

TE KAHU WHAKAHAUMARU:

THE COVID-19 STORY OF TE AHO MATUA KURA





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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, kura 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 kura to support tamariki and whānau. The home was to become the context for teaching and learning in Aotearoa.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ERO acknowledges governing body Te Rūnanga Nui o Ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori and the 10 Te Aho Matua kura that participated in this evaluation. The generosity and willingness of Te Ahi Kōpae in these kura has resulted in valuable insights that will help build our collective knowledge of effective distance and digital teaching and learning.

IHONUI-WELLBEING: A CONTEXT FOR EVALUATION

We wanted to know how successfully leaders, kaiako, kaimahi and whānau supported the ihonui-wellbeing and learning of tamariki during Alert levels at home.

ERO worked alongside its evaluation partner Te Rūnanga Nui o Ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori to identify 10 Kura Kaupapa Māori to participate in this evaluation. We wanted to learn about what was working well for whānau in supporting tamariki, and what could be done differently we should be in the unenviable situation of returning to lockdowns in the future.

Evaluators from Te Uepū ā-Motu interviewed Te Ahi Kōpae in ten kura communities affiliated to Kura Kaupapa Māori. We explored:

- Te Ahi Kōpae, leaders' reactions and responses to COVID-19



- Te Māpurua, innovations that occurred as Aotearoa moved through alert levels
- Te Pūāhuru, professional support provided to kaiako and kaimahi that assisted them to transition to and support distance teaching and learning.

FINDINGS

Te Ahi Kōpae, how leaders in Kura Kaupapa Māori responded to COVID-19

The safety and wellbeing of tamariki, whānau, kaimahi, kaumatua and kuia was given utmost priority

Many kura leaders expressed heightened anxiety because of the suddenness of the announcement for Alert Level four. Kura responded quickly to ensure online programmes and learning packs were ready. No one knew what to expect, how much to prepare or the number of resources that would be needed to support whānau. This created further uncertainty and challenge. Kura leaders felt that they had prepared as well as they could.

“Te mataku rawa te nuinga o te whānau i mua i te whakatau a te PM, ka noho te nuinga o ngā tamariki ki te kāinga” – Kura voice

“Two days was not enough time, if we were given more time, it would have helped us deal with the anxiety and challenges”- Kura voice

Most kura prepared pandemic plans with support from either Te Rūnanganui or the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) Māori advisors. They recognised each situation required a personalised response and resources were allocated accordingly.

Each kura experienced a range of challenges. Geographical isolation was especially challenging for some whānau. Kura provided food packs using items from the Kids Can programme, breakfast in schools’ programme and other local resources. All respondents spoke of gratitude for the Kids Can programme which provided much-needed kai for households.

Respondents also spoke of the importance of whanaungatanga. One tumuaki describes supporting whānau as if they were his own. All leaders showed aroha toward whānau and offered financial support to those who were impacted more than others.

“Some of us got together and bought blankets for some of our tamariki” – Kura voice

“I haere au ki te kite whānau i mua i te aukati, i kite au kāore ētahi nama i ea” – Kura voice

“Ka rongo au te aroha mō te whānau, te toro atu i te ringa āwhina ki ngā whānau” - Kura voice

For most kura there was no change from Level four to Level three as the majority of kura remained in lockdown mode. There was an overwhelming response from whānau to continue to work and learn from home. Some whānau were concerned it was too soon to return to kura and that their tamariki may become ill.



“Ko te oranga o te tāngata te mea nui” - Kura voice

At COVID Level 2 whānau were more willing to consider returning to kura. The prolonged length of time in lockdown was a contributing factor, as well as the reassurance from the government and tumuaki that it was safe to return. For some whānau however, there was still mixed feelings as to whether it was safe for their tamariki to return. Those who did not return during this time were offered other options, including the continuation of online classes or alternative timetables. At COVID Level one, whānau felt more reassured kura was safe for their tamariki.

The level of support for whanau as a result of COVID-19 was significant

The social and economic impact through job loss had a major effect on many whānau. All kura with the support of local rūnanga, marae and social development groups were able to support whānau with care packs, essential items and kai. Whānau appreciated the support. A positive outcome was that many whānau reverting back to mahi māra kai, pātaka kai, and maramataka Māori as a means to teach and sustain whānau and the wider community.

Kura were proactive in ensuring support for whānau during COVID-19. Many of the kura shared experiences of anxiety and uncertainty. Some whānau spoke of fear for the safety of their tamariki and kaimahi. These concerns extended to kaumatua and kuia. An unintended consequence for one kura was that some of the new health and safety procedures created more fear in tamariki. An example was the wearing of masks upset some children. Strong collaborative and distributive leadership in each kura was a strength during this time.

Clear communication and regular contact calls, Zoom, personal messaging was the key to assisting whānau

Leaders were quick to access networks such as Te Rūnanganui, health and social services, government resources and iwi and hapū expertise and support. There was a community-wide approach for accessing and providing additional support for tamariki, whānau and the wider community.

Other strategies used by kura whānau to ensure tamariki learning and whānau health and safety included: providing care packs, kai parcels, purchasing data and koha pūtea. Various networks and whānau who were essential workers did check-ins and delivered items to those in need. The role of local marae and the Rūnanga also played an integral part in supporting whānau from a distance. Zoom, was again a common tool used to check if whānau were safe and healthy during lockdown.

“Several māmā were our māngai for the district, delivering kai every day.” – Kura voice

“Me mihi mātou ki te marae o (name removed), i whāngai rātou i o mātou whānau o te kura.” – Kura voice

“He koha kai, he koha mō nā kākahu, nā paraikete wērā momo mea katoa.” - Kura voice

For many there were enforced adaptations to tikanga. Marae closures and the inability to attend tangi were unforeseen challenges. Despite this, whānau adjusted to the new rules and tikanga. They did not want to put themselves or others at risk of becoming ill, especially their kaumatua, kuia and those more vulnerable.



Kura shared stories of whānau resilience and are keen to build on the strengthened relationships with whānau and their communities

Many of the kura have been able to reflect and move forward with all lessons in hand. There is growing recognition of the need for a more connected and collaborative approach to supporting whānau, bringing together hapū, iwi and other services. Many kura have indicated the need to continue to learn and innovate to futureproof the kura should another pandemic occur.

Te Rūnanga Nui o Ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori provided professional support to kura leaders and whānau

Tumuaki especially liked hearing from the Rūnanga about what other kura were doing to meet the needs of their whānau. Strategies, resources, successes and challenges were shared at regular regional Zoom hui. This regular contact was valuable and timely.

Kaiako and whānau had to quickly adapt to a new way of teaching and learning. Professional learning and development supported kaiako to transition to distance teaching and learning. Most tamariki showed that they could adapt and, in many cases, enjoy learning from home. However, they did miss the whanaungatanga that they would usually experience while at kura.

Several leaders expressed disappointment at the lack of equitable access to resources

Tamariki that had devices were able to quickly engage in learning programmes. However, for many of the kura, the limited access to devices was a significant challenge. As a result, many whānau were unable to participate in online learning programmes for their tamariki. Only two of the ten kura were able to provide a device for each student. A common complaint was that very few kura received devices from the Ministry.

Most tamariki received the Ministry of Education learning packs. There were mixed feelings around the suitability of the packs for tamariki in Te Aho Matua kura.

Several kura leaders mentioned that their regional ministry Māori Advisors kept regular contact through the pandemic. In Tai Tokerau for example, many tumuaki spoke of the good communication, support and guidance from ministry senior advisors.

“We received 4 out of 40 devices from MoE and are still waiting for the rest.” - Kura voice

The implementation of online home-learning programmes varied for many kura. Some started straight away, others transitioned over a period of 2-3 weeks as resources became available. Whānau access to the internet was limited by financial constraints at times. Many whānau simply could not afford to purchase additional data. Kura used several ways to stay connected with whānau including Facebook, google class, phone calls and texts. Overall, whānau responded positively to the use of technology as a teaching and learning tool.

Four of the ten leaders interviewed were Raukura, *“Coming back as a raukura is nerve-racking but giving back to Te Aho Matua has prepared me as resilient for this job. I would like to ask another tumuaki for tips and possibly start our own kāhui ako”*. Support for new tumuaki continued during lockdown utilising Zoom networking. For some it provided a unique opportunity to gain more professional knowledge and support.



Tumuaki, kaiako, tamariki and their whānau were adaptive and innovative

All leaders agreed there was a need for kaiako to be adaptable, flexible and responsive to the learning needs of the tamariki. This included maximising the use of information communication technology (ICT). Leaders acknowledged that shifts in pedagogy, through targeted professional learning and development, was required to support all kaiako to make the necessary changes to distance teaching and learning.

Many of the kura spoke of a resurgence of Māori knowledge and epistemology. An example was the teaching and learning about the maramataka.

“Ko tētahi tohu ko te maramataka Māori, e tahuri ana ki tērā, kua aro nui atu te kura nei ki tērā he ra utaki hanga kaupapa ako, te ata whai whakaaro mo ngā mahi o mua. Tērā pea kāore e whai hua ana i ēnei rā (ngā kaupapa ako me te huarahi i whāia hei aromatawai), i tino kitea i ngā pūkenga e whai pānga ana ki te oranga tonutanga o te tangata, pērā ki te whakatō kai, te mahi ka, te noho haumaruru me te mōhio pēhea te tiaki i te whānau (ā tinana, ā hinengaro hoki).” - Kura voice

Kura and their communities utilised local resources and expertise to a greater extent than they had prior to lockdown. The Rūnanga encouraged whānau to exercise mana motuhake and tino rangatiratanga in what and how tamariki would be supported to continue to learn. This also applied to how they might best provide support for whānau.

Initially there was concern about the use of te reo Māori by tamariki, as many whānau were not Māori language speakers at home. Stories shared showed quite the opposite. Some kura held te reo courses to help whānau. Others enrolled in free online classes. Whānau spent time with their tamariki whilst in online classes and would sit afterward to continue working with their tamariki in te reo Māori.

Tamariki and whānau were using social media, Māori TV programmes, Google classes and online resources to explore te reo resources. Whānau recorded the learning and daily events of their tamariki and shared these with kaiako, tumuaki and others. They genuinely enjoyed being at home with their tamariki and learning with them.

“We found time to sit with our tamariki and learn together” – Whānau voice

“Whakawhitiwhiti kōrero ana me te kōrero Māori tonu, i ngā hororei, i tautoko te whānau i ngā mahi me te reo, ko te paina i ako i ētahi o nā mātua i te reo Māori i runga i te ipurangi, i mua, ra kare paku mōhio ki te reo ka kōrero pākehā rātou ki a mātou, kua kaha ake ngā tamariki ki te kōrero Māori” - Kura Voice

‘I can’t see any differences. Kōrero tonu ana ngā pēpi’ - Kura voice

In moving forward, leaders also look to maintain communication and further strengthen relationships amongst whānau, and with local bodies; marae, rūnanga and social and health services. This was viewed as important, and would show appreciation to the whānau, hapū, iwi and, all the others that supported them during and post COVID-19.



Leaders identify a priority going forward is providing enough devices for tamariki, so that if there is a need to return to lockdown and online learning, the transition can occur without disruption.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

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

- strong leadership and governance practice, shared responsibility and decision-making driven by collaborative kura 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 and whānau having access to hard copy learning materials, digital technology, adequate devices, and reliable internet connections
- evolving digital curriculums and kaiako capability to use technology effectively as a teaching and learning tool.

ERO and Te Rūnanga Nui o Ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori will use the insights from this evaluation to assist kura to be better prepared to deliver distance learning in what continues to be uncertain times. We will advocate for the creation of more resources 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.

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