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## The potential effects of COVID-19 on research interviews in Year 2 of the Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in Māngere

COVID-19 has made it difficult for researchers to engage in traditional qualitative data collection methods, such as interviews because physical distancing is required to prevent the spread of the virus (Dodds & Hess, 2020; Roy & Uekusa, 2020). The effects of COVID-19 on qualitative research methods means that researchers must develop and use a “variety of creative, innovative and unconventional strategies” (Roy & Uekusa, 2020, n.p) as “distance approaches to collecting qualitative data” (Taster, 2020, p. 8). In the Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge (MAIK) programme taught at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in Māngere, students have typically used interviews as a method of generating data for analysis. COVID-19 means that students must be prepared to conduct the interviews required for their research in quite different ways. This may include social distancing measures, the use of hand sanitiser and face masks, the avoidance of handshaking and hongi (see Rangiwai, 2020), and other health recommendations. It may also mean forgoing in-person interviews for online ones. This paper will briefly explain the MAIK programme and the potential effects of COVID-19 on the interviews

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process. This article will argue that if online interviews are to take place, they must be done in a culturally appropriate manner.

MAIK is a two-year programme that acknowledges the expertise of Indigenous practitioners in particular fields of knowledge and leads them through the process of writing a 15,000-20,000-word exegesis and realising a research-based project that meaningfully contributes to the development of their Indigenous communities (Rangiwai et al., 2020b). In Year 1, lecturers steer students through the completion of assessments (Rangiwai et al., 2020b). However, in Year 2, students are supervised by voluntary experts that they choose themselves (Rangiwai et al., 2020b). In Year 2, students must approach and select a voluntary Indigenous Master Practitioner (IMP) (Rangiwai et al., 2020b). This person should be an expert in a particular field that relates closely to the field of knowledge and practice of the student; the IMP supervises the project (Rangiwai et al., 2020b). In Year 2, students are required to interview participants, and analyse the data, in order to inform and shape the community project.

Students must also approach and choose a voluntary supervisor—a person with a doctorate—who oversees the exegesis (Rangiwai et al., 2020b). The word exegesis comes from the Greek, to interpret and lead, and was first applied to scriptural analysis and later extended to refer to an explanation or expository discourse (Kroll, 2004). In the MAIK programme, the exegesis refers to an explanatory or expository text that documents the inception and implementation of the project, demonstrates connections between theory and practice, describes profound learning experiences through reflection and analysis, and identifies areas for future research. In preparing students for their project work, we ask them to ask themselves the following questions:

What is the purpose of the project? What do I hope to achieve?

How will my project fit into my cultural context?

How will my cultural and personal values, beliefs, and ideas influence my project?

What works of other practitioners, past and present, will influence my project?

What do I see as the strengths and weaknesses of my project?

What frustrations do I experience in achieving my goals for the project?

What limitations are inherent in the process, both technical and creative?

Where should the project be implemented (the physical location), and why?

How does my work make an original contribution to the field? (adapted from University of Otago, n.d.).

The following image is a map of the MAIK programme. The He Waka Hiringa Map is a guide for students to visualise and conceptualise their master's journey over Year 1 (orange) and Year 2 (green) (Rangiwai et al., 2020a). While the map does not include dates, the various sections of the map coincide with 5-day teaching intensives scheduled throughout 2020 and 2021 (Rangiwai et al., 2020a).

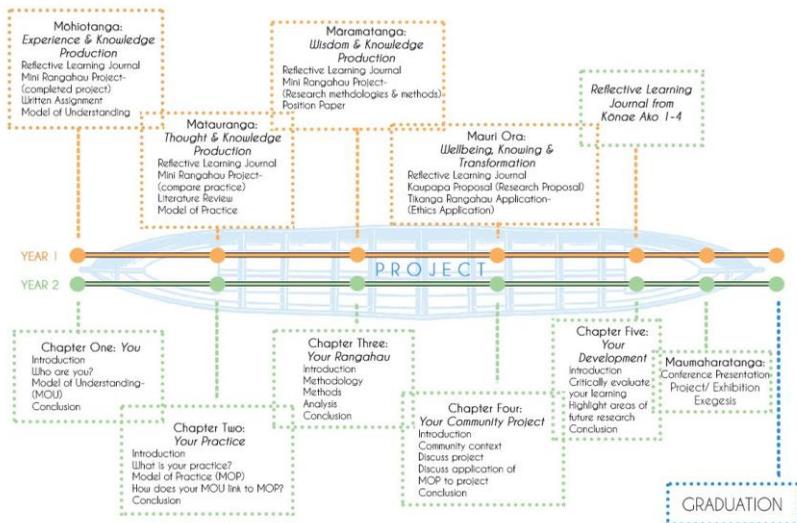


Figure 1: He Waka Hiringa Map (Rangiwai et al., 2020a, p. 6).

Each paper—Mōhiotanga, Mātauranga, Māramatanga, Mauri Ora—builds on and flows into the next—signified by the overlapping boxes (Rangiwai et al., 2020a). Also, each paper from Year 1 feeds into the final paper—Maumaharatanga—which consists of a project, an exegesis, and on-campus conference presentation (Rangiwai et al., 2020a). Fittingly, the primary written assessment for each paper may form the basis of draft exegesis chapters 1 through 4, while the reflective learning journal element directly informs chapter 5 (Rangiwai et al., 2020a). The waka represents the project which is central to the programme and is denoted in such a way that it overlaps both years; the project should be a significant contribution to a field of Indigenous knowledge and practice (Rangiwai et al., 2020a). Not only does the waka signify the project, but students should also consider that their respective communities accompany them on the journey; students, therefore, are

responsible for and accountable to their communities in far-reaching and intimate ways (Rangiwai et al., 2020a).

Importantly, students are also expected to publicly exhibit their project work in a way that is accessible to the community (Rangiwai et al., 2020a). With the restrictions and uncertainty around COVID-19, there is potential for students to exhibit in novel ways such as a virtual exhibition. For example, Feng (2020), discusses virtual exhibitions designed to inspire resilience in the face of COVID-19 in China (although these exhibitions were subjected to state surveillance). The Student Art Association Virtual Exhibition (SAAVE) (Best et al., 2020), provides an exemplar for the MAIK programme, should a virtual exhibition need to take place. A further, more local, example is the virtual exhibitions developed by Auckland Council Libraries (n.d.), some of which may be viewed here:

<https://www.aucklandlibraries.govt.nz/Pages/online-exhibitions.aspx>

Māori have always adapted to new technologies (Keegan & Sciascia, 2018) and using digital technologies as part of the research process (Roy & Uekusa, 2020) is now part of the MAIK experience (see Simati-Kumar & Rangiwai, 2020).<sup>1</sup> Given that *kanohi ki te kanohi* engagement is central to a Māori worldview (Hemara, 2000) and is also part of a Māori approach to research (Smith, 2012), the restrictions presented by COVID-19 pose some significant cultural and health challenges for MAIK students. O'Carroll (2013) argues "the idea of *kanohi ki te kanohi* is an important practice for Māori people and culture in that face-to-face engagement invokes physical and spiritual aspects of intimacy and connection" (p. 18). The physical practice of *kanohi ki te kanohi* maintains strong kin relationships (Mead, 2016) and is the basis for many *tikanga* (O'Carroll, 2013). Indeed, "*Kanohi ki te kanohi* sits at the centre of Māori

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, Simati-Kumar and Rangiwai (2020) explain the MAIK online learning plan as a response to COVID-19.

concepts and practices around communication” (O’Carroll, 2013, p. 4).

While the practice of *kanohi ki te kanohi* is essential to Māori society, Keegan (2000) argues that new technologies are dissolving the distance between people by allowing virtual forms of *kanohi ki te kanohi* to take place. Keegan (2000) opines that the internet allows Māori to maintain the practice of *kanohi ki te kanohi* in virtual ways. Digital technologies allow Māori to shift “*kanohi ki te kanohi* practices and rituals to the virtual space to empower their people with the ability and access to participate and engage” (O’Carroll, 2013, p. iii). O’Carroll’s (2013) research suggests that there is some potential for the term *kanohi ki te kanohi* to be expanded to include virtual forms of “face-to-face” communication such as Zoom. Indeed, “Māori have long been early adopters of communications technologies, which is a strong testament to the adaptive flexibility of Māori culture, society and its people” (O’Carroll, 2013, p. 271). Certainly, MAIK students will need to consider whether to conduct physical or virtual interviews, and Keegan (2000), O’Carroll (2013), and Keegan and O’Carroll’s (2018) work provides an argument for the use of technology which may be applied to research.<sup>2</sup>

Prevalent alternatives to traditional qualitative methods include online interviews, netnography—ethnographic study of online interactions (MacCarthy et al., 2020), and internet content analysis—qualitative analysis of online content (Blaine, 2019; Roy & Uekusa, 2020). As interviews are a required for the research component of the MAIK programme—which, of course, could be combined with a range of other methods—it is envisaged that online interviews would be an appropriate

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that at least 50% of the 2020 MAIK cohort belong to other Indigenous groupings and so they would need to explore the ways in which their cultural views about face-to-face engagement have been impacted by COVID-19 and how this might apply to research. Having said that, the contents of this paper should still be helpful to those students.

alternative to in-person interviews, especially in a COVID-19 context.

The abundance of video conferencing tools available offers the opportunity for researchers to engage with and draw data from participants in new ways (Archibald et al., 2020; Gray et al., 2020). Technologies such as Zoom—this is a commonly used technology in the MAIK programme—provide researchers with a cost-effective alternative face-to-face interviews (Gray et al., 2020). Zoom was found by Archibald et al. (2020), to be a preferred video conferencing platform. According to Gray et al. (2020), video conferencing platforms, like Zoom, were developed for cost-effective business communications and enhanced collaboration; they argue that these same benefits can be extended to research interviews. Concerning qualitative research interviews, Gray et al. (2020) identified the following benefits:

Convenience and ease of use

Enhanced personal interface to discuss personal topics

Accessibility (i.e., phone, tablet, and computer)

Time-saving with no travel requirements to participate in the research (p. 1292).

Renowned and distinguished Indigenous scholar Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith developed seven Kaupapa Māori research principles that will be re-interpreted here as a means of providing Kaupapa Māori-specific principles for conducting online interviews:

1. **Aroha ki te tangata:** The researcher ensures that aroha is demonstrated at all times with particular consideration for how tone and language may be misconstrued in an online setting as a result of delays caused by poor internet connection.

2. **Kanohi kitea:** Though face-to-face interviews might not be possible, the use of video conferencing platforms allows for online participation. Consideration must be given too to those who may not be able to participate using digital technology and may prefer, for example, a phone call, or a distance visit.
3. **Titiro, whakarongo... kōrero:** During an in-person interview, it is essential to look, listen, and then speak at an appropriate time. This is even more important in an online setting, as delays caused by poor internet connection may cause misunderstandings.
4. **Manaaki ki te tangata:** The researcher should understand that an interview conducted on Zoom, for example, might be considerably more draining for participants and so proper care should be taken to ensure participants are comfortable.
5. **Kia tupato:** It is always appropriate for researchers to be tread carefully and this could be even more important to recognise in an online setting as misunderstandings may be more frequent at times due to delays with the internet.
6. **Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata:** There is more potential to be misunderstood or for questions or words to be misconstrued online, so extra care to ensure that the mana of the participants is maintained at all times must be taken.
7. **Kia mahaki:** This principle is about being humble.<sup>3</sup>

Without an effective vaccine, COVID-19 will continue to impact our lives (Baker et al., 2020; Durheim & Baker, 2020; Wilson et al., 2020) which, could, of course, affect the research activities of MAIK students in

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<sup>3</sup> Those in the class who are not Māori must, of course, draw on principles from their own cultures and adapt these to an online interviewing context.

2021. While our future with COVID-19 is unclear, what is clear is that MAIK students, like all researchers, must be prepared to conduct research online. While this can seem to go against Indigenous cultural values, as demonstrated by the previous discussion around *kanohi ki te kanohi*, we must adapt to whatever is happening in the world. Indigenous people have adapted and survived, and COVID-19 and its effects on research for the MAIK programme is just a small example of how we are adjusting to an ever-changing world.

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