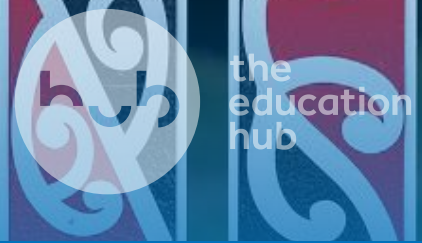


How to support Māori children with culturally responsive teaching



ECE resources

This review summarises a number of principles for culturally responsive teaching and learning that derive from research into how best to support tamariki Māori and their whānau in ECE settings.

Develop 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 whakawhanaungatanga¹ and manaakitanga²

(see the glossary at the end of this guide for key Māori terms). A whanaungatanga approach recognises the centrality of relationships between whānau, teachers, and children in early childhood education. Whanaungatanga is demonstrated through rituals of welcoming and farewell, sharing kai together³, practices such as mihimihi, pōwhiri and other opportunities for people to share their iwi, hapū, or whānau connections⁴, and mixed-age groupings that enable older and younger children to attend together⁵ and extend tuakana-teina relationships⁶.

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 important to Māori parents when choosing early childhood settings for their children⁷. Manaakitanga is expressed through ritual processes for welcoming and hui⁸, and through fostering tuakana-teina relationships between older and younger children⁹. It is also expressed through opportunities for children to be of service to the group, and to collaborate and cooperate in larger groups¹⁰.

As children are intimately linked to their whānau and cannot be seen as separate from their whānau¹¹, aroha (reciprocal obligation, commitment, and loyalty) is another important value¹². Reciprocity is also important to the Māori concept of ako¹³ in which learning and teaching are viewed as reciprocal or two-way¹⁴. 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 world¹⁵. The spirituality of the Māori child can be valued by acknowledgement of the spiritual dimensions of the world in the environment and in the child¹⁶, respect for the natural environment¹⁷, and an understanding of rituals that acknowledge Te Ao Wairua (the spiritual dimension) and Ngā Atua (gods), such as karakia or pepeha¹⁸. It is important that these rituals are meaningful, authentic practices rather than token gestures¹⁹.

Culturally responsive provision must be **based on the values, cultural practices, and ideals of whānau**²⁰. This means having whānau help determine and understand values and tikanga, or negotiating practices and values through relationships with Māori elders²¹. It is important to reflect whānau aspirations for children, and the values that are important to them in the philosophies and practices of the setting. Research has shown that when early childhood settings are positive about and include Māori ways of being, doing, knowing, and relating within their programme, Māori families are increasingly responsive and more comfortable about participating in and contributing to the setting's programme²².

Settings can make specific reference to values and beliefs for Māori children in philosophy statements, and respond to those aspirations in authentic ways and include strategies to address them in short and long term plans. Teachers can consider how the setting can appropriately acknowledge and reflect

children's culture, focusing on specific patterns of interaction, philosophies, and child rearing practices within the setting's programme, rather than on superficial cultural icons (such as songs)²³. It is also important to **make a commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi**, which research has found to make a difference to the cultural responsiveness of settings for Māori children and whānau. Teachers and leaders can explore what Te Tiriti means for their setting, and how it can be incorporated into their philosophy, curriculum, and programme.

Finally, non-Māori teachers should be humble, open to learning, and aware of the limitations of their knowledge in relation to Māori culture²⁴. Remember to acknowledge that non-Māori cannot speak for Māori²⁵, and to respect Māori authority over things of importance to Māori as a *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* obligation²⁶.

Support Māori children's identities

Māori children achieve success when their education values and reflects their identity, culture, and language²⁷. Whānau have a central role in building Māori children's sense of identity and their understanding of the world and their place within it²⁸, and Māori families value **educational experiences that validate children's Māori identities**²⁹. Key to this is knowing children both as individuals and as part of their whānau, hapū and iwi³⁰, so find out about children's whakapapa and help maintain children's links to their ancestors, elders, and whānau. Children's names should be pronounced correctly³¹, and portfolios should document and reflect children's bicultural values, knowledge, and learning experiences³².

ECE settings should acknowledge Māori in a way that recognises and promotes their unique position as tangata whenua. Teachers should be careful of beliefs about treating all children the same, and acknowledge that Māori children and their whānau do need to be treated differently³³. It is important that teachers interrogate their views and beliefs about Māori culture and are aware of how their interactions with children influence children's perceptions of their Māori culture³⁴. Māori ways of being and doing should be normalised³⁵, and allow and encourage Māori to be Māori even within predominantly Pākehā settings³⁶. For example, teachers may need to rethink their commitment to primary caregiving practices to include opportunities for Māori children to participate in care for their younger siblings and enact tūakana-tēina roles and identities. Māori contexts such as whakapapa, tikanga, te reo, history and place, and the use of pepeha, waiata, and karakia support Māori children's learning, and strengthen their sense of Māori identity.

Teachers may implicitly hold lower expectations for children because they are Māori, and children are highly aware of their teachers' expectations. Research has found that 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 detrimental to learning and achievement³⁷, so see all Māori learners as culturally advantaged by being Māori³⁸, with unlimited potential and inherent capability for success and achievement.

Build relationships with whānau Māori

Relationships are very significant for Māori³⁹ so the most culturally responsive services focus a lot of effort on building relationships with Māori children and whānau⁴⁰. In particular, positive relationships with whānau Māori are found to be important in positive educational outcomes for Māori children⁴¹, and in increasing whānau participation in early childhood programmes⁴². Strong, responsive, and reciprocal relationships with whānau Māori are also found to support settings to provide well for Māori children⁴³.

Initial hui or first impressions can make a critical difference to Māori and their consequent level of responsiveness⁴⁴. Whānau report that, when a setting's culture is inclusive and welcoming, they feel like

valued members of the setting⁴⁵. It is important to **establish relationships and share information prior to enrolment**⁴⁶, to acknowledge children's whakapapa and practise whakawhanaungatanga during initial meetings with whānau⁴⁷, and to focus the enrolment process on whānau sharing information, discussing aspirations, and finding out what whānau expect of the setting⁴⁸. Whānau expectations can be used as a starting point for assessment and addressed through portfolio narratives⁴⁹.

It is also important to continue to **invest time in getting to know individual children and their whānau**⁵⁰, and to show interest in their lives and in the community in which they live⁵¹. Teachers can initiate conversations⁵², being careful to enable relationships with whānau Māori to unfold without predetermined agendas from the early childhood setting. Some other ways in which teachers can get to know whānau Māori are by holding meetings 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 valued⁵³. Be aware that some whānau may feel shy or embarrassed (whakamā), and be flexible in regard to their participation in the programme⁵⁴ without imposing expectations or demands⁵⁵. If it is the case that your culture, upbringing, or educational experience emphasise habits of naming, judging, categorising, and labelling, be careful to refrain from making judgements, and make every effort to focus on describing and offering information instead⁵⁶.

Consult with and involve whānau Māori⁵⁷

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 learning⁵⁸ and consulted in decision-making⁵⁹. After establishing good relationships, teachers can seek to **develop partnerships with whānau Māori**⁶⁰ that explore what cultural responsiveness entails for each whānau and child. Include grandparents, aunts and uncles as well as parents⁶¹. Be open to learning from whānau⁶², who experience a strong sense of inclusion and belonging when they are invited to share their knowledge and skills⁶³.

Partnerships of shared responsibility are important to ensure that the programme supports children's language, culture, and positive identity⁶⁴. Aim to **genuinely share power with whānau** and negotiate well-defined and understood roles for them⁶⁵ in every aspect of the programme including planning, implementation and evaluation of curriculum plans, and self-review. The capacity for self-determination reflects a key agreement of Te Tiriti o Waitangi⁶⁶.

Being culturally responsive also involves **listening to and respecting the expertise of whānau Māori** on all things Māori. Whānau might be able to offer advice and guidance about how to practise tikanga appropriately in the early childhood programme⁶⁷, or Māori elders might be consulted about the correct phrases to use in mihimihi⁶⁸. Settings might provide opportunities for whānau Māori to meet and create plans for supporting programmes and practices⁶⁹, and ensure that teachers and leaders use Māori knowledge to inform decisions rather than trying to align decisions to Māori knowledge after they are already made⁷⁰.

Develop culturally responsive content for teaching and learning⁷¹

It is important to **begin with whānau's aspirations** as a starting point for developing teaching and learning programmes⁷². These may include teaching and use of te reo, waiata and pakiwaitara, local iwi tikanga⁷³, 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 weaving⁷⁴, as well as cultural values, behaviours, and dispositions⁷⁵.

It is important to be open to implementing **diverse learning pathways and teaching and learning approaches** for Māori children⁷⁶. Frameworks such as *Te Whatu Pokeka*, that have been informed by and designed for Māori, can support teachers to develop culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies for Māori⁷⁷. Plan and use strategies and contexts for learning that are linked to home and whānau contexts⁷⁸, or introduce a Māori perspective to a project or interest of the children⁷⁹, such as using the maramataka Māori (the Māori planting and fishing calendar) and incorporating traditional tikanga practices such as karakia as part of a gardening project⁸⁰.

Māori language is the foundation of Māori culture⁸¹, so it is essential to **embed te reo and tikanga Māori in the setting's programme and focus on improving your proficiency** and use of te reo and tikanga⁸². Te reo words and phrases can be provided in the context of children's play and learning⁸³, and in conversations throughout the day⁸⁴, and Māori terms and concepts can be woven through planning and portfolio narratives and displays⁸⁵. Children can be offered opportunities to learn and use karakia and waiata⁸⁶, but be sure to give karakia its due significance, and acknowledge the intent, meaning, and purpose of karakia, rather than subsuming it in a mundane routine for getting ready to eat⁸⁷.

Research has found that involvement in wider iwi community activities is important to Māori parents⁸⁸. **Engage with Māori communities** by developing links with local marae⁸⁹ and make connections with people in the wider community⁹⁰. It is important to develop an understanding of your local context, and whānau and iwi histories,⁹¹ and to make connections with local people, and historically and culturally relevant places and stories⁹². Teachers can incorporate Māori history and stories of place into children's play⁹³ 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 expertise⁹⁴. Next, review the impact of policies, practices, and initiatives on outcomes for Māori children, and reflect critically on 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 just evaluating general provision such as the use of te reo and tikanga. Solicit, and be open and receptive to, feedback from whānau, Māori teachers, and Māori in the local community⁹⁵. Find out what whānau perceive about your effectiveness in supporting their aspirations for Māori children, their identity, language and culture⁹⁶.

While you may not hold detailed knowledge of Māori culture, it is important to show that you value Māori culture and actively seek to increase your understanding⁹⁷. 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 wellbeing. 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?

Glossary

ako: reciprocal learning and teaching between two or more people

aroaha: 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: genealogy

whakawhanaungatanga: relationship-building

whanaungatanga: relationships

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