

# Chapter 1 Introduction: Scanning policy and curriculum horizons

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*E taea te piki te ngaru o te moana.  
The swell of the sea can be overcome.*

This whakataukī signals our optimism about launching into uncharted waters to generate new knowledge.

Young children’s right to have their heritage/home languages respected in educational settings is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)<sup>1</sup> and in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2008). Aotearoa New Zealand is a signatory to both. Teachers, as duty bearers of children’s rights, are able to use the UNCRC as a useful benchmark alongside the principles of *Te Whāriki*, the New Zealand early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996). These documents can guide policies that protect, promote and develop an ECE centre’s practices and ensure they are responsive to children’s use of heritage/home languages.

This chapter provides an overview of policy and curriculum documents relevant to teaching and research with young children who learn

in more than one language. We include 2013 census data and related considerations that defined the rationale for, and the parameters of, the present project. Finally, we offer provocations for the trends, challenges and opportunities for teachers as they respond to the increasing diversity of languages used by the children and families with whom they partner in ECE settings.

### ***Policy and curriculum considerations***

The UNCRC established human rights standards for the status and treatment of children. As a signatory to the UNCRC, the New Zealand Government is obligated to ensure and protect a child's identity, values and right to use her or his home/heritage languages. The UNCRC states:

States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to: ... (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own. (Article 29[c])

In addition, the UNCRC specifically promotes the protection of indigenous languages:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language. (Article 30)

Moreover, the UNCRC signals a responsibility to listen to children's views and hear children's voices: "States Parties shall assure the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in matters affecting the child" (Article 12, 1).

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples also sets out obligations for the protection of and provision for indigenous peoples' intergenerational transfer of languages (Article 13.1). This declaration was endorsed by the New Zealand Government in April 2010.

When considering the rights of children who learn in more than one language in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi), signed in 1840 by British Crown representative William Hobson and more than 500 Māori chiefs, is an important overarching covenant. Most of the Māori chiefs signed the Treaty document that was written in te reo Māori, which guarantees possession and protection of taonga. In 1986 the Māori Language Board of Wellington pointed out that taonga (“valued customs and possessions”) includes te reo Māori (the Māori language) (Orange, 1987, p. 250).

With the passing of the Māori Language Act in August 1987, te reo Māori was finally recognised as an official language of Aotearoa New Zealand, and the Māori Language Commission was set up to promote and supervise te reo Māori (Te Taura Whiri, 2015). Guided by Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and recognising the national status of te reo Māori, we acknowledge that attention to te reo Māori and tikanga Māori is a priority.

Freedom to use other home/heritage languages as well as Aotearoa New Zealand’s official languages of English, te reo Māori and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) is protected, too, by the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, according to which, the rights of a minority group include the right to “use the language, of that minority” (Ministry of Justice, 1990, Part 2, Article 20).

However, at present in Aotearoa New Zealand languages other than English, te reo Māori and NZSL have no official status, yet researchers contend that teachers and families have a responsibility to progress opportunities for heritage/home language survival and usage in both home and educational settings (Cummins, 2000; May, 2011). Attempts have been made by the Human Rights Commission (2008) to draft language policies, but these are yet to be made official. The report *Languages in Aotearoa New Zealand* by the Royal Society of New Zealand (2013) made the point that most of the world has always been multilingual and that efforts have been made to promote languages policies elsewhere.

Early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand has a history of progressing and negotiating the choppy waters of social justice issues. A current policy goal for ECE is to increase participation (specifically, enrolment numbers) in the diverse range of ECE services

present in early childhood services in Aotearoa New Zealand (Meade & Podmore, 2010).

In 2013 the Government specified 10 outcomes the public sector were expected to achieve within 5 years. These included one for ECE, which focused on participation, setting a target that in 2016 “98% of children starting school will have participated in quality ECE” (Ministry of Education, 2015). The State Services Commission reported steady progress towards this target, and that the Ministry of Education was “intensifying engagement with priority communities in order to reach the 98% target in 2016” (State Services Commission, 2015).

This policy goal, alongside rights and Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations, led us to question how young children who learn in more than one language experience participation in early childhood education. How might Articles 29(c) and 30 of the UNCRC be enacted in early childhood settings? Participation in this sense is a more dynamic concept, drawing on sociocultural and sociological childhood framings (Harvey, 2013).

The aspirations and principles of *Te Whāriki*, the national early childhood curriculum, are paramount considerations when working with young children who learn in more than one language, and their families. *Te Whāriki* is bicultural in both name and emphasis, stating that

In early childhood education settings, all children should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritages of both partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9)

Part B of *Te Whāriki* is written in te reo Māori and is specifically designed for Māori-medium services.

The curriculum aspirations for children “to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society” (p. 9) emphasise the importance of belonging and identity to infants’ and young children’s learning. The aims and focus of this study are consistent with, and draw upon, the aspirations, principles and goals of *Te Whāriki*. All strands of the curriculum were relevant to research with children who learn in more than

one language. The principles of *empowerment, family and community, relationships, and holistic learning and development* provided important navigation points on the horizon to guide this study.

Furthermore, the *Te Whāriki* strand of Communication specifies that children should experience the languages, stories and symbols of their own and other cultures. Within this strand, two learning outcomes are “confidence that their first language is valued” and “an appreciation of te reo as a living and relevant language” (p. 76). Examples of reflective questions include:

In what ways is Māori language included in the programme? To what extent do adults include phrases from children’s home languages when talking with them? ... What opportunities are there for children to hear stories, poems, chants, and songs? How well do these connect to the child’s culture? ... How is the use of community languages incorporated into the programme? (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 76)

Throughout *Te Whāriki*, readers can find similar questions for rich guidance on inclusive practices to support heritage and home languages.

Several policy documents also inform practice by specifying plans for the educational success of Māori and Pasifika<sup>2</sup> learners. *Ka Hikitia: Accelerating Success 2013–2017: The Māori Education Strategy* has the vision of “Māori enjoying and achieving success as Māori” through “an engaging and enjoyable educational journey that recognises and celebrates their unique identity, language and culture” (Ministry of Education, 2013b, p. 13). One of its goals reminds early childhood teachers to encourage participation in and the use of te reo Māori for learning. Another document, *The Pasifika Education Plan 2013–2017*, promotes the vision of all Pasifika children being able to participate, engage and achieve in education “secure in their identities, languages and cultures” (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 3).

In addition, *The New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium Teaching and Learning in Years 1–13* states that “students’ identities, languages, abilities, and talents are recognised and affirmed” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9). This is the curriculum that children go on to experience in schools. It includes the view that Aotearoa New Zealand as a society should be able to engage at least with the multilingual Asia–Pacific region.

We planned this research to understand in greater depth how learning and teaching for young children who learn in more than one language in Aotearoa New Zealand might be recognised and enhanced. The context of the study was Auckland, the largest city in Aotearoa New Zealand and one that has recently been ascribed super-diversity status by the Royal Society of New Zealand (2013), exemplified by recent census data.

### ***Ethnicities and languages: census data***

Learners in Aotearoa New Zealand are increasingly likely to speak more than one language. This nationwide trend is most evident in the Auckland region (Statistics New Zealand, 2006, 2013). Initially, data from the 2006 census endorsed the timeliness of the present study, and more recently data from the 2013 census provided further evidence of ethnic and language diversity. Table 1.1 provides data from the 2013 census showing that diversity is particularly evident within the Auckland region. European (Pākehā), Māori, Pasifika and Asian people are the most prevalent groups, with notably high proportions of the country’s total Pasifika and Asian people residing in Auckland.

Table 1.1: Ethnicity in New Zealand in 2013

Ethnic group	Auckland		New Zealand		Auckland as a proportion of NZ
	Count	%	Count	%	%
European	789,306	59.3	2,969,391	74.0	26.6
Māori	142,767	10.7	598,602	14.9	23.9
Pacific peoples	194,958	14.6	295,941	7.4	65.9
Asian	307,233	23.1	471,708	11.8	65.1
Middle Eastern / Latin American / African	24,945	1.9	46,956	1.2	53.1
Other	15,639	1.2	67,752	1.7	23.1
Total people specifying ethnicity	1,331,427	110.8*	4,011,402	111.0*	33.2
Not elsewhere included	84,123		230,646		36.5
Total people	1,415,550		4,242,048		33.4

Note:

\* Due to multiple identification (individual respondents stating more than one ethnic group) percentages total more than 100 percent.

The languages spoken most widely throughout Aotearoa New Zealand, as recorded in the 2013 census, are: English, Māori, Samoan, Hindi and northern Chinese (Mandarin). In Auckland there is a high concentration of Hindi, Northern Chinese and Samoan speakers (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2: Top 12 languages spoken in New Zealand in 2013

Language	Auckland		New Zealand		Auckland as a proportion of NZ
	Count	%	Count	%	%
English	1,233,633	95.6	3,819,969	97.8	32.3
Samoan	58,200	4.5	86,406	2.2	67.4
Hindi	49,518	3.8	66,312	1.6	74.7
Northern Chinese	38,781	3.0	52,263	1.3	74.2
Māori	30,927	2.4	148,395	3.8	20.8
Yue	30,681	2.4	44,625	1.1	68.6
Sinitic	30,282	2.3	42,750	1.1	70.8
Tongan	26,028	2.3	31,839	0.8	81.7
Korean	19,365	1.5	26,373	0.7	60.8
French	17,433	1.4	49,125	1.3	35.5
Tagalog	14,925	1.2	29,016	0.7	51.4
Afrikaans	13,992	1.1	27,387	0.7	51.1
Total people stated	1,316,262	134.1*	3,973,359	101.7*	

Note:

\* Due to multiple identification (individual respondents stating more than one ethnic group) percentages total more than 100 percent.

Nationally, the number of Hindi speakers increased significantly, and most markedly in Auckland, between the 2006 and 2013 censuses. For example, in 2006 there were 34,614 Hindi speakers in Auckland, but by 2013 there were 49,518, an increase of 43 percent. Of notable concern is a consistent decrease in te reo Māori speakers in over the last decade. The number of te reo Māori speakers fell by 12,132 between 2001 and 2013, with a recent decrease of 8,715 between 2006 and 2013. Given that te reo Māori is the only indigenous language of Aotearoa New Zealand, reversing this trend is an urgent challenge for teachers, families and policy makers.

## **Trends, challenges and opportunities**

The authors of the longitudinal study *Growing up in New Zealand*, which was based on a sample of households in Auckland, reported additional information about diversity of languages. Morton et al. (2014, p. 52) released findings from parent interviews which indicated that by 2 years of age 2,514 (40 percent) of children understood two or more languages and 431 (7 percent) understood three or more languages. The majority of children—6,090 (96 percent)—understood English; 763 (12 percent) understood te reo Māori; 464 (7 percent) understood Samoan; 302 (5 percent) understood Tongan; and 258 (4 percent) understood Hindi.

Findings specifically for Māori children in the study showed that by age 2 years more Māori children (60 percent) *could not* understand te reo Māori than *could* understand te reo Māori. Consistent with our concerns already expressed, these authors contended that the future of te reo Māori is strongly connected both to the capability of families with infants to speak te reo Māori in their homes, and to the use of te reo Māori within educational and other settings (*Growing Up in New Zealand*, 2015). These findings offer challenges to early childhood teachers, families, policy makers and researchers.

The Royal Society of New Zealand (RSNZ) highlighted rights and obligations relevant to children and families in their inquiry into the major issues facing language practices given the diversity within New Zealand. The RSNZ identified Auckland as a super-diverse city and made a case for the development of a languages policy as a way to support New Zealand's transition to a multilingual and multi-literate country (Royal Society of New Zealand, 2013). The RSNZ raised questions for policy and practice about who might take up the responsibility, alongside families, to protect and promote a range of languages. Clearly, with a policy emphasis on participation, ECE centres ought to shoulder some of this responsibility. For speakers of minority languages, English-medium settings that require children to leave their home/heritage language at home would offer little in terms of bilingual children's cognitive and language development.

Ways to address the diversity of languages may be over-simplified in some centres' languages policy statement—if they have one—and also in pedagogy. These over-simplifications risk leading to diversity

becoming invisible. This was the case with the annual information about children and staff that the Ministry of Education required ECE centres and services to report up until July 2013. These recorded a child's ethnicities but excluded their languages—although teachers were asked to report the languages they used for teaching. Ethnic identity is a broad indicator and may not accurately reflect languages spoken. In this way, the richness of language resources children have for future learning success was not captured or addressed.

Subsequently, from 2014 the Ministry of Education has progressively introduced a new digital data collection procedure for ECE services. This Early Learning Information system (ELI) included the allocation of a National Student Number (NSN) unique to each child, and directed teachers to identify and record the languages spoken in each enrolled child's home (Ministry of Education, 2013a). The ELI continues recording teachers' approximations of their use of te reo Māori, Pasifika and Asian languages in their services. One limitation was that relatively few services were using this system in 2014. However, the ELI questions potentially open up conversations about languages used at home and may act as a prompt for an exchange of information between parents and teachers about home and centre support for bilingualism.

In general, then, ECE statistics are gradually including Māori and Pasifika languages, and more extensive data are being collected. Our current study covered a wide range of languages, including te reo Māori, Pasifika languages, English, and all languages children spoke at home.

### ***Rationale for the study***

When we developed this study there was a dearth of detailed, consistent data within and across ECE centres on the languages spoken by children in ECE centres and at home with their families. Given the increasing responsibilities ascribed to ECE centres by policy and curriculum, the issue arose as to what might be considered valued outcomes by teachers and families for children who learn in more than one language.

In summary, this chapter has scanned aspects of the policy and curriculum horizons and presented statistical data on languages and

ethnicities that pertain to supporting children who learn in more than one language. The next chapter provides an overview of the literature and theoretical positions that led to the present study and specifies three overarching research questions.

*If you talk to a man [sic] in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.*  
(Nelson Mandela)

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## Endnotes

- 1 See <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/44/a44r025.htm>
- 2 Migrants and/or their descendants from the Pacific Islands now living in Aotearoa New Zealand.