



TEACHING AND LEARNING TE REO MĀORI IN ENGLISH-MEDIUM SCHOOLS IN NEW ZEALAND:

What we learned

Challenges or Opportunities?

They [students] shine when given opportunities.

Teacher, English-medium primary school, 2018.

The reo Māori programmes in English-medium schools are more likely to be sustainable when the language holds an important place in the school's culture.

Right from the outset, a school can be faced with a range of challenges when it comes to teaching te reo Māori. Whether those challenges are barriers or opportunities, however, can come down to how strongly the school believes in the importance of te reo Māori for their students and their school.

Participants in the 2018 research project on the teaching of te reo Māori in English-medium schools,¹ were able to identify a range of challenges. One of the most obvious ones was the limited number of teachers who speak Māori. When your school doesn't have a Māori language speaking teacher on staff, how viable is it, really, to teach te reo Māori?

Teachers who are proficient speakers of Māori are widely sought after, so even if you are fortunate enough to have a Māori language speaking teacher, the programme can quickly become unsustainable if they leave your school. These are very real challenges for English-medium schools. Still, many schools don't back away, but see this as a professional development opportunity. They provide Māori language tutoring for staff and embrace the concept of "ako" – learning together with their students. As many teachers know, not knowing something as a teacher doesn't stop you from facilitating learning. Encouraging students to lead the learning, or partnering with external resource people from the community are ways in which this can be done.

Since the introduction of Māori language programmes in their schools, leaders in the study found many ways to support their teachers' development and promote the language. Leaders and teachers spoke about using simple, everyday phrases as a normal means of communicating inside and outside the classroom. They also spoke of te reo Māori becoming increasingly visible around the school, on classroom walls, in the staffroom, and through the offices. This had been part of the strategy for promoting the language and providing a conducive learning environment in many schools. Greeting people in Māori doesn't require any great level of language proficiency, but it does require a commitment to changing the culture of the school, if this is not currently the norm.

¹ Haemata Ltd (2019). *WHAKANUIA TE REO KIA ORA: Evaluation of te reo Māori in English-medium compulsory education*. Unpublished report prepared for Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori.

Getting the school community on board can also be a real challenge. An unsupportive community can present itself in many ways and sometimes from unexpected quarters. School community members who do not support the teaching of Māori language in their school, whānau who have expectations beyond what the school can provide or who do not want non-Māori teachers teaching te reo Māori, and students who are resistant to learning the language are all possible scenarios.

Schools that have overcome these types of challenges have had a sound rationale for teaching te reo Māori. They have ensured teachers know about the issues and how to respond appropriately. Their teachers engage in professional development in second language teaching pedagogy so that lessons are interactive, challenging and purposeful. They have a progressive language learning plan that ensures students are not learning the same things year in and year out. They have a commitment to genuinely working in partnership with the Māori community and school whānau to identify, discuss, and address issues together. They have spoken with other schools who have faced similar challenges, and they have strong leadership.

Appropriately resourcing Māori language programmes can also be challenging, but it is necessary for a sustainable programme. Leaders who have overcome this have actively prioritised te reo Māori in the school budget and through the allocation of staffing resources and responsibilities. Including proficiency in te reo Māori as a desirable skill when recruiting teaching staff and allocating resources for Māori language tutors and/or kaiārahi i te reo to work alongside teachers are ways to support a school-wide programme that is sustainable.

However, sustainability doesn't necessitate an ongoing budget priority. Schools can build a strong Māori language support network, "Māori language guardians" (kaitiaki), including people in the school, in the community and nationally, who can support the Māori language programme with guidance, resources, and suggestions. This can be a cost-effective and helpful way to sustain the language programme in a way that evolves and grows with the school.

Starting the journey is sometimes the hardest part. Continuing it can be challenging but offers a host of unforeseen opportunities for the wider school community.

Ki te hoe!

Take up the challenge!

Reflect

What challenges are your school currently facing or likely to face in the future in implementing a te reo programme? How might they be overcome?

'Kia ita!'

Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori
MĀORI LANGUAGE COMMISSION



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