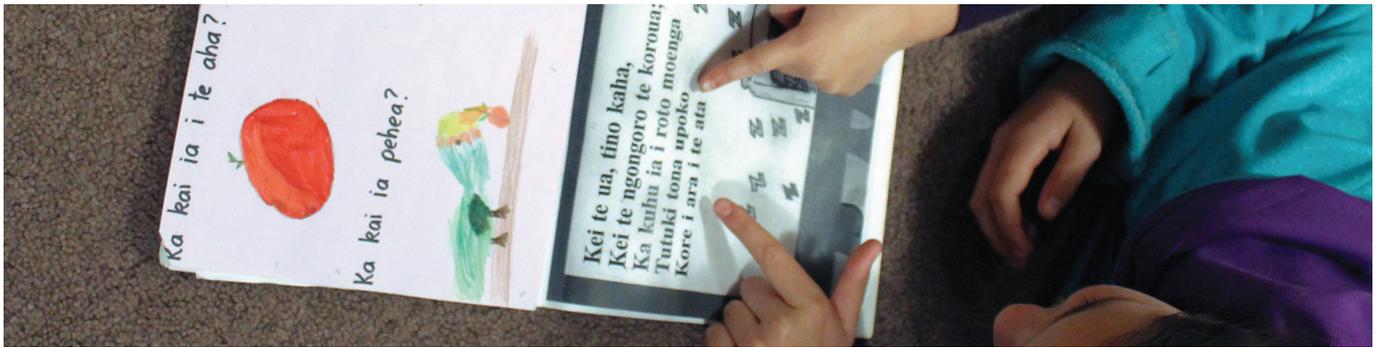


The intergenerational use of te reo Māori: evidence from Growing Up in New Zealand



Te reo Māori remained a predominant, flourishing, living language in the early post-colonisation period, however its use was in decline by the mid-19th Century, and by the mid-20th Century there were concerns that the language was dying out. Retention and use of te reo Māori is important for Aotearoa/New Zealand society as a whole, to strengthen Māori culture and identity, and to ensure that Māori succeed as Māori. Strengthening the health of te reo Māori in our country is also an obligation under Tiriti o Waitangi and other supportive legislation such as the Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Initiatives since the 1980s, including kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa, have focused on a revival of te reo Māori and have further emphasised the importance of the language to our nation's identity.

A major pathway for language revitalisation is its use within households and communities. The strengthened use of te reo Māori in homes requires infrastructure and support from and for whānau and communities, through effective policy and programmes. Over the last decade a number of Māori language strategy documents have been released by the New Zealand Government, with the most recent Te Rautaki Reo Māori released by Te Puni Kōkiri in 2014. This strategy describes the respective roles of Māori and Government in revitalising the Māori language. Key result areas of this strategy consider: Te Mana o te Reo: increasing the status of the Māori language in New Zealand society; Te Ako o te Reo: increasing the number of whānau Māori and other New Zealanders who can speak Māori; Te Mārama Pū ki te Whakaora Reo: increasing critical awareness about Māori language revitalisation; Te Kounga o te Reo: supporting the quality and appropriate use of the Māori language and iwi dialect maintenance; and Te Kōrerotanga o te Reo: increasing the use of the Māori language among whānau Māori and other New Zealanders, especially in the home.

Surveys of the health of te reo Māori conducted in 2001 and 2006 indicate that the amount of Māori language being heard in the home and community (particularly by children) may have increased across this time period, according to self-assessment of language proficiency by respondents. In 2006 it was reported that just under one quarter of those of Māori ethnicity could hold a conversation about everyday things in te reo Māori, and more than one in six Māori aged under 15 years reported that they could hold a conversation in te reo Māori.

Evidence from *Growing Up in New Zealand*

Information collected

Growing Up in New Zealand provides a unique opportunity to determine the longitudinal, including intergenerational, use and acquisition of te reo Māori, by and for those children who are identified as Māori as well as for all children growing up in New Zealand today.

This longitudinal study is following the development of approximately 7000 children, from before their birth in New Zealand in 2009 and 2010. There are over 1500 children in the *Growing Up in New Zealand* study that are identified (by their parents) as Māori, and *Growing Up in New Zealand* has conducted a number of face-to-face interviews with the parents of these children, including over 1200 Māori mothers and approximately 650 Māori fathers⁵. Understanding of the development of te reo Māori use within the new generation of New Zealand children fits within the overarching research objectives of this study to understand how to support equitable and successful outcomes for our children, as well as specific intentions to determine: the pathways by which children develop identity; how and through what opportunities children are involved in and adopt aspects of te ao Māori; and the outcomes related to these for children and their whānau.

Examples of the information collected to date from the *Growing Up in New Zealand* cohort, focused on information related to the use of te reo Māori is shown in Figure 1.

Intergenerational use of te reo Māori

Parents of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* children

When the parents of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* cohort were themselves children, 1.5% of the mothers (less than 100

mothers) had been expected to speak te reo Māori as a child at home and approximately 1% of mothers described te reo Māori as the first language in which they learned to read and write. A smaller proportion of the expectant fathers described that they had been expected to speak te reo Māori as a child at home (0.8%) and that te reo Māori was the first language in which they learned to read and write (0.7%).

Before the birth of the new generation

In pregnancy, approximately 5% (over 300) of the mothers of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* cohort reported that they were able to have a conversation about every-day things in te reo Māori, and this was also true of approximately 3% (over 140) of the fathers of the children. There are approximately 50 parental partnerships (representing less than 1% of the parents of the new generation) where *both* parents reported that they could have a conversation about everyday things in te reo Māori, before the birth of their children. A small number of parents (less than 20) described te reo Māori as the language they usually spoke at home before their *Growing Up in New Zealand* children were born.

In infancy

When they were nine months old, 15%⁶ (over 970) of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* children had some te reo Māori spoken to them by their mother, and 7% of children had some te reo Māori spoken to them by their father. There were 4% of children who had some te reo Māori spoken to them by both their mother and their father in infancy (Figure 2).

While there are a greater proportion of families speaking some te reo Māori when their children were nine months old than those who were regularly speaking te reo Māori before the children were born, there is still only a small proportion of families for whom te reo Māori is the main language. At nine months of age, less than 1% of children had a parent who was speaking *mostly* te reo Māori to them (corresponding to less than 50 mothers and less than 30 fathers).

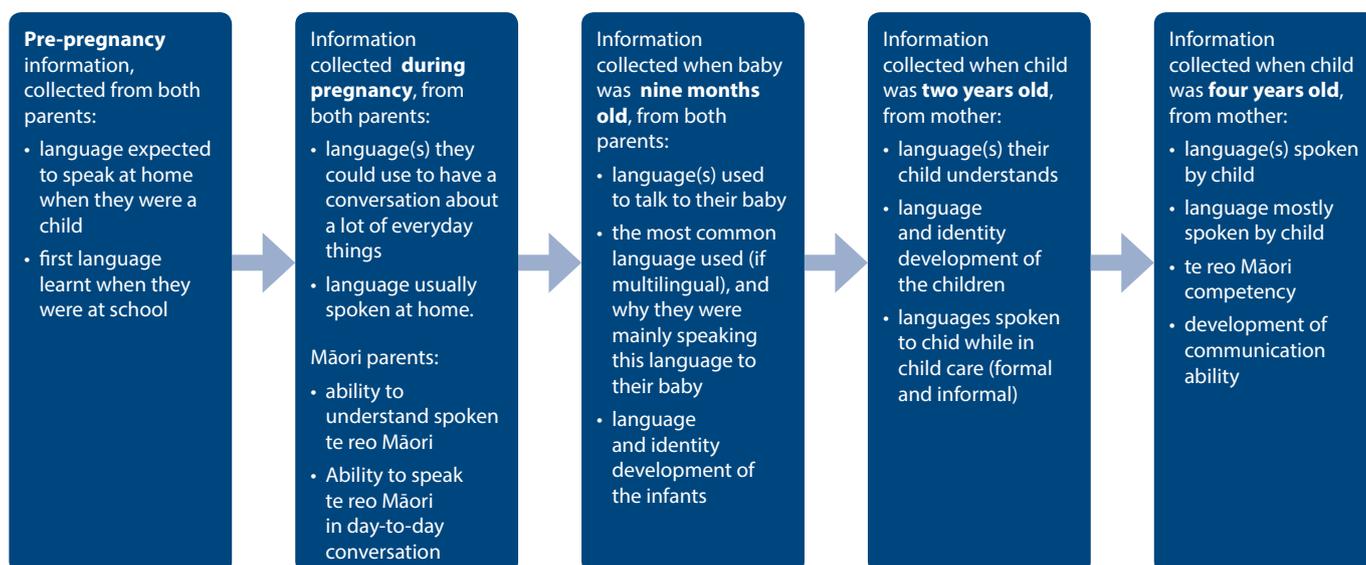


Figure 01: Summary of the information collected regarding te reo Māori use and development within the first four face-to-face data collection waves of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* study

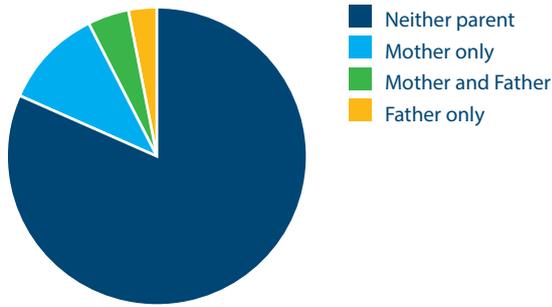


Figure 02: Proportion of children with parent(s) speaking te reo Māori at nine months of age

The most common reason why mostly te reo Māori was being spoken to their infants for both mothers and fathers (described by approximately half of parents) was because they wanted to bring up their child bilingual. The next most common reasons for why te reo Māori was mostly being spoken was to maintain their culture, and they saw this as important for their child's success. Interestingly, the most common reason why any other non-English language was mostly spoken to infants was because this non-English/non-Māori language was the language that was spoken best by parents.

When the children are two years old

At age two years, there were 763 children (12%) who were described by their mothers as understanding te reo Māori.

The proportion of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* parents and children using te reo Māori over time, and to age two years, is described in Figure 3.

Use of te reo Māori by Māori

An obligation to sustain te reo Māori, and a responsibility to support the health and development of te reo Māori is relevant for all New Zealanders. In addition, the sovereignty of the Māori language belongs to Māori, and language is the essence of Māori identity⁷. Therefore, it is important to improve our understanding of the use of te reo Māori by those that identify as Māori, and how to support the development of te reo Māori by tamariki Māori. It has been proposed that Māori language could be described as safe if 50% of Māori spoke Māori.

Māori parents

When the parents of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* cohort were themselves children, 8% of Māori mothers had been expected to speak te reo Māori at home and 7% of Māori mothers described te reo Māori as the first language in which they learned to read and write. Of the Māori fathers, 6% described that they had been expected to speak te reo Māori as a child at home and 5% described te reo Māori as the first language in which they learned to read and write.

Of those mothers that described an ability to have a conversation about everyday things in Māori during pregnancy, 82% identified at least one of their ethnicities as Māori, and 77% self-prioritised Māori as their main ethnicity. Of fathers that described an ability to have a conversation about everyday things in Māori, 89% identified at least one of their ethnicities as Māori, and 82% self-prioritised Māori as their main ethnicity.

There are 1122 mothers in the *Growing Up in New Zealand* study that identify at least one of their ethnicities as Māori and answered the question about their ability to understand te reo Māori when pregnant. Of these, 20% described they were able to understand spoken te reo Māori either well or very well, and 160 (14%) described their ability to speak te reo Māori well or very well (Figure 4).

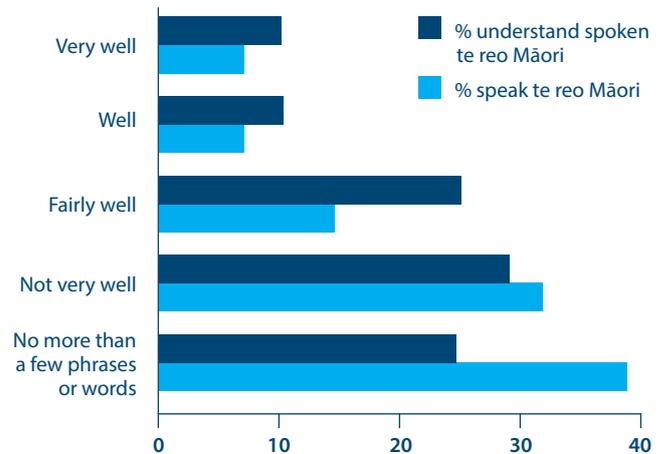


Figure 04: Understanding and use of te reo Māori by *Growing Up in New Zealand* mothers who identify as Māori

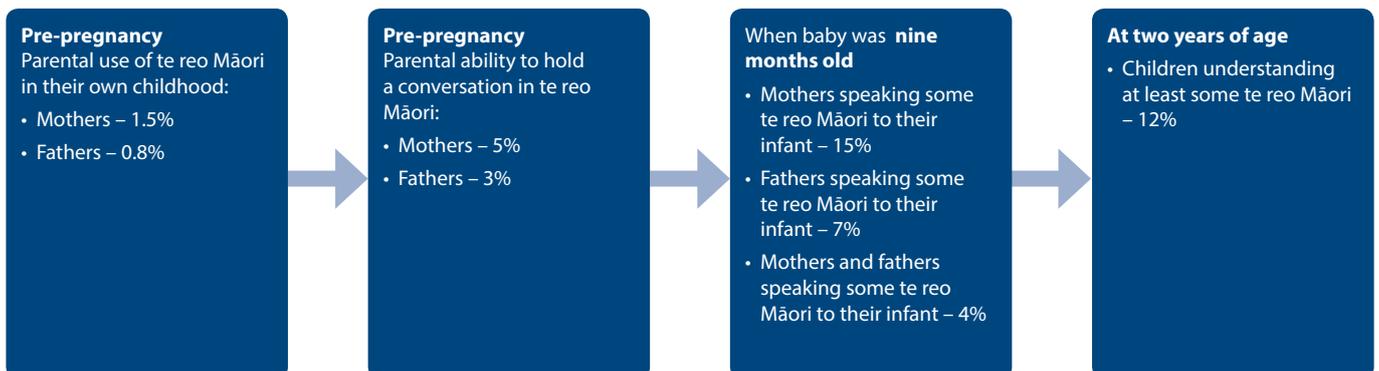


Figure 03: Use of te reo Māori over time by the parents and children of *Growing Up in New Zealand*, up to two years of age

Of the 599 *Growing Up in New Zealand* fathers who were interviewed during pregnancy and identified as Māori, 17% described they were able to understand spoken te reo Māori either well or very well, and 10% described they were able to speak te reo Māori well or very well (Figure 5).

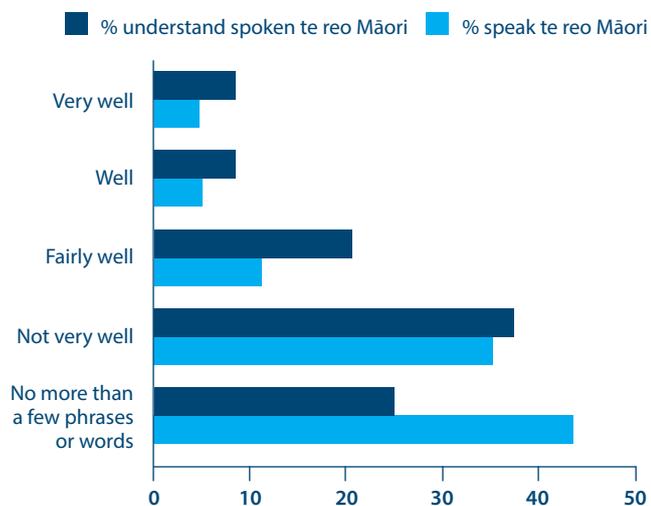


Figure 05: Understanding and use of te reo Māori by *Growing Up in New Zealand* fathers who identify as Māori

Māori children

At two years of age, there are 595 children (9% of the total cohort) who are identified as Māori by their mothers, and are also described as able to understand te reo Māori. This represents 40% of those children identified as Māori. The remaining 60% of Māori children were described as not able to understand te reo Māori at age two years (Figure 6).

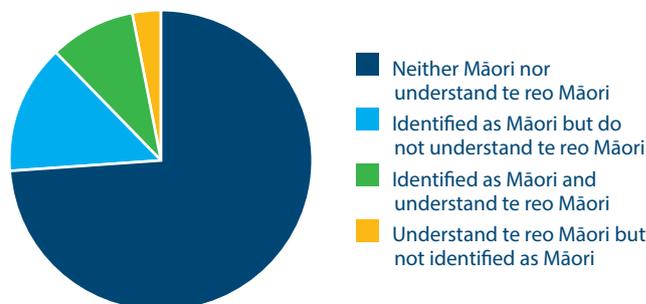


Figure 06: Māori identity and understanding te reo Māori at age two years

What does this mean?

- The future of Māori language is tied to the ability for te reo Māori to be spoken in homes in the years of infancy as well as the use of te reo Māori within other settings, including within the education sector. Also important is New Zealand's attitude to the value of Māori culture and the recognition of te reo Māori as a treasure, attention to the importance of te reo Māori by the Crown, and evaluation on the state of the language.
- The *Growing Up in New Zealand* study is able to provide an important contribution to the understanding of the use of te reo Māori by whānau Māori and other New Zealanders in the contemporary environment.
- This study is able to measure parental self-assessment of language proficiency (for themselves and their children), as well as observe the development of te reo Māori comprehension and proficiency over time.
- At two years of age, 12% of children are described as understanding at least some te reo Māori.
- A greater proportion of children are described as understanding te reo Māori at age two years than the proportion of their parents that used te reo Māori in their own childhood, or that spoke conversational te reo Māori as adults.
- A minority (20% or fewer) of Māori parents of the new generation of New Zealand children describe they are able to understand spoken te reo Māori, or able to speak te reo Māori, well or very well.
- At two years of age, more Māori children are not able to understand te reo Māori than those who are.
- At two years of age, 40% of children identified as Māori are described as understanding at least some te reo Māori.
- Ongoing attention to supporting te reo Māori within whānau and communities is required.

¹In 1986, the te reo Māori claim lodged with the Waitangi Tribunal stated that "the Māori culture is a part of the heritage of New Zealand and the Māori language is at the heart of that culture". Further, te reo Māori is also argued as a taonga and therefore guaranteed protection under Article Two of the Treaty of Waitangi. Article 13 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (endorsed by the Crown in 2010) describes obligation to protect the language, and the right to language is also described as a Human Right.

²Te Puni Kōkiri (2014). Te Rautaki Reo Māori, Māori Language Strategy. Wellington: Te Puni Kōkiri

³Bauer W (2008). Is the Health of Te Reo Maori Improving? Te Reo, 51: 33-73

⁴Te Puni Kōkiri (2002). The Health of the Māori Language in 2001. Wellington: Te Puni Kōkiri, and Te Puni Kōkiri (2007). Te Tirohanga ki te Reo Māori/The Māori Language Survey. Wellington: Te Puni Kōkiri

⁵This policy brief uses the word 'father' to describe the partners of the mothers of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* cohort. These partners are defined as those in a 'significant social relationship with' the mothers of the cohort. At the time of the pregnancy 99% of these partners were the biological fathers of the children.

⁶The analyses in this policy brief use the data set of *Growing Up in New Zealand* that is focused on the children of the cohort, with information collected from before birth until two years of age. The number of children represented in this dataset is 6327, with information provided by 6242 mothers and 3804 'fathers' (Morton et al, 2014).

⁷Te Puni Kōkiri (2011). Te Reo Mauriora: Te Arotakenga o te Rangai Reo Māori Me te Rautake Reo Māori. Wellington: Te Puni Kōkiri.

About Growing Up in New Zealand

Growing Up in New Zealand is New Zealand's contemporary longitudinal study of child development, tracking the development of nearly 7000 children in the context of their diverse families and environments from before their birth until they are young adults.

Multidisciplinary longitudinal information has been collected from the *Growing Up in New Zealand* children, who were born in 2009 and 2010, and their families.⁸ Each data collection of *Growing Up in New Zealand* seeks age-appropriate information across six inter-connected domains: family and whānau, societal context and neighbourhood, education, health and wellbeing, psychosocial and cognitive development, and culture and identity.⁹ A number of face-to-face data collection waves have been conducted with the mothers, fathers and children of *Growing Up in New Zealand* from before birth and through the first 1000 days of life. It is intended for data collection waves to occur with the cohort every 2-3 years until they reach adulthood.

The *Growing Up in New Zealand* children are broadly generalisable to current New Zealand births,¹⁰ and importantly the study collects evidence from families across the spectrum of socioeconomic status as well as ethnic diversity. The study includes significant numbers of tamariki Māori (1 in 4 of the cohort), Pacific children (1 in 5) and Asian children (1 in 6). Almost half of the cohort children are expected to identify with multiple ethnicities. This diversity of the families involved, as well as their ongoing commitment, helps to future-proof the information that can be provided from *Growing Up in New Zealand*. Retention rates are very high (over 92%) through to the preschool data collection wave which was completed in 2015.

The unique information collected within Growing Up in New Zealand is designed to contribute evidence to inform

- a better understanding of the causal pathways that lead to particular developmental outcomes in contemporary New Zealand, and
- the effective evaluation, development and implementation of programmes and policy to optimise: support for families; health and development of children; and equity of outcomes across and within the New Zealand population.

The study is run by as a multi-disciplinary team of experts at the University of Auckland, who work in partnership with experts at other academic institutions as well as a large number of government agencies including the Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (Superu) and the Ministries of Social Development, Education, Health and others to ensure that up-to-date and appropriate evidence is provided for policy translation. A number of key reports and publications have already been produced from *Growing Up in New Zealand* and the resource provided is being increasingly utilised. Data from the *Growing Up in New Zealand* study is available for access. For further information on data access arrangements, copies of existing study publications, and contact details for our team please view www.growingup.co.nz

⁸Morton SMB, et al. (2012). How Do You Recruit and Retain a Pre-Birth Cohort? Lessons Learnt From Growing Up in New Zealand. *Evaluation & the Health Professions*;DOI: 10.1177/0163278712462717.

⁹Morton SM, et al. (2013). Cohort profile: Growing Up in New Zealand. *International Journal of Epidemiology* 42:65-75.

¹⁰Morton SMB, et al. (2014). Growing Up in New Zealand cohort alignment with all New Zealand births. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*. In press.

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