# Āta: Growing Respectful Relationships

## Taina Whakaatere Pohatu
*(Ngāti Porou, Rongowhakaata, Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki, Ngai Tamanuhiri, Ngati Kahungunu)*

Te Wānanga o Aotearoa

## He Whakarāpopoto

Kai te reo ōna ake whakaaro e pupūtia ai ngā take-pū Māori. He mea tuku iho tēnei e ngā mātua tīpuna ki ngā whakatupuranga o nāianei. Ki te kaha te tangata ki te raparapa haere, ka kitea tonutia te hōhonutanga o ngā takepū nei, hai arataki paitia i a ia. Ko te kaupapa o te tuhituhi nei, he arotahi i te takepū o te *āta*. Kai konei ka kitea ētahi tauira, hai whakamahitanga ki ngā wāhi maha, kai reira te hunga tangata. E whakapaetia kai konei anō ngā take-pū hai mahinga mā te tangata i a ia e tipu ana.

## Abstract

The language has its own capacity to give a depth of meaning to Māori concepts. This was passed down by the ancestors to the present generations. A determined researcher can access the depth of these principles and find it most rewarding. This paper focuses on the principle of "āta" and examples are be given which can be applied in workplaces. The claim is made that these principles can be applied to one's own development.

Keywords: āta; te takepū āta | the āta principle; ētahi kōrero tauira | narrative examples

## Hai Tīmata | Introduction

Hai tauira mo ngā reanga katoa | As an example to all generations.

Māori have a wealth of takepū to promote well-being and advancement. Takepū are preferred ways, fashioned by Māori thinking and rationale, of engaging with others and, consequently, provides a template of preferred ways for others to engage with Māori.

In social services, practitioners engage with people who have been marginalised and disempowered in their relationships. Understanding how these domains of negativity function and interconnect can point to ways they may then be safely navigated.

This paper explores the takepū of āta and its use in dealing with tensions within relationships in the pursuit of "legitimate counter hegemonies, which are intended to

provide for more human existence for those who are marginalised, oppressed and exploited" (Smith, 1997, p. 32).

## Te Hāngaitanga | Approach

A focus on āta is an example of deliberately placing Māori thought and knowledge at the centre of activities to inform and guide practice. An understanding of this concept can be tracked through: the elements of āta, phrases involving the word āta, the relationship āta has with other Māori words and selected sets of phrases, and the value of āta when engaging in relationships.

This paper discusses āta in the context of narratives from a specific kāwai whakapapa (genealogical/geographical specific grouping). Other takepū are also incorporated into the narratives, offering their unique points of view to reinterpret āta further. Verses from kāwai whakapapa waiata mōteatea (specific genealogical/geographical sung poetry), exemplify how the felt messages of earlier generations can be reinterpreted into our present activities. Together these different aspects construct an understanding of āta and the execution of strategies in pursuit of respectfulness in relationships | te whakakoha rangatiratanga.

Te reo Māori is an important precursor for initiating entry points to deeper understandings of Māori knowledge and cultural practices as the Māori language "has been created and moulded to express our feelings and sentiments and no other medium of speech can take its place" (Te Rangihiroa as cited in Sorrenson, 1986, p. 182). Feelings and sentiments underpin cultural theory and reasoning, with language the vehicle that conveys and at the same time assesses practice. This highlights the dynamic interrelationship between language, thinking, and the lived reality of Māori as "collecting and recording is livened up by the fact that the material is new or an old friend in a new place" (ibid, 1986, p. 226). This is a timely reminder that knowledge and its meanings are travellers in perpetuity: as they are invited into kaupapa (issues) and relationships (a new place) so are they revalued as vital companions, like a new or an old friend, becoming again active participants. This is the potentiated power within te reo, to "crack" cultural bodies of knowledge. Having the courage to reflect on the boundless possibilities within Māori thinking, and the energies of earlier generations for application in our time, is the never-ending hope, entrusted by Ngata (1940) when he wrote: "Mehemea e kaha ana te hinengaro Māori ki te mea, kia mau ki tōna reo, ōna tikanga, ngā mahi a ōna tīpuna, te whakahī ki tōna Māoritanga, ka mau tonu." | If the Māori mind is steadfast in its intent to maintain its language, values and ways, the undertakings of earlier generations, to elevate its cultural capital, they will be retained.

Tuakana Nepe reaffirmed these sentiments, reminding us that "Māori language as a living medium of communication is a vital strand in the transmission of Kaupapa Māori knowledge" (Nepe, 1991, p. 55). These Māori leaders recognised the counter-hegemonic energy held within Māori language and how it could create liberating networks to enable Māori to engage any issue with integrity.

## Te Takepū Āta | The Applied Principles of Āta

Āta is a cultural tool, shaped to inform and guide understandings of respectfulness in relationships towards wellbeing. From the journey of gaining meaningful insights into the integrity of āta and its applications, five elements have been developed. First, āta focuses on relationships, negotiating boundaries, creating and holding safe space. Second, āta gently reminds people of how to behave when engaging in relationships with people, kaupapa, and environments. Third, āta intensifies peoples' perceptions; it does this by according quality space of time (wā) and place (wāhi), by demanding effort and energy of participants, and by conveying notions of respectfulness and reciprocity and conveying the requirements of reflection, the prerequisite to critical analysis, and of discipline. Finally, by ensuring that the transformation process is an integral part of the relationship, āta incorporates the fourth and fifth elements: those of planning and strategising.

## Āta — The Phrase

While these elements should be considered individually their true value can only be experienced when they are brought together. Using this process requires the discipline of critical reflection as, when applied to any context, āta creates its uniquely fashioned signposts that help guide what, how and why we do things. The phrases in the following table provide examples of this.

TABLE 1

| ĀTA: TAKEPŪ \| PRINCIPLES AND HE WHAKAMĀRAMATANGA \| DEFINITIONS | |
| --- | --- |
| **Takepū \| Principles** | **He Whakamāramatanga \| Definitions** |
| **Āta-haere** | To be intentional and deliberate and to approach reflectively, moving with respect and integrity. It signals the act of moving with an awareness of relationships, their significance and requirements. |
| **Āta-whakarongo** | To listen with reflective deliberation. This requires patience and tolerance, giving space to listen and communicate to the heart, mind and soul of the speaker, context and environment. It requires the conscious participation of all senses, the natural inclusion of the values of trust, integrity, and respectfulness. |

| Āta-kōrero | To communicate and speak with clarity, requiring quality preparation and a deliberate gathering of what is to be communicated. This is to ensure a quality of presentation (kia mārama ki te kaupapa), to speak with conviction (kia pūmau ki te kaupapa), and to be focused (kia hāngai ki te kaupapa). |
|---|---|
| Āta-tuhi | To communicate and write with deliberation, needing to be constantly reflective, and knowing the purpose for writing; in this, consistently monitoring and measuring quality is implicit. |
| Āta-mahi | To work diligently, with the conviction that what is being done is correct and appropriate to the tasks undertaken. |
| Āta-noho | To give quality time to be with people and their issues, with an open and respectful mind, heart and soul. This signals the level of integrity required in relationships. |
| Āta-whakaaro | To think with deliberation, allowing space for creativity, openness and reflection, the consequence of which is that action is undertaken to the best of one's ability. |
| Āta-whakaako | To instil knowledge and understanding deliberately. There are clear reasons why knowledge is shared — to the appropriate participants, in the required manner, time and place. |
| Āta-tohutohu | To instruct, monitor and correct deliberately, in which grounded knowledge is a constant and valued companion. Cultural markers such as kaitiakitanga (responsible trusteeship) are then accorded safe space to enlighten how and why relationships should be maintained. |
| Āta-kīnaki | To be deliberate and clear in the choice of appropriate supports to enhance positions taken. |
| Āta-hoki mārire | To return with respectful acknowledgement of possible consequences. |
| Āta-titiro | To study kaupapa with reflective deliberation. |
| Āta-whakamārama | To inform with reflective deliberation, ensuring that the channels of communication at the spiritual, emotional and intellectual levels of the receiver are respected, understood, and valued. |

Each āta phrase is considered to be a unique body of knowledge, with options of how to enter, engage, and exit relationships. These phrases need to be explored further, and always contextualised, in order to locate deeper appreciations of their transformative potential. Applying such patterns is a developmental approach to recognising and acknowledging the integrity of the exclusive space of the other, through being able to read our own exclusive spaces deeply. Comprehending the textures within relationships

then becomes a possibility. The ongoing challenge is to develop understandings of the connections that exist between āta phrases, and how they undertake obligations within the different elements of āta towards and for one another. These elements are, in effect, filters through which any relationship and activity can be decoded, as these phrases are positioned within them. Interacting with other takepū with their unique filtering processes creates further opportunities for the "wholistic" and multidimensional nature of āta and its renewing possibilities to be experienced. (Here, "wholistic" is used as it best represents how te Ao Māori chooses to define and interpret its "cultural order".) Every part of the whole, including the spiritual element, is crucial to the effective functioning of relationships, no matter what the issue or context. This requirement is all to do with the conscious pursuit of quality and integrity: mauri ora.

As it is consciously applied in daily activities, the degree to which āta participates in what we do may be continuously reviewed. Acknowledging the āta system our personal patterns can then regenerate cultural preferences into our relationships, supported by other sets of words, with their dialectical strategies and disciplines (see Table 2).

## *TABLE 2*

| PHRASES, MEANINGS, AND INTENT | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Phrases** | **Meaning** | **Intent** |
| **Kia tōtika** | Being correct | Aspiring towards quality standards |
| **Kia tika tonu** | Acting responsibly | Respecting the integrity of self and others |
| **Kia pai** | Being careful | Being considerate and deliberate |
| **Kia rangatira te mahi** | Acting with utmost integrity | Considering the unique positions of others |
| **Kia tūpato** | Carefully considering consequences | Ensuring integrity within actions |

The visionary, emotional, spiritual and intellectual features inherent in the wholistic templates of te Ao Māori are in such reflective positions towards guaranteeing culturally defined standards, quality, space and boundaries. When engaging with others they strengthen the importance of the political practice of pausing, implicit in āta.

A complementary cluster of phrases (Figure 1) contextualised to āta, further emphasises the interconnected nature of te Ao Māori. These are: te whakatinana | to enact; te whakatauira | to model; te mahitahi | to function together; and te whakawhitiwhiti

whakaaro | to exchange viewpoints, acknowledging the integrity of the other. The socialising and humanising intent expected by te Ao Māori in our relationships and kaupapa affirms the pursuit of security and respectfulness, again implicit in āta.
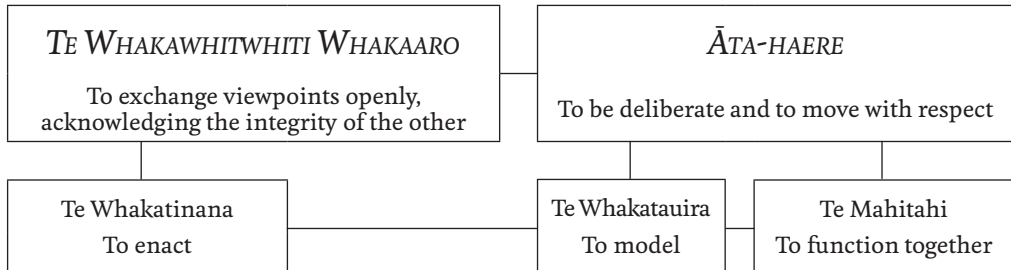
| *Te Whakawhitwhiti Whakaaro* | *Āta-haere* | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| To exchange viewpoints openly, acknowledging the integrity of the other | To be deliberate and to move with respect | |
| Te Whakatinana <br> To enact | Te Whakatauira <br> To model | Te Mahitahi <br> To function together |

*Figure 1. A complementary cluster of phrases with regard to the concept of āta*

When applied to specific kaupapa these sets of words indicate how āta ensures appropriate levels of respectfulness. This is especially important when relating with those who have been dominated, damaged, and controlled in some way.

# Ētahi Kōrero Tauira | Narrative Examples

Narratives are sites in which voices are articulated, heard, reflected upon, and to which they are responded. Narratives possess powerful messages and can be informers in future activities. Developing understandings of the messages within narratives provide unique possibilities for their continuing reapplication. In addition, incorporating these into everyday practice heightens our personal appreciation of Māoritanga (Māori cultural capital) and provides a process for drawing Māori closer to values and principles crafted by earlier generations. Narratives incorporate patterns that can be reshaped to inform our practice in any context, the idea implicit in the notion of "read the word, read the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

# Āta hoki mārire ki ōku mātua

The waiata tangi Muriahiahi was composed by Te Paea (Ngāti Porou). During the Hauhau conflict in the 1830s she accompanied her partner, Te Ngoungou when he returned to Taranaki. She was later abandoned and so composed her waiata tangi.

# Muriahiahi

I whea koia koe i taku tai whenua
Ka āta papare ake i ahau e te tau
Tuku mārie koe
ka roa te hurihanga,
Te mokai puku nei
Āta hoki mārie
ki ōku mātua,
e moea iho nei.
Mā wai e whai atu
te pae tuangāhuru?
He manu koia āu,
e ai te rere atu,
Noho ana taku iti
te tihi ki Hikurangi.

# Twilight

While we were still in my home territory
Why didn't you leave me then,
respectfully releasing me
rather then letting our relationship linger
Allow this enslaved one
to return
to the security of my elders,
of whom I constantly dream.
Who would accept and traverse
the many challenges that I face?
If I had the capability of flight
I would then go
In my humbleness to be
beneath the majesty of Hikurangi.

In Ngata (1985, Song 165, pp. 20-21)

The pain of being alone, in a place far from affirming support, is a timeless reality in the social services context. Isolation of te tuakiritanga, (the inner being) can be paralysing to people in many ways. To break out of her states of imprisonment, Te Paea reached into a personal reservoir of inner cultural strength and created the waiata Muriahiahi. Muriahiahi provides cultural options for dealing with issues of pain, anguish and despair. These are underpinned by the selected takepū of koingo and mokemoke. The cultural interpretations of these takepū help increase awareness of the shades of interpretations of human feelings when considering what the pain of being alone is. The takepū of koingo, therefore, signify yearning and longing of the whakapapa heart and soul in this instance, for its home-place and people, embedded in the terms tai whenua and ōku mātua. These indicate the importance of known valued environments, groupings and cultural legacies, as informers of future socialisation patterns. Mokemoke, the synonymous companion of koingo, is interpreted here as the felt expression of loneliness that accompanies the yearning and longing for tai whenua and its special groupings of people. Āta, therefore, can be used as a selection tool in the trawling process through cultural options, as we make choices.

The significance of valuing memories and their potential to move people proactively forward through numbing experiences and hostile environments is one alternative, reaffirmed by Te Paea. Being able to identify appropriate sources and critical mobilising supports as represented in the phrase, "he manu koia āu," is another, symbolising the transformative act of moving forward. This article suggests that āta, with its emphasis on reflective practice, encouraged Te Paea to construct her responses to emotional and psychological dilemmas and, thus, the future: "te pae tuanghuru." Being consciously aware of the state of her position, and being willing to look for the liberating possibilities inherent in pursuing distant horizons of both the future and the past, offered Te Paea proactive options: all that she needed was the courage that only she could provide.

Te Paea's legacy to social service — and health — practitioners is in the revalidating of identity and its proactive possibilities when working with marginalised and disempowered people. Revalidating processes, however, require the āta elements, together with their filters and tools, for a reflective, planned, strategically disciplined approach. For example, the reference to "ki ōku mātua, e moea iho nei" is constructed around the sheltering images implicit in whakapapa groupings: the security of templates sculptured by earlier generations. Another example is the significance of whakapapa lands, when addressing emotional and spiritual pain, "noho ana taku iti te tihi ki Hikurangi." Through their bodies of exclusive, yet connected legacies of memories, events, names and songs, sited upon selected whakapapa land, points every whakapapa grouping to their unique sources of wellbeing, stability and restorative possibilities. It accords space for more precise and decolonising understandings.

Te Paea's kāwai whakapapa still sing Muriahiahi and, in doing so, reconstitute sites for ongoing reinternalisation of her messages.

## Mā wai rā e Taurima

The following case study is an example of the consequences of disconnection and dislocation. It is used here to demonstrate the application of āta in a social service example and its environments.

Taukumekume, in this instance, negative tension, is a core element in issues where the notion of raru assumes a domineering position. Raru is a concern that creates negative tensions, upsetting mauri (wellbeing), and the balance within sets of relationships.

Some whānau members, who had been separated from the kāwai whakapapa pulse, came to our notice through the Department of Social Welfare (hereafter "the Department"). This family unit was dysfunctional. Three generations had spent more than 50 years being defined and sustained by the State system: collecting benefits, and living in a State flat, with public servants being a normal part of their daily circle. The Department determined the placement of the children, and had approached the other two ethnic groups, to whom the mokopuna (grandchildren) also belonged. When these groups did not respond, our whānau was approached as the last resort. A small part of our narrative is shared.

The first challenge for the whānau was to determine how to react with those involved in this issue. The response was, waiho mā te wā kāenga e whakarite | let "home" set the boundaries for the whānau at all times. It was decided, therefore, that responsibility for the children would reside with the wā kāenga: "Ka pēhea ngā tamariki?" | "What about the children?", to which the response was: "Mauria mai ki te wā kāenga" | "Bring them home." It was also decided that the wider whānau would take care of the rest of this family unit: "Ka pēhea te tipuna me te kōka?" | "What about the grandmother and the mother?" to which the response was: "Mā kōtau e tiaki" | "You (in Auckland), look after them."

These simple questions and responses were a reaffirmation of long established patterns of engagement within the unit as a whānau. This blueprint is our preferred method of practice. Such questions were also spaces where the āta logic and processes were constantly activated, in our conduct with one another and others. In this way, we

were able to sustain our sense of mana-whakahaere (the processes, rationales and actions of self-determining) in all issues, at all times, and in a manner that we clearly understood and to which we wished to work. The ability to manage our relationships with others was crucial to assessing the integrity of our chosen positions at all times.

The waiata "Mā wai rā ē taurima" was used as a template to guide whānau interaction with the Department and to dictate action throughout a court process to determine placement of dependents from this family unit.

| | |
|---|---|
| Mā wai rā ē taurima | Who will assume responsibility |
| Te marae i waho nei? | For the challenges that face us? |
| Ma te tika, | Let it be truth, |
| Ma te pono | Let it be honesty, |
| Me te aroha e. | Let it be valued relationships. |

nā Henare Te Owai (Ngāti Porou)

Mā wai rā ē taurima — who and what will guide practice — was the constant question. The āta process was involved in the fashioning of the chosen responses. The decision was made to match every manoeuvre of the Department: every response to each manoeuvre was a "tihē moment" (a moment of enlightenment), framed by what was crucial to the integrity of our whānau, guided by the rationales in āta and the narrative of Mā wai rā ē taurima. Table 3 lists specific engagements and responses.

During the court sessions, the Department's representatives defined what the likely adoptive home might be like. To counter this, the whānau representatives relayed precisely the environment in which the children would grow up: a community of homes, imbued by whakapapa legacies of identity and connections for many generations. When the Department wanted a particular Māori social worker to speak for them in court, the whānau had one of our own talk to him about what the whānau proposed. With that, he made himself unavailable from the case, his report, in fact, reflecting support for the whānau proposal. Āta was central in these interactions, setting domains of responsibility and accountability on different sections of our whānau, for different lengths of time. Two years ago, we celebrated the twenty first birthday of the youngest mokopuna.

## Pōpō ē tangi ana tama ki te kai māna

A continuing challenge is to forge for future generations of Māori preferred ways of being. Ensuring that Māori takepū and practices are transmitted for future use is a responsibility bequeathed from earlier generations, and is a reciprocal obligation between generations. This next case study, focusing on an oriori, demonstrates a framework for transmission.

Two takepū, whakatō and arahina, are emphasised in this example. Whakatō involves the instilling of valued knowledge seeds fashioned from te tuakiritanga of earlier generations, to the te tuakiritanga of future generations. These channels of communication allow the sharing of chosen learning, given and received respectfully, without fuss, at any

time and place. When the learning received is applied by those future generations in their relationships, then is the takepū arahina realised.

*Table 3*

| ENGAGEMENTS AND RESPONSES | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Department of Social Welfare** | **Question/ Action** | **Whānau** | **Question/Action** |
| **Psychologist** | How were the children cared for/ not cared for? | Tipuna–whānau representative | How the children would be cared for by the whānau, where, how, with whom, and why. |
| **Children's lawyer** | What were the children's rights? | Whānau representative | Whakapapa commitment to kaitiakitanga obligations, to take care of our own. |
| **Social worker/s** | How and why they represented the Department, its policies about and approaches to care. | Whānau representatives | Gisborne: Share with the social worker whānau plans and his whakapapa responsibilities to validating the whānau position. Auckland: Framing a non Māori social worker's role in his supporting and validating of the whānau position. |
| **Department's lawyer** | Represent the Department's position. | Whānau representative | Represent the whānau position. |
| **Written Material** | Represent the Department's position? | Whānau written material | Whānau counterbalance to the Department's position. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Pōpō ē tangi ana tama | Hush my child, your cry is heard, |
| ki te kai māna! | For your cultural sustenance! |
| Waiho me tiki ake | Wait while it is fetched from its source |
| ki te Pou-a-hao-kai, | where our cultural sustenance is carefully tended |
| Hei āmai te pakake ki uta ra, | and brought here in its uniqueness, |
| Hei waiū mō tama. | To nurture and advance your wellbeing. |

nā Enoka Te Pakaru (in Ngata, 1985, Song 145, pp. 152-161)

The birth of our first mokopuna (grandchild) was the opportunity for his grandmother to pōhiri (formally welcome) him into his cultural world. The first voice, language and messages that surrounded him were those of his kāwai whakapapa. The very first words he heard, pōpō ē tangi ana tama ki te kai māna, was an oriori (felt, internalised, spiritualised, whakapapa specific sung poetry) composed by one of his ancestors and still sung by his kāwai whakapapa. This oriori embraces traditions, histories, practices, and thinking which are part of his unique legacy and identity. He was being gently introduced to a select grouping of unique people, reactivated whenever the song is used. This is whakatō, arahina and āta in action.

According to te Ao Māori (Māori worldviews) the tipuna (grandparent) generation are the crucial holders of cultural blueprints. The decision to have our mokopuna raised in a three-generational, kāwai whakapapa home away from our wā kāenga (home-place), allowed reactivation of patterns for functioning as a whānau into our daily lives. Āta became a normal method that conducted our interactions, encapsulated in the question: "How do we make long established practices relevant for this time?" It also posed timeless questions, such as: "Ka pēhea a tōna wā?" | "What will his time be like?", "Ka pēhea tōna noho a tōna wā?" | "How will he live in his time?", and "He aha te mahi ma māua?" | "What must we do?" These, in turn, trigger other questions: "He aha ngā taonga kai te kōrerohia?" | "What is this cultural capital that is being discussed?", "Ko wai ngā kaipupuri o ēnei taonga?" | "Who are the holders of this cultural capital?", and "Me pēhea te tuku atu?" | "How can it be most effectively transmitted to future generations?"

These questions provide signposts for tīpuna generations. The parent (mātua) generation have the chance to learn anew with their children the legacies that are uniquely theirs. The intent is to instil positive memories, relationships, and sources for the future of mokopuna — again the concepts of whakatō and arahina in action. The imagery implicit in "Pōpō e tangi ana tama ki te kai māna" introduces the concept of nourishment. Its quality, when it is given, how and by whom, is being dialogued. Seeking daily sites of opportunity for whakatō and arahina to be naturally recreated and revalidated is the challenge. Puna (wellspring), contextualised to the tīpuna/mokopuna relationship, adds other dimensions to the kaitiakitanga and āta templates. The image here is of two springs in their culturally dialectical relationship. One is at the beginning of its time: mokopuna, waiting to be filled with its unique heartbeat, soul, rhythm and

focus; here pōpō epitomises the image of mokopuna seeking components of their moko, their unique identity and whakapapa specific imprints. The other spring, tīpuna, have lived and accumulated through their lives key components to ensure that they can fulfil their transmission obligations to mokopuna. This tipuna spring is, however, dependent on factors that would permit tīpuna to maintain levels of focus and responsibility to this unwritten yet vital cultural undertaking; and, therefore, this spring can be a wellspring, full of kāwai whakapapa legacies, becoming a space for the constant feeding of whakapapa cultural capital, or a dry spring, an indicator that these elements have been placed in the margins of tipuna through their daily lives, over their lifetimes. These possibilities reflect dilemmas, etched out especially through our relationships with non Māori. The dominance of Western thinking and bodies of knowledge, enacted as givens in Aotearoa's laws, policies and activities, demonstrate the reality of the struggle (see for example, Smith, 1997; Smith, 1999; Walker, 1990).

Should the heartbeats of the tipuna and mokopuna reach the heights of "beating as one", however, then the commitment possibilities are limitless. Given time to develop their thinking and gathered understandings, these generations indicate the importance of time (wā), as a natural companion (hoa-haere) of āta. Today our moko say "pōpō mama." At one level, this signals to tīpuna the successful internalisation of whakapapa cultural capital, activated with safety by mokopuna, in their time and way. Here is a tihē moment of mutual affirmation of whakapapa mauri ora. Importantly, it confirms a methodological process of inviting takepū in an applied way into our daily lives.

## Te Kapinga | Conclusion

Āta reflects the multi-layered nature of Māori thinking and language, signalling complexity yet simplicity, as long as there is a clarity and purity of intent and commitment. Āta re-images ways of progressing in relationships today, through phrases Māori have consistently utilised. These have been interrogated to pinpoint potential that would explain behavioural and applied theoretical patterns. It flags the significance of choosing and applying takepū, selected from Māori cultural capital, adding further dimensions when tracing interpretations within any kaupapa. Showing ways of how energies of other takepū can authenticate one specific takepū points to huge cultural possibilities engineered by Māori knowledge and application if there is an active will to explore and reinterpret.

An associated challenge is to tell our own narratives, locate the messages in them, and be game enough to validate the principles underpinning those messages, where appropriate, on a daily basis. These shared narratives can offer options for critically reinterpreting our actions. Developing such a process can offer recurring liberating moments.

For social and health services, this affords space to practitioners to consider and reaffirm reconstructions of āta within their work ethic. When deliberately invited into this expanded framework, their narratives bring unique angles which can unlock further choices that can be considered. Consciously involving āta and associated takepū, creates space to locate and select pre-emptive alternatives, after all, practitioners do want to

"alter(the)natives". In the social and health service context, "natives" are interpreted as those people in various states of pōhara (states of need); whose mauri-ora (wellbeing) responsibilities have to be woken (mauri oho), in a range of different levels (see Pohatu, 2011). Āta offers a raft of ways which a reflective Māori practitioner can consistently implement into their practice. Realising and valuing the potential in āta as a proactive social work tool to enlighten "safe practice" can then validate what Māori worldviews have to bring to professional and vocational relationships. Crucially, it requires courage to explore and activate choices from Māori bodies of knowledge at deeper levels to progress our personal practice.

Collectively, Māori social work practitioners, as they deliberately use āta in their personal practice, become part of the growing group of "voices" of Kaupapa Māori knowledge, thinking and applications, across the full spectrum of Māori activity. It is part of the politically transformative process by which Māori templates are claiming meaningful positions alongside their non Māori counterparts in different contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Boundaries are constant challenges for diversity and uniqueness that is the reality of society in Aotearoa today. The acknowledgement of boundaries signifies formality in relationships, layering further cultural justification for āta processes, approaches and standards. These processes require the application of appropriately constructed questions to every part of any issue, they provide "space-petitioners" for seeking cultural depth and understanding. Ngata (1985) offered timely reminders of this when he wrote: "te aronga me ngā kōrero o tua atu i ngā kupu." (p. xiv) | the focus and the meaning beyond the words. The conscientising essence of his words reminds us always to be mindful of the complexities within Māori knowledge, language, and thinking. Valuing then contextualising them into our issues is crucial to re-establishing culturally emancipatory depths. He also reminded us that questions are fundamental to this conscientising process as each generation seeks to understand the challenges of their time: "ka timata hoki te uiui te hunga tamariki ki ō rātou pakeke" (ibid.) | and the children/youngsters/ youth begin to question their parents/elders. As future generations, in time, begin to question their elders, so is the āta process required even more: to shape relationships and practice. Unless, however, there is the willingness to appreciate fully the transformative and ethical possibilities within āta, it will always remain (with)in our individual margins. In this article, waiata and mōteatea have also been explored as holders and initiators of potential ethical, social — and, by implication, health — service frameworks.

Finally, Māori are born to contest, the contenders being Māori and non Māori worldviews, ultimately for our hearts, minds and souls. This pattern is as current and as required now, as it was in the time of Ngata and earlier. No reira, kia manawanui tātau | Therefore, let us be of stout heart.

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