

## **Te Whanake animations: Development and implementation**

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### **Abstract**

The development of Te Whanake Animation resources began in 2005. The aim was to complement the Te Whanake 1 Te Kākano textbook (Moorfield, 2001), and provide another learning resource, specifically a digital resource, for second language learners of te reo Māori to access. The age of digitisation is fully upon us, and at the time of development, Te Whanake Animations were definitely ahead of its time. It is easily accessed online and available free to users. A small team of research assistants were employed to bring the concept to life, develop the animated characters, write scripts for the animated movies and modules, develop interactive exercises as well as compose songs to reinforce learnings, all whilst aligning with the content in Te Kākano textbook. As an original member of that research team, I will use this paper to discuss this process to provide an insight into the development and implementation of the Te Whanake Animations within my own teaching practices.

### **Introduction**

It has been 30 years since te reo Māori became an official language of New Zealand. In that time, there have been numerous efforts and initiatives with the aim to increase the use of te reo Māori and to improve proficiency levels of te reo Māori speakers. Furthermore, te reo Māori is protected under the Treaty of Waitangi and can be referred to as a taonga or treasure, yet, fluent speakers of te reo Māori have continued to decline (Mathieson, 2010). The proportion of te reo Māori speakers has declined markedly over the last century, particularly following rapid urbanisation.

Māori, for years, have had to adapt to a new way of living due to many factors, including colonisation and being forced to homogenise and assimilate through legislation such as the Tohunga Suppression Act of 1907 (Stephens, 2001). The digitisation era is well upon us and this era is no different for Māori, who need to adapt in order to progress and survive. New technology has reorganised how we live, how we communicate, and how we teach (Siemens, 2014). New ways of thinking and doing things are needed using such technologies, and in this instance reference is being made to the digital space. Initiatives need to be constantly developed and utilised for the survival of Māori; the people, the culture and the language. This paper will expand on one of those initiatives, the development of Te Whanake Animations, based on John Moorfield's research and writings published in Te Kākano, from the Te Whanake series of textbooks, study guides, teachers' manuals and other digital resources.

### **Development of Te Whanake Animations**

The inception of Te Kākano Animations happened in Dunedin, at the University of Otago.

A collaboration between teams from Te Tumu, School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies and the Educational Media, Higher Education Development Centre (HEDC) resulted in the completion of the animations, modules and interactive exercises for Te Whanake 1 Te Kākano. The intention of the animations project was to develop a resource to assist second language learners of te reo Māori and to complement the learnings from Te Kākano. A total of 15 animated movies were developed, aligning with the learning content of each chapter within the Te Kākano textbook. Each animated movie was the beginning of a ‘module’, and each ‘module’ contained up to 16 interactive exercises or activities to help reinforce and complement the learnings found in Te Kākano. The interactive exercises allowed the user to not just sit there to read and hear te reo Māori, but also provided the opportunity to type what they thought the answer was and receive immediate feedback. This would prompt them to move on or keep trying. There was an emphasis on using the correct grammar including macrons, full stops and capital letters where applicable. If they were not included, the user would be instructed to keep trying. There was mixed feedback about this feature, however, the main goal, other than developing a resource to assist second language learners learn te reo Māori, was to make sure that the reo they are using is grammatically correct and not to fall into bad habits acquiring te reo Māori.

## Research Team



*L-R: J Grant, T Metuamate, A Jordan, W Smith, M Houpapapa (Moorfield, 2017)*

I was one of five Research Assistants employed by Te Tumu to create and sketch the characters for the animations, whilst the team from HEDC brought those sketches to life through a very precise, complex and expensive process. Each of the research assistants were students at the University of Otago, all studying in different disciplines but all having a commonality through te reo Māori. The research assistants had the task of creating six

characters initially, and the process was much more in depth than first anticipated. For each character, several factors were considered in order to construct their gender, approximate weight and height, age, occupation, background and relationships, iwi (tribal) affiliation and even going as far as fabricating and developing their physical appearance. The aim was to have the animations available online and free to the user. Therefore, the characters needed to be relatable as it was anticipated a range of ages, ethnicities and backgrounds would be the users of such a resource.

## Characters



*L-R Mīria, Moe (Dog), Te Hereripene, Eruera, Neihana, Tarati, Wiremu (Moorfield, 2017)*

The six characters ranged in age from a young boy (Neihana) to an elderly woman (Mīria). A range of ethnicities included Eruera who is Chinese and Tarati who is Pākehā. Diverse backgrounds ranged from Wiremu, a farming father and Te Hereripene, a young urban university student. The attributes and characteristics of each character was well debated and discussed, a date of birth was created and so too was a list of likes and dislikes. The research team anticipated that this information would be relevant to the user. Not only to enable them to make connections and relate to specific characters, but also to help explain how each character connected with each other, in an attempt to make the storylines of the animated movies realistic. The voices of the characters were those of the research team, with the inclusion of another Te Tumu student. I have included an example of what a character's biography looked like in the development phase.

### **Wiremu**

*Born in Gisborne 8th November 1964, raised in Gisborne and is the youngest of his family. Is married to a Pākehā woman, Tarati and they have two children, an 8 year*

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*old son Apirana (Api) and a 5 year old daughter Ngāwai. He owns a house on a farm, that has cows, sheep, horses, pigs, chickens, goats, dogs and cats.*

*Wiremu is getting back in touch with his Māoritanga after leaving home for the city life, which sees him picking up mau rākau and re-learning te reo Māori. He is respectful, a good story teller, diligent, humorous and practices Ringatū.*

*Wiremu has a big body composition, approximately 6ft 3, has tattoos on his arms, and wears a vest, button up shirt, jeans, and brown boots on most days. His interests and hobbies include shearing, rugby, league, playing the guitar and going to the pub to have a couple of beers after a hard day at work. Reggae is his favourite music, specifically The Herbs, he also loves pork bones and fish heads. Wiremu can't stand snow and frosts because of what it does to his crops and farm life, he also dislikes violence, with his favourite saying being "I'm a lover not a fighter"*

The biographies for the remaining five characters were of a similar nature and, a relationship was formed with at least one other character. The physical appearance of the characters was created on real people known to the research team and photos were also taken of these people to assist with the animation process for the characters. The photos' details were, at the request of the animation team, to include side profile shots, full body shots, front and back views, close up facial shots mouthing the vowel sounds, and also, if possible, having them wear the clothes, jewellery and moko that we had mentioned in the character's biography.

## Modules

The term module was used to differentiate the sections that were developed. All modules included an animated movie, up to 16 interactive exercises with immediate feedback and some modules had a song. There are 10 chapters in Te Kākano, and 15 modules were developed to highlight and reinforce the learning structures found within those 10 chapters. Each user is encouraged to study the relevant chapter either before or concurrently whilst using the Te Whanake Animations. Although still used throughout the website, the term module was soon translated and replaced with Te Wāhanga as a heading.

## Movies

Each movie was used to introduce the new language of the module. When scripting the animated movies, the research team would align the sentence structures, content and learnings found within the Te Kākano textbook. A time limit of around 1min 30 secs was the brief given in order to showcase and use as many learning patterns as we could from that chapter, using the animated characters. When writing the scripts, we provided these in te reo Māori and English, primarily for the animators benefit, however, they were introduced later as subtitled options for the user. The user had the opportunity to use the

subtitles, to not only hear te reo Māori but to also read it. They had an additional option to read the English translation whilst listening to te reo.

### **Exercises**

Interactive exercises were also developed based on the learning patterns and content found in each chapter. Up to 16 exercises were developed for each module. The interactive nature was developed with the aim to make the learning enjoyable, interesting and current, whilst continuing to keep alignment with content from that chapter. By employing this learning technique, including interactive exercises, it was believed and hoped that the language acquisition and retention of the user would be high. Although there is no tangible way to measure this, it provides the user with an added resource to assist with learning te reo Māori.

### **Songs**

There was primarily one member of the research team responsible for composing a song, with a catchy tune and easy lyrics not only incorporating the learning that was presented within that module, but also to help the user remember and retain the learning structures and content. Every module had a song composed for it, however, a few were removed mainly due to the tunes being too similar to other songs. No further songs were composed to replace the removed ones.

### **Implementation of Te Whanake Animations**

There are many positives to why one would use Te Whanake Animations. This part of the paper will focus on those positives and how I use the animations website in my own teaching. The majority of my te reo Māori teaching is based on the Te Whanake Series. Whilst teaching from Te Kākano, reference is always made to that website, because of my experience and knowledge of Te Whanake Animations. I direct my students to the website, specific modules, exercises and songs to help reinforce a learning point that I have covered in the class. The complementary nature is great for the teacher as it allows extra practice to take place outside of the classroom, and the interactive exercises provide immediate feedback. Even when my teaching pedagogy is not based on Te Whanake, I have found the website still to be of relevance. The alignment of the content may be a little altered, however, relevant content for learning te reo for beginners could still be found.

The movies that begin each module are very useful and beneficial for a learner to watch. Although on average the movies play for approximately 1 minute 30 seconds, they provide a snapshot of the content covered within that module. The movies also provide the user with the option to play it using subtitles in English or te reo Māori. The positive is that not only is this allowing the learner to hear te reo Māori, but also to read it if they prefer. I found the subtitles option valuable when playing for beginners, they seem to enjoy and benefit from reading the English whilst hearing te reo Māori. As they progress in their learning acquisition and understanding, they are able to switch to te reo Māori subtitles,



and eventually turn them off all together.

Another positive when using the website is the availability of songs to help reinforce the learning patterns covered. Not being a seasoned singer personally, therefore squashing stereotypes that all Māori can sing, the songs are used to provide yet another avenue that will assist with learning acquisition and retention of the learning patterns and/or vocabulary. When directing my students to the website, recommendations to look at the other resources on that website are made, particularly the Māori dictionary, Te Aka. The 'one stop shop' provides a valuable resource, free to users, that can be accessed at any time and best of all, anywhere.

## Conclusion

It has been 12 years since the inception and creation of Te Whanake Animations. For its age, Te Whanake Animations is still very much relevant and utilised by a diverse range of people, all with a common goal, to learn te reo Māori. Acknowledgment needs to be made to Adjunct Professor John Moorfield for his continued commitment and dedication to the development and advancement of te reo Māori, for continuing to allow such a resource to be available online and free to users whilst upholding the mana of te reo Māori. John Moorfield also needs to be acknowledged for his passion and foresight to adapt te reo Māori to enable it to thrive in a new age, in the Information Age, within the digital space. Furthermore, since the development of the animated movies and associated exercises and activities for Te Whanake 1 Te Kākano, similar resources have been developed at Te Ipukarea for the other three textbooks in the series. These are all free and accessible at <http://animations.tewhanake.maori.nz/>

## References

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