

Attitudes of parents, students of Māori medium programmes to learning te reo Māori in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Abstract

Bilingual education provides a range of options for families wishing to educate their children through the indigenous language of Aotearoa/New Zealand. However, full bilingual education programmes continue to struggle to gain support from its Māori community despite its positive outcomes. Partial immersion bilingual programmes have the potential to play a greater role in supporting the Māori language revitalisation effort, yet they have received relatively little support from educational researchers, given that these programmes are educating the majority of students learning Māori.

This project employed a mixed methods approach to explore the experiences of principals, teachers, students and parents of partial bilingual programmes that offer between 12 and 80% Māori language instruction, and to gauge the contribution that these lower level immersion programmes make to the education of students. The study's focus on the attitudes of the parents and students from 12 level two (51-80% Māori immersion) programmes, found that this form of education attracts and engages families with wide ranging aims and expectations in supporting their children. However, meeting the needs of these students and whānau can be challenging for schools. Nevertheless, schools can indeed offer highly satisfactory educational options for families not wanting their children to enter higher level immersion programmes.

Key points

- Partial immersion bilingual education in Aotearoa New Zealand has received little attention from researchers despite offering bilingual education to a significant sized population
- This mixed methods approach used a survey, interviews and classroom observations. It sought the perceptions of principals, teachers, students and whānau of programmes incorporating 12-80% Maori language instruction

- The project found that while this educational context is complex, programmes are held in high esteem by students and whānau and offer an important Māori imbued education for their students.
- Issues that arose concerned teacher shortages and ensuring students can continue to learn via te reo Māori beyond primary school

Introduction

Māori medium education has achieved many positive outcomes in its forty years on the New Zealand landscape and performs a vital role in supporting the language revitalisation effort and in ensuring Māori children can grow up learning their indigenous language *and* succeed in school (May, Hill, & Tiakiwai, 2004). Despite this, the uptake of Māori families enrolling their children in Māori immersion programmes is relatively low, particularly in high level immersion programmes, like those in kura kaupapa Māori, which enrol around six% of Māori students (Ministry of Education, 2015). Lower level immersion bilingual programmes between 12 and 80% Māori language instruction educate the majority Māori students. However, little is known about their achievements, the challenges they face, and indeed, the function they perform in the wider Māori bilingual context. This paper focuses on parents' and students' perceptions of their engagement in level two programmes that deliver between 51% and 80% of their instruction in Māori. This level of immersion has high potential for producing bilingual and biliterate students. The paper discusses the levels of satisfaction, perceptions about teaching and learning te reo Māori, and the issues that participants needed to negotiate.

Characteristics of bilingual programmes in Aotearoa/New Zealand

New Zealand schools that integrate te reo Māori instruction into their programmes deliver six levels and two categories of Māori language provision (see Table 1).¹ *Māori medium* programmes include two levels of immersion above 50%. *English medium with Māori language* programmes offer a further five levels from three hours Māori instruction per week to 50% (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2015). This project gathered information from level 2-4b programmes, which will be collectively referred to as partial immersion. Level five programmes were excluded from this study because the quantity of Māori language instruction in these programmes is very low. Level 2-4 programmes educate 21.1% of Māori students but have received little research attention. They can however, offer quality education and support for

¹ This excludes primary and secondary schools that offer Māori language only as an optional curriculum subject.

the Māori language learning objectives of parents and the wider community, but for the lower immersion programmes (level 3-4) with less than 50% Māori instruction, this support will be primarily cultural, rather than focusing on Māori language (te reo Māori) learning (Lindholm-Leary, 2001; May et al., 2004).

Table 1: Percentage and number of Māori students in New Zealand school programmes that include Māori language instruction².

Name	Immersion level	%age of instruction in the Māori language	Number of enrolments July 2015	%age of total Māori student enrolments in NZ schools
Māori medium	1 ³	81-100%	12,958	7.2
	2	51-80%	4,884	21.1
English medium with Māori language	3	31-50%	5,819	
	4a	Up to 30%	5,950	
	4b	At least 3 hours	21,208	
	5	Less than 3 hours	121,745	68.0

Reference: (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2015)

Background

The first bilingual education programme implemented in Aotearoa New Zealand was a partial immersion programme, established in Rūātoki in the mid 1970s. However, unlike most other parts of the country where Maori children were no longer growing up in homes where te reo Māori was spoken, the Rūātoki community still had a significant population of native Māori language speakers. Thus, this programme was originally designed for a mixture native Māori and second language Maori speakers (Benton, 1981). Today, partial immersion programmes are quite different; not only do they tend to be located within English medium schools, where typically the majority of principals and staff are non-Māori (Pākehā), most students enter school with very little Māori language knowledge, and their teachers are predominantly second language learners of te reo Māori. These characteristics pose a significant challenge

² This excludes programmes at secondary school that teach Māori as a second language.

³ Level one programmes include kura kaupapa Māori, total immersion and kura-a-iwi or tribal schools)

to producing highly proficient bilinguals. To further complicate the situation, at secondary school level, because of a lack of bilingual programmes the only option to pursue Maori language instruction is as a second language alongside students who have never learned Māori. The long-term outlook for maintaining their Māori language knowledge is therefore questionable.

Despite these limitations, partial immersion programmes still occupy an important place in New Zealand education. They offer a path for families who wish their children to be exposed to the Māori language and culture without fearing that they may be compromising their children's English language learning, an issue that also affects enrolment into kura kaupapa Māori (McKinley, 2000). Partial immersion education is complex however, particularly at level two, because teachers are expected to integrate both languages *throughout* the programme, a requirement that does not apply in other Māori bilingual programmes, including level one programmes like kura kaupapa Māori.⁴ This can create a level of anxiety among staff who may not be highly proficient speakers of te reo Māori and may not have the knowledge of bilingual language learning approaches.

Attitudes to te reo Māori

The New Zealand educational context has a history of more than 150 years of negative attitudes from Pākehā towards te reo Māori. The use of te reo Māori in schools was first legislated against in 1847 with the Education Ordinance Act, and later in the 1867 Native Schools Act which required schools to use solely English as language of instruction if they were to receive government funding (Lee & Lee, 1995; May, 2012). The prevailing opinion of non-Māori in the early years of the settler governments, was best exemplified by Henry Taylor, Auckland Inspector of Schools, who stated:

The Native language itself is also another obstacle in the way of civilisation, so long as it exists there is a barrier to the free and unrestrained intercourse which ought to exist between the two races, it shuts out the

⁴ Level one programmes typically maintain a Māori immersion focus until between year 4-7, at which time a teacher is employed whose sole role is to teach English (Hill, 2011; Hill & May, 2013).

less civilised portion of the population from the benefits which intercourse with the more enlightened would confer. The school-room alone has power to break down this wall of partition... (AJHR, 1862)

Although these early attempts at extinguishing Māori language use were largely unsuccessful during the 19th Century, from the 1930s, a shift in Māori community views had begun to alter traditional communication patterns in Māori homes, English started to become the primary language of the home (Benton, 1981; L. Smith & Simon, 2001). By the mid 1970s the extent of the damage became clear when a national language survey conducted by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research found that only 26% of the Māori population could still speak their indigenous language (Benton, 1979). This sent shock waves through the Māori community and became a catalyst for the birth of kohanga reo and kura kaupapa Māori in the 1980s.

The period of the 1970s and 80s was important for the changes in attitudes towards te reo Māori that took place. Elsewhere in the world, the civil rights movements were raising awareness of educational and social injustices to minority groups. In New Zealand also, there was a growing demand for Māori rights to be acknowledged and respected, in terms of honouring the Treaty of Waitangi, regarded by many as the nation's founding document. The Treaty had long been neglected by New Zealand society and governments, as were the Treaty principles that supported Māori rights to maintain and practise their indigenous language, and to be schooled bilingually through the medium of their own language.

Signs that attitude changes were also occurring in New Zealand can be found in te reo Māori becoming an official language in 1987, Māori radio stations opening around the country, and more recently two Māori television stations being established (Hill, 2011; Te Taura Whiri i te Reo, 2015). Today there is growing acceptance of the value te reo Māori within the wider non-Māori community. A national survey conducted by Te Puni Kokiri (Ministry of Māori Development) found that in 2008, 80% of non-Māori surveyed felt that it was a good thing that Māori spoke Māori in public places and at work. This finding was 40% higher than findings

from a similar survey conducted in in 2000. Māori people's attitudes to Māori language use also improved during that same period, increasing from 51% (2000) to 94% (2008) (Te Puni Kokiri, 2006, 2012).

However, despite attitudes towards te reo Maori improving, Māori, like most indigenous languages world-wide remains a low-status language both in the Pākehā community and in some sections of the Māori community. The Māori commitment to participating in bilingual education is also a significant indicator of changing attitudes towards the language. In 2015, despite more than 90% of Māori parents sending their children to early childhood education, only 22% send them to Māori medium early childhood education contexts (Ministry of Education, 2015). The parallel figure for Māori participation in secondary schooling is 12%, demonstrating that for many Māori families, te reo Māori education is either not accessible or is viewed as necessary beyond primary school.

Very little is known about of Māori parents' attitudes towards bilingual education, and what influences their decisions to commit their children to a form of bilingual education. However, two studies (Boyce, 1992; McKinley, 2000) which have focused on this subject, demonstrate that on-going influences continue to promote English language over te reo Maori. Boyce (1992, 2005) reported a link between socioeconomic factors and educational decisions in her study of 56 Māori parents living in Porirua (Wellington). Boyce explored Māori language proficiency, Māori language use and attitudes to te reo Māori. The Māori attitudes section had two parts; the first part concerned attitudes towards te reo Māori and the value it had in their lives. Boyce found that Māori participants had positive attitudes towards te reo Māori. However, working class Māori families had a wider range of attitudes compared with middle class families Māori. Further, Boyce reported that kohanga reo parents, had the most positive attitude toward te reo Māori. Interestingly, the level of integration of the participants into the Māori community did not have a significant bearing on their attitudes towards te reo Māori in this part of the study, nor did age.

The second part of Boyce's focused on Māori and English word pronunciation did however, find a link between integration into the Māori community and positive attitudes toward te reo Māori. The parents who had closer associations with Māori tikanga were more likely to pronounce the Māori words using correct Māori pronunciation. Boyce's study concluded that integration into the Māori community and socioeconomic status could affect attitudes to te reo Maori. These factors may continue to have an influence today as Māori communities occupy low socioeconomic places in New Zealand and are increasingly urbanised, and removed from their tribal districts.

In the second part of the study study, McKinley (2000) gathered the perceptions of 81 Māori families from 12 schools (including kura kaupapa Māori, partial immersion Maori and English medium schools). She found parent commitment to te reo Maori and the skills to support their children's education was lower in Māori families whose children attended partial immersion or English medium programmes, compared with those whose children attended kura kaupapa Māori. The kura kaupapa parents were the most motivated to support te reo Māori learning and were better able to assist their children in their learning. While parents of children in partial immersion schools liked their children to be exposed to te reo Maori, they were not convinced of the need for a high level of immersion education, and in fact, often perceived te reo Māori to be in competition with English. This was the group, who were more inclined to withdraw their children if they became dissatisfied with their children's English language progress. They also chose a school because it was close to home and because other members of the whānau (family) attended. The English medium (Māori) parents had the least commitment to te reo Māori education, placing more emphasis on choosing school because it was near to their homes rather than for its programmes. They were also the least confident in supporting their children's learning at home. The findings of Boyce's study are important because they demonstrate a wide range of parent perceptions about the importance of te reo Māori. It also shows that perceptions about English language, the location of schools and socioeconomic factors may be important variables that influence parent support for Māori medium education.

Method

This mixed methods project had two phases. Phase 1 constituted an online survey of the principal and a bilingual teacher from all New Zealand schools (approximately 140) with Level 2-4b Maori language programmes. Phase 2 consisted of site visits to primary (12) and intermediate schools (1),⁵ where principals (13), bilingual teachers (15), parents (35) and students (70) were interviewed.

The Phase 1 survey was created using the online Survey Monkey programme. The process involved sending a letter via email the principals asking for them and a single teacher in their bilingual programme to complete the survey. The survey questions included the themes of teaching experience, qualifications, Maori language and culture content in programmes, student Maori language learning aims, assessment, teaching resources for Māori, benefits and concerns. The final survey question asked for participants to volunteer for Phase two site visits. At fourteen schools both the principal and bilingual teacher agreed to Phase 2. Unfortunately, one school subsequently cancelled when an unexpected death occurred in the community. At another school the site visit was partially completed with the principal and bilingual teacher being interviewed, but not the students or parents. All of the schools which volunteered for Phase 2 were level two programmes (51-80% Maori language instruction), four were from Te Waipounamu (South Island) and nine from Te Ika a Maui (North Island).

This project used Kaupapa Maori research principles as a guide. Kaupapa Māori research is based on traditional pre-European Māori values and practices. These values and practices were recently revived to challenge western forms of research which have historically provided few benefits for Māori (; Bishop, 2003; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; G. Smith, 1997). KMR approaches align to Māori aspirations and satisfy the overarching need to achieve collective benefits for participants. KMR requires a close collaboration and mutual respect between the collective comprising

⁵ In two additional schools that were part of this study the data gathering was not completed, which meant the parents and students were not interviewed.

researchers and participants. Being a non-Māori researcher working in a Māori context meant that KMR principles provided a framework to co-construct and guide the collaborative research project in designing the research and in interpreting the findings (Bishop, 1996; Hill, 2010; L. Smith, 1999). I managed the research by incorporating Māori tikanga (customs) and te reo Māori wherever appropriate. Having previously taught in similar bilingual education contexts I also shared a common bond with the teacher participants of this study. This meant that many of the themes the principals and teachers discussed, I could identify with.

This paper focuses on the findings of Phase 2 of this project, and in particular, the feedback that was gained from the students and teachers of the 12 schools where they were interviewed. However, this paper commences by discussing four significant findings derived from interviews with all participants, and affecting programme implementation.

Findings

Finding one: Level two programmes are complex

A key finding that arose from discussions with teachers, principals and parents was that level two programmes are grappling with some highly complex issues. Families have a wide range of skills to support their children's education, and can struggle to support them, particularly in relation to te reo Māori, but for some parents, also in English literacy.

I'm not confident to teach [names child] – not at all. My English is not good at all and it's my first language. I don't know how to teach in English and I don't think he will get the support he needs from me... (School one)

Another contributor to the level of complexity of level two programmes concerns teachers' skills. All of the teachers were second language speakers of te reo Māori and some were only developing fluency. This presented them with challenges in planning their programmes and led to their adopting a range of different approaches ranging from total immersion in Māori to predominantly English immersion. In one school, students moved from a level one bilingual programme for the first four years,

to a level two programme that was conducted predominantly in English. In two schools, English was the language of instruction for 1-2 years in the junior school, after which te reo Māori was implemented in separate time blocks or via individual curriculum subjects, such as mathematics. Other schools focused on oral Māori language but taught the curriculum through English. One school employed a fluent Māori language speaker to teach individual lessons to each class across the week. The reasons for the range of approaches revolved around the knowledge of the teachers, both their pedagogical knowledge and their te reo Māori fluency, the influence of whānau and the influence of the wider school such as seen in the advice and guidance from senior teachers and advisors. This finding demonstrates that there is a need for greater support and guidance of teachers of level two programmes to ensure they are consistent and meet the needs of their Māori students and communities.

Finding two: Māori language learning aims conflicts

A related issue concerns a mismatch in community and school attitudes regarding the place of te reo Māori in the curriculum. In four schools the teachers had the ambition to lift their Māori language content to level one (81-100%). However, this was contingent on gaining the approval of the Maori medium whānau, which for some schools, was expected to be controversial. This was most evident at School three, a school on the outskirts of a large city, operating both level two and level three programmes. The Deputy principal explained the dilemma.

I believe the whānau don't really want it to be level two. I believe they think it's nice for them to have reo [Māori language] but I don't think they realise that that means in order to deliver at a decent level, a good Level two programme, it means you need to do your reading, your writing and your maths in reo. And I think they are fearful of that. (Deputy principal: School three)

There are two issues here; first, that level two administrators think raising the immersion level to level one is necessary to create fluent Māori language speaking students, and second, that parents are concerned that English language objectives will be compromised by moving to a level one immersion, when considerable research evidence has demonstrated that bilingual education can lead to

bilingualism and biliteracy (Baker, 2011; Cummins, 2000; García, 2009; Hill, 2010; Lambert & Tucker, 1972; May et al., 2004; Ramírez, 1992)

In six schools however, the issue the critical issue was how to raise the reo Māori component up to their official level two designation. While this often related to the teachers' Māori language skills, it was not necessarily a problem for parents, who in many instances were happy with a strong Māori cultural focus than te reo Māori.

Finding three: Staff in short supply

A significant issue that nine of the thirteen principals discussed concerned attracting bilingual teachers. This meant that some programmes were left susceptible to being compromised. At School eight with two bilingual classes, being unable to fill a vacant position necessitated the governing board employing an emergent speaker of Māori. They compensated by employing two kaiarahi reo (fluent Māori speakers) to support the teacher. The issue was compounded when the leader of the bilingual unit resigned. At School seven, the resignation of the bilingual leader put significant pressure on the principal to find a replacement not only with the Māori language skills, but importantly, the ability to liaise with the local Māori community.

That's an issue around this kind of structure, because there are not too many teachers out there that will fit the bill to do that [to teach bilingually]. And with the qualities that she brings again which is on top of that. It was a nightmare for me. I could see the train coming down the track... (Principal: School seven)

Finding four: Low status perception of partial immersion education

Feedback from teachers at two schools raised the issue that their programmes are viewed as low status compared with level one programmes. This affected their job satisfaction and caused them to question the legitimacy of what they do. Māori language learning was central to this issue.

It's the feeling of knowing that there are outsiders from kura [kura kaupapa Māori] and people who are in the Ao Māori [Māori world] only, [that is they are not living fully in the two worlds] and look into us and we feel a lot of pressure, even though we probably don't even know them. But the pressure of being in a bilingual unit as a teacher is quite hard because we know what people say about bilingual units – my god their reo [Māori language] is not going to come out great. (Teacher: School six)

The quality of my bilingual staff - everyone wants to question that. Oh, you are going into bilingual, that education is not as good as mainstream [English medium]. So I've said to them they need to be faultless. They need to be the best that they can be because they are the first targets that people are willing to criticise. (Principal: School twelve)

There is a perception of a hierarchy in Māori bilingual education where partial immersion bilingual teachers feel their programmes are less legitimate than level one programmes. From this perspective, high immersion programmes, such as kura kaupapa Māori, are seen as the default position in bilingual education while partial immersion is seen as a lower status and less effective option. However, this need not be the case as equivalent forms of bilingual education in overseas contexts are amongst the highest achieving bilingual programmes (see for example, August & Hakuta, 1997; Freeman, 1998; Lasagabaster, 2001; Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2006)

Parents' perceptions

Thirty-five family members were interviewed over a three-week period; seven were also employed at the schools as teachers (1), kaiāwhina (teacher assistants) (4) or kaiarahi reo (Māori language support people) (2). Several grandparents and one aunty were also interviewed. Reflecting on their own childhoods, most of these interviewees grew up in homes where little if any Māori language was spoken. However, several reported living with their grandparents and learning te reo Māori as children. Unfortunately, most of this group were no longer fluent Māori language speakers.

Several parents discussed their childhood home environments where te reo Māori was spoken around them, but not to them. This was a deliberate attempt they felt, to ensure they learned English because te reo Māori was viewed as less useful than English.

Even Mum was saying that when they went to school they weren't allowed to speak the [Māori] language, so, she was saying that now is European, so everything - all documents - are done in English, not in Māori, so that's

why, it was their decision they had made... Maybe they thought it was good for our education to learn the English language. (School ten)

Only one parent attended a partial immersion bilingual school when he was at primary school, and reported speaking a little Māori to his children at home. Overall, however, home support in the languages was heavily weighted towards English.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of the 35 family members interviewed were highly satisfied with the education their children were receiving. One parent whose youngest son was in his first year at school exemplified the positive feelings many other parents discussed about an education that involves the Māori language and culture. In this case, hearing her son using te reo Māori gave her great satisfaction.

On the second day of school when I heard him come home trying to sing, and he'll muck up and start again. I was like, oh my gosh, that's just what I want. That was just his second day of school! (School twelve)

The supportive whānau (family) environment with Māori cultural values that was nurtured in the bilingual classrooms had widespread appeal to the families from all 12 schools.

The kids love it. They are comfortable. The class is like one big whānau... They treat each other as brothers and sisters. And they all hang out with each other... It's awesome, I like that feeling. (School one)

You see the big kids come over and awahi [support] the little ones. And it's amazing because it's being taught in the class. It's good to have that bilingual. (School one)

At School ten, the enactment of manaakitanga (caring) was a key attribute one parent discussed when she reflected on a family tragedy.

It was a horrible time, but it was an amazing time at the same time. And it was because - a lot of it was because of the school. Even now they are still supporting me...I think this school is so overwhelming and the teachers just work so hard with our kids as well. It's a great school. (School ten)

Teacher dedication was a key reason for parents' satisfaction with the programmes. At School eleven, the new principal had followed a succession of principals and a commissioner of nine years. The parents described school before the new principal

arrived as being closed, where parents were not welcome. This had changed completely with the new principal. Parents were now, part of the fabric of the newly designated bilingual school, and their children were gaining significant benefit.

My little one [refers to child], "I want to go to school!"
"You can't, it's the holidays!"
They love it, can't wait to come." (School eleven)

In School eight, the parents discussed the ability of the teachers to build community engagement. One example of this was an annual event called *Pā Wars*, where families were divided into their tribal groups and competitions were arranged over a weekend. This event helped to bring the community together. At this school, there were also high expectations of the parent contribution. All parents belonged to one of many committees supporting the students. This included Boys' and Girls' committees, whose parent members would arrange overnight stays and experiences such as, bush craft and fishing.

The teachers were also frequently cited as being instrumental at bringing out the full potential of students, as two parents described.

"I've noticed [names child] thrived and he's still thriving with it now. As an RTLB [Resource Teacher of Learning Behaviour]. I'm proud of what he's done. Now he's opened up in the last two years." (School twelve)

"...it's such a family environment. Everyone cares for everybody else. You're not just a number. And if someone is slipping, they'll try and help you. In another way, if they are excelling, work on that and try to help you..." (School three)

For some parents the benefits of their children's bilingual education extended to their own knowledge of te reo Maori.

I'm pushing [names daughter] to give to me what I couldn't get from my parents. And when she does come home, sometimes I have to go to the class and say to the teacher when she's doing maths in te reo – I had [no]idea. (School ten)

"They're teaching me! "What did you say, or, how did you say it? Thank you." (School eleven)

Even my mum has started to learn...and it's making them really proud. And when they [children] do their mihi, I can see the pride in that they know where they are from. So that's the real awesome outcome for them being in the bilingual. (School four)

Māori language and culture aims

The parents' views on the prominence of te reo Māori in the programme were split into three groups. Those who wanted the highest possible exposure to the Māori language, those who wanted basic Māori language skills, and parents who were more concerned about Māori culture. Those who wanted maximum exposure, attended level two programmes because there was no level one programme available in the community. For them, school was the only place where their children would have prolonged periods of Māori language immersion. One parent, who was a key driver in setting up her school's bilingual programme, discussed the original aim.

“The wish was that it would be total immersion because English is everywhere, and they didn't have the reo, and this was really important to us.” (School one)

For some of the parents in the two groups wanting lower levels of te reo Māori, there was a concern that Māori language instruction might usurp English instruction – the language they wanted prioritised. They sometimes felt that te reo Māori was in competition with English. The following quotes demonstrate the three groups of te reo Māori learning aims.

Group 1 – Maximum exposure to te reo Māori

“I want her excelling in both.” (School one)

Group 2 – Conversational Māori and culture

I would like [names her child] to be a fluent speaker of Māori, but not at a high level I don't expect it to be the same level as a kid who's been in immersion. But I expect her to be able to understand some Māori and speak some Māori... But also a part of that is learning a waiata, karakia, tikanga and all of that stuff as well, because it should all go together. (School six)

“ A bit higher than basics.” (School four)

Group 3 - English is in competition with te reo Maori

“I want my kids to read, write and spell in English.” (School three)

Concerns

Across the 12 schools visited only two concerns were discussed. The first, discussed above, was from a group of parents in School one who were worried about the programme’s high level of Māori immersion. The second concern, voiced in six schools, regarded secondary school options for their children. None of the secondary schools that serviced the schools of this study provided a bilingual option for whānau, and in one case (School two), the only second languages option was German. This was very concerning for many of the parents, and demonstrates a lack of willingness of secondary schools to take seriously the needs of students and ambitions of their families.

“...unfortunately when they leave this school there is nothing to carry on... you have to go to town [a larger town].” (School two)

“Their seniors were going from great perspective here, getting to high school and seeming like they were having the train shut down in front of them.” (Parent 1: School eight)

“We tried to build bridges. Kids who don’t understand just shut down and play up... diversity is not happening there.” (Parent 2: School eight, referring to a secondary school)

Students’ perceptions

The majority of the 70 students described their home language as being predominantly English. However, many stated both languages were present at home though this is likely to be minor. Most students also reported attending English medium preschool programmes such as kindergartens and play centres rather than kohanga reo. Those who had attended kohanga reo (Māori medium early childhood centres) were more likely to be in the schools with a level one immersion programme operating in the junior school, (schools eight and nine, or School 5, an intermediate

school whose catchment included a range of bilingual primary schools. Overall, the students' schools were the key context where they were exposed to te reo Māori.

All students voiced high levels of satisfaction about their schooling. The attractive features included their learning te reo Māori, the qualities of their teachers, music, sports, kapa haka, and school trips. Being involved in bilingual education was a positive feature across all 12 schools, so much so that when asked to think about designing a new 'model' school, the students of five schools decided its current form was ideal. The few criticisms they discussed pertained to wider school environment such as restrictive playground rules, bullying, the lack of hobbies and the state of sports fields.

Teachers

The positive contribution the teachers and principals made to the students' lives was mentioned frequently. For many students, their teachers were more like parents.

"[She's] nice but strict – a good strict." (Student 1: School seven)

"She's more like a mum." (Student 2: School seven)

"They teach us well. Their attitude is good. They try and cope with us."
(School 10)

The support teachers gave the students had widespread appeal.

"I like if you need help, she won't tell you straight out it's this and tell you the answer. She'll say what do you think, but she'll try to help you." (School four)

"The friendliness of friends and teachers, and how they encourage you to do it." (School ten).

"The people here are nice, confident at everything. They just look after you."
(School twelve)

Learning te reo Māori had a significant appeal to all students. They were proud to be involved in bilingual education programmes and learning te reo Māori.

“I like being in a bilingual class because they are always speaking Māori. And I like how the rest of the school have Māori too.” (School four)

Furthermore, the dominance of English was also a feature criticised by students from six schools:

“We do too much English in a bilingual class. Because it’s bilingual but we mostly do English.” (School four)

“Stop learning so much English.” (School two)

Student 1: “I’d probably rather be in a kaupapa Māori.”

Interviewer: “Why?”

Student 1: “... just be able to be back in our culture more.”

Student 2: “Surrounded by the culture.”

Interviewer: “Are you not surrounded by it here?”

Student 2: “We are but not as much as in a kaupapa Māori.” (School three)

The students were asked to rate their Māori and English knowledge on a five-point scale, with five being highly proficient, and one being emergent. Across the whole cohort, their personal assessments tended to align to the amount of exposure they had to each language. The students educated in schools with less reo Māori or English instruction felt their knowledge was lower (often 2-4) and those with more English or Māori, ranked them higher (4-5). Overall, it is likely that the feedback from a student at School ten applies to most of the students interviewed.

Student: “None of us can fluently speak it.”

Interviewer: “Can you have a conversation now?”

Student: “No, a little bit. It’s only simple stuff, the basics like, what’s your name and stuff.” (School ten)

The only students who were fluent Māori speakers had previously attended kohanga reo preschool and immersion programmes. Seven students from three schools were in this group. Sadly, they reported feeling they were losing their Māori language fluency.

“I’d go back there [to Māori immersion] to get my Māori back, then come back here.” (School eight)

Despite this, the students across the 12 schools had high aspirations for learning te reo Māori. Many wished to become highly fluent speakers.

“Understand – like when you go to funerals, what they are saying. Instead of having to ask someone, you will be able to know it yourself, and be able to talk and relate to what they are saying.” (School ten)

“[I like] getting your Māori and English to the same level.” (School twelve)

Conclusions

The findings from this research demonstrate that level two partial immersion programmes can provide important options for families wanting their children to have a Māori education. The parents and students were highly satisfied with their programmes. A key contributor to this was the quality of the classroom teachers, who were highly committed to their work, able to create supportive Māori-imbued environments for their students, and able to ensure an important link is sustained between school and the Māori community. However, teachers were in short supply, which meant that a resignation could create significant continuity and maintenance issues for principals, and indeed, compromise the programme objectives. The supply and support of teachers to bilingual programmes is therefore an area that requires closer monitoring at a national level. Perhaps greater incentives are necessary to encourage teacher training candidates with a sound knowledge of te reo Māori and Māori culture to commit to this important pedagogical vocation.

While the majority of the findings were positive, this project uncovered several challenges, including how to cater to a wide range of Māori language competencies and aspirations. While most parents were happy with the Māori language instructional levels provided in schools, some thought the balance was not living up to their expectations. Interestingly, the students were overwhelmingly supportive of increasing exposure to te reo Māori and gaining higher levels of fluency. However, on the one hand schools were not always able to fulfil this student aspiration, and on the other hand some parents were not convinced of the need, because of their high

priority for English language learning. In this area of parent perceptions, the findings align to those of McKinley (2000). Parents of partial immersion programmes have a wide range of hopes that are not always satisfied. The outcome can be that they remove their children who then potentially struggle in the English-only environment of English medium classrooms.

A final issue emerging from this study concerns secondary schooling for students who have attended primary school bilingual education. None of the secondary schools that service the schools of this study were supporting the students' Māori language and cultural needs sufficiently. This was a significant concern for parents, that casts a shadow over the long-term benefits of bilingual education for these students. English medium secondary schools are clearly not looking after the needs of students of bilingual programmes. In one case (School two), the local secondary school did not even have te reo Māori as a second language learning option. This means that the likely long-term outcome for those students' Māori language knowledge is marginal, as school is the key place where they are exposed to te reo Māori.

At the beginning of this paper an important question was raised of whether level two programmes can further assist the Māori language revitalisation effort. They do to some extent by offering whānau Māori language instruction that does not compromise English language learning. However, it is the Māori cultural content that is the salient feature of these programmes. Furthermore, in most schools, it is achieved within English medium schools not in fully bilingual schools which provides a positive sign for bicultural sharing of spaces in educational contexts. While te reo Māori learning objectives may not yet be fully addressed or achieved, the schools in this study provide successful and valued models for providing a Māori culturally located education for Māori students. Their teachers need to receive increased funding and professional development support to lift up the levels of Māori language programmes they are struggling to provide.

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