

Final Report – Ngā Pae Māramatanga

**The effectiveness of arts and drama as strategies to build hope and
resilience in taitamariki.**

A Māori youth suicide prevention project.

A report to Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga in fulfilment of the requirement for
Summer internship funding

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2016

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SECTION ONE – INTRODUCTION

How effective are arts and drama as strategies of Māori youth suicide prevention, in building hope and resilience in taitamariki?

This report explains my involvement in the *He Ara Toiora* research project, during a Summer Internship through Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga (NPM). My academic supervisor is Dr Lily George of Massey University, who is lead researcher and co-manager of the project, along with Gayle Dowsett of Ngātiwai Education. The internship took place in Te Tai Tokerau/Northland, over ten weeks from 7th December 2015 to 19th February 2016. This report engages with the research question posed above as a way in which to organise the report effectively.

He Ara Toiora is a research project into suicide prevention for Ngātiwai taitamariki using arts and performance-based wānanga to explore whether the use of drama, music (including waiata), dance (including kapa haka), visual arts and performance might enable taitamariki to express feelings of difficulty coping with life stressors, as well as providing a safe space for discussions in relation to suicide. It is hoped that these wānanga and resulting expressions of feelings might enrich participants' lives and enable them to find pathways and build resilience to cope with future stressors. The data collected will provide insights into how this type of engagement with taitamariki might enhance resilience and decrease the high rate of youth suicide throughout the Ngātiwai rohe and Tai Tokerau.

The overall objective of this internship with Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga to build my research capability, has been accomplished through research work on two collaborative projects between Te Au Here o Tukaiaia/Ngātiwai Education, He Ara Ngātiwai Charitable Trust and Massey University. This includes but is not limited to experience of:

- community and iwi research practices within Māori/Ngātiwai marae-based communities, including consultation, tikanga practice, and relationship development/maintenance;
- data collection practices including observational and reflective data collection, as well as transcribing data and data analysis;
- research design and implementation, including developing budgets;
- working with vulnerable populations, including development and implementation of a *Safety Plan*;
- designing, researching and writing journal articles.

SECTION TWO – SUICIDE AND SUICIDE PREVENTION:

2.1 Suicide

Suicide in New Zealand is considered to be a major health crisis (Canterbury Suicide Project, n.d.), with Māori youth featuring in disproportionate numbers as more likely to die from suicide than non-Māori youth (Best Practice Journal, n.d.; Canterbury Suicide Project, n.d.; Coupe, 2005; LawsonTe Aho, 2013, 2014). New Zealand youth have the second highest rate of suicide in OECD countries (The Guardian, 2015). Chief coroner Judge Marshall stated that “Over the last eight years I believe we’ve seen a shift in society’s preparedness to have a more open conversation about suicide, but we are not seeing any movement in what is an unfortunate static annual figure” (cited in The Guardian, 2015).

It is the need to have open conversations about suicide - rather than hiding ‘shameful secrets’ - that is considered by some as part of the solution. Well known comedian, Mike King, has been open about his own battles with depression and suicide ideation. In 2013 he stated that:

There's a real need to talk about suicide, but talk about it safely, make sure there's help there for somebody who needs it. We need to talk about why people commit suicide, and it's generally people who feel hopeless and they often genuinely believe that they are the only ones going through it and it becomes overwhelming. We have to show them that there is hope, that no matter how they feel others have been through the same thing and that they can get through it. (cited in Dinsdale, 2013a)

Speaking of the loss of son Nicholas to suicide, Jane Stevens urged that “We have to start talking about it. We would never be ashamed of our boy and we feel so strongly that people have to wake up to what is going on in this country – it is an epidemic” (cited in The Guardian, 2015).

In response to the increasing rate of suicide, the government gave \$25million to suicide prevention programmes, with \$8million going to fund Māori and Pasifika programmes (APNZ, 2013). This resulted in the development of Waka Hourua, which “supports Māori whānau, hapū, iwi, Pasifika families and communities to develop and enhance their own capacity and capability to prevent suicide and to respond safely and effectively when and if suicide occurs” (<http://wakahourua.co.nz/>). A major focus for Waka Hourua and similar organisations is the development of local, whānau/hapū/iwi-driven solutions. As noted by Michael Naera of Ngāti Pikiao suicide prevention services, part of their solution is to ‘Whakaoho Mauri’; “Awakening the life essence of a person through the protection of mana and protection of wairua” (SPINZ Webinar, 2013). Di Grennell of Te Puni Kōkiri states the necessity of “putting whānau in the driver’s seat. However where whānau lack social and economic resources, there needs to be care taken that whānau have the ability to *be* in the driver’s seat” (SPINZ Webinar, 2013).

Northland has not been immune to these appalling statistics on suicide, which conceal stories of devastation for individuals and their whānau left behind. Youth suicide statistics in Te Tai Tokerau/Northland have steadily increased in the past decade. During 2012 there was a spike in the number of young people taking their own lives, with an increase from 5 in 2011, to 19 in 2012 (Penney & Dobbs, 2014). As a result of this spike, many organisations in Tai Tokerau have received funding to devise programmes to address this crisis, with the result being that youth suicide decreased slightly during 2013 and 2014 (Penney & Dobbs, 2014). However during 2015 there was an overall 33% increase in suicide completions in Northland (Coronial Services of New Zealand, 2015). The reality is that youth suicide in Tai Tokerau is still a major health crisis, and Māori youth in Tai Tokerau are considered among those most likely to experience suicide ideation (Penny & Dobbs, 2014). As noted in *He Ara Toiora* documents (2015):

This project arose as a way in which to address the cluster of suicides in 2012, which impacted on Ngātiwai communities, as well as others in Te Tai Tokerau. *He ara Toiora* is the first of two projects...which take a positive focus on developing Ngātiwai-based strategies that respond to the specific needs and aspirations of our taitamariki. This project can be seen as part of a wider initiative to strengthen the people and mātauranga of Ngātiwai by addressing the myriad needs identified within Ngātiwai communities, but in ways that enhance and uplift, rather than deny and depress. (Information and Contacts document, November 2015)

2.2 Prevention Programmes for Māori Youth in Tai Tokerau

There are a range of services in Tai Tokerau which provide support for those who suffer from suicide or associated issues. Northland District Health Board's Te Roopu Kimiora (Health Point, 2016) offers clinics at set hours during weekdays, requiring referrals to access their services, and provides necessary support to many of our whānau. They provide Māori staff who are experienced in working with whānau. However this model may not be attractive to some Māori as the model of accessing services at Kimiora tends to be more medical than holistic. Some organisations for Māori youth in distress in Tai Tokerau have attempted to offer a more whanau-based approach, such as Te Whare Oranga at the Anglican Care Centre. However the list of practitioners at Te Whare Oranga does not include anyone who has an obviously Māori background nor does their organisation offer kaupapa Māori-based counselling (Whāngarei Anglican Care Trust, 2016). Other services that do provide kaupapa Māori services include Jigsaw Whāngarei, Otāngarei Trust, and Ngātiwai Education itself – the latter organisation provides parenting programmes for whānau, whānau education plans (WEAP), and in-school academic and pastoral support for Ngātiwai students. While these are not specifically suicide prevention programmes, they are vital to addressing the complexity of the environment within which suicide exists.

Northland Company Playworks Productions Ltd's production, 'Matanui', was an initiative intended to empower youth and their communities to build community resilience. Matanui was an interactive play performed at various locations in Northland that invited conversation and dialogue around experiences of suicide. An evaluation by Penney and Dobbs (2014) found that this production (along with community and teacher education) met its outcomes to support youth; increase youth resourcefulness; and strengthen school teams and communities.

The Raid Movement is a local taitamariki suicide prevention group sponsored by Ngāti Hine Health. They tour local colleges to spread their message, "Life over everything". As noted on their home page (see <http://www.theraidmovement.co.nz/>):

The Raid Movement is a small group of young people who are changing the world, one school at a time. Our aim is to show support to our fellow young people and show them that life is the most important gift of all.

Their Mission is to decrease youth suicide in New Zealand, and offer comfort and support to young people by emphasising that life is a gift. The website features a video with an inspirational story and song.

Whangarei and the wider Northland area have many other organisations that provide helpful services to local youth. These include the Northland District Health Board which offers many resources on its website, as well as providing active services such as Te Roopu Kimiora. The *Promoting Whānau and Youth Resilience* programme launched in 2013 uses a "three-pronged attack...with the aim of empowering the region's youth and giving them and their communities the resilience to deal with the complex issues and risk factors youth face today" (Dinsdale, 2013b). Despite these and other initiatives however, suicide continues to rise in Northland, with a 33% rise in 2015 (Collins, 2015). It is obvious that the issues surrounding suicide are multiple and complex, and therefore require multiple solutions.

2.3 What He Ara Toiora is offering Māori youth

He Ara Toiora (and *Kokiritia te ora*) identify support networks for taitamariki who are affected by suicide, contribute to positive youth development for our taitamariki and use dramatic and visual arts to search for ways to engage with, and research strategies to allow expression of feelings during times of difficulty. This is in collaboration with Ngātiwai whānau and hapū within the wider iwi, and work within Ngātiwai tikanga; for example, our kaumātua and kuia are strongly involved in the projects.

He Ara Toiora, using a performance and arts-based programme to engage Māori taitamariki, links into the belief that most Māori enjoy music and performance (waiata and kapa haka). Observational data as well as art and written pieces from participants are gathered in this performative research project over a Youth Leaders (YLS) training wānanga, a Whānau

Engagement Day, and six Taitamariki Development Wānanga (TDWs). Performative research draws on performance as an integral way of expressing research findings. Haseman (2006) notes that “when research findings are made as presentational forms they deploy symbolic data in the material forms of practice; forms of still and moving images; forms of music and sound; forms of live action and digital code” (p. 5).

At each wānanga, conversations are enacted through drama and art as well as written dialogue, and it is these which express the thoughts and insights of the taitamariki in a way that is tacit and subtle, yet incredibly powerful. Using drama process has been found to allow participants to be more comfortable ‘acting out’ a story that is similar to their own. For example, during our recent wānanga all of the participants engaged in role plays. One of the taitamariki asked her group to enact her own story using different names, giving her group insight into her thoughts and feelings, as well as their own. Osterlind (1995) promotes Augusto Boal’s findings that participants not enacting their own stories felt “free to play their real emotions, feelings and thought” (p. 77). Some of these stories and conversations will be featured in the presentation at the final wānanga for He Ara Toiora in April, to whānau and friends of participants.

SECTION THREE – BUILDING RESEARCH CAPABILITY:

During the weeks leading up to the NPM internship start date, I attended meetings with supervisor Dr Lily George. We outlined the work plan I would be following, specified the objectives and timelines and formed a detailed plan for the internship. I commenced a literature review on suicide, Māori/iwi research, and performative research, which has contributed to the writing of this report, expanded my understanding of the related issues, as well as provided a resource for others on the project.

Work completed during the internship includes collection, transcription and analysis of data from TDW2, TDW3 and TDW4 (February 2016); *He Ara Toiora* (HAT) team meetings and planning for TDW5 and HAT final performance as well as analysis of data; internship meetings with Dr Lily George; attending and supporting team, health clinician and whānau at TDWs; discussion and planning for *Kokiritia te ora* (KTO); budget planning for KTO; *Safety Plan* implementation; and reflective journaling for all TDWs attended.

3.1 Research Training with He Ara Toiora

The research training I am undertaking has relevance to improving Māori health specifically in the Ngātiwai rohe, and generally for Māori. The outputs of *He Ara Toiora* can contribute to the body of information for suicide prevention as well as positive youth development. With the training I am receiving through involvement with this project, and future academic

study, I will also be able to contribute to Ngātiwai whanau, hapū and iwi development, as well as to the pool of Māori health researchers.

My Māori community involvement continues to assist me to remain focussed on the passion I have for continuing and growing my contribution towards research. This has involved and continues to be as Trustee and member of the executive of *Ngunguru Marae Committee* for two and a half years; attending Ngātiwai hui and wānanga with topics such as waiata, tikanga, te reo Māori; Office of Treaty Settlements hui; iwi information updates; encouraging taitamariki engagement with our iwi, hapū and marae; engaging with kaumātua and kuia; encouraging continuous contact with our marae and the local kura on matters that our trustees, kaumātua and kuia believe a co-ordinated effort would benefit tamariki; interacting with the *Ngunguru Sandspit Society* to engage their group with our hapū and marae to encourage a better result for the environmental status of Māori whenua and moana; attending tangi and hui at various marae; consultation with Northland Regional Council on Resource Consent Applications in the Ngunguru rohe; and as a member of the Ngunguru Catchment Group contributing to investigation of the negative environmental impacts in our rohe. I am strongly committed to Ngātiwai people and whenua, and will always be engaged in such activities for our people.

3.2 Other Involvement in *He Ara Toiora*

I have been a part-time team member on the *He Ara Toiora* and *Kokiritia Te Ora* projects since January 2015. My role initially was to complete a summary of the literature on suicide in general, youth suicide and youth suicide prevention in New Zealand, as well as research methodologies and methods. This was to provide background for the *He Ara Toiora* and *Kokiritia Te Ora* projects and the research team. It soon became apparent that we needed a Health Clinician since we were dealing with vulnerable participants and challenging issues. Since my background is in psychology, social work and counselling, I was offered this role alongside the role of literature mapping. One of the challenges therefore, was to ensure the roles of researcher and Health Clinician remained separate and that when I was acting as Health Clinician that was my primary focus. For the term of the Internship I was Health Clinician on only one occasion however, with Dr Alayne Hall taking that role for the other wānanga.

3.3 Whānau Engagement

Throughout the early part of 2015 we held team meetings to organise and begin the engagement with taitamariki for the project. As part of the development phase of the *Kokiritia te ora* project¹, consultation hui were held in January 2015, the main purpose of which was to inform whānau further on the kaupapa and process of *Kokiritia Te Ora*, and to

¹ At this time we had secured a Development Grant from the Ngā Kanohi Kitea fund through the HRCNZ.

ask for their insight into the relevant issues. Our first hui was held with whānau at Whakapaumahara Marae, a Ngātiwai marae in Whananāki, We had a sizeable turnout for this hui, and support was offered by many, as well as interest from taitamariki to be participants. Our second hui was shortly after the first, and attendees were from interested and related organisations in the Ngātiwai rohe; this included social service professionals, teachers, a local MP, kaumātua/kuia and Ngātiwai whānau, members of the RAID Movement, as well as the three research supervisors – Professor Helen Moewaka Barnes, Dr Keri Lawson-Te Aho, and Mrs Moe Milne. Again we had a sizeable turnout for this hui, with offers of support for our projects.

One of the main insights gained from this hui was that KTO should focus on the positive aspects of our taitamariki and their development, rather than focusing on suicide. As noted by one of the participants – “Do we want to celebrate life, or mourn death?” Whaea Moe Milne suggested we help our taitamariki “know their magnificence”.

At both hui the *He Ara Toiora* project was also presented to whānau, with many attendees showing interest and support for this project as well. Many commented on the timeliness of the projects, given the prevalence of suicide for Ngātiwai whānau. Essentially therefore, *He Ara Toiora* was to lay the groundwork in engaging taitamariki and whānau in conversations around suicide, while *Kokiritia Te Ora* would extend those conversations into positive taitamariki development.

In July 2015 a further whānau engagement hui was held at Whakapaumahara Marae for the *He Ara Toiora* project. Prior to this the original Principal Investigator (PI), Dr Bert Van Djik, had withdrawn from the project for personal reasons, with Dr George taking over the PI role and Liz Sugrue being engaged as the Drama Facilitator. One of the purposes of this hui therefore was to introduce Liz to the whānau, as well as provide an update of where the project was at. A decrease in attendance was noted at this hui, however the kaumātua, kuia, taitamariki and their whānau who did attend, were all enthusiastic about being a part of this project.

3.4 Taitamariki Leader Training

A wānanga to train and select Youth Leaders (YL's) as mentors to the younger participants (tamariki and taitamariki) was held in September 2015. All those who attended (10) were chosen as Youth Leaders. Ages ranged from 17 to 48 years, with the term ‘Youth Leader’ referring to their work with youth, rather than their age. Also part of the purpose of these positions was to provide leadership opportunities and training for the Youth Leaders.

The research team engaged in team building exercises run by the Drama Facilitator. It was clear very early in the day that the participants were keen to engage and participated freely in organised activities involving Ngātiwai whakapapa and whakataukī, acting out Ngātiwai stories, and role-playing a fictional scenario about a teenager whose friend had committed

suicide. This led to several participants sharing personal experiences of suicide. This sharing of emotional experiences tended to result in displays of distress by some of the Youth Leaders, and it was evident that the *Safety Plan* we had drawn up was in fact a necessary tool for the research team, the Youth Leaders, as well as the future tamariki and taitamariki participants.

3.5 Additional Whānau Engagement

During October 2015 another Whānau Engagement day for *He Ara Toiora* was held at Ngunguru Marae and taitamariki were invited to attend along with their whānau. Relationships were built between the research team and the Youth Leaders during the evening before the Whānau Engagement day, staying overnight together and participating in acting skits. The programme planned for the following day was discussed and the mood was very positive and upbeat. Again we had a disappointing turnout at the engagement day, with six Youth Leaders, only 11 taitamariki, one parent and one kaumātua in attendance. All who did attend, however, engaged wholeheartedly in the performance activities, particularly those with Māori components. Art activities did not seem to be as well received as the drama, however at the end of the art activities when participants explained their art, they appeared to be animated and articulated their feelings clearly.

3.6 He Ara Toiora Taitamariki Development Wānanga

Our first of six Taitamariki Development Wānanga (TDW) was held in November 2015. Although I was not available to attend this wānanga, others in the research team gave feedback on the two day wānanga held at Ngunguru Marae. A guest Ngātiwai artist attended this wānanga and led participants through some art activities. In one of the activities, participants wrote negative messages they have had directed towards themselves or someone they know on a roll of wallpaper, followed by what they considered to be positive messages. Negative messages included 'chubby bubbly'; 'Hi slut'; 'Fat guts'; 'I can smell you'. Positive messages included 'help those that want to be helped'; 'listening to music'; 'friends'; 'Tangaroa is in my blood'. Feedback from participants included 'I liked the fun games and activities, art, watching people swim, meeting people, learning how to build a whare with straws'; 'loved it but need more activity'; 'the last wānanga was more fun than this one'; 'getting to know different or new people that you would be able to connect with'.

I attended a research team meeting after TDW1 when we discussed how to improve on the wānanga activities that were not well received by participants. The Drama Facilitator then met with Youth Leaders prior to TDW2, to get their feedback on the programme for this wānanga. There had been some internal challenges with staffing and several research team members who began the process with HAT had withdrawn from the project for a variety of reasons. Immediately prior to TDW2, the Drama Facilitator also withdrew, and the project Co-Manager, Gayle Dowsett (a very experienced performer and director), took over as

Drama Facilitator. All remaining research team members stepped up to fill necessary roles, and a cohesive and committed team resulted. Attrition of taitamariki was also of concern, but after robust discussion the team chose to continue regardless of numbers, as the kaupapa was not about how many taitamariki participated, but that those who participated were able to gain something positive and relevant from participation.

TDW2 was held in December 2015 at Ngunguru Marae. I attended as Health Clinician for one day, and our alternate Health Clinician attended for the other day. I also attended as a research team member assisting with data collection and whānau support, although I was careful to keep boundaries between the two roles. This wānanga included more participant discussion about the programme for all wānanga due to engagement of the new Drama Facilitator, and reports from Youth Leaders of activities they considered were not working well. It seemed that all participants were more invested in the programme, whether it was due to discussions with them on the programme, or that the programme now included a hīkoi was arranged to a Ngunguru maunga and a beach for a swim. Some difficulties were experienced during another field trip, however this allowed for discussions between research team members and open discussions with participants on how to manage difficult situations. Taitamariki participants shared that these types of difficulties are experienced often by themselves and their friends in their homes as well as when they leave their homes. The research team members were therefore able to model alternative behaviour for dealing with difficult situations, including the necessity for taking responsibility for your actions, even as an adult.

Three new Youth Leaders were taken on – male partners of two existing YL's, plus the mother of two taitamariki participants – which added some necessary balance to the group. One of these new YL's, Rangi, was tasked with composing a waiata from hopeful post-it quotes written at the Whānau Engagement day – the main theme was aroha, reflecting one of the main values underpinning the project. This waiata, *Whakakotahi Aotearoa Whakapiri*, is now sung with gusto at each wānanga. The chorus is worth repeating here:

*Love heals with gentle hands
Love stands with open arms
Love shares with constant care
And love walks with all to share.*

TDW3 was held at Waikare Marae during January 2016, and included similar performance and arts-based activities; however the theme was more about resilience. Activities included the taitamariki designing vision boards for themselves, giving expression to some of their future goals. The Drama Facilitator explained again that the participants were here to help us find ways to build hope for young people who experience difficulties. This reminder seemed to give participants a sense of pride in assisting to help others. It was again evident that participants were willing to share their experiences when asked for feedback about the wānanga they have attended and whether the types of performance and art activities would

help others. Participants engaged well during the role play activities they took part in. I again had the Health Clinician role (along with research team member role) at this wānanga and led participants through a technique on how to find their 'safe place' when experiencing difficult emotions.

The fourth TDW during February 2016 was again held at Ngunguru Marae. A guest speaker shared his story of hope and 'starting a spark' to convey the message that 'we have greatness inside of us'. Another manuhiri/guest took participants through an exercise intended to highlight how difficult it is to learn te reo Māori, using a made-up language to express this. Discussions about kaitiaki by a matua on the research team saw many participants engaging and sharing their knowledge of kaitiaki in their own area. Drama exercises and role-plays allowed participants to act out their own experiences and those of their whānau and friends, with Youth Leaders and research team members assisting them. All engaged in these role-plays, and it was clear that most realised the different ways we can change our behaviour to become more resilient. Waiata and kapa haka practise, along with guest hip hop kaiako, saw participants engaging enthusiastically. The other Health Clinician in attendance at the wānanga helped some of the taitamariki and research team to work through some feelings of mamae that were brought out during the wānanga.

3.7 Preliminary Insights

The insights gained from this mahi have been more than just learning 'how to do research'. As mentioned earlier, we organised a Whānau Engagement day and we were disappointed that only one adult whānau member attended. A primary reason for this put forward in discussions, was that some tamariki and taitamariki do not want their whānau to be present when there is opportunity for them to disclose difficulties. This was also found in a photovoice project by Jensen et. al. (2006), with secondary school age Māori and Pacific young people who told their parents to "back off because this is our project" (p. 34). There has also been some conjecture that this marae-based, adult supervised programme may have been an opportunity for parents to send their tamariki and taitamariki to a 'safe place' so that they could have someone else take care of their children's emotional needs and give the parents some time out.

The project, by its nature, has meant some of the participants have disclosed distressing events in their lives (both from their past and present), and I have been pleasantly surprised by how open they are with their stories. I have also been rather astonished at some of the circumstances these young people have found themselves in and quite proud of how they have dealt with them. I have loved watching the progress the young people have made during the journey in this project.

Although this is a research project, the outcomes participants are reporting at this mid to late stage of the project, are very encouraging for their future resilience. Participants' reports include positive statements such as:

“we feel like we know each other really well, and we support each other through facebook and stuff. It's great how some of the taitamariki who were really bad, feel a lot better now.” *Taitamariki participant*

Some reports from team members and taitamariki allow for reflection and possible adjustment of programmes. These reports include:

“we find it exhausting coming such a long way to the hui. We have to leave home about 5am, then by the afternoon we are really tired, and don't want to join in anything.” *Taitamariki participant*

“some of the things are really boring, and that's why our whānau, our parents, don't want to come. They came once and got really bored, and even though they said they think it's worthwhile for us taitamariki, they don't want to keep coming along.” *Taitamariki participant*

“It's really difficult to keep team morale up when people keep leaving, and when some of the team don't turn up.” *Research team member*

Reflecting on things such as team morale and why parents don't come to the hui, have allowed for opportunities to discuss whether we planned the programme as well as we could have. We found that by allowing taitamariki input into the programme for each wānanga and asking for their feedback on processes, taitamariki became more engaged. A similar finding by Wilson (2014) emerged while conducting a research project with youth workers using hip hop to engage with youth. By encouraging participant feedback and altering activities to keep up with new hip hop trends, this ensured continued youth engagement and interest.

Other insights included the possibility that some team members were more invested in the programme than others; and a question on whether the exhaustion that results from travel to distant marae outweigh the benefits of marae-based hui arose. These and other reflections will be taken into account during data analysis and final reporting, offering an opportunity for the participants and team to include their insights, suggestions and hopes for further research and programmes that might evolve as a result of this research.

Working with Dr Lily George on this project has enlightened me about the value of forming networks, new ways to deal with challenges (such as personality conflicts between research team members, attrition of participants), the value of working as a team, the importance of enforcing ethical procedures, and the significance of choosing research methodologies wisely.

SECTION FOUR – WEAVING RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES:

The research design used in *He Ara Toiora* combines Kaupapa Māori research and Performative Research methodologies. Performative researchers are considered to be those who enter a research project not with the sense that there is a problem, but more that they are embarking on a project which is exciting, and that they “tend to ‘dive in’, to commence practising to see what emerges” (Haseman, 2006, p. 3). When first approached to be a part of the research team for the *He Ara Toiora* project, all team members spoke with enthusiasm about how the use of performance should engage Māori participants, particularly if waiata and kapa haka were to be used, and were excited to discover what this might bring to our Ngātiwai tamariki and taitamariki.

Using theatre skills in exploring risky youth experiences, Conrad (2004) found this process was a “way to collectively draw out, represent and question their experiences through theatrical means” (p. 12). *He Ara Toiora’s* use of performance during wānanga to encourage and enable taitamariki to express their experiences was surprisingly successful. Some of the tamariki were as young as 13 years, appeared shy, and it seemed to some of the team that we would have difficulty getting them to open up to us. However, we found that as soon as role-playing of Ngātiwai whakataukī and discussions about our whakapapa were introduced, when waiata and kapa haka were taught, it seemed as if there was no limit to the amount of information the tamariki and taitamariki were willing to share.

Kaupapa Māori research methodology is based on Māori worldviews with values and principles that empower and encourage participation (Kerr, Penney, Moewaka Barnes, & McCreanor, 2010). Basically, it is research done by Māori, with Māori, and it is intended to use Māori worldviews and to be “for the benefit of Māori” (Kerr, et. al., 2010, p. 28). The *He Ara Toiora* project uses kaupapa Māori research methodology with marae-based research done by Ngātiwai, for Ngātiwai, incorporating Ngātiwai whakataukī, waiata, kaitiaki and tikanga. Although some of the taitamariki did not identify as Ngātiwai, the underpinning values and principles to encourage participation with the use of Māori tikanga using a Māori worldview, did in fact seem to allow a pathway for tamariki and taitamariki to engage with the research.

By combining kaupapa Māori and performative methodologies, the *He Ara Toiora* project incorporated Māori values and practises into performance and other arts-based activities. Restoring whakapapa consciousness is often a challenge for Māori participants (Lawson-Te Aho, 2013). However the depth of knowledge by team members regarding the whakapapa of Ngātiwai tamariki and taitamariki allowed for knowledge of their whakapapa to be shared and increased the connection of those young people to the kaupapa at our hui and wānanga.

Using performance to enact Ngātiwai whakataukī and legends integrated a connection to heritage with fun-filled activities to draw on a need for youth to express their feelings not only through dialogue or story writing, but through role-play, song and dance. One Youth

Leader taught a Ngātiwai haka to the male tamariki and taitamariki participants, who all joined in enthusiastically and have practised this haka whenever they were asked to. The leader explained the meaning of the words in the haka, providing meaning to the actions – I believe this has contributed to the confidence displayed when sharing feelings that may not be so easily expressed in other environments such as:

“It is easy to believe comments about yourself when you are being bullied.” *Tamariki participant*

“my life has turned around since I have been coming to these hui.” *Taitamariki participant*

“Good being here. Helping us with our confidence – to not be shy.” *Tamariki participant*

“[I] feel honoured to know that researchers are learning from us.” *Tamariki participant*

A Māori worldview is one that values others’ opinions and offers an outlet for the needs of all participants. Tikanga ensured that all who wanted to voice their thoughts were valued, and although this sometimes meant that our programme was behind schedule, surprising and valuable outcomes arose as a result. For example, a kaumatua at Waikare Marae explained the origins of karakia and why they are used on marae, that they can be a useful tool for coping with difficulties:

“Karakia was always acknowledged first. When you come onto the marae we have a responsibility to pass karakia on.” *Kaumatua participant*

The result of this dialogue by the kaumatua was that the Drama Facilitator encouraged participants to think about whether karakia would be a valuable tool for them to use if they were in a difficult situation. Encouraging participants to share their own ways of coping, whether they used karakia or not, brought out many insights about how resilient they are. Some comments included:

“If I’m feeling sad or not good, karakia would not help. I use the beach, I feel better there. Or the urupa. Talking to my tupuna at the urupa and talk to my Nana.” *Youth Leader*

“[we] only use karakia if we are sick. Now that I know a Youth Leader and other youth I can talk to them.” *Taitamariki participant*

He Ara Toiora also took into account tamariki and taitamariki feedback and interspersed marae-based activities with free time activities at beaches. This was a result of feedback from a previous wānanga, where participants had reported that they wish they could go to different marae instead of just the same one. It was explained to them that some marae were out of our budget, but that we would hīkoi more. Some comments from tamariki included:

“when we go off the marae and do things like swimming, that’s the best part, then we don’t mind doing the activities.” *Tamariki participant*

“[I’m] going great, thanks for beach trip and kai.” *Tamariki participant*

SECTION FIVE – PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

The following sub-sections engage with three insights gained from preliminary analysis of the data to date. These insights have been gained mainly through my observations during wānanga and engagement with collected data, and through discussions with my supervisor. As such they remain preliminary, although it is hoped each insight can be expanded into separate academic journal articles.

5.1 Challenges of Working with Iwi:

Working with iwi presented several challenges. Several members of the research team have deep knowledge of Ngātiwaitanga, however tangi and commitments to whānau and other organisations presents the challenge of replacing team members when tikanga demands that we accept and step up to commitments to tangi and whānau. Traditionally, tangi and whānau are regarded as top priorities in tikanga Māori, and Ngātiwaitanga follows this tikanga.

Another challenge was due to several of the tamariki and taitamariki participants growing up in an urban environment without much knowledge of tikanga. It was sometimes stated that they did not understand the need for long explanations about the meaning of te reo Māori me ona tikanga, and that it was ‘boring’. What we noted in the wānanga however, was the enthusiasm displayed by the tamariki and taitamariki participants for Ngātiwai-related activities. Examples include role-playing a Ngātiwai kaitiaki such as Tukaiaia, hīkoi to Ngātiwai wāhi tapu, and general kapa haka and action-based activities such as ‘Ki mai’ and ‘Pukana’. A positive strategy, therefore, could be to use such activities to incite initial entry and interest into Te Ao Māori, and enable engagement with deeper aspects when possible.

Some of the research team are fluent in te reo Māori, however most are not. This presented a small challenge, although given the lack of te reo knowledge amongst most of the tamariki and taitamariki, it was generally found that tikanga concepts were explained in English – therefore the team members who do not have fluent te reo Māori, could learn along with the youth participants. This also can be seen to reflect the fact that only 24.8 percent of Ngātiwai people can hold a conversation about everyday things in te reo Māori (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). However, as there are marae that expect that only te reo Māori be spoken on the taumata, we may be limited in future projects with lack of te reo Māori me

ona tikanga ability amongst our research team. Nevertheless, we must also always be aware of the reasons and realities amongst those we research with.

A major challenge at times was the people and therefore the project being caught up in intra-iwi and intra-organisation politics and conflict. While this is not the place to detail those conflicts, there have been times when the continuation of the project was threatened by particular conflicts. Differences in perspectives relating to suicide were sometimes evident, with one whānau member who works in the field giving evidence of kaumātua/kuia in earlier times viewing suicide as “kohuru/murder” and as “mahi Matapiko/a selfish act”. This however did not align with the perspective through which *He Ara Toiora* was working, with our emphasis on aroha and manaaki, on resilience and hope. Other challenges arose from factions within Ngātiwai not being in support of a major organisation associated with the project, and therefore were not inclined to support the project.

As noted by Sherwood and Edwards (2006) however:

Colonisation has been a tradition and action, which enabled the British people to claim their superiority over Indigenous people worldwide. This process ensured colonising nations usurped, dislocated, dismantled and demeaned the First Nation peoples in order to occupy and promote their own authority over their new subjects and country. (p. 183)

Ngātiwai people and places have certainly had experiences of colonisation, and this perhaps is reflected in some of the challenges we encountered. It is necessary, therefore, that decolonising processes occur. Lawson-Te Aho (2014) writes:

De-colonisation is a tool by which ‘psychological normalisation’ of the ‘abnormalising’...effects of colonisation can be deconstructed. However, on its own, decolonisation is insufficient to provide the courage needed for survival and positive life choices. Unresolved grief and trauma effects can become totally disempowering and oppressive as to disable the will to fight....However, precious insights buried deep in the psyche and spirit of indigenous peoples that reflect legacies of courage and determination to overcome, offer seeds of hope, that when exposed to the right conditions, might grow to become healing potential. (p. 183)

Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) book sought to ‘decolonise research methodologies’, pointing out the need for “reimagining of our world” (p. 1) where research serves our needs and purposes rather than those of others. Jenny Lee (2009) sought to reclaim the traditions and purpose of pūrākau as methodology which “draws from and responds to the wider historical, social and political research contexts, in particular the early New Zealand research context that recorded pūrākau as myths and legends” (p. 1). Decolonisation must include helping our whānau become aware of how colonisation has impacted on their experiences of the world, and through telling their stories and having their voices heard, be able to attain healing of the traumas they may have faced.

5.2 Challenges of Working with Taitamariki and Vulnerable Populations:

The tamariki and taitamariki who volunteered to be a part of *He Ara Toiora* have all had experiences of suicide either within their close whānau and friends, have attempted suicide themselves, or have experienced suicide ideation or self-harm. Working with taitamariki and vulnerable people such as these presented several challenges. ‘Tamariki’ is used in te reo Ngātiwai to describe children, while ‘taitamariki’ describes young people who are no longer children as well as those who are young adults. Generally young people need a sense that they are respected, in order for them to trust the adults who are working with them. Rapport building was necessary during the early stages of the *He Ara Toiora* project and this transpired for the first YLs and early participants. Due to having new participants at each wānanga, it was then necessary to include rapport-building activities at each new hui or wānanga. This sometimes put the programme behind schedule, however a positive to come out of this, was that new participants shared experiences that were similar to those who had been attending previous wānanga, increasing the interaction and helping those who were affected by suicide to find more peers they could relate to.

Working with vulnerable populations requires a unique approach, one which takes into account situations and conversations that may trigger deep emotions. For this reason, *He Ara Toiora* team developed a *Safety Plan*, with steps clearly laid out on the process to follow if participants displayed difficulty coping with their emotions and ensuring their emotional and physical wellbeing. There was concern that the participants in *He Ara Toiora* may find the conversations contributed to renewed suicide ideation or self-harm. Playing out scenes youth might be experiencing are described by Cozart et al. (2003) as risky, and these authors encourage dialogue by interacting with participants, not merely talking ‘at’ them. In addition, performing scenes that might be very close to situations participants have experienced, it is necessary to take into account Cozart et al.’s (2003) findings that audience members can feel mocked, and may become unsettled and disturbed if they don’t fully understand the message trying to be portrayed.

We have certainly found in this project at different times, that participants – including Youth Leaders and research team members – have reacted to emotional triggers. Sensitivity to such nuances as well as having people present with the skills necessary to deal with such events is very necessary. It is an ethical consideration of research to ‘do no harm’; however, it seemed at times we did indeed run the risk of creating harm when participants were reminded of past or current traumas. Nevertheless, we draw comfort from seeing the positive results of this project and consider that sometimes feeling the pain is necessary. As Lawson-Te Aho’s (2014) article title notes, “The healing is in the pain”, and sometimes “Re-visiting and re-narrating trauma histories [is] a starting point for healing”.

5.3 Community Research:

He Ara Toiora is a community research project. Community research needs an approach that is participatory with community input (Moewaka-Barnes, 2000b). As described above in challenges working with iwi, taitamariki and vulnerable populations, those challenges had to be overcome before the research team could ensure participation would be safe for young and vulnerable participants and to encourage community input.

Community input also aligns with the kaupapa Māori methodology used by *He Ara Toiora*. Ngātiwaitanga concepts encourage input from any person who believes they want to contribute to any kaupapa. This was found to impede on the timelines set in place to meet funding body requirements, since opening the floor to discussions (often needing to repeat explanations of the kaupapa) required long hui that not all team members could spare the time for. To remedy this, a smaller 'executive' group was appointed to meet and report back to the larger group. There was no intention to exclude anyone from discussions as this is not strictly tikanga, nor is it consistent with kaupapa Māori methodology, but given time constraints this seemed a logical solution. Anyone who wished to could attend these meetings, but this took the onus of the larger group to attend multiple meetings when their presence wasn't necessary. Some team members questioned this decision however, and eventually a few members of the team dropped off the project. Due to this and other circumstances, the rest of the team had to rally around and step in where there were roles to fill. We now have a core group who are dedicated to the project and even though some do not fully understand research processes, we have managed to collaborate with our lead researcher who patiently and humbly explains the need to fulfil data gathering requirements, even while 'copping a bit of flack' for doing so.

SECTION SIX – CONCLUSION

How effective are arts and drama as strategies of Māori youth suicide prevention, in building hope and resilience in taitamariki?

The *He Ara Toiora* research project began in January 2015. My involvement has been as a part-time research assistant at the project's inception, continuing through 2015, then being accepted as a Summer Intern through Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga (NPM) from December 2015 to the end of February 2016. The internship took place in the Ngātiwai rohe in Tai Tokerau. This report engages with the research question posed above as a way in which to organise the report effectively. *He Ara Toiora*, a Ngātiwai research project into suicide prevention for taitamariki, is an arts and performance-based project to determine whether the use of performance might enable taitamariki to express feelings of difficulty coping with life stressors. It is also intended to explore whether arts and performance can be used

effectively as a suicide prevention strategy, and provide a safe space for discussions in relation to suicide.

Prevention programmes in place in Tai Tokerau have attempted to reduce the spike in the youth suicide rate in 2012. *He Ara Toiora* is a kaupapa Māori arts and performance-based project intended to address the lack of success in reducing the high Māori youth suicide rates in Tai Tokerau, to explore whether marae-based hui and wānanga might be a more successful vehicle for these youth, and to complement and find further avenues to increase hope and resilience in this population. *He Ara Toiora*, in collaboration with Ngātiwai whānau, hapū and the wider iwi, was formed to identify support networks for taitamariki and contribute to positive youth development.

Methodologies used in *He Ara Toiora* are Kaupapa Māori Research and Performative Research. These two methodologies complement each other since both are based on engaging with participants, one using Māori worldview and the other using participatory methods such as performance. *He Ara Toiora's* use of Kaupapa Māori, marae-based research combined with performance and arts-based activities such as waiata, kapa haka and whakataukī served to enhance a sense of (re)connection for participants. This has resulted in tamariki and taitamariki expressing their experiences and increasing their connection to their tupuna, hapū, iwi, and as a result they have expressed an increase in confidence and ability to cope with difficulties. Comments such as “my life has turned around since I have been coming to these hui” and “Good being here. Helping us with our confidence – to not be shy”, have supported previous use of these methodologies.

My involvement with *He Ara Toiora* (and the related project *Kokiritia te ora*) began early in 2015 with a review of the relevant literature on Māori youth suicide, suicide prevention programmes, Māori health and wellbeing, and research methodologies and methods. During the following months it has included participation and data collection during hui and wānanga. Leading up to my internship with NPM, I engaged in further review of performative research which has increased my knowledge of related issues and provided a resource for others on the project. Training in research through *He Ara Toiora* has the intended outcome of contributing to improving Māori health specifically in the Ngātiwai rohe and generally for Māori. My involvement in this marae-based kaupapa Māori performative research project has included attending and participating in whānau engagement hui, training for Youth Leaders, three taitamariki development wānanga and many meetings with the research team.

Apart from learning how to do research, I have gained several insights during the course of the project. Difficulties getting wider whanau to attend wānanga has resulted in further review of literature where similar groups have experienced this. Participant feedback is that young people want to be in a separate space from their whanau when discussing difficulties around emotionally charged topics.

Another insight was that it took very little rapport-building before discussions about suicide were introduced, and I was surprised and pleased how open the tamariki and taitamariki are about difficult situations they have been in. From the initial stages of the project, through to the most recent wānanga in February 2016, participants continue to engage in discussions about unpleasant experiences and share how they are coping with them. Reports from taitamariki such as “we feel like we know each other really well, and we support each other through facebook and stuff” and “It’s great how some of the taitamariki who were really bad, feel a lot better now”, have inspired the whole research team to put more time and energy over and above that which is required. Some of the challenges have been difficult to overcome, however team discussions have enabled us to find pathways to carry on with the project as planned.

Incorporating tikanga into *He Ara Toiora’s* project meant that commitments such as tangi and whānau commitments are accepted as being a priority over attending hui and wānanga. This has resulted in some difficulties when team members couldn’t be present as expected. In addition, the use of te reo Māori sometimes gave rise to feedback from participants that they did not understand the need for long explanations about meanings of the words in the waiata and haka and that it was boring.

Attrition of taitamariki participants and research team members proved to be a challenge, necessitating further rapport building with new participants at each hui or wānanga. Most of the tamariki and taitamariki participants in the project have had experience of suicide or self-harm either for themselves or their whanau and/or friends. Role-playing scenes where participants might relate to the difficult situations enacted could trigger emotions previously suppressed. It has been necessary to incorporate a *Safety Plan* to ensure participants are safe if they are triggered emotionally and physically. However, we have noted significant instances of increased self-esteem and self-confidence in several of the participants. As one of the research team members noted, “You just have to love them”. But we also noted that this kind of mahi requires long-term commitment and a strong network of people willing to make this kind of commitment.

The *He Ara Toiora* project culminates in a performance for whānau and friends in April, with an analysis hui scheduled for late April 2016. The *Kokiritia te ora* project will continue through to June 2017. The data collected will provide important insights into how this type of engagement with taitamariki might enhance resilience and decrease the high rate of youth suicide throughout the Ngātiwai rohe and Tai Tokerau. Most importantly however, these are not just statistics, they are Ngātiwai tamariki, taitamariki and their whānau. Our ultimate goal is this - *Kia rere ora pai ngā tai o Ngātiwai* - that the tides of Ngātiwai flow with well-being.

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Whāngarei Anglican Care Trust. See <http://www.whgcare.org.nz/index.html>

GLOSSARY

Aroha	Love, affection, empathy
Hapū	Sub-tribe
Hīkoi	Walk or excursion
Hui	Meeting/gathering for discussion
Iwi	Tribe
Kaiako	Teacher, instructor
Karakia	ritual incantation, prayer
Kaumatua	Elder
Kaupapa	Topic, programme
Kuia	Respected female elder ²
Mamae	Feelings of sadness/emotional distress
Manaaki	Hospitality
Manuhiri	Visitor, guest
Matua	Father, uncle, in recent times used as a respectful honorific for an adult male
Moana	Ocean
Pūrākau	Legend, myth ³
Taitamariki	Young adults
Tamariki	Children
Tangaroa	Lord of the sea
Tangi	Funeral
Te Ao Māori	Māori world
Te reo Māori	The Māori language
Te reo Māori me ona tikanga	The Māori language and its accompanying customs
Tikanga	Custom, correct procedure
Tupuna	Ancestor
Waiata	Song/sing
Wānanga	Place, experience or environment where important topics are learnt.
Whaea	Mother, aunt, in more recent times used as a respectful honorific title for an adult female.
whakataukī	Proverb, significant saying
Whānau	Extended family, family group, sometimes used for members of a group with a common purpose, to include those who may not have any family ties to others in the group.
Whenua	Land

² <http://www.ngatiwai.ac.nz/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Ngatiwai-Korero-Mai-for-web1.pdf>

³ www.maoridictionary.co.nz