

# TE KAHU WHAKAHAUMARU:

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THE COVID-19 STORY OF PUNA REO

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## FOREWORD

### **Ko te tamaiti te pūtake o te kaupapa**

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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.

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## BACKGROUND

In the days preceding 26 March 2020, Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga needed to rapidly respond to and prepare for a move to distance teaching and learning. We had been informed that at midnight 25<sup>th</sup> 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 Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga to support tamariki and whānau. The home was to become the context for teaching and learning in Aotearoa.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ERO acknowledges the 39 Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga 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.

## WELLBEING: A CONTEXT FOR EVALUATION

ERO wanted to know how successfully governance, leaders, kaiako, kaimahi and whānau supported the wellbeing and learning of tamariki during COVID-19.

ERO worked alongside each of the 39 Puna Reo / Kohūngahunga governance bodies and whānau, kaiako, kaimahi and leaders to undertake this evaluation. We wanted to learn about what was working well for whānau in supporting tamariki 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 39 Puna Reo / Kohūngahunga communities from Te Taitokerau to Te Waipounamu. 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 Puna Reo /Kohūngahunga. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected from surveys and structured interviews were conducted only in te reo Māori to maintain the integrity of the learning environment. ERO synthesised these findings to identify trends and patterns about what worked well and where improvement could be made.

## FINDINGS

### **How leaders in Puna Reo /Kohūngahunga responded to Alert Level four**

Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga who had closer associations and strong support from their governing entity were able to respond more readily to the quickly- changing circumstances.

Most Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga felt unprepared for the shift to distance learning at Alert level four. Necessity to work and teach from home through digital platforms was challenging. Most kaiako and kaimahi felt overwhelmed with the hasty shift into a digital space.

### **Developing and implementing support plans for all whānau was prioritised. The health, safety, and wellbeing of tamariki and their whānau was paramount**

Leaders, kaiako and kaimahi adapted quickly to the unprecedented circumstances.

Advice from the Ministries of Health and Education guided practice. Staying calm was viewed as important to provide reassurance for whānau. Most Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga appreciated the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) bulletins as a means of providing up-to-date information to whānau.

Support plans primarily focused on the health and wellbeing of tamariki and whānau through ongoing communication, as well as learning via digital platforms. Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga that were geographically isolated were more likely to experience anxiety and uncertainty than those in urban areas or cities.

Leaders held wānanga with whānau to discuss tikanga/policy processes for online learning. They established practices to maintain whanaungatanga and remain connected. Kaiako used text messaging and/or phone calls to stay connected to whānau without internet access.

Many Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga demonstrated aroha and manaakitanga by forming cooperatives to supply kai and care packs to those in need. All cultivated kindness by working in ways that were sensitive to the needs of whānau and demonstrated awareness of the assorted complex situations some whānau experience.

*“Kaiako and kaimahi became leaders for our community. Our wider whānau looked to us to keep them informed” – Kaiako voice*

### **Tamariki wellbeing and opportunities to learn were well-supported, as whānau and kaimahi learnt new ways of working and teaching**

Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga worked together with whānau to develop and deliver learning programmes congruent with local tangata whenua of the area. Kaiako and kaimahi showed increased creativity producing resources where tamariki and whānau engaged in activities with or without digital access. Whānau posted videos and photos of tamariki learning on Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga Facebook pages.



Some Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga expressed fears that tamariki may reduce their use of te reo Māori during lockdown. Other kaiako and kaimahi said Alert levels four and three were positive for whānau, and an opportunity for parents with limited te reo Māori, to learn alongside their tamariki.

*“Non-speaking whānau recorded themselves speaking Māori with their tamariki and posted videos on Facebook.” – Kaiako voice*

Most Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga viewed connectivity to the internet as imperative in supporting distance teaching and learning. Where whānau had connectivity, online applications like Zoom and Facebook assisted greatly to keep lines of communication intact. Whānau participated in virtual karakia, waiata and wā whāriki, enabling tamariki, whānau and kaimahi to interact with one another. For many, these virtual channels allowed for some resemblance of usual Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga life in their homes.

### **Access to, and challenges with internet connectivity impacted negatively on the ability of some whānau and tamariki to engage in online learning**

Many Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga expressed a lack of digital resourcing for parents. Not all whānau had access to the internet or the necessary online applications to join video calls, and although many participated in online learning at the start, for some their engagement quickly diminished. These limitations restricted every day whānau engagement.

*“Children having to share devices was an issue”- Puna voice*

*“Some tamariki shared devices with their older siblings whose learning took precedence” – Puna voice*

*“Lack of connectivity/devices created a sense of hopelessness and incompetency within parents and whānau” – Puna voice*

Despite these challenges, all Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga whānau were determined to overcome any complications. Communication strategies were strong, and learning was ongoing for all tamariki to differing degrees.

Some Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga prepared and provided learning packs of materials and resources for tamariki learning in homes. Puna reo / Kōhungahunga and some whānau also requested the Ministry’s hardcopy material packs. The arrival of these was variable for whānau although the vast majority did not receive these until Alert Level one.

### **Overall, transitions for most centres and whānau worked well, seeing most tamariki return happy to see their friends and kaiako**

Centre managers worked closely with their kaimahi in preparation for whānau return. Consistent communication with whānau was viewed as crucial. A major emphasis of transition was the additional COVID-19 practices for centre hygiene, social distancing and learning, and contact tracing. Kaiako and kaimahi knew their whānau needs and reported different levels of whānau confidence and readiness.

At Alert Level three, some Puna reo / Kōhungahunga reopened – primarily for essential service workers who required additional support for their tamariki. However, all Puna reo / Kōhungahunga across the

country encouraged whānau to remain at home where possible. There was flexibility for individual whānau to return in their own time when they felt confident to do so.

Tamariki returned to Puna reo / Kōhungahunga at different times, and most displayed enthusiasm and happiness to be back. Whānau shared how tamariki missed their friends and kaiako. Whānau also articulated a greater appreciation for the professional work of kaimahi.

Some whānau did not manage full attendance after lockdown. Several kaimahi noticed whānau who had remained active online with learning during lockdown showed lower levels of anxiety transitioning tamariki back into Puna reo / Kōhungahunga.

Numerous Puna reo / Kōhungahunga had members of their whānau pass away during lockdown which caused enormous grief and anxiety. There are reports of this continuing to have a significant emotional impact on whānau.

*"We also acknowledge the realisation that our whakapapa will again reflect the loss of ancestors to a pandemic similar to the influenza of 100 years ago." – Puna voice*

### **COVID-19 lockdown imposed an urgency for all Puna Reo /Kōhungahunga to examine their online and distance learning readiness**

Understandably, there were elevated levels of anxiety amongst staff. Not only were kaiako and kaimahi tending to their own whānau, but they also needed to adjust to digital teaching and learning.

Building the capability of new staff and ensuring all staff understood transitional COVID-19 protocols was a priority for managers. A number of trainee kaiako and kaimahi were severely impacted during lockdown. Many had to have their programmes adapted. Wānanga/noho marae and practicums could no longer proceed. Some chose to suspend their studies. Many struggled to meet the demands of study due to COVID-19 lifestyle adjustments and caring for children at home, while others took advantage of lockdown to finish assignments.

*"...found a disconnect with the course content and all that was going on around them." – Kaiako voice*

Professional learning and development was accessed in diverse ways. Most occurred organically in response to COVID-19 and included immediate training in information technology to support working from home. Over time, the confidence of kaiako and kaimahi flourished. Lockdown presented the chance to expand information technology usage and to explore a variety of online platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Facebook and online communication and assessment tools.

*"kaimahi found their place of leadership they didn't realise they had the skills in." – Puna voice*

Many Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga had initiated online digital assessment and evaluation tools prior to lockdown. For many services, distance learning propelled the use of these tools to another level of engaging with tamariki and their whānau. For services less familiar, kaiako and kaimahi were growing their skills.



*“We had more engagement with parents and whānau than ever before!” – Kaiako voice*

*“Facebook messenger gives parents up-to-date progress of what their child actually did that day. It’s instant!” – Kaiako voice*

Many Puna reo / Kōhungahunga encouraged kaiako and kaimahi to join online webinars catering to their interests. Regular online hui and wānanga ensured kaiako and kaimahi were updated and kept well informed. As events unfolded overtime, most Puna reo / Kōhungahunga placed a greater emphasis on wellbeing and learning programmes and halted all professional learning expectations.

## INSIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The evaluation findings show Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga governors, leaders, kaiako and kaimahi were better prepared to support distance learning and whānau wellbeing when favorable practices and conditions were embedded before, and enhanced during, COVID-19 Levels four to one. These included:

- strong leadership and governance practice with informed decision-making driven by collaborative Puna Reo / Kōhungahunga communities
- 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 Puna reo / Kōhungahunga communities will use the insights from this evaluation to assist individual Puna reo / Kōhungahunga kura to be better prepared to deliver distance learning in what continues to be uncertain times.

ERO 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 already occurring in te ao Māori.

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