

Ngā pūrākau o te kura o Tuahiwi

Strengthening language and identity through literacy in Māori-medium bilingual education

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Project description

This community partnership research sought to create place-based pūrākau (ancestral stories) for a Māori medium and bilingual structured literacy program. Our study focused on braiding the streams of robust literacy practices (found within the Better Start Literacy Approach) and Māori pedagogical approaches affirming cultural identity and promoting literacy learning using pūrākau. University of Canterbury (UC) Child Wellbeing Research Institute researchers partnered with local mana whenua, Ngāi Tūāhuriri, and Te Kura o Tuahiwi located 32kms out of Ōtautahi on their Tuahiwi Pā site.

Aims

1. To create pūrākau that reflect the key cultural values, memories, and aspirations of the Tuahiwi hapū while supporting te reo Māori literacy for both Māori medium and bilingual learners.
2. To explore the impact of Ngā Pūrākau o Tuahiwi, a collection of localised pūrākau on the hapū, school community, ākonga and kaiako, including their contribution to language revitalisation, identity development, and educational resources within Māori-medium education.
3. To investigate the impact of systematic and explicit vocabulary elaboration during shared reading of pūrākau on children's expressive and receptive vocabulary development in Tuahiwi classroom settings.

Why is this research important?

Sharing ancestral stories as pūrākau is an ancient tradition in Māori culture, used throughout generations to transfer knowledge, teach traditional values and promote communication. While often incorrectly relegated to the genre of "myths and legends", pūrākau, as a traditional form of Māori narrative, is central to the sharing of philosophy, knowledge, culture, and worldviews (Lee, 2009). However, little is known about the impact of pūrākau on literacy learning in classrooms. This research continues our commitment to community partnership research by

seizing the opportunity to support mana whenua and kura aspirations through a research project. This project was underscored by kaupapa Māori methodology ethos: for Māori, by Māori, for the benefit of Māori.

Key findings

Positive impact of place-based pūrākau on hapori and kura: Ngā Pūrākau o Tuahiwi had and will continue to have a positive impact through its fostering of kotahitanga and whanaungatanga for all of our partners. These pūrākau are taonga that strengthen the connection of ākonga and their whānau to their pā. Integrating these stories into classroom literacy helped promote the use of te reo Māori, increasing community engagement in language revitalisation, and contributes to the growing level of immersion at the kura.

Systematic vocabulary instruction improves language development: The explicit vocabulary elaboration technique used during shared reading of pūrākau led to growth in children's expressive and receptive vocabulary. Elaborated words improved more than non-elaborated words across the immersion and bilingual settings. The pūrākau also fostered a deeper cultural and personal connection, as students could relate to characters and places within their local context.

Bilingual teacher professional development and resources: Providing kaiako with professional learning workshops and ongoing support enhanced their ability to deliver culturally relevant, language-rich lessons, helping develop English and reo Māori proficiency. Creating localised pūrākau began to address the lack of suitable resources in bilingual settings. Teachers emphasised the importance of contextual, place-based materials that align with their students' cultural and language needs.

Implications for practice

- *Culturally responsive teaching:* Using local, place-based pūrākau in classrooms enhances literacy skills and fosters students' sense of belonging, tino rangatiratanga and identity development. This approach should be expanded across education to ensure culturally relevant learning experiences.

- *Broader application of vocabulary techniques:* Teachers can apply this study's explicit vocabulary techniques, systematic vocabulary instruction, across different subjects in both English and te reo Māori to enhance literacy learning and to enrich language learning opportunities throughout the school day.
- *Support for bilingual kaiako:* Professional development focusing on evidence-based strategies, such as vocabulary elaboration and culturally relevant teaching, is crucial for improving student outcomes. Continuous teacher support through workshops, lesson modelling, and feedback is necessary.
- *Localised resource creation:* To support language learning education, the development of place-based, bilingual resources, such as Ngā Pūrākau o Tuahiwi, should be prioritised. More resources tailored to specific immersion levels and local contexts are needed to meet the growing demand for quality materials in education.

Our partners:

Our **Ngāi Tūāhuriri Rūnanga** whānau, community whānau and Auntie Liz Kererū. **Te Kura o Tuahiwi**, ākonga, kaiako and tumuaki, Dot and Mel. Auntie Lynne Harata Te Aika, Christine Harvey, Akeake Taiepa, and Tōmairangi Taiepa (the amazing artists and translators). Our colleagues and Māori Professors from **Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha, Child Wellbeing Research Institute**, and **Te Rū Rangahau**.

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