

COMMUNICATING MĀORI HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Platforms for voice and (re)connecting with whenua through māra kai practices

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Abstract

This manuscript presents a communication framework embedded in whakapapa. It highlights the experiences of whānau Māori as they discuss the factors that impact their health and wellbeing. It also explores how they deal with socioeconomic challenges, which are contextualised in relation to the whenua, associated ancestral place names and kinship ties. The opening of discursive spaces provides platforms for voice, and led to the establishment of māra kai on ancestral whenua and the (re)clamation of Indigenous knowledge and place names in Feilding, Manawatū. Māra kai are positioned here as a site for decolonising health and wellbeing meanings, generating conversations in the Feilding community to disrupt colonial narratives that threaten Māori health and wellbeing. Reclaiming māra kai practices through connecting with ancestral land and nurturing whanaungatanga constitutes an intergenerational approach to Māori health and wellbeing, expressed through a whakapapa-based communication framework.

Keywords

culture-centred approach, Indigenous communication, Māori health
and wellbeing, māra kai, whakapapa, whānau voice

Introduction

This study documents a māra kai initiative, co-created by 15 Māori and one Pākehā participant based in the Manawatū region of Te Ika-a-Māui and in Te Waipounamu, Aotearoa New Zealand. Drawing upon whakapapa as a base for a Māori communication framework, localised understandings

of Māori health and wellbeing were articulated through the co-creation of platforms for voice. Utilising the dialogic anchors of whakapapa and the culture-centred approach (CCA) to research, we amplify Māori health and wellbeing meanings in relationship with whānau and whenua to (re)indigenise communication frameworks.

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Whakapapa framework

Whakapapa can be explained as genealogy (Mahuika, 2019) and also the “layering of knowledge, with one layer needing to be set down, before the next one is added” (Kereopa, 2003, as cited in Moon, 2003, p. 43). Whakapapa carves out spaces of existence; yet it is also a super-connector that enables and expands upon a lexicon of social relationships (Rout et al., 2020).

Whakapapa is positioned here as a research approach of connections, comprising an ontological framework (Roberts, 2013) within which knowledge is stored (Lythberg et al., 2019) and new knowledge is created and organised (Graham, 2005, 2009). Within this paradigm, Indigenous communication constitutes whānau voices, drawing on local context, social relationships with others and spiritual connections to ancestors and deity. Communication is instilled in the connections with environment, ecosystems and all living organisms.

In this manuscript, whakapapa provides a base for an Indigenous communication approach, rooted in the genesis of creation. It entails how Māori in this study communicate their health and wellbeing challenges and solutions, in relation to one another, to ancestral practices, to land and to the wider environment. Activated in this way, Māori communication practices draw upon whakapapa and manifest whakapapa, bringing forth intergenerational mātauranga, replete with ancestral wisdom that is embedded in places of significance.

Methodologies: Whakapapa and the culture-centred approach

The interplay of whakapapa and the CCA offer a dual methodological approach to the research. Whakapapa as a methodology occurred organically, and was visible among the participants' connections to one another and to the land. This whakapapa approach to communication is a Kaupapa Māori methodology and an expression of tino rangatiratanga (Phillips et al., 2016). In this study, whakapapa is positioned as a paradigm, an approach, a methodology and as the apparatus for an Indigenous communication framework. Utilising both whakapapa and the CCA, Māori navigating the “margins of the margins” (Dutta et al., 2020, p. 16) set the parameters of the discussion and the principles and tikanga that guide the discursive space in order to create entry points for the communication of sense making and knowledge generation. Since the study was to be conducted within the author's iwi, whakapapa

as a grassroots, Kaupapa Māori approach was deemed a natural and authentic fit in that all but one of the participants were related to one another by whakapapa. The Pākehā participant was a partner to one of the Māori participants and also considered whānau.

This whakapapa approach and the CCA both have distinct theoretical positions and features. They also share a focus on centring culturally dynamic relationships between people and localised spaces, acknowledging the association of marginalised experiences with historical and contemporary contexts. The CCA is an activist communication methodology, which amplifies the voices of communities who have experienced socioeconomic marginalisation and are targets for policies and campaigns, yet their voices are often not heard (Elers & Dutta, 2023). The CCA looks to the connections between people, place and hegemonic formations, to open up discursive spaces for the voices of communities pushed to the “margins of the margins” in order to prompt social change communication (Dutta, 2020). The CCA has over 20 years of experience in building global communication theory and campaigns that seek to build voice infrastructures with communities. This is the first time that the CCA has been placed in dialogue with Kaupapa Māori in Aotearoa (Elers, 2022) and this manuscript is one part of the overall study. The CCA has expertise in examining the power imbalances within the discourse of communication, and this expertise was brought together with Kaupapa Māori theory to iteratively complement the research design and analysis stages.

Methods

All the participants belong to or are associated with Ngāti Kauwhata, an iwi affiliated to the Tainui waka in the Manawatū region. The participants form the Feilding advisory group, which was brought together to analyse the themes of the broader research titled *Theorising Māori Health and Wellbeing in a Whakapapa Paradigm: Voices from the Margins* (Elers, 2022) and co-design initiatives. The participants opted for one-to-one interviews with the researchers. One of the researchers, who is the author of this manuscript belongs to the same iwi.

These took place in person from August 2021 but were put on hold as a result of the COVID-19 Level 4 lockdown and resumed again by phone from November 2021 to January 2022. The interview questions were discussed and reworked at an advisory group with the participants prior to the

interviews. The advisory group meeting notes form part of the data collection as well.

The advisory group co-designed campaigns to amplify their articulations of health and wellbeing, nuanced with everyday challenges and carefully planned strategies focused on salient features of health and wellbeing. Four main themes are nestled within this whakapapa-based communication framework: (a) platforms for voice, (b) decolonising health and wellbeing, (c) intergenerational wellbeing and (d) generating conversations to disrupt colonial narratives and hegemonic domination.

Mahinga kai: Māra kai

Mahinga kai is the Māori term used for Māori customary food gathering practices. The concept has broader implications, which are associated with identity, wellbeing and a Māori worldview (Richmond et al., 2005). Payne (2020) emphasises that all elements of mahinga kai and the environment are connected through the paradigm of whakapapa. Māra kai is one food production and gathering practice. Roskrige (2020) defines māra kai as “land under cultivation for the production of food” (p. 22). Archaeological evidence of kūmara gardens in Waikato estimated an established garden area of 6–7 hectares (Higham & Gumbley, 2001) and an overall total garden area of over 3,000 hectares, highlighting the enormity and importance of māra kai in Māori society (Gumbley & Hutchinson, 2013).

Māra kai were indicative of continuous hapū and iwi land settlements in Aotearoa, also known as ahi kā and representative of mana whenua in that area (Taiapa et al., 2021). Māra kai can be defined as communal spaces that are discursive and multifunctional, facilitating spiritual and physical nourishment for knowledge transmission, physical activity, and food growth and security (Hond et al., 2019; Raerino, 2017). This concept is echoed by King et al. (2015), who noted that “Māori gardens provide spaces to connect and re-connect with the very essence of what it means to be Māori” (p. 17).

Land confiscation and dispossession through ongoing colonisation processes had a drastic effect on the foundation of Indigenous health and wellbeing (Griffiths et al., 2016). Extensive land confiscations by the Crown, coupled with land alienation through the conversion of communally owned land to individualised titles, has had an enduring impact on Māori health outcomes. In the absence of land or access to fertile land, and amid the urbanisation drive that resettled Māori away

from ancestral homelands to urban areas, communal māra kai practices and knowledge began to wane (Viriaere & Miller, 2018).

Reflective of a neoliberal economy, the increase in the cost of living in Aotearoa (Equb & Equb, 2015) coincided with growing interest and movement towards revitalising māra kai in Māori communities (McKerchar et al., 2015). The increase in living costs, particularly food costs, motivated some tamariki in the eastern Bay of Plenty to start their own māra kai to help their whānau and parents pay household expenses. A māra kai programme was initiated by Ngāti Awa for primary schools to help the next generation to alleviate the financial pressures on whānau (Waikato, 2023). At the same time, mātauranga Māori contextually localised to this area about mahinga kai was taught and passed on to the tamariki participating in the programme. Hana-Rāwhiti Maipi-Clarke also utilised māra kai in Rāhui Pōkeka to help whānau connect to the taiao and mātauranga Māori aligned to the mara-mataka (Te Kuru o te Marama Dewes, 2022). These movements have aided in the provision of kai for whānau, promoted overall wellbeing and reinforced Māori identity (Panelli & Tipa, 2009).

Taiapa et al. (2021) utilise the pūrākau methodology (Lee, 2015) to foreground the hapū participants’ narratives concerning the journey of Ngāti Tāwhirikura in their hapū-led māra kai initiative to build kinship connections with one another and with the whenua. In so doing, the exploration of māra kai as a visible expression of land reoccupation and culturally centred food practices affirmed their enduring ties to the land, despite a history of colonial processes that caused large-scale land confiscation, conflict and assimilation.

Kai-Iwi māra kai and Ngāti Kauwhata

There is scant written literature documenting māra kai practices in the Manawatū region. However, māra kai ancestral narratives are held within the oral histories of whānau and hapū of Ngāti Kauwhata in Manawatū. These histories tell us that prolific māra kai grew in the area known as Kai-Iwi pā. The stories of our ancestors’ māra kai cultivations include many acres of gardens that were collectively cultivated and kai shared.

Sharing stories with one another in the advisory group regularly occurred throughout the whole kaupapa from the planning to the selling of some of the produce at the Feilding farmers’ market. When planning for the māra kai establishment, the advisory group decided to give one third of

the produce to the whānau that own the whenua, to kaumātua and to other whānau needing kai. One third would be set aside for seed and the remaining third would be sold at the market to raise money to purchase more seed to grow kai on Ngāti Kauwhata ancestral land.

Ngāti Kauwhata is a relatively small iwi and many have experienced iwi invisibility in the Feilding community, seeing only neighbouring iwi names fixed to buildings in schools, in community and the surrounding area. In addition, the supplanting of ancestral place names by the Manawatū District Council, who favoured colonist names over ancestral names, effectively invisibilised hapū and iwi history within the area.

The town of Feilding was named after Colonel William Feilding, who purchased the area (43,000 hectares) in 1871 from the Crown (Kilmister, 2018). This area was a part of a bigger Rangitikei-Manawatū land block of approximately 240,000 acres. The sale and purchase of Feilding is remembered by Ngāti Kauwhata as the most fraudulent and dishonest purchase by the Crown in New Zealand's history (Durie, 2020, as cited in Hurihanganui, 2020). Notwithstanding that Colonel Feilding spent a minimal amount of time in the area, the town was named after him, with no recognition of Ngāti Kauwhata who held papa kāinga and marae in the area. Kawakawa-ki-tonga was one of the ancestral names of the area due to the abundance of kawakawa trees, used as a staple rongoā by the iwi.

The advisory group asserted the name Kai-Iwi for the māra kai and stall name at the market. Kai-Iwi is the name of the papa kāinga area encircling Kauwhata Marae. However, the name of Kai-Iwi was not associated locally by customers at the market, who thought the advisory group participants were from a different Kai-Iwi settlement, situated on the banks of the Whanganui river. The erasure of Ngāti Kauwhata place names equates with the invisibility of iwi and has had a significant negative impact upon generations of Ngāti Kauwhata.

Taiapa et al. (2021) report on similar experiences of Ngāti Tāwhirikura hapū when their ancestral place names were also supplanted, disrupting tikanga practices associated with naming places and affecting the collective remembrance of significant tūpuna and events. In establishing māra kai and a market stall with the name Kai-Iwi, the advisory group were able to utilise the marketplace not only as an alternative economy to the rising food prices in the supermarket but also to reclaim a significant mana whenua name, and generate conversations to disrupt colonial narratives that

had long sought to erase Ngāti Kauwhata history from the whenua.

The advisory group

This current study arose from the advisory group meetings following the first nationwide Level 4 COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. The advisory group became aware of food (in)security and noted the scarcity of basic food supplies such as fresh vegetables, flour and pasta: “The supermarket shelves were bare of food that we could afford, we had no choice but to ask for help to buy food” (personal communication, Feilding advisory group meeting notes, June 29, 2020). This comment highlighted the challenges for local people around access to affordable food. This issue was also recognised by the government as they released funding for community and iwi organisations to assist families with food access, resulting in bulk food purchases that probably contributed to the shortage of basic food supplies.

The advisory group participants with underlying health conditions noted:

We were grateful for the food parcels but we couldn't eat a lot of the food because it was processed food with high sugar and fat content, or it was repackaged into smaller bags with no food labels, so we had to give it away. (personal communication, Feilding advisory group meeting notes, June 29, 2020)

Some participants received food vouchers and were able to make their own decisions about the food they purchased, but since basic, cheaper food was scarce, the food vouchers had to be spent on more expensive food items that were impractical and unable to sustain large families for more than a few days. Others commented about the bulk quantities of carrots and onions, which resulted in families consuming the same produce for days on end and trying to come up with new and creative ways of cooking carrots and onions for their whānau (personal communication, Feilding advisory group meeting notes, June 29, 2020).

The conclusion drawn by the advisory group was that while they were extremely grateful for the food parcels they received, they lamented the lack of opportunity afforded to them and, in particular, those with underlying health conditions, to make decisions regarding access to food. As one participant stated:

It felt like the grocery list was written by people in Wellington for us in Feilding, rather than us being a

part of the discussions. If they knew us well, they'd know that whānau has 15 people in their whare and they've got nannies and koros (grandfathers) with diabetes so we won't give them cans and cans of processed high salt and sugar food. Actually why don't we ask them what they need? It ain't rocket science!" (personal communication, Feilding advisory group meeting notes, June 29, 2020)

In a bid to reclaim decision-making about food security in the Feilding community, the participants discussed their desire to (re)connect with ancestral land and establish a māra kai in order to enhance food security by being active decision-makers and participants in the cultivation, harvesting and distribution of organically grown kai. With the resource support of CARE at Massey University, Palmerston North, the advisory group began preparing ancestral land on two property blocks for māra kai in August 2020.

Findings

The advisory group participants' names have been changed to reflect Ngāti Kauwhata ancestral names. The findings have been grouped into the following four themes: (a) platforms for voice, (b) decolonising health and wellbeing, (c) intergenerational wellbeing and (d) generating conversations and disrupting colonial narratives.

Platforms for voice

The whakapapa-based framework of Māori communication and the CCA share a focus on co-creating platforms for voices at the "margins of the margins", in order to foreground their articulations into mainstream, discursive spaces. Tamihana's comments below highlight that regardless of education or lifestyle, people are fully capable of contributing to decisions that affect their lives. In fact, the kōrero of Tamihana shows that regardless of education and lifestyle, Māori who occupy the "margins of the margins" or the "grassroots", if given the opportunity and resourcing, are able to come together to co-design strategies for wellbeing, cloaked in tikanga of "respect", "care" and "love":

Yeah, I just think the advisory group is a platform for those ... that are afraid to say their bit, those that think they aren't educated enough, but they have still got common sense and foresight, and hindsight but because we live in a certain way we're overlooked. That is how it feels. I really enjoyed our meetings, not structured as a chairman, secretary, treasurer thing. We didn't have that, but we had

respect and we had care and we had love ... We are the grassroots and everyone has a lot of good ideas. (Tamihana, male, 46–55 years)

Listening is both a conceptual and a pragmatic tool emphasised in the CCA (Dutta, 2014). The act of listening to community voices creates entry points for alternative understandings, problem configurations and community aspirations to emerge into discursive spaces:

I think the biggest thing is just being able to listen to the people, listen to them because if you continue to listen to the people, they feel they're needed, you know ... If everybody gets a voice, everybody gets a say. Everybody is listened to. (Taimoana, male, 56–65 years)

Back then it was just kind of like "oh, I've got stuff to do", but now, I really like going because I do like the fact that we all have differing opinions and it's taught me so much more patience about myself and a lot more learning for myself as well, and yeah, trying not to be as judgemental and just listening to other people through why they think that way. (Haringaroa, female, 26–35 years)

Inherent in this commitment to listening and voice is the necessity to ensure that advisory group participants set the terms of engagement—both with one another and with others. The advisory group participants determined the tikanga to guide the meeting structure and flow. Sometimes the meetings were facilitated by the principal researcher (who is also an iwi member) and sometimes the meetings ran as a more informal discussion, going around the table to ensure that everyone had an opportunity to have a voice. Rauarangi (female, 36–45 years) stated, "I was able to express without being criticised or judged on my opinions."

Everybody had an input. I mean, everybody participated in our hui and we didn't leave anybody out. I think everybody ... we were all on the same page. So it was great because we were all thinking the same thoughts on how we were going to plan the māra kai, how it was going to be harvested ... because we needed to know also ... who we had available at the time, so we could get as many people down there for the harvesting. Because that's when we needed our people the most was in harvesting times. And it was really lovely. (Te Ara, female, 54–65 years)

I find this whole board system quite, well, some people take it to their head, I guess. Like some

people get that power role and sometimes it gets a bit too heated up, I guess. And then some people start to drop off because of it. But I feel by not having one, you know, we all had a view and I think because everybody has that same mutual respect ... It was just kind of like, oh, yeah, well, this is how it's going and kōrero just kept flowing. I liked it like that. (Haringaroa, female. 26–35 years)

Here, Haringaroa reflects on structures of board meetings that can dissuade the participation of grassroots whānau or community members. Her reflection challenges monolithic formations of community or district and government board meetings replete with expert members, advisers and agendas that are constructed to either engage with communities or represent community voice. Dutta (2015) investigated the insidious ways in which structures co-opt community participation to carry out programmes of empowerment that are scripted within dominant neoliberal governance frameworks. When configured in this way, power, resources and decision-making are still held intact by neoliberal boards, and voices of communities at the “margins of the margins” are effectively sidelined. The concept of “community participation” becomes equated with the appropriation and co-option of community voice or “cultural sensitivity” (Dutta, 2007).

Conversely, the articulations of Tamihana, Te Ara, Rauarangi and Haringaroa indicate a resistance to monolithic, neoliberal board formations and a preference towards culturally centred, dynamic, whakapapa-framed collectives that offer a wider understanding of communication, rooted in relationship to the health and wellbeing of whānau, the land and the environment and the building of mutually constitutive relationships.

Decolonising health and wellbeing

The participants frequently referenced the māra kai mahi back to the work carried out by our ancestors in previous generations. Some participants could recall first-hand the regular contribution of whānau in mahinga kai practices and others drew upon stories that had been passed down through the generations as a blueprint or a pattern towards decolonising health and wellbeing:

I grew up eeling with my dad and my uncles ... I was like a boy (laughter) ... so with the māra kai you are learning, not only the ability to feed yourself, but actually learning tikanga behind it as well, like intergenerational tikanga. (Māmaku, female, 46–55 years)

Māra kai are what our ancestors did. This was their norm. That's how they fed the people. And it was sort of, you know, just slowly but surely taken away from us. And if we can re-establish it, it is never going to get back to the way that it was, but we can try and sort of introduce those ways back into everyday living. (Manawanui, female, 36–45 years)

The narratives of Māmaku and Manawanui exemplify a whakapapa-based communication frame not just because they reference the ancestors and their prowess at food gathering and cultivation practices but because they highlight that recovering and normalising these practices in contemporary life does more than produce kai to sustain people. It also decolonises individualistic pursuits through continuing the transmission and activation of tikanga associated with kai for the collective and the wider purpose of cultivating social cohesion and health and wellbeing. In this way, we are encouraging thinking outside of ourselves as individuals or individual whānau and caring about others within the wider whānau and community. Hoeta (male, 46–55 years) noted the difference in cultivating a māra kai for a household and cultivating māra kai with and for the wider whānau: “I always had a kai garden but it is a different experience coming together with others and everyone having their input into the decision-making.” These configurations of Māori health and wellbeing are activated by connecting to the whenua and the environment, and recovering and extending upon connections among and between whānau. Hinepare and Taimoana explained further:

Just because we are related doesn't mean to say that we are in one another's lives ... but this group and the māra kai kind of helped cultivate that manaakitanga amongst us and with the whenua and our concern for the wider whānau and community. We cultivated the whenua and manaakitanga was cultivated within us. (Hinepare, female, 46–55 years)

In respect to the old man, he always shared his kai and they would share kai with one another. So, we would go out hunting eels together as families, as bulk families, not just the one family. You don't see that these days. It brought those kinds of things back to me...it brought all those tikanga back, in the way that we used to work together ... We planted, we weeded, sowed, harvested, year after year and it was my experience as a kid. So, it was good to see it come back, to be reminded. (Taimoana, male, 56–64 years)

As a platform for voice and grassroots decision-making, the advisory group planned, organised and harvested māra kai established on ancestral land, connecting to the whenua and (re)activating tikanga practices. These activities widened understandings of Māori health and wellbeing to include the health and wellbeing of the whenua, the whānau and the community through the deployment of ancestral food security practices. The layering of participants' narratives adds further context and contributes to ongoing knowledge generation concerning collective group formations and māra kai as decolonised meanings of Māori health and wellbeing.

Intergenerational wellbeing

Māra kai scholarship provides a robust synopsis of the benefits of māra kai for nurturing Māori health and wellbeing (Stein, 2018; Taiapa et al., 2021; Viriaere & Miller, 2018). The advisory group's articulations of their experiences creating a māra kai concur with these views and affirmed that the experience was "soul healing", "full of joy and happiness" and "lifted the oranga of our whānau ... and our whenua and awa".

The advisory group participants' narratives concerning the involvement of multiple generations in the māra kai mahi can be conceptualised as centring intergenerational health and wellbeing, pushing out the parameters of health and communication to include more than one whānau and more than one generation:

One of the highlights of the māra kai was to see mokopuna getting in there, getting their hands dirty. Getting the rīwai, digging up all the spuds, it was massive! Inwardly I was, oh my, look at this. I was full of joy and happiness about that. (Taimoana, male, 56–65 years)

That was beautiful. That's the kind of soul healing stuff that you can get from bringing whānau together, with whānau that are your family and you don't even know who they are. The real connecting and even getting my kids out there and connecting with their cousins that they don't know but they've been going to school with. (Manawanui, female, 36–45 years)

It was definitely beneficial for the young, even right down to the primary school kids coming down and getting involved. It is instilling memories in them. I guess for the ones living in the city, they wouldn't have a clue or know anything about that kind of stuff, but actually getting involved in it, coming

down and putting their hands in the whenua, harvesting the spuds and then being able to cook them and eat them, all those kinds of things. It is really ... the memories, and I guess for the old, for the kaumātua, coming down and just that whole whānau environment through the different generations is something that you don't really see much anymore. Everyone is too busy these days working. (Hoeta, male, 46–55 years)

These examples demonstrate whānau agency in setting their own journeys to nurture wellbeing across generations, guided by tikanga and embedded in Māori epistemologies. The departure from top-down approaches to health towards culturally centring intergenerational whānau approaches to oranga provides the impetus for localised strategies. Tamihana brought together the various strands explored through the māra kai operation as an enabler of oranga:

Connecting back to the land, gathering food with the whānau, not doing it as a job, a paid job, but doing it as a sustenance was a big up. And the oranga of that little thing we've done was worth more than money. (Tamihana, male, 46–55 years)

I just couldn't believe how many people turned up to the whenua to do the harvesting and do the kai. Yeah, I was just excited. And I just got in there and was just looking around at all the whānau and going, oh, this is so cool. Just goes to show how much whānau want to do this [and] the supermarket prices are getting terrible. (Ōroua, female, 36–45 years)

The sentiment shared by Ōroua is the same as what every person in the advisory group and other whānau who also came to be a part of the harvest expressed. For Papa (male, 26–35 years), connecting with the whenua is an affirmation of being Māori: "The feeling of being Māori being tied to the whenua, working with Papatūānuku ... I don't know how, but the feeling inside the wairua, it is uplifting in itself, with the whānau." Accordingly, decreased access to environmental resources and control over those resources within iwi and hapū areas has had a negative impact on Māori health and wellbeing (Richmond et al., 2005). Conversely, improving Māori access to whenua and the environment through generating opportunities for (re)connection has been identified as a key determinant for Māori health and wellbeing (Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor,



FIGURE 1 Kaiwi produce stall at the Feilding farmers' market. Source: Christine Elers.

2019). This has certainly been the experience of the Feilding advisory group.

Generating conversations and disrupting colonial narratives

The advisory group set up their first stall at the market on 19 March 2021 to sell one-third of their māra kai produce (see Figure 1). To our knowledge, it was the first stall by Ngāti Kauwhata iwi members at the market since it began in 2005. The items for sale included varieties of organic rīwai, moemoe, red Desiree and agria plus kete waikawa and kawakawa balm. In 2022, the advisory group continued selling produce at the market and expanded to also include kamokamo, kale and mainese, the latter made with moemoe by one of the advisory group participants, who is also of Cook Island descent.

The presence of Māori with produce grown locally by hapū and iwi members at the market drew attention and generated conversations. A few customers shared their stories with us—stories about gathering kai in the local rivers with our ancestors. The majority of others wanted to know where the produce was grown. When the advisory

group explained the location, which is near our ancestral marae, sited about 7 km out of Feilding on a no exit road towards the Ōroua river, many were astonished, not realising that they had lived many years (some had lived most of their lives) in Feilding and were not aware who the local iwi is and where our ancestral site is situated. Manawanui explained further:

There were a few people that would come to us, just to yack to us, actually and talk about how they would grow their potatoes ... some would even just go into a bit of history ... It was really interesting. But sometimes it was quite full on ... because it's a different opinion to what we have. (Manawanui, female, 36–45 years)

The different opinions that Manawanui refers to concerned the establishment of a Māori ward. In the midst of the māra kai kaupapa, the Manawātū District Council voted against the establishment of one Māori ward in the district. A protest was organised (see Figure 2). All the affected hapū and iwi came together, with others in support, and marched down one of the main streets in



FIGURE 2 Protest march on Manchester Street, Feilding, for the establishment of a Māori ward 2021. Source: Richard Torres.

Feilding to the Manawatū District Council office (Gill, 2021).

All of the Feilding advisory group participants joined the protest and the quest for Māori representation at the district council. Some of the group participants spoke at various council meetings and others relayed the hurt that they felt seeing very little semblance of Ngāti Kauwhata in the council representation in the community. The marketplace provided another opportunity to disrupt colonial narratives of separatism associated with our pursuit of Māori representation in local government:

The Manawatū District Council councillors, well, the market seems to be their go-to place every Friday, well, for some of them and so, you know, our stall gave us a chance to have conversations directly, especially during our fight to have a Māori ward. There was one Pākehā councillor who came along, and he didn't vote for a Māori ward and he's still trying to tell us why we shouldn't have dedicated Māori representation on council because it's separatist you know, ra di ra, and we were able to tell him that this here market and this town is on Ngāti Kauwhata whenua and we have been dispossessed of much of our ancestral land, which feels the same as you all blocking and denying us Māori representation at the council. (Hinepare, female, 46–55 years)

Generating conversations at the market to disrupt the erasure of Ngāti Kauwhata history, place names and identity is seen here as part of an Indigenous communication framework embedded in relationships to the land, communicated through intergenerational histories and forged in contemporary struggles for Indigenous representation in local government.

Discussion

Whakapapa provides the basis for an Indigenous communication approach. Māori situated at the “margins of the margins” articulated health knowledge and built platforms for voice so that this knowledge can emerge into dominant discursive spaces. Whakapapa is also utilised as a methodology positioning the participants' articulations as both the reclamation of knowledge and the generation of new knowledge placed in connection to kinship ties and relationships with the whenua amid the settler-colonial landscape of Feilding, Manawatū.

The formation of an advisory group and mārakai provided opportunities for whānau to (re)connect with ancestral land, building whanaungatanga amid complex realities that had rendered hapū and iwi ancestral place names and spaces invisible, as a result of ongoing processes of colonisation. The advisory group meetings presented as a platform for whānau voices that are often not

heard and enabled discussions cloaked in tikanga of “respect”, “care” and “love” to co-design strategies for food security amid the COVID-19 pandemic, challenging board formations that adopt strategies for whānau but without their voices from the “margins of the margins”.

The cultivation of māra kai equated to the cultivation of kinship relationships and the expression of manaakitanga among the group and to wider whānau and community members, who were also navigating low socioeconomic realities. This affirmed identity, not only as Māori but as Ngāti Kauwhata. The frequent referral to and sharing of ancestral māra kai practices enabled the presence of ancestors through conversations. Therefore, Indigenous communication practices constitute ancestral whispers over the contours of whenua, embodied in their descendants’ contemporary practices of māra kai, decolonising meanings of health and wellbeing, and accentuating the exigency of intergenerational wellbeing.

Indigenous communication concerning health and wellbeing also lies in the disruption of colonial narratives that sought to erase Ngāti Kauwhata ancestral and significant place names from the region. The marketplace became a discursive site to generate conversations about ancestral Māori land, historical place names and the connection to the local hapū and iwi. It also afforded opportunities to speak back to local government attempts to block the establishment of a Māori ward for Māori representation in the community. Here, Māori health communication speaks to the challenges that constrain health and wellbeing, due to the fraudulent dispossession of the Rangitikei-Manawatū block. Hence, a pathway to enabling Māori health and wellbeing is the (re)clamation of whenua and mahinga kai practices through bringing whānau voices to the fore, and through local environmental sovereignty embedded in Māori epistemology. Māori representation via one Māori ward in local government is a start at opening up diverse discursive spaces for Māori. This study has shown how alternative spaces for dialogue concerning Māori health and wellbeing can also be opened up, culturally centring the complex realities of Māori through Māori communication practices. These were expressed through māra kai processes, drawing upon enduring whakapapa connections and (re)Indigenising colonial spaces, which were identified by the advisory group as essential for localised Māori health and wellbeing and are resurgent within whānau of Ngāti Kauwhata in the Manawatū region.

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Glossary

ahi kā	fires signalling continuous occupation of whenua; those of keep home fires alive
Aorangi	one ancestral name for the Feilding area
Aotearoa	New Zealand
awa	river
hapū	subtribe or larger kinship group; pregnant
hui	meeting, gathering; where discussion takes place
iwi	tribe, nation, Māori people; bones
kai	food
Kai-Iwi	ancestral place name encircling Kauwhata marae
kamokamo	squash, stubby green vegetable marrow (or gourd), favoured Māori food eaten young and immature
kaumātua	elder(s)
kaupapa	project, topic, subject
Kaupapa Māori	Māori research theory
Kauwhata Marae	the marae (village courtyard and surrounding buildings) of Ngāti Kauwhata
kawakawa	pepper tree, <i>Macropiper excelsum</i> —a small, densely branched tree with heart-shaped leaves, indigenous to Aotearoa
Kawakawa-ki-te-tonga	one ancestral name for the Feilding area
kete waikawa	harakeke (native flax) woven baskets used to store items and in contemporary times used for shopping
kōrero	talk, narrative, discussion
koro	grandfather

kūmara	sweet potato
mahinga kai	food gathering practices
manaakitanga	hospitality, support, care for others
Manawatū	a region in the central North Island
mana whenua	territorial rights over land sourced in ancestral connections to place
marae	courtyard in front of an ancestral meeting place, where formal discussions take place
māra kai	land under cultivation for the production of food, vegetable garden
maramataka	Māori lunar calendar
mātauranga	knowledge systems
moemoe	a variety of Māori potato with purple skin and reddish-yellow mottled flesh
mokopuna	grandchildren
Ngāti Kauwhata	iwi of Feilding and surrounding areas in the Manawatū
oranga	health, livelihood
pā	fortified marae and surrounding areas
Pākehā	New Zealand European
papa kāinga	village
Papatūānuku	Earth mother, wife of Ranginui (Sky Father)
pūrākau	Māori narratives containing philosophical thought
Rāhui Pōkeka	Huntly, Waikato
rīwai	potatoes
rongoā	medicinal remedies
taiao	environment
tamariki	children
Te Ika-a-Māui	North Island
Te Waipounamu	South Island
tikanga	values and principles that guide practice
tino rangatiratanga	chiefly authority, sovereignty, Māori self-determination
wairua	spirit
waka	allied kinship groups descended from the crew of a canoe that migrated to New Zealand and occupying a set territory
whakapapa	genealogy; placing upon layers; to form a foundation; utilised here as a research approach of connections
whānau	family, extended family

whanaungatanga	kinship, sense of family connection
whenua	land; placenta

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