

Te Kura mai i Tawhiti: He Tau Kawekawē

Building the foundation for whānau educational success and wellbeing – A kaupapa Māori Early Childhood Education approach

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Intro / Project description

Te Kōpae Piripono is a kaupapa Māori early childhood education centre, based in Taranaki for the past 23 years. The research explored Te Kōpae Piripono's whānau development approach to early childhood education (ECE) and its transformative power for children and their whānau in the Taranaki community, including 'hard-to-reach' whānau.

Aims

The research aimed to build and strengthen an evidence base around the effectiveness of an innovative kaupapa Māori ECE's whānau development approach to teaching and learning that promotes positive outcomes for Māori learners and their whānau, across the life course. A key focus was the transformative power of this approach in overcoming barriers to education and wellbeing for Māori whānau. The study aimed to show how ECE can engage with and inspire Māori whānau, especially the 'hard-to-reach'.

Why is this research important?

ECE has been identified as a key setting where children's learning and development and the wellbeing of families can be improved. The ECE Taskforce (2010) argue that early intervention, including high quality ECE, is one of the best investments a society can make to ensure an optimal start to life, with social and economic benefits throughout the life course. This type of research contributes to the development and scaling up of ECE and programming that can lead to improved education, health and prosperity outcomes for whānau/families throughout life.

What we did

The research identified best practice elements of Te Kōpae Piripono's approach and how they can be further developed, with the potential for wider application in other settings. The project engaged with former whānau members to learn from their experience of how participation and engagement looked and felt for them within Te Kōpae Piripono, and how the whānau development approach impacted their lives.

Key findings

Five factors impacting the engagement of whānau in Te Kōpae Piripono, and therefore participation in their children's education and access to whānau development opportunities. These were historical, personal, institutional, cultural and socio-economic factors.

Features of the Te Kōpae Piripono approach that influenced levels of engagement and participation include

- Kaupapa Kōpae – philosophy of Te Kōpae Piripono (Tuakiri Taranaki – Taranaki Māori identity; Māori language immersion; aroha and manaakitanga – love and caring; whanaungatanga – human relations; whānauranga – sense of belonging as whānau; haumarutanga – safety)
- Kaitiaki/teacher qualities, skills and professionalism
- Whānau Development approach (participation in children's programme; provision of parenting advice and guidance; whānau wānanga – organised workshops and learning opportunities)
- Specific practices (structured enrolment process; expectation of participation and contribution; consistency of centre processes and reliability of programming; buddysystem;

courageous conversations; health focus)

Recommendations for practitioners

The seven key focus areas for action are

- Kaupapa - the clear articulation of centre philosophy, aligned with community values, and put into practice for families to experience
- Kaitiaki – recognition of the central role of teachers as skilled educators, as role models, and as vital supports for families
- Kōrero – open, honest and responsive communication is valued and practiced both informally (daily interactions) and formally (Uiui Whānau – Family interview)
- Rangatiratanga – fostering leadership (characterised by responsibility and contribution) among the whānau collective of both children and adults
- Whakawhanakē whānau – extension of the focus from children's learning and development to that of the entire whānau, with the provision of a programme of whānau development opportunities
- Hononga – connection within community to enrich centre programming and provide support and connection for families
- Tūkanga – structured processes provide the scaffolding to support centre programming that is consistent and effective

Our partners:

This study was undertaken by Te Pou Tiringa Incorporated, the governance body of Te Kōpae Piripono. The research team members are Erana Hond-Flavell, Dr Mihi Ratima, Aroaro Tamati and Hinerangi Korewha (Te Kōpae Piripono Directors), and Dr Will Edwards. Te Kōpae Piripono Kaitiaki contributed as research partners in the study. This standalone study contributes to a broader research project, Te Kura mai i Tawhiti, that is a collaboration between Te Pou Tiringa and The National Centre for Lifecourse Research (NCLR), University of Otago. The longitudinal Te Kura mai i Tawhiti study investigates what constitutes ECE programming for children and whānau that leads to improved education, health and other wellbeing outcomes in later life. The NCLR researchers who have contributed to this study are Dr Moana Theodore, Dr Gareth Treharne, and Professor Richie Poulton.

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