

Te Aka Pūkāea kia eke, Te Aka Pūkāea kia ita!



A Māori Modern Learning Environment in an English-medium primary

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Intro / Project description

This kaupapa Māori project investigates the ways that two Māori-medium pathways (bilingual and immersion) work together in a newly built Modern Learning Environment (MLEs) called Te Aka Pūkāea to progress te reo Māori and the aspirations of whānau at Newton Central School. This study explores the notion of the Māori Modern Learning Environment (MMLE), and explores how this “space” is understood and utilised by Māori teachers, students, and whānau within the wider English-medium primary school context.

Aims

This project was guided by the following research question:

How does a Modern Māori Learning Environment (MMLE) successfully facilitate dual Māori-medium (immersion and bilingual) pathways that respond to learner and whānau aspirations in an English-medium primary school?

This study aims to provide an in-depth pūrākau of Te Akā Pūkāea as an MMLE to better understand Māori concepts of “space”, in particular te reo Māori space, and the ways it operates in an MMLE context in an English-medium school.

Why is this research important?

This research makes a valuable addition to the literature through its contribution of Māori voices and whānau experiences of MLEs. The project captures the specificities of this case study as a pūrākau, as well as responds to Stewart and Benade’s (2020) call for “spatial biculturalism”, as we theorise space from a kaupapa Māori lens.

Key findings

Overall, the study found that te reo Māori forms the crucial “space” of the MMLE. Participants’ stories identify how te reo Māori is the space that is yearned for, the space that is fought for, and the space that is being reclaimed through

Māori-medium education. Subsequently, participants were less concerned with the specificities of a building design and a particular pedagogy, and were more interested in seizing opportunities within the school environment to teach, learn, speak, and live te reo Māori.

Other key findings include:

- Most parents and whānau identified difficulties accessing information about reo Māori educational pathways in order to make informed choices about pathways for their tamariki. Moreover, gaining a place in Te Aka Pūkāea is typically a challenge as both pathways are oversubscribed.
- Bringing together of two language pathways (bilingual/immersion) into one large MLE creates an important Māori centre and a critical mass of Māori language learners within the schools. This fosters more whanaungatanga, tuakana-teina mentoring, and teacher collaboration than a single cell classroom setting. Furthermore, this large physical structure and large grouping of whānau served to strengthen Māori identity and bicultural understanding across the school.
- The establishment of co-governance structures alongside the purpose-built MMLE supports the affirmation of the mana of te ao Māori. Te Aka Pūkāea symbolises a living commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and provides an example of spatial biculturalism.
- The dual Māori-medium pathways of Te Aka Pūkāea (bilingual and immersion) have a shared commitment to the Māori language acquisition with the aim of growing confident bilingual children. However, each pathway represents a different approach to Māori language education.
- The co-location of the dual Māori language pathways presents some challenges; for the rumaki pathway, like all immersion settings the infiltration of English is an ever-present problem. Understanding and respecting the boundaries of the immersion pathway so that it can flourish is identified as critical to the success of Te Aka Pūkāea.

- There have also been challenges with the MLE space including the inadequate preparation of teachers for dual-pathway instruction. When kaiako initially moved into teaching in the new MLE space, lack of involvement by kaiako in the design planning of the MLE, limited opportunities to develop collaborative teaching in the MLE, and ongoing concerns about acoustic issues and their impact on neuro-diverse learners presented some of the challenges.

Implications for practice

This study emphasises the centrality of te reo Māori as the critical space in a MMLE. As such, the design and build process of MLEs should include opportunities for Māori students, whānau, and kaiako to contribute. The inclusion of the Māori collective voice, with a particular focus on Māori language learning pathways, will contribute to a significantly different design and practice—one that also understands the history of Māori schooling and aspirations of Māori parents. The study also identifies the importance of protecting the integrity of immersion spaces as central to the provision of Māori-medium education in a school with different te reo Māori language pathways. Finally, this study identifies a need for the provision of more information about language pathways and their requirements from providers to help them make the best educational choices they can for their tamariki.

Our partners:

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