



Mana Taiohi – the journey, the destination.

Whāia te iti kahurangi ki te tūohu koe,
me he maunga teitei

Aim for the highest cloud so that if you
miss it, you hit a lofty mountain

Charmaine Tuhaka and Jane Zintl

As we start this article we want to acknowledge the mana of each other. This is the waka we row together. Being strengths-based and mana enhancing in our practice starts with us, and our relationship. Young people have the best bull\$#!+ radars. If we are unable to practice what we preach, how can we expect young people be expected to believe us as we endeavour to support them. We'd like to introduce each other:

Charmaine Tuhaka (Ngāti Porou) is a trained youth worker and social worker who consistently works with the heart and practices of a youth worker, whatever profession she happens to be being paid for at the time! Her commitment to the rangatahi, whānau and hāpori of the Hawkes Bay region shines, in both her words and actions. My recent connection with Char has been through her role (currently the Chair) of the Wellington Regional Youth Workers Trust, and as both Kaiārahi and Rōpū member of Korowai Tupu (the professional association for Youth Work in Aotearoa). She is a leader in our sector. Her passion for training and equipping Youth Workers, particularly to practice consistently with our responsibilities under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, both inspires and challenges me.

Jane Zintl comes from the ancestral lands of Rosevear Island in Cornwall, however has roots in Ōtautahi, Aotearoa. With her stands her proud family. Jane trained and started her working life as a lawyer. When I started in youth work I went to a Code of Ethics workshop in Dannevirke and was amazed at the referencing to sub-clauses of clauses (even with a page number, like woaah!). Jane is a champion and an advocate for ethical practice within Youth Work. The maximiser that she is (Clifton Strength's joke) is evident in the relationships she builds and maintains throughout Aotearoa for the betterment of the youth development sector. It is of recent times Jane, rightly so, holds the Chief Executive role at Ara Taiohi. It is a great privilege to work alongside Jane as she acknowledges and respects the whakapapa the youth development sector, and seeks to ensure its needs are met for youth workers, and more importantly the young people of Aotearoa.

From Strengths-based to Mana Enhancing

'Youth development is based on a consistent strengths-based approach' is the third of six principles of youth development from the Youth Development Strategy of Aotearoa (YDSA: Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). 'A **strengths-based approach** seeks to shift the collective thinking about **young** people from being **problem-based** to **strengths-based**' (Code of Ethics for Youth Work in Aotearoa 2nd ed, p. 33).

We have observed that strengths-based approaches are often practiced well, but not always fully understood by our sector. We have a number of models that are strengths-based (Te Whare Tapa Whā and the Circle of Courage to name a few). We have tools that help us to identify strengths (e.g., strengths finder or VIA). However, strengths-based approaches from literature are largely unknown.

This approach is about changing a mind-set. This change in mind-set is from deficit to strength, cure to care, one dimensional to holistic, from 'I know best' to 'you know best'. When the literature around strengths-based practice is considered some principles and concepts emerge; these are at the heart of strengths-based practice and have been clearly articulated by researcher Dennis Saleebey (1997 as cited in Thomas & Davis, 2005).

We've adapted these slightly as a lens to consider Mana Taiohi as an overarching strengths-based and mana-enhancing framework:

1. **All young people and environments possess strengths that can be mobilized**
2. **Young people are experts on themselves**
3. **Youth workers need to suspend their assumptions in order to truly hear young people and enable their strengths to be present.**

It is a myth that being strengths-based is about only idealistically focusing on the good stuff at the expense of the reality in a young person's life. We cannot do

this, and it is likely to cause more harm than good. Being mana enhancing is about starting with and having a lens that looks for what is right with a young person, and developing a relationship based on this. Usually this relational approach results in young people choosing to invite us into what is challenging or hard for them, because they trust us and know we care.

Mana is defined in Mana Taiohi as the authority we inherit at birth and we accrue over our lifetime. It determines the right of a young person to have agency in their lives and the decisions that affect them. Enhancing the mana of young people means recognising what is right with them, as well as the reality of their world. Young people are supported to have a voice, work to their strengths and step into leadership.

The links between strengths-based approaches, as outlined in the YDSA, and mana enhancing practices as described in Mana Taiohi are clear. Mana is broader, and more holistic, however they take the same approach of honouring the prestige, authority, influence and charisma of a young person.

Why Mana Taiohi?

The decision to frame our new-look principles of youth development around mana came as the syntheisation group started to pull together the four strands of our Kupenga Kete framework (young people, practitioners, Te Ao Māori and Aotearoa literature). Two key aspects led to the decision that mana was the overarching framework for our new principles.

Firstly, the literature team started by categorising all research and evidence under the framework of the existing six principles of the YDSA (Deane, Dutton & Kerekere, 2019). This quickly became difficult, resulting in the team reviewing Māori critique of the YDSA and identifying kupu (Māori words/concepts) that better reflected youth development in Aotearoa. These kupu are 6 of the 9 that now frame the Mana Taiohi principles. One of the reasons it was so challenging to categorise in to the previous YDSA principles was that while most of the research and literature was strengths-based, very little fitted exclusively into the strengths-based category, resulting in the strengths-based category being almost empty. There was a sense that a strengths-based approach flowed through every principle.

Secondly, as we engaged in regional hui people who work with young people consistently identified that while quality relationships are at the heart of Youth Work, practicing in a strengths-based/mana enhancing way is fundamental. It is defining for Youth Work. At our core we are one of the few professions that does not engage with a young person because they have a problem that needs to be fixed, and then close the relationship once it has been (or they consider it) 'fixed'. Youth Work skills and expertise are often required in compulsory relationships; however

pure Youth Work doesn't start until the young person has chosen to engage with the Youth Worker. Until the point of engagement, it is more like 'pre-Youth Work'. It became clear that our new framework needed to reflect this aspect of who we are as a profession. At our core we honour, acknowledge, support and enhance the mana of young people. And this flows through all the other principles. The interconnectedness cannot be ignored.

Mana in our Practice

Over the years I (Char) have had the privilege and honour of having young people walk into my office, finally answer my missed calls, talk in 'sharing circles', have a chat in the car and legit climb mountain ranges with me. Together we have laughed, cried, moaned and celebrated past events, our surrounding worlds and the anticipation of the future. These awesome beings have helped to shape me as a youth worker. Equally important have been the eager students completing certificates in youth work or professionals that have participated in my trainings. There are big hearted youth workers and volunteers I have worked with to support them to do what they do best with young people in our community. No matter the age, size, values, beliefs or experience of these people what we all have is mana. We are here for a reason, it's our journey to seek and pursue this. As youth workers and contributors to the youth development sector it is our responsibility to maintain and enhance the mana of taiohi in space and therefore Aotearoa. We also maintain and enhance our own mana and that of others. As youth workers we are at the forefront of holding space for Mana Taiohi in youth development. This reflection offers insight into how we do what we do, working alongside young people and fellow youth workers.

Youth workers are staunch at 'meeting young people where they are at'. Young people cross our paths through drop in centres, community groups, clinics, classroom educational talks, crisis interventions, and within family homes. They maybe by themselves, with their crew or with whānau. They come with history, people and events - good and not so good - that have brought them to this point in time. The lens they view their world from may have parts that are clear or foggy, rose coloured or distorted, whole or broken at the time we meet with them. The role of a youth worker is to provide them with the ability to clean and adjust the current view. Whilst the world spins around the young person, there before us stands a person 'who knows themselves best'.

At times young people share common themes, "like I've heard this before". However, what was important for one person isn't necessarily for another. As youth workers we interchangeably work from our head, heart and gut. This approach allows for a young person and a youth worker to determine 'what is up and what is needed'. The old adage of young people paddling their waka can be a metaphor of mana in

action. As a youth worker shining light on a young person's whakapapa, their surrounding worlds (te ao), their 'level' of mauri and how they are or could be, we join and connect (hononga) with their relationships and support. This helps to highlight and remind us we are resource rich. These principles can be seen as the structures of the waka or what young people come with. As a leader of a waka you determine who makes up your crew, how to utilise your crew and where you are going. Whatever is on board can determine our destination. To get momentum from our waka there is a need for skills, competencies and abilities. This gives strength to the movement, however what fires it is still needed. Young people remind us it not just what's in their toolkit, it's also the fire in their belly. Youth workers need to turn the volume up on each young person's desires, passions and dreams.

Once a waka is ready to be sailed or be paddled it needs a body of water to navigate. The environmental factors just like life can throw challenges and obstacles or provide plain sailing. As we make our way through life, the journey is just as important as the final destination. Mana Taiohi reminds us of the supporting factors in engaging with young people. These principles help with the steering, redirecting or moving forward. Or, in this case, enhance and maintain the mana of taiohi. When we engage we need to identify the connections (whānaukatanga) and commonalities between us and their worlds. We 'start where you are, with what you've got'. Straight up though, relationships, people or support that can make or break us. What keeps it real is being able to manaaki others. Role modelling respect and reciprocity in our engagements. Young people then seek this within their relationships. There is a need to value mātauranga in all its shapes and forms. Being open minded and taking each situation as a learning moment is valuable for everyone. Being a professional youth worker means we do not jump in the waka and take the wheel. When we align these principles of Mana Taiohi, whai wāhitanga (participation) is facilitated.

I (Jane) recall a young person I worked with in a community based setting that highlights how practicing like this can make a real difference. He was one of our young leaders and we had a great relationship. He was mischievous and fun, reliable, always taking the lead in practical jokes, looked up to by many of the younger people, and occasionally needed to be challenged when he stepped over a line. He ended up being in trouble at school, and I supported him at a school Board of Trustees hearing, as he faced exclusion. As I sat there, it was like I was hearing about a different person. He was described as defiant, difficult and disrespectful to the point where he was answering allegations of 'continual disobedience'. It was good for the Board of Trustees, principal and school staff to hear that there was another side to this young person that their approach and environment had missed, lost, or squashed. It was also good for us to explore with this young person how important it is as a young leader to be consistent

across contexts, and start to look at strategies to shift things at school. Fundamentally our mana enhancing relationship allowed the best of the young person to shine. We expected the best, and got the best. He is still a friend (20 years later) today.

Conclusion

As youth workers we stand before many 'lofty mountains' in our mahi. Whether it's to stand up for the contribution our profession makes in a young person's life, the challenges and aspirations we support young people with, or the demands of our evolving worlds, youth workers are on the front line. As youth workers we must support each other and young people to continue to aim high. The top of the mountain is our potential. Holding space for young people enables us to engage in the journey. We must 'check ourselves before we wreck ourselves' when embarking in the journey. When supporting a young person to climb a 'lofty mountain', we consider how high it is and the best track to take. We believe nothing is absent. We don't need to add things to make young people better or to commence this ascent up a mountain. What's important for them, shifts what needs to be important for us. This requires a youth worker to set aside agendas and meet young people where they are at. If we are able to do this in our engagements with young people and their worlds, then we truly honour them. We honour who they are, all that they are and what makes them, them. We invite those who create space for young people and who support the mahi of youth development and Youth Work to embrace Mana Taiohi. The principles of the Mana Taiohi framework come with young people as they are. We just need to provide the space and engagement to support their journey, thus enhancing and maintaining mana for the taiohi of Aotearoa.

Jane Zintl provides us all with amazing leadership as Chief Executive of Ara Taiohi.

Charmaine Tuhaka is invaluable in so many spaces not least as a Kaihautū, member of the Korowai Tupu Rōpū, and chair of the Wellington Regional Youth Workers Trust.

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