

## TANGI TE KAWEKAWĒĀ

### Whānau engagement in Kaupapa Māori early years provision—an exploratory qualitative study

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#### Abstract

Kaupapa Māori early years provision (KM-EYP) is often understood as a critical site for Māori cultural revitalisation, where a foundation for the educational success and lifelong wellbeing of tamariki Māori is laid. Given its importance, the Tangi te Kawekaweā study sought to identify and examine barriers and facilitators of whānau engagement in KM-EYP. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individual whānau members ( $n = 19$ ) and whānau groups ( $n = 5$ ) enrolled in one centre for KM-EYP, and with expert informants ( $n = 10$ ). This paper reports on the insights gained. Inductive thematic analysis identified barriers to engagement (e.g., historical trauma, whakamā, whānau disconnection) and facilitators of engagement (e.g., critical awareness, emotional and practical support, whānauranga). These findings have the potential to inform policy and practice to enhance whānau Māori engagement in the learning and development opportunities offered by KM-EYP and the early years sector more broadly.

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## Keywords

Kaupapa Māori, early years, whānau development, engagement, barriers, facilitators

### Introduction

High-quality early childhood education helps to ensure children have the optimal start to life, leading to social and economic benefits throughout the life course (ECE Taskforce, 2010; Elango et al., 2015). Kaupapa Māori early years provision (KM-EYP) is a model of early childhood education that is located within a Māori worldview, where Māori knowledge, values, practices and aspirations are paramount, and Māori language is the mode of communication. The foremost example of KM-EYP is Te Kōhanga Reo, a national initiative for mokopuna and their whānau with the stated aim to strengthen Māori language and philosophies through participation in the Kaupapa Māori immersion centres and in the kōhanga reo movement (see Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust, n.d.). Other centres of KM-EYP operate independently as stand-alone entities. While promoting positive tamariki and whānau outcomes (Education Review Office, 2017), KM-EYP has a broad focus on the revitalisation of Māori language and culture, and the improved health and wellbeing of Māori communities (Tamati et al., 2008; Waitangi Tribunal, 2013).

Currently, only 19.4% of Māori preschoolers are enrolled in KM-EYP (Ministry of Education, 2020), which suggests at least 80% miss out on the benefits of involvement, including early access to the Kaupapa-Māori/Māori-medium education pathway. The authors believe more can be learned about whānau participation in KM-EYP and the factors that obstruct or facilitate engagement. Rather than make deficit assumptions about Māori participation, this paper reports on a study that sought the perspectives of whānau members from one site of KM-EYP, each of whom had participated in the centre at some point over its 25 years of operation.

### Background

#### *Kaupapa Māori early years provision*

Kaupapa Māori Early Years Provision is an inclusive term utilised by the authors to describe early education initiatives that locate themselves philosophically and politically within an ao Māori worldview. This Kaupapa Māori orientation (Royal Tangaere, 2012; G. H. Smith, 1997) underpins the provision, framing the curriculum, pedagogy, organisational structure and processes of each site. The model is informed by the past yet future-focused on the intergenerational wellbeing

of whānau and community. It is an optimal learning environment for tamariki and their whānau (Education Review Office, 2017).

Graham Smith (1997) identified six intervention principles that are integral to the Kaupapa Māori paradigm, and inherent in KM-EYP. These are Tino Rangatiratanga—the self-determination principle; taonga tuku iho—the cultural aspirations principle; ako Māori—the culturally preferred pedagogy principle; kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kāinga—the socio-economic mediation principle; whānau—the extended family structure principle; and kaupapa—the collective philosophy principle. Whānau is at once a unit of association and belonging, a value, a practice, an attitude and a worldview. Within the whānau collectives of KM-EYP, identity, language and cultural confidence are fostered. The cultural framework of whānau (Durie, 1997; G. H. Smith, 1997) has the potential to be a powerful intervention in the pernicious impacts of colonisation on the lives of Māori.

KM-EYP adheres to Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa*, which was first published in 1996 having been developed with input from the Kōhanga Reo National Trust. Consequently, the curriculum framework drew on the traditional Māori concepts that were woven into the philosophy of kōhanga reo (Ministry of Education, 2017). When *Te Whāriki* was reviewed in 2017 to better reflect changes in the early years sector, the input of the trust continued, producing *Te Whāriki a te Kōhanga Reo*, which expands on the ao Māori themes of the first edition for use in kōhanga reo with “guidance for kaiako to support implementation” (Ministry of Education, 2017). A revised version of the framework was produced for the general early childhood sector to more broadly support the learning and development of children of all cultures and contexts. Each version of *Te Whāriki* clearly describes the integral role of family and community in early education provision, explicitly linking children's learning and development to parent, whānau and community participation.

In addition to the kōhanga reo movement, which is credited in large measure with the success of Māori efforts to revitalise Māori language and culture and rebuild Māori communities, KM-EYP includes Māori immersion centres that are chartered to, and directly funded by, the Ministry of

Education (2019a) but operate in accord with the Kaupapa Māori philosophy, principles and objectives outlined above. One such centre is Te Kōpae Piripono, in Taranaki. The centre was established in 1994 by members of the local community as a key part of a strategy to reverse the negative impacts of colonisation on the Taranaki Māori community. In particular, the muru rau-patu (government legislated land confiscations and aggressions; Waitangi Tribunal, 1996) had caused widespread suffering and loss for Taranaki whānau, hapū and iwi (see Hond, 2013).

The primary objectives of those who founded Te Kōpae Piripono were the reclamation and revitalisation of Taranaki reo and tikanga leading to cultural, social, political and economic restoration of whānau and community (Tamati et al., 2008). The centre was established so that local tamariki and their whānau had a place where they could safely be Māori, nurtured in an immersive Māori (Taranaki) early years and whānau setting providing a foundation for successful engagement as Māori in the local community and in society. The provision is guided by kaupapa Māori principles and the teachings of Taranaki tūpuna (Tamati et al., in press), and includes both the children's programme and a parents'/whānau programme of wānanga and learning opportunities. As a Taranaki-based example of KM-EYP, Te Kōpae Piripono was the site of the Tangi te Kawekawēā study.

#### ***Family engagement in early childhood education***

Mounting international evidence supports the benefits for children of family engagement in early childhood education. Halgunseth and colleagues (2009) are among those who suggest that the most favourable outcomes for children are achieved when early childhood centres work in partnership with families. Meaningful connections between home and centre have been shown to enhance children's cognitive and social development as well as positive self-image (Hedges & Lee, 2010). Family engagement in children's learning environments has been found to be one of the strongest predictors of children's school success (Weiss et al., 2009). In Aotearoa, Bevan-Brown (2003) demonstrated that whānau and community engagement in children's learning positively influences tamariki aspirations and expectations.

Beyond the benefits for children of family engagement in early childhood education, positive outcomes for parents and families have also been demonstrated (Duncan et al., 2012; Munford et al.,

2007). Mitchell and colleagues (2006) suggest that collaborations between early childhood centres and parent/family/community that are genuinely inclusive, and empowering, are the environments most likely to attract parents, thereby providing access to learning and development pathways for both children and families. Outcomes for parents might include strengthened literacy, greater engagement in their education and work environments (see Ministry of Education, 2006) and increased parenting confidence (Duncan et al., 2012). Clarkin-Phillips and Carr (2009) proposed that the provision by early childhood centres of parent support and development initiatives facilitated higher levels of parent and whānau engagement, with the potential to positively influence Māori children's lifelong learning dispositions.

#### ***Whānau engagement in Kaupapa Māori early years provision***

The Māori medium education path, with KM-EYP at its outset, has been shown to provide an optimal learning environment for tamariki Māori, achieving better outcomes than do English medium settings (Education Review Office, New Zealand Qualifications Authority, Ministry of Education, & New Zealand Teachers Council, 2010; Ministry of Education, 2013; Pihama et al., 2004). As previously stated, there is the potential for the parents and whānau of enrolled tamariki to also derive great benefit through involvement in the Kaupapa Māori and whānau-centred approach of these initiatives (Cooper et al., 2004; Ratima et al., 2012; Waitangi Tribunal, 2013).

Despite the evidence for the merits of Māori medium education, an overwhelming majority of tamariki Māori are enrolled in the general English medium stream. Until a critical mass is achieved of participation in KM-EYP, as the access point to the Māori medium pathway, the outcome potential of Kaupapa Māori education for whānau and community cannot be realised. The reasons for non-participation are likely to include the well-documented (Ministry of Education, 2012; Ratima et al., 2012) issues of availability and access, perceptions of quality, awareness, resourcing and parental experience of education. Even when tamariki are enrolled, those issues may persist to hinder parental and whānau engagement in the activities and operation of centres (Tamati et al., 2008). Goodall and Montgomery (2014) found that the benefit to families in early childhood programmes is commensurate with the degree and nature of parents' engagement in the programme and in their children's learning.

At Te Kōpae Piripono in Taranaki, each whānau has been affected to some degree by the tragedy that is Taranaki's historical backdrop of colonisation, of muru raupatu, and the ongoing negative consequences for the community (Hond, 2013; Waitangi Tribunal, 1996). The sustained impact on Taranaki Māori contributes to a day-to-day struggle for survival, which whānau may prioritise over decisions about participation in early years provision, Kaupapa Māori or otherwise (Hond, 2013; Ratima et al., 2012).

This paper reports on research that sought to learn more about the barriers and facilitators of whānau engagement in KM-EYP, from parents and whānau themselves. The qualitative phase of the Tangi te Kawekaweā study was a retrospective exploration of whānau engagement in Te Kōpae Piripono, as an example of KM-EYP. With an annual roll of approximately 25 preschoolers, most of whom are enrolled for five years, more than 200 tamariki and their whānau have attended Te Kōpae Piripono since its inception in 1994, providing a rich source of data.

The Tangi te Kawekaweā study sits within a wider research programme, Te Kura Mai i Tawhiti, which is being conducted as a partnership between the Māori community organisation Te Pou Tiringa (the parent body of Te Kōpae Piripono) and the University of Otago's National Centre for Lifecourse Research (see Ratima et al., 2019). The analysis presented herein addresses the research question: What are the barriers and facilitators of whānau engagement in KM-EYP?

## Methods

This study was undertaken from a Māori-community-derived interface approach that drew on the strengths of both mātauranga Māori and Western science paradigms (Ratima et al., 2019). Such an interface approach acknowledges that two knowledge systems are equally credible and relevant in disciplined inquiry (Durie, 2004; Edwards, 2010). In the context of KM-EYP, a Māori community-based researcher conducted the research within a Māori worldview, employing a qualitative methodology and processes that align with Kaupapa Māori research practices (Bishop, 2005; L. T. Smith, 1999/2012).

In 2016, the lead researcher (the first author) interviewed 19 former and current Te Kōpae Piripono parents and 10 other expert informants and held five wānanga (focused discussions), one with each of five former or current Te Kōpae Piripono whānau (parents/families). A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure

participants were those most able to provide data of relevance to the research (Patton, 2015). The transcripts of individual interviews and wānanga discussions formed the data set, to which an inductive process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was applied, informed by theoretical perspectives on KM-EYP and whānau engagement developed in earlier research (Tamati et al., 2008). The University of Otago Human Ethics Committee approved the study (reference number 13/224).

Appropriate consents were gained from participants. All interviews and wānanga were audio-recorded. Seven interviews took place in person, 10 by video-conference and one by telephone; four wānanga took place in person and one by video-conference; seven expert informant interviews took place in person and three by video-conference.

Of the Kōpae Piripono participants, six of the former parents continued to be involved in the centre in management or governance roles, and of those, two were also grandparents of current pupils. A further three former parents were grandparents of current pupils, two former parents and one former pupil were current kaitiaki, and a second former pupil was a current parent. The external expert informants were selected for their in-depth knowledge relevant to this research: five were Māori early education specialists (one from Taranaki, four from other regions and one a former Te Kōpae Piripono director), four were Taranaki Māori community leaders and experts in local history (one was a former Kōpae Piripono parent) and one was a historical trauma researcher.

A semi-structured interview schedule guided data collection. Parents were asked to share their experience of engagement in the Kōpae Piripono whānau collective; circumstances before, during and since enrolment; the supports and barriers they encountered regarding engagement in the centre; and the impact of involvement on the lives of their whānau members. External expert participants were interviewed on their areas of expertise in relation to the research questions about KM-EYP.

Thematic analysis of the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006) involved six phases: familiarisation with data, generation and refinement of codes, collation of codes to develop preliminary themes, thematic mapping and refinement, definition and naming of themes, and reporting patterns of meaning for the data set. Quotes are presented in the following results section to support the identified themes.

## Results

The inductive thematic analysis led to the development of the following six high-level themes that can be understood as engagement factors: (a) colonisation impacts, (b) emotional responses, (c) whānau connection, (d) institutional features, (e) cultural identity and (f) socio-economic position. In combination, the themes are expansive, aligning with Māori holistic concepts of health (Durie, 1994) and Western socio-ecological models of human behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The themes reflect the multiple levels and wide-ranging factors that influence whānau engagement in KM-EYP. The high-level themes are used in this section to structure presentation of the research results.

### *Theme 1: Colonisation impacts*

The historical context of engagement in KM-EYP was highlighted by participants recognising the damaging impacts of colonisation and, in particular, the muru raupatu on the Taranaki Māori community. They spoke of historical trauma (Pihama et al., 2014), and of their resentment and grief at the losses their whānau, hapū and iwi had suffered. They articulated how the processes of colonisation dismantled the fabric of their communities and interrupted the transmission of Māori language and cultural knowledge. The loss was felt deeply by participants. The ongoing impacts of colonisation were considered a determinant of Māori educational disengagement:

Colonisation has a huge impact because of what it does to remove the cultural and economic norms of [Māori] society in those times. ... The biggest thing is the loss of land. The loss of ability to connect with each other ... their parents and their grandparents were forced to go to schools where their Māoriness was actively negated and opposed and belittled by the education system, which then drove a lack of engagement within it. (R30—father of former pupil, expert informant)

Participants described how communities became increasingly marginalised as traditional structures and processes were dismantled, leading to the reduced capacity of whānau to participate in te ao Māori, in broader society and therefore in KM-EYP:

[Māori became] disempowered, no cultural connection, no reo ... the current lifestyle ... the smoking, the drinking, all of that stuff is all the effect of colonisation. ... The lack of education as

well and so if you're not educated, how could you possibly know that the best place for your children is in [early childhood education]? (R18—mother of former pupil)

With increased awareness of their local historical context and of the example and teachings of ancestors, parents were motivated and mobilised to work to counter the impact on their whānau. One response was to engage fully in KM-EYP, which they viewed as the vehicle for their tamariki and whānau to grow and flourish as Māori, thereby becoming able to contribute to the reclamation and revitalisation of that which was lost.

### *Theme 2: Emotional responses*

Participants spoke of the positive emotions they felt on discovering and then entering the centre. However, fear and anxiety were also commonly experienced by whānau entering the unfamiliar Māori immersion setting:

That's a big jump to go into Te Kōpae ... where everyone's learning te reo, even the babies have got te reo, and I don't know how to behave there. ... A lot of our people feel inferior. ... When I was 32, I wouldn't [have gone] to Te Kōpae because I'd be bloody terrified. (R27—expert informant)

Whānau participants also spoke of their whakamā, of feeling inadequate or embarrassed about their personal circumstances or life experiences, all of which affected engagement. Participants recalled negative experiences (e.g., low teacher expectation) in mainstream education. This meant involvement in any form of education was difficult for some. Others reported, however, that they had been highly motivated to ensure that their tamariki did not have a similar experience:

We were this whole generation of kids who—it's almost an embarrassment—that we look Māori, but we can't really function in Māori events. ... And that's what I'd hoped for our girls, that they wouldn't ever experience that discomfort and humiliation. (R10—mother of former pupil)

### *Theme 3: Whānau connection*

The level of support provided by one's wider whānau was described as a critical factor influencing engagement in the Kaupapa Māori environment. The attitudes and opinions of participants' own whānau members were highly influential in their decisions to enquire and then join the Kōpae Piripono whānau collective. Furthermore, the

ongoing support of whānau was for some a key determinant of sustained engagement, particularly when those whānau members too were engaged in the programme:

It was Mum who entered us and ... supported us to stay there. Any time [it] got a bit tough and I thought I can't afford it, or, I can't do this, she would say, "You ... go and talk to [kaitiaki], if you need a real big hand we'll help you". I think having someone behind us pushing ... was very helpful. (R2—mother of former pupil)

Conversely, the absence of whānau support was keenly felt by some parents:

I was the only person outside of Te Kōpae who was speaking te reo to [son], and mine was limited. So, we ended up leaving because he was struggling ... I myself didn't really have much [whānau] support, and I was struggling with my journey as well. (R5—mother of former pupil)

The support provided by the Kōpae Piripono whānau collective facilitated engagement. Participants talked of the values of manaakitanga and whanaungatanga they experienced, the sense of whānau and community that bound the collective, and the positive impact that it had on their lives:

Our confidence grew [and we became] comfortable in our identity as proud Māori ... and the manaakitanga, the tikanga, the whakawhanaungatanga, we got all of that. Having no family here in Taranaki we made our whānau in Kōpae and then it just started getting bigger and bigger. So, the Kōpae has had a huge positive impact on our lives and our kids' lives, and our parents and our extended families because we've continued the pathways. (R13—mother of former pupil)

Whānau participants recalled how fortunate they felt to have found and then to have been welcomed into the Kaupapa Māori early years whānau collective:

We had a set of circumstances that [enabled us] to invest in Te Kōpae Piripono along with others ... it became a whānau kaupapa, not just the immediate whānau but the wider whānau, and that kaupapa, that feeling, stays intact right through to this day. (R9—father of former pupil)

#### **Theme 4: Institutional features**

This theme relates to the specific features of the centre of KM-EYP as an institution. Participants indicated that Te Kōpae Piripono staunchly adhered to its kaupapa, requiring some whānau to make significant changes to their lifestyle and worldview. While some whānau were unable to do so, participants talked about the importance of adherence to kaupapa, and maintenance of programme quality, which most often referred to Māori aspects of the provision: language—dialect, standard and consistency of use; tikanga-based practice; and whānau-centred approach. They also spoke of the skill, professionalism and kindheartedness of the kaitiaki and other whānau members, which was reassuring and inspired confidence that they could meet the centre's expectations. Caring and courageous conversations led by kaitiaki were described that were solution focused and supportive of whānau outcomes:

One of the major things for me was being really clear with whānau, who wanted to be a part of the Kōpae, what that commitment meant ... there was an expectation that we would provide quality reo, quality early childhood education and whatever else, for their child, but there was an expectation that they would also be giving something. (R25—expert informant, former kaitiaki)

Participants endorsed the centre's whānau development approach that provided opportunities for learning and growth (e.g., wānanga on topics such as parenting, decolonisation, and reo and tikanga Māori), facilitated whānau engagement and gave vital support to parents and whānau. Wānanga on key topics had the potential to transform lives:

Te Kōpae Piripono is fabulous, but it's not the [whole] answer. ... It's part of the solution—given where our people are at ... part of it is the critical awareness, decolonisation, whatever you want to call it, to get people into the headspace where they can see that it is a door worth opening. (R31.1—mother of current pupil)

Whānau participants spoke of the benefit they derived from observing the social interactions of kaitiaki and others at the centre. It helped them parent better and supported their engagement alongside their tamariki in the programme. Participants also spoke about the positive impact that engagement had on their home life and their functioning as whānau:

Our family learnt how to be a bit stronger and work together ... just being able to be a part of [the centre] made us feel that we were ... better people ... that we were more important because we were doing stuff like that for our kids and with our kids. (R2—mother of former pupil)

### **Theme 5: Cultural identity**

A principal driver of whānau engagement was the aim to secure for their tamariki an intact local Māori identity with proficiency in te reo Māori. Study participants spoke about their belief that the centre would provide access to Māori knowledge and experiences of which they had hitherto been deprived, and which had been problematic for them. Some talked about those who found it easier to deny the relevance of things Māori, avoiding Māori contexts where they might experience uncomfortable emotions; however, they also talked about how engagement in KM-EYP reoriented them to te ao Māori and boosted their confidence as Māori parents and role models for their whānau:

I was pretty embarrassed ... with my level of understanding ... initially, because I didn't really know anything, and I thought ... that I should know something ... I'm a Māori, you know! Being involved with Te Kōpae and the reo and tikanga, and all that that entails, made me ... get real with myself. (R1—father of former pupil)

Many parents described struggling to maintain the use of te reo Māori in the home because of their isolation and low fluency levels. Ways were sought to support their efforts by organising social events and play dates with other Māori language speakers and seeking out reo-related wānanga opportunities. Parental engagement in the centre programme was recognised as necessary to increase reo proficiency and understanding of tikanga in a real-world setting supported by kaitiaki and other Kōpae Piripono whānau members:

There was an expectation that both parents [come] in to spend time with their child ... or contribute some mahi in the Kōpae. ... I think that is important, because what [kaitiaki] are doing is modelling developing language, [they're] modelling how you have conversations with kids, a whole lot of things. (R25—expert informant, former kaitiaki)

Participants recalled their joy in finding an early years centre that was culturally relevant and linguistically enriching for their tamariki and whānau.

The quality Kaupapa Māori programming, they said, had positively affected whānau identity and functioning, and facilitated engagement:

I really enjoyed ... the absolute sense of validation of our lives, that here was an organisation and learning environment where [son's] Taranakitanga and his whanaungatanga, and his whakapapa, all meant something. ... His sense of identity was nurtured [so] he'd have that grounding and understanding of who he was. ... And that flowed on for us as well, as a whānau. (R8—mother of former pupil)

While participants spoke of the attraction of the cultural offering at Te Kōpae Piripono, that was not the case for all. The centre's Māori immersion environment and requirement for parental and whānau engagement challenged some parents:

Some families are stayers, and some just run for the hills ... the reo is a barrier at first but if it's really what you want, if it is your hiahia rawa then if you stick to it ... the path does become easier, but you can't just think that Kōpae is going to do it for you. (R13—mother of former pupil)

Expert informants echoed the parent comments about the importance of te reo Māori within the Kaupapa Māori approach and the positive impact that the environment can have on whānau. They acknowledged the variety of ways whānau might respond on entry to KM-EYP because of previous life experience and levels of exposure to Māori language and culture:

Many of these whānau are going to be coming in without te reo. ... [The expectation has been] that you are brown ... you should be able to speak the Māori language, but as we know in most cases, that isn't the case. So, it can actually cause paranoia ... and the ECE has to reach out, draw on their expertise of manifesting manaakitanga. (R23—expert informant)

### **Theme 6: Socio-economic position**

The constraints of low socio-economic status restrict whānau choices and limit the capacity of whānau to cope with domestic issues as they arise. Participants' comments suggest that when whānau are preoccupied with coping with the daily demands of living and survival, the education of their tamariki is less likely to be a priority:

There are lots of challenges for these families: no

car, no interest, wet and cold weather, no money, no energy, no support, more than one preschooler, no pushchair, no adequate housing, solo parenting, no security. ... In these circumstances, ECE becomes a very low priority or often is not even on the radar. (R29—expert informant)

Some participants spoke about the personal sacrifices they made for their tamariki to attend the centre and others mentioned the challenges of grappling with fees, transport and other demands:

The main challenge for us was getting there ... [husband] would drop us in the morning and we'd catch the bus into town, and then we'd catch another bus ... and then I'd walk basically. Once we had finished, [we'd walk back to] catch the bus home to [community], then walk from [community] to our house. (R6—mother of former pupil)

Participant comments indicated that the severity of the challenges faced by marginalised whānau, without intervention, ensures they are disengaged from services, including any early years provision:

Their focus is on one thing only, and that is survival; there is nothing else in their minds. They can't get to thinking about anything else apart from, they are one payment away from crisis. They live on the edge of crisis, and when they are in that mode, they cannot think about cultural strengthening. It is too far away. (R22—expert informant)

## Discussion

Whānau engagement in KM-EYP can promote positive health and wellbeing outcomes for tamariki and substantial benefits for whānau and community (Education Review Office, 2017; Tamati et al., 2008; Waitangi Tribunal, 2013). The Tangi te Kawekaweā study sought to gain a better understanding of Māori engagement in KM-EYP by listening to the voices of whānau and other expert informants. Six engagement factors were identified that cover wide-ranging areas—colonisation impacts, emotional responses, whānau connection, institutional features, cultural identity and socio-economic position (summarised in Table 1). These factors help us to think about what influences whānau engagement and how we address barriers and reinforce facilitators. For each of the engagement factors, an aligned barrier and facilitator is identified, demonstrating how factors can act as barriers to engagement for some parents and whānau, yet act as facilitators for others. Furthermore, while a given factor might at first be

a barrier for whānau at the point of entry, it can eventually become a facilitator for that whānau and encourage further engagement. Whether facilitators triumph over barriers sufficiently to enable parents/caregivers to enrol their tamariki and then engage in the provision is contingent on how effectively the centres can attract, connect with, support and inspire each whānau.

### *Colonisation impacts*

The historical context of Te Kōpae Piripono is a painful backdrop for participants, who are confronted daily by reminders of the historical injustices that are perpetuated in their community (Hond, 2013). The muru raupatu in Taranaki and throughout Aotearoa has been a significant contributor to the social, cultural and economic impoverishment of many whānau (Hond, 2013). Historical trauma has framed the lives of descendants, including our participants, many of whom have felt inadequate and dissociated in both the Pākehā world and te ao Māori. The colonisation experience is the prevailing barrier to engagement in KM-EYP.

It is perhaps for the whānau most severely affected by colonisation that KM-EYP can have the most significant benefit. Within the culturally congruent and purpose-driven whānau collective of Te Kōpae Piripono, participants were able to envisage a different reality and find support to achieve it for their tamariki and whānau. Through the centre activities and community involvements, participants learned about the historical antecedents of current circumstances, thereby gaining critical understandings to help them make sense of their lives and reorient themselves to the future with a Māori worldview. Bennett and Liu (2018) found that awareness of how history affects people's lives provides explanations that can bring into perspective possible next steps. At Te Kōpae Piripono, it is believed such critical awareness of historical impacts can facilitate engagement, helping whānau appreciate the importance of their role as the link between generations past (their tūpuna) and future (their mokopuna), and as change agents for a better future (Tamati et al., 2008).

### *Emotional responses*

Given the legacy of colonisation for Māori, it is not surprising that parents and whānau can arrive at centres of KM-EYP feeling inadequate. Emotional responses such as whakamā, anxiety and fear may be experienced, particularly when people have had limited exposure to Māori language and culture, but have felt the weight of



TABLE 1 Barriers and facilitators of whānau engagement in KM-EYP

Engagement factors	Barriers	Facilitators
1. <i>Colonisation impacts</i>	Pernicious effects of colonisation, including historical trauma	Raising critical awareness of the historical context
2. <i>Emotional responses</i>	Whakamā—emotional responses including anxiety, embarrassment and shame	Centre provides emotional and practical support that reassures and inspires confidence
3. <i>Whānau connection</i>	Whānau disconnection and limited social supports	Fostering whānauranga—feeling and acting as a member of a whānau/community
4. <i>Institutional features</i>	Centre expectation of engagement and commitment to kaupapa	Quality programming in an inclusive Kaupapa Māori environment
5. <i>Cultural identity</i>	Limited exposure to Māori language and culture	Cultural offering supports the development of a secure local Māori identity
6. <i>Socio-economic position</i>	Social and material disadvantage	Centre responds to the needs of whānau, enabling engagement

others' expectations of them. Perhaps, as we heard in the study, there is regret about aspects of their personal circumstances. A high level of anxiety can be associated with unhappy childhood memories of schooling, which can also inhibit involvement in their children's learning (Ratima et al., 2012). Without support, these emotional responses can act as internal barriers to engagement in KM-EYP and in the community more generally.

In some cases, the conduit to entry for participants, despite their anxiety, was within-community wānanga opportunities that provided access to local Māori narratives, language and culture, and critical thinking about issues affecting their whānau. On arrival, they said, the warm embrace and support of the whānau collective, the Māori environment, the children's learning programme and the potential for their own growth and development captured their interest and reassured them that KM-EYP was right for their tamariki and whānau. Our findings suggest that a whānau development approach to provision supports parents and whānau, alongside the tamariki, to build confidence and capacity in te ao Māori, and to foster skills for effective parenting, conflict resolution and constructive communication. The approach can support whānau who need help to manage challenges in their day-to-day lives.

#### **Whānau connection**

The practical and emotional support that parents receive from their wider whānau and friends can be pivotal to successful engagement in KM-EYP. It can provide a protective layer that reassures in times of uncertainty or hardship. Without such support, parents may struggle to meet the

commitment to Māori language expected of them or to manage the logistical challenges of involvement. For some whānau, engagement in KM-EYP is an act of courage, particularly if at odds with their family and friends' preferences. The centre's whānau collective is an additional source of support, care and connection for parents and whānau. KM-EYP is sometimes an individual's first opportunity to experience the sense of belonging to whānau (termed *whānauranga* at Te Kōpae Piripono; Ratima et al., 2019; Tamati et al., in press) and of feeling validated and valued as a whānau member. At Te Kōpae Piripono, it is believed that whānauranga is central to a secure local Māori identity and the notion of wellbeing from a Māori perspective. The early years sector is encouraged to adopt a whānau-centred approach, such as that of KM-EYP. There is now a range of professional development providers that can help teachers develop the cultural competencies to better provide for tamariki and whānau who come into their care.

#### **Institutional features**

So successful has been the colonisation of Aotearoa that a little over one in six Māori adults say they can speak their Indigenous language fairly well or better (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2020), and the majority of Māori have limited access to their own culture. In that context, centres such as Te Kōpae Piripono must staunchly defend their cultural and linguistic boundaries and the quality (e.g., the standard and consistency of the Māori immersive environment, and the programme planning and delivery that promotes tamariki and whānau development) of their provision. There

can therefore be a perception of KM-EYP as culturally inaccessible, which can serve as a further barrier to whānau.

A key aspect of quality in KM-EYP is that of the bridge that centres provide to whānau giving access and demonstrating whaiwāhitanga. Better promotion of each centre, including heightened visibility in the community, can raise awareness of KM-EYP so it becomes an option for more whānau. A planned approach to community outreach can help parents and whānau feel welcome and supported to transition into KM-EYP and become engaged. It is vital that new whānau enjoy a facilitated entry and induction process, so they are well informed and supported to engage successfully (Tamati et al., 2008).

At Te Kōpae Piripono, deliberate engagement strategies (including the provision of tuakana/buddy and whānau support, wānanga and regular hui with tumu, kaitiaki and the whānau collective) help whānau settle in, and experience Māori values, such as manaakitanga and whanaungatanga, in practice. Intentional processes that support centre engagement with parents and whānau enable centres to be responsive to the needs of each whānau.

Kaitiaki mediate whānau entry and facilitate their engagement in the programme. Kaitiaki are of the local Māori community and have a unique set of skills that emanates from their Māori worldview, varied life experience and professional expertise. They understand the circumstances of whānau and can empathise with the challenges they face, providing both emotional and practical support. They are mindful of the direct impact their practice has on children's learning and the outcomes whānau derive from engagement.

KM-EYP, such as Te Kōpae Piripono, are modern-day constructions of whānau, where members are connected by Kaupapa Māori or cause, not necessarily by whakapapa (Lawson-Te Aho, 2010; G. H. Smith, 1997). Whānau participants in this study maintained that their participation was driven by the desire to belong to the Kōpae Piripono whānau. For some, participation was a personal act of resistance aimed at reclaiming cultural heritage, Māori identity and a sense of place for themselves and their tamariki.

### **Cultural identity**

While cultural alienation was a significant barrier for some participants, others spoke of the same becoming a driver of engagement. They aspired for their tamariki and whānau to develop a secure local Māori identity, becoming proficient

in their heritage language and holders of cultural knowledge, to which they, in their time, had limited access. This outcome was considered key to whānau wellbeing, aligning with the work of Cram (2014), which highlighted the association between cultural identity, sense of place and wellbeing. Participants described the positive impacts of engagement in this real-world Kaupapa Māori community for themselves and their whānau, including greater facility with and use of te reo Māori, and higher comfort and confidence levels in ao Māori settings, and in their roles as parents or caregivers. They spoke of their responsibility for those outcomes.

Participants described wanting the best for their tamariki. Engagement in the centre often occurred once they were assured of the quality of the cultural offering (reo and tikanga Māori) and the learning programme for tamariki. The relationship between quality of provision and whānau engagement aligns with the work of Ratima et al. (2012), which found that programme quality was a critical factor in parental decisions on whether to enrol their tamariki in Māori-medium education.

### **Socio-economic position**

There is overwhelming evidence of socio-economic disadvantage as a barrier to parental engagement (ECE Taskforce, 2010). Wide and enduring inequities between Māori and non-Māori across the range of socio-economic indicators are well documented (Ministry of Social Development, 2016). Study participants spoke of their experience of hardship due to low income, which posed a practical barrier to engagement in KM-EYP—the very engagement that can promote positive whānau outcomes.

KM-EYP strives to accommodate the needs of whānau who wish to engage but have limited means to do so (Tamati et al., 2008). Whānau development programming and the social, emotional and practical support available to parents and caregivers within centres can facilitate engagement and create pathways to wellbeing. Government policy must recognise the importance of these additional functions of KM-EYP and all centres that work with whānau in similar ways, to ensure that the sector is adequately resourced to provide this level of support. Furthermore, government action is required to address the structural inequities that underpin whānau disengagement.

### **Strengths and limitations**

There are a range of strengths and limitations in the present study. Qualitative research does not

seek results that are statistically generalisable; rather, it aims to understand the investigated phenomenon in depth and detail (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). This is what we have attempted to achieve; however, because all whānau participants were from one centre of KM-EYP, albeit participants from 25 years of operation, the findings cannot be necessarily generalised to all other settings. The ongoing Tangi te Kawekaweā study and broader Te Kura Mai i Tawhiti research programme will include subsequent quantitative phases that are informed by, and complementary to, the current study. The retrospective nature of the research introduces limitations related to participant recall, but it is a strength that participants were able to share their lived experience of KM-EYP. The lead researcher is a foundation member of the KM-EYP whānau collective, and this raises the issue of insider status, which may have led to shared assumptions during the interviews and analysis. However, having a trusted researcher is required within Kaupapa Māori Research (L. T. Smith, 1999/2012) and enabled excellent participant engagement in the study. The analysis was conducted with input from all co-authors.

### Conclusion and implications

The Kaupapa-Māori/Māori-medium education pipeline is a successful pathway for tamariki Māori with the potential to lead them and their whānau to positive lifelong outcomes. The path begins in early life when whānau step into centres of KM-EYP. Currently, only one in five tamariki Māori is enrolled in KM-EYP. This statistic should concern those who strive to restore Māori communities to social, cultural and economic strength, contingent on the improved health and wellbeing of tamariki and whānau. There may well be more than one pathway to wellness, but unless whānau Māori are encouraged in more significant numbers to enrol their tamariki in KM-EYP (and then sustain engagement through Kaupapa Māori schooling and beyond), the transformative potential of the Kaupapa Māori approach to education for the Māori community and the country is substantially reduced.

This study sought to learn more about the reasons for the current low uptake of KM-EYP (barriers) and the mechanisms by which access can be enhanced and engagement sustained (facilitators), by drawing on the lived experience of whānau members from one KM-EYP in Taranaki, and other Māori expert informants. Six inductive themes were developed that can be understood as engagement factors (colonisation

impacts, emotional responses, whānau connection, institutional features, cultural identity and socio-economic position) experienced differently by whānau, and variously as both barriers and facilitators that are fluid and malleable. Early years providers exert significant influence on whether whānau are enabled to participate in their programmes.

Collectively, the facilitating aspects of the factors characterise what constitutes quality KM-EYP from a whānau perspective, including the provision of a safe and nurturing whānau environment and maintenance of high standards of reo and tikanga Māori, with skilled delivery of a culturally relevant curriculum. There are takeaways in that finding for the early years sector to help enhance practice and provision for whānau Māori.

These findings support the outcome potential of KM-EYP for whānau and argue for government policy that improves the social and economic context of the provision so it can be even more successful. Future planned research will help determine whether exposure to KM-EYP has a lasting beneficial impact on the lives of whānau, including participation in te ao Māori and broader outcomes across the life course.

### Glossary

ako Māori	the culturally preferred pedagogy principle
ao Māori	Māori world
hapū	kinship grouping
hiahia rawa	passion
hui	meeting
iwi	tribe, nation
kaiako/kaitiaki	teacher
kaupapa	philosophy; purpose; the collective philosophy principle
Kaupapa Māori	Māori paradigm; based within a Māori worldview
kia piki ake i ngā rarururu o te kāinga	the socio-economic mediation principle
kōhanga reo	variety of KM-EYP governed by Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust (language nest)
mahi	work
manaakitanga	hospitality, kindness, generosity, support
Māori	Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand
mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge

mokopuna	grandchildren, children	whaiwāhitanga	inclusiveness
muru raupatu	state-sanctioned confiscation of Māori land	whakamā	embarrassment, shame
Pākehā	non-Māori, predominantly referring to European	whakapapa	genealogical connection/s
reo	language	whakawhanaungatanga	to build relationships
reo Māori	Māori language	whānau	family; group of people bound by genealogy or shared interest; the extended family structure principle
tamariki	children	whanaungatanga	relationships, connection
Tangi te Kawekaweā	study title (the call of the kawekaweā [long-tailed cuckoo] heralds spring and the opportunity for growth)	whānauranga	a Te Kōpae Piripono word for feeling and acting as a member of a whānau/ community
taonga tuku iho	the cultural aspirations principle		
Taranaki	a tribal nation and region of Aotearoa New Zealand		
Taranakitanga	of Taranaki, or having a tribal affiliation to Taranaki		
te ao Māori	the Māori world		
Te Kōhanga Reo	kōhanga reo movement governed by Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust		
Te Kōpae Piripono	Taranaki-based centre for KM-EYP		
Te Kura mai i Tawhiti	title of research programme (sacred legacy of an ancient era)		
Te Pou Tiringa	governing body of Te Kōpae Piripono (the pillar of support)		
Te Whāriki a te Kōhanga Reo	The Kōhanga Reo version of Te Whāriki (early childhood curriculum of Aotearoa New Zealand)		
Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa	Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum		
tikanga	culture; conventions; protocols grounded in traditional values		
Tino Rangatiratanga	the self-determination principle		
tuakana	older/senior/experienced sibling/peer		
tumu	director		
tūpuna	ancestors		
wānanga	knowledge/learning; forum for sharing knowledge/ learning		

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