

# [Exploration of beliefs as a early childhood teacher](https://assignbuster.com/exploration-of-beliefs-as-a-early-childhood-teacher/)

The purpose of this essay is to explore my beliefs as a teacher and how these beliefs will shape my practice as an early childhood teacher. The metaphor I have chosen is A Guardian ‘ Katiaki’ of a Flax bush ‘ Pa Harakeke’. I will discuss my personal history and teaching beliefs in relevance to the metaphor I have chosen. There will be an emphasis on the importance of family and culture in my life and how it shapes my teaching practice and beliefs. I will also discuss some theories that support my practice and also talk on my image a young child. References to support literature will evident throughout this paper.

The metaphor I have chosen that I believe best informs my beliefs as a teacher is A Guardian ‘ Katiaki’ of the Flax bush ‘ Pa Harakeke’. I chose this metaphor because to me it symbolises the growth in life and in the early childhood profession. Before I can be refer to myself as a guardian, I consider myself of being in the life cycle of the Pa Harakeke. The Pa Harakeke is recognised within Maori society as a symbol of family and protection (Pihama and Penehira, 2005). It is also a visual representation of the importance of parents and elders as protectors. The centre shoot ‘ te rito’ symbolises the central importance of a child. The Harakeke is believed to have three inner layers which represent a family. The new shoot represents a child te rito which is protected by the next inner layer that represents the parents awhi rito. The outer layer symbolises the grandparents or ancestors tupuna. To me, this symbolises my childhood and how I grew up under the care of my parents and grandparents. I refer myself as a guardian now because I believe it is my responsibility to nurture for the child in the absence of their parents. I see this as a very significant role, because I can image how hard it must be for children to stay away from their parents for such a long period of time. As a guardian, it is my number one priority to make the child feel as safe, cared for and well looked after. Ministry of Culture and Heritage (2011) describes a Kaitiaki as a person who is recognised as a carer, protector, guardian or conserver.

Another reason why I chose to describe myself as a Guardian of the flax bush is to emphasis my beliefs about seeing each child as an individual. The flax bush family has many different species, and varieties of flax. This symbolises children as individuals and unique in their own special way. It is the guardian’s responsibility to be knowledgeable about the different species, including its need for growth of each flax bush. Same thing applies to me as a teacher. To be a teacher, who sees children as affirmed individuals should have some depth of knowledge about each child’s likes/dislikes, dispositions, strengths, health concerns etc. A great source to find this information is from the family. Families can provide valuable information on the child, which will help teachers get to know the child better. This is will help build trusting relationships amongst family, teacher and children.

As a guardian it is also my responsibility is to nurture and promote the growth of the child as a whole in a safe/trusting environment. This makes significant links to the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum. It relates to the principles of Empowerment (Whakamana) where the child is encouraged to become independent and is provided with resources which will enable them to direct their own lives. There are also links to the principle of Holistic Development (Kotahitanga) where all dimensions (such as physical, social, cultural, spiritual emotional and cognitive) of human development is considered in understand the child as a whole (Ministry of Education, 1996). It is a personal belief that I have learnt from my own culture that to understand wellbeing every aspect of development must be considered.

Durie’s model of the Te Whare Tapa Wha illustrates the four dimensions of Maori well being. These are physical health Taha Tinana, spiritual health Taha Wairua, family health Taha Whanau and mental health Taha Hinengaro. It is believed that our physical being only supports and protects us from the external environment and is one aspect of health well-being. Spiritual health relates to us as individuals or as a community about who/what we are, where we have come from and where we are going. Traditional Maori analysis on physical illness will focus on the the Taha Wairua to determine whether harm here could be a contributing factor. Family health relates to the importance of family. It links to our ancestors, our ties with the past, the present and the future. This dimension makes significant links to the Pa Harakeke. It relates to the importance of family in the health and well being of a person. The last dimension concerns mental health as thoughts, feelings and emotions are vital elements of the body and soul. It is about how we see ourselves in the world, our ability to communicate and to feel that our mind and body are inseparable (Durie, 1998).

Another health model which is relevant to providing depth in understanding holistic development is Rose Pere’s model of Te Wheke. The concept of Te Wheke (the octopus) is a symbol used to represent family. Each of the eight tentacles represents a dimension of well being. “ The tentacles of the octopus are overlapping and interwined to symbolise the interconnected and inseparable nature of the dimensions” (Pere and Love, 2004). These Maori health models relate closely to the concept of focusing on a child’s well being as a whole. Both models include the valued importance of family/whanau and their contribution to a child’s health and wellbeing.

The life cycle of the ‘ Pa Harakeke’ consists two major parties that are central to the child ‘ te rito,’ these are the parents and grandparents. This metaphor was very relevant to me because my parents and grandparents were the most important people in my life from birth. They played the role of a guardian, protector and carer, but also as my first teachers. I have always had a very strong bond with my parents and grandparents, which is still there till this day. Claiborne and Drewey (2010) explain how love and acceptance generated towards children by adults/family can positively impact on their health and growth.

My family play’s an important role in my life. They have always been there for me, and it is because of them of their encouragement and faith in me that I am doing this course. Sometime I feel as though my family are like a group of cheerleaders. They cheer me on, when I am about to loose hope, they give me the support and confidence to keep on going, and for that I am very grateful to have a family that is so loving and supportive. My teaching philosophy is based on building respectful relationships with each child’s parent/family because I believe they are the first teachers in every child’s life. My ultimate goal is to achieve close relationships with parent/families and stand alongside them in partnership to assist and provide experiences that will best support their child’s learning and development. Fraser (2005) suggest that through collaborative partnership between teachers and family children experience a sense of continuity and care which encourages them to learn and grow.

This metaphor also highlights the concept of culture. It indicates my knowledge and understanding of bicultural awareness. I believe biculturalism is important in the early childhood sector and that “ all children should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge and understanding of the cultural heritages of both partners of the Treaty of Waitangi (Ministry of Education, 2010). One reason why I chose to use the metaphor of ‘ A Guardian of the Pa Harakeke’ is because; to me it portrays my achievement in learning about the Maori culture and understanding a different perspective on how we see the world around us. I believe that every child should have the opportunity to learn Te Reo Maori because it is the language of our land and we need to be teach children to be proud of it. I have made it a personal goal to learn as much as I can about Maori culture to further my knowledge and understanding. In order for me to teach children about Maori culture, I need to know about it myself.

Culture plays an important role in my life as student teacher and it influences my teaching philosophy daily. Wong (2005) states “ children learn through cultural tools available to them which include childrearing practices, language, customs and rituals”. I believe this quote is very important to me, because I have learnt to be responsive, and caring through seeing my little cousins being bought up with such love and care. Culture is all around us and we can see the different cultures through our multicultural society. “ Every culture will be different in the ways it transmits cultural knowledge because cultures have different goals for the development of children and different ways of communication knowledge to children” (Claiborne, 2010, p160). I was born in the Fiji Island and my nationality is Fijian Indian. My ancestors are from India, therefore as a child, my parents/grandparents taught me a lot about my culture and my ancestral background. I also learned about the Fijian culture because I consider Fiji as my motherland and I’ am very proud of my country. However when I was ten years old, my whole family migrated to New Zealand. When I moved to New Zealand, I experienced a multicultural community. I had to adapt to the diverse culture/lifestyle of NZ, but I also retain the roots of my cultural beliefs.

A major theorist that focused on the interlocking systems of family, culture and environment is Bronfenbrenner. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems model emphasises the influences of society and culture in an individual child’s life. The immediate relationships and surroundings around the child is called the Microsystem. In this layer the most important influence would be parents/family and also the early childhood centre the child attends to. In the child’s Mesosystem the child experiences a sense of connectedness between home and early childhood setting. The excosystem relates to the child’s connections with larger social systems. It does not have an active role in the child’s immediate context but does have influence the child Microsystem. For example a parent who is employed, is able to provide resources for the child, however if the parent was to lose this job it will cause fiancial stress associated to the provision of those resources and this is likely to cause negative impact on the parent-child relationship (Wong, 2005). The Macrosystem relates to the large cultural patterns which include cultural values, customs and laws. For example “ cultural contexts that value children and families may manifest ideological and organisational structures in society, which result in the provision of good quality, affordable and accessible childcare” (Wong, 2005, p18).

Language acquisition is also a complex component of cultural system (Crain, 2011). According to Wong (2005) every culture has its own language and it holds knowledge about the uniqueness of being in that cultural community. Vygotsky argued that language is the most vital symbolic tool in development. I believe that language is an important part of cultural norms. Through language, we can express cultural views and relate to each other within the same community. I am trilingual, being able to speak Hindi, English and Fijian. I am fluent in all three languages and I believe it is a great advantage in this field of work. Parents/family that speaks the same language may feel more comfortable conversing more openly about their feelings and what they except of their child’s learning. It can help in expressing and talking about concerns in a more comfortable manner.

Vygotsky’s sociocultural cognitive theory is an emphasis on how culture and social interactions guide cognitive development (Santrock, 2009).

Vygotsky’s believed that child development occurred as a result of natural and cultural activities. He referred to cultural activity as “ social processes through which we learn to use cultural tools and to think” (MacNaughton and Williams, 2009). He argued that children need to be directly taught new concepts rather than waiting for them to make their own discoveries (Crain, 2010). Vygotsky introduced the concept of ‘ Zone of Proximal’ which was a term used to differentiate between a child ‘ actual development levels as determined by independent problem solving’ and the advanced level of ‘ potential development as determined through problem solving with the help and guidance of a skilled adult’ (Claiborne, 2010). According to MacNaugton (2009) good quality scaffolding allows for joint problem solving. This concept provides great depth and understanding on how children’s knowledge and understanding can be extended. As a teacher I want to be able to provide children with opportunities for exploration but also guide them to extend their learning.

I believe that the reason why Vygotsky’s concept of ‘ Zone of Proximal’ is appealing to me is because I remember I was guided through task I was not able to do. One significant memory that I have, which is an example of the concept of ‘ Zone of Proximal’ is when I was five years old, I got my first pair of lace up shoes. Every where I went I wanted to wear them and my parents always had to put them on for me. One day I decided to do up my laces on my own, I tired and tired for a long time but I just couldn’t do it, my mother was standing on the side, watching me try and tie my lace up. So as soon as I was about to give up, she intervened and helped me do them up. She went through it with me step by step. It took me a few days until I independently did up the laces myself, it memorable moment for me because I was so proud to be able to do it all by myself. Therefore I want to become a teacher who gives children opportunities to feel proud of their achievement knowing that they did something all by themselves. I want to be able create an atmosphere where they feel they are valued and have a sense of self worth.

My image of a young child is that each child is an individual have unique qualities that define them as who they are. Before I started my Bachelors in Early Childhood Education, I didn’t know what it would be like. I decided to do early childhood because I simply enjoyed being around child. Through the past 2 years of ongoing research, and attending lectures I have really learned the importance of the early years of life and the meaningful learning and development that occur during this time. After my two years in training as a student teacher, I have a more clear vision of a young child. A young child is strong, powerful, and competent learners who need to be challenged and encouraged to form their own working theories about the world they live in. I believe that play is very valuable to children’s learning and development in the early years. Through play children have the opportunity to engage in open ended exploration (Gonzalez-Mena, Widmeyer Eyer, 2007).

In conclusion, the metaphor of Guardian of the flax bush, explained my personal beliefs as a teacher. My teaching beliefs are formed from my childhood experience. I learnt the importance of family and culture as I was growing up, and till this day it plays a major role in my life. As a teacher I believe that children should be experience a safe, secure environment where they are cared for and their needs are met. As a student teacher, I have learned to recognise the children’s health and well being as a whole. This means recognising all dimensions of well being. The two models that provide insight on the importance of all dimensions of health are Pere’s ‘ Te Wheke’ and Durie’s Te Whare Tapa Wha models. Children are our future and my aim is to provide each child with the opportunity “ to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicator, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p9).