

Te Ao Māori perspective on Messy Play (Korihori Pōrehe)



Kia heke iho rā i ngā tūpuna, kātahi ka tika.

This *whakataukī*, taken from *Te Whāriki*, refers to intergenerational expertise and the respect Māori have for the wise counsel of the ancestors. It is a reminder to consider the ways science, teaching and learning is enriched through the integration of traditional Māori knowledge and values.

Rich sensory experiences that are vital for optimum brain development are readily available in nature. Playing in the *onepū* (sandpit); or planting *kai* (food) in the *mara* (garden); exploring heuristic baskets filled with *rākau* (wood), *kota* (shell), *huru* (feather), and *kōhatu* (stones); listening to *manu* (birds) sing or shaping the first woman Hineahuone with *uku* (clay) all provide stimulation prompting the brain to form neuronal connections.

Korihori pōrehe (messy play) can be enhanced with *pūrakau* (storytelling) for example, the *pūrakau* of Taranaki Maunga (mountain) and his journey from the central plateau has been recounted by iwi for centuries. It is said Taranaki Maunga was formerly known as Pukeonaki and stood near Tūrangī, with Ruapehu, Tongariro, and Pihanga. Pukeonaki and Tongariro both loved Pihanga and fought over her. But Tongariro was stronger and Pukeonaki (Taranaki), bearing the scars of battle, withdrew underground, carving out the bed of the Whanganui River on his journey to the sea. When he surfaced, he saw the beautiful Pouākai range standing inland and he was drawn towards her. Pouākai and Taranaki's offspring became the trees, plants, birds, rocks and rivers flowing from their slopes. We can recreate this *pūrakau* in the *onepū*, *tamariki* can build volcanoes from the *oneone* (sand) and include vinegar and baking soda for the eruptions while sharing the *kōrero* of the three prominent volcanoes.

Tamariki are drawn to *korihori pōrehe* invitations like *korikori wai* – natural water play areas like streams that are full of opportunities for discovery and exploration. Another location is the *ngāhere* (forest) to take risks, test theories and be creative, it also provides ingredients like leaves and mud for *rongoā* potions which help *tamariki* to integrate their sensory experiences, yielding improved dexterity and co-ordination.

Centre *whānau* can enthuse *tamariki* to be in awe of how our *taiao* (natural environment) works, be curious and willing to inquire into cultural views and values that can enrich scientific learning. Māori are intimately connected to *taiao* (nature) and often introduce themselves in personal terms to *maunga* (mountains), *awa* (rivers) and *whenua* (land) through *whakapapa*. Promotion of Māori values and practices that contribute to *kaitiaki* environmental sustainability, can be role-modelled by valuing natural materials and respectful use of them.

Korihori pōrehe provides an opportunity to learn *kupu hou* (new words), *kōrero*, express feelings and offer tamariki the space to imagine and be creative like using sticks and shells as *taonga puoro* (percussion instruments). *Korihori pōrehe* experiences are often enjoyed as a *whānau* and they support the *Mana Tangata* contribution strand of *Te Whāriki* by providing opportunities for *tamariki* to work with and alongside others.