THE INITIAL COVID-19 RĀHUI

Resilience among social work tauira in Tairāwhiti and Hawke's Bay

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in some significant changes in tertiary education in Aotearoa New Zealand. This situation report identifies the current situation and the issues and challenges for social work degree students at the Eastern Institute of Technology's campuses in Hawke's Bay and Tairāwhiti. The report highlights the resilience of tauira in these challenging times. It also proposes a way forward for future learning that supports tikanga and the diverse needs and realities of tauira.

Keywords

COVID-19, resilience, tauira, Tairāwhiti, Hawke's Bay, social work

Introduction

Monday, March 23, 2020, started as an ordinary day. Classes at the Hawke's Bay and Tairāwhiti campuses of Eastern Institute of Technology (EIT) in Aotearoa New Zealand were operating as normal. Nevertheless, awareness was growing about the dangers of COVID-19, which had been declared a pandemic on March 11 by the World Health Organization. March 23 turned out to be the day the Prime Minister announced that Aotearoa would move to Alert Level 3, effective immediately. Moreover, the country would move to Alert Level 4, a complete rāhui, within 48 hours. Tauira became restless; text messages started to flow; the threat of the COVID-19 rāhui was immediate.

With no rehearsals or forewarning, kaiako and tauira alike turned their attention to prioritising and planning, based on fundamental needs: tamariki, kaumātua, whānau, kai. Flour, toilet paper and pasta were urgently sourced. Businesses were closed, jobs lost, and people would have to work and study from home for an indefinite period.

This situational report draws on the experiences of tertiary educators and their students in a regional polytechnic to provide a snapshot of how the initial COVID-19 rāhui between Mach and June 2020 affected tertiary education in Aotearoa, with analysis of demographic and socioeconomic data.

COVID-19 arrives in Aotearoa New Zealand

On March 1, 2020, the novel coronavirus first identified in Wuhan, China, was declared to be present in Aotearoa. Between March and June 2020, 1,504 people in Aotearoa contacted the virus and 22 people lost their lives to COVID-19. The timeline in Table 1 shows the changing rāhui

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levels during that period and their impact on tertiary providers.

Tauira demographics

Eastern Institute of Technology delivers a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree from campuses located in small Hawke's Bay and Tairāwhiti cities in Aotearoa, New Zealand. While this report is specific to this community it is important to note that the impacts of COVID-19 are different according to demographic characteristics. It is widely recognised that the impacts of COVID-19 are not experienced equally across the population, and this section highlights these challenges for low-income and Māori communities. Table 2 shows the usual resident population of Gisborne District, Napier City and Hastings District, according to the 2018 Census.

As can be seen in the data in Table 2, both Hawke's Bay and Tairāwhiti have a higher percentage of Māori tauira than the national percentage. The main iwi in Tairāwhiti are Ngāti Porou, Rongowhakaata, Ngai Tamanuhiri and Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki. The main iwi in Hawke's Bay is Ngāti Kahungunu.

Tairāwhiti region is in the most deprived quintile (Quintile 5) in the New Zealand Index of Deprivation (NZDep) for 2018. As Table 3 shows, 74.3% of the 2020 Hawke's Bay campus BSW tauira lived in areas in the fourth or fifth quintile of the index. The dimensions of deprivation in these areas include lack of access to the internet at home, lack of adequate technology to study (e.g., laptops), financial hardship, rental housing, single-parent families, and people living in overcrowded and damp homes.

Some of the challenges faced by tauira before the COVID-19 pandemic included multiple work and home commitments, financial limitations, and housing and serious health issues for themselves and/or dependents. Many tauira are also older "second chance learners" who have re-entered education after many years and who have minimal foundational education. As such, they may be

TABLE 1 Timeline of COVID-19 rāhui levels, March–June 2020

Dates	Situation for tertiary education
March 25–April 27	Level 4: Lockdown. Education facilities and most businesses closed. Only essential businesses permitted to operate.
April 28–May 13	Level 3: Restricted (partial) lockdown. Physical distancing of 2 metres. Tertiary education facilities are still closed.
May 14–June 7	Level 2: Reduction of social distancing to 1 metre. Limited access of tauira and staff to campus, with restrictions of numbers permitted in each room.
June 8–June 30	Level 1: Education facilities and workplaces open but required to operate safely. No restrictions on personal movement but people encouraged to maintain a record of where they have been.

TABLE 2 Usual resident population of Hawke's Bay districts with % Māori population

District	Population	% Māori
Gisborne	47,000	54.6%
Napier	62,000	24.5%
Hastings	81,000	29.6%
Aotearoa	5,000,000	16.5%

Note. Adapted from 2018 *Census place summaries* [Data set] by Stats NZ, 2018, https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-place-summaries/

TABLE 3 Percentage of tauira in each NZDep quintile

Quintile	1	2	3	4	5	Rural
	2.9%	4.7%	10.5%	30.5%	43.8%	7.6%

Note. Adapted from *NZDep2018 Index of Deprivation* by J. Atkinson, C. Salmond & P. Crampton, 2019, https://www.otago.ac.nz/wellington/otago730394.pdf

TABLE 4　Gender and ethnicity of tauira

EIT campus	No. of tauira	% of BSW tauira identifying as Māori (2020)	Female	Male
Hawke's Bay	82	57.3%	90.2%	9.8%
Tairāwhiti	22	81.8%	91%	9%

TABLE 5　Age range of tauira

EIT campus	Under 20	20–29	30–39	40–49	Over 50
Hawke's Bay	13.2%	40.6%	24.2%	16.5%	5.5%
Tairāwhiti	0	40.9%	40.9%	18.2%	0

experiencing significant academic struggles. This situation was the "normal" for EIT BSW tauira before the challenges and realities of an international pandemic hit. Table 4 presents the gender and ethnicity demographics of BSW tauira, while Table 5 shows their age distribution.

Initial response to COVID-19

As kaiako, the authors' initial response was to consider how best to action emergency remote teaching and online learning and how to ensure this was done efficiently. Assessments had to be both achievable in the situation and not compromise academic integrity and professional standards. In short, we needed to ensure an ethically sound and robust learning experience. Within a week the BSW teaching programme was being delivered remotely to tauira.

Staff sought hautūtanga from a governance level within the institution, from with the social work profession, and from within their team. Resources to teach, problem-solving skills, teamwork and commitment from the teaching team proved to be vital factors in delivering the programme and supporting tauira to study remotely.

Tauira needed whakamanawa. They were hoping for answers to questions that early on were unknown. Pūatatata needed to be vital and ongoing, so tauira communication and pastoral support were made a priority. Our tauira felt this and responded grounded in aumangea—seeking support, reassurance and clarity where and when needed.

Issues faced by tauira during the rāhui

Table 6 briefly summarises the key issues identified by the authors based on their knowledge of their tauira and the challenges they faced during the initial rāhui period.

Coping with the "new normal" (Levels 3 and 4)

Aumangea was frequently demonstrated by the tauira throughout the rāhui, the same aumangea as modelled by their teaching staff. Our research highlighted that during this time there were people in these communities that found capacity to develop strategies founded in aumangea to cope in this time of unprecedented rāhui. This was also seen in the Zoom classes as the tauira maintained attendance, became more engaged, and become more willing to share their homes, lives and feelings. Initially, using video conferencing technology requiring them to sit in front of a screen, facing other faces close up was a daunting prospect for many of our tauira, knowing that their kaiako could also observe them close up and see into their homes—including their tamariki and whānau. In the first weeks, many chose not to share their video in the class session, but this whakamā changed as they became more confident with the "new normal". It became commonplace to greet tamariki on the screen or listen to a tauira answer a question with a Disney movie playing in the background.

The functions of tuākana/tēina and ako had many faces also, with teaching staff, tauira and our whānau alike uniting in the lockdown learning experience together. Tauira and kaiako took leadership roles based on their skills and knowledge, particularly in relation to the use of technology for teaching and learning. This was a reciprocal relationship of support and learning and resulted in less formal and more effective relationships and ako. Tauira, kaiako and our whānau shared their lockdown experiences. We shared our homes, our strengths and our challenges throughout the shared crisis.

As kaiako, we too were affected professionally and personally by the COVID-19 pandemic. We were juggling the responsibilities of our own

TABLE 6 Issues faced by tauira during the initial rāhui

Reality of life/study/work balance	• It was a challenge for many tauira to maintain balance being at home all day throughout the rāhui.
Caregiving responsibilities	• Many tauira had tamariki, elderly or unwell parents or extended whānau for whom they were primary, or sole, caregivers.
Accommodation	• Many tauira lived in small, overcrowded houses. • Their "bubble" expanded during the rāhui as other whānau came into their homes. • Rental accommodation was a significant stressor for some. • Rental leases expired for some during the lockdown. Others experienced difficulties with landlords and in rent payments due to financial hardship from loss of income. • Some tauira were homeless at the start of the rāhui, with at least one living in a car and others in unsatisfactory and temporary hostel accommodation.
Coping with new technology	• Teaching remotely required adopting new technology. • Assessments for tauira were online, which included oral presentations and skills-based assessments. • IT support was difficult to access for both kaiako and tauira.
Lack of adequate resources	• Lack of reliable laptops or computers meant that some tauira had to resort to doing an assessment presentation on their smartphone, and others were unable to access the required course material online. • Internet access was patchy, with Wi-Fi connections intermittent and data limited.
Outside work throughout lockdown	• Part-time work became full-time work as essential workers for some (e.g., as supermarket workers, cleaners).
Family events	• People were banned from attending tangi and births, and supporting ill whānau in hospitals.
Home schooling	• Schooling at home generally had minimal support (from other adults or teachers) and lacked technology.
Fractured support systems	• Relationship breakdowns increased. • Family harm was more prevalent. This is demonstrated by a 22% increase in family violence investigations during Level 4 (New Zealand Police, n.d.).

homes, whānau and children as well as delivering the BSW in its entirety in the online space—something entirely unprecedented. As qualified social workers, we were very aware of the stresses and trauma impacting on tauira at this time, and this added to the sense of responsibility we felt to support tauira to continue to achieve their studies while maintaining programme requirements.

We recognised the immediate need for increased pastoral care and well-being support for tauira whose study aspirations were in danger of being overwhelmed by the circumstances. We rearranged the programme timetable to accommodate whānau, ensured that all students had access to internet and devices, offered additional tutorials for assessments, amended assessments that had practical components, offered individual and group pastoral care, supported students and their whānau to access financial supports, worked extended hours, and remained contactable to support tauira well outside office hours. This was necessary to support tauira to continue to be successful in the realities of the "new normal".

The principles that underpin the responses of kaiako as we moved into a "new normal" can be linked to the six capacities of whānau well-being developed by Sir Mason Durie (2006). These form part of a second-year BSW course called Te Tiriti in Action. In a "normal" year, these concepts are taught throughout the course, culminating in an assessment-based noho marae where the tauira demonstrate their understanding of manaakitanga, pupuri taonga, whakamana, whakatakoto tikanga, whakapūmau tikanga and whakawhanaungatanga.

These capacities complement and are supported

by the personal capacities highlighted within our initial response to COVID-19 as discussed earlier in this report: aumangea, hautūtanga, whakamanawa and pūataata. As kaiako, we recognised that these concepts and approach could support our tauira and our efforts to teach kanohi ki te kanohi. At the beginning of the rāhui, as kaiako we made the decision to embrace the concepts as supporting factors. Table 7 summarises how we introduced and modelled them to tauira.

What we learned about tauira aumangea

The most prominent capacity kaiako observed, reflected upon, and discussed with tauira was resilience within the tauira cohort. Many Māori tauira juggled study and whānau responsibilities daily, such as caring for elders, educating and caring for their own children, and maintaining home life without many of the support systems they could access outside of lockdown.

Classes were able to become more flexible to cater for very different contexts. Babies, children and pets appeared in Zoom classes within the homes of kaiako and tauira alike. Some tauira struggled to find a space in a crowded home to attend class, with one tauira solving this problem by sitting in a tent outside the home for classes.

Tauira responded well to flexibility around assessments, which included online presentations and demonstrations of practice skills when the social worker was unable to be in the same room as the client. Deadlines could be flexible when appropriate to cater for individual circumstances due to the pandemic. Whanaungatanga enabled us to build stronger reciprocal relationships with tauira across both campuses supported by manaakitanga, kotahitanga and pūataata. The wider team of programme staff committed to all be in it together. This strengthened our collegial relationships, enabled us to present a united front, and supported positive outcomes for our tauira.

Tauira and kaiako developed some creative responses to the issues faced, such as lending and delivering personal laptops and textbooks to the mailboxes of students. We also learned that digital literacy can be increased for all in times of necessity. The determination to continue studying remained solid for tauira and the commitment of teaching staff remained steadfast—despite the issues and challenges of the rāhui.

TABLE 7   Capacities, key tasks and examples

Whānau capacities	Key tasks	Examples in the online space
Manaakitanga	Care of whānau	• Adapting class length and timetable to support tauira to care for their whānau • Supporting access to resources such as laptops and textbooks, reading material and financial support where available • Taking time daily to check in on all tauira and linking those in need to learning advisors and or support services
Pupuri taonga	Guardianship	• Upholding professional and programme integrity and functions • Maintaining kanohi ki te kanohi (online)
Whakamana	Empowerment	• Pastoral care • Encouraging reflective practice • Ensuring access to study resources
Whakatakoto tikanga	Planning	• Adapting assessments • Adapting timetables
Whakapūmau tikanga	Promotion of culture	• Karakia to open and close classes • Maintaining kanohi ki te kanohi online • Supporting tauira to support one another and the principles of manaakitanga and whanaungatanga • Tuākana/tēina and ako operational
Whakawhanaungatanga	Whānau consensus	• Shared decision-making based on tauira needs between tauira and kaiako

Note. Adapted from Measuring Māori wellbeing by M. Durie, 2006, https://treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2007-09/tgls-durie.pdf

Implications for tertiary educators

The COVID-19 global pandemic has had profound consequences for the mental health and well-being of tauira. This was compounded by a mandatory separation, for both tauira and kaiako, from the usual support systems as people were confined to their homes, which led to an identified need for increased pastoral care and well-being support for tauira.

Not all tauira were able to continue their study. For these tauira, this decision was not made lightly and was indicative of the multiple and complex life challenges they faced at this time of uncertainty and change. For many tertiary education organisations this has been an unavoidable impact of COVID-19.

At times there was a lag in academic management decision-making which limited the availability of IT support and laptops for tauira. Academic managers imposed significant demands on kaiako to ensure delivery of a satisfactory programme for tauira under new and, at times, challenging circumstances.

Kaiako were expected to be able to transfer their mahi to their home and to continue their teaching, planning, coordination and research seamlessly. We witnessed our colleagues working incredibly hard to ensure that tauira were not going to miss out on high quality of teaching, and this has inevitably impacted on our personal and family lives. Mahi tahi between kaiako and management involves an ongoing partnership of support, resources and acknowledgement.

Moving forward: Key findings and reflections

The key questions arising from this situation report are:

1. What do we want to return to academically in a post-COVID-19 world? How can we support this new vision?
2. Can the flexibility resulting from COVID-19 remain into the future to support the diverse needs and realities of tauira?
3. What has the COVID-19 pandemic taught us and what needs to change?
4. How can we incorporate the concepts discussed in this situation report in our future response to this uncertain environment?

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that there can be change and evolution in teaching platforms. We have learned new ways to teach, communicate and function in a way that is transformative in the academic setting. Since the initial rāhui period we have experienced a resurgence of COVID-19, and therefore a return to pre-COVID-19 academia is looking increasingly unlikely. The pandemic has demonstrated that staff and students can adjust to change and that it is possible to redefine and reprioritise what is important to teach, and how this can be achieved.

The pandemic has also highlighted that our tauira are grounded in aumangea and more than willing to make changes in order to achieve their academic goals, despite existing life challenges. There needs to be a different tikanga established where there is a stronger emphasis on whakamana, pastoral care, and well-being support becoming an integral part of the degree. Teaching and learning could continue to be flexible and diverse in a way that enhances the capacities of all tauira to achieve.

Our experiences during the initial rāhui showed that change cannot be achieved without hautūtanga and mahi tahi. The Prime Minister frequently referred to the people of Aotearoa as being "a team of five million" when facing COVID-19. This is also true of EIT's Social Work degree. We need the team of institutional governance, fellow kaiako and tauira to fully focus on what is most important: to provide an ethically sound and robust learning experience to enable tauira to become resilient and strong social workers.

Mā te huruhuru, ka rere te manu.

Adorn the bird with feathers and it will fly.

Glossary

ako	learning
aumangea	resilience
hautūtanga	leadership
iwi	tribe
kai	food
kaiako	teacher/lecturer
kanohi ki te kanohi	face to face
kaumātua	older persons
kotahitanga	unison/unity
mahi	work
mahi tahi	collaboration
manaakitanga	whānau care
noho marae	overnight stay on meeting grounds
pūataata	transparency
pupuri taonga	guardianship
rāhui	ban/prohibition

tamariki	children
tangi	mourning rituals
tauira	student
tikanga	protocol
tuākana/tēina	the relationship between older and younger in teaching and learning
whakamā	shy; ashamed/shame(d)
whakamana	empowerment
whakamanawa	reassurance/encouragement
whakapūmau tikanga	planning
whakatakato tikanga	cultural endorsement
whakawhanaungatanga	whānau consensus
whānau	family/extended family

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