

A Māori perspective of being and belonging

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Abstract

Belonging and being are inextricably linked. From a Māori perspective, belonging and being can be viewed through a number of interconnected historical and contemporary frames. One frame is derived from Māori perceptions of the creation of the universe and genealogical relationships to the universe and everything in it. Another frame of belonging and being stresses increasingly diverse and complex positionings that require negotiation of radically different terrains of assumptions, behaviours, values and beliefs. This article explores two interrelated aspects of being and belonging from a Māori perspective: *whakapapa* ('genealogical connections') and *whanaungatanga* ('family relationships'). It discusses how each aspect has changed over time as a result of colonisation, urbanisation and western education, and identifies how the reflection of each has been transformed.

Keywords

Belonging, identity, Māori, relationships

Introduction

Belonging and being are inextricably linked. From a Māori perspective, belonging and being can be viewed through a number of interconnected historical and contemporary frames. Historical frames are derived from Māori perceptions of the creation of the universe and *whakapapa* ('genealogical') relationships to the universe and everything in it. Contemporary frames of belonging and being stress increasingly diverse and complex positionings that require negotiation of radically different terrains of assumptions, behaviours, values and beliefs. These include ideas about how worlds are constituted and ways of acting, being and belonging within those worlds. Delpit (1995) claims that individuals interpret information, behaviours and situations through their particular cultural lenses, which operate involuntarily, below the level of consciousness. This makes it appear that one's view is simply the normal and natural way it is. Contemporary urban environments, institutions and structures tend to reinforce Pākehā (New Zealander of European descent) cultural values and beliefs. As a minority cultural group in Pākehā-dominated urban environments,

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institutions and structures, Māori tend to have their cultural knowledge, values and ways of being thrown into relief in encounters with non-Māori (Metge, 1995). For this reason, culture is often viewed as an overarching frame of being and belonging for Māori, whereas for Pākehā it tends to be viewed as just one of many definers, if it is mentioned at all.

Te Whāriki: He whāriki Matauranga mo ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa/Early Childhood Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017) describes the ways Māori perspectives of belonging and being could be enacted in early childhood education practice. *Te Whāriki*'s unique bicultural framing expresses the vision that all children in Aotearoa New Zealand grow up as competent and confident learners, strong in their identity, language and culture. It states:

Located in Aotearoa New Zealand, this vision implies a society that recognises Māori as tangata whenua ['people of the land'], assumes a shared obligation for protecting Māori language and culture, and ensures that Māori are able to enjoy educational success as Māori. (Ministry of Education, 2017: 2)

Te Whāriki can be translated as 'the woven mat', which is a metaphor for the early childhood education curriculum, where the four curriculum principles – *Whakamana* ('empowerment'), *Kotahitanga* ('holistic development'), *Ngā Hononga* ('relationships') and *Whānau Tangata* ('family and community') – are interwoven with the five curriculum strands – *Mana Atua* ('well-being'), *Mana Reo* ('communication'), *Mana Aotūroa* ('exploration'), *Mana Tangata* ('contribution') and *Mana Whenua* ('belonging'). The woven nature of *Te Whāriki* means that all the principles and strands contribute to children's developing sense of being and belonging. The *Mana Whenua* strand, however, makes a specific reference to the development of a sense of identity and belonging (Hemara, 2000).

This article explores two interrelated aspects of being and belonging from a Māori perspective: *whakapapa* ('genealogical connections') and *whanaungatanga* ('family relationships'). It discusses how each aspect has changed over time as a result of colonisation, urbanisation and western education, and identifies how the reflection of each has been transformed. The article utilises *pūrākau* ('narratives') from *kaikorero* ('interviewees') in a recent research project entitled 'Te Whatu Kete Mātauranga: Weaving Māori and Pasifika infant and toddler theory and practice in early childhood education' (2017) to reinforce messages about belonging and being in both traditional and contemporary contexts. The research involved each of the six participating early childhood education services meeting with *kaumatua* ('elders'), *whānau* ('families') and church leaders in their communities to collect and collate *pūrākau* about traditional ways of caring for babies and young children; cultural practices; rites and ceremonies; the spiritual, physical and social relationships that surrounded infants and toddlers; and the values and understandings that underpinned constructs of the child, the learner, the teacher and learning. Statements from *Te Whāriki* with specific emphasis on the 'belonging' strand, *Mana Whenua*, will also be utilised to demonstrate Māori perspectives of being and belonging. Contemporary indicators of being and belonging as Māori are also briefly discussed in the final section of the article, and implications for early childhood education are identified.

Whakapapa – 'genealogical connections'

Whakapapa has many meanings, but can generally be viewed as 'genealogy' and 'history'. *Papa* describes something that is broad and flat, such as a board or slab, and *whaka* can be translated as 'to enable' or 'make happen'. The definitions of *whakapapa* in the *Dictionary of the Māori Language* include:

- To lie flat
- Place in layers, lay one upon another
- Recite in proper order genealogies, legends, etc.
- Genealogical table (Williams, 2001)

Whakapapa operates at many levels, but tends to be associated with genealogical narratives – stories that are recounted layer upon layer, ancestor upon ancestor, up to the present day. *Whakapapa* provides a continuous lifeline from those who existed before to those living today, and encompasses everything that is passed from one generation to the next, from one ancestor to the next and from the deceased to the living (Berryman, 2008). It connects Māori to people and land, the past, present and future, the spiritual world and the universe (Mead, 2003; Te Rito, 2007). *Whakapapa* informs relationships and provides the foundation for inherent connectedness and interdependence with all things (Cheung, 2008). *Whakapapa* is therefore fundamental to Māori understandings of belonging and is at the very core of what it means to be Māori (Barlow, 1991; Berryman, 2008; Cheung, 2008; Rangihau, 1977).

Whakapapa ki te tīmatanga o te Ao me ngā Atua – ‘to the beginning of the world and the gods’

Whakapapa denotes the genealogical descent of Māori from the divine creation of the universe to the living world (Berryman, 2008), from the gods to today. Māori are descendants of the heavens and, through *whakapapa*, can trace their lineage back to the very beginning of time and the creation of the universe (Barlow, 1991; Te Rito, 2007). The genealogy of creation begins with Io taketake (the originator). Ranginui (the sky father) and Papatūānuku (the earth mother) are followed by their children. There are variations in the accounts of the number of children born to Ranginui and Papatūānuku; however, it is generally accepted that there were at least six main *atua* (‘guardians’ or ‘gods’), who received authority over certain domains of life. They include: Tūmatauenga (the guardian of war), Tangaroa (the guardian of the oceans), Tawhirimatea (the guardian of the weather), Rongomātāne and Haumia tiketike (the guardians of food), and Tanemahuta (the guardian of the forests). Māori trace their genealogy or *whakapapa* back to Tanemahuta, to the world of the gods and to the creation of the universe (Barlow, 1991; Reilly, 2004; Te Rito, 2007). From this perspective, people are not superior but related through *whakapapa* to all aspects of the environment and connected to everything in it. The *pūrākau* from the *kaikorero* highlight the ways children learnt about their spiritual connectedness to the gods:

Through play we learnt about the Māori gods and their realms that they were guardians, like Tanemahuta – guardian of different Māori trees, birds and insects – and about his most prized deed – the creation of Hine-ahu-one, the first human being.

Bush walks taught us how to talk to Tanemahuta and Tawhirimatea.

Whakapapa ki te Taiao – ‘to the environment’

Whakapapa links to the environment are conceptualised in terms of humans being an integral part of the natural world, interconnected and complementary. *Whakapapa* embeds Māori in the environment along with all other flora and fauna and natural resources in identifiable and established ways. This interdependency between humans and ecosystems is expressed in the *pūrākau* and can

be viewed in terms of reciprocal relationships that recognise *manaaki whenua* ('caring for the land') and *manaaki tangata* ('caring for people'):

I love the *awa* ['river']. Because I knew our people treasured it, it was a *tūpuna awa* ['ancestor river'], I just loved being down there. I felt at home.

I remember how my mother's description of how the female elements ... were much like that of the *whenua* ['land']. Nurturing and sustenance and giving life to all things, much like that of Papatūānuku, the *whenua*, which nurtures and sustains all living things.

When visiting her *tūrangawaewae* ['place to stand'], she has a spiritual sense of belonging and believes that we always give back to Papatūānuku.

Whakapapa ki te tangata – 'to the people'

Whakapapa provides a continuum of life from the spiritual world to the physical world, from the creation of the universe to people – past, present and future. Not only does *whakapapa* permit Māori to trace descent through past generations; it also allows movement and growth into the future. Identity – past, present and future – comes from *whakapapa* links to the past through ancestors, to the present through *whānau*, and to the future through children and grandchildren. *Whakapapa* connects to *whānau*, the immediate family grouping, as well as to the *hapū* ('subtribe') and *iwi* ('tribe'), who share a common genealogy. The term *hapū* also means 'pregnancy' and reflects the notion of being born from common ancestors, of being born from the same womb. It emphasises the importance of being born into the group and highlights the concept of growth and connectedness (Ministry of Justice, 2001). *Iwi* is the largest unit in Māori society. It is made up of a number of related *hapū* whose defining principle of identity and organisation is based on descent from a common ancestor. The concept of the tribe is fundamental to defining who people are and their sense of belonging (Maaka and Fleras, 2005). The word *iwi* can be translated as 'bone'. It relates to the bones of ancestors, which are sacred. Furthermore, bones are important for strength and giving form. Thus, bones in the sense of *whakapapa* give strength and form to the people (Ministry of Justice, 2001). *Whakapapa* therefore establishes personal, collective and *whānau* identities, positioning and connectedness to other *whānau* (Berryman, 2008; Walker, 1996). One *kaikorero* states:

I learned a *pātere* ['chant'] that talks of the *wāhi tapu* ['sacred places'] and the *pepeha* ['tribal saying'] of our *hapū*, *taonga* ['treasures'] of our *tupuna* ['people']. Even though we are born and raised in Hamilton, we still have a very strong connection of *whanaungatanga* ['family relationships'] with our *whānau* up north.

Whakapapa ki te whenua – 'to the land'

Not only does *whakapapa* connect one to people past, present and future; it also connects one with the land. Māori can trace their genealogy back to Papatūānuku, therefore they not only live on the land, but are of the land (Ministry of Justice, 2001). Tribal history is recounted through reciting prominent landmarks and the ancestors who lived there. Oral history helps cement occupancy of *iwi* land and *iwi* authority over it:

Whakapapa identifies who I am, where I am from and in doing so identifies a place that I can proudly call my *tūrangawaewae* ['tribal lands']. It is this whakapapa knowledge that gives an individual or collective a sense of purpose that ... grounds us to Papatūānuku ... my whakapapa and *iwi* affiliations are my biological

and kinship credentials that form my Māori identity and by alluding to my tūrangawaewae I have established a connection to my wāhi tapu [‘sacred place’]. (Graham, 2009: 1–2)

Land is therefore fundamental to being Māori and developing a strong sense of belonging. The term for ‘land’ is *whenua*, which is also used to mean ‘placenta’. This is important because, for Māori, the placenta is buried in the land, in a place of significance, and, at death, the body is buried in the land, also in a place of significance, thus completing the cycle and completing the symbolic and physical connection to the land. *Whakapapa* identifies who one is and where one is from, and thus identifies the place one belongs (Graham, 2009). Te Rito (2007: 4) explains that ‘[h]aving knowledge of whakapapa helps ground us to the earth. We have a sense of belonging here, a sense of purpose, a *raison d’être* which extends beyond the sense of merely existing on this planet’. The *kāikorero* emphasise that land was not viewed as a commodity, but as a source of identity, belonging and continuity, shared with the dead, the living and the unborn (Ministry of Justice, 2001):

Our kids are raised to know that’s their *whenua* and where their roots are from. Their *whenua* has been buried up north to keep them connected with our *whenua*. We take them back up there so they can play in the streams and walk the *whenua*.

We ... keep the afterbirth and bury it in our *whenua* so that our child will always be connected with their land/home ground.

Whakapapa and Te Whāriki

Te Whāriki makes a number of statements emphasising the importance of recognising children’s *whakapapa* as central to children’s sense of identity and connectedness to their worlds. The *Mana Tangata* (‘contribution’) strand recognises *whakapapa* – to the beginning of the world, the gods, the environment, the people and the land – as being central to children’s sense of belonging and self. It emphasises that Māori ways of knowing and being must be appreciated and respected in order not only to understand the child, but also to support children’s learning and development. *Te Whāriki* states: ‘Respect is shown for Māori views of the world, the natural environment, and the child’s connection through time to *whenua*, *atua* Māori [‘Māori gods’] and *tīpuna* [‘ancestors’]’ (Ministry of Education, 2017: 31). It further stresses the aim that ‘Children have a strong sense of themselves as a link between past, present and future’ (36) and that ‘Children’s relationship to Papatūānuku is based on whakapapa, respect and *aroha* [‘love’]’ (31). The importance of *kaiako* (‘teacher’) knowledge, skills and attitudes is explored in *Te Whāriki* statements such as:

Kaiako recognise *mokopuna* [‘children’] as connected across time and space and as a link between past, present and future: ‘He purapura i ruia mai i Rangiatea’ [‘a seed sown in Rangiatea’ – Māori spiritual homeland]. They celebrate and share appropriate *kōrero* [‘speech’] and *waiata* [‘songs’] that support *mokopuna* to maintain this link. (38)

Kaiako are cognisant of the concept of *tangata whenua* and the relationship that Māori have to each other and to the land. This guides *kaiako* relationships with *whānau*, *hapū* and *iwi*. Kaiako share appropriate histories, *kōrero* and *waiata* with *mokopuna* to enhance their identity and sense of belonging. (33)

Colonisation, urbanisation and western education

As a result of rapid colonisation, assimilation and western education, ideas about being Māori and belonging shifted in the 19th century. These changes were further shaped after the Second World

War with the alienation from tribal lands because of government land-purchasing policies and confiscations. It is difficult to gauge how much land was lost, but over three million acres were lost through confiscations alone (Boyes, 2006). Associated with the loss of land was the loss of the community's economic base. This culminated in large numbers of Māori needing to move to urban environments to find employment. Approximately 80% of Māori were forced from their tribal lands to cities and towns (Raerino, 2007). Alienation from the land had a devastating effect on Māori identity – personal, social and spiritual – severing *whakapapa* and *tangata whenua* connections to the land. It severed the physical and spiritual bond with the land and with past generations who had lived on the land. Walker (1989) explains that for 70% of urban Māori, all ties to the land were lost completely. It alienated Māori from a fundamental source of identity, being and belonging, and led to significant numbers of Māori not being fully able to connect to their tribal roots or integrate into the mainstream of wider Pākehā-led society (Maaka and Fleras, 2005; Raerino, 2007). As McIntosh describes:

The dominant paradigm of Māori society argues that ... whakapapa established place and home. In this sense, urban de-enfranchised Māori who have no knowledge of their whakapapa may find themselves culturally homeless, a potent element of a sensed alienation from both Māori and non-Māori society. For many, homelessness begins as a symbolic state and transforms into an actual state. (McIntosh, 2005: 42)

For some, the absence of traditional tribal connections led to them creating their own urban social networks and new forms of social institutions, including pan-tribal voluntary associations, church groups, clubs, youth groups and urban *marae* ('gathering complexes'). These institutions provided a connection between the urban context in which they lived and their attachments from the past. As Barcham (1998: 305) explains: 'while urban Māori have lost some of the symbols used in the rural environment to demarcate their ethnic and cultural identity, they have adapted other symbols to help make coherent their life in the modern urban environment'. This supported the development and retention of a sense of connectedness to people, place, and the wider physical and spiritual worlds, no matter where the individual resided (Durie, 1997; Raerino, 2007).

Whanaungatanga – 'family relationships'

For many, the development and retention of a sense of connectedness to people, place, and the wider physical and spiritual worlds is related to *whānau* ('family'). *Whānau* means 'to give birth' and is the basic family grouping of Māori society. *Whanaungatanga* comes from the word *whānau*. *Whanaungatanga* or 'kinship' is the way Māori view, maintain and strengthen *whānau/hapū/iwi* relations. Through shared experiences and working and living together, *whanaungatanga* provides a sense of belonging (Māori Dictionary, n.d.). It involves rights, responsibilities, obligations and commitments among members, which generate *whānau*/family cohesion and cooperation (Reilly, 2004).

Whanaungatanga ki te tangata – 'with people'

Whanaungatanga relates to the close relationship developed and maintained between members of the *whānau* as a result of working together. It connects the individual to kin groups, providing them with a sense of belonging and therefore strengthening each member of the kin group (Berryman, 2008; Mead, 2003; Pere, 1984). *Whanaungatanga* is about establishing *whānau* connections and reinforcing the commitment, responsibilities and obligations that *whānau* members have to each other (Berryman, 2008: 223). *Whanaungatanga* includes philosophies and practices that strengthen

the physical and spiritual harmony and well-being of the group. The importance of developing *whanaungatanga* with people is stressed by the *kaikorero*:

We grew up with all of our cousins; we were always close to our cousins; there was no distinction between brothers and sisters or cousins.

With my sisters and our husbands, our children are brought up very close. We were taught that our cousins were our brothers and sisters, and our children are raised the same way. Their *whanaungatanga* to one another is so strong because they were always together. Every night we have dinner together at one another's homes.

Whanaungtanga ki te whenua – ‘with place’

From a Māori world view, the relationship, both physical and spiritual, to *whenua* cannot be overstated. 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 mountains and rivers, and to Papatūānuku, the earth mother. For urban Māori, these natural identity markers and traditional places of belonging are mostly elsewhere, making the development of a sense of belonging to place more complex. McCreanor et al. (2006) highlight a number of factors that strengthen a sense of belonging to place for Māori within urban environments, including knowledge of specific locations and relationships with *tangata whenua* from the locations; knowing a place through spending long periods of time or growing up in the locality; connections with *whānau* who may already be living in the area; and community facilities that allow participation in *whānau* networks, such as *te kōhanga reo* (‘early years language nests’) or *kura kaupapa Māori* (‘Māori-medium primary schools’), *marae*, and sports and recreational facilities. One *kaikorero* emphasises the place of *te kōhanga reo* in supporting *whanaungatanga* relationships: ‘Started learning from the *kōhanga reo* ... building relationship with *tamariki* (‘children’) and *kaiako* (‘teachers’). Knowledge and experiences were passed down to the next generation’.

Whanaungtanga ki te Taiao – ‘with the natural world’

The traditional view of the *Taiao* or ‘natural world’ is one that acknowledges the natural order of the universe, including the living and the non-living. It is perceived in terms of connectedness and the relationships of all living things, rather than ownership or control of the natural world. According to Marsden:

the resources of the earth did not belong to man [*sic*] but rather, man belonged to the earth. Man as well as animal, bird, fish could harvest the bounty of mother earth's resource but they did not own them. Man had but user-rights. (Marsden, 2003: 67)

From this connectivity and relationships with the natural world comes the requirement to care for, nurture, connect with and safeguard the natural world. Appreciation of the natural environment is highlighted by McCreanor et al. (2006), who make the point that, for many urban Māori, attachment to the natural environment, including beaches, parks, forests and bush reserves, is of particular importance as it connects them with important cultural relationships and responsibilities. One *kaikorero* explains about playing and learning in the natural environment:

Learning about Papatūānuku and the *whenua* and also about the *māra* [‘garden’]. It was where she felt safe and learnt about her history ... The only toys I had was the natural environment, that being the *rākau*

['trees'], the *māra*, *ngā kararehe* ['animals'] and, of course, importantly, our *te awa tupuna* ['ancestral river'], Waikato.

Whanaungatanga ki te Ao wairua – 'with the spiritual world'

A Māori perspective of the world maintains that all things have a spiritual as well as physical body, including the earth, birds and animals. The concept of *wairua* is derived from Māori cosmology and literally means 'two waters' – the spiritual and the physical. Foster (2009: 24) states that *wairuatanga* functions as a 'medium in maintaining balance and establishing parallels between the physical and the metaphysical domains that deals with the spiritual potential of human beings'. It is an expression of the relationship between the physical and the spiritual, and of the wholeness of life. 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 world, the spiritual world (Marsden, 2003; Ministry of Justice, 2001; Reilly, 2004; Shirres, 1997). In this way, people are inherently connected with the universe and with the world of spiritual powers, the world of the gods. *Karakia* ('prayer') was also an important aspect of the daily lives of the *kaikorero*:

Karakia were at every meeting starter back in the day. Grandparents were very spiritual; praying over us kids at the time was the greatest gift you could possibly have.

Karakia was important, morning and at night *kai* time.

Whanaungatanga ki Te Reo – 'with the Māori language'

The Māori language is regarded as sacred as it was given to the ancestors by the gods, and so is a means to know the gods (Barlow, 1991). Love (2004) adds that Te Reo Māori is an aspect of *wairua* which stems from and is integral to the spiritual realm. It has a life force, a living vitality and a spirit. Pere (1991: 9) states that 'language is the life line and sustenance of a culture'. It is both a communication tool and a transmitter of values and beliefs. Language is also a means of transmitting customs, valued beliefs, knowledge and skills from one person to the next and from one generation to the next. It reflects the cultural environment and ways of viewing the world. It is a source of power and a vehicle for expressing identity (Barlow, 1991). 'Language is the window to a culture, and transmits the values and beliefs of its people' (Reedy, 2003: 70). The *kaikorero* explain the importance of language and culture in their childhoods:

Cultural, religious, language and *whānau* were important in my upbringing. *Marae* was a family home where different practices were implemented.

Tikanga ('customs and traditional values'), *marae* and *kawa* ('protocols'), *karakia* was a daily ritual for the *tamariki* in their upbringing.

In 1900, the Māori language was banned in schools, which led to generations of Māori children being deprived of a fundamental aspect of their identity. The decline in speakers of Te Reo was marked and, by the 1970s, there was a danger that the language would become extinct. Ka'ai (2004: 204–205) states that 'even though it served as an important indicator of Māoriness, the viability of te reo Māori as a language of daily communication was in serious doubt'. McIntosh (2005: 45) adds that an inability to converse in Te Reo Māori not only excludes participation and

belonging in many Māori settings, but can engender a sense of shame in people: ‘The sense of shame experienced by those who are non-speakers is very real’. One *kaikorero* shared her story of language loss, stating that: ‘Te Reo ... was strongly discouraged ... at *kura* and corporal punishment was enforced if they spoke Māori’.

Whanaungatanga and Te Whāriki

Whanaungatanga with people, places, the natural physical world, the spiritual world and the Māori language is also reinforced in *Te Whāriki*. The principles of *Whānau Tangata* (‘family and community’) and *Ngā Hononga* (‘relationships’) interweave with the *Mana Whenua* and *Mana Tangata* strands to highlight the importance of *whanaungatanga* not only in terms of belonging and being, but also as an overall requirement for all children. *Kaiako* roles, responsibilities and understandings are also explained in statements such as:

Kaiako are aware of the concepts of mana (‘power or prestige’) and whakapapa and the importance of these concepts in the development and maintenance of relationships. They understand the collaborative processes inherent within whānau. (Ministry of Education, 2017: 36)

Kaiako support mokopuna to engage respectfully with and to have aroha for Papatūānuku. They encourage an understanding of kaitiakitanga (‘guardianships’) and the responsibilities of being a kaitiaki (‘guardian’) by, for example, caring for rivers, native forest and birds. (33)

Contemporary definers of belonging as Māori

In contemporary contexts, Māori are required to negotiate radically different cultural terrains of assumptions, behaviours, values and beliefs about how the world is constituted, and what it means to be and belong. What is clear is that belonging for Māori in contemporary urban contexts is often linked to sites of cultural reproduction that allow Māori to connect with and experience Māori environments, structures and processes within urban settings. Within these settings, there are definers of Māoriness that can shape, order and constrain an individual’s ability to belong as Māori.

As discussed earlier, an ability to speak Te Reo Māori and possessing knowledge of cultural values, protocols and histories can impact on one’s sense of belonging and acceptance by others as Māori. These abilities and attributes are highly valued in Māori environments, and allow the individual to contribute, take responsibility and assume leadership roles in those contexts. Conversely, one’s inability to speak Te Reo can impact negatively on the development and maintenance of a sense of belonging and acceptance in some situations.

Growing up or spending time in Māori communities supports the development of sociocultural competence and understandings related to interpreting cultural and social behaviours – for example, expressions of humour and cheek; ways of demonstrating politeness and respect, especially in relationship to different age groups in the community; showing hospitality and generosity; caring for others; and ways of greeting and speaking English through Māori slang terms and idioms. Having an understanding of these ways of being within Māori environments supports acceptance and belonging in Māori groups, whether you are ethnically Māori or not. Urban Māori environments may include sports groups such as rugby league and softball clubs, where a large percentage of players and supporters are Māori and Pacific Islanders, as opposed to soccer and cricket clubs, where the opposite is often the norm. Educational establishments such as *te kohanga reo*, *kura kaupapa Māori* and *wananga* (Māori tertiary institutions) also provide Māori environments, along with urban *marae* and social service groups and organisations.

When looking at being and belonging from a Māori perspective, it is important to note that there is no one Māori reality. Contemporary Māori ways of knowing the world are ones of both unity and diversity: on some levels, Māori are unified; on others, they are divided by their distinctiveness (Maaka and Fleras, 2005). Māori are not a homogeneous group and there is no one single Māori cultural way of being and belonging as Māori. Being and belonging as Māori has different meanings for different groups (Durie, 1998).

As Durie (1997) points out, being Māori now draws from a multiplicity of sources. However, if a person wishes to identify through their Māori ancestry, they are Māori. 'How many other elements from Te Ao Māori ['the Māori world'] a person draws on to add to that single critical factor can only make the identification stronger' (Durie, 1997: 160).

Māori live in and between two worlds (at least) – Te Ao Māori, the Māori world, and the world at large. Some choose to situate themselves differently in either world, and some give up trying to live in either world and create their own (e.g., gangs). They are nevertheless, by virtue of descent, Māori. (Nikora, 2007: 104)

Implications for early childhood

This article has outlined the interconnected frames, both historical and contemporary, that support understandings of being and belonging from a Māori perspective. Although the lived experiences of *whakapapa* connectedness may not be the reality for many Māori, *whakapapa* remains a potent identifier of being and belonging as Māori. *Whanaungatanga*, associated with *whānau*, *hapū* and *iwi* groupings, is today an expression of belonging within wider contemporary urban sites, both Māori and non-Māori. As these sites of belonging become more diverse, it is important to recognise that the huge majority of Māori identify as being Māori; however, how they wish to belong as Māori is open to interpretation. These interpretations of being and belonging have implications for *kaiako* in early childhood education.

Te Whāriki emphasises the importance of *tamariki* developing self-esteem and confidence as a result of a strong identity and sense of belonging not only in the early childhood education service, but also in their communities and worlds. It also provides guidance for *kaiako* to develop their understandings of Māori perspectives of being and belonging:

Learner identity is enhanced when children's home languages and cultures are valued in educational settings and when *kaiako* are responsive to their cultural ways of knowing and being. For Māori this means *kaiako* need understandings of a world view that emphasises the child's *whakapapa* connection to Māori creation, across Te kore ('the nothingness'), te pō ('the night'), te ao mārama ('the world of light'), atua Māori ('Maori gods') and tīpuna ('ancestors'). (Ministry of Education, 2017: 12)¹

Connections to past, present and future are integral to a Māori perspective of relationships. This includes relationships to tīpuna who have passed on and connections through *whakapapa* to, for example, maunga ['mountains'], awa ['rivers'], moana ['seas'], whenua ['lands'], and marae. (21)

Supporting the development of a sense of being and belonging for *tamariki* Māori and their *whānau* in early childhood education services requires that *kaiako* not only recognise the importance of *whakapapa* and *whanaungatanga*, but also authentically and respectfully incorporate these perspectives into their practice. It entails acknowledgement that being and belonging for Māori may not only relate to the 'here and now', but can link back through time to *Te kore*, *te pō*, *te ao mārama*, *ātua*, *tīpuna*, *maunga* and *whenua*. Furthermore, understandings of the contexts of belonging and being – the multiple and increasingly complex urban environments in which they are exhibited – are critical to further supporting the development of a sense of belonging – *Mana*

Whenua. These understandings and perspectives of belonging and being are not only applicable for Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand, but have broader international implications for supporting being and belonging for indigenous peoples. Cultural world views are implicit in the development and implementation of the curriculum, and recognising this is central to understanding being and belonging. It is important for teachers to recognise and respect indigenous understandings of being and belonging from their own country.

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Note

1. For an explanation of Māori creation stories, see Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal (2005).

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