

Tihei-wa Mauri Ora

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Abstract

This is the developmental story of an indigenous kaupapa Māori counselling resource grown in Aotearoa, and based in Te Ao Māori. Two wahine Māori counsellors working in iwi social services in the Far North of New Zealand teamed up to create an assessment tool that has relevance for tangata whenua. The construct is based on concepts of the realms of creation according to the Māori worldview: Te Korekore, Te Pō, Te Whei-Ao, ki Te Ao Mārama. Tihei-wa Mauri Ora!

Whakatauki

He kākano ahau
I rūia mai i a Rangiātea
E kore au e ngaro

Ko Whangatautia te Maunga
Ko te Tai o Wharo te Moana
Ko Awapatiki te Awa
Ko Merekana te Whenua
Ko Te Uri o Hina me Tahaawai nga hapu
Ko Te Rarawa te Iwi
Ko Teina Piripi ahau

Ko Tongariro te Maunga
Ko Taupo te Moana
Ko Mokai te Marae
Ko Ngatiwairangi te Hapu
Ko Tuwharetoa te Iwi
Ko Vivienne Body ahau

Ko Whakarongoria te Maunga
Ko Te Hokianga te Moana
Ko Utakura te Awa
Ko Mataetata te Marae
Ko Ngati Toro te Hapu
Ko Ngapuhi te Iwi
Ko māua tahi tēnei

Our shared traditions are oral—histories handed down through the generations from our tūpuna. It was through these stories, traditions, and ways that we searched for a more meaningful method of assisting taitamariki who were grappling with suicidal ideas. In searching, we believed that our own cultural frameworks held the knowledge we needed in order to connect and begin a healing journey with taitamariki who were trying to make sense of their own existence and life. In our Māori worldview, one cannot go past Te Korekore, Te Pō, ki Te Whei-Ao, ki Te Ao Mārama, which are our beginnings, our source of life for the entire living world. “Tihei-wa Mauri Ora” is a story of the creation and re-creation that we readily see and experience throughout the natural world of Māori and other indigenous cultures. Nature provides examples of this regeneration in the continuous growth of plant life. It is within these natural formations that Māori view themselves and the world around them.

Te Korekore

Te Korekore is the realm between non-being and being—that is, the realm of potential being. This is the realm of primal, elemental energy or latent being. It is here that the seed stuff of the universe and all created things gestates. It is the womb from which all things proceed. Thus the Māori is thinking of continuous creation employed in two allegorical figures: that of plant growth and that of gestation in the womb. (Marsden, as cited in Royal, 2003, p. 20)

Plant growth

... te pū, te more, te weu, te aka, te rea, te waonui, te kune, te wh , primary root, tap root, fibrous roots, trunk, tendrils, massed branches, buds, fronds ... (Marsden, as cited in Royal, 2003, p. 20)

Human birth

... te apunga, te aponga, te kune-roa, te popoko-nui, te popoko-roa, hine-awaawa, tamaku, rangi-nui a tamaku.

Conception, the first signs of swelling, the distended womb, distended vagina, contraction, membrane ruptured, first stage of delivery and final stage. (Marsden, as cited in Royal, 2003, p. 21)

Our experience of Te Korekore: The realm of potential being

In the aftermath of the highly dramatic suicide of a 14-year-old Māori girl, we recognised the negative flow-on effects in the community. It seemed as though many of

the students in several of our high schools had become “infected” with romanticised ideas of suicide and other forms of self-harm. There were clusters of youth showing up in various locations throughout Muriwhenua. It was discovered that these different clusters of teens who were Māori were either related to or associated with the young woman, or knew of her death. There appeared to be a suicidal contagion and a copycat effect happening in the teen population throughout the Far North. Māori rates of hospitalisation for suicide attempts are highest in the 15- to 24-year-old group (Ministry of Health, 2008).¹

As counsellors working under the banner of Te Runanga o Te Rarawa in iwi social services, we were in a position to notice this phenomenon occurring in the community. In many respects, we were challenged to deal with the situation that confronted us as a community, to stabilise these clusters of teens exhibiting suicidal ideation. We were on the back foot, however, as initially our service had not been actively involved in this particular situation, until it was recognised that the cultural aspect, a vital ingredient in the postvention response, was not in place. It had been largely and systemically overlooked, underrated, or possibly derailed.

*Hutia te rito o te harakeke
Kei hea te kōmako e ko?
Rere ki uta
Rere ki tai.
Ki mai koe ki au,
“He aha te mea nui o te Ao?”
Maku e ki atu “He Tangata, He Tangata, He Tangata.”
If the centre of the shoot of the flax bush were plucked
Where would the bellbird sing?
You fly inland
You fly to sea.
You ask me,
“What is the most important in the world?”
I would say, “’Tis people, ’tis people, ’tis people.”*

(Campbell, as cited in Metge, 1995, p. 13)

There is one very basic and somewhat taken-for-granted notion that must be mentioned here. It is the knowledge of *tapu i te tangata*: the understanding of the sacred or divine element that is intrinsic to a person (Pa [Rev.] Henare Tate, personal

communication, 29 May 2009). People are tapu by right of their existence and being. The source of mana is tapu, or as Malcolm Peri puts it, “Mana is the expression of your tapu—your potential” (Te Hiku o Te Ika Trust, 1992). Each person has a whakapapa linking him or her back to Atua. Principles of tapu, mana, tika, pono, and aroha are concepts collectively known throughout Māoridom. These concepts are referred to in northern traditions and among other iwi throughout Aotearoa (Thornton, 2004, p. 266). They are conveyed in the tikanga of our tūpuna, *taonga tuku iho*, that gave order and motivation to life. In Te Tai Tokerau, these aspects of our culture have re-emerged within contemporary times as the Dynamics of Whanaungatanga (DOW) and have been actively promulgated by Pa Henare Tate and Malcolm M. Peri (Te Hiku o Te Ika Trust, 1992).

There are various concepts of tapu. One notion is that everything created has tapu, or as Michael Shirres (1997) puts it, “Every part of creation has its tapu, because every part of creation has its link ... with spiritual powers ... and with Io, Io Matua Kore” (p. 35). Within Te Korekore, a simultaneous dichotomy of absolute nothingness and absolute potential, all things exist. Io, the very source of all things, exists within this environment of Te Korekore, the quintessential foundations of creation.

Ko te tapu te mana o ngā atua.

Tapu is the mana of the spiritual powers. (Shirres, 1997, p. 33)

When we were finally engaged to support these teen clusters, we found our general mental health assessment tools inadequate for capturing the particular situation or mood of students who were now at a high level of vulnerability; these tools, including scaling questions, did not enable them to communicate their real state of mind or sense of connection with life. Some three or four months down the track, their needs/risk had escalated to include several other suicide attempts in the teen population. As Māori counsellors, we were concerned about the fact that our assessment tools did not seem to be effective aids in our work of supporting these students. Thus we got together and, sharing our kōrero, we discovered that what we needed was not readily available to us.

There is a duality to Te Korekore, in that in this state of absolute nothingness there is also a state of absolute potentiality to bring into being all things. It was from this place of seeming nothingness that we decided to look to find a relevant assessment tool or to create one.

Te Pō

Te Pō is the realm of becoming ... According to the Io tradition, at the border between Hawaiki Tapu in the Pō regions is Te Waipuna Ariki (the divine fountain of Io the fountainhead). This is the fountain through which the primal energy of potential being proceeds from the infinite realms of Te Korekore, through the realms of Te Pō into the world of light (Te Ao Mārama) to replenish the stuff of the universe as well as to create what is new. Thus it is a process of continuous creation and recreation. (Marsden, as cited in Royal, 2003, p. 21)

Te Korekore i takea mai, ki Te Pō-t-kitea, Te Pō-tangotango, Te Pō whāwhā, Te Pō-namunamu ki te whei ao, ki Te Ao Mārama.

From the realm of Te Korekore the root cause, through the night of unseeing, the night of hesitant exploration, the night of bold groping, night inclined towards the day and emergence into the broad light of day. (Marsden, as cited in Royal, 2003, p. 21)

Our experience of Te Pō: The world of becoming

It was within our counselling work with the various groups of youth affected by the recent suicide loss that we found ourselves groping in the darkness in terms of ongoing relevant risk assessment. This was our Te Pō. As counsellors, we found ourselves attempting to use assessment tools that felt clumsy and meaningless for ourselves and the youth we were working with. The tools we had simply felt wrong; they didn't really fit or make sense—to us or the tamariki we were trying to support.

One afternoon we talked about the inappropriateness we sensed of the risk assessment tools. We had recently been developing an initial, general counselling assessment tool that was culturally relevant. Then the idea came to make a risk assessment tool that was culturally appropriate for Māori. We knew and affirmed that there must be a better way of assessing our tamariki in terms of suicide or self-harm risk that fitted and held relevance within our own cultural frameworks. We thought about that for a while and then we started singing to each other, waiata, pao; we had a kōrero about a vision of a tunnel, and round circles. Then the song emerged: te pu, te more, te aka, a song our tamariki sang. By the end of the day we had notions of Te Korekore, Te Pō, Te Whei-Ao, ki Te Ao Mārama.

Overnight we went off to find out more about our own processes of creation, and by morning we had identified them: Te Korekore, Te Pō, Te Whei-Ao, ki Te Ao Mārama. We also began to form pictures in our heads about how this should look in

a visual, continuous, self-assessment type format. We managed to get our first prototype of the construct drawn up, with help of our administrative support people. It was a bar of colour, from black to white with varying shades of grey from Te Korekore ki Te Ao Mārama. We also managed to call it what we thought it was: “Tihei-wa Mauri Ora”—The Breath of Life.

Tihei-wa Mauri Ora



**Te Kore
Kore**
(VOID,
ENERGY,
POTENTIAL
BEING)

**Te Po-te
Kititea**

**Te Po-
Tangotango**

**Te Po-
Whawha**

**Te Po-
Namunamu**

**Ki Te
Whai-Ao**
(GLIMMER OF
LIGHT,
COMING INTO
BEING)

Ki Te Ao-Marama
(BRIGHT LIGHT OF DAY)

Tihei-wa Mauri-ora
(THERE IS LIFE)

Te Po
(THE NIGHT, DEEP)

Korero:

There was a quiet excitement because we knew we were onto something and this time it felt right; our wairua confirmed this to us. That same day, Vivienne went off to a tangi of one of her whanaunga, and after the burial the grieving whānau came back into the marae. The kaumātua there, in his whaikōrero ki te whānau pani, acknowledged the whānau who were all dressed in black and he painted the picture so aptly in his kōrero. He talked about Te Pō, saying something like “... a marika, kei a koutou i roto i te pō ... ā te wā ka tae ai koutou ki te Ao Mārama” (“... you are all in the dark night now, but in the time to come you will be back in the world of Light”) (Wiremu Wiremu, personal communication, 21 August 2009).

In that moment, it confirmed to Vivienne that we were on the right track in the design of our assessment construct. There it was, right before us: a living, breathing process, natural and available, relevant and meaningful. It was just there waiting for us to recognise it and bring it into our consciousness and reality. This story has been told and retold to us through the generations of time. Its simplicity is a testament to its truth and beauty which still holds relevance in our lives today.

Te Whei-Ao ki Te Ao Mārama

The Wheiao is the state between the world of darkness and the world of light, but it is much closer to the unfolding of the world of light. (Barlow, 1996, p. 184)

Te Whei-Ao is a turning point, just as the unborn child turns and engages into the birthing canal. This is what midwives refer to as “transition,” where the baby and the “whare tangata mahi tahi kia puta i te kopu.” Barlow (1996) refers to Te Whei-Ao as the entire birth process, from the time labour pains start until the baby is born (p. 184). Other descriptions of Te Whei-Ao are heard, such as “tihei mauri ora ki te wheiao, ki te ao mārama” (ibid., p. 184). Te Whei-Ao is a transitional, pivotal, crucial point or moment in time—for example, the koru right before it’s ready to unfold, the flower opening in the morning light of day, the emergent blossom from whence the beauty unfolds—kia puawai.

In a practice scenario, persons with suicidal ideation, in that moment of Te Whei-Ao, recognise a glimmer of hope that holds them in the land of the living. It is in this instant that suicidal people locate themselves visually with the construct and also within the entirety of creation. They locate themselves and find their place for this particular point in time of their lives. Perhaps for the first time, they are able to assess themselves on a continuum of life, and to locate themselves in a culturally appropriate, creative order that allows and validates their experience of grief, confusion, and pōuritanga. At the same time, they know that this is a right and appropriate place for them at this particular time in their life. There is also the sense that this state, although valid, is part of a natural order that will change and move towards light as the healing journey progresses. It gives them a “right of being” in the entire whole of creation; they also begin to see that they are part of a larger dynamic force allowing for self-acceptance, safety, order, and validation.

The Tihei-wa Mauri Ora construct shows a life continuum where periods of light and darkness are normalised as proper and valid, given this space and time in their lives. The construct locates the person in an innate way within Te Tuakiri o te Tangata (Te Ataarangi Educational Trust, 2000). Io has already implanted this knowledge and wairua within us, and when we see it, there is recognition from within; an innate resonance and memory ignited. The connection to ourselves and our collective understandings grounds us in the whole cosmic order of life. The concept of Te Wā and continuous life forces becomes apparent in the construct and for the people involved.

Te Ao Mārama: The realm of being

Te Ao Mārama is the realm of being... Through the great path of Tane linking these three realms there is a two way traffic: the spirits of the departed descending to Hawaiki and that which is in the process of becoming ascending to the world of being. (Marsden, as cited in Royal, 2003, p.21)

Once we had our initial confirmation from the kaumātua Wiremu Wiremu at Rahiri Marae that we were indeed on the right track from the Te Pō kōrero, we decided to take our prototype to see how it would be received by some of the youth we were working with. We took our band of colour from black to white and all the shades between representing Te Korekore, Te Pō, and Te Whei-Ao ki Te Ao Mārama to a 14-year-old Māori girl who was in counselling. As she looked at the resource (or drawing), I asked her to tell me where she was when we first met and where she was now. Immediately she pointed to Te Pō and said, “That’s where I was,” and then to Te Whei-Ao and said, “That’s where I am now” (“Tui,” personal communication, 19 August 2008). I was stoked;² I couldn’t believe what I was hearing and seeing. I kept asking her if she wanted me to explain it, and if she understood it. She confirmed that she indeed understood it, and let me know in no uncertain terms that she didn’t need any further explanation. She kept looking at me as if to say, “What’s wrong with you, Teina, don’t you get it?”

The other launch into Te Ao Mārama was when I took the resource to a supervision group connected to an Amokura training programme on abuse, neglect, and violence. There I presented our learnings, our work in developing the construct and the situation it grew from. I showed the group how we were using the construct in our counselling work as a resource for risk assessment. The group response was overwhelming and they were excited about the prospect of using the tool within their various roles of work with whānau. Some members of the group saw applications for its use in supervision—for example, the situation in which a supervisee might indicate a position on any particular issue, and identify the changes that were required, in order to arrive at the desired place in regard to that issue. Others in the group saw applications for the construct in terms of goal-setting and reviews. It was then that we realised the wider applications possible for this construct. Meanwhile, people wanted us to produce a resource from the construct that they could use right away.

Since this time, we have been using the construct in our work and trialling our findings. Around the same time, we decided to write our story to share with others this first stage in the development of Tihei-wa Mauri Ora.

Kōrero whakamutunga

In many ways this kōrero is the birthing story of an idea to use our own cultural knowledge as a means of assessment, a framework to gauge a particular place or stage, Te Wā, in the whole of one’s life story. There is a growth and emergence through the darkness and towards light as the idea grows to take form in our hearts and minds. This very process is not uncommon. In fact, Durie (1997) records the nineteenth-century writer Richard Taylor’s “metaphoric reference to ‘the epoch of thought’ as originating in the period of Te Kore, the void, and gradually evolving to full awareness” (p. 144). Our children sing of the growth of thought in the following waiata (Te Puāwai o Te Ataarangi ki Kirikiriroa, 2003):

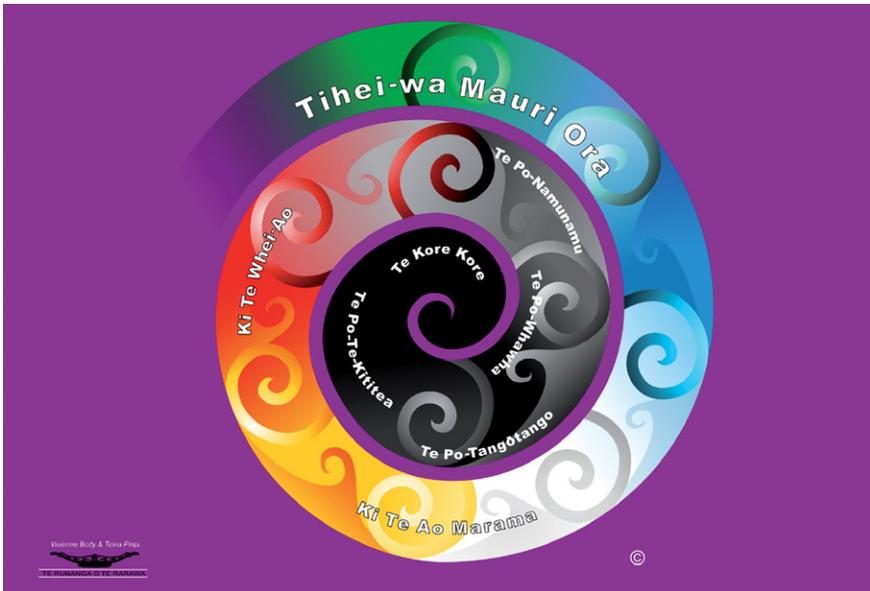
<i>Nā te kukune te pupuke</i>	<i>From the conception the increase</i>
<i>Nā te pukuke te hihiri</i>	<i>From the increase the thought</i>
<i>Nā te hihiri te mahara</i>	<i>From the thought the remembrance</i>
<i>Nā te mahara te manako</i>	<i>From the remembrance the desire</i>
<i>Nā te manako te wananga</i>	<i>From the desire the knowledge</i>
<i>Nā te wananga te mātau</i>	<i>From the knowledge the understanding</i>
<i>Hui e!</i>	<i>Gathering the forces</i>
<i>Taiki e!</i>	<i>Raising and confirming the forces</i>

Then there are others such as Buck (1949, p. 435), who saw thought as developing along natural growth paths corresponding with plant life, as found in the following:

<i>... Te Pū</i>	<i>Root, cause</i>
<i>Te Weu</i>	<i>Rootlets</i>
<i>Te More</i>	<i>Taproot</i>
<i>Te Aka</i>	<i>Vine</i>
<i>Te Tipuranga</i>	<i>Growth</i>

Thus it is hardly a unique idea to take a familiar metaphor of growth and emergence and relate it to a particular thought/whakāro, and then to apply it in our lives. The beauty of the idea is in its simplicity—looking toward something considered to be old and antiquated, and bringing it into our everyday reality, and whakamana te kōrero ō ngā tūpuna. We wish to be really clear that this story of creation from Te Korekore ki Te Ao Mārama is not exclusively ours; we merely looked to ngā kōrero ō nehera and found the treasures there in ngā taonga tuku iho. Our idea was not the cosmic kōrero of creation from Te Korekore, ki Te Pō, ki Te Ao Mārama as handed down through

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the generations of time. Our idea was to look within our own cultural paradigms to find an assessment tool that resonated with relevance, connection, and meaning for us and the people we work with.

In our initial trials with whānau, we found that our taitamariki instantly located themselves within the construct with little to no explanation required. There was an immediate connection. We recognise, however, that much work is yet to be done in

the development and trialling of applications of this tool for both Māori and potentially for non-Māori as well across the lifespan. In some instances there will be a need for further enhancement in people's understanding of the construct. That is where the culturally resourced practitioner delves into the kete kōrero to breathe life into the construct—to paint in the picture, and bring to life the most appropriate metaphoric kōrero of creation, recalling the movement from the dark to light, or human conception through to birth and growth, as plant life also develops. All of these are different analogies for continuous life forces moving towards the emergence of light and life—*Tihei-wa Mauri Ora!*

Glossary

Aroha	Love, compassion, and understanding
Atua	Demi-gods
Dynamics of Whanaungatanga	Family interrelationships
Io	Creator
Io Matua Kore	Creator, the parentless
Kaupapa Māori	Pertaining to Māori culture
Kete	Woven flax basket
Kia puawai	Coming forth into full bloom
Kōrero	Talk
Kōrero whakamutunga	Conclusion
Koru	Seed or frond
Mahi tahi kia puta i te kopu	Birthing process
Mana	Dignity, value, worth, power
Mauri	Life force
Muriwhenua	Five northernmost tribes
Ngā	Some, plural
Nehera	Yesteryears
Pao	Traditional Māori chant
Pono	Truth
Pōuritanga	Sadness
Puawai	Blossoms
Pumanawa	Sensory, cellular memory
Putiputi	Flower
Taitamariki	Youth

Tangata	People
Taonga tuku iho	Ancestral treasures handed down
Tapu	Sacred, divine; may also be restrictions associated with
Te Ao Mārama	Into the light of the world
Te Kore	Nothingness
Te Korekore	A duality of nothingness and potential of all things
Te kōrero o ngā tūpuna	The treasured stories of our ancestors
Te Pō	Night
Te Tai Tokerau	Northern region
Te Wā	Seasons of time
Te Whei-Ao	Realm between Te Pō (world of darkness) and Te Ao Mārama (world of light)
Tihei-wa Mauri Ora!	The breath of life
Tika	Correct and proper according to Māori culture
Tikanga	Māori cultural lore governing norms and practice. Handed down thru passages of time. Māori cultural traditions and protocols
Tupuna	Older person
Waiata	Songs
Wairua	Spiritual being, spiritual nature
Whakamana	Strengthen
Whakapapa	Genealogy
Whakatauki	Traditional Māori proverb
Whānau	Family
Whangaungatanga	Family interrelationships
Whare tangata	“House of people,” reference to a woman’s womb

Notes

- 1 The 2006 census revealed that approximately 73% of the population identify as being of European/Other descent, 13% as Māori, 8% as Asian, and 6% as Pacific Island (www.stats.govt.nz). In terms of suicide rates relative to ethnicity, Māori had the highest rate of suicide (17.9 per 100,000 in the 2003–2005 period, compared with the non-Māori

rate of 12 per 100,000), and the majority of Māori deaths by suicide occur in the 15- to 35-year age group. European/Other record the second highest rate, followed by Pacific and then Asian. Hospitalisation rates for intentional self-harm follow a similar pattern (Ministry of Health, 2008).

- 2 “Stoked” is a colloquial term to mean delighted, thrilled or overwhelmed with pleasure.

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