



Ēhara tāku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini: the power of a collective

Emma K. Quigan, Janet S. Gaffney & Rae Si'ilata

To cite this article: Emma K. Quigan, Janet S. Gaffney & Rae Si'ilata (2021): Ēhara tāku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini: the power of a collective, Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online, DOI: [10.1080/1177083X.2021.1920434](https://doi.org/10.1080/1177083X.2021.1920434)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1177083X.2021.1920434>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 17 May 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 388



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Ēhara tāku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini: the power of a collective

Emma K. Quigan ^a, Janet S. Gaffney ^b and Rae Si'ilata ^c

^aTalking Matters, COMET Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand; ^bMarie Clay Research Centre, Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand; ^cTāmaki Makaurau Campus, Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangī, Auckland, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

Transmission of skills and knowledge is a core message in dominant discourses surrounding early verbal and non-verbal communication of babies. Narrow conceptualisations fail to place adequate emphasis on sociocultural elements of language and children's sophisticated non-verbal communication. Utilising Kaupapa Māori research methods, this study describes a critical reflective narrative of a community-led parenting programme that makes space for whānau to re-centre Indigenous linguistic and cultural practices. 'He Awa Whiria/The Braided Rivers' metaphor is used to illustrate three themes derived from the analysis: Ma te kotahitanga e whai kaha ai mātau/In unity we have strength, reciprocity/whakaututu, whānau ki te whānau and manaakitanga/love and compassion for others. Data sources included focus groups; interviews; and reflective researcher memos. The evolution of the collective-agentive approach is illustrated within each theme with selected critical episodes. This study describes the parent-coaches-researchers journey to illustrate how a community's rangatiratanga/sovereignty led to system transformation. The whānau collective journey represents an organic response of one 'targeted' community to lead the way in responding to deficit assumptions of parents and their children held by educators in the realm of early oral language. Indigenous knowledge, ways of being and languaging are central and valid for the success of all tamariki/children.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 23 December 2020
Accepted 20 April 2021

KEYWORDS

Oral language; indigenous; parent; family; community

Glossary of Māori words and concepts

Aotearoa	New Zealand	oriori	Traditional chant/waiata
hapū	Both Sub tribe and pregnant	Pākehā	Non-Māori New Zealanders of European background
kaitiakitanga	Guardianship and protection	pepeha	A way of introducing ones self
kaupapa	Set of values, plan and purpose	pēpi	Baby
kotahitanga	Unity	pūrākau	Stories
kaumatua	Elder	pūtaiao	Māori science

CONTACT Emma K. Quigan  emma.quigan@cometauckland.org.nz

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

kōrero	Talking	Tāmaki	Indigenous short name for Auckland and, a cluster of suburbs in Auckland
mana	Spiritual power/prestige	te ao Māori	Māori worldviews
mātauranga	Māori knowledge	wairua	Spirit
mauri	Lifeforce	whakapapa	Genealogy
mokopuna	Grandchild/ren	whānau	Family (including extended)

This paper describes a community-led parenting initiative that focuses on babies' and young children's oral language. The authors present a path in oral language research and parental support congruent with a philosophy that promotes linguistic and cultural pluralism within the Aotearoa/New Zealand context. International research is filtered and incorporated based on the contextual fit and woven together with the rich local knowledge of parenting partners.

'My strength is not mine alone, but that of many' is an analogous translation of the Māori title of this paper. This whakatauki/proverb is attributed to Pāterangi of Ngāti Kahungunu, who maintained that collective effort of many was necessary for the completion of any task (Mead and Grove 2001, p. 24), which sometimes differs from an individualistic focus of a Pākehā/European New Zealander view (Pere 1991). In this context, Pāterangi's ancestral saying highlights that language revitalisation is an ongoing and collective effort. A successful 'parenting' programme would include a child's extended whānau/family and iwi/community, not only their nuclear family.

Many local and international parenting programmes target specific groups (i.e. low-income, Indigenous, migrant, and special needs), who are perceived as being at risk of not achieving in school and having language deficits (Hancock et al. 2002; Ramírez et al. 2018). The majority of programmes focus on verbal language skills to be deconstructed into discrete teachable skills (Rafferty 2014). The premise is that teaching parents to interact with their child in direct, prescribed ways will set the child on track to attain the required skills for life success. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, parenting programmes must take a broader view to include and value the rich languages, cultures and practices of all families.

Promulgating a broader view of communication competencies goes against the popular myth of the so-called 'word gap'. Hart and Risley (1995) coined the term 'word gap' or 'language gap' in a study they conducted in the 1980s. Their highly criticised study of children ($n=42$) from families of professional versus welfare families in the US, extrapolated data of parents' words and utterances spoken to their children to estimate that, by age three, the cumulative gap between 6 children in the lowest-income homes, compared to 9 children in the highest income homes would be 30,000 words. Despite extensive methodological critique, 'the word gap' has captivated the public, policy makers, and family agencies worldwide and normalised assumptions that linguistic and cultural practices of non-western and bilingual households are lacking (Dudley-Marling 2007; Dudley-Marling and Lucas 2009; Miller and Sperry 2012; Avineri et al. 2015; Dyson 2015; Johnson 2015). Despite 25 years of challenge, the word gap is used to promote linguistic practices of economically privileged, native speakers of English to ameliorate the effects of poverty on children's development (see, for example, Suskind et al. 2013; Suggate et al. 2018).

This 'word gap' conceptualisation fails to recognise the bi/multilingual and sociolinguistic proficiencies of emergent bilingual children and their families, often nested in family language and literacy practices, inclusive of multiple 'Englishes' (Si'ílata 2017).

This study demonstrates how the ‘word gap’ fails to encapsulate the complexities of language learning and fails Indigenous peoples.

Ko wai te ‘Talking Matters’ – what is Talking Matters?

Talking Matters, formed in 2016, is now a national campaign across Aotearoa/New Zealand promoting the importance of talking with children in their first 1000 days of life. It is a philanthropically funded initiative tasked with influencing government policy and seeding community-based projects. Emma (first author) is an employee of Auckland COMET, the founding agency of Talking Matters; the co-authors were consultants through 2018 and co-supervised the study from which this paper is drawn.

The campaign, Talking Matters, has been through a journey of reflecting on underlying theories and valued sources of knowledge. Initial proposals for funding drew on literature from special needs education, following the premise that early oral language competencies are strong predictors for later academic success, particularly with regard to literacy learning. Describing some children as less ready, or not ready, for learning introduced a deficit lens into the programme design. At the time of launching Talking Matters, Janet (co-author) advised against proceeding with a simplistic understanding of how children learn, positioning language development as a process driven by meaningful communication in families, in contrast to a Eurocentric view of language acquisition as incremental skill learning. Janet also advocated for Rae (co-author) to be invited as a member of the Talking Matters working group, given her expertise in bilingualism.

Emma, who was simultaneously deeply engaged with Talking Matters and this research process, began to think critically about her co-authors’ perspectives and created new streams of knowledge for Talking Matters. Infants are active participants in learning to speak, not mere recipients. This more nuanced lens foregrounds human development and language learning as a cultural process. Infants not only become speakers of languages; they also become speakers of cultures (Ochs 2002).

Ko wai mātou/who are we?

Talking Matters to Tāmaki (TMTT) is a partnership between the wider Talking Matters initiative and the Glen Innes Family Centre (GIFC). Each organisation contributes to the funding and shares decisions about future directions. A small group of local women from East Auckland (Tāmaki), who challenged top-down, expert-driven programmes and initiatives in their community, agreed to collaboratively design a linguistically and culturally sustaining initiative for local whānau/families and their young children. Frustrated by stereotypes, yet conscious of systemic achievement gaps, the women were committed to designing an alternative approach. Previously referred to as parent leaders, the women chose the title of ‘coaches’, as they offered guidance and support to families. Emma served as a mentor to the TMTT coaches.

Holistic interpretations

The question ‘Ko wai mātou?’ can be translated as, ‘Who are we?’ It can also be read as, ‘We are water’. This parallel linguistic relationship represents the interconnectedness and

interdependence of humans and the natural world in language and being. We are wai/water, and wai/water is us. This example is one of the many ways that Māori connect with language uniquely. Language carries onto-epistemological values and meanings; in this case, the indistinguishable, relationship of the human, and natural worlds (Ngata 2018).

Waiora is one of the many words for well-being in te reo Māori (the Māori language). Waiora refers to a sense of wellness across physical, spiritual, emotional, environmental, and collective domains. Wellbeing in Māori contexts does not separate physical from mental health, as good health is the interaction of all domains through the spiritual interconnectivity of mauri and wairua (Durie 2003). Furthermore, linguistic- and bio-diversity are inseparable (Skerrett and Ritchie 2018). Wellness, transformation, and reclamation in contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand cannot occur in a mono-lingual and Eurocentric space. Sustainability of language and culture are, therefore, inseparable, as both are required for Māori wellbeing.

The subjectivities of the primary researcher (Emma), played an essential role in the study.

While I was raised fully aware of my whakapapa and could proudly recite my pepeha/ ancestry, I was raised with Pākehā thought patterns and interpretations and visually present as Pākehā. This, of course, influences how I connected with Te Ao Māori/the Māori world. I was also educated in the field of special education (speech-language therapy), which taught me to follow a ‘transmission’ or adult-dominated lens with regards to child development. Becoming aware of this was the first step in taking a more responsive lens to what a child is noticing, learning and growing and where that fits in the context of their whānau and environment. Context matters. As I learn more about other perspectives, cognition, language socialisation, and mātauranga Māori, my perspective shifts and the desire to draw on traditional knowledge grows.

In the Māori world of Aotearoa/New Zealand, language is not a discrete skill, as is embodied in this whakatauki from Timoti S Karetu:

Tōku reo, tōku ohooho
Tōku reo, tōku māpihi maurea
Tōku reo, tōku whakakāi marihi

My language, my awakening
My language, my greatest possession
My language, my most beautiful adornment

In te Ao Māori/the Māori world, language is an inherited way of being, inseparable from culture. Conceptualising infants as empty vessels, ready to be filled with language and education does not fit with a Māori worldview. Language is not an entity that can be held, assessed, and judged. Te reo Māori is more than a means of communication. The language has its own mauri/lifeforce (Waitangi Tribunal Report; Durie 1986). The authors draw strength from this whakatauki to offer another way of conceiving, designing and implementing a programme with whānau for their children that weaves together knowledge from multiple streams.

Strength is required when it comes to te reo Māori revitalisation. While the mauri/lifeforce of the language can never be lost, te reo Māori is in danger. More than one-third of the world’s languages are classified as endangered. More than half of those are predicted to become extinct by 2100 (Barrett-Walker et al. 2020). The impact of colonisation by the 1980s led to fewer than 10,000 fluent speakers of te reo Māori remaining (Nicholson and Garland 1991). Today, there are approximately 185,000 speakers (Stats 2018), however, te

reo is on UNESCO's list of vulnerable languages. Many young parents, particularly those living in urban settings away from their *tūrangawaewae*/place to stand, desire to revitalise and reclaim the cultural and linguistic resources that remain. No oral language programme should exist in Aotearoa/New Zealand without a strategy to revitalise te reo Māori. Aotearoa/New Zealand is a bilingual/bicultural nation. The context of Aotearoa/New Zealand is framed by Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi, first signed on 6 February 1840 by representatives of the British Crown and Māori rangitira/chiefs is a founding document of New Zealand (Orange 1987). The treaty was drafted with the intention to establish a British governor of New Zealand, recognise Māori ownership of their land, forests and things of value to them and give Māori the rights of British subjects. These assurances to Māori were promptly ignored and breached. Māori were not given the same rights as British subjects and settlers determined the value of resources, including languages spoken.

TMTT did not intentionally set out with a language-revitalisation agenda: Rangatiranga and genuine engagement from the community led us there. The whakatauki inspired us. Indigenous language is inherent in the collective whakapapa, which shapes the lens through which we view development. This paper describes a path of cultural reclamation in progress.

He aha te kaupapa/what is our purpose?

TMTT represents the formation of a community movement for village-style childrearing in an urban context. This story did not start as a movement but rather, as a *programme* to create a transformative space in which young children's oral communication could flourish. Children have the potential to transform whānau/families, communities, and researchers, as whānau were eager to engage in programme activities that would benefit their children. Parents, family agencies, and early childhood centres in this urban community had received many messages from media and family-facing agencies about the devastating consequences of the 'word gap' on Māori and Pacific Islands children's future school success. This deficit discourse permeated the parent-education landscape in this community and the wider context.

Māori have demanded the education sector acknowledge and value Mātauranga Māori to eliminate deficit discourses for decades (Metge 1990). Simon (1986) cautioned that education policies that include a 'Māori stream' have little impact on children when they are implemented by Pākeha with good intentions, but little knowledge. Such policies may in fact cause more harm (Ritchie and Skerrett 2014). Creating a community-led programme, drawing on knowledge from within the community was a first step towards redressing misconceptions and inequities.

Parenting programmes

A plethora of international and national programmes has been designed to address the perceived language disparity through a narrow monolingual lens with dominant colonising practices (Brice-Heath, as cited in Avineri et al. 2015). Manualised programmes, intended to be implemented at scale, provide a one-size-fits-all solution to a complex issue. These programmes were designed to impact parents, predominantly mothers, to

create rich language environments. The use of existing programmes, founded on deficit assumptions and practices, to redress systemic inequities proliferates more of the same without respect for languages, cultures and contexts (Simon 1986; Metge 1990; Ritchie and Skerrett 2014). While many language programmes for young children are limited in focus and reductionist in scope, others have moved beyond this narrow conceptualisation. Portier and Peterson (2017) noted that when Indigenous teachers work collaboratively to develop resources, the scope of oral language programmes and assessment tools are widened. While their study is not focused on families, there are implications for parenting programmes. If parents from the community are collaborative partners, perhaps the initiative will be more relevant? Working collaboratively is one step towards widening the scope. The next step involves valuing languages other than English and the cultures in which they are rooted.

Although language is foundational to development, children in Aotearoa/New Zealand do not always have the opportunity to hear or to use their heritage language outside the home. Programmes aimed at redressing inequalities regarding children's access to a language-rich environment must acknowledge the mana/prestige of te reo Māori. Protection of te reo Māori was guaranteed under Te Tiri o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi, and educational inequalities cannot be redressed without restoring the mana of te reo Māori. The process of designing a programme with Māori magnified the gravity of language reclamation and revitalisation.

TMTT: a blending of knowledge systems

Bringing together western science, Mātauranga Māori, and the lived experience of whānau/families, TMTT is a strengths-based initiative to support whānau to learn more about the importance of talk and interaction with their babies. Children begin the process of learning to communicate before birth (Partanen et al. 2013). The developing foetus perceives words and sounds in the womb, and babies are born recognising the voices of their mother and close family members (Karmiloff and Karmiloff-Smith 2001). From the moment a child is born, they are making sense of the world around them and learning to communicate. Language learning is an ongoing interaction between the child and their environment.

The TMTT whānau-coaching model has been co-developed with whānau from the outset and continues to evolve. TMTT whānau participants are mentored by whānau coaches, who see themselves as peers of participants. They intentionally build on the strengths and assets whānau already have to enrich language environments in their daily lives.

TMTT programme components

TMTT began with a launch event held on a local school-based marae (a Māori meeting place), to welcome whānau and their pēpi/babies. The launch included an orientation to the programme so that whānau could leave with clear expectations about what they might expect to happen over the following weeks and months. Other components were an early language assessment (a conversation between the coach and whānau about communication behaviours), weekly home visits to set goals and reflect on the

previous week's activities, information about new talking tips and other language resources. Coaches also provided ongoing support by phone, text and email. Group sessions were another essential aspect of the programme. Whānau shared their experiences, learnt new skills and tips, and engaged with other resources at these sessions. Each cohort finished with a celebration on the marae.

A blended approach in motion

TMTT incorporated the use of multiple knowledge systems and approaches. The coaches used LENA (Language Environment Analysis) technology (Xu et al. 2014) to monitor and reflect on whānau language use. Children wore the LENA device once a week or fortnight to record a proxy for adult words, adult and child interactions, child vocalisations, and electronic sounds in the home. The LENA technology records canonical syllables as consonant–vowel and vowel–consonant pairs to provide an approximate count of conversational turns (Xu et al. 2014). The device fits into a small pocket on a cotton vest which is worn over the child's ordinary clothes. Coaches receive a breakdown of the data from these records in the form of a report, outlining conversational turns between the child and their whānau over the course of the day. The LENA report cannot provide data on the words and utterances used. The conversation between the coach and whānau is key for eliciting specific examples about the types of interactions that occurred with the child.

Alongside the LENA device are a series of Talking Tips and family-coaching resources that are made available when purchasing the product. In North America, the coach is usually a professional trained in child development (Ramírez et al. 2018; Ramírez et al. 2020). TMTT makes a case that the best people to coach and walk alongside whānau are parents from the same community. Parent coaches for TMTT utilise the 14 Talking Tips created by LENA as conversation starters and weave them together to affirm and build on practices whānau are already doing. There are inherent issues with building a programme from an existing, imported product. Pihama (1993) critiqued import of the USA Parents as First Teachers Programme to Aotearoa/New Zealand as being inappropriate for Māori and founded on the assumption that parents were failing in their parenting. 'Adaptations' for Māori were cosmetic in nature, and there was no inclusion of Māori knowledge, of te reo or tikanga. We have considered whether LENA may be a Eurocentric resource given that it only counts verbal communication. Tools can be Eurocentric when they cause the user to work or think in the dominant culture's way, and at the expense of other cultures and languages. The journey of the TMTT parent coaches demonstrated that critiquing Eurocentric resources and programmes from an Indigenous practices can be a springboard for Indigenous leadership, agency and transformation. There is a risk that LENA could cause us to unintentionally prioritise the verbal over non-verbal communication. To mitigate the risk, LENA is never used in isolation from other forms of observation of the environment and interaction, including videos, photographs and conversational reflections.

He awa whiria/the braided rivers

This study draws on the metaphor He Awa Whiria/Braided Rivers (Macfarlane et al. 2015) to describe the work-in-progress to reduce the dominance of western onto-

epistemologies and practices in parenting-support initiatives. The story is a work-in-progress because the learning of the collective and their programme design are evolving. With every change or new awakening, a new assumption or discourse is opened for discussion and challenge.

He Awa Whiria/The Braided Rivers is a framework developed by MacFarlane and colleagues (2015) to weave both Indigenous and western knowledge systems. He Awa Whiria uses the metaphor of the iconic braided rivers of Waitaha/Canterbury, which are unique in the world and are distinctive river eco-systems providing habitat for rare birds, fish, plants and other species. Kaitiakitanga/guardianship and protection of the rivers is vital to preserving the mauri/lifeforce of the system. Sustenance of biodiversity extends to early oral languages. TMTT is committed to (re)visioning diversity of language/s as an essential part of a healthy ecological system of communication.

Macfarlane et al. (2015) proposed that western knowledge and theory are culturally bound and, therefore, cannot be directly transferred into another culture (i.e. te ao Māori). The import and use of manualised oral language and parenting programmes from overseas ignores the unique cultural contexts of Aotearoa/New Zealand and assumes a common worldview, that of the population for which the programme was originally designed. Resources developed in Aotearoa/New Zealand that are founded on western theories and practices are often indigenised or 'Māori-ised' in superficial ways (Pihama 1993). When te ao Māori/the Māori world is not valued, assumptions of universality prevail. Jones (2012) warned against oppositional and binary views of Māori/Pākehā differences, which can lead to essentialism. The differences between Māori and Pākehā are nuanced and layered.

He Awa Whiria allows vastly different worldviews to contribute to a *kaupapa*, while simultaneously holding their own *mana*. Kaupapa and mana are concepts that are difficult to succinctly translate into English. Kaupapa can refer to a topic of discussion or a wider purpose, which carries underlying values and principles. Mana sometimes refers to the status or prestige in a human, although the term holds deeper meanings. Mana is the supernatural force in a person, place or object. For a kaupapa to stand on its own mana, an element of stewardship, or *kaitiakitanga*, is required to provide protective space for expansion without dilution. Any action can enhance the mana of a person or object, or trample on it. He Awa Whiria makes the case to not force the blending or intentionally minimise either knowledge system. Each stream is allowed to flow on its own mana.

Macfarlane et al. (2015) advocated for blending the two knowledge streams to create culturally relevant and sustaining programmes for Māori in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The photo of the Waimakariri River in the South Island of New Zealand illustrates the intertwining networks in flow (see Figure 1). TMTT used LENA as one data-collection tool about the language environment of whānau. These data, alongside other sources such as observations, photographs, and video recordings, served as provocations for conversations of coaches with families. LENA, and the associated materials, is a western channel of the complex river network.

Method

This study employed Kaupapa Māori research (KMR), a decolonising approach that allows a critique of Pākehā constructions of Māori identities and affirms Māori self-

definitions and self-valuing (Smith 2012). KMR prioritises Māori epistemologies and ontologies and establishes them as equal and relevant to other worldviews. As a form of resistance and transformation, KMR methodology has the potential to evoke social change through theoretical analysis and political action. Rather than force-fitting research methods into a Māori framework, KMR recognises the validity of Māori knowledge, language and culture and seeks to make a beneficial transformative contribution (Smith et al. 2012). Graham Smith's (1990) Kaupapa Māori research principles



Figure 1. Aerial photograph of the Waimakariri River (Emma Quigan).

underpinned the framing of the research study. These eight principles and how they were enacted within the study are:

- Tino Rangatiratanga – The Principle of Self-Determination was applied from the outset of the study. The purpose was to identify pathways for whānau to lead their parenting journey, and to promote Tino Rangatiratanga/Self-Determination in the parent education space.
- Taonga Tuku Iho – Cultural Aspiration led us on the path towards linguistic and cultural reclamation and revitalisation, which included the privileging and use of Māori and Pacific ways of being, languages, and cultural practices at project events.
- Ako Māori – Culturally Preferred Pedagogy guided us to explore Māori practices in TMTT such as waiata and pepeha. We also chose Māori pedagogies to reflect on our work, including kōreroero, ako and tuakana/teina.
- Kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kainga – The Principle of Socio-Economic Mediation guided us to ensure the role of Whānau Coach was a paid position, with the decision to name and identify coaches and whānau (with consent) so that employment opportunities could be made available. This was to assist in alleviating and redressing negative pressures, stereotypes and disadvantages often experienced in Māori communities.
- Whānau/The Principle of Extended Māori Family Structure was validated by recognising that participants in the study were welcome to include their extended family members in research events if they desired.
- Kaupapa – The Principle of Collective Philosophy was enacted in the study by understanding that the kaupapa was about the collective vision of the community and was larger and more encompassing than the research project.
- Te Tiriti o Waitangi – The Principle of The Treaty of Waitangi was enacted in the study by affirming the tangata whenua status of whānau, hapu and iwi and providing a mandate and requirement to work in partnership with mana whenua, through guidance from Tautoko (Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei kaumatua/elders).
- Āta – The Principle of Growing Respectful Relationships was applied through the enactment of reciprocity which included two-way knowledge and power sharing between the first author, whānau coaches and wider participating whānau. Āta/Respectful Relationships allowed us to create a safe space to challenge assumptions, to co-construct, to co-reflect and to co-learn.

The role of connection and whakawhanaungatanga (building relationships) is critical to engagement in KMR. In this study, whanaungatanga was not built through the research. Instead, the research occurred within whanaungatanga. TMTT coaches were not simply invited to ‘take part’ in a research project. The conceptualisation of this research evolved from hours of conversation about how to (a) protect the whānau ki te whānau nature of TMTT, (b) share the evolving framework with other communities and (c) document the process of building a whānau ki te whānau (family to family) parenting programme. The coaches were engaged as co-researchers, invested in the emancipatory potential of community-led research from the onset and declared as such in the university-approved ethics application. Employing KMR created a reflexive space to explore why TMTT took a Māori focus, and to ask ‘Is the Māori focus at the expense of Pasifika voices?’ This excerpt from a conversation about

methodologies with Shannon, a Samoan co-researcher-coach (see [Table 1](#) for descriptions of co-researchers and authors), illustrates the ongoing discussion about the focus:

Well I'm not Māori but my kids are, and I have spent most of my life here and of course, my partner's Māori as you know. I think from a Treaty [Treaty of Waitangi] point of view that it's right to put Māori ways of seeing at the centre and it's a nice change. It is usually Pākehā. And people need to realise that there is so much to learn from the culture.

The conversation with Shannon contributed to a decision to include talanoa, a Pacific (originally Tongan) approach to co-constructed dialogue/interviewing, that differs from mainstream social-research approaches. Vaioleti (2006) described talanoa as a means of exchanging ideas without a rigid framework. 'Tala' meaning to 'talk', and 'noa' meaning 'ordinary' or 'unrestricted' in Tongan language refers to the research relationship space as occurring 'in a state of 'noa' (a non-tapu/non-taboo or 'free from restriction' state)', so that talanoa is enacted 'in a safe space allowing free dialogue that is both unrestrained and culturally appropriate. Talanoa 'goes beyond a supposedly 'simple' use of co-constructed dialogue, to a process that is more deeply founded on familial, empathic and culturally appropriate relationships' (Si'ilata 2017, p. 103). The talanoa session presented an opportunity to come together to reflect on the journey of setting up TMTT and to reminisce about the process. Shannon suggested talanoa as the most appropriate format so that 'everyone can share and be real'.

Emma has known the four co-researchers who took part in the talanoa session for many years and they have developed relationships built on mutual trust, respect, and friendship. Talanoa provided an appropriate framework for a researcher who is both an insider and outsider (Si'ilata 2017).

Table 1. Descriptions of co-researchers and authors.

Talking Matters to Tāmaki Co-Researchers-Coaches		
<i>Shannon Tangi</i> Samoan born with mixed heritage of Samoan, Tongan and Cook Island. She has four children who are of Māori and Pasifika descent. Shannon was one of the initiators of TMTT	<i>Samantha Makoare</i> (Ngāti Whatua), of Māori and Cook Island descent, has lived in Glen Innes all her life. Sam has three children and became involved with TMTT while pregnant with her third daughter	<i>Charlotte Liddicoat</i> (Te Rarawa) grew up in a rural community but has lived in Glen Innes most of her life. She has six children and six mokopuna/ grandchildren. Charlotte has been a coach for two years
<i>Samantha Repia</i> (Ngāpuhi) grew up in Glen Innes and has six children. She has coached for one year and has introduced many of her family/whānau to TMTT	<i>Ariana Kahui</i> (Ngāti Maniapoto) has lived in Panmure and Glen Innes for most of her life. She has two daughters. She took part in TMTT with her first daughter and then became a coach	<i>Tracy Rangi</i> (Tūhoe) Tray grew up in Taneatua, but has lived in Tāmaki for all of her adult life; she has five children
Co-Authors		
<i>Emma K. Quigan</i> (Kāi Tahu, Kāti Māmoe) is the first author of this paper. She lives in Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland with her wife and hopes to have children soon. She has worked in Glen Innes for over six years	<i>Janet S. Gaffney</i> was born in the midwest of the US. She has been a lifelong teacher, including tribally governed schools of First Nation peoples. She has worked at the University of Auckland for 8 years and is a recent, proud citizen of Aotearoa	<i>Rae Si'ilata</i> (Ngāti Raukawa, Tūhourangi, Fiji) has five children with her Samoan husband. She has taught in Samoa and Aotearoa, and works in teacher education and Māori/Indigenous doctoral supervision

Talanoa approach

Māori and Pacific tikanga/protocols informed the gathering and analysis of information in this study. Each group and individual conversation, or talanoa, was audio-recorded. They began and ended with karakia/prayer, sharing food and having an informal conversation about family, recent events and work before recording. Whakatauki/proverbs relating to childrearing and whānau were used as opening provocations for discussions.

Emma recorded brief notes at events and kept a reflective journal for the duration of TMTT. Excerpts from these reflective memos provided context and researchers' subjectivities to the narrative. The transcripts, field notes and reflective memos were the grist of robust discussions and emails among the authors, which prompted cyclic returns to data and literature sources, and conversations with co-researchers-coaches for clarification and elaboration.

Co-researchers and participants

This paper includes the rich narratives of the Māori and Pacific Islands women engaged in developing a community-led whānau movement to create rich language environments for infants and their whānau. Four cohorts of whānau have taken part in the TMTT collective, and it continues to evolve beyond the parameters of this study.

Context

Tāmaki is made up of the suburbs of Glen Innes, Panmure, Mt Wellington and Point England. Tāmaki is a multicultural community. Based on the 2018 Census (Stats NZ) the demographics of Tamaki represents Pacific peoples (40%), Pākehā (35%), Māori (22%), Asian (18%), Middle Eastern/Latin American/African (1.5%) and Other (1.0%). Percentages exceed 100% as some individuals identified in more than one group. Around 30% of the population is under the age of 20. Within the time frame of this study, TMTT had reached 52 families and 60 children, who identified as Maori (75%), Pasifika (31%), Other (4.9%) and Pākehā (3.3%). The average age of the children is 16 months. The wider whānau, grandparents, siblings, uncles and aunties are consistently part of the coaching discussion and planning. Over 60% of participants were introduced to TMTT through whānau connections (Table 2).

Analysis process

The audio-recorded interviews, talanoa sessions and informal conversations were transcribed for analytic purposes. Field notes were analysed alongside the transcripts. Emma read the transcripts multiple times and made notes about patterns and areas of interest. As patterns emerged, she manually coded the transcripts in a series of Microsoft word documents by cutting and pasting relevant extracts into new coding documents. The decision was made to code inclusively so that the same excerpts could be included in multiple coding categories. The co-authors provided commentary on interpretation and alternative lenses at research meetings.

Three prominent themes were identified and are presented as key findings (Table 3).

Table 2. Timeline of significant events for Talking Matters to Tāmaki.

Date	Event
1 June 2017	Community hui at Ruapotaka Marae to discuss oral language
Sep–Oct 2017	Shannon, Samantha and Charlotte conducted parent interviews
12 Oct 2017	Community hui at Tāmaki marae: whānau sharing results of interviews with whānau
Jan–June 2018	First cohort
Sept–Dec 2018	Second cohort
Feb–Aug 2019	Third cohort
June 2019	Coaches talanoa
Aug 2019	Interviews with Ariana and Tracy
Sept–Dec 2019	Fourth cohort

He kitenga matua/some key findings

Three key themes were identified that represent a significant evolution in the work of the parent-coaches over the time of the study and illustrate the journey of a collective: (a) Ma te Kotahitanga e Whai Kaha Ai Mātau/In Unity We Have Strength, (b) Reciprocity/whakaututu and (c) Whānau ki te whānau manaakitanga/love and compassion for others. The themes represent strands in the Braided River that denote a marked change in direction or understanding of how parenting programmes are different when designed by, and implemented within, the community of the whānau. Narratives follow of critical episodes that illustrate each theme or strand. These strands, like bends in the river, represent a current place of understanding on a journey that is not yet finished.

(a) Ma te kotahitanga e whai kaha ai Mātau/in unity we have strength

Self- and joint-agency of coaches was fostered and nurtured throughout the journey of creating a collective parenting programme. Emma, and a team of professionals (project manager, speech and language therapist and data analyst) from Talking Matters, supported the process from the beginning and the parent coaches held their place as partners. At the talanoa session, Charlotte reflected:

We've always been able to connect with the Talking Matters people as equals. We don't want you (Talking Matters) to leave, we still learn so much, but I need to take more leadership so that I can guarantee TMTT lives on.

A note from Emma's reflective journal on 25 November 2019 marked a shift in understanding:

Consultation is not partnership. We need to be okay with coaches suggesting something that we don't like, or haven't thought of. Partnership is listening and being open. I still think I

Table 3. Focus group and interview schedule.

Focus Group/Interviews	Participants	Date	Length (h)	Language
Coaches' Talanoa	5 adults 5 children	29/06/2019	4	English with te reo Māori
Ariana	2 adults	29/08/2019	1	English with te reo Māori
Tracy	2	29/08/2019	1	English with te reo Māori

need to assert myself and speak up. But then, I need to expect that of my colleagues, too, and be cool with it when they do.

The complex and multi-faceted concept of rangatiratanga/self-determination describes the path that coaches have walked alongside the Talking Matters team. A partnership which values agency utilises the skills and knowledge of all involved to work towards common goals as a collective can be described, in a Māori context, as kotahitanga/unity, or solidarity. Kotahitanga refers to working as one, and extending support to everyone and receiving the same back. The coaches asserted their rangatiratanga/self-determination the first time they met the Talking Matters team at the community hui, with Charlotte urging us: ‘Don’t base action on stereotypes’ (Fieldnote, 29 June 2017). The warning about stereotypes heightened awareness of positionalities as the team entered this new relational space.

Shannon, Sam M, Charlotte, and a project manager from the Glen Innes Family Centre (GIFC) challenged the Talking Matters team regarding the deficit lens on which the initiative was founded. That conversation was the catalyst for initiating the partnership with GIFC. The parent coaches and Talking Matters team met at a local community centre with a kaumatua/Māori elder. The kaumatua advised the Talking Matters team to allow the process to flow even if it felt uncomfortable. At the talanoa on 29 June 2019, Shannon reflected:

We knew the statistics are that Māori and Pasifika kids are really low in school with reading, writing and in a lot of things. I think it’s sad. I see those early childhood stats and I think ‘no that can’t be, that’s not my child’ because I see every Māori or Pasifika child like my own. So, I see the statistics and think ‘No, that can’t be’. They are advanced at different things you know.

The parent coaches and staff from the GIFC proposed to explore the realities of raising children in Tāmaki from a strengths-based perspective. Shannon added, ‘We need to make the questions natural for us. Not a formal interview style’ (Reflective note, 27 August 2017). The local parents had different perspectives to some of the Talking Matters staff on what ‘natural’ might look like. A member of the Talking Matters team suggested questions about how families use communication strategies to grow a baby’s brain and the frequency with which they read with their baby. The parents rejected these questions, sensitively explaining that the questions were laden with assumptions and unlikely to be conducive to a rich dialogue. They instead suggested questions such as, ‘What sort of signals does your baby give you when they want to tell you something?’ Shannon reflected at the talanoa session that this was when she realised that we needed her knowledge and input as much as she needed ours (June 2019). Charlotte reminisced about the first planning meeting:

Sometimes when I’ve gone to planning hui with bigger organisations and you felt like you were on the same page, but then you quickly realise that the big organisations have already decided how it’s going to be and your presence it pretty much to tick a box. It hasn’t been like that with you guys. (Follow-up conversation with Charlotte, 25 January 2020)

The parent coaches completed 12 interviews with whānau residing in Tāmaki, who were raising children under three years of age. Whānau were recruited through personal connections and word of mouth. A procedural difference arose when the professionals from

Talking Matters and GIFC planned to complete the interviews and analysis before deciding the next steps. When early insights from the interviews revealed whānau in Tāmaki were seeking support and connection with other whānau, Shannon reserved a local church hall for whānau to meet. The parent coaches responded to the whānau desire, not waiting for a conclusion (Table 4).

When local parents interview other parents from the same community, ‘the conversation does not end when the interview ends’ (Shannon, Planning Hui Interview, 27 June 2019).

Shannon continued to draw from the rich stories shared in the whānau interviews. ‘It taught me to listen to what they really want and think. That’s how I coach,’ Shannon explained during a debrief meeting in July 2019. Shannon reminded us that Samantha R’s introduction to TMTT was through being part of the interviews:

She was the one who talked about different cultures, how her partner is Samoan and she’s Māori. Sam liked the fact that her kids were learning both Māori and Samoan. When they visit her in-laws they like to sing. (Talanoa, June 2019)

Samantha M. added, ‘and now it’s come around in full circle. Now she’s a coach’, referring to Samantha R’s journey. Much like how the braided rivers of Waitaha weave in and out from one another, meeting again after parting, the coaches understand that their experiences are interconnected even at times where it seems they are not. They see their individual and collective knowledge and understandings as continually flowing and growing.

(b) Reciprocity/whakaututu

TMTT fosters a culture of reciprocity/whakaututu where interdependence is valued. The following critical episodes demonstrate tipping points in the evolution of reciprocity/whakaututu. In a Māori context, reciprocity can also be described as *ako*. The concept of *ako* is to both teach and learn. *Ako* recognises that new knowledge and understanding can grow from shared experiences, and to learn something well you must teach it to others (Pere 1991).

A telephone debrief session with Shannon in November 2019 served as an impetus for rethinking the role of outsider professionals in community development. I (Emma) shared my amazement with Shannon at how engaged whānau are in the programme, and how different that was to my experiences working as a speech-language therapist. The entry in my journal reads:

I’ve never seen such ownership. Like parents creating resources and setting goals beyond the sessions and beyond the programme. I used to feel the need to push. Sometimes Shannon tells me to share my speech therapy expertise more. I guess that’s what I’m there for. She’s so good at observing the va [or relational space] and making a pretty good

Table 4. Follow-up conversations.

Participants	Date	Length (min)	Topic
Shannon	08/07/2019	20	Coaching styles
Shannon	22/11/2019	30	Phone call to debrief TMTT whānau hui
Charlotte	25/01/2020	30	Partnership and te reo Māori
Sam Repia, Ariana, Shannon	13/12/2019	15	Talanoa on Braided Rivers metaphor

interpretation of what to do next or how to respond. Maybe it's about staying in your lane. (Emma, 5 December 2019)

I began to understand the whakatauki/proverb: *Mā te tuakana e tōtika te teina, mā te teina e tōtika te tuakana.*/The older will lead the younger and the younger will lead the older. Shannon and I flow between the reciprocal roles of teina and tuakana, more and less experienced.

'I learn so much from the parents, too.' Charlotte reflected that her coaching style had evolved the more she got to know whānau. Through coaching, she learned to listen before jumping to offer advice:

Another thing with being a coach is to give parents enough time to respond. It's a tip we give about children! When you ask them a question, don't go there to think you're going to be there to teach them all these things and leave all this stuff. It's actually that you want to draw out their strength. And actually, I find myself doing it all the time. I'm on a roll telling them all this information and they start to respond to me – but I'm still talking! I need to stop myself. I learn so much from the parents too. (Talanoa, June 2019)

Emma had shared with the team via Facebook that Ruapotaka Marae was hosting te reo Māori classes but did not have any uptake. After Charlotte commented that she learns so much from parents, Shannon added, 'Some of the parents liked seeing the Māori content in the TMTT workbook we made and now she's doing a Māori course at the marae! And now I'm actually keen to join, too' (Talanoa, June 2019). Charlotte announced that she planned to sign up for te reo Māori course that the parent suggested. The group enthusiastically chatted about how wonderful it was to learn about courses in the community from other parents, and that they would not have otherwise known.

Charlotte talked about reciprocity as a driving motivator for registering for the reo course:

So when [parent] signed up she talked to me about wanting to give back in a sense. Like she learned so much from us introducing her to some of her language from TMTT and she wants to be able to pass that knowledge on, too. This journey of being a coach has been massive for my whānau and introduced me to a different way of thinking. So I need to hone my skills, so I can give back. Does that make sense? (Follow-up conversation, 25 January 2020)

The whānau ki te whānau exchange of knowledge re-centred Indigenous wisdom and practices. Whānau coaches encouraged parents to look back to our tūpuna for guidance and inspiration and whānau do the same with coaches. This is possible when parenting programmes are designed by and within the community.

(c) Whānau ki te whānau manaakitanga/love and compassion for others

The final strand of this analysis explores the value of whānau ki tewhānau sharing of knowledge and how that intersects with the programme's underlying values and operation. Whānau have always supported other whānau. These relationships are based on trust and reciprocity, and contribute to our quality of life. We draw resources and support from whānau. Whānau who have participated in the programme are trusted sources of information by their wider whānau and recruit others into the initiative.

Since the inception of TMTT, coaches and participating whānau have grappled with the possibility of unintentionally excluding non-Māori from TMTT, if the materials look ‘too Māori’ or the structure of the programme appears to overly cater to Māori:

Today Sam talked about how holding the first session on a marae might be excluding for people. She asked, ‘What if they don’t identify as Māori?’ and ‘What if they’re uncomfortable?’ Everyone seemed to agree. They talked about keeping it as open as possible. So is ‘as open as possible’ a western style and English language by default? Talk about colonisation! Why do Pākehā keep getting to be the norm? I hate that we feel hesitant to recentring of Māori. (Emma’s journal, 19 February 2018)

Ariana raised a similar issue during her interview. She expressed ambivalence towards TMTT having a specific Māori style:

I was trying to get my friends on board and they’re Pakistani Muslims. Her biggest concern is speaking Pashto. I don’t think they have an issue with it, but I do wonder what it would be like for another Pakistani family who don’t have a connection with Māori? Would we be able get them so involved when we were also trying to push te reo Māori [the Māori language]? There could be a little reluctance there. Not from any like racist thing but just not being able to relate as much. (August 2019)

During the interview, Emma immediately responded to Ariana’s musing at the time with the same interpretation and discomfort expressed in my 2018 reflective journal:

So my reaction when we say that kind of thing, like ‘Oh, if we make it too Māori how will it connect to other cultures is like saying Pākehā is normal, the baseline?’

Ariana agreed that we have an opportunity to de-centre the English language and Euro-centric practices. She expressed a willingness to learn more karakia/prayers and connect more deeply with her whakapapa/genealogy. At the time, I (Emma) felt a sense of unease that Māori and Pacific women were so tentative about promoting Indigenous practices. I spoke with the kaumatua/elder of the project and he shared a more nuanced interpretation.

I think both perspectives have merit. You’re on your journey and they are, too. Both perspectives need attention. Go think about what you can change with aroha/love. (5 September 2019)

Rae (co-author) affirmed an interpretation that was accepting of ambivalence and the journey that people are on, while also gently supporting them to understand the place and position of tangata whenua/people of the land. Contemplation of what makes whānau feel welcome and valued is the manifestation of manaakitanga/love and compassion for others. The coaches did not assume that any language or culture is more relatable or appropriate. With each iteration, they questioned how they are serving their manuhiri/visitors. I re-read Shannon’s comment with a new lens: ‘We have so many cultures in our area. We might come across someone who is totally into their own language and I don’t want them to think, ‘Oh why is it just Māori?’ An approach that infuses te reo Māori is not mutually exclusive from one that is multilingual. Creating space for the plurality of languages in a community affirms the inherent value of multilingualism.

While TMTT starts with a child and their language development, for many of the coaches, whānau and I (Emma), TMTT has been the impetus for linguistic and cultural reclamation. The TMTT has become whānau, simultaneously strengthening individuals and contributing to the collective.

An opportunity for employment and leadership

The local-led research journey was a mana-enhancing experience for Shannon, Samantha M. and Charlotte. The women shared their findings at the Talking Matters Summit and were thrilled to see researchers and community leaders engaging with their insights (Tangi et al. 2017). The Summit was a conference showcasing local research and initiatives about oral language in the early years. At the Summit, the women from Glen Innes met another group of parents engaged in a different satellite project with Talking Matters, which involved using the LENA technology. Inspired by the potential of combining data with coaching conversations and goal setting, they requested access to the tools (Emma's journal, 13 October 2019). Tracy expressed hesitation at using imported resources from LENA: 'I thought the LENA sessions were a bit dry for the whānau I saw but the recordings were good. People found that interesting and they wanted to know more' (Interview, 29 August 2019). Tracy explained that she avoided using the LENA resources (i.e. programme structure, talking tips, coaches manual) and preferred to have a 'natural conversation' with the family. Other coaches initially relied more heavily on the LENA resources, adapting the language to fit the community and explaining that the parent tips were useful for the whole whānau.

The more the coaches engaged with the LENA resources, the more they adapted the resources they used. They demonstrated a rangatiratanga/sovereignty type of leadership by searching for local tikanga/protocols and customs to complement the talking tips associated with LENA, creating a hybrid. Charlotte reflected: 'I think for myself. It's almost like I've been given permission to incorporate things that I know without it being—you know—awkward' (Talanoa, June 2019). The parent-coaches discussed the complexities of feeling ashamed about not knowing enough te reo Māori, not feeling 'Māori enough', and not seeing practices like waiata/song valued when growing up. Shannon felt the same about Samoan and Tongan languages and pese/hiva/songs. Being their full selves and acknowledging their continual growth felt like, in Samantha R.'s words: 'Permission had finally been granted, so we're not going to stop!' (Talanoa, June 2019).

We make the difference, not a machine

By April 2019, the coaches had successfully led three cohorts of TMTT, each building on the next and growing the collective. Three coaches had doubled to six. On 8 May 2019, the TMTT team were given the opportunity to share their experiences in a community venue with a group of Aotearoa and international researchers. The reflexive dialogue from the experience encouraged the coaches to interrogate their reliance on LENA technology. Janet (co-author), coordinator of the visiting Researcher Network, asked, 'Do you need the LENA?' and 'What's your role in the coaching process?'. Tracey pondered, 'I think we're giving a machine all the credit. Us coaches actually have more influence than some machine' (Emma's journal, 10 May 2019).

Examining the coaching process with Aotearoa and international researchers who were focused on early oral language/s of young Indigenous and Pacific Islands children and their families, encouraged the coaches to question unexamined assumptions. Is LENA the only tool to collect data? What about non-verbal communication and overheard speech? Does the programme length need to be the same for everyone? These

philosophical and practical questions were further examined in the talanoa session. Some coaches continued to see value in the LENA device. Samantha's opinion was to keep it: 'I think we do need it. I think parents like seeing the reports and they get a lot out of them.' Samantha R., being the newest coach, chose to withhold judgement for now. Charlotte felt ambivalent:

If we didn't have devices, I'd say nah get rid of them. But the fact that we have screens and devices, people expect something like that. But maybe it doesn't need to be as important. (Talanoa, 29 June 2019)

Charlotte also cautioned about the potential dangers of LENA. Reducing the intricacies and subtleties of interacting with children to an analysis of numbers ignores the richness of oral interactions and could unintentionally cause shame.

For example, if you had a visit from Plunket [nationalised home-visiting nurses] and they just honed in on the fact that your baby wasn't meeting milestones, it could be a big thing. So that's why I think we be careful with the reports [LENA]. So, they don't go 'Aww stink! My baby is behind.' (Charlotte, Talanoa, June 2019)

These conversations are unlikely to have occurred without the provocations from the researchers. Shannon has continued to interrogate decisions around LENA usage, the coaching framework, and programme configuration. Shannon's astute questions led to the formation of a new role in TMTT, that is as a tuakana (i.e. older sibling or more experienced) coach.

I want to focus now on the coaches seeing how their kōrero [focused talk] makes the difference, not LENA. A thing we've learned from using LENA is that the parents can use data like that. Some people thought it would be too complicated for them – but they get it. So we can think about other types of data too now. (Follow-up session with Shannon, 11 November 2019)

Agency is critical for genuine co-design with community partners. You cannot grant someone agency or tell them to have it. Agency is fostered and nurtured among true partners: *Ma te Kotahitanga e Whai Kaha Ai Mātau/In Unity We Have Strength*.

Kōrerorero/Discussion

The three streams of findings are supported by episodes described in the words of TMTT collective. Each of the episodes is like standing in a moving river. They each reflect a narrative-in-progress of the braiding and re-braiding of ideas, relationships, and theories. Programmes that target Māori and Pasifika children may have good intentions to redress inequities. When designed, implemented, and evaluated without the relational leadership of the local community, however, they perpetuate another iteration of colonisation. Ramírez et al. (2018) suggested that the entry point for oral-language parenting programmes is less important than the overall quality of the programme; if the programme is of high quality, how you get there is irrelevant. The critical episodes described in this paper tell a different story. If we understand *kaupapa* to mean the principles and values that are the foundation for action and *mahi* to mean the performance of the action, the TMTT community coaches were driven by the kaupapa. Programmes that are designed or delivered by those outside the community are driven by the mahi or the

action. These drivers or sources inspire different uptake, engagement, and results. Shannon's question, 'What sort of signals does your baby give?' is an example of how Pacific peoples value non-verbal and embodied communication as much as verbal. The word signals is inclusive of verbalisations, gestures, facial expression and silence. When we made space for multiple knowledge systems to meet, the discussion with whānau was richer. The creators of TMTT mutually gained new ways of seeing interaction and communications through reflexively examining our interpretations.

He Awa Whiria/The Braided Rivers provides a framework from which to observe the changing flow and intermingling of knowledge streams. As time went on, the TMTT coaches rejected the import of the LENA curriculum and saw the value of our own curricula. Perhaps the tool has value, but not all the resources. They were not developed in Aotearoa/New Zealand; they were not developed by Indigenous people, or had these people in mind; and they do not view whānau within a holistic lens. LENA, the tool began to be seen as one of many tools available. Creating an Indigenous framework for coaching that draws on whānau knowledge and ways of knowing represents a stream that intersects with the use of the LENA tool, and flows in a new and uncharted way. In a way, a blending of knowledge systems can be at odds with decolonising especially when Indigenous knowledge is filtered through a western lens. For those on a journey of linguistic and cultural re-connection, the risk of dilution is real. This can only be reconciled through communication and reflexivity and embracing multiple voices and affirmation of the centrality of culture to children's growth, learning and development. This story illustrates our understandings as a collective in a moment of time. A blending of knowledge systems has the potential to be decolonising when there is room for multiple ways of knowing to flow.

Mā hea mātou haere ai? Which way will we go?

Babies are a powerful starting point for visioning a better future and setting goals for the whole whānau. The blending of Mātauranga Māori, Pūtaiao and western science provided the spark for reclamation, both linguistic and cultural. Attempting to challenge deficit discourses when working on a project that is founded in a deficit paradigm presents challenges. Government and philanthropic funding agencies require service providers, in this case TMTT, to identify a social problem and propose a solution. This starting point creates a challenge from the outset. Service *receivers* are targeted and *providers* are either operating from a deficit lens of the children and whānau or are constantly grappling with how to work with integrity. Specialised, technical knowledge is valuable when braided with the community and family expertise and experience of whānau, who lead the way. The wider campaign of Talking Matters has been greatly influenced by TMTT's holistic view of communication.

Approaching the kaupapa/programme with authenticity is possible with appropriate representation. For example, TMTT was initially funded to target whānau living in the Tāmaki suburbs. As the collective grew, whānau talked with whānau about what they had learned, their results and growth. Whānau who resided outside of Tāmaki wanted to join. Sharing korero/discussion about the significance of the Tāmaki awa/river in migration stories and the flow of information in both past and current times illustrates the fluidity of movement.

A critical factor that determines whether a stream will meander or braid is erodibility. Streams with banks resistant to erosion will form narrow, meandering channels. For a stream to braid, the banks must erode in places (Ashmore 2001). What will wear down and erode with TMTT? Will it be the deficit theorising that sparked the programme and Eurocentrism? Or will it be the Indigenous lens and practices? Will TMTT grow in scale, obtain funding from elsewhere and become yet another western parenting programme?

The success of TMTT poses a reasonable risk. Positive feedback from whānau and a reported increase in confidence and connection makes the initiative attractive to funders and generates interest from other communities. With success, often comes growth, however with growth some level of erosion is inevitable. Some elements will solidify, and some will crumble. The findings of this study are intertwined like the braided rivers. One finding cannot be reported without the others. To do so would be reductive. We are aware of the double-edged sword that LENA represents. On the one hand, the tool has been a catalyst for new whānau conversations. On the other hand, the quantitative nature of the tool appeals to policy makers wanting a quick, traditional measure of westernised 'success'. A tool like LENA without the element of whānau ki tewhānau and reciprocity is unlikely to spark the deep-rooted and sustained journey required for linguistic and cultural reclamation. Using a narrow measure of progress of programmatic change is easier and cheaper than meaningful alternatives. The Braided Rivers analogy demonstrates the additive benefits of blending knowledge systems and tools without subjugating the more vulnerable, minoritized language and culture.

A blending of knowledge systems occurs naturally in contemporary colonised environments. TMTT coach, Samantha R. suggested, 'For now I think we need to flood the western awa, coz our side has already had so much crossover!' Flooding or intentional blending can only occur when creators of a programme have a deep understanding of the cultures, languages, and identities of those involved and the erosion of outdated assumptions and practices.

Mā hea mātou haere ai? Which way will TMTT go? TMTT has the will and the strength to maintain rangatiratanga/sovereignty over the dreams, aspirations and culturally embedded languaging interactions of the community's tamariki. We share our journey as one example of system transformation in the hope that other whānau and communities that initiate early oral language programmes will start their journeys further upstream and envisage Indigenous ways of being and of languaging as normal, valid and central to our aspirational notions of languaging success for our tamariki.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge all of the whanau who have created TMTT. This article shares some of the many stories. We would also like to acknowledge the thoughtful suggestions from Dr Jenny Ritchie.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authos.

Funding

This paper was supported in part by the Royal Society New Zealand Catalyst Seeding Grant [grant number CSG-UOA-1802].

ORCID

Emma K. Quigan  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9964-9739>

Janet S. Gaffney  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0782-2093>

Rae Si'ilata  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0939-6940>

References

- Ashmore P. 2001. Braiding phenomena: statics and kinetics. In: Mosley MP, editor. *Gravel-bed rivers*. Christchurch: New Zealand Hydrological Society; p. 95–114.
- Avineri N, Johnson E, Brice-Heath S, McCarty T, Ochs E, Kremer-Sadlik T, Blum S, Zentella AC, Rosa J, Flores N, et al. 2015. Invited forum: bridging the 'language gap'. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*. 25:66–86. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jola.12071>.
- Barrett-Walker T, Plank MJ, Ka'ai-Mahuta R, Hikuroa D, James A. 2020. Kia kua te reo e rite ki te moa, ka ngaro: do not let the language suffer the same fate as the moa. *Journal of the Royal Society, Interface*. 17(162):20190526. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsif.2019.0526>.
- Dudley-Marling C. 2007. Return of the deficit. *Journal of Educational Controversy*. 2(1):1–14.
- Dudley-Marling C, Lucas K. 2009. Pathologizing the language and culture of poor children. *Language Arts*. 86(5):362–370.
- Durie ET. 1986. Report of the Waitangi Tribunal on the te reo Maori claim. Report no. Wai 11. [accessed 2020 Mar 1]. https://forms.justice.govt.nz/search/Documents/WT/wt_DOC_68482156/Report%20on%20the%20Te%20Reo%20Maori%20Claim%20W.pdf.
- Durie M. 2003. *Nga kahui pou, launching Maori futures*. New York (NY): Huia NZ. [accessed 2020 Jan 18] <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>.
- Dyson AH. 2015. The search for inclusion: deficit discourse and the erasure of childhoods. *Language Arts*. 92(3):199–207.
- Hancock TB, Kaiser AP, Delaney EM. 2002. Teaching parents of preschoolers at high risk: strategies to support language and positive behavior. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*. 22(4):191–212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02711214022200402>.
- Hart B, Risley TR. 1995. *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Baltimore (MD): Brookes.
- Johnson EJ. 2015. Debunking the 'language gap'. *Journal for Multicultural Education*. 9(1):42–50. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-12-2014-0044>.
- Jones A. 2012. Dangerous liaisons: pākehā, kaupapa Māori, and educational research. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*. 47(2):100–112.
- Karmiloff K, Karmiloff-Smith A. 2001. *Pathways to language: from fetus to adolescent*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Macfarlane S, Macfarlane A, Gillon G. 2015. Sharing the food baskets of knowledge: creating space for a blending of streams. In: Macfarlane A, Macfarlane S, Webber M, editors. *Sociocultural realities: exploring new horizons*. Christchurch: University of Canterbury Press; p. 52–67.
- Mead SM, Grove N. 2001. *Nga pepeha a nga tipuna – the sayings of the ancestors*. Wellington: Victoria University Press.
- Metge J. 1990. *Te kohao o te ngira, culture and learning*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Miller PJ, Sperry DE. 2012. Deja vu: the continuing misrecognition of low-income children's verbal abilities. In: Fiske ST, Markus HR, editors. *Facing social class: How societal rank influences interaction*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation; p. 109–130.
- Ngata T. 2018. Wai māori. In: Joy M, editor. *Mountains to sea: solving New Zealand's freshwater crisis*. Wellington: BWB Texts; p. 6–12.

- Nicholson R, Garland R. 1991. New Zealanders' attitudes to the revitalisation of the Māori language. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. 12(5):393–410. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.1991.9994472>.
- Ochs E. 2002. Becoming a speaker of culture. In: Kramsch C, editor. *Language acquisition and language socialization: ecological perspectives*. New York (NY): Continuum; p. 99–120.
- Orange C. 1987. *The treaty of Waitangi*. Wellington: Allen and Unwin/Port Nicholson Press.
- Partanen E, Kujala T, Näätänen R, Liitola A, Sambeth A, Huotilainen M. 2013. Fetal brain learns to process speech. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. 110(37):15145–15150. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1302159110>.
- Pere R. 1991. *Te wheke: a celebration of infinite wisdom*. Gisborne: Ao Ako Global Learning.
- Pihama LE. 1993. *Tungia te Ururua kia tupu whakaritorito te tupu o te harakeke: a critical analysis of parents as first teachers* [MA thesis]. University of Auckland.
- Portier C, Peterson SS. 2017. Rural northern Canadian teachers' discoveries about young children's oral language. *Language and Literacy*. 19(2):109–126.
- Rafferty M. 2014. A brief review of approaches to oral language development to inform the Area Based Childhood Programme. Dublin, Ireland: Centre for Effective Services. [accessed 2020 February 8]. <http://hdl.handle.net/10147/611389>.
- Ramírez NF, Lytle SR, Fish M, Kuhl PK. 2018. Parent coaching at 6 and 10 months improves language outcomes at 14 months: a randomized controlled trial. *Developmental Science*. 88(4):1216–1234.
- Ramírez NF, Lytle SR, Kuhl PK. 2020. Parent coaching increases conversational turns and advances infant language development. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, USA*. 117(7):3484–3491. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1921653117>.
- Ritchie J, Skerrett M. 2014. *Early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand: history, pedagogy, and liberation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Si'ilata R. 2017. Mana whenua, mana moana and mixedness in a Māori/Pacific whānau. In: Rocha ZL, Webber M, editors. *Mana tangatarua: mixed heritages, ethnic identity and biculturalism in Aotearoa/New Zealand*. New York (NY): Routledge; p. 97–116.
- Simon JA. 1986. *Ideology in the schooling of Māori children*. Delta Research Monograph No. 7. Palmerston North: Department of Education, Massey University.
- Skerrett M, Ritchie J. 2018. Ara mai he tetekura: Māori knowledge systems that enable ecological and sociolinguistic survival in Aotearoa. In: Cutter-Mackenzie A, Malone K, Barratt Hacking E, editors. *Research handbook on childhood nature*. Cham: Springer; p. 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51949-4_59-1.
- Smith GH. 1990. Taha Maori: Pakeha capture. In: Codd J, Harker R, Nash R, editors. *Political issues in New Zealand education*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press Ltd; p. 183–197.
- Smith LT. 2012. *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples*. 2nd ed. London: Zed Books.
- Smith G, Hoskins T, Jones A. 2012. Interview: Kaupapa Māori: the dangers of domestication. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*. 47(2):10–20.
- Stats NZ. 2018. [accessed 2019 Dec 19]. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-place-summaries/maungakiekie-tamaki-local-board-area>.
- Suggate S, Schaughency E, McAnally H, Reese E. 2018. From infancy to adolescence: the longitudinal links between vocabulary, early literacy skills, oral narrative, and reading comprehension. *Cognitive Development*. 47:82–95. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogdev.2018.04.005>.
- Suskind D, Leffel KR, Hernandez MW, Sapolich SG, Suskind E, Kirkham E, Meehan P. 2013. An exploratory study of 'quantitative linguistic feedback': effect of LENA feedback on adult language production. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*. 34(2):1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525740112473146>.
- Tangi S, Makoare S, Britton C. 2017. *Insight Tāmaki: voices of whānau*. Paper presented at: Talking Matters Summit; Sep; Auckland, New Zealand.
- Vaiolenti TM. 2006. Talanoa research methodology: a developing position on Pacific research. *Waikato Journal of Education*. 12(1):21–34. <https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v12i1.296>.

Xu D, Richards JA, Gilkerson J. 2014. Automated analysis of child phonetic production using naturalistic recordings. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*. 57(5):1638–1650. https://doi.org/10.1044/2014_JSLHR-S-13-0037.