

MIRUMIRU PAPĀ—HOUHIA TE WHANOKĒ | BURSTING BUBBLES— THE UNUSUAL NEW NORMAL

Ngā pūrākau o ētahi kaiako whare wānanga i te wā o te
mate urutā KOWHEORI-19 | Narratives of kaiako at one initial
teaching education provider during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Tuhinga whakarāpopoto | Abstract

This research explores the experiences of some kaiako at an Aotearoa tertiary provider during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each kaiako drew inspiration from the pūrākau of Ranginui and Papatūānuku to write a personal narrative with a particular focus on the national rāhui. The objective was to better understand kaiako well-being and bicultural practice to prepare for future events with uncertain and shifting circumstances. The lived experiences of these kaiako were analysed through two lenses across two phases of analysis. The first lens used was kōrero pūrākau, using the pūrākau and context of the separation of Ranginui and Papatūānuku by their tamariki. The second lens employed the three tikanga principles: whanaungatanga, manaakitanga and kotahitanga. A list of recommendations based on the findings are presented in this article to support people who are coming to terms with their new normal.

Keywords

COVID-19, tikanga, Kaupapa Māori, kaiako, rāhui

He kupu whakataki | Introduction

The research presented in this paper was based on the individual and collective experiences of some kaiako from three takiwā ako (Rotorua, Heretaunga, Tūranganui-ā-Kiwa) of Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand, during the COVID-19 pandemic and national rāhui (hereafter called rāhui) from the start of the Level 4 (25 March 2020) to the end of the Level 3 rāhui (14 May 2020). The research set out to explore the experiences of kaiako through a Kaupapa Māori lens with a view to capturing the complexity and diversity of the lived experiences throughout the rāhui and periods of alert level restrictions. Each kaiako drew inspiration from the pūrākau of Ranginui and Papatūānuku (hereafter called I te Timatanga) to write a personal narrative with a particular focus on the rāhui:

The pūrākau (story) of the separation of the sky father, Ranginui, and the earth mother, Papatuanuku, describes the earliest narrative of suffering, separation, loss and hope . . . Frustration grew amongst the children as they felt restricted by the lack of space. “Tapu”, derived from this purakau, describes a state of restriction. (Rangihuna & Kopua, 2016, p. 3)

The purpose of this research was to better understand what it meant personally and professionally for kaiako well-being and bicultural practice to transition between physical and virtual workplaces—bursting bubbles into, across and out of these bubble spaces. In 2020, the uncertainty surrounding new and unprecedented COVID-19 times meant kaiako were not prepared for what was to become their new normal. This research focus was therefore important to ensure kaiako were better prepared to cope with future

unexpected events in the face of unsettling and shifting circumstances.

Te whakatewhatewha i ngā tuhinga | Examining the literature

On 25 March 2020, a state of national emergency in Aotearoa New Zealand was declared because of COVID-19; therefore, at 11.59pm, the whole country moved into Alert Level 4. This meant the whole country went into rāhui. Households had to isolate themselves and “bubbles” were formed to stop the spread of COVID-19 (Cram, 2020). The transition to working from home meant that kaiako needed to find “optimal solutions to deliver equal and equitable learning opportunities for all students” (Godber & Atkins, 2021, p. 1). Some students, kaiako and whānau experienced social isolation from being confined to restricted spaces (Reimers et al., 2020). The challenge for initial teaching education providers during this time was the ability to succeed in the changing learning environment while supporting students and lecturers to build their own resilience (Godber & Atkins, 2021). The importance of “well-being” and the need to work together was paramount to being able to adapt to the new norm.

Some studies researching the impact that COVID-19 has had on people focused on early childhood education (see, e.g., Dawes et al., 2021; Henderson et al., 2022) and others focused on tikanga principles (see, e.g., McMeeking & Savage, 2020; Pihama & Lipsham, 2020). Research corroborates the view that there were ways to combine tikanga principles during COVID-19 to ensure the safety of whānau, kaiako and hapori. McMeeking and Savage’s (2020) study discusses cultural adaptation, when iwi can change tikanga to suit the current health climate. An example of this is “Cultural adaptation began in early March, exemplified by a Ngāti Kahungunu meme

to replace hongis with the ‘Kahungunu wave’ ... ‘tikanga demands that we do what’s tika or what’s right for any occasion’ (Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi Inc, 2020)” (McMeeking & Savage, 2020, p. 37).

Adapting tikanga to stop the transmission of COVID-19 required Māori to review how they could make changes while upholding their intrinsic values and beliefs. Innovative practices were employed, such as using live-streaming and other digital platforms to allow people to retain traditional practices (Pihama & Lipsham, 2020). Te One and Clifford (2021) echo the view of Pihama and Lipsham (2020), who promote the use of tikanga Māori to “develop successful responses to the global pandemic” (p. 1). Although Simati-Kumar and Rangiwai (2020) examined the effects of COVID-19 on tertiary education in relation to moving from teaching kanohi ki te kanohi to online learning, they did not explore this from a tikanga perspective. These authors caution the tertiary education sector to be prepared to respond to the “shifting circumstances” (Simati-Kumar & Rangiwai, 2020, p. 11) surrounding COVID-19 and its impact on taura achievement. In alignment with this view, Bussey et al. (2022) emphasise the “lack of preparedness” for events such as COVID-19 on a global scale and that “there is an urgent need for more studies which shine a light on how the lives of each of us have been affected and changed” (p. xviii).

This study addressed the lack of research surrounding the impact of COVID-19 on kaiako experiences from an interchanging tikanga perspective. In doing so, it sought to better understand how different kaiako personal and professional bubble worldviews shaped lived experiences and hauora. The research question asked was: Drawing from the pūrākau of Ranginui and Papatūānuku, how have the tikanga principles of manaakitanga, whanaungatanga and kotahitanga navigated us through the uncertainty of rāhui to prepare us for shifting circumstances? For the purposes of this article, kaiako are referred to in the first person plural.

Te whakapapa o tō mātou rangahau | The background of our study

As an organisation whose policies, philosophies and practices draw strongly from bicultural values, we turned to te ao Māori to guide us moving forward. The te ao Māori creation story I te Tīmatanga was chosen for this study because of the alignment to the Aotearoa rāhui. The period of this pūrākau is particularly relevant because it is when tamariki of Ranginui and Papatūānuku were born and held

between their parents. This period is referred to as noho tatapū and is described by tohunga Mark Kōpua (Rangihuna & Kopua, 2016) in the phrase “i noho tatapū ngā atua” as a time of increased unrest when the many tamariki of Ranginui and Papatūānuku were collectively restricted in the tight embrace of their parents (p. 3). This phrase, i noho tatapū ngā atua, often shortened to noho tatapū, is the origin of the kupu *tapu*. The other period of relevance is the separation of Ranginui and Papatūānuku by their tamariki.

Ngā tikanga Māori, te whanaungatanga, te manaakitanga, me te Kotahitanga | Tikanga Māori principles of manaakitanga, whanaungatanga and kotahitanga

Tikanga are not easily defined; therefore, each of these tikanga principles would need to be defined relevant to our inquiry. Using the backdrop of our chosen pūrākau, a definition for each tikanga principle was created. It was agreed that whanaungatanga would be the first tikanga principle considered. The rationale for this was that the pūrākau of I te Tīmatanga is predicated on the relationships between the various atua in the story. Without these relationships, or the whanaungatanga between the atua, there would have been no pūrākau for us to base our inquiry on. Additionally, Mead (2016) suggests that there is an interconnectedness between all tikanga principles, such as the way manaakitanga, or hospitality, is used to develop whanaungatanga, further progressing to kotahitanga. The following three sections outline our interpretation of the tikanga principles for the purposes of this study.

Whanaungatanga

Originally, the concept of whānau was defined as a family group (Williams & Broadley, 2012). This is a very specific reference to familial blood ties, through which there are genetic, physical, immutable relationships between family members. This is precisely the type of bond that was shared between the atua in our chosen pūrākau. However, in a more modern context, the definition has expanded to include those who have a shared commitment to a common cause (Mead, 2016). According to Williams and Broadley (2012), “whanaungatanga is about knowing you are not alone, and that you have a wider set of acquaintances that provide support, assistance, nurturing, guidance and direction when needed” (p. 8). However, for a whānau of colleagues working toward a common cause, the act of being a family requires continual, regular

and active input. This active, deliberate input is what we refer to as *whanaungatanga* for the purposes of this inquiry. Therefore, any deliberate act of communication, collaboration or co-operation can be seen in this light.

Manaakitanga

Manaakitanga is a Māori tikanga concept that values the relationships between people and how they are treated (Mead, 2016). Manaakitanga represents the Māori word mana, meaning authority, prestige or power, as well as whakamanawa, meaning to encourage or uplift (Williams & Broadley, 2012). Caring for others is a universal human quality and to connect with a heart is the essence of manaakitanga and linked to the values of integrity and the constant building of warm, trusting relationships (Guzman et al., 2008). The concepts of manaakitanga and whanaungatanga are often interwoven. In enacting manaaki as a tikanga with others, one is essentially practising and enhancing one's own mana (Forsyth & Kung, 2007).

Kotahitanga

Kotahitanga is the combination of kotahi (one) and tanga, which indicates “the act of”. Kotahitanga, then, can be thought of as “the act of being as one”. Moorfield (2011) defines kotahitanga as “unity, togetherness, solidarity”. This solidarity also encompasses putting aside one's personal aims for the betterment of the collective. Kotahitanga or unity of purpose and collective commitment to a common goal or outcome is maintained through intentional enactment of whanaungatanga and manaakitanga. Regular connection with the whānau sustains individual motivation and allows time and space for each to share and seek support and reaffirm purpose and direction (Williams & Broadley, 2012).

Ngā tikanga Kaupapa Māori | A kaupapa Māori methodological approach

As a collective, the researchers drew from a mātauranga Māori perspective in line with Kaupapa Māori methodology. Kaupapa Māori theory empowers a Kaupapa Māori research approach that accepts Māori cultural beliefs, values, knowledge and worldviews as both effective and genuine, thus allowing research presented under such esteem to stand on its own virtues (Smith, 1986).

Smith (1997) informs us that the term Kaupapa Māori is “used by Māori to describe the practice and philosophy of living a Māori culturally

informed life” (p. 453). Hotere-Barnes (2019) recommends that we acknowledge the importance of recognising the competing and practical theoretical considerations of carrying out research from a Kaupapa Māori perspective that includes both Māori and Pākehā researchers. This provocation posed by Hotere-Barnes (2019) was responded to at wānanga hui by ensuring that this research was guided by those within this study who identify as Māori. In drawing from Kaupapa Māori methodology linking to kōrero pūrākau and tikanga Māori principles, it was possible to explore the relevance to kaiako everyday lived experiences.

He kōrero mō ngā kaiako me te horopaki | An introduction to the kaiako who participated and the context

The researchers were the participants in this study at Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand Ngā takiwā ako toru. For this study, we regard all participants as kaiako. Initially, our research team was made up of eight kaiako. However, because of people leaving and commencing employment, the present research team comprises 11 kaiako, eight of whom identify as Māori and three as tauwiwi. Alongside our professional roles, we value our personal roles as parents, grandparents, son and daughters.

Because these unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic times presented circumstances that were difficult to predict, this research study took longer than we anticipated to complete. This research inquiry journey commenced in 2020, but it was not until 2022 that it was finalised. This opened up new possibilities for it to be seen with fresh eyes as new members joined the research team. Therefore, this inquiry was strengthened because it drew upon the valued insights of those who were part of this important mahi at different points along the way.

Ngā tikanga | Procedures

Kaiako each wrote a narrative based on their lived experiences from the announcement that a rāhui was about to be imposed through to our return to Alert Level 2 and beyond until the end of May 2021 as we adjusted to the “new normal”. There were eight narratives in total because three kaiako participated only in wānanga analysis. Data collected did not include narratives written by colleagues who had left the organisation.

Te kohikohi raraunga | Data collection

This research study used two methods of data collection: pūrākau and wānanga.

Te tikanga o te pūrākau: From an iwi Māori

lens, pūrākau are stories that can include the beginning of time and the divine beings. Wirihana's (2012) understandings of pūrākau derived from a wānanga with a kaumātua who shared his interpretation of pūrākau and broke the word down into "pū (source), rā (light, day, sun), ka (past, present and future) and ū (from within)" (p. 212). Far from being considered mere tales or myths and legends, pūrākau have preserved ancestral knowledge, reflect Māori worldviews and portray the lives of tūpuna in creative, engaging ways—whakapapa narratives. Telling pūrākau can also include storying from a contemporary worldview (Lee, 2005). Drawing from Lee (2005), "pūrākau as a valid research method is part of a wider movement by Indigenous people to advance 'decolonising methodologies' in which cultural regeneration forms a central part of our education goals" (p. 2). Wirihana (2012) believes that the use of pūrākau aligns with the expectations of Kaupapa Māori research in three ways. First, the use of an oratory method of story collection honours traditional Māori oratory methods of sharing knowledge. Second, the stories of kaiako are honoured by using their voices as much as possible. Each kaiako drew inspiration from the pūrākau (I te Timatanga) of Ranginui and Papatūānuku as a whāriki from which their respective and very different personal narratives were woven. Third, the use of pūrākau values the subjective interpretations of experience.

Te tikanga o te wānanga: The term wānanga is said to have emerged from the pūrākau of Papatūānuku and Ranginui that frames this research. In the darkness, ngā atua, the tamariki of Ranginui and Papatūānuku, came together to discuss the matter at hand. The conversations were robust, and the tamariki were not always in agreement about how to proceed. Nonetheless, they reached a course of action and attained their goal. In this way, our discussions become a pūrākau within the pūrākau.

Wānanga is the place to kōrero every time we hui together. We recorded our wānanga through Zoom recordings, minutes and notes. Relevant excerpts from wānanga recordings were transcribed for the purpose of providing data evidence for the report. Wānanga as a method of data collection provided a way to share views, have voices heard, make collective decisions through coming together, supporting one another and challenging and inspiring each other's thinking.

Ngā matatika | Ethics

Ethical approval was sought from Te Rito Maioha ECNZ to undertake this research. Each participant read and understood the organisation's Ethical Standards of Practice for Research, and the proposed research was undertaken in accordance with the standards. For ethical purposes, all participant data used in this research are identified as kaiako and numbered 1 to 8.

Te wewete i ngā raraunga | Data analysis

An analytical framework was developed and employed to analyse each kaiako narrative. Analyses were undertaken in two phases: through self-analysis and collective analysis. Lived experiences of kaiako as depicted in their narratives were analysed by employing the following tikanga principles:

- Whanaungatanga: *What* we do.
- Manaakitanga: *How* we do it.
- Kotahitanga: *The reason why and the outcome of what we do, and how we do it.*

Subsequently, experiences were analysed through the perspectives of ngā atua depicted in the pūrākau of Ranginui and Papatūānuku, by linking to tatapū or tapu experiences in COVID-19 rāhui and subsequent alert levels.

Ngā kitenga me ngā whakawhitinga kōrero | Findings and discussion

The insights gained from bursting bubbles have prepared us to embrace the uncertainty of our future ways of knowing, doing, being and becoming. This section highlights how the different personal and professional bubble discourses shaped our lived experiences and hauora. The findings presented in the section that follows discuss the interwoven tikanga principle links of whanaungatanga, manaakitanga and kotahitanga, and address the research question: Drawing from the pūrākau of Ranginui and Papatūānuku, how have the tikanga principles of manaakitanga, whanaungatanga and kotahitanga navigated us through the uncertainty of rāhui to prepare us for shifting circumstances?

There is a sense of whanaungatanga throughout the chosen pūrākau with a clear depiction of the challenges faced by those seeking connection and collaboration. The story of Ranginui and Papatūānuku illustrates not only the relationship between people, but also between time and space—the progression from night into day, and the physical closeness, and challenges, between Ranginui, Papatūānuku and their children.

Similarities between the narratives and the pūrākau are evident in the following whanaungatanga experiences faced by kaiako:

By the time the first week of March had ended, further confirmed COVID-19 cases were reported within the borders of Aotearoa—all of a sudden home did not feel as safe as it once was. (Kaiako 8)

As weeks turned into a month, we really missed the regular contact with our family who lived nearby. (Kaiako 6)

As I left the building, I knew my colleague would be the last person I would encounter, outside of my whare for quite some time. I would miss my colleagues—these two courageous wāhine—but knew that missing them was better than losing them. For me rāhui had begun! Thank Goodness! (Kaiako 8)

Some days were tough, and I really struggled not having a support network at hand to help with my tamariki. I come from a big whānau and not being able to connect with them physically was hard getting used to; it felt very unnatural. (Kaiako 4)

When viewed through a whanaungatanga lens, findings revealed the importance of providing opportunities for whānau, and colleagues to connect physically, mentally and spiritually. Each of the narratives reflected this:

Evenings were the time to connect as a family and we watched lots of movies together, played board games and spent a few nights sleeping in a tent in the backyard or a mattress in the living room. It was an opportunity to truly reconnect with each other and explore time together that was slow and meaningful. (Kaiako 7)

Visiting our son was restricted; however, medical staff requested that it would be a good idea if someone stayed with him while he was undergoing treatment. With the manaaki given by the organisation I was able to be with our son while he went through some of the worst parts of his treatment. (Kaiako 2)

For my whānau, we engaged in wānanga around what each day could possibly look like for our whānau . . . We decided we would implement the Te Whare Tapa Whā model to ensure each of the pou of our whare were being nurtured. (Kaiako 5)

We connected in different ways with whānau, taurira and our stakeholders. Affording time to be with others was vitally important because of the social responsibility each of us upheld and uplifted for one another's hauora:

I was torn between the deep sense of social responsibility I felt for my whānau, friends, colleagues. (Kaiako 8)

Our findings expand on the mahi of Guzman et al. (2008), who discussed how relationships can remain connected even when people are not in the same physical space. However, what stood out for us was that we were all aware of the amount of time we needed to invest in others. We discovered the importance of offering multiple opportunities to be able to come together to build relationships and enjoy a sense of whānau connection. One way we did this with colleagues was through daily karakia, which provided an opportunity to connect. We discovered that daily karakia was vital to our lived experience during rāhui because it was more than just reciting a karakia; it was about centring ourselves spiritually:

This became the glue that held our team together and fused our relationship on a whole different level. (Kaiako 1)

Karakia mornings and nights to cleanse the wairua, body, hinengaro and whānau. Ngā Atua had karakia when they separated their parents. In fact, they had karakia for any job whether new or standard. (Kaiako 2)

Tikanga Māori traditionally values kanohi ki te kanohi kōrero to form whanaungatanga. Although we are an online provider, rāhui restricted all physical contact, and therefore, it was particularly important to create routine in an online space to connect everyone. With students, we transitioned from a focus on study support to prioritising pastoral care in hui manaaki to ensure taurira well-being was maintained because we noticed an increase in COVID-19 related issues, such as a decline in mental health and extra mahi responsibilities. The employment of video conferencing software in the form of Zoom became part of everyday life—very quickly, kaiako learned how to navigate their way around this space using the tools at hand to engage with taurira in innovative ways, such as virtual backgrounds, whiteboards and breakout rooms. “Teaching both with a heart and from the heart” (Guzman et al., 2008, p.487) was infused in kaiako

practice. We realised that we had to become more sensitive to the different social responsibilities that taura now had because of this new normal. Being innovative meant thinking creatively and embracing new spaces such as social media forums:

Ensuring that each team member was OK was paramount because staff well-being and our relationships are what govern my whole being in my job. I know that each and every one of my team were reacting to the rāhui in different ways, so the daily Zoom hui became our new normal. (Kaiako 1)

I put systems in place to ensure the manaaki of taura into the programme and to create a virtual place where whanaungatanga could be fostered; in doing so providing opportunities for taura to establish and maintain relationships with one another and with me as well as the other kaiako in the programme. (Kaiako 8)

Technology had its challenges at mahi, but we managed to maneuver around the screen and keyboard satisfactorily. Zoom was new to me, but I got through the how to. A new tikanga of tapu, we needed to be careful with new updates, noa happened when we got the hang of the new updates. Facebook media was a blessing for the whānau. Our son could post pānui up to inform his whānau, hapu, iwi and friends about his progress. (Kaiako 2)

What was important for me was that our stakeholders trusted us and trusted that this new way of maintaining relationships was presented with no ulterior motives attached. The cool thing with our combined team was if one base was delivering a hui, each base had a representative and in the eyes of our stakeholders we presented as a united front. (Kaiako 1)

Maintaining contact with our students and stakeholders was paramount, and that was when I had to think outside the square and Zoom became the new normal as a meeting place. (Kaiako 1)

Our research study highlights the importance of safe spaces that are non-judgemental and are open to each other's whakaaro and the different perspectives we each brought to our lived experiences. This finding concurs with Williams and Broadley (2012) and Guzman et al. (2008), who inform how kotahitanga becomes evident when diverse perspectives are celebrated and woven together as people work alongside each other,

sharing their thoughts and growing their own perspectives that develop through an online learning medium. Different perspectives made us mindful not to lose sight of the significance of human touch:

People may say that technology replaces contact because you can see them daily via various social media platforms, but I disagree; nothing can ever supersede human touch and that smell of babies. (Kaiako 1)

Decisions during the rāhui were not made without robust discussion and debate; individuals had their own thoughts, feelings and alternative solutions to offer up. We liken this to the pūrākau of Ranginui and Papatūānuku, in which through wānanga the decision was made by the majority of their tamariki to separate their parents. During these wānanga, different ones offered the unique skills and supports they possessed to contribute to a successful outcome (Kameta, 2009). The unified commitment and purpose for us as kaiako during the COVID-19 rāhui period was a shared commitment to our own and each other's well-being, the retention of our taura, and an as seamless as possible transition into continued study while they were locked down at home with their own families and situations. Wānanga about how we would meet this commitment was required, focused on how we would continue to offer and enact these three core tikanga and ensure the members within this whānau were supported with manaaki, felt the connection of whanaungatanga with us, and remained committed to our shared goal of continued support within our online platform. Accordingly, any action taken that supported this overarching goal was seen as an enactment of kotahitanga. For example:

Karakia served to embrace us all in the same way Tama-rereti (Tane's younger brother) hung up Uru's children in the sky to give light and hope to all by providing a pathway for all to follow and overcome the darkness enshrouding us all. (Kaiako 6)

I grew closer to the students over lockdown. The broadcasts of the COVID unity message strengthened kotahitanga across the country, and my outlet became the communication with students. Being physically isolated from friends and whānau forced me to suppress certain ways of doing and being, which did not last and ended up manifesting itself through the way that I was interacting with students. In the end this strengthened the relationships I had established with them pre-lockdown

and I felt as if the students were with me right throughout this ordeal. (Kaiako 6)

When viewed through a kotahitanga lens, whānau maintaining emotional connections and upholding intrinsic whakapapa values and beliefs are key. Supporting one another by having virtual spaces to come together in dialogue to discuss emotions, fears, anxieties, how we were coping, happy moments and lived experiences were vitally important. An example of this was in the way our team provided hui manaaki for centre managers and that became a space for them to connect and kōrero about COVID-19 work-related challenges and what had become their new normal:

These hui manaaki ... fast became valuable times to connect, to discuss ... a COVID-19 world and to deeply listen to what their lived experiences at this time involved. What I was very aware of was that ECEC [early childhood education and care] services were mostly closed except for the children of essential workers. (Kaiako 8)

Meeting virtually throughout the day was not convenient and so hui manaaki took place predominantly at night via Zoom hui ... Pastoral care was lifted to another level ... evenings were a time to prepare or connect with others in their centre environments. (Kaiako 8)

Hui manaaki was a time to emotionally connect because life in a COVID-19 world was fast paced and changing rapidly for us all:

This emphasis on emotionally connecting with each other was vitally important because ... we found ourselves ... not able to physically touch in virtual worlds, but COVID-19 had enforced no touching in our physical worlds too. (Kaiako 8)

With reference to the chosen pūrākau, manaakitanga is demonstrated through the desire to uphold the mana of the whānau. This notion drew out a range of perspectives, because each child (of Ranginui and Papatūānuku) had a different idea about how to best achieve manaakitanga—that to achieve this would cause another's mana to become off-balance. Some believed that separating the land and sky would allow for the growth of mana among the children, albeit at the expense of the parents' desires, while others viewed the separation and change as a form of disrespect, regardless of the state in which they were living. The narratives discuss the sacrifices made by each

kaiako while trying to uphold, not only the mana of their whānau, but also their communities, their students, their colleagues and the organisation, as evidenced in the following narrative examples:

Living in a multigenerational whare, the Prime Minister's message to take care of our elderly and work from home resonated with me—the well-being of my parents and tamariki was my first priority—was I going to be faced with a decision—whānau or work? My wairua felt like she was being pulled down. (Kaiako 8)

There were days when I had some silly thoughts running through my mind and a constant thought was that my mokopuna would not remember me; absence and separation can do that. I just wanted to see and hold them. (Kaiako 1)

Although we missed our whānau dearly, talking to them at times from the driveway was tough. However, keeping our circle tight and ensuring each member of our whānau was safe was paramount. (Kaiako 5)

I appreciated that some people in Aotearoa viewed the rāhui as restricting their freedom but for me it was protecting our freedom—keeping us safe. COVID-19 was amongst us and if we were ever to move freely again, this time of rāhui was essential to our survival. (Kaiako 8)

It goes without saying that providing these hui was time consuming but I am a firm believer that we must look after the people that keep us in a job, and they liken to a planted seed in order for it to grow you must water and care for it; for me it is a no-brainer. (Kaiako 1)

It became apparent that during these unprecedented times it was important to be thoughtful about the struggles and challenges that each of us faced, depending on our bubble environments. It was evident that manaaki was received and given in both tangible and intangible ways. One kaiako discussed how in the current climate, manaakitanga was best achieved by adhering to the everchanging tikanga:

We remained physically close to our own by putting on hold our duties on the marae and in the community. (Kaiako 3)

As we moved deeper into lockdown, our sense of community shifted virtually to the online

community that had become more apparent in our whare. Our kura was online, mahi, kōhanga, whānau—all online. Other than the odd trip to the local supermarket, whanaungatanga for us was happening virtually, and as that grew, so too did the need to practise other tikanga. I could never have imagined the transition of tikanga from a physical space to an online space, but it happened. (Kaiako 3)

As the days rolled by, I thought more about my mokopuna, and found that I went through periods of total sadness; the feelings were like tidal waves that swept over me and I soon realised that it was the lack of physical contact that I missed. No one knew that I went through many teary periods, especially after my mokopuna catch-ups; I guess my coping mechanism was to put on a brave face and get on with work. (Kaiako 1)

Although I didn't realise it, being locked down was a blessing in disguise as it allowed me to evaluate areas of my life and self that I wanted to change. I was given time to manaaki myself through grief I was experiencing in order to ensure my own mental and emotional well-being was uplifted. At the forefront of my mind was my tamariki; in order to keep them well, I had to be well within myself. (Kaiako 4)

Another kaiako demonstrated manaakitanga in another way:

A group was formed to manaaki the elderly. Deliveries of grocery packs were dispersed too as many Ngāti Pikiao descendants were living in the vicinity of Rotorua. (Kaiako 2)

I was excited to talk to the children about how this would be a historical moment in time for them. How people would talk about the year 2020. How it would become their own pūrākau for future generations. How we would notice communities coming together, families helping other families and what we did to get by and get through it keeping each other safe. How our actions were going to affect those around us and that all we could control at this time was how we treated others. (Kaiako 7)

The separation of Ranginui and Papatūānuku caused some resistance and tested relationships within their whānau unit. Similarly, some of us were happy to exit our home bubbles and return to work and others resisted:

I found myself resisting returning to the physical workplace when others were excited about this thought. The “long tail” of COVID-19 concerned me; again the social responsibility I felt toward others loomed large. When others were bursting bubbles and traversing the world of Level 2, I was still in my Level 3 bubble space. The transition from a safe and secure home bubble space to physical places and spaces took time. Eventually, I made this transition—kindness, trust in others, manaaki, aroha and understanding were key. (Kaiako 8)

Returning to mahi was a blessing for some ... It meant no more distractions. (Kaiako 2)

I welcomed the return to the office. Lockdown was a beautiful but exhausting experience of survival—physically, mentally and emotionally. We survived the ultimate battle against COVID, but in achieving this, we fought a battle against our own conditioning, and we redefined new ways of doing and being. (Kaiako 3)

Furthermore, some of us had to contend with whānau and others who did not take the rāhui seriously or had differing perspectives on experiences that should be shared, and that tested relationships:

We did not want manuhiri—and some of our whānau even became aggressive about it. The hostility made it feel like we were entering World War III. We changed tikanga, and went against our own beliefs, but we knew these were the measures we had to take to protect our whānau. (Kaiako 3)

Tensions were evident in hui on the 24th of March; unknowingly my pūrākau, about what was occurring in my community, triggered an emotional response in another—anxieties were high. I could see that talking about the rawness of this reality could potentially be a “tipping point” for work whānau whose relationships I cherished. It became even more apparent to me that not only physical and social but also people's emotional well-being was a priority at this time. From the rāhui outset, it was as if we were called as a tīma to manaaki one another through these COVID-19 times. (Kaiako 8)

Admittedly, the impact of COVID presented resistance, differing perspectives and tensions; however, we were able to adapt to shifting circumstances by keeping the tikanga principles close. Expanding on the work of Ungar (2008, as cited in Boulton & Gifford, 2014), we discovered that

being resilient became important for people as they navigated cultural experiences in relevant and meaningful ways. This expands on the work of Te One and Clifford (2021), whose research illuminates the “adaptability of tikanga to maintain whanaungatanga”. For this reason, as a team we were able to uphold the organisations’ Tō Tātou Oati Pūmanawa Tangata—Our Values and Behaviours and the bicultural principles underpinning all that we do.

Ngā hua me te whakakapi | Results and conclusion

This research allowed us to explore the experiences of Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand takiwā ako kaiako and staff during the rāhui and alert level restrictions. In doing so, in-depth insights were gained concerning the potential of pūrākau and tikanga principles as a way of critically exploring and analysing lived experiences to better understand how we could prepare for future events with uncertain and shifting circumstances. Moving forward with our eyes firmly fixed on the past, lessons learned from this research study to prepare us for the future are:

- Be open to reassessing the three principles of manaakitanga, whanaungatanga and kotahitanga so that people’s professional and personal lives align in “new normal” times.
- Commit to wānanga to ensure tikanga can continue to be offered and enacted in relevant and authentic ways.
- Prioritise safe spaces that are non-judgemental and open to people’s different whakaaro and perspectives.
- Have awareness that manaaki is received and given in both tangible and intangible ways.
- Embrace differing perspectives because they provide an opportunity to critically engage with and better understand others’ ways of being, doing and knowing.
- Respect the responsibilities others may have because of their different cultural ways of being, doing and knowing to ensure connectiveness is preserved for them as individuals and us as a collective.
- Provide opportunities to connect with others physically, mentally and spiritually. Ways to do this are through karakia and hui manaaki.
- Ensure time is prioritised to recognise and acknowledge one another’s social responsibilities by upholding and uplifting their hauora.
- Be sensitive to the different social responsibilities of taura, colleagues and stakeholders.
- Be open to new and innovative ways to engage with others in online spaces.
- Understand that keeping a group unified, committed and emotionally invested in the hauora of others is hard work and takes effort.

Although COVID-19 presented challenges and struggles, it also provided us with the opportunity to be better prepared to engage with circumstances that shift or unsettle our thinking and feeling. We now better understand how our personal and professional bubble worldviews shaped our lived experiences and hauora as we were coming to terms with our new normal. The lessons we have learned pave a way forward and can be used as a future guide as we encounter changes in tikanga and navigate our way through struggles and challenges in the face of uncertainty.

Kuputaka | Glossary

aroha	kindness, affection, love, compassion
atua	god, deity, supernatural being
hapori	society, community
hauora	health, to be in good spirits
hinengaro	mind
horopaki	context
hua	finding, result, outcome
hui	meeting; to gather, assemble, meet
hui manaaki	meetings to support the holistic well-being of others
I te Tīmatanga	known as the beginning of time, the conception of the world
iwi	tribe or extended group of people who descend from a common ancestor
kaiako	lecturer or teacher
kanohi ki te kanohi	face to face
karakia	spiritual incantations
kaumātua	elderly person
Kaupapa Māori	Māori approach, Māori agenda, Māori principles, Māori ideology
kitenga	finding, observation, perception, view
kōhanga	preschool
kohikohi	collect or gather

kōrero	to speak, narrate or discuss	tamariki	children, to be young or youthful
kotahitanga	the act of coming together for a specific purpose, also encompasses unity and solidarity	tapu	sacred, holy, not to be tampered with
kura	school	tauira	student, pupil; can also stand for an example or way of modelling
mahi	work	te ao Māori	the Māori world or Māori worldview
mana	prestige, power, influence, control or status of people, places and objects	te tikanga o te pūrākau	pūrākau as a methodology
manaaki	to support, take care of, give hospitality to, look out for; show respect, generosity and care for others	te tikanga o te wānanga	wānanga as a methodology
manaakitanga	an expression of care and support for others, ensuring the well-being of others is nurtured; also extends to the whenua to ensure it is sustained for future generations	Te Whare Tapa Whā	the four cornerstones of Māori health
manuhiri	visitor	tikanga	customs, rules, procedures, methods, protocols
Māori	the Indigenous people of Aotearoa	tīma	team
mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge handed down by ancestors	tino rangatiratanga	self-determination, sovereignty, autonomy
moana	sea or ocean	tirohanga	view, see, sight, look
mokopuna	grandchild	tohunga	Māori expert
ngā tuhinga	literature	tūpuna	ancestors, grandparents
noho tatapū	a period of time when the children of Ranginui and Papatūānuku were born and held between their parents	wāhine	women
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent	wairua	spirit, soul
pānui	announcements	wānanga	to meet, discuss, deliberate
Papatūānuku	Earth Mother or deity of planet earth	wānanga hui	a collective meeting, to share knowledge collectively
pou	pillars	wewete	analyse or unravel
pouako	teacher, lecturer	whakaaro	perspective and ideas
pūrākau	traditional stories and whakapapa narratives	whakakapi	to conclude, complete, close
rāhui	lockdown, temporary restriction	whakamanawa	to encourage, uplift
rangahau	study	whakapapa	genealogy, to descend from, lineage, background
Ranginui	deity of the sky	whakatewhatewha	investigate, examine, study, enquire
rārangi	list or catalogue	whakawhitinga kōrero	discussion
raraunga	data	whānau	extended family, family group
takiwā ako	regional education centre	whanaungatanga	kinship, to feel a sense of connection through shared experiences; familial ties, relationships
		whare	house
		whāriki	foundation, woven mat
		whenua	land

The use and translation of te reo Māori has been informed by *Te Aka: Māori Dictionary* (Moorfield, 2011) and the literature used to inform the development of this research project.

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