

The voices of Māori & Pasifika performing arts

Insights report
2022



Prepared for



This report was produced on behalf of Toi Mai WDC by Te Amokura Consultants; Rewa Harriman (Senior Consultant) - Te Whakatōhea and Leah Te Ua (Consultant) - Tuwharetoa/Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki.

Te Amokura Consultants provide te ao Māori advice on policy, communications and engagement, strategy and leadership. We primarily exist to drive and provide better outcomes for Māori.

He whakamihi

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E kore rawa ngā mihi e mutu ki a koutou.

**“Kia ū, kia mau ki tō Māoritanga
Be firm in holding on to your Māori culture”.**



Ngā kaupapa

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Kupu whakataki

Preface

Kapa haka is an expression of identity, it is a mixture of skill, art and sound that transcends generations and cultures. It is a unique part of our whakapapa as New Zealanders and a window into Te Ao Māori - *he tāonga tuku iho*. Māori performing arts have the ability to connect to everyone while celebrating history, language and culture.

Kapa haka has evolved over the years, particularly with the establishment of regional and national festivals where each rōpū take the stage to represent their whānau, hapū and iwi. School festivals and competitions are very popular for tamariki, an annual highlight for their whānau and communities. Its reach internationally is widely known and consistently used to market Aotearoa. Whether it's at the marae, on school grounds or on an international stage, kapa haka has a beauty and power that is uniquely ours.

Like Māori, Pasifika have a rich history in performing arts where they can celebrate their culture, language and beauty on stage. While Aotearoa is now home for many Pasifika, performing their native tongue and dance keeps their taura here or connection to their people and homelands alive.

This insights report is part of the body of work being developed in an effort to understand how the performing arts sector in Aotearoa dealt with the disruption caused by COVID-19.

The purpose of this insights report is to discover and understand how Māori and Pasifika adapted within the context of Performing Arts. To this end, collecting the voices of our Māori and Pasifika whānau and their lived experiences is paramount. We wanted to know what cultural practices looked like prior to COVID-19 and the impacts and challenges learnt through disruption with subsequent lockdowns, and social distancing requirements, depending on alert levels and traffic light settings. We found the voices to be clear and rich.

The report concludes with a list of potential priorities for further action and consideration that will provide Toi Mai with a plan for advancing a digital agenda that is truly representative of Māori and Pasifika. We believe this will contribute to outcomes that are meaningful and recognise the value of the performing arts sector in the cultural, social and economic wellbeing of Aotearoa.

Papakupu

Glossary of te reo Māori

ākonga - student

hapū - sub-tribe

tāonga tuku iho - heirloom, something handed down, cultural property, heritage.

iwi - tribe or confederation of tribes

kaiako - teacher

kapa haka - Māori cultural group

mihimihi - to greet, pay tribute, thank

tamariki - children

taura here- urban kinship group

rangatahi - Youth

rōpū - group

te ao Māori - the Māori world

tēina - younger brothers (of a male), younger sisters (of a female), cousins (of the same gender) of a junior line, junior relatives – plural form of *teina*.

tuākana - elder brothers (of a male), elder sisters (of a female), cousins (of the same gender from a more senior branch of the family).

wairua - spirit, soul - spirit of a person

waiata - song, to sing

whānau - family, extended family, family group

whakaata Māori - Māori Television

Te mahere

Our approach

The lived experiences of Māori and Pasifika, reported here, captured through a series of one-on-one interviews and a group online wānanga.

The participants we engaged with are passionate and knowledgeable practitioners that are dedicated to the preservation of performing arts in Aotearoa at all levels, including parents, tutors, performers and judges.

We spoke to 18 participants in total.

While they represent a small portion of the Māori and Pasifika population, they provide a good starting point to guide future action.

The insights and observations gained through the report should not be considered “trends” but rather create an opportunity for further analysis and/or investment.

> Direct quotes from participants are formatted in bold italic text to illustrate pertinent points. All quotes have been anonymised to uphold the confidentiality of our participants.



Ngā tāngata

Our audience

We initially planned to hold several online wānanga. However, due to ongoing home and work commitments, participants were not available at the proposed hui times. While alternative times to meet were arranged, last minute changes with availability caused some obstacles. However we did manage to hold one wānanga with 3 participants that were able to add extra rich kōrero as each person could contribute in more detail. The rest of the interviews were done one on one via zoom or phone which worked easier for our participants. Limitations of not having more or bigger wananga meant that people weren't able to build on one another's korero.

Participants

Wānanga	3
1 on 1 interviews	15
Total participants	18

Nationality breakdown

Māori	12
Pasifika	6

Māori

Participants in attendance were at the forefront of Māori broadcasting and performing arts; which included a kapa haka tutor/cultural advisor, students from secondary schools, kaiako, and employees of Whakaata Māori. Participants were based across Te Tai Tokerau, Te Tairāwhiti, Taupō and Pōneke. We also spoke with a representative of Te Matatini society Inc.

There was a good mix of digitally savvy and non-digitally savvy participants.

Pasifika

Participants were well known in Pasifika communities, including the organiser of Polyfest and one of the most experienced judges from the festival. Tutors were based throughout schools in South Auckland and various schools around Aotearoa, including two rangatahi from the winning Samoan team for 2022.

Ngā kaupapa kōrero

Key themes

The pre COVID- 19 environment

Performing arts is an in-person - kanohi ki te kanohi interaction, bringing whānau and groups together to learn, entertain or compete.

While technology has enabled kapa haka to be accessed through different mediums e.g; television, radio & social media, rōpū have traditionally run their practices in person.

If rōpū are preparing for an event or competition, weekday evenings and weekends are taken up with wānanga and practices.

The two most commonly used platforms were Facebook, and Google classroom.

These were generally used for communication by the groups to either post videos or lyrics of items as a learning tool for performers outside of team training. At the top end of the scale, rōpū are highly competitive and privacy is of utmost importance, so videos are only shared privately amongst members of the group and are encouraged not to share outside of the rōpū.

The impact of COVID-19

Covid-19 changed everything and its impact was felt far and wide in kapa haka circles. The restriction of any in-person gatherings led to postponements and then cancellations of festivals and events.

Initially, the main focus was on *the health and wellbeing of whānau* so interaction online was used to check in with each other. The public uncertainty over this time exacerbated feelings of isolation.

“Whanaungatanga is a very important part of kapa haka, and without regular in person training, zoom catch-ups were the best alternative. “

Throughout the pandemic, Tāmaki Makaurau groups were impacted more severely than the rest of the country with additional lengthy lockdowns.

Covid-19 had a similar impact on our Pasifika whānau which affected the spirit of their practices online. From a tutor perspective, it was hard to teach effectively through these digital means while students had other commitments within their household and communities. Many would also be distracted by siblings and other whānau members while connecting from home.

Barriers to digital engagement

With everyone needing to switch to digital platforms for school, work and play during the pandemic; kapa haka followed suit. However, it wasn't as seamless or effective as their usual face to face practices.

The barriers and challenges of using an online platform for kapa haka were felt by everyone who attempted to do so. Having an internet connection was the first hurdle, next was the hardware - without a suitable device it was impossible to participate. If the rōpū managed to get through those initial barriers, the main limitations were the lag time, the quality of sound and not being able to use multiple microphones at once.

While the challenges seemed insurmountable for some who didn't go online, others adjusted and lowered expectations to continue working in these spaces. Splitting up into smaller groups, e.g., sopranos and altos, to focus on their parts, and tutor led sessions working on actions were some of the adjustments made. For one group, the digital option enabled them to ***“keep on top of their goals and get to the stage”***.

However, it did take time for those engaged online to figure out how to conduct kapa haka digitally and what could be achieved within the limitations.

The main digital platforms that were used by participants were Zoom, Facebook, Youtube, Google classroom, Microsoft Teams and Webex. Microsoft Teams was the most popular platform for Pasifika as most students and users had this subscription through their schools already.

Culturally being online was not ideal for Pasifika performers. Many of the movements are with the hands and feet making it hard to demonstrate the proper movements, or as a tutor to clearly see if the rōpū are doing those actions correctly.

Audio limitations were also an issue for Pasifika groups as the delay and lag time via digital platforms resulted in not hearing correct pronunciation of words.

The lack of physical interaction and connection was another major issue with shifting to a digital platform. However, participants did what they could to adapt and navigate this new way of connecting.



“We did attempt to have one singer at a time, however, this method tended to be not very engaging for the rest of the rōpū listening. This didn't last long, we only tried this once, so we reverted to using the digital space as a means of communication instead.”

“Sometimes when i would log on, i would feel tired, cause sometimes performing and learning online can be quite draining mentally.”

“We tried Zoom, but the thing with the zoom you can't all sing together.”

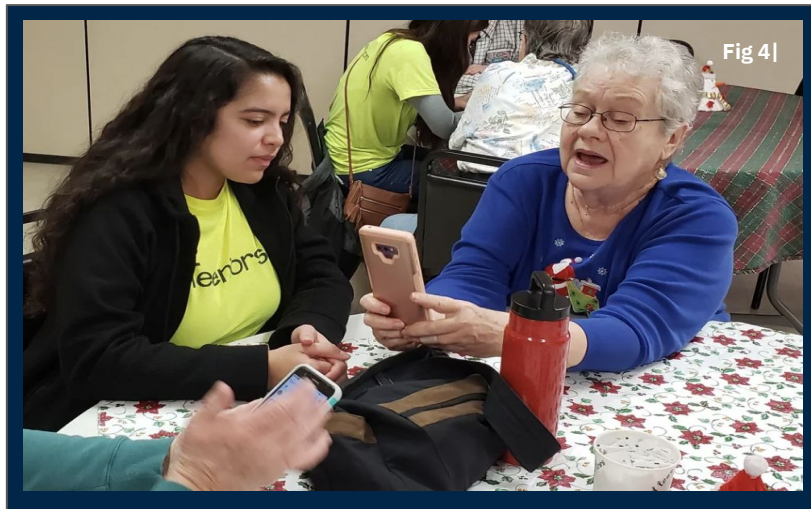
“One of the biggest limitations of online learning is that you don't get physical contact with each other. The body language and the group dynamics are missing.”

“It's a hard ask, how do you show the emotional aspect of aroha and manaakitanga to people at home, when you are on a screen.”

“The negative part of having it live streamed and also like as a person watching it all through like, I feel like we miss out on the excitement of it. (Polyfest).”

Overcoming the barriers

Embracing a “teina tuakana” model enabled reciprocal learning between rangatahi and the older generation e.g., “teina” supporting their “tuakana” with digital skills and “tuakana” supporting “teina” with cultural knowledge.



For the more mature individuals it was a new experience for most and time was needed to help them adapt.

Digital support throughout was paramount during this time, amongst students, performers and teachers alike. Much was done to get everyone on the same page. Introduction sessions to Zooms with the parents was one way of assisting with familiarisation of technology.

One tutor said, while Microsoft teams was her default platform in the beginning, she has now expanded to use TIKTOK, Instagram and podcasts.

The benefits for this tutor meant including attracting audiences from around the globe that she did not have before ie; Dubai, Spain and Ukraine. A private Youtube channel was also utilised but restrictions around the length of videos uploaded meant the tutor had to edit raw footage first.

From the perspective of production/composer, digital means was an amazing comms tool to get panui out to kaimahi, and audiences alike. Overall participants we did speak to did adapt quickly under the circumstances presented.

“We have a small national office and because of our size, I would say we were able to adapt and be agile.”



“Online became a necessity for maintaining assemblance of learning but it was only then that we started to realise and, and see what the limitations of online were.”

“There are things that you can achieve really well with your kapa haka with your group that you're working with, with your family. But at the end of the day, there are elements of kapa haka that you can't just duplicate online, you've got to be there in person.”

Live events

All kapa haka festivals throughout the country were seriously affected by Covid-19. Many events were either postponed or cancelled. For any events that were proposed to go ahead; health and safety was a big concern which included adhering to the alert level settings and pivoting to see what a revised festival could look like with restrictions or if that was even possible. This was an unprecedented time for event organisers, who had never had to think about reimagining their festivals in the same way. While coverage of festivals has evolved to give more access to audiences online, the foundation of these events is to come together in one place to celebrate culture, people and language.



The Auckland secondary schools Māori & Pacific islands cultural festival 2022 (Polyfest)

The Polyfest features traditional music, dance, costume and cultural speech competitions, and is one of the most recognised events in Aotearoa. It is a showcase of New Zealand's diverse cultures and a celebration of youth performance. Students traditionally compete on six stages, performing traditional items from different Polynesian cultures. Pre Covid-19, the festival attracted crowds of around 90,000 but this year (2022) that number was zero, a first in its 47-year history as there were no audiences.

The entire event was live-streamed through Whakaata Māori, allowing access to not only Aotearoa but the world. Local Auckland schools were showing livestream in the halls where rangatahi were able to stay engaged with performing groups.

Besides New Zealand, statistics show top viewership came from Australia, USA and Hungary. Through their new partner, Pasifika TV, for the first time audiences in the Pacific watched the festival on TV at home. Festival content was also accessible on TIKTOK and Facebook to engage younger demographics. Without being present, live shoutouts on screen helped engage the audience further while watching online. Some schools even showed the livestream in their halls, allowing students to watch performances together.

While this didn't replace being at the festival in person, digital platforms gave event organisers and producers opportunities to open up the festival to a wider audience and realise that both offerings can be achieved in the future.



“It is important that our language is 100% correct as this adds to the spirit and legitimacy of the performer.”

“The nature of our teachings, was hard to demonstrate virtually.”

“Families, who don't have laptops don't have PC, they only used a phone. There was no access to lyrics while videoing.”

Te Matatini - *Kapa haka Aotearoa*

Te Matatini celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, it is a cultural celebration and the pinnacle event for Māori performing arts in Aotearoa. It is held every two years at different locations across the country, and is one of the most highly anticipated events for performers, their whānau and all haka enthusiasts worldwide. The national stage highlights the best of the best from all corners of Aotearoa and Australia.

When COVID-19 first hit in 2020, regional competitions were underway with some national qualifiers already decided. However, with New Zealand in lockdown, upcoming regional competitions were cancelled and Te Matatini 2021 postponed to 2022.

During this uncertain time Te Matatini was led by the objective “*Tiakina whakapapa*” which kept the hauora of our people at the forefront of any decision made. Postponing Te Matatini allowed te ao kapa haka to concentrate on their own whānau and communities throughout 2020.

In 2021 more decisions had to be made by event organisers as Tāmaki Makaurau went into a regional lockdown. Te Matatini prepared three alternative plans relative to the alert levels that determined whether the festival would go ahead, be postponed again or be cancelled altogether.

Auckland spent more than 100 days in lockdown restricting all gatherings and movement in the rohe, eventually leading to Te Matatini 2022 being cancelled. A digital means has opportunities for access to kapa haka worldwide. In order to make this happen, more funding will enable them to evolve in the digital world.

“This will be helpful for us moving forward and I also understand there are a number of questions around the digital space and how we utilise that.”





“Kapa Haka provides a platform to normalise the use of te reo Māori; it connects us to our cultural values and stories; it provides a pathway for higher education and keeps whānau healthy while also providing employment opportunities. The benefits of kapa haka permeate all aspects of our society.”

Matatini is a place for each iwi to bring their best wear and performance. Kids today are into haka and they know the uniqueness of each iwi and rōpū.

Benefits of digital platforms

The overwhelming positive for switching to digital spaces or being present online is connection and access. Being able to still connect to people, whether it's your whānau, rōpū or audience is not only important, it's an integral part of being Māori. Our rangatahi are “digital natives” who have grown up navigating these spaces, the older generations are now adjusting to this new way of communicating as well.

“There is a place for it, everyone’s online now. Connections are a huge part of te ao Māori. Anyway you can have that connection and feel supported, platforms like Facebook and Instagram are good tools to enhance connectivity during uncertain times.”



Digital platforms have given kapa haka accessibility to those who wouldn't have been exposed to it in the past. It is a glimpse into te ao Māori, its past, present and future. For kapa haka fans around the world, it's access to their favourite rōpū, waiata and items which has reconnected them back home. .

Tutors loved the digital space as a place to keep in touch with their students. Some ākongā found their leadership skills increased during this period due to the changing environment. Another added benefit was the knowledge that their performances would now be seen worldwide which gave an extra boost of pride while taking the stage.

Rangatahi are used to the online environment because most subjects at high school are through an online delivery, but noted the ability to interact and communicate through these trying times was an important part of their own wellbeing.

“We had alot of faith in each other, and we could express this on our groups FB page, and when we would meet up online on zoom.”

From the judges table, they liked having performances filmed as it allowed judges to be able to analyse the intricate movements and the performance thoroughly; whereas students felt this was a step too far, and performances should be judged “in the moment” rather than through a delayed viewing that is subject to much more scrutiny.



“There is a place for it, everyone’s online now. Connections are a huge part of te ao Māori. Anyway you can have that connection and feel supported, platforms like Facebook and Instagram are good tools to enhance connectivity during uncertain times.”

“We sometimes moan about technology and social media, but in a lot of ways, it's actually an effective way to bring people together without having to drive through traffic to leave home on a cold evening.”

“We were able to also include it our students from outside of Auckland so it wasn't just Auckland based we had anyone, even Dubai, France, and the UK, they took part in our online classes.”



Risks of digital spaces

The increased level of accessibility to kapa haka online can also provide opportunity for exploitation. It's a double edged sword, once content is online, it can be used or manipulated by another party for good or bad. In most cases, it is positive but there are times where exploitation and cultural appropriation takes place.

It's not surprising to see kapa haka in digital spaces, Māori have always adapted as a people, and expanding into the digital world is no different. Tikanga or Māori cultural practices are in place to help guide people in different settings and can be adapted to a degree as we evolve. Some aspects of tikanga can be upheld online such as karakia, mihimihi and waiata, however it's impossible to share a hongi or feel the wairua through a screen.

“The difficulty with online is you aren't able to really experience the person and how the wairua of that person is.”

Having a camera set up with a zoom link inside marae is becoming more commonplace now, this has even extended to tangihanga. However, there is constant consideration around how progressive we should become with our culture, ***“how much do we give out of our taonga, and how much do we retain, maintaining authenticity is key.”***

Authenticity of performance and protection of intellectual property, were expressed especially the negative impacts of these when sharing out onto the digital world. Examples given of of this included; original performances being edited or changed from what they were, and images turned into memes.

“This is the risk factor of putting up any type of kapa haka on a public platform because although we share their same kind of value system to maintain and protect the mana of the taonga there are another 7.4 billion people out there who don't have that same type of awareness or that ambition.”

Pasifika participants noted the impact on their health and wellbeing while being ‘online’. Having minimal space at home or not being able to change scenery restricted their creativity in thought and in action. Another issue was the expectation to be engaged for long periods of time. Regardless of the mental state of the individual, they were expected to be fully engaged which led to feelings of anxiousness and nervousness.



Matihiko āpōpō

A digital future?

It is clear that rōpū would use digital platforms more regularly if they were fit for purpose, if the barriers and challenges signaled earlier were addressed, e.g., lag time, quality of sound and multiple microphone use, there would be a greater uptake of this technology.

“Our rōpū is known for choral singing so we sing in multiple parts, the different parts need to hear each other, it's the fusion of notes. If there was technology that could help us with this particular skill it would be helpful and we would definitely use this technology.”

Harmonising and hearing the blend of vocals is an essential part of kapa haka so until there is software that can achieve that, the benefits of practicing online are limited. For some, quality is better than quantity and they would rather wait for in person training where you can meet all expectations, than settle for a substandard result.

Māori have a long history of being innovative. Kapa haka is pivoting, -a hybrid model has successfully been run for one event where multiple stages were set up and live streamed. Other events could easily follow this direction if restrictions are in place. Looking even further ahead, some participants can see advancements including augmented reality or even holograms where you're beaming performers onto stage.

“There is a place for haka in the digital space because everyone is online now. Hologram performances, linear standard kapa haka, this is where the future is, beaming performers onto stages.”

The future for Pasifika performing arts aligns with that of kapa haka. While some welcome the digital space and its advancements, others are more skeptical. As long as digital platforms are fit for purpose and enhance the experience, it will be supported. All agree that in person trumps online, but both can meet the needs of different audiences.

“Digital platforms allows our culture to be seen and heard .”

“I think we're comfortable with innovation. I think it's just getting to grips with technology and what it's capable of doing for our people.”

“Regardless of kanohi-ki-te kanohi there is an avenue for continuing to utilising digital.”

“Connections are a huge part of te ao Māori, Facebook and Instagram are good tools to enhance connectivity during uncertain times.”

“I welcome the digital spaces, but prefer it to be a live event, and a link.”



Aronga mātua

Recommended priorities

The following priorities have been recommended to address some key areas highlighted in this research project. If Toi Mai adopts these priorities it will create a greater appreciation for performing arts, and build digital knowledge and freedom for the sector.

We have identified priorities that are digital or skills specific and wider opportunities for Toi Mai to consider in the future.

- Provide equitable funding towards Te Matatini, enabling growth and innovation; i.e., developing digital expertise
- Continual investment in digital infrastructure for whānau, hapū, iwi and Pasifika communities; i.e., internet connection, hardware and devices.
- Enable and support digital skills training for whānau, hapū, iwi and Pasifika communities to raise knowledge, awareness and understanding of using digital mediums.
- Continual investment into Māori & Pasifika agencies and practitioners by establishing a new appropriation focused on growing the cultural and creative sector.
- Build capability around performing arts in Primary schools.

Ngā whaipanga

The value of Māori & Pasifika performing arts sector

All participants believe that kapa haka provides an opportunity for Māori culture to take centre stage which contributes to the cultural, social, and economic wellbeing of Aotearoa. For Māori; ***“It’s the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, skills and reo”***.

For Aotearoa, it's part of the exquisite fabric that forms our national identity and how we present ourselves internationally. Its value is known by some but not yet recognised by all. Kapa haka has so many benefits and will continue to be a cornerstone of te ao Māori whatever the future holds.

Pasifika participants also believe their performing arts add to the richness and identity of Aotearoa. Their tikanga and values are upheld through these artforms and it’s their way to express the very essence of who they are ***“it is how we express ourselves and our place within the universe”***.



Fig 14|



Fig 15|

Kōrero tāpiri

Appendix

Interview questions

- What did your practice look like pre-COVID? (in person - online)
- How did your group adjust once COVID hit?
- What digital devices and platforms did you and the rōpū use?
- Were the devices/platforms fit for purpose?
- What were the key challenges to practicing / delivering online?
- How did you overcome these issues?
- How has tikanga been impacted by using the digital space?
- How did this digital experience influence your health and wellbeing?
- What were the positive highlights for you, your rōpū and your industry of moving entirely online?
- Were there negative aspects to being online?
- What do your practice sessions look like now?
- Is the digital space still being utilised by the rōpū now? If not, why not?
- If you had to do this all over again with what you know now, what would you do differently?
- How will performing arts be reframed in the future with this digital offering as an option?

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