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# Responses to Covid-19 in Steiner Early Childhood Settings in New Zealand

## Report to SEANZ

Dr Neil Boland  
Dr Anita Mortlock

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# Responses to Covid-19 restrictions in Steiner early childhood settings in New Zealand

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## Introduction

Tēnā koutou katoa,

The year 2020 has brought unprecedented challenges to communities worldwide as the whole world wrestles with the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although New Zealand is reckoned to have managed the pandemic better than many other countries, there have still been serious consequences including for tamariki (children), whānau (families) and kaiako (teachers) in early childhood settings the length and breadth of the country.

Waekura, as the national body of Steiner early childhood education in New Zealand, has tried to support all Steiner early childhood settings to find their own best way through this uncertain time. Drawing on some of the initial thinking and resources provided by the International Association of Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE), Waekura members worked together closely to develop approaches to Covid-19 restrictions that placed the wellbeing of tamariki at the centre of their response. This meant Waekura members chose not to focus on delivery of curriculum content to tamariki homes or expect whānau to deliver or replicate Steiner early childhood curriculum at home. Instead kaiako focussed on encouraging parenting that supported tamariki wellbeing and resilience. They worked toward strengthening relationships and communication, and offered some insights into ways to accompany children and help them make sense of their experience, taking care not to add additional expectations on whānau which were unmanageable or added further stress to their lives.

Every community and every setting in New Zealand has had a different experience of the periods of lockdown and much information has been shared in meetings, over cups of tea, by phone or over social media. However, this information has remained largely anecdotal. To gain a fuller and more accurate picture of how the New Zealand Steiner early childhood movement has experienced the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, Waekura commissioned Dr Neil Boland and Dr Anita Mortlock to gather information and present it in a report which you are now reading. This report summarises responses gathered from Steiner early childhood teachers throughout New Zealand about pedagogical responses to the first lockdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and their experiences of the subsequent learning period. It explores if and how this continues to affect Steiner early childhood teachers and teachers' perceptions of its impact on tamariki and whānau.

The information was gathered during a single week in August, just before Auckland went back into a Level 3 lockdown. As such, it is a snapshot of a period of time which has passed, and we are aware that stressors for many families have increased over time. Nonetheless, I believe it offers a valuable insight into the resilience and strength of the movement nationally.

Ngā mihi nui,



Karen Affleck

Auckland, New Zealand, 25 September, 2020

## Background

What has become the Covid-19 pandemic emerged in early 2020 in China with cases being steadily identified around the world over the following months. Few countries or regions have emerged unscathed. The first case in New Zealand was announced on 28 February and there was a steady rise in numbers over the subsequent weeks. Learning from the experience of other countries, the New Zealand government decided to “go hard and go early” to break the cycle of community transmission. On 23 March, 2020, a Level 3 lockdown was declared throughout New Zealand, giving people two days to prepare for a Level 4 lockdown starting on 25 March.

The highest rating on a four-level scale (see Image 1), Level 4 required all early childhood facilities to close for the duration the level remained in place. In addition, all but ‘essential workers’ were required to stay at home, venturing out only to buy food, go to the pharmacy (all doctor’s appointments were online) or take exercise locally so long as distance from other people was maintained. All other workplaces were shut, with workers continuing online where possible. This remained in place for five weeks. Level 4 was rated by Oxford University’s Coronavirus Government Response Tracker as 96% restriction in force (Oxford University Blavatnik School of Government, 2020).

Everyone was told to identify their own ‘bubble’ – immediate contacts, often household members – and not mix with those in other bubbles, even close family members. Almost all travel ceased. The border was closed to everyone except returning New Zealanders and permanent residents. Weddings, funerals, tangihanga and other important events were cancelled or greatly restricted. Due to the raised health risks, visits to rest homes and hospitals stopped, including those to terminally ill patients.

**Image 1:** New Zealand Government’s stages of Covid level alert

## Stages of alert

### ALERT LEVEL ONE: PREPARE

Covid-19 in NZ, but contained

- Activate border measures
- Contact tracing
- Cancel mass gatherings of more than 500 people
- Stay at home if sick and report flu-like symptoms
- Intensive testing for Covid-19
- Physical distancing encouraged

### ALERT LEVEL TWO: REDUCE

Contained but risk of community transmission growing

- Entry border measures maximised
- Further restrictions on mass gatherings
- Physical distancing on public transport
- Limit non-essential travel around country
- Employer to begin alternative ways of working if possible (shift work, working from home etc)
- Business contingency plans activated
- High risk people to remain at home (over 70s, people with existing conditions)

### ALERT LEVEL THREE: RESTRICT

Heightened risk that disease not contained

- Travel in areas of community transmission limited
- Affected educational facilities closed
- Mass gatherings cancelled
- Public venues closed
- Alternative ways of working required and some non-essential businesses closed
- Non-face-to-face primary care consultations
- Elective surgeries and procedures deferred and healthcare staff reprioritised

### ALERT LEVEL FOUR: ELIMINATE

Likely that disease not contained

- People to stay at home
- Educational facilities closed
- All non-essential businesses closed
- Rationing of supplies and requisitioning of facilities
- Severe travel restrictions
- Major reprioritisation of healthcare services

Timeline of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic in New Zealand	
<b>28 February</b>	New Zealand reports its first case of Covid-19
<b>23 March</b>	New Zealand moves to Alert Level 3. Schools and ECE centres close to all children but those of essential workers
<b>25 March</b>	New Zealand moves to Alert Level 4
<b>27 April</b>	New Zealand moves to Alert Level 3. Children of essential workers and those who can't be at home are able to return to school and ECE centres
<b>14 May</b>	New Zealand moves to Alert Level 2. Schools and ECE reopen to all students
<b>8 June</b>	New Zealand moves to Alert Level 1. No cases of community transmission for 102 days
<b>12 August</b>	Auckland moves to Alert Level 3 after four cases of community transmission are picked up. The rest of New Zealand moves to Alert Level 2
<b>31 August</b>	Auckland moves to Alert Level 2.5. The rest of New Zealand remains at Alert Level 2
<b>22 September</b>	New Zealand moves to Alert Level 1 except Auckland
<b>24 September</b>	Auckland moves to Alert Level 2

A result of these restrictions was that young children throughout the country were locked down at home with their parents/caregivers with little notice, while teachers were confined to their own bubbles. For children, routines were abruptly altered; what was familiar was disrupted, contact with other children was greatly reduced (and for many children stopped). Suggestions, perspectives and resources from IASWECE and Waekura were shared with each centre on what could be done to help support children at this difficult time. Centres were then left free to interpret, adapt and use the resources, and advise teachers and whānau in a manner that suited their local context and communities. Contact between kindergartners and the community (and each other) became digital. This study seeks to discover how teachers in the 25 licensed Steiner early childhood centres in New Zealand met the challenges of the pandemic lockdown and gather information about its ongoing effects. It also asks to what degree the advice given was helpful.

In New Zealand, value was placed on relationships during the COVID-19 response. Early on, relationships were placed in the spotlight as “be kind” became the mantra of the country. The *whakataukī* or Māori proverb *He waka eke noa* states how, as a #teamof5million, we were all in this together. The reciprocal relationship of *whakawhanaungatanga*<sup>1</sup> became critically important as the connection between home and learning was experienced in different ways.

The International Association of Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE, 2020b) has asked the representatives from its member national bodies to investigate how teachers, children and communities were affected during lockdown, and what they did to bridge the situation till children

<sup>1</sup> The process of establishing relationships, relating well to others.

could once more attend early childhood care settings. Also of interest are the short-, medium- and long-term effects of this lockdown on children, teachers and communities (emotionally, socially, economically), if practices have changed as a consequence, if attitudes have changed, and what has been learned should this situation ever reoccur. In response to this, the researchers were asked by Waekura, the national early childhood body, to undertake research leading to this report.

As New Zealand is one of the countries considered to have been more successful than most at tackling the virus, this report is of value and interest to the international Steiner movement.

### Respondents and researchers

The respondents are all employed in Steiner early childhood settings in New Zealand. The invitation to participate was emailed to all settings by Waekura, with a request that details be passed on to all centre managers, teachers and assistants so they could take part in the questionnaires if they wished.

The researchers are academics in New Zealand universities with wide experience of early childhood education. Dr Neil Boland is senior lecturer at Auckland University of Technology and is a specialist in Steiner education. Dr Anita Mortlock works at the Victoria University of Wellington where she lectures and supervises students in early childhood education.

### Context

The study takes place in the context of Steiner early childhood services. These centres use a holistic pedagogy emphasising child-directed play and practical activity (Nicol & Taplin, 2017). They are spread throughout New Zealand, both in urban and rural settings. Some settings are attached to schools and comprise multiple groups with a number of teachers; others are smaller, single-room settings.

The survey opened on 4 August, 2020 and was paused on 11 August. When the survey began, it was intended to keep it open for two weeks, but on 11 August the government announced further restrictions due to a re-emergence of Covid in the community in Auckland which affected the provision of early childhood education. This would almost certainly have had an impact on the content of the responses. We reserve the option to open the survey again to gather data on how the second lockdown period affected children and teachers; this is being actively considered. This report documents responses to the first lockdown period only, gathered during the week of 4 August.

The lockdown period was often one of financial as well as social and professional strain for early childhood settings. The New Zealand government provided wage subsidies for affected businesses yet there have been multiple news reports of the financial consequences of the pandemic to the early childhood sector (Collins, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). The questionnaires did not seek information on financial effects of the lockdown, though did ask for information about enquiries and enrolments.

There were regular informational bulletins from the Ministry of Education throughout the period (2020) and information was shared by Steiner early childhood bodies worldwide (IASWECE, 2020a).

### Methodology

The data sought in this research is, to a degree, time sensitive. It needed to be gathered before teachers had 'forgotten' how lockdown affected them as individuals and as teachers. This was one of the main reasons why a survey methodology has been adopted.

- It allows the collection of data quickly and easily

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- It does not take up a lot of the respondents' time
- The data collected can be analysed swiftly and made into simple-to-read graphs
- Identifying and selecting respondents in this instance is straight forward, as usual demographic considerations such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture and age do not pertain to the study. Given the finite number of Steiner early childhood teachers in New Zealand, the link to the questionnaires could be sent to them all.
- Two surveys were distributed:
  - In the first, the majority of questions were multiple choice and involved a Likert scale. This had the advantage of speed of response and also of scoring and analysis. Some items were grouped into a multi-item scale for ease of answering. These advantages were balanced by responses being less nuanced and less individual.
  - The second survey contained a number of open questions. These allowed for personal responses, which have been analysed thematically.

Though small in scale, the questionnaires involve mixed methods, being both quantitative (Likert scale questions, able to be numerically analysed) and qualitative (open-ended questions, analysed thematically) (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

### Study design

In consultation with the body requesting the research, the vocabulary used in the questions was plain and direct and the questions themselves are as short as could be managed. Any specialist references could be easily understood by anyone working in the field. Loaded questions or ones leading the respondent towards a certain answer were avoided (Patten, 2017).

The design of the research (online questionnaires) was chosen out of respect for and consideration of the time pressure many teachers work under (Cumming, 2017). For the same reason, the questionnaires were designed to be able to be answered on a phone as well as a laptop. The project was suggested by Waekura and there were several rounds of consultation with them regarding the form and content of the questionnaire. It was reviewed and approved by AUTECH, Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (reference 20/193).

Steiner early childhood teachers – the respondents – are the group most likely to benefit from the research. The principle role of the respondents is one of sharing information so data can be gathered to provide an overview of how the Steiner early childhood movement as a whole has responded to and has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is hoped that this will help inform future actions inter/nationally as well as locally in each early childhood centre, especially should such a situation occur again (settings in Auckland have already gone through two periods of lockdown).

The opening screen of the online questionnaires was laid out as a consent form. In order to begin the questionnaire, respondents indicated their consent by ticking 'I agree', so providing evidence of consent.

Respondents in the online survey could exit the survey at any point and choose not to have their data recorded. Being anonymous, there has been no interaction between the researcher and respondents or between respondents, and power imbalances cannot come to the fore. The respondents come from all cultures and backgrounds. This was not a feature of the enquiry; no identifying questions were asked about gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture or belief.

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## Literature

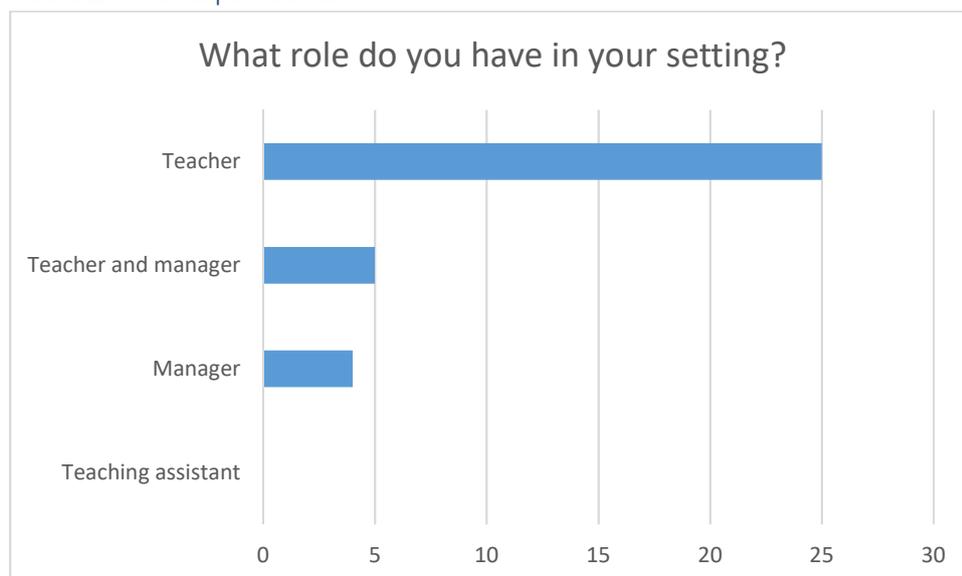
There is a scarcity of published research into early childhood responses to the pandemic, though likely many studies are in progress. The only New Zealand report we know of to date is Mitchell, Hodgen, Meagher-Lundberg and Wells's report from the University of Waikato's Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research which surveyed managers of early childhood settings nationwide (2020) to which we refer readers for additional context.

## Findings

In all, 36 teachers responded to the first, and shorter, questionnaire which asked questions which could be analysed and presented graphically, and 16 to the second which consisted of open-ended questions. This second set of question came from IASWECE and has been asked of Steiner early childhood settings in all member countries.

### Quantitative questions

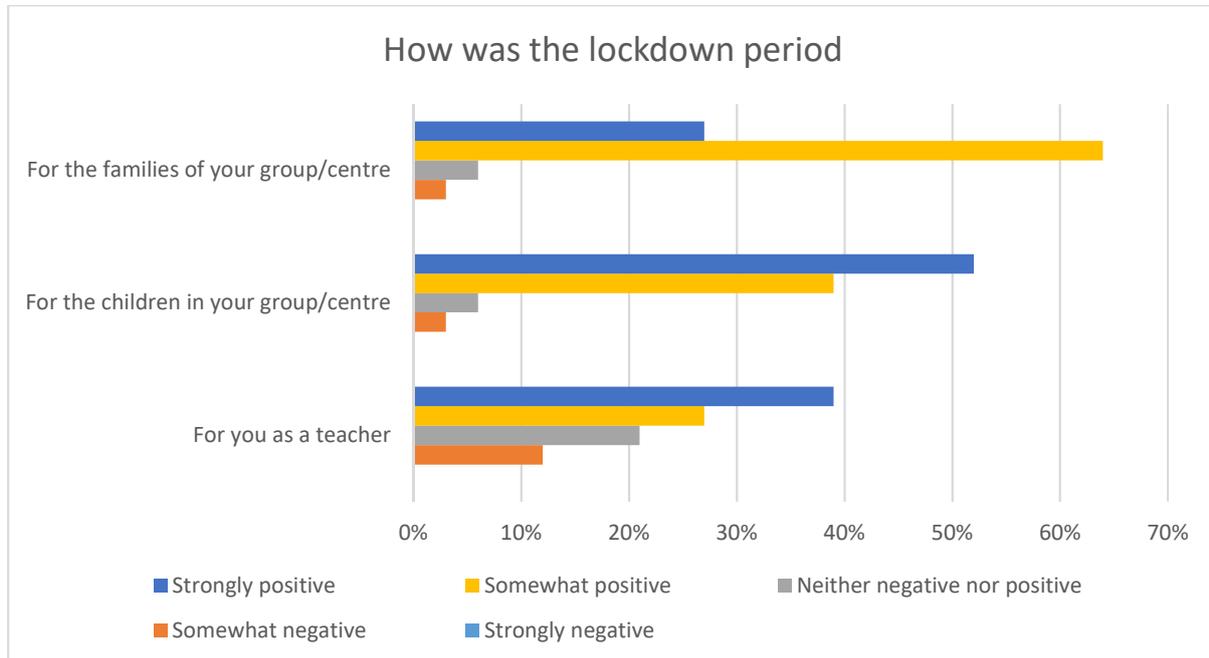
Table 1: The respondents



### Analysis

The large majority of respondents work as teachers. This response ratio was expected. In addition, the questionnaire was answered by a number of those who are both teachers and managers, and just managers. What was surprising was that no teaching assistants completed the questionnaire. Reasons for this are unclear. Three possibilities are that a) the questionnaires were not distributed to assistants (verbal enquires indicate that this was not the case), b) they were completed at staff meetings which the assistants did not attend, or c) the teaching assistants were for some reason not motivated to complete them.

Table 2: The lockdown experience



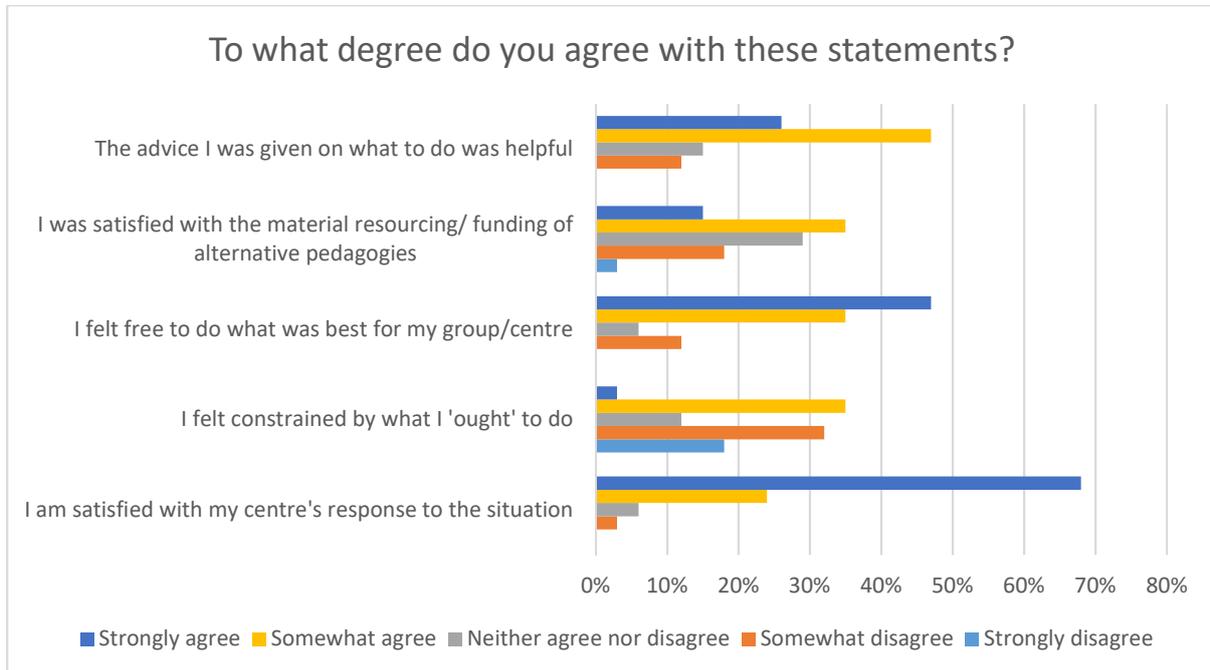
### Analysis

From this data, it is clear that the lockdown period for whānau, for children as well as for teachers was strongly positive. This is especially the case for families and children, with 91 % of respondents indicating that lockdown was positive or strongly positive, with the highest ratios for families’ lockdown experiences. This is a very strong indication that the slowing down of daily life and the opportunity for many families to spend time as a social unit for a period of weeks was highly beneficial. This mirrors accounts from beyond the early childhood sector (Victoria University of Wellington, 2020).

The lockdown experience for teachers was positive overall (66%) but more mixed, with 12% indicating that it was somewhat negative.

No socio-economic data was collected in the survey. It has been widely reported in the press that the pandemic has exacerbated inequalities in society with those better off managing well during lockdown and those less well-off being affected more negatively (Davison, 2020; Gauthier et al., 2020). It is possible that the positive impressions of the lockdown period are, to a degree, a reflection of this.

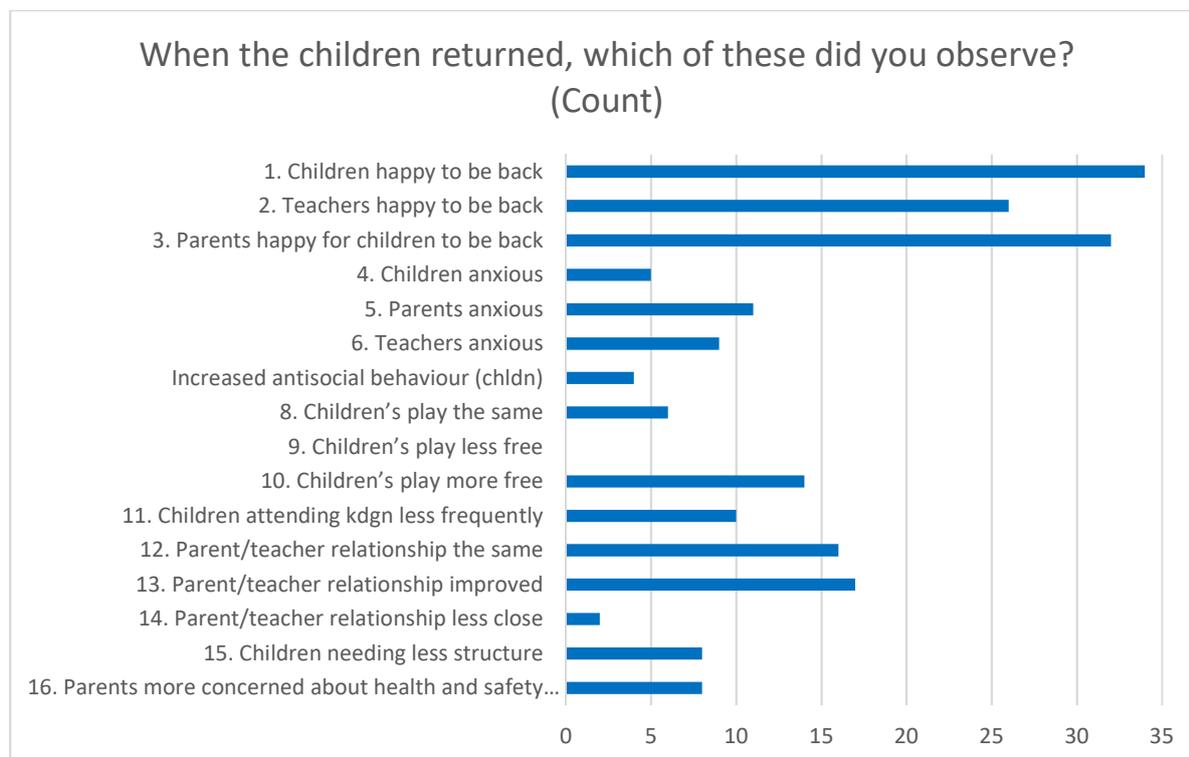
Table 3: Advice and support



Analysis

A similarly positive picture is indicated by responses to questions regarding support and advice and overall response. An overwhelming 92% were satisfied or strongly satisfied with their setting’s response to the situation (68% agreeing strongly) while 73% considered that the advice they received was helpful. Regarding pedagogical response, the replies were less clear. 88% considered themselves free to do what was best for their group/centre (12% disagreeing) while at the same time 38% felt themselves constricted by expectations of what they ‘ought’ to do (with 50% feeling unconstrained).

Table 4: The situation after lockdown

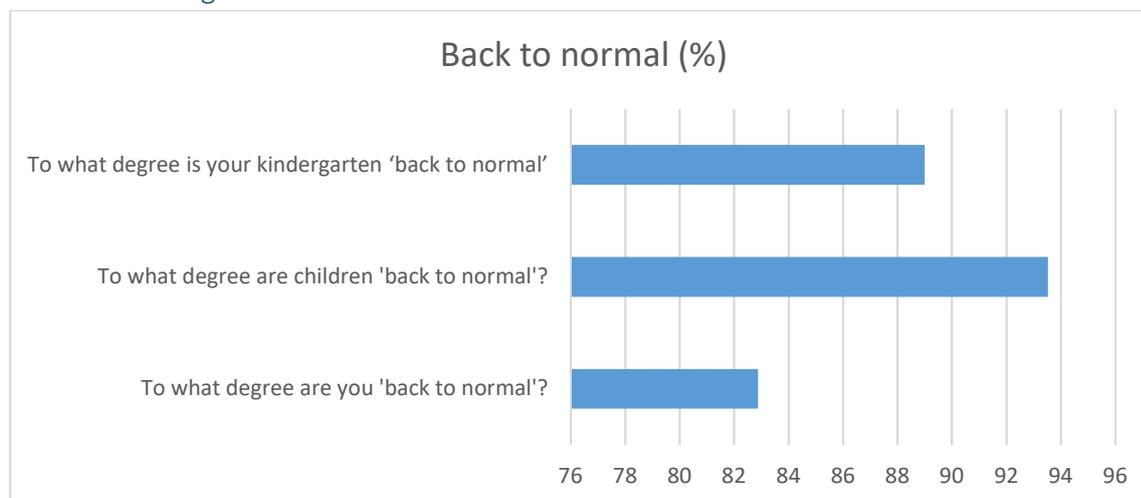


Analysis

In this set of questions, what is most striking are the positive aspects of returning. Children happy to be back (all responses), parents happy to send their children back (32/34 responses) and teachers happy to be back (26/34 responses). Parents (11 responses) were more anxious than teachers (9 responses) with teachers indicating that children were the least likely to show anxiety (5 responses). Regarding relationships, nearly all responses (33/34) rated the parent–teacher relationship the same or improved after the lockdown period. 20 responses indicated that the children’s play was as free or freer than before, with no one reporting that it was less free.

Some changes in behaviour were observable in children (4 replies, this is expanded below) and a number of parents were more concerned with health and safety policies than before (8 responses). That only 8 out of 34 replies indicated this increase in health concerns is perhaps comment worthy. It indicates that there is a significant level of parental trust in the professionalism of the teachers and their ability to meet health and safety requirements in the centres; it is also possible that reported lowering of attendance reported (10 out of 34 responses) is another aspect of this, where children were kept at home due to health concerns. A final reason could be that at the time of the survey young children were infrequently represented in the national statistics for those who caught the virus.

Table 5: Getting back to normal

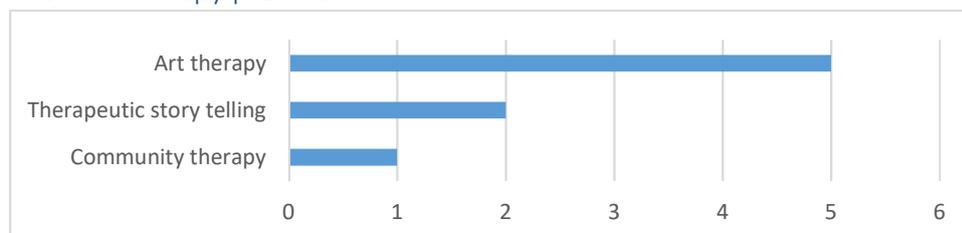


**Analysis**

As a snapshot just before New Zealand left Level 1 because of a renewed community outbreak of Covid-19, Steiner early childhood settings were to a substantial extent 'back to normal' (89%), particular the children (over 93%). Teachers were the least 'back to normal' (83%) – this figure includes those teachers who recorded much lower scores (teachers responses to this question ranged from 20% back to normal to 95%).

It would be interesting at some stage to investigate how and if this has changed during the further periods of pandemic restrictions.

Table 6: Therapy provision



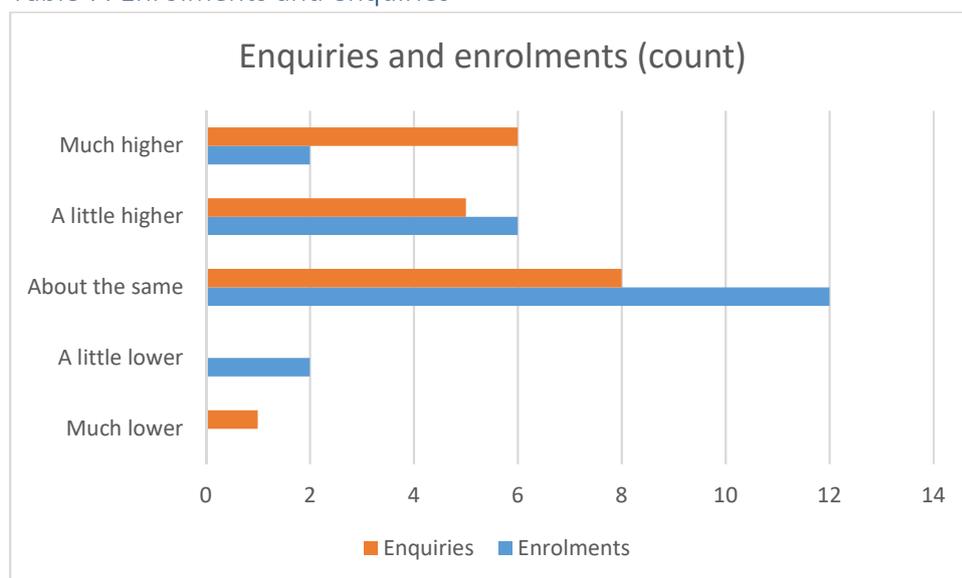
**Analysis**

Of the 34 respondents, eight said that their settings were providing specific therapies to children during the period of the questionnaire to help offset negative effects of the lockdown. The most commonly reported was art therapy (5). No additional information was given as to what form this took, if it was undertaken by a trained art therapist or how frequently it took place.

Therapeutic story telling is a form of narrative sometimes practised in Steiner early childhood settings in which situations are expressed metaphorically in story form to make a strong connection with the inner reality or the child. Such narratives are usually told by a trusted and respected individual (see Mihic et al., 2017; Perrow, 2012). The story mentioned was *The little gnome who had to stay home* (Perrow, 2020).

“Community therapy” was explained as the therapeutic value of community events after lockdown, in this instance, a shared community festival. This possibly is more accurately described as social activity, which certainly can have a positive effect, but would not fall under the umbrella of therapies.

Table 7: Enrolments and enquiries



### Analysis

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to record unemployment in New Zealand as well as a severe recession (BBC, 2020). These financial effects have apparently not affected enquiries and enrolments in Steiner early childhood settings as they have in other areas of the early childhood sector (Gerritsen, 2020).

### Qualitative questions

As well as a set of quantitative questions, early childhood teachers were asked to respond to a set of open questions for qualitative analysis. These included the questions sent to Steiner early childhood settings worldwide from IASWECE, the International Association of Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Education.

#### Q8: Have there been positives to lockdown for your centre or for you personally?

A significant majority (77% or 21 out of 27 respondents) observed increased wellbeing in themselves and others from extra time spent at home, increased family and community connections, and more opportunity to rest and reflect on the bigger picture. This reflects the responses in Table 2. Two indicative responses are given below:

*“Completely different perspective on 'the big picture', closer, warmer, more loving and supportive relationships between colleagues, teachers and children, teachers and parents/families; greater depth and care of community connections, less structured curriculum; more awareness and care of planet earth, a more open perspective and willingness to change from everyone; increased creativity in problem solving (adults); more willingness to give to others (adults); more appreciation of friends and family; greater support of each other;*

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*more appreciation of life and of the earth; greater enjoyment of positive experiences, increased gratitude; less fear; children very, very settled, more content, more tolerant, very happy to be together at kindergarten."*

*"... phoning parents during lockdown to check in deepened relationships."*

*"Children having had much more time with their families in their home, to connect."*

*"More family time during lockdown was a BIG bonus for many."*

Four respondents (who all identified themselves as managers) observed that lockdown presented them with an opportunity to improve systems and practices:

*"We have created more effective communication systems for our families via email and newsletters. We have more robust procedures and policies around Health and Safety."*

*"There's been.... more time to review paperwork - policies and procedures"*

*"The lockdown was generally a positive experience for our families. Some parents spoke about how much they valued and appreciated kindergarten when they returned; and that they are even more committed to Steiner education for their children after their lock down reflections. The lockdown also gave us time to work on the changes we are making to the way we undertake our assessments!!!"*

*"...Teachers have developed computer skills to be able to complete children's assessment work and communication with parents online."*

One respondent commented that the children in their group were significantly more independent, and another expressed gratitude for the New Zealand government's response to Covid-19. Another commented on positive effects the pandemic had had on community relationships:

*"Much closer relationships with some families because of the way we kept in contact with families and a specific focus on wellbeing for children, teachers and children. Rather than delivering lots of content for parents to do at home we decided to work with parents by phone and email and text to support their parenting."*

One respondent highlighted a dichotomy which has been reported on elsewhere in the press. Namely that the Covid-19 pandemic has intensified situations existing previously in society (Schifferees, 2020; Woolf, 2020), that those in society who were previously 'comfortable' (adequate housing, food availability, financially managing) experienced the lockdown period as positive, whereas those who were already suffering from inadequate or overcrowded housing, who were struggling financially or who were 'essential workers' (NewstalkZB, 2020) who remained working throughout the lockdown period as well as having responsibility for their children, experienced it much more negatively.

*"A beautiful time to connect with myself, my children and family. It was wonderful to call each of our families weekly during lockdown and see how they were doing and ask what support they needed. Mostly parents were cherishing their children and time together. Those that were finding it hard were parents who had extra demands from their work life and parenting at home. I've adjusted the amount of things I try to do in a day since lockdown, taking a much less hurried approach to things."*

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### Q9: How are you finding things in your centre at the moment?

Comments written in response to this question echoed the results indicated in Table 5 – that overall, the lockdown was perceived as positive for children, whānau and teachers in Steiner early childhood settings. The following are indicative responses showing positive situations in centres but strains and tensions in staff:

*“We have settled back into our routines and rhythms - life is very much back to normal.”*

*“Children overall seem to be very settled”*

*“It is going slowly back to normal. There are some parents without any work though, some children attend less days”*

*“We have recently changed the rhythm of our kindergarten day, the first time in 10 years as we found that having too many transitions for the young child was really challenging. We have simplified our day and seen much deeper play and children are more settled. When we came out of lockdown, children and parents were really glad to be back at kindergarten. The first two weeks were beautiful, then in week 3 the stressors of everyday life began to impact negatively on children. Hurried adults and fraught connections with more push back from the children. “*

*“We are doing term 1 and term 3 simultaneously. Teachers are tired and a little vulnerable.”*

This also affected teachers.

*“Things are feeling a little thin at present. Teachers are feeling etherically stretched through supporting the children's needs. Children who returned to kindergarten, 'topped up' from spending so much time at home with their families are feeling tired and more needing at the moment.”*

*“The children and their families are terrific however I am finding that I am feeling somewhat frustrated with some members of our teaching team... I am finding myself thinking looking forward to going home to my family more frequently now than before the rahui”*

### Q10: Have you observed any changes in the children?

A third of the respondents to this question (5 of 15) reported no changes, a third reported initial positive changes and a third reported some tiredness, anxiety or unsettled behaviour among children.

*“All of them seem to be doing great and enjoy to be back at kindergarten playing with their friends”*

*“The children returned to kindergarten after the lockdown rested and calm. They were all so gentle, emotionally settled and very happy to be back with their friends. There was an air of contentment and unity in our rooms. This has lessened during the term, but this may have been due to new children starting and the natural processes of social reconfiguration”*

*“Children with tendencies towards anxiety are more anxious than usual”*

*“Behaviour in the form of 'pushing back' the busyness of the world has increased as parents are back to the normal day to day hurried lifestyle of before lockdown”*

One respondent also noticed a change in the character of children’s play, possibly influenced by increased screen-based activities during lockdown:

*“... however I noticed a lot more play revolving around movies, YouTube from children who have come in from other centres as five year olds”*

#### Q11 Have you noticed any changes in your community regarding the parenting of children?

The large majority of responses to this question were positive, especially the effects of the Level 4 lockdown itself. This positivity has worn off a little as ‘normal’ life has resumed. Two respondents highlighted the tendency of lockdown to strengthen both the positive and the negative. This is similar to replies to question 8.

*“Initially most whānau seemed to have reconnected with their tamariki and it was very noticeable. Things have started to return to how they were, with whānau becoming busy again and tamariki tired.”*

*“For some parents it was the longest they had been with their children and enjoyed it. For others it highlighted challenges they are facing with parenting. Those children who are most at risk in our centre due to a number of factors may have heightened risk at home. The impacts of Covid on families is only now just starting to kick in with job losses and financial stresses. We have a few conspiracy theorists which has been unhelpful as we work in the calm middle space to help families feel welcome and safe in our kindergartens again. Parent evening and festival attendance has been higher than usual. Families seem to want and need community.”*

*“Parents seem to want to be involved more in their child's kindergarten life. There seems to be more of a need to create the community around kindergarten and the children. Community events such as working bees, festivals etc. have been well attended. My observation is that parents are feeling a little tired and thin at times with the parenting of their children.”*

#### Q12: What needs is this situation highlighting?

40% (6 of 15) reported the situation highlighted the benefits to children of slowing down and being connected with family.

*“For me, I think whānau time is so important. The extensive uninterrupted time at home brought whānau closer and more settled.”*

*“Our children and families generally thrived during lockdown. They were grateful for the communication we sent (the Waekura resources were invaluable here - we all enjoyed them, thank you!)....”*

20% (3 of 15) reported the situation highlighted vulnerabilities

*“The Covid situation highlights the vulnerability of life and how life can easily change”*

And a further 20% of responses (3 of 15) indicated that the situation highlighted the need for extra support around the kindergarten community through the provision of therapies, education material on parenting, and community building.

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*“Need for more access to therapies, for teachers, parents and children. More robust building of community and support around our children and families.”*

*“More parent education on parenting”*

The survey picked up on the presence of Covid-19 conspiracy theories in the community:

*“The impacts of Covid on families is only now just starting to kick in with job losses and financial stresses. We have a few conspiracy theorists which has been unhelpful as we work in the calm middle space to help families feel welcome and safe in our kindergartens again.”*

#### Q12: What are your burning issues?

33% (5 of 15) stated they had no burning issues or gave no response. 27% (4 of 15) identified issues relating to teaching practice and management of their schools:

*“We continue to work at deepening our understanding of anthroposophy and Steiner pedagogy in our kindergarten. We are very grateful for all the support Waekura has offered us to date. [A speaker’s] visit and continuing guidance has been invaluable for us, both in terms of our Steiner teaching practices and the documentation she has shared with us - her support is a touchstone for us all. We see the need to focus some attention on the working relationships within our teaching teams and in our Management Group. [We need to] consider how we can strengthen our financial wellbeing and sustainability. We would love any organisational, financial or administrative support the wider Steiner whānau has to offer in this regard.”*

*“The busyness of a full roll”*

27% (4 of 15) felt that general wellbeing and resilience of teachers and families was a burning issue:

*“My first priority is to relax, be happy and have a positive outlook regardless of the circumstances. I will also prepare for further changes in life.”*

*“How we keep the teacher’s etheric robust and resilient as these times are asking more of us and the general feeling of teachers [that they are] wearing a little thin,”*

One participant was concerned about the effect of social distancing and hygiene requirements on child development:

*“I am concerned in regards to the sense of touch, how it will be for children not to able to touch things, each other, etc.”*

Another recorded her perception of the governmental response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

*“Worldwide control and the underlying agenda”*

#### Q13: How can we at Waekura help?

The majority (60%) of respondents did not identify any help required while two voiced appreciation for the additional home learning resources provided by Waekura.

29% of respondees (3 of 15) requested support for kindergarten governance, management and pedagogy through challenging times:

*“Leadership in how we respond to these challenging times: how do we configure our kindergartens so that we are pedagogically consistent with the anthroposophical impulse and [be] financially sustainable.”*

*[Waekura should] “... Be a 'hub' of information, guidance and support for kaiako and communities, a central place to go for assistance. Support governance to value what is important for childhood and family life and for policies and decisions to allow kaiako to do what they do best. To share the slow pedagogy with the rest of the ECE sector.”*

Two teachers reinforced the importance of wellbeing resources such as therapy and parenting information.

*“Parent education to help families to see the importance of a slower, more relaxed pace of life”*

*“[Anthroposophical] nursing therapies for teachers, children and their families, creating resources, networking and support for teachers, articles for parents, etc.”*

And another mentioned the importance of researching the impact of screen time on young children.

*“The impact of the use of technology and screen time during the lockdown in Steiner communities is something we want to understand more about.”*

#### Q14 Anything else you'd like to add?

*“Gratitude for the support given by Waekura and the close connections between EC settings in the Steiner Waldorf movement”*

## Summary

### Key trends

Most respondents reported that things are now back to normal or are calm and settled in their centres.

One third of respondents observed no changes in children, one third observed positive changes, one third observed negative changes.

Many respondents perceived that the benefits of lockdown were that people were able to enjoy a slower pace of life and that families were able to spend more time together and foster deeper connections in their relationships. This has lessened a little over time as life has gained something of its former busyness.

A majority of respondents noticed an increased sense of happiness and contentment on the resumption of kindergarten after lockdown.

A majority of respondents expressed a desire to retain a slower pace and sense of contentedness coming out of lockdown.

However, there was a recurring theme that the initial positive effects appear to have waned somewhat and children and teachers are feeling more tired and stressed with the return to business as usual.

The importance of community support and connection has been highlighted through the experience of lockdown. Some noticed that whānau were more appreciative of the kindergarten and recognised its importance as a centre for community.

A smaller number of respondents reported negative effects of the Covid-19 lockdown for some whānau including increased anxiety and an increased experience of parenting challenges.

A small number of respondents state they would value help from Waekura to support strong governance, management, teaching and communities in the context of the current challenges.

There is interest in learning about the effects of screen-time, presumably as some children may have had increased screen exposure over lockdown.

## Conclusion

We hope that this report gives an insight into how Steiner early childhood settings in New Zealand have been affected by and have managed consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. For us as researchers, one of the most striking features is the positivity of the respondents which comes through the report and the resilience, commitment and dedication which they show to their students and communities.

This report is a snapshot of a small window of time in August 2020. The pandemic looks to be with us all for a long time to come. It will undoubtedly continue to have financial, educational, individual and societal consequences which we can only guess at. We hope that there will be aspects of this report which will help inform local or national planning and so support and benefit Steiner early childhood education in New Zealand into the future.

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Corresponding author: Dr Neil Boland, [neil.boland@aut.ac.nz](mailto:neil.boland@aut.ac.nz)