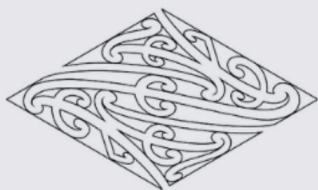


A Spotlight on Te Kura Ākonga o Manurewa

Conditions for successful distance/hybrid learning



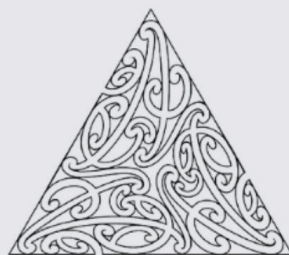
MANAAKI

“Ko te tohu o te rangatira
he manaaki”



WHAKAMANA

“Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi
Engari he toa takitini”



TIAKI

“Tiaki taiao,
Tiaki tangata”



AROHA

“Aroha tētahi ki tētahi”

This spotlight has been created from a transcribed interview with Irihapeti Matiaha, principal of Te Kura Ākonga o Manurewa. She describes seven conditions that she has found to be essential for effective hybrid/distance learning.

The spotlight is “told” in Irihapeti’s words.



The school was established in 1982 and is situated in the suburb of Manurewa. We had planned to celebrate her 25th birthday last year but were unable to do so due to COVID. The proprietors own the buildings and the land, and they founded the Kura in response to families who had to relocate to Tāmaki Makaurau-Auckland for work but still wanted Māori speakers around their children. This school had five whare ākonga attached to it, all of which fed into it and all of which have since closed. Te Ngaru Whare Ākonga was the last of the five and it closed its doors two years ago. Since that closed, the only ones who can feed into the Kura are kohanga reo.

Rebuilding the strategic plan is critical for the future that lies ahead of us. The Marau ā-kura has already been embedded, but we wish to enhance and expand on it. We can only accommodate 90 children here.

Conditions for successful hybrid/distance learning

Knowing your kura community

I believe that, as a leader, you will know how to approach your community at difficult times such as these if you have a good understanding of the community. I get a lot of information from the Ministry of Education and other people in similar positions to me, and it's nice to talk to them, but it's also good to approach the kura community and see what is important to them at such times.


Being respectful of whānau – keeping it simple

I have always been clear that when we shift to learning from home we will not put out a timetable telling our whānau what they should do in their own homes. We can't tell them, well the child must get up at 7:00 a.m., go to te reo at 8:00 a.m., and go to Pāngarau at 9:00 a.m. That is not something we will do because it goes against our tiaki, manaaki, aroha, and whakamana values. How does treating them like that leave whānau feeling empowered? How is that mana enhancing? We are

mistaken if we believe we can just write this schedule and take it home to tell our whānau how they should live. I know a lot of our whānau have toddlers up to children sitting NCEA. They're trying to manage all of that, and some people are single parents. We needed to be mindful of making life as simple and as easy as possible for everyone.

Communicating with whānau

I always like to be kept in the loop, and this is an important aspect of my approach. If our kura community is to trust in me (as school leader) and the team, to hold their tamariki safely in our hands I needed to make sure that our comms were clear, and that parents and whānau knew exactly what we were going to be doing as a school in response. We have regular hui with all of our whānau who come to our school. So I had online Zoom meetings with whānau throughout the pandemic events. We had to take them on the journey with us every step of the way. We had new parents coming into the kura, so we had to make sure we prepared them as well.



At one whānau hui, we unpacked the Health and Safety plan. We had about 38 whānau on our first whānau hui. Last week, we even had our nurse join the hui as well and she spoke. I said to her, it'd be better if our whānau heard it from you, not me – I'm not the nurse, I'm not a doctor. And they loved it. Parents became very clear about what steps we are taking. They're clear that they can just openly ring me with any question. And yesterday I got a few of those, but they were good questions. So, it's not hard to talk to your whānau.

So, we took our whānau on the journey with us. To do that, you have to know them and to understand their situations and contexts and then you'll know how to roll with them. For example, you needed to pass on all the Covid-19 information in really concise and simple ways. I put the information in short three-minute videos on the Facebook page. This was much better than a long newsletter.

Communicating and collaborating with staff

My priority is always to communicate with the teaching staff. Their aptitude, expertise, and knowledge are of the highest calibre. As a result, to be the best leader possible, I have learned that I must collaborate with, and work alongside, the staff and that things go much more smoothly when you work with your staff as a team. Towards the end of Term 4 2021, there was a general feeling from schools that we'd been in lockdown and that we couldn't finish the year in the way we normally would. And I was saying, yes, we can and we can do assessments, we can do end-of-year reports, we can do parent-teacher interviews, and we are having a prize-giving. We covered all of that at the end of last year which again points to our teaching team. You know, without this team of staff, it would have been so much more difficult to do. Instead, it was easily done. It's that input from everybody. Instead of waiting for me to come up with all the solutions, come with your own! Bring it to the table, which helps me in my role as a leader. It's important to be a good listener as well, and to take on board what they bring to the table and appreciate it. If it works, that's cool. If it aligns with what we're doing, awesome. So much of what we do involves them, so I need to seek their thoughts and ideas. I've been a strong believer of that.

Prioritizing staff wellbeing and their families

When we went into lockdown, I told my teaching team that they are also a family member, a husband or wife, a mother or father, and that they needed to make their family their priority. Their first responsibility was to look after their own family and then the Kura could come after that. So it was different for each teacher in how they dealt with the situation to fit with their family contexts.

Taking learning and communications online

Once staff families were sorted, whānau were notified, and information was shared across all platforms: we have Class Dojo, a whānau Facebook page, and everyone has an email address. Because we have a domain, all our students now have email addresses. So we were easily able to contact them.

Access to Chromebooks

A couple of years ago, when we first went into lockdown, the Kura only had 3 laptops and students had to rely on hard packs for learning from home. Last year was a little easier because of our collaboration with our Manaiakalani Cluster's Outreach for Education programme called Kootuitui ki Papakura.

Now our students have Chromebooks from year 3 and beyond. There's a Kawa of Care, an agreement between students, parents, and our school to ensure the best care and responsibility is exercised with the devices that have been provided at a very subsidized rate. This opportunity will be available to each student throughout their time at our school.

This has enabled students to have access to tools which help them continue learning whether they're onsite or in hybrid/distance learning. As well as supporting continuous learning during times of school closure or hybrid learning, students are now more digitally prepared for high school and it won't be a shock to them now.

What we learned

For any school to begin designing their hybrid learning journey at their Kura, it is crucial they start by looking at the needs of their own community both inside and outside their Kura.

We learned that understanding and viewing the community as an ally in education can make all the difference to the success of hybrid/distance learning. I also learned, as a leader, that seeing your staff as partners in the work is essential and means that together you can achieve things that others may not think are possible.

Partnerships with whanau/iwi and the wider community can be enhanced using technologies – as long as everyone has access to these technologies and is supported in how to use them well.

Sensing the opportunity, simple communication apps like Class Dojo has allowed our Kaiako at our Kura to keep whānau/ parents informed about their tamariki's important school activities.

