

Conceptualising Māori and Pasifika Aspirations and Striving for Success (COMPASS)

Executive summary



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The COMPASS project is part of NZCER’s Te Pae Tawhiti Government Grant programme of research. It is also aligned to the broad goals and aspirations of NZCER, in that its overarching purpose is to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the notion of Whakaterere Tōmua—Wayfinding.

The COMPASS project has examined the ways kaiako, ākonga, and whānau navigate educational experiences and contexts. Using quantitative and qualitative data, COMPASS focused on examining the social-psychological conditions for school success from the perspectives of Māori and Pasifika students ($n = 5,843$), Pasifika whānau members ($n = 362$), and kaiako Māori ($n = 311$) from 102 schools across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Study 1 identified a range of motivational and engagement clusters (Flourishing, Thriving, Striving, Surviving, Struggling), which were examined alongside students’ educational and wellbeing outcomes. We found that, predominantly, Māori and Pasifika learners were flourishing, thriving, or striving in our study. They were motivated to learn, engaged in classroom activities and discussions, felt supported, and were proud of their cultural status.

Study 2 identified a range of features and functions of role models who support ākonga Māori. From a Māori worldview, role models are like poutokomanawa—they are people who hold the whare up, connect the people to their cultures and futures, and at the same time embody the traits of people ākonga aspire to be.

Study 3 identified qualities and practices that Pasifika learners and families perceive as important to supporting Pasifika success. Central to the success of Pasifika learners is the establishment of partnerships and relationships with Pasifika communities that focus on sharing information about the child’s learning and having a collective vision for their future.

Study 4 identified insights by kaiako Māori on schooling conditions that make a positive difference to Māori learners. Kaiako insights also offered a nuanced perspective on educational success and flourishing ākonga, one that encompassed a traditional view of academic support and success, alongside a culturally specific and contextualised one. To kaiako, pathways to success for ākonga Māori are founded on whanaungatanga, connectedness and manaakitanga, reciprocal care and concern.

Taken together, the four studies identified critical factors that serve as important punga (anchors) in the educational journeys of ākonga:

- strong and positive motivational beliefs about learning, as well as participation in learning experiences that are culturally embracing, aspirational, and future-oriented
- having strong and positive networks of support and role models, both in and out of school, who enable and embody success for ākonga
- home–school partnerships that are built on mutual care, respect, and a collective vision for ākonga and their communities
- school-wide conditions and teaching practices that are strength-based, ambitious, and contextually unique to the needs of Māori and Pasifika ākonga.