

TE HONONGA AKORANGA

COMET



Submission on the inquiry into learning support for ākonga Māori

Submission 099/19
Prepared on behalf of COMET Auckland, February 2022

Whakatauāki

E kore e taea e te whenu kotahi ki te raranga i te whāriki kia mōhio tātou ki a tātou.

Mā te mahi tahi o ngā whenu, mā te mahi tahi o ngā kairaranga, ka oti tēnei whāriki.

I te otinga me titiro tātou ki ngā mea pai ka puta mai.

Ā tana wā, me titiro hoki ki ngā raranga i makere nā te mea, he kōrero anō kei reira.

- Kūkupa Tirikatene

The tapestry of understanding cannot be woven by one strand alone.

Only by the working together of strands and the working together of weavers will such a tapestry be completed.

With its completion let us look at the good that comes from it.

And, in time we should also look at those stitches which have been dropped, because they also have a message.

About COMET Auckland

[COMET Auckland - Te Hononga Akoranga](#) is an independent charitable trust and Auckland Council's CCO focused on education, skills, and lifelong learning across Auckland and, increasingly, other parts of the country. Our latest Statement of Intent is [here](#).

Briefly, our work involves:

Sector leadership – mapping data and evidence, working with sector leaders to identify and prioritise the most crucial areas of focus, and connecting people around that common agenda, to plan collaborative action.

That can then lead to advocacy or changes to partners' business as usual, or sometimes to planning and trialling new ways of working (incubation projects).

These incubation projects generally develop through scoping and planning to trialling, and then implementation and evaluation, with the goal of handing them on once they are fully developed so we can move on to focus on another part of the system.

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the submission on the inquiry into learning support for ākonga Māori. We identify this area as key to supporting the educational outcomes for ākonga Māori. This submission has been assembled based on our collective knowledge and experience and our ongoing engagement with stakeholders, including educators, community leaders, employers, parents, and students. We are interested in presenting an oral submission when that time comes around.

Aotearoa New Zealand is becoming more unequal. There is greater disparity in all social metrics, including wealth, health, education, and employment. There is also greater recognition that our education system does not serve Māori as they are still disproportionately over-represented in negative metrics. We know that Māori learners are innately capable and recognise that the education system needs transformation for Māori to realise their potential. Targeted action is required to lift those under-served by the system so our society can thrive.

COMET Auckland has established a number of engagement opportunities with Māori educators and learners who have given feedback on a number of priorities listed in this inquiry.

Barriers for ākonga Māori to succeed in education

We know that there are many barriers in the current education system that continue to limit the opportunity for ākonga Māori to realise their full potential. We also know that how ākonga Māori perform in the compulsory education sector will directly impact their future. Therefore, addressing such barriers must continue to be a main priority and focus for the Ministry of Education.

COMET Auckland held a number of workshops to identify barriers for ākonga Māori. These comments from a recent Tāmaki Makaurau Education forum and online panel discussions that we held with rangatahi Māori. Here are the barriers they identified:

- Streaming classes based on academic abilities
- Racism in schools
- Tokenism
- Unstable housing and socioeconomic factors
- The need for Māori representation in Senior Management and Board of Trustees
- Deficit thinking
- The attitudes of Senior Management
- Eurocentric Education System
- Disconnection between school and whānau
- The capacity of some teachers to shift outcomes for Māori students
- The need for strong and healthy relationships
- Decision makers are too one-sided in decision making.
- Dominant western practices.
- Negative stereotypes

- Resourcing
- The need to train and employ Kaiako Māori.
- A lack of opportunities for Kaumātua/Elders to come into school
- Lack of Māori voice
- Negative stereotypes, so our Māori students do not feel proud to be Māori
- Disconnected from their marae
- Māori kids learn at kura, but whānau cannot support at home
- Positive role models, particularly for academic pathways
- Māori teachers are siloed, stretched, and under-resourced.
- Career pathways for ākonga Māori need to be a priority

The importance of te reo Māori

The opportunity to learn te reo Māori is important for all ākonga Māori because it supports tamariki to connect with their identity. It gives them a sense of purpose and strength in their well-being, essential for learning.

There are also benefits to ākonga Māori in te reo Māori being part of core curriculum for all children. This sends a clear message to ākonga Māori that their language is valued by the school and the nation. It is also likely to increase inter-cultural understanding in the class, which in turn can contribute to addressing the subtle and overt racism that ākonga Māori often experience in mainstream schools.

We believe that te reo Māori should be fully resourced and strengthened in schools. There are several ways in which te reo Māori can be reinforced in schools, such as language opportunities, tikanga, whakapapa, local Māori history, and the importance of marae to support children's learning. This is also a way of supporting tamariki Māori with culturally responsive learning environments.

Te Ahu o te Reo has been a successful way to build the knowledge and skills of those teachers who have been able to participate, so they can more effectively incorporate te reo Māori in their teaching and learning. However, it cannot reach all teachers immediately and it will take time for teachers to build enough skill to effectively teach te reo Māori as a language. Meanwhile, the government could consider funding other existing programmes, including Te Reo Tuatahi. Note that COMET Auckland has no financial or programme interest in Te Reo Tuatahi. However, part of our role is to look at work that is making a difference for Auckland learners. Having observed the programme in action, heard from stakeholders and seen the results of an external evaluation, we note that Te Reo Tuatahi is achieving outcomes in three areas. Firstly, children are gaining knowledge and skills in te reo Māori – this happens immediately, in contrast to the longer-term effects on students from purely teacher competency-focused programmes like Te Ahu o te Reo, because children are taught by fluent language assistants. Secondly, teachers build both knowledge of the language and also skills and methodologies for teaching it because they are in the classroom working alongside the language assistants and are also reinforcing the learning throughout the rest of the week. Thirdly, a number of the language assistants from Te Reo

Tuatahi go on to train as teachers, which increases the availability of teachers who are fluent in te reo Māori.

Over the last two years, we have organised a series of events meeting with Māori Educators and Learners including the Tāmaki Makaurau Education Forum and working with Kāhui Ako to understand their aspirations regarding opportunities for te reo Māori. Here are some of their comments:

- Make te reo Māori a core component of the New Zealand Curriculum
- Encourage all teachers to learn te reo Māori / tikanga Māori
- Give access to external organisations to work alongside schools to support te reo Māori to thrive
- Encourage a love for te reo Māori and biculturalism
- Normalise the use of te reo Māori everywhere
- Schools need to prioritise te reo Māori

Recommendations:

1. Develop a coherent plan to ensure that all children living in Aotearoa can learn te reo Māori, by making te reo Māori core curriculum from year 1 to Year 10. Ideally this plan should include opportunities to learn te reo as a language, or to learn in and through te reo Māori (i.e. in bilingual or immersion settings) if they choose. Clearly this cannot happen immediately but there needs to be a deliberate plan to make it possible over time, as otherwise it will never happen. The [Strategy for Languages in Education](#)¹ which we co-wrote with other members of the Auckland Languages Strategy Working Group includes a suggested plan which could be used as a starting point.
2. All schools should be resourced to support the teaching and learning of te reo Māori, by:
 - a. Strengthening Te Ahu o te reo Māori so that all teachers can access this professional development opportunity.
 - b. Supporting and encouraging schools to regularly build relationships with external Māori organisations that can support te reo Māori
 - c. Funding for full-time positions in Kahui Ako (communities of schools) to work closely with teachers to plan learning pathways for te reo Māori across schools within a Kahui Ako or local group of schools, and to provide te reo Māori professional development opportunities.
3. Require (e.g. through ERO criteria) that all schools ensure that Te reo Māori is a living and thriving language within the school, that is seen, heard, read, and felt in all facets of the school environment.
4. Strengthen the learning opportunities in initial teacher education institutions so all graduating primary teachers are equipped to teach te reo Māori and all graduating secondary teachers are equipped to incorporate te reo Māori in their teaching and classroom environment.

¹ [Languages In Education Strategy 2019-2033 | Comet Auckland](#)

5. Develop learning resources for sequential learning of te reo Māori from year 1 to year 10, aimed at students who do not speak te reo Māori at home, for use in mainstream schools. The learning progression should enable all students to reach level 4 in te reo by the end of year 8 so they have conversational te reo Māori for life in Aotearoa and so they are well-prepared to study te reo for NCEA if they choose.
6. Provide funding to groups like Te Reo Tuatahi² that support te reo Māori teaching in English-medium schools, where teachers do not yet have the capability to effectively teach the language themselves.

Quality teaching

Relationships are the basis for good learning. Teachers need to continuously work on developing mutually respectful relationships with students and their whānau, including taking steps to get to know students and their whānau outside of the classroom. This could be around a stronger community presence in the school.

Recent reports from the Office of the Children's Commission (2018) and NZCER (2020) highlight teachers still have deficit thinking and negative stereotyping of ākonga Māori, including covert and overt racism. There is a strong need to continue to address this issue.

Streaming harms the confidence and motivation of students. Low streamed classes are usually stacked with ākonga Māori. The students who are put in these classes think that the school and teachers believe they are "dumb" and that they have low expectations of them. These low teacher expectations translate into students having low expectations of themselves, which affects their success in both the short term and the long term.

Streaming therefore exacerbates inequities in education and is damaging for students' learning and wellbeing. Good teachers should instead offer a range of good learning experiences that cater to all students, including differentiated learning. Professional development opportunities for school and teachers are needed to support the move away from streaming.

Teachers also need to involve students in decisions about their learning, for example through opportunities for co-construction of unit teaching plans, and regularly collecting and acting on student feedback on teaching programmes.

It has been encouraging to see in recent education documents an increase in mentions of things like language, culture, and identity; partnership with iwi mana whenua; and Mātauranga Māori. These things have been largely ignored for too long. There is some concern that these important concepts could be implemented at a surface level only. It takes time and effort to understand values, concepts, and worldviews other than the ones from our own culture and up-bringing. Fully

² [\(1\) Te Reo Tuatahi - supporting te reo in schools | Facebook](#)

recognising Mātauranga Māori through the education system will be a long process but could yield very significant benefits for Māori learners and also for all New Zealanders.

Teacher education providers need to better equip pre-service teachers with skills to be culturally responsive to the learning needs of Māori students. This may mean that teacher education programmes need to re-examine what they are doing and the support they are giving their student teachers.

Recommendations

7. Strong signals from the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office to end the practice of streaming by academic ability in schools.
8. More professional development for teachers on differentiated learning, to support effective teaching in unstreamed classes.
9. Providing more culturally relevant material to support teaching and learning in the classroom for Māori students.
10. Encourage more Māori to become teachers and pathways into leadership opportunities such as faculty leaders and/or senior leadership roles.

Addressing racism in the education system

Given the data that Māori and Pasifika communities are significantly over-represented in the statistics of persistent disadvantage, a key area that needs to be addressed is the impact of racism, including in the education and skills system. The Office of the Commissioner for Children's *Education Matters to Me* report³ shows that a significant proportion of students report experiencing racism at school. Our own small-scale consultation with rangatahi from a range of education settings confirmed these findings.

The striking thing in our consultation was that young people who attend kura reported that they did not experience racism in school, and in fact they were shocked to hear that their counterparts in English-medium schools faced racism.

Racism is likely to impact on achievement and life opportunities in two main ways. Firstly, teachers' unconscious biases can lead to lower expectations of some groups of students, which in turn inadvertently leads to those students having fewer opportunities to learn complex material, less attention from the teacher and less encouragement to achieve. There is extensive evidence that low teacher expectations impact significantly on students' learning. Secondly, overt and covert racism impacts on students' well-being, their feeling of belonging and their self-concept as a learner, which can have far-reaching effects on their motivation at school and their long-term decisions about education and training, which then limits their future work options.

Given the feedback from the rangatahi we interviewed, with Māori young people in mainstream schools experiencing racism at school, while none of those in kura reported experiencing racism, strengthening the kura system and encouraging more whānau Māori to

³ Experiences-of-Maori.pdf (occ.org.nz)

send their tamariki and rangatahi to kura would reduce the number of ākongā Māori who experience racism at schools.

With over 90% of rangatahi Māori in mainstream schools, it is also crucial to address racism in these schools. The Hurihanganui programme from the Māori Achievement Collaborative⁴ is specifically designed to change teachers' perceptions of people of other cultures, and particularly of Māori, and to build their skills and understanding in how to use learners' culture and language as a strength to support their learning, can help address the impact of racism in schools.

Recommendations:

11. Fully support and expand the Hurihanganui programme to reach more schools with this effective anti-racism programme.
12. Incorporate more in-depth training on teo reo Māori, tikanga Māori and Māori worldviews in initial teacher education and ongoing professional development, to address teachers' negative assumptions and low expectations of ākongā Māori.

Strengthening the kura system

Māori young people who come through the kohanga reo and kura kaupapa system are more likely to succeed in NCEA, and anecdotally they also seem to have advantages in wellbeing and employment (this would be an extremely valuable avenue for further research). There is also increasing demand from employers for employees who are fluent in te reo Māori, confident in tikanga, understand Māori values and worldview and are able to connect the business/agency with iwi mana whenua, mataawaka and other kaupapa Māori organisations. Sadly, only around 5% of Māori young people attend a kura or wharekura. This is partly due to a lack of supply, and also to perceptions of variable quality which are partly due to ongoing under-funding.

Recommendations:

13. Develop a cohesive plan to encourage more whānau to choose kohanga reo, kura and wharekura for their children and young people. This should include increasing provision, especially in areas where there is even greater need; increasing funding; ensuring local pathways for immersion and bilingual learning in te reo Māori so parents are not forced to drive long distances as their children progress; and sharing data about the value of this option for children's learning and future success.
14. Integrate the above plan for kaupapa Māori pathways within a wider plan for ensuring all children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand have access to learning te reo Māori.

Strengthening relationships with whānau and iwi

⁴ [About — Māori Achievement Collaborative \(mac.ac.nz\)](#)

Active parent engagement in children's education makes a measurable difference. When parents engage with their children's learning (as opposed to being involved in non-learning-related school events), there is benefit for children's achievement⁵.

This engagement needs to be about more than merely providing information about children's progress or giving parents strategies to read with their children at home. It is about a two-way partnership of trust where schools and families recognise the strengths each brings, and work to support each other's role.

Developing resources for local history and knowledge would be an opportunity for greater connection between schools and local iwi, so they can share their history, their traditional stories, their tikanga, their reo a iwi (local language/dialect) and their unique knowledge about local flora and fauna, natural environments and place names.

The importance of local history and language is a frequent theme in discussions and feedback from the regular Tāmaki Makaurau Education Forum hui that we host, bringing iwi education representatives, Māori educators and others interested in Māori education together. Participants often call for greater emphasis on local history and on reo a iwi in the education system. This could contribute to authentic learning across the curriculum while also strengthening connections between schools and local iwi.

STEM education has proved to be another valuable context for school-iwi partnerships. For the past six years we have coordinated SouthSci, the south Auckland branch of the MBIE-funded Participatory Science Projects, under the Curious Minds umbrella. These projects support partnerships between STEM experts, community and children and young people to answer STEM problems relevant to the community. Many of these projects have involved local iwi, who bring traditional scientific knowledge and local insights to the partnership, with benefits for both school and iwi. These partnerships would be unlikely without the coordination and funding provided by SouthSci.

Recommendations:

15. Develop and distribute research-based resources and professional development for teachers and school leaders on how to build strong partnership-based relationships with whānau Māori.
16. Provide funding and expertise to support iwi-school partnerships, for example using the model from MBIE's participatory science projects.
17. Make the most of the opportunity presented by the new history curriculum to support and encourage kahui ako and other place-based groups of schools to work with local iwi to understand and share local histories.

Early years

The period from pre-birth to 3 years of age is the time of greatest brain growth when patterns of connections in the brain are being established. Language, social relationships, physical coordination, and emotional control all develop rapidly during this period, enabled by and in turn influencing brain development. At this age, most children spend most of their time with

⁵ Biddulph, F., et al. (2004). The complexity of family and community influences on children's achievements. Best Evidence Synthesis. Wellington, Ministry of Education.

their family, so the most impactful interventions in the early years are likely to be those focused on families.

Two influences have been shown to be particularly impactful at this age. Firstly, regular “serve and return” conversation builds brain development, language and relationship. Secondly, “toxic stress” (multiple stressors over time) is a very significant negative influence on brain development and current and future learning. A secure relationship with a caregiver, and serve and return conversation, are protective factors that can mitigate the effects of toxic stress. Interventions that address one or more of the above would be worth prioritising in your research on what works.

Our early years initiative, Talking Matters⁶, focuses specifically in building the “serve and return” interactions that research shows are most effective in building babies’ brains. It includes a deliberate focus on supporting whānau to use te reo Māori with their pepi so they grow up strong in their language, culture and identity.

Talking Matters partners with whānau, communities, practitioners, iwi and government to build and support language-rich environments for children, working to grow the capability of families and practitioners to strengthen communication and language in the first 1,000 days. We design innovative systems that respond to whānau and practitioners’ aspirations, using data that drives positive change and measures its impact.

Given the very high rates of ECE enrolment for under-3s, it is crucial that ECEs provide high-quality learning environments for young children. One of the most important aspects of quality is the amount and type of interactions between teachers and children; two and fro talk builds brains, yet evidence from ERO and others shows many ECEs struggle to support children’s language development. Our own work through our Talking Matters campaign shows the level of adult-child talk in even high-quality ECEs is well below what a child might experience at home. With support and regular feedback, teachers can learn to increase interactions. Improving teacher/child ratios would further increase the amount of talk and interaction a child receives at ECE.

A language-rich environment is vibrant and contains all the languages of a family, community or setting in spoken, written, cultural, gestural and artefactual form. It is the space where children in their first thousand days of life can develop the communication skills they need to thrive as thinkers, talkers and readers. “Serve and return” is a key indicator of a language-rich environment. It is a process of connection and responsive back-and-forth communication that promotes brain development and enhances child and whānau wellbeing.

Recommendations:

18. Provide in-depth professional development for ECE teachers on the value of supporting and using children’s first or heritage language, and on how to build children’s language and brain development through serve and return.

⁶ <https://www.talkingmatters.org.nz/>

19. Provide more support for parents and whānau to enable them to be able to spend focused time with their pepi in the early years, so they can secure relationships and share their language with their pepi and tamariki.

Transition to work

Transitions always present both opportunity and risk; the effectiveness of a transition can impact on a young person's trajectory for years to come. Research in both the USA and Britain found that youth unemployment leaves a "wage scar". Even six months of unemployment before the age of 23 can lead to significantly lower income ten and even twenty years later.⁷ Our experience shows that young people, especially those living with disadvantage, need support to gain the employability skills needed in order to avoid long-term unemployment and transition successfully to work. Programmes that are most effective to build employability skills have a balance of conscious skill-building and authentic practice in a context that is as similar as possible to where the skills are intended to be used, i.e. the workplace.

For the past seven years we have been working with secondary schools, youth service providers and employers to develop and deliver the Youth Employability Programme: License to Work (YEP)⁸, which is designed to build and assess the competencies in a workplace context, through interactive workshops, volunteering and work experience.

Based on our youth employability experience, COMET Auckland is also leading a collective impact approach, Youth Employability Aotearoa (YEA) to develop a cross-sector NZ employability model. This work includes representatives from multiple government agencies, sector groups and other key stakeholders. YEA aims to support and build on community employability models and to provide collaborative leadership towards a vision that every 14-24-year-old in NZ is employable. As part of this work we have compiled a database on organisations that are supporting employability skill-building for young people across Aotearoa. This database⁹ can be found on the YEA website (yea.org.nz)

20. Strengthen career pathways for ākonga Māori. Ensure that there is quality career advice early on.
21. Support opportunities for Ākonga Māori to be engaged with local businesses, community groups and organisations, and tertiary providers, for example through strengthening Gateway and through specific employability skill-building programmes.
22. Ākonga Māori must have access to role-models across a number of sectors so they become aware of a wide range of possible career choices.

⁷ <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2011/09/10/left-behind>

⁸ <https://cometauckland.org.nz/our-campaigns/vep>

⁹ <https://yea.org.nz/the-collective/>