

Teaching and learning about the histories of Aotearoa New Zealand

School leaders and kaiako experiences with early curriculum implementation

He whakarāpopototanga | Executive summary

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In March 2022, curriculum content for teaching Aotearoa New Zealand's histories (ANZH) in the *New Zealand Curriculum*, and Te Takanga o te Wā (TTotW) in *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*, was released and gazetted for schools and kura to begin using in 2023.

This report provides insights into the thinking and practices of tumuaki (school leaders) and kaiako (teachers) from eight schools—four primary schools, one intermediate school, one composite school, and two secondary schools—as they began to implement the new curriculum content. Across the eight schools, we interviewed over 50 school leaders and teachers.

In this phase of our research, we explored these research questions:

- What aspirations do tumuaki and kaiako have for Aotearoa New Zealand's histories in localised curriculum?
- How do schools develop, navigate, and sustain relationships to support the Aotearoa New Zealand's histories curriculum content?
- How is localised (Aotearoa New Zealand's histories) curriculum content shaping how diverse students and teachers see themselves (their identity) in relation to the whenua and to other people?

Research demonstrates how people's identities—including cultural backgrounds—can influence their perspectives about, and responses to, Aotearoa New Zealand's histories curriculum and teaching (Dam, 2022; ERO, 2024; MacDonald, 2022; O'Malley & Kidman, 2018; Yukich, 2021). Some of the tumuaki and kaiako we interviewed identified as Māori, and some identified as Pākehā or tauīwi. For this reason, we invited tumuaki and kaiako to share what it meant for them as Māori, and/or Pākehā or tauīwi, for Aotearoa New Zealand's histories to be taught in their schools. For ease of reading, in the report we use one term, "tauīwi" to encompass Pākehā and tauīwi interviewees.

First reactions to the curriculum, through the lens of identity

Amongst the tumuaki and kaiako interviewed, initial reactions to the Aotearoa New Zealand's histories and Te Takanga o te Wā curriculum content were largely positive. Many were excited about the opportunities they saw for the curriculum to strengthen knowledge, identity, and connections to whenua. The nature of these connections, and their personal and cultural benefits, could differ depending on people's whakapapa; i.e., whether they primarily identified as Māori or as tauiwi. Kaiako and tumuaki saw the curriculum as generating more opportunities for learners to develop critical understanding of our histories, how they have shaped our present, and how this knowledge could be used to help shape the future. Participants were positive about the way the ANZH learning area foregrounded mātauranga Māori and te reo Māori, commenting on the usefulness of framing ideas through whakataukī. Some were excited by the "push" the curriculum would give for Aotearoa New Zealand's histories to be taught consistently across all schools.

Excitement about the curriculum content was tempered with some concerns. Māori participants were cautious about the level of critical awareness tumuaki and kaiako tauiwi would bring to implementing the curriculum. Some tauiwi felt anxious about their own or their colleagues' knowledge and capabilities to "get it right" in implementation.

Aspirations of kaiako and tumuaki for ākonga, whānau, hapū, and iwi

For tumuaki and kaiako, the histories curriculum content had inspired hope. Their aspirations for ākonga were often the same as their aspirations for whānau and communities: that learning Aotearoa New Zealand's histories would help develop critical understanding of our past and present, acceptance of and respect for all cultures, and feeling secure in one's identity, whakapapa, and connection to place.

Tumuaki and kaiako aspired to normalise mātauranga Māori in schools alongside other forms of knowledge. A number of recent reports have noted the positive impact that curriculum content derived from te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori has for ākonga Māori in terms of identity, te reo Māori and wellbeing (Bright et al., 2023; Nikora et al., 2022). Tumuaki and kaiako were noticing similar benefits for ākonga as they learned about their histories.

Tumuaki and kaiako hoped that the histories curriculum would help to change the hearts and minds of those within communities who have negative views about Māori and mātauranga Māori. Tumuaki and kaiako hoped that schools and communities would see and value the important contributions that hapū and iwi make, and help to ensure that hapū and iwi are properly resourced when they do choose to engage with schools.

Aspirations of kaiako and tumuaki for themselves, their schools, and for Aotearoa New Zealand

The Aotearoa New Zealand's histories curriculum held personal as well as professional significance for the tumuaki and kaiako we interviewed. For many, this included exploring their own whakapapa and ancestry, as well as their personal and family connections to national and local histories. Many were conscious of gaps that needed to be filled in their own histories knowledge, as well as in the histories knowledge of whānau and the community. Many tumuaki and kaiako were also working on building their knowledge and confidence to integrate te reo Māori and mātauranga Māori into their teaching practice.

Tumuaki and kaiako aspirations for their schools included building an inclusive and empathetic learning environment, embedding localised histories across the curriculum, having a clear progression for learning, and having a positive reputation in the community.

Ultimately, at a societal level, tumuaki and kaiako hoped that teaching Aotearoa New Zealand's histories would support greater understanding of Māori experiences and perspectives, a greater level of comfort with multiple perspectives, and pride in our individual and collective identities. They had aspirations around eliminating racism, honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and building critical citizenship capabilities.

Relationships to support teaching Aotearoa's histories

All the schools had worked on developing their relationships with hapū and iwi and saw this as essential for teaching Aotearoa New Zealand's histories. The depth and longevity of these relationships varied. All schools valued and wanted to continue to develop and nurture these relationships. Other key relationships that tumuaki and kaiako saw as essential were the relationships between staff within the school, and between school and whānau. Some schools were working together as Kāhui Ako to implement Aotearoa New Zealand's histories. Others were interested in strengthening connections with other schools to share ideas and experiences around teaching Aotearoa New Zealand's histories.

Discussion

Many of our findings resonate with previous research that has documented how educators, and the wider public, think about the teaching of these histories (Bright et al., 2021; ERO, 2024; Rangahau Mātauranga o Aotearoa | New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2021). Most educators have shown support for the curriculum content, recognising it addresses a longstanding gap in teaching the histories of these lands and its people, especially for Māori.

The tumuaki and kaiako we interviewed appreciated the clarity, direction, and mandate offered by the new curriculum content. Schools that were already far down the track and had embedded histories into their curriculum felt affirmed and encouraged to continue to build on what they were doing. Schools that were at the start of their journey liked the push and direction the curriculum gave them for knowing what to focus on.

With the social sciences learning area due to be redrafted again in 2025, the shape and focus of Aotearoa New Zealand's histories within this learning area remains to be seen. We hope that the aspirations shared by participants, and the potential for transformation identified in this research, will be sustained through the rewriting process.

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