



ECE / OVERVIEW

How to support Māori children with culturally responsive teaching



- 3 Developing bicultural values for your setting
- 4 Supporting Māori children's identities
- 5 Building relationships with whānau Māori
- 6 Consulting with and involving whānau Māori
- 7 Developing culturally responsive content for teaching and learning
- 8 Reflection and review
- 9 Glossary
- 10 Further Reading

The majority of Māori children attend mainstream early childhood services, and are likely to be taught by Pākehā (non-Māori) teachers who may lack Māori cultural knowledge or language. Developing culturally responsive teaching and learning for Māori children and their whānau involves:

- Developing bicultural values for early childhood settings
- Supporting children's identity as Māori
- Building relationships with whānau Māori in order to develop knowledge about Māori children and their whānau's expectations and aspirations for their children's learning in the setting
- Consulting with and involving whānau Māori in planning, implementing and evaluating the programme, and encouraging whānau Māori to contribute skills and knowledge to the setting
- Developing rich and culturally responsive content and strategies for learning and teaching
- Reflection and review, in partnership with Māori

Developing bicultural values for your setting

Shared values and aspirations are important to Māori parents. Māori families value educational experiences that are reflective of key values such as *whakawhanaungatanga* and *manaakitanga* (italicised words are listed in the glossary).

A *whanaungatanga* approach recognises the centrality of relationships between whānau and teachers and children in early childhood education. Whanaungatanga is demonstrated through rituals of welcoming and farewell, sharing kai together, practices such as *mihimihī*, *pōwhiri* and other opportunities for people to share their iwi, hapū or whānau connections, and mixed age groupings that enable older and younger children (siblings/cousins) to attend together.

Manaakitanga involves caring attitudes and a willingness to support each member of the collective group. A culture in which caring for others is both expected and encouraged is found to be important to Māori parents when choosing early childhood settings for their children. Manaakitanga is expressed through ritual processes for welcoming and *hui* and through fostering *tuakana-teina* relationships between older and younger children. It is also expressed through opportunities for children to be of service to the group, and to collaborate and cooperate in larger groups.

As children are intimately linked to their whānau and cannot be seen as separate from their whānau, *aroha* or reciprocal obligation, commitment and loyalty is another important value. Reciprocity is also important to the Māori concept of *ako* in which learning and teaching are viewed as reciprocal or two-way. Finally, a child's *wairua* is considered an important part of the developing child, and comprises their connectedness to the continuum of life from the spiritual world of the ancestors and gods to the physical world. The spirituality of the Māori child can be valued by acknowledgement of the spiritual dimensions of the world in the environment and in the child, respect for the natural environment, and an understanding of rituals that acknowledge Te Ao Wairua (the spiritual dimension) and Ngā Atua (gods), such as *karakia* or *pepeha*. Ensure that these rituals are really meaningful, authentic practices rather than token gestures.

Ako, manaakitanga, aroha, and whanaungatanga are the values most relevant to building cross-cultural partnership with Māori children and whanau, but remember to acknowledge that non-Māori cannot speak for Māori, and to respect Māori authority over things of importance to Māori as a *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* obligation. Culturally responsive provision must be based on the values, cultural scripts and ideals of whānau. This means having whānau help you determine and understand values and tikanga, or negotiating practices and values through relationships with Māori elders.

Reflect whānau's aspirations for their children, and the values that are important to them in philosophies and practices

When early childhood settings are positive about and include Māori ways of being, doing, knowing and relating within their programme, Māori families are found to be increasingly responsive and more comfortable about participating in and contributing to the setting's programme.

- Make specific reference to values and beliefs for Māori children in philosophy statements. Write the philosophy statement in te reo and English. Respond to those aspirations in authentic ways and include strategies to address them in short and long term plans.
- Carefully consider how the setting can appropriately acknowledge and reflect children's culture. Focus on specific patterns of interaction and emotion and specific philosophies and child rearing practices within the setting's programme, rather than on superficial cultural icons (such as songs).
- Be humble and open rather than take an expert stance, so that you remain open to learning and aware of your limitations in relation to Māori culture. Adopting a learning orientation will help you avoid misrepresenting Māori symbols or rituals too.

Make a commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi

This has been found to make a difference to the cultural responsiveness of settings for Māori children and whānau.

- Explore what Te Tiriti means for your setting, and how it can be incorporated into your setting's philosophy, curriculum and programme.

Supporting Māori children's identities

Māori children do better when their education values and reflects their identity, culture and language. Whānau have a central role in building Māori children's sense of identity, understanding of the world and their place within it, and Māori families value educational experiences that validate their children's Māori identities.

Know children as individuals and also as part of their whānau, hapū and iwi

Respect Māori children for who they are and acknowledge their cultural identity.

- Find out about children's whakapapa – who they are, where they are from and who they belong to. Ensure children's names are pronounced correctly. Affirm children's ancestral connections and include processes and interactions in the programme that maintain children's links to their ancestors, elders and whānau.
- Notice, recognise and document culturally significant features for Māori children, such as their origin, whakapapa, mana, whanaungatanga and manaakitanga, and ensure portfolios reflect children's bicultural learning experiences.
- Value what children bring to their learning, acknowledge their prior experiences, and focus on helping children feel confident in who they are.

Interrogate your views and beliefs about Māori culture

Be aware of how your interactions with children influence children's perceptions of their Māori culture. Be careful that you don't implicitly hold lower expectations for children because they are Māori.

- Acknowledge Māori in a way that recognises and promotes their unique position as tangata whenua, and see all Māori learners as having unlimited potential, inherent capability for success and achievement, and as culturally advantaged by being Māori.
- Have high expectations. Children are highly aware of their teachers' expectations, so Māori children are more likely to succeed in education when teachers have high but realistic expectations for Māori children's achievement, whereas low expectations are found to be detrimental to learning and achievement.
- Be careful of beliefs about treating all children the same. Instead, acknowledge that Māori children and their whānau do need to be treated differently. However, ensure that Māori ways of being and doing are normalised, and allow and encourage Māori to be Māori even within predominantly Pākehā settings.

Incorporate te reo, Māori culture and tikanga in curriculum

The use of te reo and **tikanga** Māori supports children to connect with their identity as Māori and strengthens their sense of well-being, which is so important for learning.

- Use Māori contexts such as whakapapa, tikanga, language, history and place to support Māori children's learning.
- Strengthen children's sense of Māori identity through the use of whakapapa, pepeha, waiata and karakia.
- Be aware of tensions between the identities of Māori children and the values of the setting, for example, where children expect to be responsible for younger siblings while teachers are committed to being primary caregivers. If there are conflicting values, Māori children may feel the need to leave part of their culture behind in order to participate in activities within the setting that are aligned with the dominant Pākehā discourse.

Building relationships with whānau Māori

Relationships are very significant for Māori so the most culturally responsive services focus a lot of effort on building relationships with Māori children and whānau. In particular, positive relationships with whānau Māori are found to be important in positive educational outcomes for Māori children, and in increasing whānau participation in early childhood programmes. Strong, responsive and reciprocal relationships with whānau Māori are also found to support settings to provide well for Māori children.

Pay special attention to first impressions

Initial hui or first impressions can make a critical difference to Māori and their consequent level of responsiveness. Whānau report that, when a setting's culture is inclusive and welcoming, they feel like valued members of the setting.

- Prior to enrolment, it is important to establish relationships and share information. Visit Māori parents at home to explain what the centre offers and to find out what parents would like to see.
- Acknowledge children's whakapapa and practise whakawhanaungatanga during initial meetings with whānau and during the transition/welcoming process.
- Focus the enrolment process on whānau sharing information, discussing aspirations, and finding out what they expect of the setting. Use whānau expectations as a starting point for assessment and ensure these expectations are addressed through portfolio narratives.

Make time to sit and talk with parents and whānau

This is found to develop deepened understanding and empathy between teachers and whānau.

- Focus on creating a warm and welcoming environment and maximise informal interactions to build rapport with whānau.
- Invest time in getting to know individual children and their whānau. Be interested in their lives and in the community in which they live. Initiate conversations with whānau about children's interests, and the aspirations, interests and skills they have.
- Hold meetings with whānau to develop and strengthen relationships, exchange information and share kai. For Māori, eating together is a celebration of the collective sustenance of life, and the preparation and sharing of kai in early childhood practice is highly valued.
- Acknowledge and accept those who feel shy or embarrassed (whakamā) and do not force participation.

Focus on building relationships, without hidden agendas

Enable relationships with whānau Māori to unfold without predetermined agendas from the early childhood setting.

- Don't impose any expectations or demands on whānau, but accept whānau as they are and focus only on getting to know them.
- Refrain from making judgements, which undermine relationships with parents and children. Be aware that your culture, upbringing or educational experience may have engendered habits of naming, judging, categorising and labelling, for example, within documentation and assessment, and instead make every effort to suspend judgement and focus on describing and offering information.
- Be flexible in regard to whānau's participation in the programme.

Consulting with and involving whānau Māori

As Māori children must not be treated as separate or disconnected from their whānau, whānau should be involved in discussions about their children and their learning and consulted in decision-making. After establishing good relationships, work to develop partnership with whānau Māori that explores what cultural responsiveness entails for each whānau and child. Include grandparents, aunts and uncles as well as parents. Be open to learning from whānau as whānau experience a strong sense of inclusion and belonging when they are invited to share their knowledge and skills.

Develop a partnership of shared responsibility with whānau for the care and education of children

Partnerships with whānau are important to ensure that the programme supports children's language, culture and positive identity. Aim to genuinely share power with whānau and involve whānau in every aspect of the programme including planning, implementation and evaluation of curriculum plans, self-review and decision-making at all levels.

The capacity for self-determination reflects a key agreement of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Ensure there are well-defined and understood roles for whānau, which have been negotiated with whānau.

- Develop clear philosophies about working with whānau Māori.
- Focus on building partnership as a key activity for children and families transitioning into the setting. Spend time discussing what whānau want for their child on enrolment and in regular formal and informal discussions thereafter. Use face-to-face discussions rather than forms.
- Develop effective processes for listening and responding to whānau Māori's expectations of the setting and their aspirations for their children. Consult whānau through both formal and informal means for decision-making. Consider designing surveys just for whānau Māori and carry out surveys face-to-face where possible.
- Involve whānau in discussing children's progress and setting goals. Seek whānau voices and perspectives in portfolios, and be guided by Māori in developing teaching and learning programmes for Māori, rather than informing parents about the programme.
- Encourage whānau to take a lead in a range of initiatives, including policy development, te reo and tikanga, and planning for events in the setting.
- Find ways to keep dialogue open and make time to connect with and listen to whānau. Devolve expertise in order to make space and opportunity for whānau to be comfortable to express themselves.

Learn from whānau

Being culturally responsive involves listening to and respecting the expertise of whānau Māori on all things Māori.

- Seek whānau advice and guidance about how to practise tikanga appropriately in the early childhood programme. Create a Māori whānau group with the purpose of supporting your team to increase their knowledge of tikanga, or seek support from Māori members of staff. Check with Māori elders about the correct phrases to use in mihimihi.

- Provide opportunities for whānau Māori to meet and create plans for supporting the setting's programmes and practices.
- Use Māori knowledge to inform decisions rather than trying to align them to Māori knowledge after they are already made.

Encourage whānau participation

Feeling welcome to participate is important to Māori parents.

- Acknowledge and utilise the expertise and skills that whānau bring to the setting. Include all members of a child's whānau in the programme, utilising the knowledge and skills of all generations.
- Develop meaningful activities for children's learning that whānau can participate in and contribute to.
- Recognise that it is not always appropriate to make whānau and children who are feeling whakamā participate.

Developing culturally responsive content for teaching and learning

It is important to begin with whānau's aspirations as a starting point for developing teaching and learning programmes. These may include teaching and use of te reo, waiata and *pakiwaitara*, local iwi tikanga, and involvement in the local iwi or Māori community. Cultural content might also include waiata and haka, stories about Māori characters, studying native plants, carving and weaving, but be aware that adding cultural content to programmes is not enough. It is also important to incorporate cultural values, behaviours and dispositions.

Implement diverse learning pathways and teaching and learning approaches to cater for Māori children's learning preferences and whānau's aspirations

For example, Māori children may like to interact and work in groups, balancing individual needs with those of the group.

- Plan and use strategies and contexts for learning that are linked to home and whānau contexts.
- Learn to understand and use frameworks that have been informed by and designed for Māori in order to develop culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies for Māori, such as Te Whatu Pokeka.
- Engage in a project-based curriculum which is responsive to the interests of children. Encourage children to invent ideas for exploration and learn through creative expression, so they are able to lead the project according to their own interests and cultural processes.
- Introduce a Māori perspective to a project or interest of the children. For example, when carrying out a gardening project with children, one setting shared the maramataka Māori (the Māori planting and fishing calendar) with children, and incorporated traditional tikanga practices such as karakia to elicit wairua while planting.

Embed te reo and tikanga Māori in the setting's programme

Māori language is the foundation of Māori culture. Focus on improving your proficiency and use of te reo and tikanga – this is critical for creating a culturally responsive environment for Māori.

- Learn a new phrase or word regularly to stretch your skills in te reo beyond common phrases like 'e noho' and 'horoia o ringa ringa'. Use te reo words and phrases in the context of children's play and learning, and in conversations throughout the day. Weave Māori terms and concepts through planning and portfolio narratives and displays.
- If you display basic words or phrases, charts, waiata and karakia in te reo, be careful they do not become 'superficial icons' or token gestures of responsiveness.
- Recognise competent speakers of te reo as a significant resource for supporting both Māori children and your learning.

- Create opportunities for children to learn and use karakia and waiata. Be sure to give karakia its due significance, rather than subsuming it in a mundane routine for getting ready to eat (along with toileting and washing hands). Finding out about and acknowledge the intent, meaning and purpose of karakia.

Engage with Māori communities

Involvement in wider iwi community activities is found to be important to Māori parents.

- Use Māori experts from within the setting and from the local community.
- Develop links to work with local marae and make connections with people in the wider community.
- Develop an understanding of your local context and whānau and iwi histories. Make connections with local people, historically and culturally relevant places and stories, and what is meaningful to local whānau. Incorporate Māori history and stories of place into children's play and support children to connect culturally with people, places and the past.

Reflection and review

Begin by developing an understanding of your own identity, culture and language, as well as developing an openness to, and understanding of, Māori knowledge and expertise. Be open to taking some risks and learn from your endeavours to be more culturally responsive to Māori.

Review the impact of policies, practices and initiatives on outcomes for Māori children

Reflect critically upon the extent to which Māori children experience success in their learning.

- Use self-review to evaluate the outcomes of your setting's practices and programmes for Māori children, rather than evaluating general provision such as the use of te reo and tikanga.
- Don't assume silence on the part of Māori families means that they are satisfied with the Māori content of your programme, as many Māori whānau may be unable to articulate their expectations.
- Solicit, and be open and receptive to, feedback from whānau, Māori teachers and Māori in the local community. Find out what whānau perceive about your effectiveness in supporting their aspirations for Māori children, their identity, language and culture.

Seek professional development

While you may not hold detailed knowledge of Māori culture, it is important to show that you value Māori culture, acknowledge your own shortcomings, and actively seek to increase your understanding.

- Take up professional development opportunities to increase your knowledge and understanding of Māori world views, tikanga and theory, Māori pedagogies, and Māori perspectives on concepts such as well-being.
- Observe how Māori colleagues engage in genuine and responsive conversations with whānau, how they build on whakapapa connections and practice whanaungatanga and manaakitanga in daily practices.
- Use Tātaiako to assess and develop competencies for knowing, respecting and working with Māori children and whānau and for integrating Māori perspectives, knowledge, aspirations and world views into your practice.

Questions for self-review:

- how well do your setting's values and beliefs align with those of whānau Māori?

- how are the values and beliefs of whānau Māori included in your philosophy statement?
- how are whānau Māori included in reviewing your philosophy statement?
- how well is your philosophy implemented in practice?
- what are the nature and quality of your relationships and partnerships with whānau Māori?
- how well do the setting's strategic vision and plans take account of the aspirations of whānau Māori?
- how well do policies, procedures and practices (including teaching practices, planning, assessment and evaluation) reflect the aspirations, expectations and values of whānau Māori?
- how effective are processes for communicating and consulting with whānau Māori, particularly to find out about expectations and aspirations?
- how are Māori world views, perspectives, values, tikanga and te reo included in the programme?
- how effective are teaching strategies for engaging Māori children and supporting their learning and positive identity as learners?
- what is the impact of the programme for Māori children?
- how well do you notice, recognise and respond to the interests, strengths and needs of Māori children?

Prepared for The Education Hub by Dr Vicki Hargraves

Glossary

ako	reciprocal learning and teaching between two or more people
aroha	respect, reciprocal obligation, commitment and loyalty
hui	meeting, gathering
karakia	prayer or incantation for connecting to the spirit world, gods and ancestors
mana	a supernatural power, force or energy in a person, object or event
manaakitanga	hospitality, kindness
mihimihi	speech of greeting
pakiwaitara	stories and legends
pōwhiri	welcoming ritual or ceremony
tangata whenua	indigenous people
tikanga	correct practice, procedure, or custom
tuakana-teina	older children supporting younger relatives (can also be applied to non-relatives)
wairua	spirit or spiritual interconnectedness
whakamā	shy or embarrassed
whakapapa	recitation of genealogy
whakawhanau-ngatanga	relationship-building
whanaungatanga	relationships

Further Reading

- Education Review Office. (2010). *Success for Māori children in early childhood services*. Wellington: ERO.
- Ministry of Education (2009). *Te whatu pōkeka: Kaupapa Māori assessment for learning. Early childhood exemplars*. Wellington: Learning Media. Retrieved from <http://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Early-Childhood/TeWhatuPokeka.pdf>
- Ministry of Education. (2011). *Tātaiako: Cultural competencies for teachers of Māori learners*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Ritchie, J., & Rau, C. (2006). *Whakawhanaungatanga—partnerships in bicultural development in early childhood care and education*. Wellington: Teaching and Learning Research Initiative. Retrieved from www.tlri.org.nz
- Ritchie, J., & Rau, C. (2008). *Te Puawaitanga: Partnerships with tamariki and whānau in bicultural early childhood care and education: A summary*. Wellington: Teaching and Learning Research Initiative. Retrieved from www.tlri.org.nz