

# The challenge of retaining creativity and playfulness in the minds of our mokopuna, in an increasingly AI directed world

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*Mā tika o te toki o te tangere, me te tohu o te panoho, ka pai te tere te waka ngā momo moana kato*

*"By designing and shaping the keel of the waka to perfection, your canoe will overcome all obstacles"*

I would like to start by sharing a Learning Story I wrote for Ralph:

Kia Ora Ralph

You and Ruby had been spending time at the art table, carefully making beautiful, colourful kites out of paper and long threads of wool. Once complete you excitedly asked Kaiako Deborah if she could help to tie the kites on to the handrails of the balance frame, to see if they would fly. Tying things is something you have been working on lately. Once tied securely in place, you waited. Every so often there was a gust of wind and the two kites spun and waved like crazy, you bounced up and down in delight, watching the display. The trouble was that the gusts were infrequent and you found waiting for the wind frustrating. Deborah mentioned that in the Philippines there is a local saying that if you whistle it will make the wind come. You both considered this and then you and Ruby tried and tried to whistle to see if it worked in Aotearoa as well as in the Philippines, but with no success. Deborah mentioned that if you could find someone to whistle

Tawhirimatea might be listening and might come to make the kites dance. As we know, Tawhirimatea brings the wind.

As you attempted the tricky task of getting your mouth and tongue in the correct position for whistling, no sound came out. Whistling is a skill that requires lots and lots of practice, just like tying, so you agreed to save that personal challenge for another day and to go on a hunt to find someone who could whistle now.

When you came to me you asked if I could whistle. I considered my skills in this area and I said I could, but only quietly. I demonstrated. With an intense searching look you stared deep into my eyes, can you do it again? You asked. Each time I attempted a whistle you ran back to where the kites were to see if Tawhirimatea had been listening.



### ***My thoughts on this learning***

*Here, your creative sense of playfulness and the mystical world of the Atua connected. There is so much more to the world than our physicality, especially when we consider extending our creative selves. When you invited me to whistle I was transported through the vortex of time to when I was a child staying at my Uncle's place. He was an Uncle who could whistle well and often. I hadn't thought about how I shared family holidays with him for such a long time. Thank you for taking me to this special time in my life as you discover new opportunities for learning and new possibilities our natural world has to offer, it is times like this that form powerful ripples in our world.*

*I often used to hear whistling when people walked down the street, while they were working or just because they were happy, I don't hear it so often these days, I wonder if the skill and art of whistling is fading from our world?*

### ***How might you stretch this learning?***

*As you are learning, with determination and lots and lots of practice, you can do the most surprising things. If you ever do want to learn to whistle I think you will be able to one day. Does anyone in your family whistle? Maybe Rupert has mastered this art now he is at school and he could give you some pointers. It is a personal skill that takes time, perseverance and careful manipulation of breath and mouth. Once you accomplish it you will never forget how to do it, and then if you ever needed the wind to fly a kite, you could just whistle and I am sure, somewhere, Tawhirimatea will be listening.*

*Aroha nui, Christine.*

### ***Whānau shared their feedback on this learning story;***

From Lewis Cate (Grandparent in Wellington); *"Look out Ralph! next time you see Nana and Pa .. it will be a whistle fest 👍"*

From Harriet (Mum): *"We are all loving this story thank you. We've been trying to practice whistling today but not much success yet!"*

From Sam (Dad): *"Thank you Christine"*

From Pip (Grandma); *"What a lovely observation and insight. Thank you."*

Like ripples in a pond the focus of this human endeavour spread instantly, with the magic of technology. Here Nana and Pa and Ralph's whānau immediately made connection and then shared in the excitement and challenge of learning to whistle in real time, the community wrapped itself around Ralph to offer support and aroha in his quests.

Writing this Learning Story made me consider; *why is whistling fading in our present world?* I did some research and I came across an opinion that in 1979 when the Sony Walkman, the first portable audio cassette player was introduced, it had a major influence on 1980's culture. For the first time you could put on head phones and have a party-of-one inside your own head. Over the next 30 years, Sony sold nearly 400 million copies. The portability of this device had a massive impact on society and the need to create ones' own portable music from whistling, was no longer needed.

I posed the question, what else has faded with the introduction of major technologies? Years ago I was privileged to do a university paper with Professor Tom Nicholson, on

Invisible friends and since then I have always kept a curious eye out for them at kindergarten I haven't seen much evidence of them recently and I wondered if they still existed, whānau would definitely know. So I put out an informal survey to our whānau and out of 39 responses 5 said yes their child does have an invisible friend, 2 said they thought so, and 32 said no. During my studies the number of invisible friends for a group of 39 would have been about half.

### ***Are these ephemeral beings mostly fading out?***

Care for Kids, early childhood research wrote an article called, Have Screens Killed Imaginary Friends? And they share that from a research survey of 1000 parents it is clear that fewer children have imaginary friends than they did five years ago. The survey participants blame technology, with 63 per cent saying they think screens are making children less imaginative.

With a sharp intake of breath I proceeded. They said "Parents tend to fill every hour of a child's day with activities and screens and they are no longer left to get bored. When children are left to their own devices, it invites them to be creative and discover an inner world where they meet fun imaginary friends."

Sarah Steel, Managing Director of The Old Station Nursery, believes it is adults that are failing children by not taking time and interest in children's imaginary play and are too often themselves glued to screens and phones. The World Health organisation recommends screen time for children for the age we work alongside, is less than 60 mins per day. Less is better. When being sedentary, engaging in reading and storytelling is encouraged.

What is our role as Kaiako as we work with the highs and lows of screen time and the mind blowing advances of AI, as we support creativity and playfulness for our mokopuna? What here will fade alongside whistling and imaginary friends as our young ones spend more and more time on screens?

The Silicon Valley optimist, Elon Musk recently stated that superhuman artificial general intelligence AGI will be smarter than anyone on Earth, this could exist next year. AGI is a term often used as a shorthand for machines whose intelligence exceeds that of humans. Some say that the emergence of super intelligent machines is not going to be an event but will progress over many years.

HeyGen is here now, and their website states, "this innovative video platform harnesses the power of generative AI to streamline your video creation process." With this app you take a video of yourself then AI clones your video and what you want to say, with your natural speaking voice and style, then it alters this video making your lips move in perfect rhythm. It then translates what you have said, showing you speaking another language, of your choosing. You can choose 40 plus languages seamlessly, and all of this happens in moments.

Imagine being able to use this application to communicate with people who don't speak or understand your language, instantly having a conversation with them in their home language, The convenience of this would be very helpful in our settings as we often need to impart information. But looking at the long term outlook for the development of this application, it will potentially remove the need to go through

the process of learning another language and unlocking doors to the richness of learning about the culture the language stems from. As we know learning language goes hand-in-hand with learning about culture, will this also become a victim to the process of fading, alongside whistling and invisible friends?

AI is here and growing at an immense rate of knots. The huge potential of this technology is only limited by the quality of information humans initially input. This is the challenge, as the accumulation of artificial intelligence might not be the quality we would hope for. The threads of inaccurate or intentionally misleading information will be woven in to the fabric of this intelligence, just like, we as humans experience a range of inputs, we develop our own individual working theories to make sense of this new information. But with AI it doesn't have the luxury of creativity and playfulness to develop clear understandings, it uses the masses of inputted information from many human sources and it arranges this information in clear and calculated ways.



Arnold, B. (2012). Left brain right brain illustration [Artwork]. Cartoon A Day.

If we look at the human brain and the effect all these fascinating, flooded and mind blowing technological advances have on it, you can see it is the left side of the brain

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that becomes activated, the side of the brain that deals with data and logic, control and all things analytical. It focusses on the external world and is designed to categorise and organise the billions of bits of data; details, details and more details about those details.

Margaret Carr and Guy Claxton remind us to keep the balance and to also activate the right side of the brain, the creative, the playful side. This side of the brain focusses on the present moment, seeing ourselves as an amazing miracle of life, at one with all that is.

AI can push, push, push gathering and analysing data, but we are biological creatures where we can certainly push and push, then we have to pause. We gather information, stretch our thinking then we pause to stabilise what we have learned through our playful, creative right side of the brain work. The remarkable ability of the brain to rewire itself is called, neural plasticity, this is where the brain can change through growth and learning, where neural pathways make new connections, then adjustments are made to accommodate this new information. We see this in our mokopuna as they make sense of their world by deepening their working theories. It is important we make time to pause, so the two sides of the brain can work in harmony.

Guy Claxton and Margaret Carr discuss this in their paper, Tracking the Development of Learning Dispositions (2002). Being playful, means being ready, willing and able to perceive or construct variations on learning situations and thus to be more creative in interpreting and reacting to problems. They identify three different types of playfulness, which they refer to as mindfulness,

imagination and experimentation. Mindfulness is a kind of perceptual openness which relies upon the inclination to notice the unfamiliar or to 'read the situation' in different ways. Imagination is mental playfulness: the inclination to generate alternative inner scenarios and fantasies, to draw on different analogies and spot unlikely connections. Experimentation refers to the ability to play with or explore physical material and conditions so as to discover their latent properties and possibilities

Lorraine Sands shares “Teachers are gatekeepers, and Kaiako can leave those gates open for multiple ideas to emerge or shut ideas down through scheduled time constraints, tightly controlled programming, and hierarchical power structures, thereby limiting possibility thinking and action. We make learning design decisions moment-by-moment each day as we set in place, the time and the social setting that influences children’s growing identities as learners, teachers, and researchers. “

As I observed some mokopuna , deeply engaging in their learning as they used construction resources, it totally floored me to discover what it was they were developing their working theories about. They were creating spy drones! They excitedly bandied about very knowledgeable ideas, excited by the emotion these words evoked, my thoughts turned to the horrors I had recently seen in news footage from the genocide in Gaza. I tightened my resolve to not impede, in any way, the work these agentic mokopuna were doing. Diti Hill taught me this level of deep learning is so fragile that we adults can burst the bubble of learning so easily, and loose the developing knowledge and

understanding that is forming. What they were exploring is the technological reality they are growing up in, and they need to find ways to make sense of the power, the intrusiveness and the potential, spy drones bring.



Anna Craft came up with the phrase ‘Possibility Thinking’. This is where a learner moves beyond the given of ‘what is’ to the possible, ‘what could be’. This idea challenges us to look at the learning environments we offer in our kindergartens. Do the spaces we offer drive learning to promote possibility thinking? Do they stretch our mokopuna beyond their current thinking, into places of possibility, where they have time and space to test theories, where they can find problems and work on ways to refine and solve them, where learning is ‘irresistibly engaging’ which is an expression Michael Fullen uses, where they are free to explore things they find deeply interesting. Do Kaiako support this in our learning places where power is shared, or do they take over and impose their wishes on these learners through routine and limitations?

Te Whāriki guides Kaiako to intentionally create early childhood experiences that give children plenty of opportunities to follow their own interests, pose their own

questions, explore shared experiences, where kaiako nurture these capable, confident, curious learners who are so open to exploring the world. This goes to the heart of teachers vision for learning, as the way we design spaces reflects what matters in our place.

As we work alongside the young humans we have in our settings, we understand that their brains are forming at an incredible rate of knots, we have the potential to create learning environments where the dispositions of creativity and playfulness have time, space and freedom to form well, creating strong synapses between the left and right hemispheres of the brain, so throughout their lifetime they will always, always make the effort to call on Tawhirimatea with a whistle, or chat and play with their imaginary friends, or learn another language and connect with other cultures, it is so important we ensure we offer our ākongā this.

This is our most important and vital task.



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