The Recolonisation of the ~~Aotearoa~~ New Zealand Curriculum in 2025

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Introduction

We mihi to the Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA), who value Māori voices and invited us to write this paper. Ngā mihi nui kia koutou katou.

This paper presents our reflections on our experiences of the evolution of the New Zealand Curriculum. The title of the paper implies that the New Zealand Curriculum is currently undergoing a process of recolonisation. The discussion, therefore, begins with a comprehensive explanation of how we understand the processes of colonisation and decolonisation.

We then position ourselves within the phased progressions of the New Zealand Curriculum over 50 years. Our past experiences as Māori learners, teachers, leaders, a principal (Bruce), and a PLD facilitator and researcher (Therese) are chronicled across the early, middle, recent and current years of biculturalism policy. Specifically, we share our recent experiences as members of the Ministry of

Education's Bicultural and Inclusive Framework Core Working Group, which developed the original curriculum refresh, Te Mātaiaho (2021-2023).

Our proposition that the curriculum is being recolonised is based on our observations of the recent work that has been undertaken to *"refresh the refreshed curriculum"*. These observations of recolonisation are outlined. To conclude, we offer a guiding framework for leaders who are committed to resisting the recolonisation of the New Zealand Curriculum, through protecting and advancing Te Tiriti o Waitangi in education.

Colonisation and Decolonisation

Colonisation and decolonisation are loaded topics in education and need to be engaged with in a critical and reflexive way. We appreciate that our proposition that the New Zealand Curriculum is currently undergoing recolonisation requires an explanation of how we understand both colonisation and decolonisation. While we define our understanding of these two processes in this section, our interpretation of the recolonisation is presented later in the discussion (under the heading 'Recolonising the Curriculum').

Colonisation

The late Dame Evelyn Stokes was a renowned New Zealand scholar who specialised in historical geography. She worked closely with Māori communities and her research and writing were characterised by a strong focus on Māori rights, colonisation and the Treaty of Waitangi. Stokes (1980) explained that the colonisation process usually emerges in three distinct, sequential phases: ***Exploration and Infiltration; Invasion and Dispossession;*** and finally ***Consolidation of Immigrant Settlement.*** This sequential conceptualisation of colonisation is useful because we can layer this frame against the history of Aotearoa.

Exploration and Infiltration

The ***exploration*** expeditions of Abel Tasman in 1642 and James Cook in 1769 precipitated the arrival of sealers, whalers and missionaries between the late 1700s

and the early 1800s. These arrivals represented the first waves of European immigration and initial ***infiltration*** into Māori communities. These immigrants introduced new knowledge and technologies, which were welcomed; however, this period in history was also marked by the devastating importation of deadly diseases that decimated Māori communities.

Invasion and Dispossession

Invasion is an apt descriptor for the New Zealand land wars of the 1860s, which, in the wake of imported diseases, exacerbated loss of life and the rapid decrease in the Māori population. Before the land wars, the formation of what is commonly referred to as the "settler" government had begun. We purposefully resist using the term settler when referring to early European arrivals, as this insinuates that Europeans were the first to settle in Aotearoa. This insinuation is false and works to deny Māori their unique cultural status as tangata whenua, the first peoples of this land. We instead draw from Stokes' framing of colonisation and use the term "immigrant" government to emphasise the point that Māori polities, organised forms of tribal government, were in existence before Europeans immigrated and became the majority population in this land.

During the decades spanning the 1850s to 1870s, the immigrant government developed several acts, including the Native Lands Act, 1862, 1865; the New Zealand Settlements Act, 1863; the Native Schools Act, 1867; and the Public Works Act, 1876. This selection of acts constitutes what we suggest was political violence because they resulted in land, cultural, political, economic, social, psychological and legal ***dispossession*** for Māori.

The catastrophic and ongoing impacts of invasion and dispossession were and are the intentional outcomes of a political system that was formally imported from Westminster through the New Zealand Constitution Act of 1852. A product of invasion and dispossession, this imported political system endures today.

Consolidation of Immigrant Settlement

Immigration predictably intensified under the immigrant government, and land dispossession for Māori accelerated. According to Stokes (1980) this intensified

immigration would have been characterised by organised groups consolidating their hold on the territory through reconstructing their societal patterns (ways of thinking and being) in the new land. She further suggested that during this phase, the Māori, indigenous inhabitants, would have been regarded as inferior and expected to assimilate much of the introduced culture. The benefits of assimilation in this phase of colonisation, however, were limited, as Māori inhabitants were rarely accepted as full members of the newly forming and increasingly powerful colonial society.

In the context of education, the school curriculum provides the fundamental roadmap for teaching and learning; therefore, this policy of assimilation was, and still is, a powerful mechanism for consolidating immigrant settlement. There are numerous historical examples linked to the previously mentioned acts of invasion and dispossession that deserve specific attention.

While the Māori language was initially the medium of instruction in the early missionary schools, the Education Ordinance Act 1847, introduced by Governor George Grey, funded schools to teach in English only. By funding English as the only language of instruction, the act intentionally undermined Te Reo Māori and elevated the English language to a position of superiority. This is a clear example of the consolidation of immigrant settlement. Walker (2004) contends that Governor Grey's intentions were not just about undermining one language and elevating another. He suggests there was a wider, 'civilising' agenda at play and quotes Grey who posited that schools be sites for "speedily assimilating the Māori to the habits and usages of the European" (p.146).

This power dynamic of privileging the habits and usages of immigrants and suppressing the cultural norms of Māori was exacerbated with the introduction of the Native Schools Act in 1867. This act sought to more explicitly suppress the Māori language by officially banning the use of Te Reo in classrooms. The eradication of the Māori language and therefore the suppression of Māori culture were consistent features of the Native Schools. Social engineering that advanced European students and disadvantaged Māori continued to play out in a range of ways.

State schooling for European students became compulsory in the Education Act of 1877, but was not compulsory for Māori until 1894, nearly two decades (17 years) later. While Māori leaders were expected to provide land for Native Schools, they could not

contribute to the curriculum. Walker (2016) states that at this time in history, "the genealogy of Māori knowledge was excluded and disqualified as inadequate" (p.24).

The curriculum in Native Schools, the roadmap for teaching and learning, was not intended to extend the intellect of Māori students. This was particularly evident in the Native District High Schools that were established to cater for Māori secondary school students. The academic courses that constituted the curriculum in District High Schools serving European communities were simply not available to Māori students in the Native Schools.

Having reviewed some historical examples of how Stokes' (1980) third phase of colonisation played out in the mid to late 1800s, we contend that similar examples of education policies and practices that consolidate immigrant settlement are still identifiable in 2025. We will further explain this contention later in the discussion, but, following on from our explanation of colonisation, it is necessary to unpack how we understand the process of decolonisation.

Decolonisation

Our experience over many years has shown us that raising the topic of decolonisation in staffrooms, advisory forums, professional learning workshops, conference presentations, contract negotiations, and whānau barbeques is fraught territory. While we have had some productive conversations about decolonisation, generally, we have noticed that it is a contentious topic for Māori and non-Māori alike. Attempts to engage in sense-making about what decolonisation means, could mean, or what it might look like, often trigger a range of emotions from high interest to varying degrees of anxiety, defensiveness, denial and fear.

When we have explored why some people have been highly interested in making sense of decolonisation and why others have been more apprehensive, we have found that the extent to which the process of colonisation is understood influences how the process of decolonisation might be understood. For example, in Aotearoa, most people understand that colonisation has been and is a harmful, violent and at times deadly experience for Māori. If people understand the prefix "de" to mean the reversal of colonisation, they might deduce that decolonisation requires Māori to

inflict similar measures of harm, violence and death on Europeans. For example, when discussing decolonisation, we often hear "Yeah, but two wrongs do not make a right". This speaks to the idea that decolonisation is simply the reversal of colonisation and/or, as Mercier (2020) cautions, that decolonisation involves the removal of the coloniser. These are simplistic responses that do not adequately recognise or respond to the nuances and complexities of addressing the legacy and ongoing impacts of colonisation.

As we have worked to further develop and strengthen our understandings of decolonisation (which remains a work in progress), we have drawn from the research and writings of Aotearoa scholars. In the book, *Imagining Decolonisation* (Elkington, et al, 2020), the process of decolonisation is described as simultaneously dismantling colonial systems and restoring Māori ways of knowing, being, and relating. In the same book, the late Moana Jackson elaborated further on this description and suggested that decolonisation might not be the right term and therefore process to adequately address colonisation. He proposed that, like colonisation, decolonisation came from somewhere else, so it is perhaps more appropriate to replace decolonisation with an ethic of restoration.

An Ethic of Restoration

According to Jackson (2020), restoration is not just about deconstructing or culturally sensitising the colonial attitudes and power structures that have been created. It's about restoring "a kawa that allows for balanced relationships" (p.149). He also contends that restoration, like colonisation, is a process, not an event. Replacing the term decolonisation with an ethic of restoration opens up the possibility to:

- make right even the most egregious wrong
- build new non-colonising relationships
- rekindle faith in the 'ought to be' in this land
- draw on the same land-and tikanga-centred way of ordering society that was envisaged in Te Tiriti

Decolonisation, understood through Moana Jackson's ethic of restoration, sits comfortably with us, and it is this explanation that we promote in our work and will continue to refer to in this discussion.

The next section outlines our lived experiences and observations of the progression of the New Zealand Curriculum.

The Progression of the New Zealand Curriculum

The evolution of curriculum can be charted alongside the different policy eras of Aotearoa education. Likewise, from the 1970s, our own experiences can also be charted along this continuum of time.

Assimilation Policy

The previously mentioned education acts mandated the suppression of the Maōri language and the imposition of an assimilatory curriculum. The period of the Native Schools is therefore synonymous with the era of assimilation policy (Barrington, 2008; Walker, 2004).

Integration Policy

Native Schools were renamed Māori Schools from the late 1950s and were gradually phased out during the 1960s. According to Kukutai (2010), the transition from assimilation to integration over these decades was viewed by some as a form of progress. Assimilation sought to suppress Māori culture, while the integration policy sought to redefine the relationship between Māori and non-Māori by recognising diversity and selected aspects of Māori culture. Given that Māori did not have the authority to determine which selected aspects of their culture would be recognised, it has been suggested (Simon, 1990) that this approach was not fundamentally different from assimilation.

Multicultural Policy

The growing diversification of Aotearoa society in the 1970s instigated a policy focus on multiculturalism (Johnson, 1998). This was distinguishable from the policies of assimilation and integration because cultural diversity was considered to be acceptable within the social structure of Aotearoa (Irwin, 1989). However, multiculturalism was problematic for Māori (Johnson, 1998) because the policy obscured the vision inherent in the Treaty of Waitangi, prompted a focus on relationships between *all* ethnic groups and consequently ignored the importance of the fundamental Treaty relationship between the Māori and European signatories. From a Māori perspective, this policy phase did not progress education or curriculum for Māori. A more explicit acknowledgement of the Treaty of Waitangi was necessary.

Biculturalism Policy

The mid to late 1970s were a politically dynamic period in Aotearoa. Significant policy began to emerge at this time under the mantle of biculturalism. Of particular note was the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975. This legislation positioned the Treaty firmly in the national agenda.

Additionally, during this period, the kaupapa Māori movement, focused on Māori resistance and cultural revitalisation, gained momentum. This cultural revolution (Smith, 2003) was the manifestation of Māori concerns about the underachievement of Māori students and the ongoing suppression of Māori identity, language and culture in education. Within New Zealand's monocultural schools, Māori identity was ignored and belittled, which meant that Māori students could not see positive associations with their culture (Walker, 1973). This proposition reflected the concerns of Māori communities, and these concerns, along with Māori activism, demanded a political response.

The establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975, therefore, heralded the arrival of biculturalism policy in education, which continues today.

Biculturalism recognises the Treaty partnership between Māori as tangata whenua and the Crown. The concept of biculturalism is further unpacked by Sullivan (1994):

> Biculturalism is concerned with redressing past injustices and re-empowering the indigenous people. Implicit in this principle is the acknowledged fact that after a century and a half of cultural domination, Māori set their own path and make their own decisions about Māori development in partnership with non-Māori (p. 195-196).

The transition from integration (which purported to recognise Māori culture) to biculturalism (which recognised Māori as tangata whenua, with fundamental rights under Te Tiriti o Waitangi) was a progressive shift.

We both entered English-medium education in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which means we have had front-row seats to the evolution of education for half a century. When we started school, the political dynamics were beginning to permeate through education. These were the early years of biculturalism. We break the other years down into the middle, recent and current years of this policy era.

The Early Years of Biculturalism 1975 - 1990

We learned waiata, how to count and identify colours in Māori at primary school. Te Reo Māori was a curriculum subject we could select at secondary school, and we could also participate in school kapahaka performing arts teams. We recognise this as progress because our grandparents' generation was punished for speaking Māori at school. Many of our parents' generation (including our own) refrained from taking up these opportunities because of the residual trauma associated with speaking Te Reo.

Outside of Māori (the subject) and kapahaka, however, both of us struggle to recall examples of how the Treaty and, therefore, Māori were positioned in the curriculum. We acknowledge that these were the early years of biculturalism. Fortunately, we got to experience the policy from a different perspective in the middle years when we both became teachers at the same school in the late 1990s.

The Middle Years of Biculturalism 1997 - 2006

We are not sure what curriculum documents outlined the fundamental roadmap for our learning when we were students. But, as intermediate school generalist teachers in the 1990s, our teaching was guided by five individual, subject-specific and

colour-coded curriculum documents: Mathematics, Science, English, Social Studies, and Health and Physical Education. The 1993 New Zealand Curriculum was the first national curriculum, which meant that it could be mandated and enforced. It did not go unnoticed by either of us that two of the curriculum documents (English and Social Studies) specifically referenced the Treaty of Waitangi.

Understandings about biculturalism (Sullivan, 1994) were still in the early phases of socialisation. Resource packs to teach the Treaty of Waitangi were available, and we were encouraged to draw from a healthy range of literacy resources that engaged with Māori and the Māori world. In the year 2000, we started singing the bilingual version of the national anthem in school assemblies, and engagement in Māori cultural rituals such as pōwhiri and tangihanga were becoming fairly normalised school practices.

When viewed in isolation, these discrete responses implemented under the guidance of five curriculum documents may seem insignificant. They were nonetheless the collective attempts of our education community to create a curriculum that more strongly embodied the intention of biculturalism and therefore the promises of Te Tiriti. This learning gave us all a foundation to build on.

While the early and middle years of biculturalism could be seen as being progressive, when the baseline is assimilation and integration, the extent of this progress was rightly critiqued and challenged. We were reminded by Distinguished Professors Graham Hingangaroa Smith (1990, 1997) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) that when the state defines biculturalism, this results in symbolic, tokenistic inclusion. This arrangement does not allow for meaningful Māori authority, and, therefore, the potential for transformation is compromised.

In retrospect, these cautions would have been useful to understand as we continued to work in schools and entered the recent years of biculturalism. At this point, we were working in different schools: Bruce was a principal, and Therese was a deputy principal.

The Recent Years of Biculturalism 2007 - 2017

We vividly recall the controversy when the Draft New Zealand Curriculum was released for consultation in 2006. The document faced significant criticism from leaders and teachers for failing to reference the Treaty of Waitangi and the bicultural foundations of Aotearoa. The fact that these omissions had been noticed and were then strongly challenged was indicative of the considerable progress that had been made by leaders and teachers to better understand the critical place of the Treaty in our national, fundamental roadmap for teaching and learning.

Consequently, the final version of the New Zealand Curriculum released in 2007 reflected a distinctly different flavour from its predecessors. The document referenced the Treaty of Waitangi six times. Moreover, it referenced Māori people, knowledge, reo, tikanga and Māori medium education 35 times. The Principles, defined as the foundations for curriculum decision making, included this clear statement:

> The curriculum acknowledges the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and the bicultural foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand. All students have the opportunity to acquire knowledge of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga (p.9).

It is important to point out that, while the curriculum holds a privileged position in the education landscape, this policy does not sit in isolation. Between 2007 and 2021, several significant strategies, standards, research reports and guidelines were revised, introduced, and published. These documents more explicitly reflected biculturalism, providing both the expectations and the support required for educators and their boards to better understand (and give active expression to) Te Tiriti o Waitangi:

- National Administration Guidelines 2007
- Te Marautanga o Aotearoa 2008
- Ka Hikitia - Managing for Success: The Māori Education Strategy 2008-2012
- Best Evidence Synthesis: School Leadership and Student Outcomes: What Works and Why 2009
- Te Tū Rangatira: Māori Medium Educational Leadership 2010
- Ka Hikitia: A Demonstration Report Effectiveness of Te Kotahitanga Phase 5 2010-2012

- HAUTŪ (Māori Cultural Responsiveness Self-Review Tool for Boards of Trustees) 2010
- Tātaiako: Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners (2011/2012)
- Ka Hikitia - Accelerating Success Māori Education Strategy 2013-2017
- ERO School Evaluation Indicators 2016
- Teaching Council Our Code Our Standards 2017

Although the New Zealand Curriculum 2007 was clear about the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi, these complementary documents provided teachers, leaders and board members with the mandate, guidelines and confidence to push their learning and leadership further. As well as focusing on the Treaty of Waitangi and biculturalism, there are other strong and consistent themes throughout these documents. These themes include the importance of inclusion, culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally responsive leadership, equity and excellence and strong relationships with whānau, hapū and iwi.

Throughout this period (2011 - 2017), we watched with interest to see how these key documents influenced school policies and practices. They were important in the various roles that we held during this time. Bruce was leading a large urban primary school and was also mentoring beginning principals. Therese worked at the University of Waikato as a researcher, PLD facilitator and lecturer specialising in educational leadership, policy and research methodologies. Additionally, we were both members of school Boards of Trustees, and we both held numerous advisory roles on a wide range of Ministry of Education initiatives. These multiple roles took us all over Aotearoa and abroad, giving us a fairly comprehensive macro and micro view of curriculum and education as a whole.

In 2017, educators, whānau, iwi, hapū, learners and communities were provided with an opportunity to contribute to Kōrero Mātauranga (also referred to as Kōrero Education and Conversation Education). The purpose of this kōrero was to ask these groups what a successful education system should look like and then use this feedback to shape the future of education. Kōrero Mātauranga was a major initiative that started in 2018 and ran through to 2020. Several systemic changes happened in 2020, which brought us into the current years of biculturalism.

The Current Years of Biculturalism 2018 - 2025

Although Kōrero Mātauranga was similar to a stocktake, the swift evolution of education in Aotearoa did not stop. The development and publication of significant acts, strategies, standards, research reports and guidelines that emphasised Te Tiriti/ the Treaty and biculturalism continued to become available to educators:

- Te Ahu o Te Reo Māori 2019
- Education and Training Act 2020
- National Education Learning Priorities 2020
- Ka Hikitia - Ka Hāpaitia Māori Education Strategy 2020
- Draft Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories (Released for consultation 2021)
- Secondary Principals' Collective Agreement 2023
- Primary Principals' Collective Agreement 2023
- Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories 2023

The introduction of Te Ahu o Te Reo Māori in 2019 was welcomed and celebrated by Māori and non-Māori across the system. The opportunity for teachers to learn and further embed Te Reo into the curriculum was an exciting prospect.

Consultation through Kōrero Mātauranga closed in 2020. It was interesting to learn that in July 2019, before it closed, the Ministry of Education estimated that there had been over 43,000 participants who provided feedback (education sector and communities). This would make Kōrero Mātauranga one of the largest education consultations in Aotearoa's history. We have been unable to ascertain the final number of participants because we have been unable to locate information about Kōrero Mātauranga. One major recommendation that emerged from the synthesis of this evidence, however, was that the New Zealand Curriculum be refreshed.

In February 2021, it was officially announced that the national curricula for schooling, Te Marautanga o Aotearoa and The New Zealand Curriculum, would be refreshed over three to four years. In March, we were both nominated by the organisations we represented (Bruce, Te Akatea and Therese, University of Waikato) to provide advice on the curriculum refresh. By April, we were both selected to participate in one of the New Zealand Curriculum refresh working groups that began work in May. The next section describes our experience in the development of that refreshed curriculum, namely, the original Te Mātaiaho: 2021 - 2023.

Te Mātaiaho: 2021 - 2023

As the curriculum refresh commenced, we learned that several groups were represented in the ecosystem that was called the Bicultural and Inclusive Framework Working Group. A key requirement of the curriculum refresh, as outlined in the Ministry of Education's brief, resonated with both of us; namely:

> The New Zealand Curriculum will be refreshed to ensure it is bicultural and inclusive, clear and easy to use. To do this, the New Zealand Curriculum needs to honour our obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and be underpinned by the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child and Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

We appreciated the clarity of the Ministry of Education's remit:

> The Bicultural and Inclusive Framework Working Group will ensure that the refreshed NZC is bicultural, inclusive and values the identities, languages and cultures of all learners.

Three sub-groups made up the Bicultural and Inclusive Framework Working Group:

- **Rōpū Kaitiaki:** to advise on the integrity and appropriate weaving of mātauranga Māori through the curriculum, grounded in te ao Māori and te reo Māori me ōna tikanga.
- **Core Working Group:** to anchor the process across the three years of development, ensuring there is coherence in the way the bicultural and inclusive framework is developed and interpreted
- **Task Specific Groups:** (including the Curriculum Voices group elaborated on later) to join the Core Working Group at key points, as content area specialists, points to develop specific aspects of the refresh, e.g. Key Competencies.

The Rōpū Kaitiaki was a group of acclaimed Māori scholars who had, and continue to have, considerable credibility within te ao Māori (the Māori world). These individuals are also highly respected amongst non-Māori educators in New Zealand, and they are revered by international indigenous and non-indigenous theorists within and beyond the field of education.

In the Core Working Group, we were two of five Māori, three Pacific and two European advisors. The individuals in this group were nominated based on their expertise in curriculum and their experiences working and researching in the fields of Māori, Pacific, and inclusive education.

The second hui that the Core Working Group had with the Rōpū Kaitiaki was in June 2021 at Te Rau Karamu Marae in Wellington. During the pōwhiri that opened the hui, Dr Wayne Ngata was inspired by the kōrero that was shared. He proposed a frame for the refreshed curriculum that was grounded in the concept of 'mātai', which means to study, deliberately examine, and observe. Following the pōwhiri, he further unpacked his thinking around this concept with the Core Working Group. We both vividly recall Wayne talking about the different layers of 'mātai'.

Mātairangi represented our whakapapa and the distant horizon we were heading to; while Mātainuku was the foundation and the act of bringing those Mātairangi visions down to earth and taking action. This perspective provided a frame for how the curriculum that we were refreshing could be seen because Mātaiaho was about weaving the different dimensions of the curriculum together. While a Te Ao Māori way of conceptualising, developing and implementing curriculum set the frame for the refresh, there was strong consensus across the Core Working Group that the Te Tiriti o Waitangi/ Treaty of Waitangi and mātauranga Māori needed to be explicit throughout the weaving of the new, national foundational roadmap for teaching and learning.

The Curriculum Voices Group consisted of approximately 150 Māori, Pacific, and European educators, leaders, and curriculum experts, specifically selected to reflect diverse schools and community perspectives across Aotearoa. This group was responsible for providing continuous feedback on the design, content, and implementation plans of Te Mātaiaho. It was also their job to "check" the work of the Core Working Group to ensure the refreshed curriculum was bicultural, inclusive, clear, and easy to use for all school contexts (as per the parameters of the Ministry of Education's brief).

After some initial phases of testing, there was a high degree of comfort across the ecosystem of groups that Te Mātaiaho was ready to release for wide testing throughout the education system. After living through the various phases of progression that the curriculum had made and having closely worked on the refresh, we were both confident that the system was ready for a re-envisaged curriculum. In the next section, we highlight (in italics) characteristics of Te Mātaiaho that resonated with our earlier descriptions of decolonisation (Stokes, 1980; Walker, 2016) and an ethic of restoration (Jackson, 2020).

Te Mātaiaho: Decolonisation and an Ethic of Restoration

Since 1847, when formal schooling in Aotearoa commenced, Māori have been

excluded from contributing to the New Zealand curriculum. The configuration of the three aforementioned sub-groups within the Bicultural and Inclusive Framework Working Group, appointed to lead the curriculum refresh, reflected a significant turning point in New Zealand education. Having Māori at the conceptualisation phase of the curriculum refresh design signalled that the system was moving beyond state-defined biculturalism and symbolic inclusion of Māori, to building what Moana Jackson referred to as *new, non-colonising relationships.* This move also resonated with the proposition of Sullivan (1994) that biculturalism *redresses past injustices and reempowers indigenous peoples.*

It was somewhat extraordinary for Māori to be engaged at the very start of a critical process like a curriculum refresh (not just 'added on' later). What also made it extraordinary for us was not just the timing of Māori involvement; it was the number of Māori involved in an advisory capacity. The Rōpū Kaitiaki and the Core Working Group were mainly Māori. This created an advisory setting that we were both unfamiliar with because in advisory contexts for the Ministry of Education, we had become accustomed to being the tokenistic one or two Māori in the room. We saw the determined inclusion of multiple Māori as progress and a representation of Moana Jackson's *kawa that allows for balanced non-colonising relationships* that *rekindle faith in the 'ought to be' in this land.*

The front cover of the draft document of Te Mātaiaho, released for testing in September 2022, presented a karakia that was especially created by Dr Wayne Ngata to signal the intent of the proposed refresh. The introduction explained that the curriculum was framed within a whakapapa that flowed from Mātairangi through to Mātainuku. We recognised that it was rather remarkable for a reader to begin their engagement with a document through a karakia and then be introduced to a curriculum that was explicitly founded on a mātauranga Māori way of understanding and engaging with the world. This frame *draws from the same land-and-tikanga-centred ways of ordering society* that Moana Jackson suggested were 'restoring' as envisaged in Te Tiriti. Additionally, these forms of restoration are the *antithesis of the late 1800s, the assimilation era that Walker (2016) described as a time, when Māori knowledge was excluded and disqualified as inadequate.*

Mātairangi (the distant vision) was defined in the original Mātaiaho (2021-3) as the guiding overarching kaupapa, expressing the centrality of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, its principles and New Zealand's vision for education. The inclusion and articulation of key shifts and calls to action ensured that school leaders and teachers would honour Te Tiriti. To enhance the clarity of how we understand a curriculum that is Te Tiriti honouring and inclusive, there are 33 references to Te Tiriti o Waitangi in the first

sections of Te Mātaiaho (p.1-20). Additionally, the word Māori in relation to people, reo, mātauranga and tikanga is referenced 36 times. These multiple references to these very special words in the fundamental roadmap for teaching and learning in New Zealand are powerful. They bring forward the language that was so brutally suppressed and nearly eradicated through the curriculum. These progressive changes, therefore, speak to the endeavour of *making right even the most egregious wrongs* (as proposed by Jackson, 2020).

It has been an immense undertaking that has involved thousands of teachers, school leaders, politicians, policy-makers, iwi and hapū leaders, researchers, whānau and learners, for over half a century, to reach the point of curriculum evolution that the original Te Mātaiaho represented. Consequently, since 2023, it has been confusing, frustrating and difficult to accept that we can no longer see, and we rarely hear about, that original Te Mātaiaho in the education system. The webpages that once housed all of the guiding material, videos, resources and feedback have disappeared. This invisibility concerns us because it resonates with a historical pattern of suppression and eradication, to aid the consolidation of immigrant settlement.

The original Te Mātaiaho could stand up to critique against indicators of decolonisation and an ethic of restoration. We are unconvinced that the *refresh of the refreshed curriculum,* currently out for consultation in the form of two documents (Te Mātaiaho: The New Zealand Curriculum English Years 0 - 6 and Te Mātaiaho: The New Zealand Curriculum English Years 7-13), stands up to the same critique. We go further and propose that they both fail the decolonisation and ethic of restoration tests, while achieving an Excellence Endorsement for recolonising the curriculum.

Recolonising the Curriculum

We recognise that the two refreshed curriculum documents that are currently out for consultation are focused on the English curriculum area rather than an overarching curriculum frame that the original Te Mātaiaho articulates. This means that a direct comparison between each of these documents and the original Te Mātaiaho is difficult. However, we have described how the original Te Mātaiaho stands up against the decolonisation and ethic of restoration indicators, and we can therefore compare how the two English curriculum documents compare in that regard.

The Configuration of the Refresh the Refresh Group

Although we were part of the Core Working Group, responsible for developing and ensuring that there was coherence in the way the bicultural and inclusive framework was developed and interpreted, communication between our group and the Ministry of Education ceased in 2023, before the general election in October that year. Our group has never received official confirmation that our "work is done", nor have we, as a collective, been asked to comment on (or contribute to) the work of the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) that the Minister of Education appointed in December 2023.

We are not sure about the exact cultural configuration of the current MAG, but we do understand that it is dominated by European researchers and educators who have been associated with anti-Māori, libertarian ideologies (Holloway, 2024, 2025; Moss, 2025). We understand that this group includes one or two Māori only, which is another indicator of a return to symbolic and tokenistic engagement with Māori. This stands in contrast to decolonising and restoring notions described by Jackson (2020) as *building new, non-colonising relationships,* as well as Sullivan's (1994) vision of *redressing past injustices and reempowering indigenous peoples.*

We contend that the configuration and activation of the MAG, combined with the marginalisation of the Rōpū Kaitiaki, the Core Working Group, the Curriculum Voices Group and the dismissal of 50 years of curriculum progress under the policy of biculturalism, is frankly unbelievable. It sits in opposition to the view of Jackson (2020), in terms of restoring *balanced relationships that rekindle faith in the 'ought to be' in this land.*

The Exclusion of Mātauranga Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi in the Refresh of the Refresh

While the draft of the Years 0-6 English Curriculum references a reconfigured, colonised version of the Te Mātaiaho frame, there are no such references in the draft of the Years 7-13 version of the English Curriculum. This is where the familiar historical pattern of the reconsolidation of immigrant settlement is particularly evident. For example:

- We were unable to find any reference to Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi in either document.
- In the original version of Mātaiaho (2021-3), the curriculum refresh document, Mātairangi was described as the overarching kaupapa, expressing the centrality of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its principles, and New Zealand's vision for education. In the current draft Years 0-6 English document, the description of Mātairangi has been changed so that the overarching kaupapa guiding the curriculum is based on the science of learning.
- The draft Years 0-6 English curriculum references Te Reo Māori three times; and Te Ao Māori and Māori perspectives are referenced twice, respectively
- The draft Years 7-13 English curriculum document references Te Reo and kupu Māori four times.
- While neither of the draft English documents reference Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Years 7-13 curriculum references Shakespeare.

We have been following some of the commentary of non-Māori researchers and writers (Holloway, 2024, 2025; Moss, 2025; Thomas, 2024, 2025) who have more closely analysed the discursive and ideological orientations of some members of the MAG. The group is chaired by Michael Johnston. We have both met Johnston, and we did know that he is a senior fellow of the New Zealand Initiative. We were not aware, however, of Holloway's research, from which we learned that the New Zealand Initiative is a right-wing, neoliberal-oriented organisation that draws ideas and funding from the Atlas Network. Elizabeth Rata, a Pākehā sociologist and proclaimed libertarian, has had considerable input into the direction of the refreshed refresh. Moss (2025) rightly points out that Rata infamously dismissed the status and value of mātauranga Māori in our education system in a collaborative letter penned to the Listener in 2012 entitled, "In defence of Science". Rata, it seems, is supported by an advisory group, including one or two Māori, who endorse the idea that *Māori knowledge should be excluded and disqualified as inadequate.* The inferior status of Māori knowledge and people is reinforced by the MAG's recommendations that Te Tiriti o Waitangi, our nation's founding document, be removed from the curriculum and replaced with the science of learning. Additionally, it is difficult to fathom how this group has rationalised the exclusion of Te Tiriti while sanctioning the inclusion of

Shakespeare (from Elizabethan and Jacobean England) in the 2025 fundamental roadmap of teaching and learning in Aotearoa.

The Cultural Appropriation "Te Mātaiaho"

Both the aforementioned English curriculum documents carry the name Te Mātaiaho, which insinuates that they are (or, at least, resemble) the original Te Mātaiaho. This insinuation is disengenuous and offensive. It is also a clear example of cultural appropriation that manifests itself in the perpetuation of colonial patterns of dispossession—where Indigenous knowledge and language are taken on, while Indigenous people themselves remain marginalised.

- The karakia Dr Wayne Ngata developed for the original Te Mātaiaho is reproduced in the draft Years 0-6 English document but not in the Years 7-13 document.
- The "whakapapa" of Te Mātaiaho is referenced in the draft Years 0-6 English document without explanation of what that whakapapa is, which reflects a return to tokenism.
- The whakapapa of Te Mātaiaho is not referenced at all in the draft Years 7-13 English document, yet the document carries this special gifted name as a title.
- As mentioned in the previous section, the meaning of Mātairangi has been changed in the draft Years 0-6 English curriculum document such that Te Tiriti o Waitangi is removed and replaced with the science of learning.

We have discussed the power of language and the opportunity that the original Te Mātaiaho represented to bring forward Te Reo Māori, as well as the mātauranga and tikanga that authenticate the kupu. The architects and authors of the draft English curriculum documents have culturally appropriated the title Te Mātaiaho and the definition of Mātairangi. This is a clear indication that the Minister of Education and the advisors whom she has appointed have no intention of making right the most egregious wrongs (as recommended by Jackson, 2020, within the ethic of restoration). They appear to be committed to perpetuating them.

A Guiding Framework for Protecting and Advancing Te Tiriti o Waitangi

This paper has chronicled our journey through the evolution of the New Zealand curriculum, culminating in our proposition that the current "refresh of the refreshed curriculum" represents a concerning process of recolonisation. We have highlighted how the original Te Mātaiaho (2021-3), developed with deep, genuine engagement and a commitment to an ethic of restoration, embodied a significant step towards a truly bicultural and Treaty-honouring curriculum. In stark contrast, our observations of the current English curriculum documents reveal a troubling exclusion of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and mātauranga Māori, alongside instances of cultural appropriation that perpetuate colonial patterns of dispossession.

For leaders committed to resisting this recolonisation and advancing Te Tiriti o Waitangi in education, a guiding framework is paramount. This framework must be rooted in the principles of truth-telling, unwavering commitment to Te Tiriti, and the active pursuit of an ethic of restoration, as articulated by Moana Jackson (2020).

Here, we offer a framework for leadership that actively protects and advances Te Tiriti o Waitangi in the New Zealand Curriculum:

Uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the Foundational Document

Leaders must unequivocally assert Te Tiriti as the primary guiding document for all curriculum design and implementation. This means moving beyond tokenistic references to genuine integration of Te Tiriti's intentions, ensuring that the curriculum reflects the partnership between Māori and the Crown, and prioritises Māori aspirations for educational success as Māori.

Champion Mātauranga Māori and Te Ao Māori

Actively advocate for the centrality of mātauranga Māori and te ao Māori within the curriculum, not merely as an add-on or an object of study, but as a legitimate and foundational way of understanding and engaging with the world. This includes

ensuring that Māori language, tikanga, and perspectives are authentically woven throughout all learning areas.

Resist Cultural Appropriation and Tokenism

Develop a critical lens to identify and challenge instances of cultural appropriation, where Indigenous knowledge and language are adopted without genuine engagement, authority, or benefit to Indigenous people. Leaders must ensure that references to Māori concepts are meaningful, contextualised, and developed in partnership with tangata whenua.

Demand Transparency and Inclusivity in Curriculum Development

Insist on open, robust, and genuinely inclusive processes for curriculum design. This means ensuring that Māori academics, educators, whānau, hapū, and iwi are not merely consulted, but are empowered as co-designers and decision-makers, with their expertise and lived experiences valued and prioritised. We have a model of what this looks like in the 2021 - 2023 journey of Te Mātaiaho.

Invest in Professional Learning and Development Focused on Te Tiriti and Bicultural Competency

Provide ongoing, high-quality professional learning opportunities for all educators to deepen their understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, unpack the complexities of colonisation and decolonisation, and build their cultural competency (as outlined in frameworks like Tātaiako). This goes beyond surface-level understanding to fostering critical self-reflection and transformative practice.

Advocate for Systemic Accountability

Work towards establishing clear accountability mechanisms within the education system that measure and report on the genuine implementation of Te Tiriti principles and the achievement of equitable outcomes for Māori learners. This includes challenging policies and practices that undermine bicultural aspirations.

Conclusion

The recolonisation of the New Zealand Curriculum is not an inevitable outcome. It is a political choice that can be resisted through informed, courageous, and principled leadership. By protecting and advancing Te Tiriti o Waitangi, we can ensure that the curriculum truly serves all learners in Aotearoa, fostering a future where tangata whenua and tangata tiriti flourish and the promises of Te Tiriti o Waitangi are fully realised. This is not merely an educational imperative; it is a moral obligation for a just and equitable society.

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