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# Identity, Cultural Well-being, and Growing up Kāpo Māori



From left: Kelly Tikao, Christine Cowan, Nancy Higgins and Hazel Phillips

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**Nancy Higgins**

Donald Beasley Institute

**Hazel Phillips**

He Parekereke/Institute for  
Research and Development in  
Māori and Pacific Education  
Victoria University of Wellington

**Christine Cowan**

Ngāti Kāpo o Aotearoa Inc.

**Kelly Tikao**

Donald Beasley Institute

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## Abstract

This article<sup>1</sup> explores how education services impact on the identity and cultural well-being of kāpo<sup>2</sup> (blind) Māori. Interviews with 21 key informants indicated that Māori view being kāpo 'as normal' and prioritise aspects like whānau and belonging, which are not always taken into account within New Zealand's educational structures. When educational services don't acknowledge such Māori constructions of being Māori or were culturally dissonant, kāpo Māori and their whānau spoke about becoming culturally dislocated and losing their mana. This is problematic for Māori because education is seen as an important vehicle to fulfilling aspirations to be Māori and self-determining.

There are no published studies about kāpo (blind) Māori in New Zealand, although there has been some general research about blind people and about Māori with a disability (Bevan-Brown, 1989; Collins & Hickey, 2006; Higgins, 2001; Phillips, 2005). This article documents some of the initial results from the first year of a two-year project that has been funded by the Health Research Council. In line with the *Treaty of Waitangi*, and framed as a kaupapa Māori study, the aim of this project is to explore how the impairment of blindness affects Māori and how health and education services impact on the identity, cultural well-being and health of kāpo Māori and their whānau.

In New Zealand the 2001 *Disability Strategy* stated that disabled people are disabled by a society which take no account of their impairments (Minister for Disability Issues, 2001), and others have noted that society disables Māori by taking no account of their identity, their culture, or the meanings that they give to disability (Kingi & Bray, 2000; Phillips, 2005). Phillips (2005) noted that Māori have been disabled through assimilatory educational practices and deficit theorising that have marginalised and excluded Māori from their own knowledge base, language, cultural values and practices. Jill Bevan-Brown (1994) pointed to the different ways in which Māori and Pākehā view disability. Like other researchers (Wilkie, Berryman, Himona, & Paul, 2001), she found that the predominant view held by those she interviewed was the notion that all people, irrespective of their abilities, were taonga (valuable)

and, as such, were valued members of their communities. Significantly, the participants in Bevan-Brown's Master's study did not know a Māori equivalent for the term intellectual disability (Bevan-Brown, 1989). Māori concepts of disability today reflect an acceptance and valuing by the whānau (family) of the person as they are, and the result of colonisation, as opposed to the dominant perception of disability as a medical problem or tragedy (Kingi & Bray, 2000). However, if just being Māori is considered disabling then being a disabled Māori takes on added meaning. On that basis it can be argued that perhaps Māori with an impairment are doubly oppressed or disadvantaged (Phillips, 2005). However, Phillips (2005) noted that being Māori and being disabled may not be discreet oppressions, but instead 'interconnected parts of a whole way of looking at the world in which difference is considered inferior and in which unequal relationships are demarcated' (p. 88).

Māori identity is shaped and established through whānau, hapū and iwi, a matrix of intergenerational relationships in which connectedness and belonging are central components (Phillips, 2005). Moeke-Pickering's (1996) literature review on Māori identity within whānau found that there are two primary reference points in conceptualising Māori identity. First is tribal structures and descent. Here whakapapa provides the framework for tribal structures (whānau, hapū and iwi) in which relationships are organised and maintained. Second are cultural practices, such as language, customs, kinship obligations and traditions, in which shared understandings are constructed and maintained. It is within these 'nests of identity' that many Māori argue that the concept of whānau is central to understanding the individual and in developing Māori educational and community capacity (Durie, 1997; Macfarlane, 2003; Nikora, Karapa, Hickey, & Te Aweko-tuku, 2004; Wilkie et al., 2001).

Research has shown that culturally appropriate educational services foster emotional and psychological well-being, raise self-esteem, and facilitate learning (Bevan-Brown, 2000). When students feel that services are alien to them or do not value who they are, then they will not be able to learn because of the stress and anxiety that accompanies their educational experience (Bevan-Brown, 2006). Macfarlane (2005) argued that the reason so many Māori fail in both mainstream and special education settings is because the links between culture and education are missing, in particular an understanding of Māori cultural practices and values. In the UK, researchers have argued that disabled people who were black or of an ethnic minority experienced racism and 'disablism', and noted that the impact of multiple oppression needs to be researched and recognised so that culturally competent services can be delivered and so that disabled people, who are black or from an ethnic minority, can have positive and inclusive educational and rehabilitation experiences (Johnson & Morjaria-Keval, 2007; Miles, 2002; Simpson & Cameron, 2004).

In New Zealand, Bevan-Brown (2000) reported on the interim results of a three-year research project evaluating the Ministry of Education's Special Education 2000 policy. She found that Māori students were missing out on special education services and programmes because such services and programmes lacked cultural relevance and appropriateness. She also noted that within education services there were:

- negative and stereotypical attitudes towards Māori children, their parents and whānau;
- low teacher expectations of Māori children;
- school personnel not recognising the importance of culture in the provision of programmes and services for Māori children;
- principals believing culturally appropriate services need only be provided where there are a large number of Māori students, and
- school personnel blaming parents for their children's special needs (Bevan-Brown, 2000).

Later in 2006, Bevan-Brown noted that despite research in the area and the abundance of Government guidelines and official documents about the rights of disabled Māori to receive a

culturally appropriate and effective education, disabled Māori children and youth were still neglected, inadequately provided for, overlooked, and excluded (Bevan-Brown, 2006).

Hall and Bishop (2001) argued that cultural diversity poses a challenge for professionals because it raises questions about the ethical obligations that they have with regard to catering for cultural difference. The notion of cultural diversity, they continue, presents two major challenges for education professionals: the first in relation to understanding, addressing and developing the cultural identities of children; the second in acknowledging and understanding the impact their own cultural identities have on their students. Schools are a major site in which all children's perceptions about their ability and identity are developed, and to that end education professionals play a significant role in shaping the way their students see themselves and how and where they fit into the world. When students are consistently treated as less, whether because of their disability, culture or other reason, then their sense of identity is in danger of being negatively influenced and their ability to become self-determining individuals is threatened (Caran, 2008; Hall & Bishop, 2001).

For kāpo Māori, there are no focused studies about their identity. There are a few commissioned studies that examine issues that are relevant to their uptake of education and health services. An examination of the 2006 *Cost of Blindness* study (Gravitas Research and Strategy & Market Economics, 2006) indicated that kāpo Māori were not accessing education services. Previous to this, in 1992, Maaka Tibble, the National Advisory Officer for the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind (RNZFB), won a Winston Churchill Fellowship to 'explore and discuss with indigenous people in North America, the programmes they have for their people who have visual impairments' (Tibble, 1992, p. 2), and relate this information to the services that kāpo Māori received in New Zealand. Tibble found that, as with kāpo Māori in New Zealand, native people with vision impairments in North America were not accessing services, had been colonised, had migrated from their family ties and found it difficult to maintain their culture and language, and were positively advocating for self-government in every aspect of their lives. His recommendations were that:

- an approach to rehabilitation services be implemented that would include emotional, mental, physical and spiritual dimensions;
- the RNZFB advance its bicultural policy and practices with Ngāti Kāpo o Aotearoa;
- Iwi Runanga and Congress allow for the full participation of kāpo Māori and other Māori with a disability;
- the New Zealand Government support Ngāti Kāpo to lift awareness within Māori communities about the needs of kāpo Māori, and
- the World Blind Union establish an international network of indigenous people with a vision impairment.

In her doctoral thesis, Higgins (2001) explored the meaning of blindness and the educational experiences of blind people in New Zealand. Her participants included two kāpo Māori participants, Hine (pseudonym), an adult who had attended a residential special school, and Davania (pseudonym), who attended the special school as a day student. Overall, Higgins found that blind people in New Zealand were constructed as different and 'other', were socially dislocated, and had to strive to achieve a social place (Higgins, 1999, 2001, 2004; Higgins & Ballard, 1999a, 1999b, 2000). This social dislocation and exclusion occurred because of the participants' encounters with health and education services which took little account of their social place in their families or whānau, local schools, or local communities. They were rarely included at school, encountered prejudice in employment as adults, and some participants had difficulty finding friends and partners.

### Research method

The research design and method for this project reflected not only the location of the research within the kāpo Māori community but also the collaboration between Ngāti Kāpo o Aotearoa Inc. and two research organisations: He Parekerekere (Institute for Research and Development in Māori and Pacific Education, Victoria University of Wellington) and the Donald Beasley Institute. It drew together the particular strengths of all three organisations to provide a multi-disciplinary and multi-location approach to the research and a commitment to working together for a common end (Jeffrey, 2003). The goal was to un-

lock the potential within whānau, hapū and iwi and in particular kāpo Māori so that they can live as Māori, actively participate as citizens of the world and enjoy good health and a high standard of living (Durie, 2001; Health Research Council, 2004; Ministry of Research, Science and Technology, 2007). Thus the project was based on a kaupapa Māori framework in which:

- the research responds to issues of importance to Māori;
- Māori are the primary researchers;
- all the researchers are guided by tikanga (cultural values and practices) Māori;
- the integrity of the participant is of the utmost importance;
- new Māori knowledge is created by using matauranga Māori as its foundation;
- the research is wholly relevant to Māori;
- Māori are the primary beneficiaries, and
- dissemination of the research is taken back to the community (Foundation of Research, Science, and Technology, 2006).

Such research works to privilege Māori ways of knowing and doing that retrieves spaces for Māori voices and perspectives in which Māori realities are legitimate and social transformation occurs (Smith, 1999), not the transformation of Māori but transformation of policies and services to Māori.

This article presents some of the results from the first phase of a two-year qualitative research project, drawing primarily on the stories of kāpo Māori rangatahi (youth) and tamariki (children) and their whānau about their identity and educational experiences. Included also are vision educators' experiences of providing educational resources and support to kāpo rangatahi and tamariki and their whānau. Gathering and telling stories was considered by Ngāti Kāpo, which established a research management committee for this project, to be the most appropriate methodology to use. Telling stories is fundamental to making sense of experiences in the world (Bishop, 1996; Phillips, 2003) as well as to providing a 'forward glance' helping to anticipate future situations and encounters (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The art of gathering stories foregrounds the importance of respect, reciprocity and caring between researcher and researched, placing the relationship between the researcher and re-

search community at the centre of the research. To that end stories 'are especially viable instruments of social negotiation' (Bruner, 1990, p. 55). Not only is this well understood by Māori, but according to Bishop (1996) there is a strong cultural preference by Māori for narrative and conversation.

After approval from New Zealand's Multi-Region Health and Disability Ethics Committee, each of the 21 key informants whose narratives are used in this article participated in an unstructured open-ended interview in which researchers used a topical interview guide (Patton, 2002). Key informants included six education professionals, six participating rangatahi (youth) (three males, three females, aged 13–20 years), and nine participating whānau members of two rangatahi, and three tamariki (children under the age of 12 years). All of the key informant interviews were transcribed, and throughout a five-day research hui (meeting) the research team developed an analysis framework for the emerging themes within the interview data.

## Results

Four interwoven themes emerged from the participants' narratives. These included cultural location, cultural consonance, cultural dissonance, and cultural dislocation. Cultural location and dislocation were directly related to participants' identity as Māori, as kāpo and as kāpo Māori, and their experiences of belonging and connectedness. Cultural dissonance within education services led to cultural dislocation which impacted on their ability to express themselves fully as Māori. On the other hand, cultural consonance enabled kāpo Māori to develop firm cultural locations and positive identities as Māori and kāpo Māori.

### Cultural location

The rangatahi participants in this study identified, first, as Māori, and most introduced themselves within their whakapapa (genealogy). For example:

*Aroha: I am Aroha, I am from Y city and I am Māori on my dad's side. He is Ngāti A. and Ngāti B. ... So all [from the] Coast. I grew up on a farm and I have a really big family.*

One rangatahi stated that he was 'half and half' Māori because he had English ancestry as well.

Some participants' knowledge of their whakapapa was directly related to being kāpo. For example:

*Tane: I got my disability from my grandfather and he passed it onto my mother and my mother passed it onto me. And I'm from Nga C. and Ngāti D. and I am seventeen.*

Like other participants, Aroha stated that when she was with Māori, she only thought of herself as Māori, and not as a vision impaired Māori:

*Aroha: Like to me, being Māori and vision impaired is not normal, but maybe it is normal in the European world. When I was growing up ... like it was pretty much an all Māori community and you are Māori and that's it ... You are just Māori and that's all you are.*

All the participating parents in the study expressed a desire for their kāpo tamariki (children) to learn about their whakapapa and culture even if they, themselves, were not actively involved. For example, one father said:

*Hare: I've always felt in terms of identity that it's been really important to share that knowledge, that foundation of my knowledge about identity, with them. Yeah and aspects on tikanga Māori as well. I guess the challenge for me [and my children] – is trying to come to my own understanding of it's appropriateness at various times in my life and working around that, because some people value it higher than others.*

Some of the participating rangatahi were 'chosen' by their grandparents to carry on the knowledge of their whakapapa in their family. Rawiri both acknowledged and reciprocated his grandmother's gifts to him.

*Rawiri: She shared her whakapapa and all that. But you know because she does all this, she helped my mum out too. She helped me out too. Before I come here she tidies up my clothes. Or I have done something similar and I accept her hospitality.*

Aroha explained that because she had lived with her grandmother, she learned a great deal from her. She was able to pass her knowledge of whakapapa to her other whānau members.

*Aroha: It was good at the whānau reunion and stuff because no one really*

knew. Well the people, like our family from [a small town] didn't really know much. So it was good to be able to share stuff like that. ... She taught me how to make kete (woven basket) and stuff like that.

These relationships are integral to Māori identity and cultural well-being, because, as one of the older participating kāpo kuia (elders) explained, Māori believe that:

*The tupuna (ancestors/grandparents) and the mokopuna (grandchildren) are made for each other. That's the strength of it, everything is for that moko, for all of us. They have all got something special and they all know and are carrying that. And there is some part of your tikanga with them for the rest of their lives. You have just got to love them and cherish them.*

These intergenerational relationships are very important. For example, one participating mother, Amiria, explained that if she had to relocate so that her kāpo tamaiti (child) could have better access to educational services that it would devastate the child's grandparents:

*Amiria: It would break the grandparents, not so much me and my husband. It would a little, but not as much as it would my mum.*

The Māori concept of 'whānau' to all of the participants in this study was a large part of their lives, and was where they found closeness and support:

*Tane: My whānau is [my father and mother] and I have two brothers and a sister. And I would define family, they're there to support me and to look after me and whenever I need them they'd be there.*

Tane said that he also learned from his whānau what it was like to be kāpo. When asked about how being kāpo affected his cultural well-being:

*Tane: I've sort of gotten used to the idea since its been coming through my family, since, yeah, since it's been passed down. So I sort of have like – a knowledge just looking back at my father – my grandfather and my aunty and my cousins and stuff, that have got the disability as well. So like I can sort of see what direction they're going in and like – ah sort of just helps me out.*

Most of the kāpo rangatahi defined their whānau as blood relations, but they also indicated that they had whānau to whom they were not related, but to whom they felt close. For example:

*Ngaio: Um, whānau to me is the people I am close with. ... I call my whānau the people I have been brought up with, that I am close to. ... My whānau are the ones who have been there for me, and who I will be there for, and would do anything for, really.*

Similarly, the participating parents had a wide view of whānau, which included those from whom they received support:

*Erihapeti: We have little bits of different groups of family, little like support groups that we are in. ... I have put down the conductive [class] as whānau, which is all the kids that have been through Conductive Ed. We were going to a church, which was for people with disabilities so that was another little whānau. Seem to have a lot of sub whānau going on as well as the main whānau that we have.*

Only one participating whānau indicated that their blood relations were not supportive, were distant from them, and thus they were not included as whānau:

*Hare: We had contact every day [with my sister] ... She'd do anything for us. But apart from her when Kura was a baby, 'oh she's a real cute baby.' And, you know, everybody's around and then when she gets bigger everyone ... can't really be bothered ... And the only way to get through it really is I look at it that they're the ones missing out, not Kura. They're missing out on not knowing her.*

Tikanga (Māori cultural values and practices), the marae (meeting house), and te reo Māori (Māori language) were considered as integral to being Māori and being kāpo Māori. Tane explained that because he knew te reo and tikanga he knew how to be in the Māori community, and on the marae:

*Tane: Uhm well I've been brought up with te reo Māori and tikanga since, well, birth and I respect that. And I have understanding and I know what to do, what's wrong, what's right.*

Aroha also talked of her upbringing, of being immersed in te reo Māori

and about the marae. She talked further of the obligation that goes with having the knowledge and ability to speak te reo Māori, especially in the context of diverse experiences of connectedness and belonging within her own whānau.

*Aroha: Sometimes I choose not to [kōrero (speak) Māori] because it was kind of a thing that Nan taught me but when she died it kind of just changed, but like on the marae and stuff with all the kōrero and stuff I will because there is only four of us in my generation that can, so I will but sometimes I choose not to because it is like, weird. But I used to have to all the time else she wouldn't talk to me.*

### **Cultural consonance**

Educational services that were consonant with the participant's Māori identity enabled them to develop positive cultural identities as Māori and kāpo Māori. Going to local kōhanga reo (a total immersion Māori language family programme for young children from birth to six years of age) and kura (school) provided tamariki not only with groundings in Māori knowledge, practices and language, but also with opportunities to develop social relationships that affirmed their identity as Māori. One participant said:

*Ngaio: I am very glad I went to Kōhanga Reo. I mean right from the beginning I learnt my Māori fluently. I was in a different environment being able to associate with sighted children instead of kāpo children. It is really a skill that a lot of people who are institutionalized have trouble with, making friends. The people they make friends with are within their circle whereas I didn't have other kāpo children around me, so I made friends with those who were [around me]. It made me feel I wasn't that different. That was a big thing because now I know that I can do anything.*

One of the participating parents emphasised that she drove two hours a day to send her child to a school which was bilingual, to ensure her daughter received a culturally relevant education:

*Mārama: It is very important to me, that's why we sent her to the bilingual school even though it meant half an hour drive in the morning there and back as opposed to the five minute walk to the local school but yeah, it is really important and as part of being Ngāti Kāpo as well she gets to do the marae stays and things.*

The vision education professionals who were a part of this study said that educational services needed to be culturally consonant, by acknowledging, and teaching, te reo and tikanga, and providing services to whānau and not to the individual. For example, one responded to a question about how to contribute to a kāpo Māori child's self identity and sense of belonging by saying:

Mary: *I guess it is around honouring the language and probably at the very simple end of the continuum is the Pākehā making sure that the Māori pronunciation is correct. And providing opportunities for the young people to kōrero in te reo, to be immersed in programmes around te reo.*

Another education professional said that providing effective educational services to kāpo Māori meant educators needed to focus on developing respectful relationships:

Linda: *I think it's down to communication and the knowledge of tikanga and being really sensitive to what the issues are, in terms of communicating with, and being respectful of how you will be working with a family. ... I think that is more important than anything else really because I think if you come to any relationship with respect, things are likely to go well. They might not go quickly but you will get there.*

Mary pointed out that it was important to have Māori teachers, who, themselves, identify as Māori and are connected to their cultural traditions, values and practices, and who, in turn, can positively contribute to Māori students' identity:

Mary: *I think it is around the need to have Māori teachers and staff because they are inherently embedded in who they are. It is not a 'learning about' or a 'learning to be' from outside the culture.*

**Cultural dissonance and dislocation**  
Despite all of the narratives from our participants stating the benefits of culturally consonant educational services, our research found that most kāpo Māori participants encountered cultural dissonance when they interacted with education services, irrespective of the setting. This was due to a lack of educational resources and the undervaluing of cultural location and contexts for kāpo Māori students, and thus prevented the participants from

consistent access to te reo Māori, Māori cultural knowledge and practices, and their communities. However, even immersion settings were not always ideal places for kāpo Māori students. For example, one whānau did not wish to enrol their child at kōhanga reo because it was not sufficiently resourced to provide an education that met the needs of their child.

In addition, two Māori immersion settings in this study were not able to welcome kāpo Māori students because of the way negative beliefs about impairment were prioritised in their schools. For example, despite Hemi being welcomed into one school's whānau [immersion] class, the school was reluctant for him to attend because of his multiple impairments. The school was unable to provide him with the opportunities to learn within an immersion setting, consequently making it difficult for him to be Māori and kāpo at the same time. His mother, said:

Erihapeti: *When he first started I got him in to the Māori class. The Māori teacher thought he was just fantastic and said he can come back any time. But from the 'special' unit side, they don't want him travelling off around the school for safety reasons.*

Mārama wanted her daughter, Marika, to have a bilingual education but the principal of the school that she approached refused to accept the child into the school because of her impairment, despite the immersion unit's acceptance of her. The mother was threatened that punitive actions would be taken and her daughter would be ostracised. Despite the principal acknowledging that it constituted a breach of human rights, the child was effectively denied entry into the school:

Mārama: *We had a meeting [with the school], they have a bilingual unit and it has got a great reputation and we went and met with them and the guy in the unit said they have got a waiting list but the guy that runs the unit said, 'No we will fit her in here. That's fine.' And then we had a meeting with the principal and he said straight out, 'I don't want to put the burden on one of my teachers of having to have this girl in our classroom.' And I pulled out – I said, 'Well you know that is actually a breach of the Bill of Rights to say that.' And he said, 'Yes it is.' ... He made it really hard. He said if she went there, he wouldn't put*

*her in the bilingual unit. He would make her wear a reflective vest in the playground because there are so many big boys around and it would be dangerous for her and others to just be in the playground.*

Some whānau chose to send their children to mainstream schools because of lack of resources but encountered cultural dissonance, despite schools having access to vision specialist teachers. Marika's mum, Mārama, pointed out that there were no such teachers who could speak and read Māori:

Mārama: *There are no vision resource teachers who can speak te reo Māori to back up home based te reo Māori talking and reading. Like at early intervention, they didn't have a Māori person there and ... I was trying to speak as much Māori, and I mean I don't speak a lot of Māori, but as much as I could. But there I am taking her to speech language therapy but they don't have anyone who can speak Māori there, or even just pronounce it. ... And the same with the visual resource centre, I can teach her to read her Māori but they don't have a teacher that can back it up. Even if they just knew the basics, it is not hard to learn the basic pronunciation for preschool. You don't have to be a genius.*

Mārama said that she also needed to advocate for braille books and resources in Māori for Marika.

Because of a lack of resources for vision specialist support services for local schools, most of the rangatahi participants attended or boarded at the Homai Campus School, which is a special school for blind and vision impaired students. Rawiri and Aroha indicated that they needed to board there because vision education services were not adequate in their own communities. The secondary school they attended had a visual resource centre, which was attached to Homai.

Aroha: *[The special school] was the first big decision I guess, yeah. I kind of didn't really have a say there because I kept changing my mind, 'Yes I want to go, no I don't want to go.' And so mum and dad just go, 'Right you are going.' But it was a good thing that they did because it did help me with schooling and it did help me with opportunities that I guess I probably couldn't have had in [my town] because it is such a small place.*

All of the vision educators who were interviewed agreed that there were in-

sufficient resources in the local areas, that ideally children should not need to attend Homai and be taken from their communities. One educator said:

Joanne: *Where these young people need to be is amongst their family. ... I see the students that come into the hostel and I don't see it as long-term. I mean there are some long-term students there but the ones that are coming in now I see it as coming in for perhaps a boost for education. They need to access Manurewa [secondary school near Homai with a visual resource centre] or the school to focus on their education. But I always see the whole big transition back into the family life is vital.*

Five of the six rangatahi participating in this study attended Homai. At Homai, the mismatch between the culture of the school and the culture within which the kāpo Māori students had been raised continued. When Rawiri boarded, he said that he got homesick and missed his cousins, but he liked the big city where the school was located. Prior to their attendance at Homai, five of the six participating rangatahi had close links to their Māori communities as young children. Two had lived with their grandparents, one had lived as a young child on the marae and two had attended kōhanga reo. Thus, these five rangatahi had a good knowledge of te reo Māori and Māori culture.

However, two of the participants, who were fluent in te reo, noted though that when they left their communities that they were unable to continue te reo Māori because their knowledge was greater than that of their new teachers. Aroha stated that te reo should extend beyond paperwork, and that this was not available at her school or at Homai:

Aroha: *I had the option of taking Māori at [secondary school] last year and this year but writing on a piece of paper isn't my idea of Māori. Like to me Māori is doing noho marae (being together at the marae) and being in the whole setting of marae, that's Māori to me, like that is true Māori ... Last year [at Homai] we did have waiata (singing) every Tuesday after school and it was probably the closest we came to [it], yeah.*

Rawiri also pointed out that doing te reo would mean having a teacher who did not understand kāpo people:

Rawiri: *I want to do Māori but I don't really like the teacher there. He might be*

*afraid that I know more than him. ... Also he doesn't know how blind people ... he hasn't had a blind person in his class before.*

Ngaio and her whānau resisted as much as possible identifying with 'blind' education because of the way it constructed blindness. At Homai, she was concerned about the limited education options which were available to her. She said that Homai did not take into account the differences between Māori and Pākehā. It was as if the blindness defined her, her capabilities, and what she could be.

Ngaio: *We only have one option and one way that is a problem with all the services at the moment. With Homai they are taught to train in a textbook way that you must follow but I don't believe in that. I believe that everybody has their own way of doing things and therefore should be given the choice in how to live their life. ... If somebody wanted to go to that high school [near Homai], they have to stay at Homai but it is very restricting there.*

When she boarded at Homai, she said that it had a European culture and her mana (dignity as Māori) was taken from her.

Ngaio: *Like they are run for purely European and as I said there was Te Whānau o Homai and they were very culturally supportive but that was personal. In the actual institution there wasn't any. ... And because they didn't have a lot of cultural services in the institution, kāpo Māori are taken from home, especially those who come from out of Auckland. They are just forced to live a different way and their culture is just completely thrown out the window, not recognised. We have to adapt to this whole new way so when you go back to your family, you don't remember everything. Your culture has gone. They really take away your mana. ... You can't live by your culture in the hostel. Like I always used to take my shoes off, before going in to somewhere and look at me now, I am wearing my shoes everywhere because you have to wear your shoes at the hostel. ... I mean it is hard to explain it but you feel like you can't be yourself. Like you can't be Māori.*

Reka, who also boarded at Homai, believed that kāpo Māori should resist being separated from their local communities, regular classrooms, and sighted peers, because 'special' education does not provide an education that prepares students for the 'real world'.

Reka: *I have seen kids that have gone through special education and they have come out the other end not really knowing the real world. Like we live in an exciting world and I guess vision impaired people have to learn to live in that and if we have special education and we are not surrounded by people with normal sight, then we are not going to know how to communicate to them.*

One of the vision education professionals noted that the challenge for vision education professionals was to attend to the whole child, and not just 'bits of them'.

Linda: *There is still something missing in the picture. I do think it is that holistic – we all should be dealing in the whole. I think whether it is in your own local area or in a physical setting like the campus school or through the resource centre, it's actually being able to address the whole of the child rather than the bits of the child. And I think that's a challenge in terms of providing appropriate services to whoever this child is. To make sure that what you are doing addresses the whole need, and ... it's your openness to actually see things in a different way or have a different view.*

One of the vision resource teachers highlighted the lack of choices for students and their whānau wanting a schooling that not only reflected their cultural knowledge, practices and values but also the specific issues that face kāpo students. On the one hand, no formal structures or dedicated Māori staff were in place to culturally support, or teach te reo Māori to students at Homai or in the mainstream. On the other hand, Māori immersion settings may not have an understanding about the educational needs of kāpo students. She said:

Linda: *The other sort of key issue I think is around access to the schooling option of your choice ... it comes across to me that people are beginning to feel limited. It is getting too hard to be the only, say, Braille user, within a Māori immersion setting. It is not that the information can't be translated but it is just that whole barrier that we have no fluent speaking Resource Teacher Vision. We have nobody Māori. ... So that means that people perhaps are making choices that aren't necessarily the choices they would like to make. They have also been voices from families at times being concerned about immersion settings actually having a real understanding around special education and their needs.*

Parents faced significant challenges to maintain culturally relevant schooling options for their children. They have found other ways in which to maintain their links to te reo Māori, Māori knowledge, and tikanga through Ngāti Kāpo o Aotearoa Inc., an advocacy and education organisation run by kāpo Māori, for kāpo Māori.

Marama: *They are really good. They are really supportive, they give Marika a cultural side because she was in bilingual school but now she is not at bilingual school so she has lost that cultural part of it so I think it really was a good cultural support as well as the support they give educational as well.*

### Discussion and conclusion

It is clear from the narratives of the young kāpo Māori participants and their whānau that their cultural location in the world is Māori first and kāpo second. Their aspiration to be Māori and to retain their 'Māoriness', irrespective of their vision impairment, reflects the general vision of Māori to be successful as Māori across local, regional, national and global settings (Durie, 2001). To be Māori is not just about belonging, it is to be actively connected to whānau, hapū, and iwi through whakapapa and through cultural practices such as whanaungatanga (facilitating relationships through obligations and responsibilities). A strong sense of obligation and reciprocity across generations is an important component of being Māori and in particular kāpo Māori. It is through intergenerational whānau relationships that te reo Māori, Māori knowledge and tikanga are transferred to mokopuna (grandchildren).

However, given the nature of the lived experiences of Māori, not all whānau have maintained connections with their wider whānau and many Māori dislocated from their homelands as a result of urbanisation have forged new forms of whānau. These whānau are what Metge (1995) has called 'whānau of interest' where relationships based on shared interests have taken over from whakapapa-based notions. Whatever kind of whānau that kāpo Māori have and are establishing for themselves, the important message from this study is that whānau does matter. Similarly, it is clear from the narratives in this study that while traditional cultural reference points are important for our participants' identity as Māori, there is also room for diverse ways of being Māori.

Despite the findings of past research on disability and the promises of education there are still considerable shortcomings in educational provision for Māori and, in particular, kāpo Māori. Not only are there issues for kāpo Māori within immersion schooling settings due to lack of resourcing for kāpo students, but also resourcing and cultural issues for students enrolled in mainstream schools and Homai. There is a lack of Māori teachers, and specifically teachers who are fluent in te reo Māori with vision specialist training. The educational choices for kāpo Māori students and their whānau are limited to non-existent.

In conclusion, we argue that this research verifies the point that the cultural dislocation and dissonance that occur within educational provision are not discreet oppressions of Māori and of being disabled but rather are mutually supporting demarcations of inferiority and inequality. Developing consonant educational services so that kāpo Māori can develop positive identities and be self-determining requires a commitment from the Ministry of Education to prioritise Māori culture, te reo, and tikanga for all Māori students, while at the same time providing specialist support that kāpo Māori have a right to access within the culture and local communities.



### Notes



- 1 A condensed version of this paper has been produced for the South Pacific Educators for the Vision Impaired (SPEVI) Biennial Conference Proceedings, January 4-9, 2009, Adelaide, Australia.
- 2 Ngāti Kāpo o Aotearoa, and consequently the authors of this paper, use only one macron over the letter 'a' in the word, kāpo. However, it is acknowledged that in the general use of the word, a macron over the letter 'o' is also used (i.e., kápō).



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**Dr Nancy Higgins (Pākehā)** is currently an associate researcher at the Donald Beasley Institute. She has lectured in education at the University of Otago and the Dunedin College of Education. Her research interests include inclusive education, disability studies, and social justice. Contact: [nhiggins@donaldbeasley.org.nz](mailto:nhiggins@donaldbeasley.org.nz). **Dr Hazel Phillips (Ngāti Mutunga)** is a senior lecturer at He Parekerekere (Institute for Research and Development in Māori and Pacific Education), Victoria University of Wellington. She has extensive experience in kaupapa Māori research methodology. Her background is in Māori education and development where she advocates for culturally relevant and appropriate service provision. **Mrs Christine Cowan (Ngāti Kahungunu)** is the CEO of Ngāti Kāpo o Aotearoa Inc., a Māori disability service organisation run by and for blind and visually impaired (kāpo) Māori and their whānau. Through her work with Ngāti Kāpo she achieved her own personal goals of working for a Māori organisation whose philosophies, principles and practices are based upon the positive in Te Ao Māori. **Ms Kelly Tikao (Waitaha, Kāti Mamoe and Kai Tahu)** is an emerging Māori Researcher at the Donald Beasley Institute. Her background is in nursing, broadcasting, and Māori community development. She has a strong interest in Te Reo and indigenous studies.

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- Professor Anne Graham** is the Director of the Centre for Children & Young People (CCYP) at Southern Cross University, Australia. Anne's research and professional interests include children's social and emotional well-being, children's participation in education and family law, ethical issues in researching with children and young people, and teacher learning. She is the author of a highly successful series of publications for a loss and grief education programme, 'Seasons for Growth' (Graham, 1996, 2002) in which over 120,000 children in five countries have now participated. Anne's work in the CCYP is focused on research, education and advocacy that enhances the participation, protection and provision for children and young people, particularly in regional and rural areas. Anne and her colleagues at the CCYP have collaborated with the Children's Issues Centre at the University of Otago on a number of Childwatch International projects including children's citizenship, rural childhoods and children and the law.