

TAIAO AND MAURI ORA

Māori understandings of the environment and its connection to wellbeing

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Abstract

This article draws on research undertaken for the study *Kaitiakitanga: Māori Experiences, Expressions, and Understandings* (Beverland, 2022). Four main themes were identified: Whānau, Taiao, Taonga Tuku Iho and Tino Rangatiratanga. The research was undertaken through a Kaupapa Māori methodology that carried an obligation to apply Māori ways of knowing and being across all areas of the study. This article draws upon one component from the larger study that concerned taiao and mauri ora. Kaikōrero discussed how being on land, by their respective waterways or being able to access their own cultural resource brought them mauri ora such as balance, cultural connection and wellness. The article begins by outlining how Māori discuss and understand our relationship to taiao, which includes our whakapapa relationships. Taiao and mauri ora are then discussed and defined. Finally, the methodology, methods, findings and discussions related to taiao and mauri ora are presented.

Keywords

environment, kaitiakitanga, land-based healing, Māori health and wellbeing, mauri ora, taiao

Introduction

Kawharu (1998), in her seminal work on kaitiakitanga, discussed it as a relatively recent word, brought into being during the development and consultations around the Resource Management Act 1991. Since that time, kaitiakitanga has become an accepted and widely used term to discuss Māori responsibilities and obligations concerning land, water, wāhi tapu and treasures of consequence, or taonga. It is considered an environmental and sustainability ethic employed by Māori to protect and care for all parts of our earth and universe (Forster, 2012, 2019; Henwood & Henwood, 2011; Kawharu, 2002; Mataamua & Temara, 2010; Muru-Lanning, 2016; Mutu, 2010; Ruru et al.,

2011; Te Aho, 2011; Waitangi Tribunal [Wai 262], 2011). This article draws on research undertaken for the study *Kaitiakitanga: Māori Experiences, Expressions, and Understandings* (Beverland, 2022). The main study provided an opportunity to pose two main pātai related to kaitiakitanga: How do we, as Māori, experience, express and understand kaitiakitanga? What mātauranga and tikanga have informed our knowing?

Four main themes were identified in the larger study: Whānau, Taiao, Taonga Tuku Iho and Tino Rangatiratanga (see Table 1). This article relates to the two subthemes identified within the Taiao theme, namely, taiao understandings and mauri ora. The article begins by contextualising

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TABLE 1 Overview of themes and subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
Whānau	Ko te kairaranga i te tira: Kuia Kaitiakitanga: Wider whānau roles
Taiao	Taiao understandings Mauri Ora
Taonga Tuku Iho	Kaitiaki Te Tuakiritanga, the inner being He mana tō te kupu, he tikanga tō te kupu
Tino Rangatiratanga	Impact of colonisation Asserting Tino Rangatiratanga

taiao and whakapapa. Taiao is the term related to the environment, and whakapapa sets the relational and spiritual context that binds us to our human and non-human relations and to the cosmos. It is the discipline of these relationships that creates the caretaking and guardianship responsibilities that are described as kaitiakitanga. Mauri ora, the Māori concept related to health and wellbeing, is then discussed and defined. Finally, the methodology, methods, findings and discussions related to taiao understandings and mauri ora are presented.

Taiao, in te ao Māori, is discussed within the physical or environmental discourse. It is a word used by Māori that concerns the environment, earth, natural world and nature (Marsden & Royal, 2003; Royal, 2010; Te Ara, 2010). Taiao can be described as everything that a person can access in the space of the earth and universe, that which Papatūānuku and Ranginui created. It is used as a term that encompasses all the elements in the environment. From the mountains to the sea, the land, sky and everything in between, Māori have whakapapa relationships with each other as well as with all that is spiritual and physical in nature (Jones, 2013; Marsden & Henare, 1992; Pihama et al., 2023). As explained by Simmonds (2014), “Whakapapa, then, is not only about positionality, it is also about connectivity, history and geography” (p. 25). Penetito (2021) extended this understanding and wrote that Māori are born to honour whakapapa and that we are all “creatures of te taiao” (creatures of our environment) (p. 37) alongside plants, water and creatures that fly, crawl or swim and breathe. Whakapapa is argued to be the fundamental way through which our people organise ourselves and our world, and how we understand the relationship between all

things (Che’s Channel—Te Paepae Waho, 2020; Kawharu, 2000, 2002; Potter, 2020; Te Aho, 2011). Whakapapa is therefore much more than the terms often used in translations—genealogy, lineage or descent (Durie, 1998; Forster, 2019, 2003; Pere, 1994)—because these terms often fail to recognise that for Māori, everything in the world has whakapapa, which is to say everything is related and relational.

The basic premise of the relationship Māori have with taiao is the idea of belonging and connection, rather than ownership and control, and this extends to an economic foundation, a tribal identity and a spiritual base (Durie, 1998, 2001; Hond et al., 2019; Hutchings & Smith, 2020; Muru-Lanning, 2016; Mutu, 2010; Potter, 2020; Ruru et al., 2011; Te Aho, 2011). One way of expressing this belonging and connection is through whaikōrero and pepeha that include ancestors, mountains and water. For example, “ko Taupiri te maunga, ko Waikato te awa, ko Pōtatau Te Wherowhero te tangata” can be translated as “Taupiri is the mountain, Waikato the river, Pōtatau the man/ancestor” (Mead & Grove, 2001; Roberts et al., 1995).

Durie (1998) stated that “land is necessary for spiritual growth and economic survival. It contributes to sustenance, wealth, resource development, tradition; land strengthens whanau and hapu solidarity, and adds value to personal and tribal identity as well as the wellbeing of future generations” (p. 115). This exemplifies the centrality of connection to taiao for Māori and elucidates why hapū and iwi have fought against colonisation for generations to assert their roles and obligations to taiao (Waitangi Tribunal [Wai 262], 2011). Colonisation has disrupted and fragmented our ways of being and has interfered with our ability

to live our lives as Māori (Pihama & Lee, 2019; Walker, 2004). Colonisation has pervaded every area of Māori society, from our understandings and relationships with the natural environment, to language, tikanga, mātauranga and the collective ways that enable wellbeing. Māori understand that to be well, or to have mauri ora, our relationships within taiao are crucial.

The word mauri on its own has several different meanings, which include the notions of energy, connecting, vibration, vitality and life force (Durie, 2001; Marsden & Royal, 2003; Pere, 1997; Pohatu, 2003). Mauri, when paired with ora, meaning to be alive and well, is related to human happiness, positivity, flourishing, being balanced, having good vibration and health, having good relationships with the living and the spirit world, feeling exploratory and generally feeling positivity and strength (Kingi et al., 2015; Pohatu, 2003, 2011). Tākīrangī Smith (2019) explained how the environment is a critical factor for the reciprocal human experience of mauri ora:

Mauri is the energy from which all life generates, resonating within all things throughout the environment—natural or built. While there are intangible qualities associated with the management of the natural *resources* the vitality of the mauri can be gauged through the assessment of the health and wellbeing of ecosystems, natural resources affiliated with those, and the resilience of relationships between people, their culture, and the environments to which they associate. (p. 18)

Pere (1994) further identified the dynamism of mauri and its different states, the continuum of being in mauri ora and other mauri states such as noho and oho, and that people have an important contribution to make in the maintenance and momentum of a mauri state. How our mauri is affected by the wider environment and social contexts is an important consideration. There is a reciprocal relationship between Māori and taiao whereby the health and wellbeing of each depends on the other, so that it is mutually beneficial (Henwood & Henwood, 2011; Marsden & Henare, 1992; Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2019). Māori have varied and often complex tikanga and mātauranga regarding all areas of the earth and sky, which includes the universe, and there is a natural order, a balance, an equilibrium, so that when one part of the system is unbalanced, the entire system is out of balance (Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013; Mead, 2003; Mead & Grove, 2001). Māori ensure this balance through tikanga

and mātauranga such as kaitiakitanga (Blair, 2002; Kawharu, 2002). Without equilibrium, the human condition, the environment, health and balance are severely affected (Carney & Smith, 2020; Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2019; Waitangi Tribunal [Wai 262], 2011). Being on the whenua, being near the awa, or returning to your own lands are cultural ways that Māori seek wellbeing, identity, (re)balance and (re)connection.

Kaupapa rangahau: Methodology

Māori, through the philosophy of kaitiakitanga, continue to discuss and send clear messages about the importance of taking care of, not only ourselves, but also the metaphysical and physical realms of our world, so that all things are well, balanced and healthy. This article and the larger research study are a contribution to these conversations. To engage with Māori about their experiences, expressions and understandings of taiao and the connection to mauri ora, it was necessary to underpin this research with a Kaupapa Māori methodology.

Kaupapa Māori theory (KMT) provided the platform to effect transformation and promote tino rangatiratanga and mana motuhake. This meant honouring, privileging and applying Māori ways of knowing and being across the research. The principles of KMT provided signposts to analyse and organise ideas, views and experiences in a way that was consistent and carried cultural integrity. The principles of KMT used were tino rangatiratanga, taonga tuku iho, ako Māori, kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kāinga, whānau, āta, Te Tiriti o Waitangi and kaupapa.

Tikanga rangahau: Methods

Kaikōrero: Participants and recruitment

Twenty-four participants shared information about taiao and its relationship to mauri ora. All 24 kaikōrero identified as Māori and spanned a range of contexts. These contexts included education, environment, rongoā, rangatahi, whānau, tauira, kaiako (teachers of kaitiakitanga), te reo Māori, social work and mātauranga. The kaikōrero age range was 16–75 years. All kaikōrero engaged in whanaungatanga, and their identified iwi spanned the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The process for identification and recruitment was approved by the Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics) SOB 19/24. Through the process of whanaungatanga, I identified and invited most kaikōrero. The exception was the social work supervisors and social work practitioners, who were recruited through

the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers.

The ethics application included two *hoa-haere*. Both *hoa-haere* were *te reo* speakers and were crucial to the safety of the *te reo* Māori space within this study. They were critical to the checking and analysis of my translation and *whakamārama* of *te reo* within this work.

Hui: Interviews

Individual and group hui were held with *kaikōrero*. The *whānau* (*n* = 7), *tauirā* (*n* = 4) and *kaiako* (*n* = 3) each gathered for a group hui, while *mātanga* (*n* = 5), social work practitioners (*n* = 2) and social work supervisors (*n* = 3) all participated in one-to-one hui. All hui included *tikanga* processes, such as *mihimihi*, or introductions, greeting and engagement processes; *whanaungatanga*, or the process of building rapport and getting to know one another; *kaupapa*, or explaining the reason that the hui has been called in conjunction with formal paperwork; offering *kai*; offering *koha*; and the *poroaki*, or closing the session.

An open-ended interview schedule was used during all hui, in which the topic areas included *kaupapa*—questions about *kaitiakitanga* and its meaning, understandings, definitions; *tāngata*—questions related to *kaitiakitanga* and its practice; *wairua*—questions related to the spiritual realm, emotions and feelings; *te ao tūroa*—questions related to the environment; and general—*mōteatea*, *oriori*, *karakia*, *waiata*, *whakataukī* or *akī* that

related to *kaitiakitanga* or that *kaikōrero* wanted to share. The individual hui ranged from one to two hours, and the group hui from one to three hours. The interviews were audio-recorded (with *kaikōrero* permission) and later transcribed.

Analysis

A *Kaupapa Māori* analysis process (see Figure 1) was designed and constructed through the framework *āta* (Beverland, 2022). In the ethics application, two *hoa-haere* were named to assist with translation of *te reo* and with the analysis of *kaupapa*. The framework was co-constructed with the *hoa-haere* and *whānau*, and discussed with the supervisors of the research. The *kaupapa Māori* analysis process included being able to interpret *te reo Māori*, not just English. It also required recognition that the information gathered holds aspect of *tapu*, *whakapapa* and *kare-ā-roto*, and therefore, *te tuakiritanga* became a central consideration alongside the work of theming. The framework was used to action and guide the analysis process, to discuss issues, debate *kaupapa*, and construct themes and ideas. In line with this process, patterns, linkages and connections from the *kōrero* were discussed and finalised. Finding patterns, linkages and connections through a *Kaupapa Māori* lens meant that understanding *pūrākau* was critical. This concerns unlocking epistemological constructs, cultural codes, philosophical thought and worldviews that underpin our identity as Māori (Lee, 2015). In that vein, repetition,

I mahi ngātahi mātou ko ngā *hoa haere* i ngā āhuatanga katoa e pa ana ki ngā mahi Arohaehae.



FIGURE 1 Kaupapa Māori analysis process

kaupapa, whakataukī, analogies, similarities and differences, dialect and theory were all important. Seven positions are presented in Figure 1 that were used to thematically analyse data within the larger study, and although numbered, were not linear in their use. A summary of this figure and the seven positions is presented below:

- *I mahi ngātahi mātou ko ngā hoa haere i ngā āhuatanga katoa e pa ana ki ngā mahi arohae-hae.* Collective discussion throughout the study regarding extracts, chapter construction, theming, te reo, progression of analysis, keeping the study on track, and maintaining focus on aims and objectives.
- *Te tuakiritanga.* Encompasses a person's identity, personality, attributes, qualities and kare-ā-roto. Working through the information gathered from the kaikōrero involved canvassing information that crossed into experiences, ā hinengaro, ā wairua, ā tinana. Protecting and tending to the kaikōrero was important, as was considering the depth of the sharing of information.
- *Āta mahi—Kia mōhio he aha ngā whakaaro i puta mai i ngā puna kōrero.* To become familiar with kōrero. Āta mahi began the process of analysis by looking holistically at what was being discussed by the kaikōrero and highlighting initial thoughts.
- *Āta titiro—Āta titiro ki ngā kōrero e hāngai ana ki ngā mātāpono o Kaupapa Māori.* Identify, look for and consider Kaupapa Māori related themes that align to Kaupapa Māori principles named within the methodology.
- *Āta whiriwhiri—Kimihia ngā whainga i roto ki tēnā ki tēnā o ngā uiui.* Pinpointed discussions regarding the themes, and the themes tentatively decided upon. Plaiting or weaving together ideas and then moving on to discuss, negotiate and decide upon.
- *Āta whakaingoa—Kātahi me whakaingoa ngā kaupapa kōrero, kaupapa āpiti rānei.* This process closely follows the last whereby themes are named, labelled and coded. For example, throughout the kōrero there were several themes related to whanaungatanga, connection, wairua, disconnection and so on. During this part of the process there was a need to negotiate the placement of these themes and place them accordingly.
- *Āta whakaaro—Whakarōpūhia i ngā kaupapa kōrero kātahi me āta whakaaro.* This was an opportunity to bring together the structure of the thesis and decide on the

themes and subthemes within the individual chapters. This āta related to chapter construction, which included naming the chapters and finalising subtheme names. Each of the subthemes identified at this stage were carefully considered within larger concepts or philosophies to lay down a clear path toward the final chapter construction.

- *Āta wetewete—Me arohaehae ngā whakaaro i roto i ngā kōrero.* Āta wetewete is the process of carefully unravelling, releasing and setting free as well as writing up the themes, their relevance, considering new contributions, what relevance and significance the kōrero had to kaitiakitanga and how the chapters related to other chapters and to the other themes in other chapters. Here there is an opportunity to change themes and reconstruct subthemes.
- *Āta tuhi—Tuhia te tuhinga kairangi.* Āta tuhi is the point at which the study is typed, finalised and prepared for review. This process of writing, review and reflection was ongoing as themes presented themselves. A process was followed to introduce, link and then connect the theme to kaupapa.
- *Āta whakaaro.* The process of reflection.

Ngā hua: Findings

While the subthemes of taiao understandings and mauri ora have been synthesised below for this article, kaikōrero discussed these within the larger context of kaitiakitanga.

Taiao understandings

This first section outlines kaikōrero discussions regarding the tikanga and mātauranga that underpin the relationship Māori have with taiao. The components elucidated from the kōrero included equilibrium/balance, identity and whakapapa, cultural resource and work, and whenua and pito.

Equilibrium/balance: Inherent in the kōrero was the idea that there is balance not only within relationships, but that tikanga, such as karakia and aroha, will ensure an overall equilibrium. Kaikōrero highlighted the importance of having reciprocal relationships with our environment, and related this to health and wellbeing; they also specifically highlighted sickness of a spiritual and physical nature when the balance is not right. As a whānau kaikōrero explained, the health of the land and the people is intimately intertwined: “Ka ora te whenua, ka ora te tangata, ka ora te tangata, ka ora te whenua.” Kaikōrero often called upon whakataukī like this one to speak back to relationships with parts of taiao. This whakataukī includes

the word “ora”, meaning to be alive or well, which describes a shared, respectful, balanced and reciprocal relationship between Māori and the land. A rangatahi kaikōrero reiterated this belief in their kōrero: “It is pretty straightforward, look after the whenua to look after yourself. Don’t look after the whenua, well, you are going to get māuiui.” Māuiui for Māori is not solely regarded as physical sickness but can include mental and psychological illness. Underlying the statement of this kaikōrero is the recognition of tikanga, which is that to take care of whenua, there is a certain way to treat it because of the reciprocal obligations humans and whenua have to one another. A rangatahi kaikōrero highlighted this in their expression of the significance of intergenerational knowledge transmission from their grandmother. The mātauranga shared by their kuia was about weaving, physical wellness, spiritual wellness and taking care of the taiao. This example encompassed aroha, whakapapa and karakia as key tikanga that guide the human relationships with one another as well as with te taiao:

Nan teaching us how to weave, and before we even do that there is like a karakia and there is a whakapapa to that hua ... for me that relates to kaitiakitanga because not only you are looking after yourself, but you are looking after te taiao as well and you are looking after the spiritual side too, and the physical side for everyone, not just yourself. I feel like kaitiakitanga is more in everything, the aroha you have for everything. (Rangatahi kaikōrero)

Identity and whakapapa: Identity and whakapapa are an important part of the overall fundamental understanding of kaitiakitanga. They mirror the literature, which makes clear that kaitiakitanga is fundamentally about whakapapa and our obligation and responsibility to the sustainability, taking care of and maintenance of that whakapapa.

Kaikōrero acknowledged the connection between us, the metaphysical and the physical, and spoke about why we have tikanga such as pepeha, and why understanding whakapapa is important to understanding our position in the world and how this underpins philosophies such as kaitiakitanga. For example, a mātauranga kaikōrero discussed culture, maunga, tūpuna and atua as necessary for Māori security of identity and wellness: “Those things that we refer to in our pepeha and expressing our connections to our maunga, etc., they are important in that we have those connections through our ancestors to those places

and those strengthen our wellbeing, our identity.” This mātauranga then went on to explain that Māori view ourselves as inseparable from taiao and that the words we use and the pepeha we recite have a deeper meaning than some might think. Within their kōrero is a comment about kaitiaki having a reciprocal responsibility; for example, we are kaitiaki of the maunga, the maunga is our kaitiaki. There is an essence of cooperation and collectivity:

When we say things like, ko so-and-so te maunga, ko so-and-so te awa, ko so-and-so te whenua, that that is our connection, and in doing so we are reinforcing, reinstating our roles as kaitiaki of that maunga, of that awa, of that whenua. It is not just a stand up and just blurting out words; there is a deeper significance in saying those things. When we say that we are from that maunga, then we are saying that we are the kaitiaki of that maunga as well as the maunga being our kaitiaki. When we say we are from that awa, then we are saying that we are the kaitiaki of that awa and that awa is our kaitiaki. Same with the land and same with the iwi ... it is instilled in the way we practise our pepeha, in exchanges between peoples, it is intrinsically part of who we are. (Mātauranga kaikōrero)

Other kaikōrero highlighted the interconnection of the self, taiao, tūpuna and whenua, and of how strength and mana reside in our ancestral lands and home places. Identity, whakapapa to land and the weaving together of things tangible and intangible were acknowledged. A kaikōrero discussed land as the “source of things” and made clear that the land is the way to know oneself. Mana was used as a word that connects this kaikōrero with the members of their whānau that have passed on into the spirit world, with the connection to the mana of those who have passed residing in whenua. While the words wairua and mauri were not used by this kaikōrero, they were implied and deeply felt:

Going back to the source of things, to the land, our connection to people, our connection to ourselves ... when you are connected with your whenua, and you feel that mana from your tūpuna who have stood there before you. (Mātauranga kaikōrero)

Cultural resource and work: The practices explained in this theme exemplify, first, the deep connectedness Māori have with their relations; second, the ways in which Māori gather resources, which are grounded in tikanga and mātauranga and passed intergenerationally; and lastly, the

continuing importance Māori place on taking care of whenua and places of significance.

Kaikōrero highlighted that kaitiakitanga was not just about being connected to land, but that the maintenance of, sourcing food from, understanding resources and being good custodians of the land was equally important. A rangatahi kaikōrero highlighted the importance of whānau collectives in this mahi:

Things like cleaning up the urupā, painting it and the fence around it, collecting wood ... once or twice a year I help ... Uh, well, we go up with family, our uncles and all that ... you're not allowed to eat up there inside the urupā ... only outside ... We catch fish in our creek ... we got lucky at Christmas ... Nana Nui actually showed us in the end how to trap it.

For this rangatahi, “uncles” showing them how to maintain the urupā is part of the tikanga and this involves understanding roles and responsibilities. Second, the idea that there is no eating within the urupā identifies that the rangatahi knows this is a key tikanga. Lastly, that a grandmother was involved in the pūrākau of catching fish in the creek highlights intergenerational knowledge sharing or ako. This also acknowledges the significance of mokopuna–kaumātua relationships for whānau. The collection of food from one's own whenua is an extremely important tikanga identified by this rangatahi in terms of fish from the creek. Therefore, they identify not only the resource (fish) on whenua, but the importance of access to this resource (on their own whenua).

Food and its importance and connection to kaitiakitanga was also reiterated and expanded on by a mātanga kaikōrero in their explanation of the ceremonial aspect of gathering and consuming kai:

Eating the kererū was a way that they would honour Tāne, it wasn't taking from Tāne, but Tāne is their kaitiaki for Tūhoe, that is our kaitiaki, that is our big God. We eat because he becomes part of us when we do that. We are actually honouring him, and we have all of these ceremonies around the eating of that particular species of bird, because it is a key element within our culture, but it also a way that we honour our main God is by partaking in his flesh that becomes our flesh and that is our way of reconnecting to that kaitiakitanga.

Here, the tikanga included honouring kaitiaki and deity, nourishment and becoming one with the kererū—“his flesh that becomes our flesh” and

finally, ceremony regarding how the bird is eaten and caught. This kaikōrero elegantly described a symbiotic relationship between themselves, the child of Tāne and the taiao.

Whenua and pito: The practice of returning the whenua and pito by burial was explained as a process of connection, revitalisation and renaissance by the kaikōrero. Kaikōrero discussed how this practice had been interfered with through colonisation, assimilation and urbanisation. Of note, the kaikōrero who did not have whenua found ways to connect to the cultural practice by burying it where they lived. Kaikōrero saw the burial of whenua and pito as tikanga connected to taiao, but also as kaitiakitanga tikanga.

Several kaikōrero engaged in discussions regarding whenua and pito when speaking about connection to whenua. They spoke about the interrelated nature of whenua, pito and humans, and drew on the tikanga and mātauranga passed through intergenerational knowledge transmission. A kaikōrero referred to several tikanga that are important to Māori, including that burial occurs in accordance with tikanga, that pito and whenua are returned to whenua, and that this is how one remains connected to whenua:

So, in regard to the whenua, we're connected to it, right. So, when a baby's born and then we have the whenua and the pito, there is a practice that we do whereby we return that back to the whenua. So, at home we have a specific place that all the afterbirth or the whenua that they have go to a specific place and that connects everything back to that particular mauri. The mauri of the whenua, māmā, pēpi is all connected ... in the whenua, and we all know where it is and it's all looked after, and it's taken care of. Sometimes depending on iwi affiliations, you might have the whenua go one way and the pito go another. I've heard of that. (Social work supervisor kaikōrero)

Mātanga kaikōrero also spoke about how rākau or plants are used at burial sites as location identifiers and that taking care of the tree is an important tikanga. This is to remember where the pito and whenua are buried, and it may be kept secret to selected whānau members in case of mākutu:

Kei tangohia te whenua, kei tangohia te pito, ka tanumia ki raro i tetahi rākau—and the kaitiaki part was the whereabouts of that rākau. (Mātanga kaikōrero)

Up at Whānau-ā-Apanui they bury theirs and the pito in the pōhutukawa tree at the roots. But ours are in the whenua, and we all know where it is, you know what I mean, and it's all looked after, and it's taken care of. Sometimes depending on iwi affiliations, you might have the whenua go one way and the pito go another. I've heard of that. (Mātanga kaikōrero)

A whānau kaikōrero referred to burying pito as rongoā and as a function of being well. Rongoā refers to Māori understandings of remedy, solution, medicine or healing treatments. Their kōrero made it clear that the pito is part of the remedy and solution for māuiui. Tikanga was reiterated in terms of how to heal and how to feel well through burying the pito and whenua around the home as a spiritual protection and barrier to māuiui: "In terms of the pito ... it is the rongoā for us, for when our kids would be māuiui ... to be placed around them" (Whānau kaikōrero).

Mauri ora

The second subtheme of mauri ora highlighted that taiao is strongly connected to mauri ora, with kōrero canvassing areas such as whanaungatanga, equilibrium and wellbeing. For Māori to be well, all that is around must also be well, and in a context where all living things are in balance, mauri ora is a natural occurrence and consequence. A mātanga kaikōrero, for example, described land, culture and connections as regulating mauri, and this regulation is dependent on the level of connection to the whenua. Returning to whenua is explained as holistically healing and important to mauri ora:

Without our land, without our culture, things that connect us to our tīpuna and our atua, we become unwell, and it may not necessarily manifest itself physically, but it could manifest itself culturally, spiritually, emotionally, mentally. Physically on the face of things they might be looking very well, but culturally, spiritually, emotionally and mentally that person may be having a difficult time. (Mātanga kaikōrero)

A rangatahi kaikōrero described a similar rationale for why they would return home. They referred to different mauri states, including feeling stress, feeling overwhelmed, feeling relief and feeling okay. Going home is an important part of the process of returning to a state of mauri ora and mental wellbeing:

I can't think of any specific times, but I just know whenever I am stressed out, or I feel overwhelmed by things, I know it is time for me to go home ... then it's just like a relief, like everything is going to be okay. (Rangatahi kaikōrero)

Another mātanga kaikōrero explained how taiao is connected to healing, connectedness, balance, wairua and the metaphysical, linking the spiritual dimension to taiao and discussing how this aligned to being well. They described how their river is a guardian, thus illustrating the kaitiakitanga of this awa. They explained that conducting karakia was the way to connect spiritually with the awa and self. Finally, this kaikōrero emphasised that when outside of one's area, one must continue to enact tikanga to be able to access mauri ora:

When I have certain things that I need to do, or there are certain things that I have on me, I go to the river here, I conduct karakia and this river here becomes a kaitiaki for me ... you create a spiritual connection between something ... I have no whakapapa to this river, I am not from this area, but this area has cared for me for near on 10 years, and I am indebted. It is that relationship back to the place. I am responsible for ensuring that I conduct myself in a particular manner while being in this area ... Then the awa becomes my kaitiaki as well. I go to the awa, and I will conduct karakia and if something has happened, I will do a karakia over myself. I've done it a number of times, so it is not as if because I am not living somewhere. I cannot have a practice. I just make the practice where I am from. (Mātanga kaikōrero)

When this kaikōrero disclosed "there are certain things that I have on me", there is an inference that visiting the awa, and the power of the awa itself, will help free them from matters that relate to not feeling well spiritually and to attain a level of mauri ora. "I will do a karakia over myself" is a tikanga they practise as part of a process of being well or returning to a place of tau. Karakia is about freeing oneself, another or any context or situation from infliction in this respect, but also about acknowledging atua or kaitiaki. This balance, rongoā, māuiui, whakanoa te tinana and reciprocity were also described by other kaikōrero:

It is like a balance ... the rongoā is huge ... go into the bush and just be silent; we still have a connection there and sometimes too we need to take

time out to go back to those connections. (Whānau Kaikōrero)

Even being able to go inside to just whakanoa te tinana. (Rangatahi Kaikōrero)

The shift from a spiritual, metaphysical connection with taiao to a human-centric understanding is a key point made in the following kōrero. The kaikōrero warned against shifts in ideology for Māori because these will affect our understanding and experience. Both the physical and the metaphysical environments were referred to by this kaikōrero:

This connection to the physical and metaphysical environment is arguably changing in an Aotearoa context for Māori, driven largely by the tools of colonisation. I think for me one of the biggest changes has been, in my experience, is that a shift into thinking about kaitiakitanga as human beings being the centre of all things has been really significant, but I think that's a whole issue for te ao Māori generally. For far too long we have bought into, which is a very colonial, a Western way of viewing the world, that human beings are the ultimate species of the world and that we roll over and that we dominate everything. This has shown to have impact on our health across all sectors. (Mātanga kaikōrero)

In contrast to connection, the next kaikōrero spoke of the impact of disconnection, which is equally important when discussing the continuum of mauri ora. This kaikōrero clearly identified the misuse of power and control by the Crown. Also inherent in this kōrero is a clear distinction between the ideology and cultural interest of one group against another—in this case Pākehā—which is inferred in the “they”:

Donna Awatere in Māori sovereignty, and it always stuck in my head, talked about colonial ways as being the mowed lawn mentality, and the mowed lawn mentality was about having control over your environment. That is what they first did when they came. They cleared the land, so we all had lawns and not ngahere. Her thinking was that this is embedded in a colonial understanding of their environment—we have to tame it, we have to control it, we have to keep it in shape, but the shape has to be the particular kind of mowed lawn view of the world. That means that you can divvy up the land, that means you can portion it up, you can sell it, you can commodify it, all those things. (Mātanga kaikōrero)

Several themes are present in the above quote, including colonialism, stolen land, commodification and urbanisation, and how that has affected the idea of belonging and connection versus the colonial idea of ownership and control.

Conclusions

The philosophy of kaitiakitanga plays a significant role in these contemporary times in advancing practices related to our overall sense of identity, mauri ora and connectedness to time, place and space. In the larger study, there is an assertion that kaitiakitanga must be understood through connection to taiao and that a shift away from a whakapapa and metaphysical connection to a human-centric one will undermine the integrity of kaitiakitanga. Understanding the environment and ancestral ways of knowing and being through a whakapapa lens plays a significant role in being healthy and maintaining a sense of wellbeing and positivity. For Māori, whakapapa encompasses memories, relationships, experiences and a sense of self, and kaikōrero expressed this connectivity and interdependence. What interrupts this connection was also identified by kaikōrero, namely, power and control differentials. Maintaining cultural integrity was seen as critical: kaikōrero warned against shifts in ideology that affected how Māori understand and express our own tikanga and mātauranga.

Kaikōrero expressed and explained that taiao was crucial to the navigation of tension, stress and problems. Being with and in te taiao generates healing, connectedness, balance and wairua. Positive health outcomes for Māori include a holistic spectrum of variables such as the person's social environments, their connection to land and place, and ancestral ways of knowing and being. These variables play a significant role in being healthy and maintaining an overall sense of identity and wellbeing. Kaikōrero affirmed that mauri ora includes conditions of positivity, flourishing, knowing themselves, knowing their world as Māori, having relationships with taiao and happiness generally, which reduced feelings of anxiety and isolation and which contributed to strengthening relationships and identity. Several of these conditions across the most specific domains of mental, emotional, cultural and spiritual wellbeing were highlighted in this part of the study. The findings show that kaitiakitanga practices and a relationship with taiao are important to attaining a higher sense of purpose, hope and provision of assurance, and to feeling part of a much larger meaning of life.

Kaikōrero in this study discussed taiao and mauri ora in ways that help them make sense of their lives, make sense of te taiao and make sense of their experiences they have as Māori. They confirmed that the interdependency among humans and nature, the physical and spiritual worlds, the ancestors, past present and future, and all living things, animate and inanimate, are bound to one another in an interconnected way, deeply reflecting spiritual and cultural cosmology tied to place (Johnson-Jennings et al., 2020).

Acknowledgements

This article was supported through the Titiro Whakamuri, Kōkiri Whakamua Project (Tū Tama Wāhine o Taranaki), which is a part of the Health Research Council of NZ Programme number HRC 19/694, Tangata Whenua Tangata Ora: Investigating Health Gain through Whenua Initiatives, hosted by the Whariki Research Centre, Massey University.

Glossary

akī	encouragement
ako	to learn, learning
aroha	kindness, affection, love, compassion
āta	careful, deliberate, purposeful
āta titiro	look with deliberation
āta whakaaro	think purposefully, carefully
atua	a god, ancestor, deity
awa	river
ā wairua	spiritual form
hapū	subtribal group
hinengaro	mind
hoa-haere	valued companions, constant companions
hua	finding, result, outcome
hui	to gather, meet, meeting
iwi	tribal group
kai	food
kaiako	teacher
kaikōrero	speaker(s), the person or people speaking, participant(s)
kaitiakitanga	the act of minding, guarding, caring, keeping, trusteeship—connected to the physical, metaphysical and human realms
karakia	prayer, incantation, spiritual guiding words to Māori deity
kare-ā-roto	feelings and emotions
kaumātua	grandparents/older people

kaupapa	floor, stage, platform, topic, policy, matter for discussion
Kaupapa Māori	Contexts that are Māori, Māori theoretical underpinnings, Māori praxis
kererū	New Zealand pigeon, <i>Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae</i> —a large green, copper and white native bush pigeon
kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kāinga	socio-economic mediation principle
koha	gift, token
kōrero	conversation, talk, talking
kuia	older woman, grandmother
mahi	work
mākutu	witchcraft, magic, sorcery, spell
māmā	mother
mana motuhake	separate identity, autonomy, self-government, self-determination
Māori	native, Indigenous person of Aotearoa, New Zealand
mātanga	experienced person, professional, skilled, expert
mātauranga	knowledge, information that is Māori, education
māuiui	sick, weary, fatigued, sickly, unwell, illness
maunga	mountain
mauri	lifeforce, vitality, special nature, measure of emotion, state of being
mauri ora	happiness, flourishing, wellness, being alive
mihimihi	speech of greeting
mokopuna	grandchildren
mōteatea	lament
ngahere	bush, forest
noho	sit, be still
oho	awaken
ora	to be alive or well
oriori	lullaby
Pākehā	a person of predominantly European descent
Papatūānuku	the earth
pātai	questions, inquiry
pepeha	tribal saying or proverb, expressing ancestors, where you are from, information about tribal affiliations and whakapapa

pēpi	baby	wairua	spirit, spiritual
pito	navel, section of umbilical cord nearest the baby's body	wetewete	to untie, unravel, release, set free
pōhutukawa	New Zealand Christmas tree, <i>Metrosideros excelsa</i> , <i>Metrosideros kermadecensis</i> , <i>Metrosideros bartlettii</i> —trees found in coastal areas that bear large red flowers about Christmas time and have leaves that are velvety-white underneath.	whaikōrero	formal speech, oratory
poroaki	leave-taking, farewell	whakaaro	to think, plan, consider, decide
pūrākau	narrative, story, messages of kaupapa and whakapapa	whakamārama	understandings
rākau	tree	whakanoa te tinana	to remove tapu from the physical body and make the body balanced and at peace again
rangahau	research	whakapapa	genealogy, to layer, lay flat upon one another, ancestral and current relationships, recite genealogies
rangatahi	youth	whakataukī	proverb
Ranginui	the sky	whānau	to be born, give birth, family, be connected familiarly
rongoā	medicine, healing, traditional Māori treatments, connected to health and wellbeing	whanaungatanga	relationships, kinship, connections within whānau, whānau diversities and whakapapa
taiao	the environment	whenua	earth, land, ground, placenta
tāngata	people	whiriwhiri	to select, choose, pick
taonga	treasures of importance to Māori, objects, resources		
taonga tuku iho	treasures of importance gifted from ancestors		
tapu	sacred, prohibited, forbidden, holy, under spiritual protection		
tau	wellness, balance		
tauira	example, student		
te ao Māori	Māori worldview		
te ao tūroa	light of day, world, Earth, nature, enduring world, natural world		
te reo Māori	Māori language		
te tiriti o Waitangi	the treaty of Waitangi		
tikanga	practices, to be right, method, habit, purpose, technique		
tinana	body		
tino rangatiratanga	absolute authority, self-determination, sovereignty		
tīpuna	ancestors, grandparents		
titiro	to look at, inspect, examine, observe, survey, view		
tuakiritanga	identity		
tuhi	to write, draw, record		
tūpuna	ancestors		
urupā	burial ground, cemetery		
wāhi tapu	a sacred place or sacred site		
waiata	song, chant		

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