



Te Reo Māori Can Be Easily Learned Through Waiata Tamariki

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This publication describes an effective way for student teachers and colleagues in early childhood education to learn te reo Māori (Māori language) that has been implemented by lecturers at Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association. The approach was developed after observing how waiata tamariki (children's songs) are an integral component of Māori language acquisition in early childhood education settings. Language development is a fundamental aspect of early childhood teachers' pedagogy.



Language Learning

In 1987 Māori language became official in this country. The quotes below provide some of the rationale for its recognition. At a kaumatua hui organised by the Department of Māori Affairs in 1979, Sir James Henare said “*Ko te reo te mauri o te mana Māori*” (the language is the life essence of Māori mana). Language is the life essence and sustenance of a culture. It provides the tentacles that can enable a child to link up with everything in his or her world. It is one of the most important forms of empowerment that a child can have. Language is not only a form of communication but it helps transmit the values and beliefs of a people” (Pere, 1995, p. 9).

“Acquisition is the unconscious process that occurs when language is used in real conversation. It is a pattern of meaningful interactions between people, more so pakeke (adults) and tamariki, where initially each has particular roles that can become reversible” (Tangaere, 1997, p. 13).

For tamariki to acquire the ability to communicate through language, they need to be guided by those closest to them (Drewery & Bird, 2007, p. 167). Therefore in the early childhood environment it is crucial for staff and student teachers to build positive relationships with tamariki and their whānau/families. Vygotsky also emphasized the importance of these relationships in supporting and enhancing children's development (Claiborne & Drewery, 2010, p. 18). Conversely, the way we communicate with each other is one of the most important aspects of development that link people together.

Today, in different institutions throughout the country, many people are eager to learn te reo Māori.

Our Approach

The Diploma of Teaching Early Childhood Education programme delivered through Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa is a centre-based programme taken over 3 years. Centre-based training means students spend 15 hours a week working in a “home” centre – The student is either paid or volunteers for 15 hours a week in the centre – supported by a Liaison Teacher, attend an intensive day of tutorials and workshops each week run by a teacher education provider, and take part in practicum experiences in other centres each year. Te Tari Puna Ora’s teacher education programme, taught in 16 Bases across the country, consists of four modules – Ako/Pedagogical studies, Te Korowaitanga/Professional studies, Ao Aotearoa/Contextual studies, and Te Pūawaitanga o te kākano/Tangata Whenua studies – each of which has different kaupapa (subjects). While te reo Māori is included in all the modules, Tangata Whenua studies is the module that most strongly emphasises te reo Māori.

Lecturers teaching waiata tamariki in our teacher education programme demonstrate to students how waiata contribute to their own Māori language acquisition. They learn new words easily with memory aids like pictures on the waiata charts (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2009), and are shown how language structures in waiata can be taken into everyday usage. During 2008 a small action research study within the teacher education programme at the Rotorua Base was conducted over 8 weeks using focus group interviews and content in the visiting lecturer’s records. A week after the lecturer taught students waiata tamariki using this pedagogy, she conducted two focus group interviews (10 students in each group on two separate days). The first group’s response was that “having waiata sessions in class gave us the confidence to practise in the centre. Having done this allows our colleagues to grasp kupu from waiata and to be/so they can be utilised naturally in the centre environment, e.g., Morena tamariki mā (morning children).” The second focus group commented, “it makes it so much easier when you can see the waiata been explained in class and how we can use this in the centre environment.” Examples from the visiting lecturer’s record booklets support these responses. Student teachers realized that if waiata were sung consistently every day confidence in speaking te reo Māori was increased. A major theme in the records of these interviews was that this modelling gives student teachers the confidence to utilise the same approach to te reo Māori teaching and learning in the early childhood centres in which they work. Students who come to the Rotorua Base range from those having no knowledge of te reo Māori, let alone of pronunciation, through those with some understanding and limited correct pronunciation, through those with medium knowledge to those with excellent knowledge of te reo Māori. Having knowledgeable students is a bonus, as they give immense support to pouako (Māori lecturers) in the programme. Not only do these students get to utilise waiata to maintain te reo Māori, their input acknowledges the Māori concepts of manaakitanga (showing kindness), tautokotanga (support), and tuakana and teina relationships (older and younger).

Throughout our 3-year teacher education programme weekly tikanga practices maintain regular exposure to and practice in singing himene (hymns) and waiata. Narratives showed that the students returned to their home centres and provided professional development to their colleagues in learning waiata. Also, while on practicum placements, our students provided professional development to centres by sharing waiata. Evidence for this was provided by Associate Teachers through both verbal and written reports that highlighted “students out on practicum support the centre by introducing waiata, and the learning shared supports the idea how easy te reo

Māori can be gained,” or “It was great having B. in the centre sharing the waiata she learnt in class. It made us more aware how waiata can be understood; it was a fun way of learning.”

One learning outcome in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 80) says “children experience an environment where they discover and develop different ways to be creative and expressive.” Our study showed adults being just as creative and expressive through waiata.

The emphasis in the first year of study is on correct pronunciation. This is done through karakia (incantation), himene (hymn), pēpeha (introducing yourself) (Williams, 2003), and waiata for tamariki. In the second year of training students learn the formation of sentence structures through the same media as in the first year. The tasks are more involved, like making a resource in te reo Māori and sharing the resource to invited guests at a wānanga (gathering). Third year assignments include rauemi (resources) created for tamariki that revolve around waiata. By this stage students are expected to use sentence structures competently in their early childhood centre.

Waiata can be used as an education tool for teaching and learning and as such are driven by the practice of whanaungatanga. Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) found that learning through song methods appears to be universal for children’s learning and development. Children’s waiata contain easily memorised models for expanding competency and correct articulation of te reo Māori. Listening to the waiata tamariki, adults (and children) can absorb words and sentence structures.

Waiata or songs and chants are an important part of Māori culture. The words and expressions preserve the wisdom and knowledge of ancestors. Traditionally, waiata were always performed in unison with very few actions and with no musical instruments or choreography (McLean, 1996). While this may still be the case today, contemporary waiata are commonly sung with accompaniment, include harmony, and can be performed with complicated actions and choreography.

As there is limited waiata tamariki material available in early childhood centres within Aotearoa/New Zealand, we decided to share it around. Students were asked to bring waiata from their home centres to Te Tari Puna Ora workshops. What differs in our approach is the pouako going through the waiata pointing out where phrases in them can be used as everyday sentences in the early childhood curriculum.

Our approach accesses everyday te reo oral sources, rather than just those in print format, as tools to promote the learning and use of te reo Māori in everyday contexts. This brings te reo Māori alive in the community and takes away the pressure for teachers to be reliant on finding fluent speakers of te reo Māori to model the language correctly.

While many centres have charts of common kupu (words) on their walls, for example, *Horoi o ringaringa* – (Wash your hands), *Haere ki te whāriki* – (Go to the mat), and other types of te reo print resources (e.g., *Kei a Wai* card game, and numeral and alphabetical charts), these are seldom used as a basis of oral language speech. Our research showed that it is easier for students and practitioners to recall sentence structures and word meanings learned through waiata that incorporate common sentences and kupu. Listening to waiata on CDs also supports learning correct pronunciation of Maori words (Hemara, 200, p. 23; refer also to the waiata included below). Planning a workshop in a class session on language acquisition through waiata made students realise how

waiata is another means of acquiring te reo Māori. Feedback from students was positive: “I didn’t realise [until now that] we could pull word/s out of this waiata and use it every day in the centre.” “I am going back to the centre to look at our charts on the walls.” “Te reo Māori kupu are much easier to remember when it is sung.” “I will regularly use waiata in order to understand the kupu in them.”

Our research involved identifying a range of current waiata tamariki that are readily accessible and designed for use in early childhood education contexts. Here are examples of waiata tamariki from different media sources. There is also one composed by Te Tari Puna Ora students in 2005.

Mōrena, mōrena	Morning, morning
Kei te pēhea koe?	How are you?
Kei te pai, kei te pai	well, well
Kei te pai ahau.	I am well

He waiata (Ministry of Education, 1992)

Tēna koe tēna koe	Greetings to you, greetings to you
Kei te pēhea koe?	How are you?
Kei te pai, kei te pai	well, well
Kei te pai ahau	I am well

Waiata Māori (Rikihana, 1980)

This waiata is for greeting one person. Other pronouns include more than one person: ‘Tēna kōrua’ (to greet two people), and ‘Tēna koutou’ (to greet more than two people). Of course the use of ‘Tēna koe/kōrua/koutou’ is the formal greeting. ‘Mōrena,’ ‘Āta marie,’ and ‘Kia ora’ would be generally used as part of informal greetings, see the continuation of this waiata below.

Mōrena, mōrena	Morning, morning
Kei te pēhea koe?	How are you?
Kei te pai, kei te pai	well, well
Kei te pai ahau.	I am well

He waiata (Ministry of Education, 1992)

Tohora nui	Whale is big
Tohora roa	Whale is long
Tohora tino momona	Whale is very fat
Tohora puhapuha	Whale is blowing
Whiore piupiu e	Tail is wagging
Tohora kau ana te moana e.	Whale is swimming in the sea

Waiata Māori (Rikihana, 1980).

This waiata is based on size. Ngā kupu 'nui', 'roa', 'momona' are kupu that students can use to describe objects that have different sizes, i.e. the tēpu nui (the big table), the rākau roa (the long stick), etc. 'Tino' defines the size: tino nui (very big) tino roa (very long).

Kei hea te tuna? Kei hea te tuna?	Where is the eel?
Kei roto i te awa! Kei roto i te awa!	In the river
Kei hea te tuna? Kei hea te tuna?	
Kei raro i te toka! Kei raro i te toka	Under the rock
Kei hea te tuna? Kei hea te tuna?	
Kei roto i te hinaki! Kei roto i te hinaki!	In the eel trap
Kei hea te tuna? Kei hea te tuna?	
Kei roto i te hangī! Kei roto i te hangī!	In the earth oven
Kei hea te tuna? Kei hea te tuna?	
Kei roto i te rourou! Kei roto i te rourou!	In the food basket
Kei hea te tuna? Kei hea te tuna?	
Kei roto i taku puku!	In my tummy!

Waiata Māori (Rikihana, 1980)

Kei roto waho runga raro	That's in, out, up/above, down/below
Kei te haere au ki mua	I'm moving forward
Kei roto waho runga raro	
Kei te haere au ki mua.	
Kei te haere au ki mua	
Kaua titiro whakamuri	Don't look back
Kei roto waho runga raro	
kei te haere au ki mua.	

Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa students, 2005

'Kei hea te Tuna?' is asking where the tuna is. In the centre the same question can apply using 'Kei hea te ...?', replacing tuna with other objects, e.g., pōro (ball), pukapuka (book), etc. Replacing the 'te' with 'a', for example, 'Kei he te ...' to 'Kei hea a...' refers to a person – 'Kei hea a Hemi?' (Where is Hemi?) The response to the question is: 'Kei roto i te kihini a Hemi' (Hemi is in the kitchen). Another example is: 'Kei raro i te kāpata te pōro' (The ball is under the cupboard.)

He aha te tae	What colours?
O ēnei motoka?	Are these cars?
Whero, pango, kākārīki	Red, black, green
Kōwhai, karaka	Yellow orange
Parauri, he mā	Brown, white
Māwhero, kahurangi.	Pink, blue.

Wi Matuku (www.tereomaori.tki.org.nz/Teacher-resources/HeiWaiata). (08/06/2009)

This song provides many opportunities for te reo Māori practice, particularly for learning about colours. Ask the question 'He aha te tae?' (What is the colour?) about objects within the classroom or on cards or posters. The response is: 'He pango te tae.' (Black is the colour.)

Te reo Māori skills can be further extended, as in the waiata, by adding 'o te ...' [name of object]. The colour names and the names of the objects can be added to a 'Ngā kupu hou' (new words) chart.

Pakipaki pakipaki tamariki mā × 2	Clap clap children
Peke peke peke peke tamariki mā × 2	Jump jump children
Hikoi hikoi hikoi hikoi tamariki mā × 2	Walk
Oma oma oma oma tamariki mā × 2	Run
Kanikani kanikani tamariki mā × 2	Dance
Titiro titiro tamariki mā × 2	Look
Huri huri huri huri tamariki mā × 2	Turn
Whakarongo whakarongo tamariki mā × 2	Listen

He Waiata (Ministry of Education, 1992)

This waiata speaks for itself. Not only can you sing along, you can also use the words in sentence structures, in and out of the centre environment.

These waiata are only some of the many that reveal how easy it can be to learn te reo Māori through song. We found student teachers do actually use them in early childhood centres and that often these students are catalysts for encouraging other staff members to gain confidence to introduce waiata tamariki (Visiting Lecturer records about student performance during their teaching practicum experiences). We hope whānau/families will be encouraged by early childhood teachers to kōrero (speak) Māori through waiata tamariki on tapes and CDs.

It is heartening to see waiata charts displayed on walls, waiata tapes playing in the background, waiata sung by staff and tamariki at mat times – even though tamariki may have little understanding of what they are singing about. A further enhancement would be the addition of pictures to charts by students and teachers to help understanding and memory of vocabulary.

What students and their colleagues came to realise is that waiata are both a rich source of Māori language, and an easy means of acquiring the language. These results occur when waiata are sung every day, and the words in the waiata are explained and used consistently (Royal-Tangaere, 1997, p. 30). Hemara (2000) refers to 'education by exposure'. If this is done, anecdotal evidence indicates it boosts the confidence of the students and their colleagues. Moreover, the actions that accompany the words in waiata make it so much easier to understand (Roush, 2005). As a student who has become fluent in te reo Māori explains, "actions speak as loud as words."

I finish with a well-known whakatauki:

"Ahakoa he iti he pounamu"
(Although it is small it is a gem).

This whakatauki supports the idea that, however small the amount of te reo Māori spoken by lecturers and student teachers may seem, it is being spoken. When students transfer their learning of the Māori language through waiata into early childhood settings, te reo needs to be spoken or sung frequently over the day so the tamariki can grasp and understand it. This is good practice for the student – in both senses of the word.

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Acknowledgement

Students of Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa



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