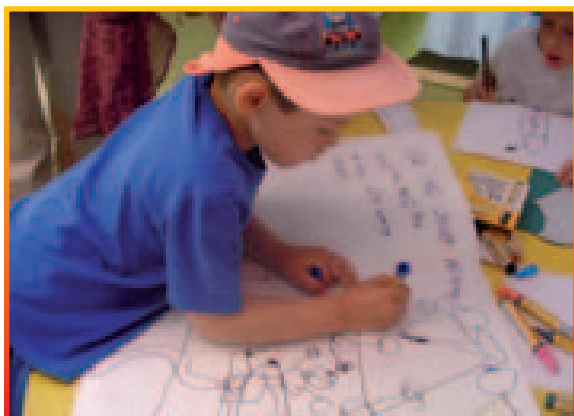


Fire at the marae

8 November

It is so hard to believe for all of us that our beloved marae has been burnt down. The children are constantly talking about it. Many drive past it each day to come to kindergarten. The teaching team has engaged in much dialogue with the children and together they have come up with a plan. Not just some ordinary plan, a marvellous plan indeed.

This is what has been decided at our morning meetings with children. Whaea Taini has lost so many precious things and so why not make her something precious from the B.B.K. children. "Yes, a good idea," thought Daniel P. and Oliver. Daniel suggested a taniwha like the one we had in our garden. It was put to the rest of the group and the decision – unanimous. We would ask Steve if that could be the focus for this Friday. Steve is always extremely agreeable and suggested we must get to work with our plans immediately.



Children hurried to the table to sketch out their plans, chatting about the burning down of the marae, and some thought that the taniwha would be able to catch the bad guy and kill him!! Others drew much gentler taniwha surrounded by flowers. The drawings are stunning and Steve visited later in the day to view them. He is feeling very positive about this taniwha and suggests that we



make it on a smaller scale in case Whaea Taini doesn't have much space in her office at the moment.

With the koha collected, the card nearly finished and the taniwha about to begin there is a feeling amongst us all that this will bring our community even closer. Since our earlier trip to the marae, children and families have embraced the bicultural weave that has emerged through our curriculum. I guess we all felt part of us was affected when we heard the news of the arson.

Some children were bewildered and needed to go and visit, whilst others collected news cuttings and shared their feelings at mat time and through their drawings. On Monday next week we shall count the money together on the mat, wrap up the taniwha, and make a special delivery with aroha to Whaea Taini. I hope now some of our anger will disappear!!!!



Parent's voice

29 October

Child: Daniel

Marae fire

Daniel was very taken with the tragedy of the marae fire. On the way home from kindy he spoke about what had happened very seriously and was angry with the "baddies" who did the terrible deed. He said it was very sad! He had enjoyed the visit to the marae earlier in the year. He asked if we could go and see what had happened. We did so immediately. The ruin was covered in blue plastic. I explained why they had covered the building. There was a pile of burnt chairs at the gate. He saw how the fire had damaged them and could smell the burnt, smoky smell.

On the way home, he asked what had happened to all the objects that were inside the building and to

the wood carvings. (Later in the evening when he was telling Dad the story, he demonstrated how one carving had stuck out its tongue and looked very fierce!)

We chatted about how fire damages and destroys things, with many, many, many questions from Daniel on the subject. Later Dad made a small fire outside to demonstrate what fire does and how it can destroy.

Daniel came to me during the afternoon and showed me two drawings he had done about the fire. He showed how the marae was on fire, one had a fire engine in it, with the water hose, a fireman and two Māori people. It showed the chairs inside the marae. The other drawing included a fire engine and police car, a sign telling people what had happened, a “baddy” lighting the fire, someone inside the fire, who had to be rescued, chairs, other furniture and carpets burning, the wood carvings were initially drawn with faces, then covered over, because they were damaged in the fire. (The two drawings were included in the portfolio.)

Out of this tragedy, Daniel has had a big learning experience about the danger and destructive ability of fire, about the “bad” people who do this type of thing. It ties up with his recent observation of the ever-present graffiti and the whys and whos of that damaging subject.

Mixed emotions

Prue

How can I describe the feelings? What an amazing experience we all had gathering at our beloved marae (devastated by fire) to extend our heartfelt feelings and aroha to Whaea Taini.

The children, their whānau, Steve and his pupils and our teaching team had been working towards

this day for a few weeks and little did we know the emotion exchanged between us all when presenting the taniwha to Whaea Taini would overflow as it did. Some of us cried, some of us reflected on what had happened and still felt angry, but the children stood reverently still and took in the proceedings with such dignity. They just knew what was expected.

Eventually smiles emerged as Whaea Taini accepted the taniwha and proud children moved forward to hongi or kiss Whaea Taini remembering so clearly that this is what one does on a marae. Children were encouraged to lean forward and touch the “broken house” (children’s words) and view for themselves the remains of a special place they had visited five months earlier, a place full of wonderful stories and memories.

Whaea Taini assured the children that the taniwha would play a significant part in the rebuilding project and she felt that the bush walkway once repaired would be the best resting place for such a fine creature. She felt he would be admired by many!! We could tell that she was very touched by receiving such a beautiful gift.

To be able to share these precious moments with Steve and the school children made this healing journey so special. They played such a vital role in the creation of the taniwha and to have them be part of the presentation gave it real meaning for our children. It would have been out of the question not to involve them.

I am left wondering now about how Daniel feels, and whether he will continue his drawings. There will no doubt be “conversations” around our visit and I look forward to children expressing their feelings and engaging in robust reflection on the reciprocal relationship we have with Whaea Taini. We look forward to her visit in the near future to bless our native garden.



What has surprised our teaching team?

Our children have taken on board Daniel's pain and shown such interest in the many drawings he has done at home and at kindergarten about the fire. They have engaged in deep and meaningful conversations about the fire and perused the many newspaper cuttings with much interest. Their voice needed to be heard and they expressed it in many forms, some creatively using mixed media, through drama and music, but most of all they wanted to question and ponder over the precious carvings and artefacts that had been destroyed and what they could do to make Whaea Taini happy again.

Did their thinking change our view?

We began to reflect more on our practice and revisit our thinking on the role we needed to play with supporting these children in their understanding of something so devastating as losing something precious in a horrible senseless arson attack. Were we prepared to answer questions honestly, would we gloss over certain aspects or was this demeaning to children's intelligence? It was decided unanimously that our image of the children stood strong and we valued their thinking and reasoning and yes we would embark on a journey with them to make sense of this disaster and hopefully heal some of the hurt and lingering uncertainty.

How did the visit impact on us all?

It opened up a new world, a world of reciprocal relationships, a reaching out and embracing of two cultures, a sharing and understanding which needed no words. The reverence and pride the children showed during the ceremony gave us such strength and made us aware that when children say "I just know" that we need to take notice and respect that, yes, they intuitively do know some things. Through such open and meaningful conversations with all parties there was a consensus that we did the right thing. Our visual documentation tells a wonderful story of togetherness, pride, and humility.

What's happening here?

A parent and a teacher at a kindergarten report on the children's responses to a fire at the local marae.

What does this assessment tell us about the learning (using an Exploration/Mana Aotūroa lens)?

Children, families, and teachers explore an event of great significance for the local community. The parent comment describes the ways in which the child Daniel explores the fire. He visits the burnt building. He asks lots of questions, and his father builds a small fire to demonstrate "what fire does and how it can destroy". Daniel communicates his own understanding of the event through drawings.

The children at the early childhood centre and a visiting artist, Steve, draw plans for and construct a taniwha to present to Whaea Taini at the marae as a precious gift, expressing their sense of loss and attachment to the marae.

How might this documented assessment contribute to Exploration/Mana Aotūroa?

The documentation, the drawings, and the photographs will provide a focus as the children work through their learning and make sense of this tragedy.

What other strands of Te Whāriki are exemplified here?

The kindergarten community has reaffirmed its closeness to the local marae, illustrating a sense of *belonging* to the wider community.