

Understand Me: Crafting Selves and Worlds in Collective Storied-Conversations with Tamariki/Children, Whānau/Families and Kaiako/Teachers

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Project dates: 10 December 2020 – 31 March 2023

**Mā ngā korero tuku iho tātou me ō tātou ao e kitea ai, e rongongia ai, e whaiora ai.
E tatou te fauina i tatou ma a tatou si'osi'omaga, e ala iā tatou tala.
We craft ourselves and our worlds in stories.**

Project description

Understand Me was an aspirational exploration for deepening teachers' relationships with children and their families through *storied-conversations*. The project partners explored how storied-conversations carved pathways of understanding between home and school in a community representative of the superdiversity of Tāmaki Makaurau. *Understand Me* offered a reflective space to imagine how storied-conversations could inform curriculum and pedagogies. Children and adults storied their worlds multimodally across generations, inclusive of family languages and cultures. Storied-conversations occurred in and out of classrooms. The recorded conversations included families who identified as Māori, Samoan, Tongan, Tongan-European-Māori, Fijian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani. Teachers unearthed everyday storied-conversations and incorporated their learnings to enhance the school-sanctioned curriculum. By enriching the local curriculum with new understandings contributed by children and families, the school embraced their place as the centre of the community.

Research questions

- How might a child, parent, and teacher better see and understand each other's worlds through storied-conversations?
- How might knowings, already existing in the everyday lives of children and families, forge a pathway from home to shape curriculum and pedagogies?
- How might educators embrace the tensions between the relational and the quantifiable to reimagine curriculum through storytelling with children and families?

Evolutions of the methodology

- **Storied-conversations** evolved from being formally scheduled and deliberately spaced, to *pop-up* stories that became more visible in the everyday.
- **Co-design talanoa** was an organic shift from the planned approach of Critical Participatory Action Research, which better reflected the way project partners desired to engage.
- **Whānau-supported transitions to school for young children** was a natural evolution of the project, with younger siblings, not yet school-aged, engaging in storied-conversations alongside parents and siblings.

Key findings

1. Storied-conversations with people, places, and things were hidden in plain sight.
2. Through co-design talanoa, teachers co-created a nurturing space to slow down, reflect, share new understandings and interrogate tensions in their work.
3. Storied-conversations invited potentialities in which children, whānau, and teachers saw each other and themselves in new ways.
4. Home and intergenerational family pedagogies were unearthed in storied-conversations, shifting the directional flow of knowledges and challenging social hierarchies.
5. The school embraced its family-gifted place.

Implications

- **Collectively engage in professional learning-research:** Blur the lines between research and pedagogy by creating space to co-compose professional learning conversations for deliberate curriculum innovation.
- **Collectively embrace the tensions:** Move towards understanding the unknown by presencing children and whānau. Genuinely engage with taken-for-granted curriculum to surface culturally located assumptions and beliefs that misrecognise differences as deficits.
- **Collectively sustain the everyday work of understanding:** Value the stories of the people and the place to continuously shape the school's official curriculum to reflect the community.

Project partners

Marieta Morgan is Samoan-born, Jacoba Matapo is Samoan-Dutch, Janet Gaffney and Meg Jacobs are American of European descent, and Alison Li was born in Hong Kong. In addition to Principal Stan Tiatia (Samoan) and Deputy Principal/co-author Marieta Morgan, 16 teachers from Papatoetoe North School contributed, representing the following self-identified ethnicities: Māori-Pākehā, Māori-Cook Islands Māori-Aboriginal-Irish, Samoan, Tongan, Samoan-Tongan, Tahitian-Cook Islands Māori, Indian, Cambodian and New Zealand European/Pākehā.