māori concepts and values were conveyed by kaiako and co-author, Ruth Ham, as resonating with refugee families.

> Our Māori values and respect for others, it resonates with families and it's adopted naturally and easily because [refugee families] connect with it and have an affinity to it.

Māori concepts of kinship connections and responsibilities can offer a valuable lens for developing interactions with families in ECE settings.

Hākari - feast

Hākari is the final stage of the pōwhiri process. It is about hospitality and mana. Food is noa or ordinary and so is an important component in the removal of tapu (Walker, 2004). The hākari is the coming together of the hosts and the visitors, to share food and feast. This sharing of food signifies a binding together so that the visitors are connected to the hosts.

In an ECE setting, Whanaungatanga ki ngā aoturoa (Connecting our cultures and environments) relates to the sharing of cultural worlds, including aspects such as, language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts, and environmental features such as home, institutions and the natural world. Parents made *many* comments on how Māori culture and language are accepted and respected in Aotearoa New Zealand and their belief that their language, culture and presence will also be accepted and respected:

> I noticed that in New Zealand, they value the traditional culture of the Māori … I noticed that there is Māori language and art. So even though I do not really understand what that means, I see that it is the way to spread respect and love to the Māori. They are important, they are major. And they have to be preserved … value, the cultural value and history. So it's a sense of belonging that we have for the things like culture and art. So, every time I come to pick up my son, he sang … I don't know what it means but I can understand that they integrate it very well in the curriculum. [V., Parent, Newtown Kindergarten]

> But then when I came here, and then you see how Māori are … respected. The language is everywhere … I like it. I never knew of any Māori before. And then when I came here, I started learning the story of Maui, the story of Matariki … it's very fascinating, and it's very good because it makes me feel like, 'Actually, those people are really accepting everything,' … so if I bring into that mix it would be accepted too. It's already happening, it would be accepted and people willing to actually learn from it. And that's what I see exactly in this kindergarten. [N., Language Teacher Aide, Berhampore Kindergarten]

Kaiako and co-author, Ruth Ham, made the point that te Ao Māori (Māori world) concepts, dispositions and perspective are important aspects of the curriculum for all children:

> How do we build a bicultural curriculum? And it really comes down to, for me, that whole group learning is driven by a Te Ao Māori concept, or a Māori disposition.

> I've been head teacher at …, I've supported the team in the specific style of group planning that is led by Te Ao Māori concepts, or Māori dispositions. So when we're looking at what children are learning, we're not looking at, well there's bugs in the garden, so let's learn about bugs. Our focus would be on, 'The children are interested in bugs, what is it about bugs? Is it about caring for them?' They might be kaitiaki. Or it might be more about the relationships they're building with other children, the whanaungatanga.

The pōwhiri framing in practice

The following are two examples of ways the powhiri framing can be reflected in practice.

The first involves artworks depicting cultural stories that act as a catalyst for understandings. A kindergarten approached a local artist to create pou or pillars to be strategically placed around the kindergarten playground. The pou represented Ranginui (sky father), Papatūānuku (earth mother) and their children, the atua of the different domains. The kaiako regularly talked to the children about the pou and what they represented. They also utilised a range of resources and practices to inform children about the atua such as books, storytelling and waiata. Children became familiar with atua, and were able to explain who the atua were, their domains, and their importance to the world. Children were also encouraged to represent their ideas and perspectives through art, songs, and discussions, and by making links to the pou.

Aspects of the excerpt that enhanced children's sense of belonging:

- Children were able to develop mana atua relationships through connecting with ngā atua and explaining why caring for atua were important, for example caring for Tane Mahuta, the atua of the forest, plants and animals. They were able to express the legends associated with atua. The pou allowed children to touch the pou, to physically connect to the representations of the atua, and what they represented.
- Mokopuna were able to develop mana whenua relationships through connecting the pou with the land. They made connections with the land, sea, forests, food, the earth and sky around them.
- Mokopuna also developed relationships with the aoturoa (Mana Aoturoa), the environment, through learning the stories of the pou, and being able to recite and represent these stories through art, song, storying, enhancing their sense of knowing, being and belonging.

The second example involves place-based education (Penetito, 2009), linking the land of Aotearoa New Zealand and the land of the home countries. Teachers in the kindergarten explored ways that place-based education could affirm children's identities, supporting them to position themselves within the local environment and make connections to their places of birth. In all kinds of weather, the children and teachers take 1½ hour walks around the neighbouring estuary. These walking endeavours are part of larger projects back in the kindergarten that are sustained over time. They involve children story-telling, learning about Māori history, taking responsibility for cleaning and planting, observation, scientific exploration of changes of seasons, patterns of tide, art, mathematics, and so on. The kindergarten built a relationship with a local kaumātua (elder) who told them stories of the neighbouring volcanic mountains. Teachers made connections with mountains from children's home countries that were significant to

children's families. They found out about these mountains by inviting families to tell stories, bring photographs and recollect memories. This process was facilitated by a teacher who spoke the child's home language. Teachers worked with children to google and explore these mountains and surrounding landscapes, and encouraged children to express their ideas through art. They enabled children to sustain connections with people and experiences from their home country.

Final comments

This article focuses on the research question: "How can a framing that builds on concepts of Mana whenua from kaupapa Māori theory be used to strengthen a sense of bicultural belonging for refugee families in Aotearoa New Zealand, and also help families sustain a sense of belonging in their home countries?" The pōwhiri phases articulated in the article, followed by the metaphorical practices and understandings of kaiako and families to metaphorically actualise each phase of pōwhiri, whether physical or metaphorical, involve hospitality, generosity, relationship building, acceptance, respect and celebration. Pōwhiri is a demonstration of mana and whanaungatanga that is required to welcome people appropriately, within a Māori context.

What is evident from the comments of kaiako/teachers and families is that the framing encompasses many of the aspects that support a sense of bicultural belonging for refugee families in Aotearoa New Zealand, and also helps families sustain a sense of belonging in their home countries. Through the development of understandings of Māori cultural values, language, arts, worldviews and understandings, families are able to see the similarities and connections to their own cultural knowledges, and homeland. An example of these connections are the similarities in perceptions of the spiritual, the spiritual world and beliefs. Families recognised that although specific religious beliefs may differ, the recognition and importance placed on the spiritual brought people together, supporting a sense of belonging and connectedness. Families also acknowledged the important place of Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand and in ECE. They recognised New Zealand as a bicultural nation and the place of Māori as tangata whenua (people of the land) and the respect and acceptance accorded Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand. Their sense of connectedness to Māori was expressed as they explained that, as Māori were accepted, New Zealanders would be more likely to accept them. This gave them a sense of optimism for the future, more specifically their future in Aotearoa New Zealand. Many of the families expressed a strong desire to learn te reo Māori and were proud that their children were learning it. They acknowledged the importance of te reo Māori to Māori and Aotearoa New Zealand as a whole, where learning te reo would provide them with a sense of belonging, and would promote a sense of togetherness and connection.

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