

TE KAHU WHAKAHAUMARU:

THE COVID-19 STORY OF KŌHANGA REO

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FOREWORD

Ko te tamaiti te pūtake o te kaupapa

Quality education is the right of every child and young person in Aotearoa and is underpinned by learning environments that place the learner and learner outcomes at the centre of all activity.

Successful learning organisations are those that are on a continuous, deliberate and future focussed journey of improvement, using evidence to shape their direction and decision making.

BACKGROUND

In the days preceding 26 March 2020, kōhanga reo needed to rapidly respond to and prepare for a move to distance teaching and learning. We had been informed that at midnight 25th March 2020 the entire country would go into COVID-19 Alert Level four Lockdown. There was uncertainty about how long the situation would continue. Timely responses were required from kōhanga reo to support tamariki and their whānau. The home was to become the context for teaching and learning in Aotearoa.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ERO acknowledges the 80 kōhanga reo that participated in this evaluation. The generosity and willingness of whānau, kaiako, kaimahi and leaders has resulted in valuable insights that will help build our collective knowledge of effective distance and digital teaching and learning and responding to the needs of learner and whānau wellbeing during times of crisis.

WHAT DID ERO FIND?

Overall, ERO found that kōhanga reo implemented a range of creative and innovative strategies to respond to challenges and support the leaning and wellbeing needs of tamariki and their whānau. At the heart of their response were the principles of manaakitanga, mahi tahi and hauora. Issues kōhanga reo faced were predominantly about caring for the most vulnerable and the lack of access to quality resources to support ongoing learning at home.

This document presents our findings on how kōhanga reo responded to Covid-19.

WELLBEING: A CONTEXT FOR EVALUATION

We wanted to know how successfully kōhanga reo leaders, kaiako, kaimahi and whānau supported the wellbeing and learning of tamariki during COVID-19

ERO worked alongside Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust and the whānau, kaiako, kaimahi and leaders of 80 kōhanga reo to undertake this evaluation. We wanted to learn about what worked well for whānau in supporting tamariki learning and, what could be learned if we should be in the unenviable situation of returning to lockdowns in the future.



Evaluators from Te Uepū ā-Motu interviewed 80 kōhanga reo communities across the motu. We explored:

- leaders and kaiako reactions and responses to COVID-19
- innovations that occurred as Aotearoa moved through alert levels, and
- how well leaders, kaiako and kaimahi were supported personally and professionally to adapt to the situation.

The values of aroha and manaakitanga underpinned the evaluation framework. These guided the process and reviewers' interactions with the participating kōhanga reo, and where possible hapū and iwi representatives. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected from surveys and structured interviews conducted in te reo Māori. ERO synthesised these findings to identify trends and patterns about what worked well and what could be improved.

FINDINGS

How leaders, kaiako and kaimahi in kōhanga reo responded to COVID-19

The health, safety and wellbeing of kaiako, tamariki and whānau was paramount

Regular communication with whānau was viewed as a key strategy to support whānau wellbeing. Keeping in close contact with the most vulnerable was viewed as vital by kaimahi, particularly those tamariki, whānau and kaumatua who required targeted support. Kai and care parcels were provided to whānau who needed it to minimise stress.

Regular communications and updates by committee and kaimahi guided whānau decision making, and COVID planning and preparation. Good use was made of whānau hui and online platforms to share information. This included health and safety messages, positive and practical tips on how to keep whānau safe and general wellbeing check-ins. Meetings were held when needed. Weekly pānui were sent out by the kaupapa kaimahi, whānau notice board, and kōhanga reo Facebook pages.

“This was something we had never experienced before so we were unaware of the impact that the lockdown would have on us all. We needed to stay as calm as possible. I am grateful for our kaimahi, they quickly put mahi into place. Our lives did not have to change. I cannot talk enough of how proud we are of our kaimahi” – Whānau voice

Relationships with the wider community was a feature. Connections with local kura were established and hui were held in local kura to promote community understanding. Manaakitanga and support for kaimahi and essential workers was well considered. Many kōhanga reo across the motu have health professionals and essential workers that needed to return to work. Some kaimahi volunteered to open the kōhanga reo to support whānau who were essential workers.

The move to Alert Level four lockdown happened quickly. Whānau adapted and prepared as best as they could in the circumstances.

Preparing to move into lockdown was a very stressful time for whānau. However, anxiety levels were alleviated by the information and guidance of Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust, the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) and the Ministry of Health and daily news updates.

Uncertainty about changes in alert levels prompted some whānau to update policies and emergency management plans. Others felt they were well placed to respond to changes in Alert Levels. A range of wellbeing, health and safety policies and plans guided whānau through this process. Further pandemic planning advice was accessed through the ministry website. Whānau found Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust guidelines and recommendations to be very helpful.

Promoting whānau wellbeing and continuity of tamariki learning was imperative

Kaimahi made it their duty to ensure the impact of COVID-19 was minimal. They organised learning packs containing a range of resources to support learning at home. Where needed, kaimahi delivered learning packs to whānau in their homes.

Supporting kaimahi wellbeing was also a priority. Many were overwhelmed preparing additional learning resources. They were encouraged to focus on their own whānau and their needs. Assistance through the wage subsidy was a huge relief for many kaimahi. They stayed connected via online platforms and regular pānui.

“It was important for our kaimahi to be supported and prepared as well as we could be, to be focused and to keep calm” – Leader voice

Connectivity to the internet and having devices resulted in increased whānau engagement

When devices and internet connectivity were easily accessible, the engagement of whānau in tamariki learning increased greatly. Whānau were quick to use technology to support learning. Online learning planned for by kaimahi provided a range of activities for tamariki to engage in. These included arts and crafts and kori tinana. As a result, parents were more active in children’s learning. Resource packs also supported continued learning for tamariki.

Transition to in-home learning for tamariki with access to devices and connectivity, and where kaimahi had digital capabilities, was widely found to be seamless. Kaimahi quickly adapted to the change in delivery. Whānau presented tamariki learning to kaimahi through videos and photographs.

“I am so proud of our kaimahi, they quickly put mahi into place, lives did not have to change, cannot talk enough of how proud I am of our kaimahi” – Whānau voice

Kaimahi with internet and digital tools were able to continue working and supporting learning from home. This helped keep everyone informed. It also allowed kaiwhakahaere, kaimahi and office holders or whānau whakahaere were able to complete their responsibilities.

Connectivity through online activities helped kaimahi to stay connected with each other and work together to benefit their tamariki and whānau. Te Ara Tuatahi and Te Ara Tuarua continued for most taura. They attended Zoom meetings to check in on their progress and completion of kete. Other kaimahi carried out personal inquiry cycles relating to their teaching practice. There were also opportunities for kaimahi to complete first aid courses online.

Staying calm and keeping connected was a challenge in the absence of connectivity to the internet

The main challenge was keeping whānau calm and reassured, especially those whānau who were out of contact because of poor or no connectivity. For these whānau, kaimahi drove to their homes to keep connected.

“We were concerned about some whānau and tamariki that we could not contact them.” – Whānau voice

Not all kaiako had access to the resources to enable them to work from home and some kaimahi lacked the expertise to successfully use digital devices. They acknowledge that they were thrown into lockdown with little or no skills, and that the new way of teaching hindered some kaimahi practice.

Accessibility to appropriate learning resources was an issue for many whānau

Kaimahi provided as many material resources as they were able to and supplied links to websites and social media pages to stay connected with whānau and tamariki. The Kainga Kōhanga page was used well by kaimahi to guide teaching programmes. Some whānau fully engaged in learning with their tamariki. Many whānau did karakia, sang waiata, shared mihimihi and completed learning activities and tasks. However, many missed out because of no or poor internet connectivity.

The non-delivery of resources from Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust and the Ministry was a barrier to continued learning for some whānau. Rural locations and limited resources of kōhanga meant what could be delivered to whānau and tamariki was sometimes limited. Furthermore, in some cases the resources that were given to whānau were only used by a small number of tamariki. Kaimahi were aware that most whānau have other tamariki who were also learning from home. Consequently, there were not always enough devices.

“For us that live rurally, we were limited to what we could deliver to our kōhanga whānau. We do not have many resources.” – Whānau voice

While some kōhanga were able to access resources, most of the learning packs and materials provided by the Ministry were received after whānau had returned to kōhanga reo and some whānau missed out altogether. Kaimahi knew the whānau that needed more resources. They encouraged whānau to use natural and simple resources that were in and around their environment. Using home-life experiences, like cooking and gardening were also encouraged as contexts for learning to occur.

Digital tools were provided to some tamariki.

Some whānau accessed and used a range of learning resources

Ki te ao Mārama and Māori TV were a means of increasing te reo Māori in the home. There was a range of different experiences for whānau, with regards to the ministry resources. Whānau who did receive these were grateful. Kaimahi and whānau agreed that the resources received complemented the learning packs that kaimahi had prepared. This also helped whānau focus their funds of necessities and kept children engaged.

The lack of quality Māori medium resources available became more apparent during COVID-19

The biggest concern for whānau was the appropriateness of the resources. Almost all the resources did not support the Māori language development of tamariki. Most resources were better suited for school aged English-medium learners. Most of the reading material was at reading levels for older tamariki. Some whānau received outdated resources that they could not use, like VHS tapes.

“We found it strange that they would send us a video of MOKOTOA. Who owns a video recorder?” - Whānau voice

Kōhanga reo whānau responded to the pressures of COVID-19 well

Kōhanga reo communities were provided with supportive collective leadership. This provides a positive platform should we be in the unenviable situation of changing Alert Levels in the future.

All kōhanga reo whānau consulted in this evaluation feel they are well prepared should another pandemic occur. They note that communication was a key to their success and will maintain this in future. Whānau are confident in their policies and procedures for pandemic planning, and health and safety practices. Contact lists and procedures have been updated and new resources were purchased to support regular contact with whānau. All kōhanga reo are using contact tracing. Kaimahi and whānau acknowledge that there are improvements needed to enable kaimahi to use digital tools with confidence and understanding.

“We are more prepared, we know what to expect and what to do.” - Whānau voice

Minimising challenges to operation and training was focused on reducing stress for whānau, and continuity of learning for tamariki

The drop in rolls and fluctuations in daily attendance has had a significant impact on kōhanga reo. They attribute this to a range of reasons. These include whānau wanting to keep their babies close, whānau being unsure about sending their tamariki back to kōhanga reo, seasonal sickness, and whānau job loss. Funding has reduced as a result of falling roll numbers. Priority has been placed on ensuring staff wages are maintained to support kaimahi.

“It was important to ensure we retained and provided job security for our kaimahi during these uncertain times.” - Whānau voice

There was minimal disruption for most taura in-training. District offices provided support and facilitated online hui to check taura progress with completion of kete. Strategies were in place to support taura who did not have access to online learning. Telephone check-ins were another way they keep connected. Lockdown gave many taura time to catch up on their kete. Some taura had other priorities during lockdown. Trainers could not always meet with their taura, but those taura continued as required. There were also issues around presenting kete online, with some taura preferring to present in person.

Many kōhanga reo had kaimahi that had high health risks. This had a significant impact on staffing in returning after lockdown. Some kōhanga reo had to employ extra staff to meet ratios. To support kaimahi health, further practices have been established. This includes annual health checks for kaimahi and stricter



kaimahi sickness policies. They continue to use online platforms to keep connected and revisit priorities. Whānau have systems in place if kaimahi are needing to take leave.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The evaluation findings show kōhanga reo leaders, kaiako and kaimahi were better prepared to support distance learning and whānau wellbeing when favorable practices and conditions were embedded prior to, and or enhanced during, COVID-19 Levels four to one. These included:

- strong leadership and governance practice and informed decision making driven by collaborative kōhanga reo communities with effective communication practices
- tamariki access to meaningful and differentiated learning experiences and resources that develop their linguistic and cultural capabilities and their skills to participate in te ao Māori, and achieve education success as Māori
- kaiako, kaimahi and whānau having access to appropriate hard copy learning materials, digital technology, adequate devices and reliable internet connections, and
- evolving digital curriculums and kaiako capability to use technology effectively as a teaching and learning tool.

ERO and leaders in these kōhanga reo communities will use the insights from this evaluation to assist kaiako, kaimahi and whānau to be well prepared to deliver distance learning in what continues to be uncertain times. We will advocate for the creation of more resources, in te reo Māori, and improved access to technology for all tamariki and whānau. The findings highlight the opportunity to harness and share more broadly, in the education sector, the effective digital teaching and learning practices in te ao Māori already occurring.

T. Savage

Tanya Savage

Te Pou Mataaho - Manager Evaluation and Research - Māori