

Tākaro *Play*

Weaving together the threads of indigenous knowledge, science and cultural values provides a holistic view of child development to support whānau in their parenting journey, enriched by the understanding that their ancestors were remarkable caregivers who cherished their tamariki.



During our hui, workshops and wānanga, developed for whānau Māori, we explore mātauranga Māori and lived experiences, through conversations about tūpuna parenting practices and scientific understanding in child development. During our wānanga, He Hīkoi Mahara, we surface positive parenting narratives, connecting the past with the present, empowering whānau to recognise the parenting treasures handed down to us by our tūpuna. Here, our Learning Designer, André Ngāpō expands on two stories written by whānau during these wānanga, linking them to the kaupapa of tākaro/play.

Knucklebones

School holidays.
Whānau, cousins,
siblings, aroha, bonds.
Clicking of the sheep
knuckle bones
On the backs of our
hands or on the floor.
Fun and laughter.
Competitive.
Trying to out do one
another.
I see the bond with
cousins and siblings in my
own children.

In this heart-warming story of playing knucklebones during the school holidays, the essence of tākarō, or play, is beautifully captured. The experience of whānau coming together evokes the concept of te whare tapere — the traditional Māori community space of entertainment where tākarō was a central part of cultural expression.

Our tūpuna understood the significance of tākarō. Play was more than just a means of recreation — it was a vehicle for learning, for skill development, knowledge transmission, creativity, fostering social connections and to release and relax. Play serves as a bridge between the physical and spiritual realms. It enables individuals to connect with their surroundings, to their ancestors, to others, and to their holistic selves — an opportunity to balance the mind, body and spirit.

Within the whare tapere, play was intertwined with many forms of expression such as kapa haka, taonga pūoro, kōrero, haka, karetao (puppets) and body adornments. Parents, whānau and communities might apply this knowledge through providing tākarō experiences where traditional knowledge, cultural values, and te reo Māori are present, thus ensuring the continuity and thriving of our heritage.



The author of the knucklebones story sees the same bonds and aroha among her own children and their cousins that she cherished as a child. Along with the fun and laughter came competition and cooperation, developing motor skills, building perseverance, and encouraging others.

And, as with knucklebones, sometimes the simplest forms of play, be it splashing together in the waves, word play, or an old-fashioned game of hide and seek, can provide the most profound experience — experiences shared by the next generation of tam-ariki that ensure that the spirit of tākarō endures.

*Kia kawea tātou e te rēhia.
Let us be taken by joy and
entertainment.*



Te Taiao

When I was 9, it was the best and worst time in my life.

I lived in a whare that had a field next to it. My brothers and I used to play in it most days.

We would play hide and seek, chase each other with sticks and make huts.

The field was full of trees and a big bush area on the fence near the road.

In that field I felt the warmth of the sun.

In this heartfelt pūrākau, the power of tākaro, or play, reveals itself in many ways. For the young boy, tākaro serves as a sanctuary for relaxation and release, offering solace and respite from life's challenges. The field, with its surrounding trees and bush, becomes a haven where the warmth of the sun nurtures not only the tinana (body) but also the wairua (spirit).

Our tūpuna Māori understood we are all a part of te taiao, the natural world, connected through mauri - an intrinsic life force binding and animating all things. In this story, the presence of rākau (trees) and the field filled with sunshine bring the boy to a space of deep connection with nature. In te ao Māori, the land is a living entity, our tūpuna are a part of it and we are all connected. Through play in nature, our connection to the wairua of the land and our tūpuna may be observed - the potential for a sense of belonging and ancestral presence.

The bonds formed with siblings through play in this story speak to the importance of whānaungatanga and tuakana/teina relationships (older sibling/younger sibling). These relationships are integral to Māori culture, embodying values of support, guidance, and interdependence. Play strengthens these connections, providing shared experiences that forge lasting memories and nurture the spirit of aroha.

Parents and whānau might apply this knowledge through finding forms of play that help tamariki to:

- find peace and relaxation
- to come into harmony with the natural world
- to strengthen whānau and tūpuna bonds.

This powerful story connects us to the significance of tākaro in Māori culture, where play is not merely an activity but a way we can deeply connect with life.

